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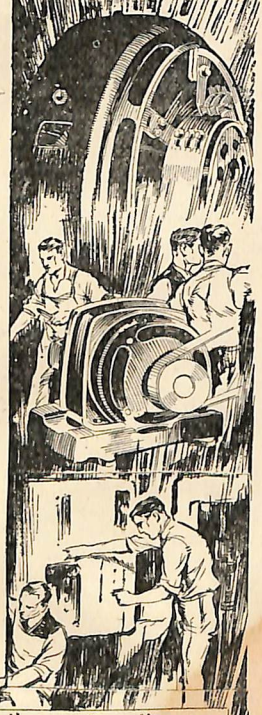

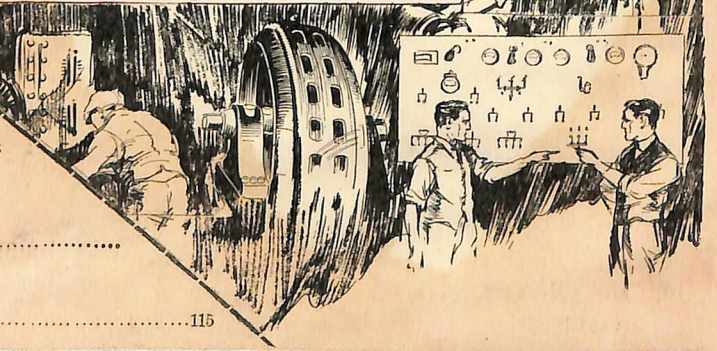

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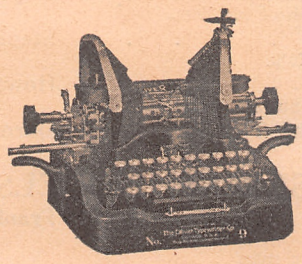

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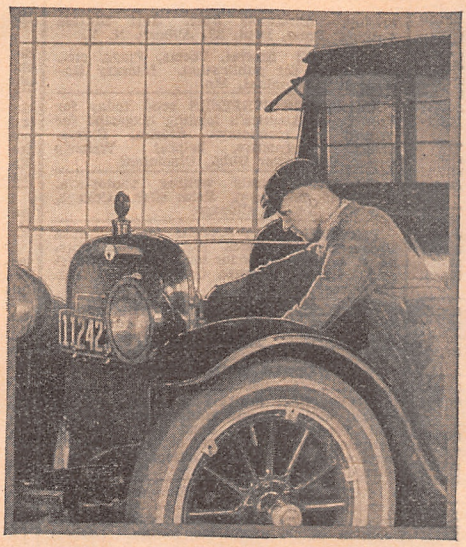

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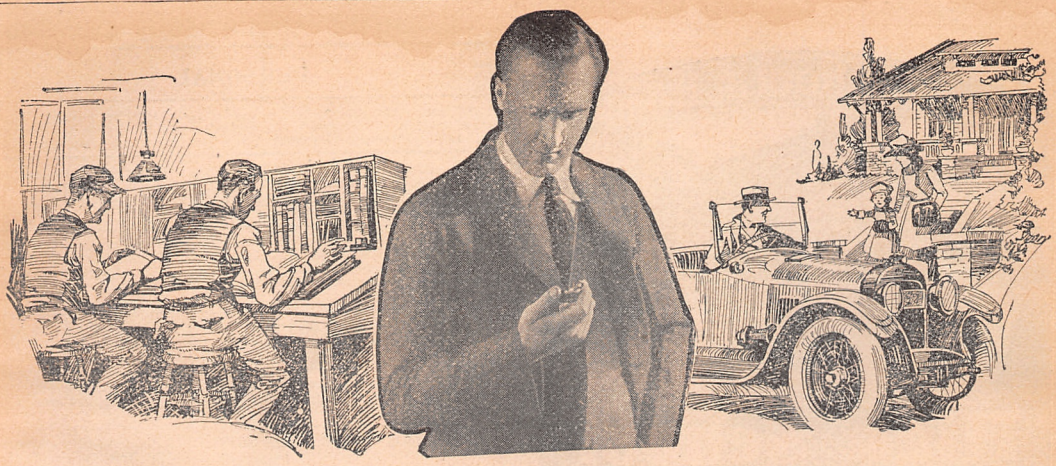

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TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

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The Mystic Image

By Ralph Boston

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

FORTUNE SIGNALS.

HAD there been a traffic cop at the particular place, the accident would probably not have happened. In such a quiet, residential part of the city, however, the traffic was never so congested as to require supervision.

On one side of the main thoroughfare was a park of many acres, with tree-shaded benches along the borders close to the street. Across from the park were the fine homes of wealthy and well-to-do citizens, with the magnificent brick-and-stone building of the Travelers and Explorers Club occupying a prominent corner. The cross street skirting the end of the park intersected the avenue and passed the club building; and diagonally across from the club was a drug store, the only store of any kind in the immediate vicinity.

A spick-and-span high-powered roadster was proceeding west in the cross street. Coming from that direction, rules of the road gave it right of way over the battered taxicab, which was traveling north by the avenue. The driver of the taxicab took a chance, spurted recklessly, and tried to beat the roadster across the street intersection.

There were a number of men on the park benches at the time; they were mostly men in seedy clothes, many of whom were scanning eagerly the early editions of afternoon newspapers. A few of the other sex were in evidence. Three or four baby carriages were closely parked so that the nursemaids

in charge could talk together comfortably; and on a bench directly across from the wide and impressive entrance of the Travelers and Explorers Club sat a young woman quite by herself, industriously plying a shuttle in the fancywork known at "tatting."

Worthington Bailey, who sat near by, eyed the girl covertly over the top of his paper. He recognized the work and the deft manipulation of the shiny shuttle as a pastime of his sister Laura, years before. In Bailey's fancy, the girl took on the character of Fate, the Weaver, and he contrasted the plenty and happiness of his boyhood days with his life's present pattern—poverty-pinched and with a bread line in prospect. At this moment the two cars came together. The girl dropped her tatting, the nursemaids screamed, and the men jumped from their benches.

Bailey was among the first to reach the scene of the collision. The roadster's fenders and running board, on one side, were crumpled up, and the taxicab's lamps and radiator were badly wrecked. The glass wind shields of both cars had been shattered, and the drivers, among the sharp fragments, had turned on each other and were saying things.

A passenger in the roadster had been thrown to the pavement. His driver, it seemed, was too taken up with the war of words to give him any attention. Bailey ran to him and lifted him to his feet.

Evidently he was a man of wealth and position, and well over fifty. A trickle of crimson rilled down the side of his smooth-shaven face, and he was in a momentary daze.

"Are you badly hurt?" Bailey asked, supporting him upright.

The man touched his face mechanically and then looked at his stained fingers. He shook himself, and a weird smile touched his lips. The shock had passed and he was in a comprehending mood.

"I might have known it!" he muttered. "No," he added; "I am not hurt very much. A piece of the wind shield must have cut my face as I was hurled from the car." Deliberately he removed a handkerchief from his pocket, wadded it into a ball, and held it to the side of his face. "Look after the car, Henry," he called to the driver; "I'm going over to the drug store. That taxicab man ought to be pinched for this. Pick up that bag, will you?" he added to Bailey. "Bring it along, and come with me."

The bag was a small one of alligator skin, its top drawn together with a cord of brown silk. Bailey picked it up; and he gathered in also a fine and very expensive Panama hat. He handed the latter to its owner and then, as he walked unsteadily, took his arm to give him further support.

In getting from the street to the sidewalk Bailey stumbled over the curb and fell to his knees. For one like Bailey, who was usually sure-footed, the awkward misstep was hard to account for. The other turned on him with a surprising and ill-timed laugh.

"Hang on to that bag, friend," he admonished.

Bailey hung on to it until he reached the drug-store entrance; then his companion took it from him gingerly.

"The accident was nothing, and I'm all right now. Much obliged to you."

In this way Bailey was dismissed. He turned and went back to the gathering crowd in the street. A policeman had arrived on the scene and was questioning both drivers and taking notes. The taxicab driver was so clearly in the wrong that the driver of the roadster was allowed to take his car away under its own power. The taxicab would have to be towed, and the driver went to the drug store to telephone for another cab to call for his fare and to report his troubles to headquarters. Bailey returned to the park bench and his newspaper.

He could find nothing among the want ads that looked halfway promising. It was the same old story again, just as it had been day after day. What little money he had been possessed of on starting that hunt for employment had dwindled away to a couple of nickels. He had passed up his frugal breakfast,

that morning, in order to conserve those two lonely five-cent pieces; and he had pulled up his belt another notch and tried to forget about a noon meal. The early edition of the afternoon paper he had found on the park bench.

Certainly he was in a hard row of stumps. The country he had helped to save by two hard years in France seemed now to have nothing for him; but this fact did not make him bitter, nor becloud in the least his sane judgment. "Deflation" and "readjustment" were the two words that sounded the depths of his predicament. He left three thousand a year to heed the call to arms; and now he was seedy, hungry, and out at elbows, with just two jitneys in his jeans. But his own heart was like the great, throbbing heart of his country—sound, and struggling back toward the rhythmic beat of normalcy.

After all, what was a little hard luck to a strapping, ex-service man of twenty-six, with no dependents? Dependents! There was the hard rub! Mouths to feed and nothing to feed them with! Bailey had divided fifty-fifty with his old buddy, Roswell, his small store of cash before taking up the hunt for a job. Roswell had married, and besides his wife there was a kiddie to be looked after. Great old chap, Roswell! He was running an elevator now, and could pinch along until better times.

Bailey saw the middle-aged, well-dressed man in the Panama hat emerge from the drug store, cross the street to the Travelers and Explorers Club, and disappear through the wide entrance. Presently another taxicab appeared and took aboard the stranded fare from the disabled car.

"That's a fine hunk o' cheese, inhabited mostly by skippers that never seen the blue water exceptin' through first-cabin ports or from a promenade deck! And as for explorin', the heft of *their* explorin' is done with bank rolls that would choke a cow and over the roulette tables at Monte Carlo. And here's us, buddy, that traveled to France and explored German trenches, wanderin' around on our uppers and wonderin' where the blazes our next meal is comin' from. Is that right—and them feedin' on the best to be had over there?"

A sour-faced pessimist halted in the gravel walk to toss these remarks at Bailey. He had heard them before.

"Where in this world can you find things better than we have them right here, friend?" inquired Bailey calmly. "Everybody's paying the price, even those with a good-sized stake laid by. We'll weather this, and pretty soon we'll find ourselves on Easy Street again. Sit tight and don't rock the boat."

The pessimist sniffed. "Come around back o' the pavilion," he whispered, "and I'll ease your strain with a good stiff swaller o' hootch. How about it?"

"Nothing doing," said Bailey.

The man went on toward the pavilion alone. The nursemaids had wheeled their baby carriages away, but the girl with the tatting still occupied her bench and plied the busy tatting shuttle. She had heard the remarks of the pessimist and his offer of a "swig" of something he carried on his hip. Looking up, she smiled in Bailey's direction, nodded approval—then dropped her eyes to her work.

She was a friendly sort of person and, somehow, Bailey was cheered. He was willing to bet that she had been an overseas nurse; somehow she had the look about her. And, Lord, how that fancy-work of hers brought back his Sister Laura!

Bailey went into a daydream involving the past; and he was still dreaming when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked up with a start to see, standing over him, the gentleman who had been thrown out of the roadster. There was a patch of court-plaster on his right cheek, and his face wore a friendly smile.

"Well, I'm back again," he remarked, "and I hope you will pardon me if I am a little inquisitive—it is just possible it may mean something to you." A pair of keen gray eyes took Bailey's measure in a kindly way. "Does it happen, young man, that you are unemployed and looking for a job?"

Bailey experienced a thrill of hope.

"I've been trying for two weeks to trail down a job," he said.

"My name is Burt," the other went on, "of Burt, Wesley & Carstairs, Brokers. Here's my card."

The business card was beautifully engraved, and up in the left-hand corner, underlined in pencil, was the name, "Condon J. Burt." Hunting a job was one thing, but to have a job come hunting him in this manner was a novel state of affairs for Bailey. He started to rise, but Mr. Burt restrained him and took a seat on the bench at his side.

"Up in those two middle windows on the second floor of the Travelers and Explorers Club," went on the broker, "are three friends of mine. We have luncheon together every week day at one-thirty. I was half an hour late to-day, and you were a witness to one of the reasons. You can see my three friends looking out and watching me. They are interested in my movements, having commissioned me to come over into the park and pick up an honest, courageous, and dependable young chap who is foot-loose and looking for a job." The speaker paused speculatively.

"My name," said the young man, "is Worthington Bailey. I am foot-loose, honest, and, I hope, dependable. In the matter of courage, Mr. Burt, you would hardly expect me to speak for myself."

"I'll take a chance on the courage part," returned Burt, studying the steady black eyes. "What can you do, Bailey?"

"I was superintendent in a box factory before I went to France——"

"Ah! And after you got out of the army?"

"The box factory was having hard sledding and couldn't take me back. I worked in an automobile factory until it shut down; then I put in a few licks as a steeplejack, painting flagpoles and high smokestacks; after that I was a deck hand on a lake steamer."

Burt gave an amused laugh. "Your occupations have been somewhat varied," he remarked, "but they are quite to the point. What my friends and I want is to send a young fellow on what may prove a dangerous journey. He will be given one thousand dollars for expenses; and presented with a purse of four thousand dollars when—and if—he returns to that dining room in the club over there on any week day at one-thirty p. m. Does the prospect attract you?"

Bailey caught his breath. "It hits me," he answered with emphasis, "right where I live."

"Then come over with me," said the surprising Mr. Burt, getting to his feet, "and let me introduce you to my friends. I think you are just the man we want."

CHAPTER II.

CARVED FROM IVORY.

WHEN Phineas Journeval Thorpe, LL. D., the famous traveler, explorer, and ethnologist, came out of the West African jungles with his astounding revelations concerning the lost continent of Atlantis, he was lionized by his brother members of the Travelers and Explorers Club.

The club, an association of millionaire globe-trotters, had financed many an expedition into the dark corners of our planet; but it had not been called upon to contribute a dollar toward the explorations of Phineas J. Thorpe. The doctor was a gentleman of vast private means who insisted on using his own money in his special undertakings.

He was a small man physically; but, in spite of a leaning toward the unusual—and often the bizarre—in theories, he was considered a giant in mental stature. At the time of his West African venture he was fifty-seven years of age, of a hardy constitution, and tough as a pine knot. He had worked in the pestilential jungles with all the industry of an enthusiast, and he had unearthed records of a past civilization which seemed to point conclusively to a continent that had once bridged the Atlantic, outflung from the very point on the African shores where he had centered his scientific labors.

The high tide of accomplishment, so far as the Travelers and Explorers Club was concerned, was marked by the doc-

tor's return to civilization, and recorded in the series of amazing lectures which he gave in the club's auditorium. Among the wealth of relics which he brought back to his native country was one which he had not unearthed in the wilderness—one which was not prehistoric.

It was an object of merely current and passing interest; and yet, oddly enough, it had aroused more discussion among the club's members than all the battered remains which had to do with the lost Atlantis. This was a little figure, six inches high, carved from ivory. It was an idol from the tribes of Northern Yoruba, and was called "Edju." To quote the doctor:

"Edju is a heathen divinity, and is always carved with very large feet and with a queue. Often there is a tobacco or signaling pipe in its mouth; and often, for a very good reason, there is a club over its shoulder.

"Edju is a spirit of strife and ill will, fomenting discontent and disturbances. At a certain residency where I was royally entertained, the British governor referred to this queer little idol as 'Old Calamity.' Unless one possesses the secret that inhibits its malicious influence, Old Calamity is warranted to bring troubles to all who carry the image in the hand or about the person. It is said in West Africa that Edju came first from the East—from the Niger—bringing the palm nuts and also the sun. He is the 'Bringer' indeed, but mostly the bringer of personal misfortune."

From these remarks, as a basis, the weird abilities of Edju as a trouble maker were amplified by questioning of an incredulous or a jesting nature. Men of ripe age and mature judgment were not taking seriously the malefic influence of six inches of carved ivory. Notwithstanding his solemn face and learned manner the little doctor had been known to perpetrate a joke on occasion. Was he, with this Edju image, trying to hoax his friends?

The point made by his inquisitors was this: If the heathen idol brought misadventures to any who carried it, "in the hand or about the person," how was it that the doctor himself had escaped the calamities of Old Calamity? Phineas Thorpe's reply was to the effect that he was "in the know," and possessed the secret that rendered him immune from baneful results.

What was the secret? The doctor refused to make it known generally; but, in due course, he divulged it in confidence to his three most intimate friends, Gainbridge, Putnam, and Burt.

All these men were over fifty, sound of judgment, successful in business, and with such a warm personal attachment for Thorpe that his ideas commanded their respect. Chester Gainbridge was president of one of the largest banks in the city, Nathan Putnam was a merchant prince with a hobby for geography and antiques, and Condon J. Burt was a wealthy broker. These four had formed the habit of meeting at half past one every week-day afternoon for luncheon in a private dining room of the club.

At these regular gatherings the ivory idol was discussed. Gainbridge, at one of the luncheons immediately following a certain "ladies' night" at the club, declared that Old Calamity's powers were no more malicious than those of a wooden Yoruban doll, or *"allangiddi,"* which also formed part of the doctor's collection.

The collection had been exhibited, on ladies' night, in the writing room of the club; and the doll, a mere product of Yoruban home life, had won more attention from the ladies than even the Shango urns whose archæological value was immense. Thorpe at once challenged the statement of his banker friend; and thereupon the banker wagered a thousand dollars that he could carry the ivory image about with him for a period of twenty-four hours without suffering any personal misfortunes.

The doctor had accepted the wager promptly; and Gainbridge went off to his favorite golf course with the alligator-skin sack containing the image in his pocket. Astounding things happened to him.

His game was wretched, he lost three

balls, broke his pet driver, fell into a creek, and, on his return from the links, narrowly escaped being run down at a railroad crossing, was held up by two bandits, thoroughly searched, and relieved of all his personal property and his automobile.

The rogues of the road seemed to be greatly incensed about something, and just before making off with the car they hurled the banker into the highway and threw his golf clubs after him. Fortunately—or unfortunately—the alligator-skin sack with the image was in the bag; otherwise it might have been taken by the robbers along with the banker's wallet, watch, and automobile. At eleven o'clock that same evening Gainbridge personally returned Edju to the doctor; and not until the image was out of his possession did he feel easy in his mind.

Next day, at luncheon, he described his experiences. He was not convinced that the idol was to be blamed for his misadventures; nor, on the other hand, was he at all convinced that it wasn't. Thorpe explained that the banker's poor game, his lost golf balls, his broken driver, and his fall into the creek were all the result of Edju's baneful influence. The holdup, he averred, was a plain coincidence.

Putnam jeered at the explanation and insisted on carrying the idol for a few hours himself. He fell down a coal hole, smashed a rare antique vase that he was showing to a friend, broke a choice meerschaum pipe, burned a hole in a five-thousand-dollar Chinese rug—and, at nine in the evening, rolled an afternoon newspaper around the alligator-skin sack and started hurriedly for Thorpe's apartment.

As he turned a corner he ran into a couple of footpads, who went through his pockets swiftly but thoroughly, showed much ill humor, and at last took to their heels. Putnam picked up the newspaper roll, containing the alligator-skin sack, and went on with it to the doctor. He, also, experienced a great relief on being rid of the ivory image. Early next afternoon Phineas Thorpe coolly informed him, in the private dining room of the club, that the idol was responsible for everything that had befallen him—except the robbery.

The only one to jeer, on this occasion, was the practical-minded broker, Condon J. Burt. He'd take the fool idol and he'd show 'em! Burt vowed that he would not run back to Thorpe with the image, but would hold to it and make delivery at luncheon on the following day. "And to-morrow," Burt had said gloatingly, "is Friday! Watch my smoke."

Thorpe, Gainbridge, and Putnam, on Friday, reached their usual luncheon rendezvous a little after one. Early though they were, the banker and the merchant believed that they would find Burt waiting for them, in a panic to be rid of the little ivory hoodoo. The broker, however, was not waiting. Nor did he appear at one-thirty, the invariable minute when luncheon was always served.

"Perhaps Burt has been—has been killed!" hazarded Gainbridge, a bit wildly.

"No, Chet," returned Thorpe sharply; "Edju never kills anybody. Jonas," he added to the waiter, who served their luncheons and who had appeared promptly for orders, "Mr. Burt is late and we'll wait for him."

Now this Jonas, the waiter, is a man worthy of note. He had been steward aboard the steamer which had carried Phineas Thorpe to the African coast; and, while the boat was lying in the Lagos roadstead, he had asked and secured permission to accompany Thorpe into the interior.

Jonas had proved himself a faithful body servant during all the doctor's jungle wanderings; and he had also given striking proof of an adventurous disposition by joining the native Ogboni League, whose secret rites and mysteries called for courage of a high order. Accompanying the doctor on the return to America, Jonas was given employment at the Travelers and Explorers Club. He was an excellent waiter, but, somehow, seemed a little out of his element. Receiving his orders regard-

ing the luncheon, he bowed respectfully and faded from the room.

It was nearly two o'clock before Burt arrived and cut short the anxiety of his friends. His manner was uncertain, and there was a patch of court-plaster decorating his cheek.

"Did you see it?" were his first words.

"See what?" came three voices in chorus.

"Why, the last slam handed me by that African boox," went on the broker. "A taxicab collided with my roadster at the corner and"—here he touched the patch on his face—"left me this souvenir."

"We didn't see a thing," said Putnam.

"Don't lay that up against Edju," put in Thorpe, taking the alligator-skin sack from the broker, "for the accident was nothing more than a coincidence."

He went over to one corner of the room where a kit bag, which he had brought with him that day, stood open on a leather couch. He bent over the bag for a few minutes, his hands engaged on some work within it; then, at last, he turned away.

"All ready, Jonas," he went on to the waiter who, watchful and alert, had thrust his head in at the door. "Tell us your troubles, Con," he added to the broker.

During the meal that followed Burt went into his adventures at considerable length.

In the street a sign had fallen and barely missed him in its descent.—"Coincidence," said Thorpe. He had taken a ride in his motor boat in the evening and had drifted for three hours offshore with a crippled engine; having made repairs and headed the boat for home under its own power, he bungled the landing and stove in the bow—but he still had the image in his pocket when he was fished out of the water.—"Old Calamity probably was responsible"—Thorpe.

On the way home he picked up a satchel lying in the road. It contained six quarts of "booze." A cop caught him examining his "find," mistook him for a bootlegger, and gave him a ride to the police station. There his story was accepted and he was allowed to go home.—"Coincidence."

He put the alligator-skin sack with the ivory image on his dresser for the night. Sneak thieves jimmied a basement window, but were overheard by the butler and put to rout.—"Another coincidence."—Nothing further happened during the night. He forgot the idol, Burt continued, and went to his office, as usual, in the forenoon.

"Forgot the image, eh?" queried Gainbridge skeptically. "Go on! You were dodging trouble, Burt."

"Not at all!" insisted the broker. "I left early for home in the roadster, picked up the idol and—fell the full length of the steps on leaving the house."

"Edju was back of that," asserted Thorpe.

"And then came the accident right at the corner of the park," added Burt. "That closes my chapter of troubles. There isn't a superstitious hair in my head, but I'm free to admit that this ivory image works like a veritable hoodoo."

"Everybody is superstitious, more or less," averred Thorpe. "The human mind is founded on brute instinct, as any psychologist will tell you; and traces of those ancient, unreasoning instincts remain with us. You wonder why I have been so free from calamities while having that heathen idol in my possession. The secret that has kept me immune is this: I knew that the only power the image possessed lay in its unsavory reputation as a trouble bringer. Suggestion, my friends! That's all there is to it.

"Had I told each of you that Old Calamity was a mascot, and had I recited incidents to prove it, apart from the plain coincidences that have befallen you, all your luck would have been good and not evil."

This brought spirited protests, to which Thorpe listened unmoved.

"No, my friends," the doctor insisted; "before giving Old Calamity into your hands I had dwelt on the image's malevolent powers. Superstition, latent in

each of you, caused you to expect trouble. Expectation laid you open to the various personal mischances. You were shaken out of your customary poise; and the mind, working upon the physical powers of the body, rendered the physical powers unreliable.

"You had, what I may call, lapses of effort; hence, little calamities," the doctor went on. "I could give that leather sack with the image to some stranger, tell him nothing about what the sack contained, and the stranger would go about his business for days, weeks, and months, absolutely with no accident happening to him save misadventures that would fall under the head of coincidences."

"I'll bet a thousand you couldn't!" declared Putnam.

"So'll I," chimed in Gainbridge.

"Same here," Burt added; "only the stranger would encounter so many rough 'coincidences,' as you call them, that you'd have to admit the ivory boox was responsible."

For a moment Thorpe was reflective; then he inquired: "Shall we try a little experiment? I have a scientific friend who, at present, is making a study of some rock pictures in the Southwest. Shall we pick up some stranger and send him out to Professor Purcell with Old Calamity? The stranger, of course, is not to be told anything about the evil powers of the idol, and he will carry the image to Purcell and back.

"If I prove to your complete satisfaction," Thorpe continued, "that nothing which happens to the stranger can possibly be due to the influence of the idol, you gentlemen lose one thousand dollars each. If I cannot prove this, then I lose one thousand dollars. And I would suggest that your three thousand dollars, if I win, together with my one thousand dollars, if you win, be given to the stranger as an honorarium on his return from the Southwest."

This proposal was received with the utmost enthusiasm. It was settled at last that the entire four thousand dollars was to go to the stranger as an honorarium, no matter whether the doctor or his friends won the wager; for to these men of wealth the satisfaction of having the question at issue settled in this rather weird but conclusive manner far outweighed the money involved. It was also agreed that each should contribute two hundred and fifty dollars to the stranger's traveling expenses.

"Now," said Thorpe briskly, after these details had been arranged, "all that remains is to find our lucky stranger. Where are we to get him?"

"Just one moment," spoke up Burt.

He arose from the table and walked to a window overlooking the park. After a long scrutiny of the occupied benches he turned back to his friends, visibly pleased.

"I have some one in mind," he announced; "a man, to be selected almost by chance, from the crowd in the park. Judging from appearances, I believe the man I am thinking about would jump at the opportunity to make this little trip into the Southwest. I'll step over there, if the rest of you are agreeable, and put the proposition up to him."

"Consider first," interposed Putnam, "the unfair advantage we shall be taking of this innocent stranger. Phineas calls him 'lucky.' Well, in my opinion he will be anything but that. He is to be loaded with dynamite, and not so much as a word of warning is to be given him! Is that fair, gentlemen? Is it humane?"

Phineas Thorpe had gone to the corner and was dipping into his kit bag. Out of the bag he took a small, oblong pasteboard carton and the alligator-skin sack.

"I maintain that the idol will have no effect whatever upon the fortunes of the subject of our experiment," he said, waving the sack by its silk cord, "if nothing is said about its baneful influence. That is the nub, the kernel, the *sine qua non* of the whole proceeding. Naturally, convinced of my position as I am, I cannot consider the matter as at all inhuman or unfair. On the contrary, we are shaking the plum tree for the benefit of one whom you call an innocent stranger. The man, whoever he is, is certainly in luck."

"To look at it in another way, Phineas," suggested Gainbridge, "if your theory is disproved, we are getting some unknown and perhaps very worthy person into a lot of hot water."

Although physically of small stature, Thorpe had a dominating personality. "No," he averred with emphasis; "we shall not get him into hot water with the heathen idol. Observe, gentlemen!"

He slipped the alligator-skin sack into the small carton, closed the top of the box, then moistened a strip of gummed paper and pressed it down and smoothed it over the cap.

"This box is not to be opened until it is in our hands again," he continued, "and the stranger is to be so instructed. Not for one moment, night or day, is it to leave his person. He will proceed to Tarantula Springs, Arizona, seek out my friend, Professor Hannibal Purcell, and have him write his name, in ink, on the side of this carton, also setting down the date, hour, and minute of his signing. That will be proof that the stranger attended faithfully to his part of the contract.

"After securing Purcell's signature," Thorpe went on, "the stranger will at once return East, report to us here at our luncheon hour—and collect his four thousand dollars." Thorpe laughed. "Very easy money," he added, "but if you gentlemen consider the experiment inhuman or unfair, here is the place to let it drop."

A thoughtful silence fell over Gainbridge, Putnam, and Burt.

"If you allow the matter to drop," continued the doctor, "then, by that act, you prove my contention that all mankind is handicapped with a vein of superstition; you make it evident that you believe a mere bit of carved ivory is gifted with uncanny powers. What is your will?"

"I'm for going on," answered Burt.

Gainbridge and Putnam nodded. Thorpe chuckled as he removed a long wallet from his coat, counted out a thousand dollars in bills, and laid them on the table beside the pasteboard carton.

"I happen to have the cash for our lucky stranger's traveling expenses," said he; "so if he consents to undertake the mission we can start him off at once. You gentlemen can settle your share of the expense money with me at your convenience. Go get your man, Burt," he finished.

After the broker had left for the park, Nathan Putnam turned to Chester Gainbridge.

"Somehow, Chet," he remarked uneasily, "I've got a funny feeling about this."

CHAPTER III.

UNDER ORDERS.

WITH just the proper amount of ceremony, Worthington Bailey was ushered into the private dining room by Condon J. Burt. His eyes roved curiously about the walls, paneled in Jacobean oak; he flashed a wondering glance at the three prosperous, well-groomed men who had pushed back from the table; but it was the table itself, bearing the remains of a generous luncheon, that caught and held his hungry gaze.

The broker introduced Bailey to his friends; banker, merchant, and explorer each arose gravely and took the hand of the young man in a cordial grasp.

"When did you have your last meal, Bailey?" inquired Thorpe.

"If you can call two doughnuts and a cup of coffee a meal," Bailey answered, "I had it last night in a sandwich wagon." He laughed. "I've been a bit down on my luck," he explained.

"Sit here," said Thorpe, getting up and waving Bailey into his chair. He touched a button. "Jonas," he went on to the waiter, who had immediately presented himself, "you will bring a good meal for our friend Mr. Bailey. No man," he added impressively to his fellow members of the club, "should be asked to talk business or make a momentous decision on an empty stomach."

"Thank you," returned Bailey quietly.

There was a well-bred air about this seedy young fellow from the park that made a deep impression upon the four who had cast him for the central figure

of their queer experiment. They showed their consideration by talking among themselves while food was being brought and while Bailey was satisfying his hunger. The subject discussed by Thorpe and his friends was a certain sautoir of pearls.

Bailey could not avoid overhearing the talk; and from it he gathered that, on a recent ladies' night at the club, Mrs. Nathan Putnam had lost the pearls; that they were tremendously valuable; that the house committee was taking the matter to heart even more than were Mrs. Putnam and her husband; and that detectives had been employed to find the thief and recover the stolen property. The affair, it appeared, was being kept very quiet; and, although the utmost was being done to solve the mystery, nothing had so far been accomplished.

"I understand that the house committee has offered a reward of five thousand dollars," remarked Gainbridge.

"I'll cheerfully double it in order to get back the sautoir," said Putnam.

"And I," went on Gainbridge, "would gladly pay a similar sum to have the thief apprehended—if he happens to be among the attachés of the club. I feel as the house committee does—that the good name of this organization is at stake."

"Bosh!" exclaimed Putnam deprecatingly. "The good name of the club has nothing at all to do with it. The robbery might have happened anywhere, and I am sorry that the house committee feels so keenly in the matter."

By that time Bailey had finished his meal. With hunger fully appeased he felt like a different person. Gainbridge offered him a cigar. He accepted it, and took a light from the match which the ever-ready Jonas had struck and was holding for him.

"That will be all, Jonas," said Thorpe. When the waiter had left the room and the five were once more alone together, the doctor proceeded: "Now, Bailey, I'll tell you what we want. Out near Tarantula Springs, Arizona, is a friend of mine, one Professor Hannibal Purcell. What we desire of you will seem absurdly simple, but it is to settle a point upon which my friends and I have a difference of opinion. Our differences, of course, need not concern you.

"This little box"—here Thorpe picked up the carton—"is to be taken to Purcell. You will inform him that you come from me, and that it is my request that he sign his name in ink on the pasteboard side, and add the date and hour on which he affixes his signature. Having had this done, you will return here on any week day, and meet my friends and me in this room at one-thirty in the afternoon.

"If you accept this commission, you will be paid at once one thousand dollars in cash for traveling expenses; and when you get back and deliver the little box, intact and unopened, into our hands, you will be paid four thousand dollars. Will you take the job?"

"That is a lot of money to give a stranger for making a pleasure trip," observed Bailey, with a touch of skepticism.

"It may be anything but a pleasure trip," spoke up Putnam.

Thorpe shot a warning glance at him. "And then again," said the doctor, "it may prove just that, and nothing more. The standing of these gentlemen who make you the offer, Bailey, is proof that there is nothing questionable about the transaction. You have an opportunity which does not often come the way of a young fellow in needy circumstances.

"We merely specify," Thorpe went on, "that the little box is not to leave your person, night or day, while you are making your trip to the Southwest and back; and the seal is not to be broken, nor the box opened, from the time it leaves our hands until it is returned to us. If you lose the box, or if it is tampered with, it will constitute a breach of contract and cost you the four-thousand-dollar honorarium."

"What makes you gentlemen think that I will faithfully perform your mission?" asked Bailey curiously. "I am a stranger to all of you."

"You have the look of a young man of character and integrity," said Thorpe.

"And besides," added the more practical broker, "there will be four thousand dollars in it for you if you conscientiously carry out the terms of our agreement."

Bailey had a genial, pleasant laugh, and he indulged it again. "This sounds like a tale from the famous 'Thousand and One Nights,' gentlemen," he observed. "I am out of a job and on my uppers, and this magnificent opportunity falls upon me from a bleak and unpromising sky. Naturally I am curious about the box, which is to make the trip to Tarantula Springs and back, unopened. But that is not my affair, so I shall confine my attention to the money side of this queer deal. As you say, Doctor Thorpe, it seems absurdly simple—and the reward far and away too large. Of course I accept. When do you want me to start for the Southwest?"

"As soon as possible; and we wish you to return as quickly as you can." Thorpe handed Bailey the thousand dollars. "You need clothes, Bailey," he went on, "and you had better use some of your expense money for a new outfit. We have provided liberally for all your needs. And this little box"—here he passed over the carton—"you will remember to keep constantly about you, guarding it as the apple of your eye."

Bailey put away the money carefully; and, with even more care, he stowed the box in the breast pocket of his threadbare coat. "I will do my best," he promised, "and if I have no trouble in locating Professor Purcell at Tarantula Springs I should be back within ten days, at latest."

"We are setting no time limit, Bailey," said Gainbridge; "you may find that the work will take you longer."

"It would be interesting," struck in Putnam, "if you would write or wire us every day a brief report of any unusual circumstances that—er—you may encounter."

"I can't imagine anything unusual happening to me," returned Bailey, "but I am under orders, and if you gentlemen instruct me to report by letter or wire each day I shall do so."

Thorpe nodded. "That's not a bad idea, Bailey. Mail a report every day to Condon J. Burt, in care of the Travelers and Explorers Club if, as I believe, you find your journey humdrum and void of important incident; but wire, if it should happen that you meet with anything of an exciting nature. Send your telegrams collect, and make them as complete as you think necessary."

Bailey was a young man of shrewdness and penetration, and there was a humorously quizzical light in his eyes as he prepared to leave these surprising gentlemen and make ready for his trip to Tarantula Springs.

"I judge that at least three of you are expecting telegrams," he remarked, "and just why that should be so of course I have not the least idea. My business, however, is to do the work I have been told to do and for which I am to be so remarkably well paid. I am very grateful to Mr. Burt, as well as to the rest of you gentlemen, for throwing this chance my way." He shook hands all around. "Good-by," he said, and left the room in what was clearly a cheerful frame of mind.

"A fine type of young American manhood, friends," commented Gainbridge, "if I am any judge."

Putnam leaned forward to drop the remains of his cigar into an ash tray. "I've still got a queer feeling about this experiment," he confided.

"There is no cause for worry," said Thorpe reassuringly, as he brought his kit bag from the corner. "Putnam, I'm called out of town for a few days, and I want to leave in your charge the Yoruban *allangiddi*, or wooden doll."

He removed from the bag an oblong block of carved wood capped with a rudely executed neck and head. It was twelve inches in height, and a very primitive plaything of the child of a heathen tribe of West African natives. Putnam's eyes sparkled as they rested on the crude toy.

"If you wish," went on Thorpe, "you may put this on display in the toy section of your department store; but tomorrow evening the mothers' society

want it at their regular monthly meeting in Apollo Hall. In the bag you will find the manuscript of my brochure on 'Child Life among the Yorubans.' Will you take the doll to Apollo Hall to-morrow evening, make my excuses to the ladies assembled there, and read the brochure?"

"I shall be very glad to do so, Phineas," Putnam answered.

"And on the day after to-morrow evening," proceeded Thorpe, "I have promised the doll and the brochure to Professor Stanton, the archæologist. Will you see that they are delivered to him?"

"Certainly," Putnam promised; "but it seems too bad that you are called out of town just as our experiment with the ivory idol is going forward."

"I shall be back in plenty of time to learn the result of the experiment," said Thorpe; "a result of which I am already as certain as I am of anything in life. The idol will bring no evil fortune to Worthington Bailey, you may rest assured of——"

"By George!" came excitedly from Burt, who had made his way to the window and was looking out upon the street. "Old Calamity is already getting Bailey into difficulties. Look here!"

Gainbridge and Putnam hastened to the window; but Thorpe, his mind serene and his manner leisurely, paused to replace the doll in the kit bag before joining his friends at their post of observation.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS CROWDED HOUR.

BAILEY was like a man in a dream when he left the private dining room of the Travelers and Explorers Club. Somehow his recent experience lacked the stamp of reality, and as he walked the length of a thickly carpeted corridor, got into an elevator, and descended to the ground floor, the idea that he was the victim of some weird and wonderful illusion grew in his mind.

Just within the broad entrance of the club building was the statue of a man of a bygone age, wearing queer and unfamiliar clothes. At the feet of the life-size figure was carved the name, "Marco Polo." Bailey paused to lean against the pedestal upholding this eminent Italian and medieval traveler, and groped mechanically in his trousers pocket.

A thrill ran through him as he touched the money, the thousand dollars in bills. Here was a fact that shattered illusion with the most convincing realism. He lifted a hand to the breast pocket of his coat. A box two inches square and six inches long has bulk enough to make itself most pronounced when buttoned against the chest. Bailey undid the buttons and touched the small carton with his fingers. By George, it was there all right!

His cheerful frame of mind had not left him, but now it blossomed more brightly as he ceased to question his luck. With his left hand inside his coat and resting on the box, he passed out of the building, crossed the walk to the curb, and then began crossing the street toward the park. He was nearly on the other side when he heard a yell of warning and the sharp screech of an automobile horn.

He had been mooning along, his wits traveling wide and seeking to explore the ways of Dame Fortune; but now the shout and the high note of the motor siren brought him back to earth in a flash. He glimpsed a rushing car, almost upon him, and gave a tremendous leap.

His quickness saved him. On hands and knees he landed on the cement walk in front of some of the park benches.

"Watch where ye're goin', you rube!" yelled the driver of the automobile as it shot by.

Bailey was jarred but practically uninjured. The little box had been projected from the pocket of his unbuttoned coat and cast upon the trampled turf of the park's edge. A man in a cap ran forward, picked it up, and raced away among the trees. Bailey was on his feet in a twinkling and off in pursuit.

"Hey, there!" he cried as he ran. "Drop that box!"

The man in the cap was a good sprinter. His flight carried him past the pavilion, along the shore of a lagoon, and by bridle paths and graveled walks to a good distance. But he could not evade his pursuer, who kept after him steadily and slowly but surely drew nearer.

Not a park policeman, mounted or on foot, was anywhere to be seen. At last, just as Bailey was almost within arm's reach of the man, the latter dropped the carton—evidently in the hope of escaping while his pursuer halted to pick it up.

This hope was realized. The little box was all-important to Bailey, and his consternation on seeing it slipping away from him in the hands of a thief had lent wings to his pursuing heels. While he slowed to a pause and gathered in the recovered package, the man who had tried to appropriate it vanished quickly and completely.

Bailey dropped down on a bench to rest for a moment. A sharp run like that, immediately following a hearty meal, had set his lungs to pumping more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case. At a sprint or a dash he had been as good as any in the A. E. F., with wind second to none.

He fell to wondering, as he sat and rested, why any thief should have thought that rough little container worth stealing. Bottles with forbidden liquids were often so wrapped, however, and perhaps that fellow in the cap thought he was making off with something in the nature of a thirst-quencher.

"A pint of redeye might come in a square, long bottle," thought Bailey with a grim smile, "though why the deuce it should be billed for a trip to Arizona and back is too many for me."

The rough treatment the carton had just experienced would probably have broken a concealed bottle, and anything in the way of liquid would now be dripping out of it. Bailey shook the box close to his ear, but not a sound was given forth.

"Everything is O. K. once more," muttered Bailey, "and now I'll proceed with my plans. The first thing is to catch a street car for downtown and outfit myself for the trip to Tarantula Springs."

He put away the carton and painstakingly buttoned his coat over it; then, seeking a short cut back to the street and the car line, he climbed the approach to a footbridge that spanned the narrowest part of the lagoon. He was halfway across the bridge when his attention was caught and held by a man and woman in a canoe.

"Well, what do you know about that!" muttered Bailey, settling his elbows on the bridge railing and staring downward.

The man with the paddle was the sour-faced pessimist who had invited Bailey to accompany him to a sequestered spot for a drink of hootch; and the girl with him was the one who had sat on the park bench, plied the tatting shuttle, and had looked up to smile approval when Bailey declined the unknown's invitation.

The characters of these two, it seemed to Bailey, were as wide apart as the poles; and he experienced a shock of revulsion at seeing them together in the same canoe.

"It's a cinch," he ruminated, "that you can't always judge by appearances. The tatting reminded me of Laura, and thoughts of Laura brought back the old home ties; and, of course, I thought the girl down there was a nice little home body with as much use for a bird like the one she's with as she might have for a boa constrictor. The world is full of surprises——"

His philosophizing carried him no further, for at that moment another canoe darted out from under the bridge. It collided with the craft which was holding Bailey's attention. Quick work with the paddle, on the part of the man with the girl, would have prevented an accident; but the man seemed to lose his head. As a result, both canoes were overset and their occupants spilled into the water.

There was one man only in the craft that caused the trouble. He paid no attention to the girl, but clung to his canoe, and seemed more interested in

righting it and salvaging his paddle than in anything else. And the fellow with the girl proved to be a poor swimmer, and plainly was thinking only of himself. Any red-blooded young chap would have done exactly what Bailey did; that is, kick off his shoes, throw off his hat and coat, climb over the rail, and dive to the rescue. The only idea in Bailey's mind was to get the girl safely ashore.

He was a strong swimmer. "Don't struggle," he said quietly, coming alongside the girl; "I'll take care of you."

"Never mind me," was the answer, as a pretty face, dripping and bediamonded with water, turned to his; "I can swim like a fish. Look—up on the bridge!"

Bailey was taken aback by this calm challenge to his chivalry. He could see now something that had escaped his notice—the girl was swimming easily and well in her waterlogged garments. For just one moment he felt like a fool, trying to star himself when there was no need; then, as he turned his head for an upward glance, his chagrin took another angle.

A hulking, red-haired person on the footbridge was divesting himself of a ragged coat and faded, disreputable cap, and coolly appropriating the coat and straw hat Bailey had left behind him. Evidently the big hobo found Bailey's wearing apparel, dilapidated though it was, an improvement upon his own. He did not linger to exchange shoes, but took Bailey's worn brogans under his arm and left the bridge at a good rate of speed.

"Look after your property," instructed the girl. "It was real nice of you to try to help me, but I can get out of this without the least trouble."

Bailey laid a straight course shoreward and swam his best. When his feet touched bottom and he splashed out of the water and ran up the low bank, the hobo was a hundred yards away and going strong. Hatless, coatless, and in his stockinged feet, drenched to the skin and dripping, Bailey began his second pursuit of that eventful afternoon. The hobo had his coat; that was the important thing, for the carton was in the coat pocket.

Flight and pursuit led across a broad meadow where a number of persons were playing tennis. Bailey came into the meadow by way of a baseball diamond which, at the time, was not being used. He laid a watery trail across third base, aiming to overhaul the hobo in the vicinity of the tennis courts. The chase had claimed the attention of the players with the rackets, and their games halted while they watched developments.

The hobo, in attempting to leap a net, caught his foot in it and plunged headfirst to the ground. A mounted policeman came galloping across the diamond. He called upon the hobo to halt, but the red-haired giant merely regained his feet and raced on toward a clump of lilacs at the edge of the meadow. At this point he vanished, the mounted officer spurring after him.

Bailey came to the wrecked net; and there, by a stroke of luck, he found the little carton. A second time it had been spilled out of the pocket of the coat. The trustee of the package was well content. So far as the red-haired hobo was concerned, he could keep what he had taken—and cause Bailey little loss now that the box was recovered.

In his dripping deshabille, the young man smiled cheerily at the wondering tennis players, proceeded to the edge of the meadow, and there encountered the policeman. The latter, from the back of his horse, was peering in every direction. It was quite plain that the red-haired fugitive had made good his escape.

Bailey was closely questioned. He told how he had divested himself of hat, coat, and shoes and leaped from the lagoon bridge to the rescue of a young lady who was in no need of assistance; how he had seen the hobo appropriating his wearing apparel, and had made his way to shore and given chase; and, at last, how he had recovered the only part of his lost property that was of any particular value.

The officer seemed skeptical, and reached down to take the carton and

examine it. While he was thus engaged, four gentlemen hurried suddenly around the large lilac bush. The officer's mount shied violently, unseating its rider, who came to earth on both knees with an awkwardness that did little credit to his horsemanship. What the officer said, on the spur of the moment, is no matter.

"Too bad, O'Farrell," commiserated one of the four gentlemen. "Are you hurt?"

"No, Mr. Putnam," said O'Farrell, getting to his feet and jerking savagely at the bridle reins; "this kangaroo is a new one, and I've only had him twice on park duty. And he'll stop this fancy steppin' or I'll break his neck for him."

"What has happened to you, Bailey?" inquired Condon J. Burt.

Bailey regretted that the four members of the Travelers and Explorers Club had somehow arrived on the scene to be witnesses of the lame start he was making in the work they had set for him. He kept nothing back, however, but related in detail the incidents of his crowded hour since leaving the club building.

Three pairs of eyes flashed triumphantly at Phineas J. Thorpe. The doctor, however, remained serene, and took the carton from the officer and placed it once more in the hands of Bailey.

"This young man is our friend," Thorpe explained to the policeman, "and he is engaged in a mission for us and must not be detained. Did you lose your money in the lagoon, Bailey?" he asked.

Bailey experienced a momentary consternation. His traveling expenses! He had been so greatly concerned about the box, up to that moment, that he had not thought about the money. Now his right hand leaped convulsively to the pocket of his water-soaked trousers. The next moment his troubled face relaxed, and he brought into view a very damp roll of bank notes.

"You had considerable luck, after all," remarked Gainbridge. "You are going on, Bailey?"

"Going on?" Bailey echoed. "Why, of course; unless you gentlemen think that my poor beginning warrants your passing this chance along to somebody else."

"Not that," returned Thorpe; "you'll do, Bailey, but I would suggest that you be a little more careful hereafter."

"You can't be too careful," supplemented Putnam.

"Better come back to the club," suggested Burt, "and wait there until I can have a new outfit of clothes sent to you."

"Thank you," said Bailey, "but I'm not going back to the club until I arrive from the Southwest with Professor Purcell's signature and my final report."

"Excellent!" applauded the little doctor. "I perceive, Worthington Bailey, that you are not a quitter. Are these your shoes?" He indicated a pair of worn brogans lying close to the lilac bush.

"Why, yes," Bailey answered, and dropped down to put on the shoes. "That hobo let go of them here; and you'd naturally think they would have got away from him when he hurdled the net and lost the box. But everything seems to be taking a queer angle, this afternoon. I've had more adventures in one short hour than in all the time since I left France."

"Be on your guard against more of them," warned Putnam.

"Thank you, I will." Bailey got up and stamped his feet into the brogans.

"And remember," said Thorpe, "you are to keep the carton about you, night and day, until you return it to us again."

"It has got away from me for the last time!" Bailey declared.

He waved his hand blithely; and then, a hatless, coatless, and bedraggled figure, proceeded in the direction of the avenue. The four from the club followed him at a distance.

"We've hipped you, Phineas, right at the start off," Gainbridge remarked.

"I'll not admit it," said Thorpe.

"The burden of proof is on you," spoke up Burt.

"I'll meet that challenge at the proper time."

"It's a blooming shame," remarked Putnam regretfully, "that we're sending

that fine young chap into a sea of troubles without a word of warning."

"Stop him, if you feel that way about it," said Thorpe.

"Too late now," muttered Putnam.

They had reached a point from which they could see Bailey getting into a taxicab at a corner of the avenue where there was a hack stand. The door of the cab closed on him, and he was whirled away in the direction of downtown.

CHAPTER V.

THAT TURN OF DESTINY.

FRIDAY afternoon and evening Bailey worked with speed. From the moment the taxicab deposited him at an emporium where "everything in men's wear" was to be had, he made every move count.

First, he called a city ticket office on the telephone and secured his reservations. In this he was lucky. He was leaving at ten-thirty, that night, and Pullman space cannot always be had on such short notice.

Next, he went through the great store from top to bottom, selecting everything he needed, quickly but with a discriminating eye. There were few departments in which he did not buy something or other. As a hard-driven sailorman will lighten ship in order to stay afloat, so in the lean days Bailey had sacrificed the best of his wardrobe, piece by piece, to the end that he might keep his head above water. His last purchase was a roomy suit case in which to carry his reserve supplies.

Three doors away from the gentlemen's outfitting establishment was a barber shop. Here Bailey spent nearly two hours. He went into the place looking more like a tramp than a respectable ex-service man; and he came out of it clear-eyed and glowing, shaved, shorn, and crisp in all his newness.

This doughboy who, as top sergeant, had been called "Go-getter Bailey of the Thirty-second," showed now at his civilian best. "How'd Sergeant Bailey come out with that machine-gun nest, lieutenant?" Bailey's captain had asked on one occasion. "Put it out of action, sir," the lieutenent had answered. "Good old Bailey!" the captain had exclaimed; "got there, as usual." And the other had commented: "Surest thing you know, captain. There with the bells on!" After that he was "Bells Bailey" quite as often as the Go-getter. Now he was "going over the top" to Tarantula Springs and back with a dinky little pasteboard box that apparently was coveted by others.

"It's got to be there with the bells on for Worth Bailey this trip," he said to himself as he dropped in at a corner drug store; "I need that four thousand."

What he did in the drug store was in the nature of casting an anchor to windward.

His last call was at the humble lodging house to which financial distress had driven him. He owed the landlady a week's room rent, and her eyes bulged wonderingly as they fell on the roll from which he extracted three dollars. Already the landlady was in a half daze over the way her seedy lodger had suddenly blossomed forth in bright new raiment. She was very respectful, which was a marked changed from her recent attitude toward Bailey; and, also, she was exceedingly curious.

"Fortune's wheel has turned for me, Mrs. Crilley." This was the only sop he threw to her curiosity. "I'm leaving at once for the West. There are only a few odds and ends of personal property in my room, and what I do not take with me you may dispose of in any manner you think best. Good-by."

He shook her limp hand; and when he at last departed, Mrs. Crilley was still dazed and wondering. Following a late supper in a restaurant, Bailey proceeded to the railroad station. And there happened the only untoward incident he had encountered since his crowded hour in the park. The redcap left the wrong grip in his sleeper section. With the strange traveling bag in his hand he started through the train on a hunt for his new suit case. Then came a surprise.

In the second sleeper forward he met

a young lady with the suit case. "Ah," she exclaimed in a tone of great relief, "there it is! I was very much worried about that bag. You are looking for this case, are you not?"

Bailey, staggered, fell back a step. Brown hair, blue eyes, young, and very pretty! Could it be possible that this was the same girl he had seen in the park, first with the tatting shuttle and then in the canoe? He dropped his eyes to the name tag buckled to the handle of the bag. "Miss Mildred M. Summers," was the name he read there.

"Yes, Miss Summers," he said, struggling to get back to normal; "sorry you have been annoyed."

She smiled. Surely he had seen that smile before. She was at a disadvantage, for the suit case was neither tagged nor otherwise marked.

"So far as annoyance goes," she told him, "I guess it's about fifty-fifty." They exchanged luggage. "Thank you," she said, and turned with her traveling bag and went forward.

Bailey thought about Miss Mildred M. Summers before he went to sleep that night; and he thought about her when he got up in the morning, hoping he might see her at breakfast in the dining car. But she did not put in an appearance. Just after the train started through Kansas, Bailey traveled its length to the buffet car. He could not discover Miss Summers anywhere; but one of the Pullmans was a compartment sleeper, and very likely she was snugged away in one of the compartments.

Was she, or was she not, the girl he had seen in the park? At first he had been almost positive that she was, but now he was beginning to have doubts. It was almost incredible that they two should meet again, on the Transcontinental Limited, westward bound. Although Chance often coquets weirdly with Old Probabilities, yet here was a turn of destiny that seemed too impossible.

"I've been under some sort of a spell ever since I took charge of that pasteboard box," thought Bailey, "and now the spell is apparently working on my judgment. I've got to come out of it, if I'm to pull off this Tarantula Springs job in a way that's safe and sane. Miss Mildred M. Summers is not the tatting girl. Now, Bells Bailey, you wake up and be sensible."

But he had no sooner, as he supposed, recovered his mental poise, than he found his judgment going off at another fool tangent. Directly across from him, in the buffet car, sat a large man with red hair and a florid face. Bailey caught himself wondering if this could be the hobo of the bridge episode. The red-haired man was talking with a person who wore high-heeled boots, a suit of crumpled "ready-mades," and had a high-crowned, broad-brimmed Stetson hat on one of his crossed knees.

"Punchin' cows for the Blakesley outfit in southern Arizona," Bailey heard the man in the boots confide to the man with the red hair; "been away for a month lookin' over the East. Believe me, neighbor, I'll be glad to hit the range again."

Bailey, just then, had another wild dream. Was that cowboy the sour-faced pessimist who had offered him a drink of forbidden wet goods, and had later gone canoeing with the girl of the shiny tatting shuttle? There was a burr to the voice that certainly sounded familiar.

Realizing suddenly to what wild extremes his speculations were carrying him, Bailey threw away his half-smoked cigar and bolted for his own Pullman. His wits were out of bounds completely. He wanted to nap a little in a seat corner of his section, in the hope of quieting an imagination which, he felt, was becoming too unreliable. The first thing he knew he would be mistaking the little conductor for Phineas Thorpe, or the brakeman with a pink in his buttonhole for Condon J. Burt!

However, dozing in the forenoon was out of the question, so Bailey read a morning newspaper, and followed that with two hours of light fiction in a magazine. By luncheon time he had the impression that he was mentally refreshed and steadied. The girl with the auburn hair was in the dining car,

across the aisle and one table in advance of the place at which he was seated. It was borne in upon him, rather disagreeably, that he was neither refreshed nor steadied mentally, after all. The lovely face, which he studied in profile, continued to recall insistently the girl in the park.

"'Balmy,'" he thought; "that's what the Tommies, overseas, would have called my state of mind. I'm like poor old Beasley, who was shell shocked and took me for a general—and his nurse for the Queen of Sheba."

Following luncheon, Bailey passed two hours in the buffet car. Fortunately neither the big fellow with the red hair nor the cowboy appeared in the club car to bother him. He returned to his sleeper and read some more fiction; then he struck up an acquaintance with a traveling man on the observation platform, and the time passed very pleasantly.

Bailey and the traveling man had dinner together. This new acquaintance did not remind the ex-doughboy of anybody he had ever seen before; and he was just congratulating himself on having a cheery, clear-headed companion right up to the junction point where he was to leave the main line when the porter appeared with a whisk broom and told the traveling man that the next station was where he got off.

That was at nine p. m. After bidding the drummer good-by, and watching him debark, Bailey strolled disappointedly back to the "umbrella porch," as he had heard the observation platform called, and settled himself down on a camp stool.

"Pleasant out here, don't you think?"

It was a soft voice and had a familiar ring. Bailey turned around—and drew a sharp breath. It was the girl with the auburn hair; and she was plying a tatting shuttle! Trying further to convince himself that he was mistaken in her identity was out of the question.

"Did I startle you?" the girl went on, with an amused laugh. "I thought you knew there was some one else on this rear platform."

An incandescent bulb glowed in the top of the umbrella porch—an artificial glare that killed all the poetical glamour of a soft, round moon and a sky full of glimmering stars. This was well, for Bailey was not sentimentally inclined at the moment.

"I knew there was some one else out here, Miss Summers," he told her; then smiled as he added: "It wasn't that, but the tatting that threw me off my balance temporarily."

The girl promptly rolled up her fancywork, stowed it in a silk bag, and hung the bag over the back of her chair.

"You mustn't be off your balance, even temporarily, Mr. Bailey," she said. "I didn't dream that tatting could have such a tremendous influence on a person."

"The name is correct," he commented, "but I'm puzzled to know where you got it."

"Not from your suit case, certainly. I knew who you were some time before the redcap mixed our luggage. But that is immaterial. What I am curious to know is why this fancywork of mine gave you such a start. Do you mind explaining?"

"Well, you are really the girl I saw in the park," he answered. "I was in doubt about that until I saw you manipulating the shuttle. So," he continued whimsically, "we are old friends. Are you traveling far, Miss Summers?"

"As far as a place called Tarantula Springs, Mr. Bailey," was her surprising statement.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "It just happens that I am bound for the same place. Tarantula Springs seems to be quite popular."

"I wouldn't say popular. The right word, I think, would be 'necessary.' I haven't gone hunting for Professor Purcell from choice, but because of the demands of plain, prosy business."

Here was another surprise. Bailey could not believe that his plans and the girl's fell out in that way by mere accident. Just what was Miss Summers' business with Purcell, anyway? Bailey wished he knew. She was growing by swift degrees into a deep, baffling mystery.

The girl reached over her shoulder and produced an orange from the silk work bag. "Are you fond of oranges, Mr. Bailey?" she inquired calmly.

"Not at bedtime," he returned.

"Well, I am. Acquired the habit in France. Have you a knife? I find I left mine back in the sleeper."

"Then you were a Red Cross nurse, 'over there!' " he said, removing a man's size jackknife from his trousers pocket. "Do you know, Miss Summers, I guessed that when I saw you in the park."

"Mind reading or second sight?" She laughed softly. "But you never guessed I could swim!" She held out her hand for the knife.

"Permit me," he requested, and reached for the orange.

"I like my oranges in the Florida way; the juice, not the pulp——"

"I know; prefer 'em that way myself."

Orange in one hand and knife in the other, he stood up and leaned his back against the railing. The Limited had come to a full stop at a place where there seemed no excuse for it. All about the train was shadowy open country. A house, in which section hands probably lived, stood in dusky silhouette on one side of the track.

Close to the rails, and a little to the rear of the umbrella porch, was a large pile of ties. There was a damp, marshy odor in the air, and a rural chorus of frogs and crickets formed a steady background for the obbligato of the panting engine at the other end of the train.

"Why in the world are we stopping here?" the girl inquired.

"Probably for water," Bailey said.

He was working carefully at the orange, trimming the outside in a little circle around the stem end. Next, he plugged the fruit and penetrated with his blade to the juicy interior—all in the most improved Florida manner. He had nearly finished when the Limited began very slowly to get under way.

And at that moment, all unheralded by the faintest sound of voice or movement, a wide noose writhed through the air from the direction of the pile of ties. Bailey, backed against the platform railing, failed to note the circle of hemp. The girl saw it, however, and sprang to her feet with a cry of warning. She was too late by a fraction of a second.

The noose fell, encompassing Bailey's head and shoulders. In a twinkling it had dropped to the rail, grown taut, and imprisoned his arms at his sides. Orange and knife dropped from his hands. He felt the increasing pull, and crouched and braced himself against the railing and the iron grille work below it.

Two dusky forms had leaped from the shelter of the railroad ties to the middle of the track. Tailed on to the other end of the rope, they were digging in with their feet and bracing backward.

All this had happened in a few brief seconds. But, sudden though the movement had been, its object was perfectly apparent. Bailey was to be pulled off the train. As the Limited moved onward at increasing speed, the rope was to hold rigid and drag him overboard.

With the use of hands and arms denied him, Bailey was endeavoring to pit his strength against that of the two schemers on the ties. The strain was terrific. The men between the rails were slipping and sliding and scrambling, but grimly holding to the end of the reata.

Bailey, panting and struggling, felt himself yielding to the tremendous pressure across the platform railing. And at the very moment when he was about to slip clear of the platform, the girl leaped to his side, and leaned quickly out beyond his straining form.

Another second and the pressure relaxed. The men between the rails tumbled backward in a ludicrous sprawl—contortions dimly visible in the half gloom. And Bailey slumped to the moving deck under his feet, breathing hard.

"That was a very close call, Mr. Bailey!" exclaimed the girl.

She was cool and composed, just as an army nurse who had no doubt been under shell fire might be in such circumstances. She had Bailey's knife in

her hand; and he understood that, at the critical moment, she had caught up the knife and severed the rope's taut strands. An admirable display of quick thinking and quicker action, he called it.

Slowly Bailey got to his feet, freed himself of the noose, and tossed it into the right of way.

"That was remarkably well done, Miss Summers!" he declared.

"Oh, no," she told him; "it happened to be the obvious thing, and I did it. Here's your knife, Mr. Bailey. And even my orange didn't go overboard! We're rather lucky all around, don't you think?"

CHAPTER VI.

TWO AND TWO TOGETHER.

AN hour later, while Bailey lay in his bunk considering the mysterious Miss Summers, and the foiled attempt to remove him bodily from the Limited, the train halted and remained at a standstill for so long that he lifted the curtain at one of his windows and peered out. The place was small and not one, it struck him, to claim such lengthened attention from a fast train. Some one was hurrying along the aisle of the car. Bailey opened his curtains and saw the porter.

"Why are we stopping here, porter?" he asked.

"Track ahead blocked by a freight wreck, cap'n," was the answer. "Reckon we'll be here for quite a spell."

Bailey dropped back on his pillow and resumed his speculations. So far as the girl was concerned, he frankly admitted himself to be "up in the air." She was going to Tarantula Springs, and even to the same Professor Purcell with whom Bailey himself had important business. Why this was so he could not imagine.

Bailey was impressed with the idea that her journey, in some manner, had not a little to do with his own. The circumstances of Miss Summers' being in the park, taking the same train, going to the same place in the Southwest, and intending to make a call on the same man at Tarantula Springs, were all eloquent of design and too far-fetched for the ways of chance. But Bailey could make nothing of that part of the situation.

He was a little more at home with the main adventure of the evening—the attempt to haul him bodily off the platform of the moving Limited. It must be that the red-haired man and the cowboy, whom he had seen in the club car, were really the hobo and the sour-faced pessimist whom he had met in the park. For some reason, they wanted the little pasteboard box; and they had not hesitated to rope Bailey and try to drag him off the train in the hope of securing it. Here, again, bobbed up the why of it all; a very important question for which there seemed no answer. Bailey gave it up and went to sleep.

In the morning he strolled into the dining car for breakfast; and he was given a seat directly across the aisle from the red-haired man and the cowboy! He began revising his theories.

The two men with the rope had surely been left behind by the Limited, on the preceding evening. That being the case, it followed naturally that these two in the dining car could not have been the ones who had made the audacious attempt with the reata. It was a simple matter of putting two and two together, as the saying is; of summing up the known facts and abiding by the result, no matter what fine theories it demolished.

The large, red-haired person and his cowboy companion had absolutely no interest in Bailey, to judge by their manner. They paid attention to their breakfast and to each other, and took only casual note of the man across from them.

Miss Summers was not in the dining car; but she was there at noon, and, from a distant seat, nodded brightly to the ex-service man as he dropped into a chair at another table. Had there been room at Miss Summers' table Bailey would have invited himself to eat luncheon with her, but all four chairs at that particular table were occupied.

After his usual afternoon smoke in the buffet car, Bailey made his way to the observation platform. Miss Sum-

mers was not there. He sat down to wait, hoping that his patience would be rewarded. It was; for, presently, Miss Summers came with her silk bag and took the unoccupied camp chair beside him.

Besides Bailey and Miss Summers, there were an elderly lady and a little girl on the umbrella porch. The little girl was taking kodak pictures of the passing scenery. With alien ears to overhear their talk, Miss Summers and Bailey conversed on general topics; but when the lady and the little girl left the rear platform, the events of the preceding evening came up for discussion.

"Is there any reason, Mr. Bailey," queried Miss Summers, "why two men should want to drag you off the train in that startling manner?"

"Only one reason, I think," he said; "and that is robbery."

"It was rather rough and spectacular for a mere robbery. It seems to me other methods might have proved more effective. I've been thinking," the girl went on, "that those men, for some purpose of their own, wanted to delay your trip to Tarantula Springs. Would there be any reason for that?"

"I can't think of any." Bailey reflected a moment. How far ought he to go in taking this young woman into his confidence? The mystery of her being there, en route to the same place he was going, acted automatically as a check on personal disclosures. "Miss Summers," he asked, "do you happen to know Doctor Phineas J. Thorpe of the Travelers and Explorers Club?"

"I heard him lecture on his West African discoveries during a recent ladies' night at the club," she answered, "and I was also introduced to him. Of course, everybody has read about him in the newspapers. A most remarkable man!"

There was no hint in this of anything in the way of light for Bailey.

"I saw a red-haired man, and a man who looked like a cowboy, in the buffet car yesterday," Bailey went on, "and somehow they reminded me of the fellow who took my coat on the lagoon bridge, and of the chap you were canoeing with in the lagoon. Of course, they were differently dressed. I had about decided I was mistaken, until that attempt was made to drag me off the train, last night. I was snared by a cowboy's reata; and, in the dim light, one of the men at the other end of the rope vaguely suggested the red-haired man."

The girl's mobile face reflected deep interest. "Well, may they not have been the two miscreants?" she asked.

"Impossible," he said. "The train was gathering headway rapidly when you slashed the reata. It would have been manifestly impossible for the two to get aboard again. This morning, Miss Summers, I saw both men at breakfast in the dining car."

"It does not follow that the two in the dining car were not the ones who tried to delay you last night."

She spoke quietly, and Bailey's amazed eyes sought her face.

"Evidently you are better informed than I am, Miss Summers," he observed. "How could it be possible?"

"We were delayed for two hours, last night, at a little station, while a freight wreck was being cleared from the main track," the girl proceeded. "The train stopped less than an hour after our little adventure out here. I was wide awake all during those two hours. Just before the train started, I saw from my window an automobile dash up along the wagon road. The car came from the east, Mr. Bailey, and two men got out of it and boarded the train. Isn't it possible—rather, isn't it altogether likely—that those men were this red-haired person and the cowboy?'

"By George!" exclaimed Bailey, struck hard by the girl's reasoning. "The freight wreck proved their opportunity to get back on the Limited. Undoubtedly there was a telegraph station at that water tank; news that the Limited was being held up by the wreck got back to the two men; they found an automobile somewhere and overhauled the train! Now they are brazening the matter out, sure in their own minds that I cannot suspect them! If you hadn't seen that automobile I would

still be in the dark. You must know that cowboy, Miss Summers."

"How does that follow?" she asked coolly.

"If he is the man I think he is, you were canoeing with him on the park lagoon."

"Then certainly I know him, for I am not in the habit of canoeing with strangers. But I haven't seen Jerry Daller on the Limited; and, naturally, I should have to get a good look at him in order to be sure that he and the man you saw me with in the park are one and the same."

"Who is this Jerry Daller?"

"A brother of a girl I know, Mr. Bailey, and merely an acquaintance."

"Is he a cowboy?"

"He used to live in the West. Really, however, I know very little about him. I had an object in going out in that canoe with Jerry Daller—or I should not have gone."

Here was another moment when confidences would have greatly simplified matters, but neither the girl nor Bailey showed any disposition to delve deep into their personal affairs.

"It is getting too dusty out here," remarked Miss Summers, cutting short an embarrassing silence, "and I believe I will go back to my sleeper. If I get a good look at the cowboy, Mr. Bailey, I will let you know whether or not he is Jerry Daller. Meanwhile," she finished earnestly, her hand on the screen door, "I would advise you to be very, very careful."

Bailey was not finding the dust oppressive; in fact, there was no more of it than there had been on the evening of the preceding day, when they were gliding across the Kansas prairies. This girl with the auburn hair had not complained about it then. She had beaten a retreat, Bailey was positive, in order to avoid further questioning.

His feeling of disappointment in Miss Summers was hardly justified. He began to realize this after a few minutes' sober reflection. If she was an enigma to him, no doubt he was quite as much of a riddle to her. And if he refused to be frank and open in the matter of his own business, how could he in reason expect her to be confidential about private affairs?

A barrier of hidden motives had interposed itself between them. Hereafter they would not be able to meet each other without a feeling of constraint. Bailey regretted this exceedingly.

It seemed to him that he had known Miss Summers for a long time. The calendar is a matter of days merely, while life tells its story in events and experiences. One person will live more in a year than another will in a decade. It all depends on the completeness with which a person responds to his environment.

From the bench in the park, Bailey had brought Mildred Summers into his life by conjuring up his sister Laura. She had given him a smile that had warmed his heart. He had dived from the bridge into the park lagoon for her; his suit case and her traveling bag had been mixed by a redcap; they had talked together on the umbrella porch; and she had saved him from possible disaster by a display of rare presence of mind. All this, in the ordinary course of events, might have occupied weeks or months instead of two or three days.

Besides, there was a subtle attraction about Miss Summers. Bailey was quick with his likes and dislikes, and he was beginning to like the auburn-haired ex-army nurse immensely. Here, undoubtedly, was the secret of his disappointment when she had left him so abruptly. But he felt different about that, half an hour afterward, on returning to his own Pullman quarters.

He did not see Miss Summers at dinner that evening; but when he got off the train to stretch his legs in a New Mexican city where they were to stop for an hour, he caught a glimpse of her pacing the station platform. He hurried forward to join her; and she, either purposely or by accident, evaded him in the crowd. He found her, at last, in the great room of the station building where Indian curios were displayed for sale. She was looking at Navajo blankets. By the time he reached the

blanket department, she had gone to inspect an assortment of primitive crockery; and from there he followed her to a counter where she was selecting picture post cards.

"Going to remember the folks back home, Miss Summers?" he inquired.

She smiled at him over her shoulder. "For my own collection, Mr. Bailey," she answered; "this trip will be so short that writing letters or post cards to my folks is hardly necessary."

This reminded him of his daily letter; and he secured a sheet of paper, an envelope, and a stamp, and retired to a writing desk. His trip also was to be short, and writing to Condon J. Burt every day was a nuisance. But he was under orders. He wrote:

In Kansas, last night, two men tried to rope me and drag me off the observation platform. The attempt failed, and it is all I have to report.

He was about to sign his name when a man in a cap hurried up to him. "Does your name happen to be Bailey?" the man asked.

"You've nicked it," he answered; "Worthington Bailey."

"Then here's a telegram for you; it's addressed to you on Number One."

Bailey opened the yellow envelope, drew out the inclosed sheet, and, in considerable amazement, read the following:

Leave train at Lacoma. Understand Professor Purcell is there, studying the Pueblos.
BURT, GAINBRIDGE, AND PUTNAM.

"Here's a go!" he muttered; and he felt grieved about the new orders until he remembered that Miss Summers' business was also with Purcell, so that if he stopped off at Lacoma to see the professor she would have to do the same. He added the following to his letter to Burt:

Just received the message signed Burt, Gainbridge, and Putnam. If I find Purcell at Lacoma, it will shorten my work by at least four days.

Then he signed his name, sealed the letter, stamped it, and dropped it into a post box. Three minutes later he joined Miss Summers on the station platform.

"Here's news for you," he said. "I have just received a telegram instructing me to leave the train at Lacoma. Professor Purcell has finished studying the picture rocks at Tarantula Springs and is now in Lacoma studying the Pueblo Indians."

A look of incredulity crossed the girl's face. "It doesn't seem possible!" she exclaimed. "Are you positive there's no mistake, Mr. Bailey?"

"It's clear enough, Miss Summers, and is signed by three of my four employers. Read it for yourself."

She halted under an electric light and read the telegram carefully. "I wouldn't pay any attention to it, if I were you," she advised him. "I don't believe it is genuine."

"What makes you think it isn't genuine?" he demanded.

"That's the way it impresses me."

He laughed. "A woman's reason! Well, I can't afford to ignore the telegram. If it isn't genuine, I'll discover that at Lacoma. Then I can catch the next train west. What will you do, Miss Summers? Bank on your impressions and go on to Tarantula Springs?"

"I shall have to think it over," she said.

Then she turned away and he saw her laying a straight course for the station telegraph office.

CHAPTER VII.

STRATAGEMS AND SPOILS.

AFTER a great deal of consideration, Bailey arranged with the conductor of the train for a brief "stop-over" at Lacoma. He believed the telegram to be bona fide, and harbored none of Miss Summers' forebodings; nevertheless, it was the part of wisdom to "play safe." If, by any chance, he failed to find Professor Purcell in Lacoma and his work still called him to Tarantula Springs, he would not be out any more money for transportation.

Lacoma was about as large as a cross-roads hamlet in the East. For the railroad company, however, it was a good order point; also it was picturesque and attractive to tourists because of the ter-

raced Indian pueblo only a short walk from the station.

Trains east and west, in the daylight hours, were always greeted by a swarm of squaws, in full Indian regalia, with pottery, beadwork, and other trinkets to exchange for travelers' dinero. This swarthy, chattering, gay-clad throng, operating almost within the shadow of the queer community house, was a commercial asset for any transcontinental line; and, as such, it was exploited to the utmost.

Bailey's train was due in Lacoma at eleven-twenty, but, being a little behind schedule, it did not arrive until midnight. Bailey, suit case in hand, descended from the darkened Pullman and stood in the faint glow of the station lights. A sleepy porter closed with a clatter the vestibule door behind him. Then a second door, two coaches forward, rattled shut; and Bailey turned to see a slender figure approaching him through the half gloom.

"Decided your impressions regarding that telegram were not reliable, Miss Summers?" he asked.

"No," the girl answered, "I am still of the opinion that this is not your proper move, Mr. Bailey. Perhaps I can prove it; we'll see."

She went into the station, and, through an open door, he could see her at the window of the operator's room. He followed her into the building, and saw her turn away from the window disappointedly.

"I sent a telegram from the town where you received your message," she explained, "and hoped to have an answer here. But it has not come."

Just at this moment a man entered the waiting room. He wore a bell-crowned Mexican hat, a cotton shirt open at the throat, and brown corduroy trousers.

"Mr. Worthington Bailey?" he inquired genially.

"Yes," Bailey told him.

"Well, I'm Hanchett, Professor Purcell's secretary. The professor got a telegram this afternoon stating that his friend, Doctor Thorpe, was sending you out here to see him, and that you'd arrive on the eleven-twenty. I'm here to take you to the professor."

"Fine!" Bailey exclaimed. "I'll be with you in about two shakes, Hanchett."

The professor's secretary went out on the platform again, and Bailey returned to Miss Summers.

"You see?" he observed. "Everything seems to be working out properly. Too bad you have been put to so much inconvenience at this time of night, Miss Summers. If you'll stay here in the station while I go with Hanchett——"

"You forget," the girl interrupted, "that I also have business with Professor Purcell. I shall go with you and the professor's secretary."

It was all right for him to go knocking around in a strange place at midnight, but he felt that it was no venture for a woman. He told Miss Summers so, and was rewarded with a cool, deprecating smile.

"Objection overruled!" she said, in her best judicial manner. "I suppose you have seen army surgeons and nurses working under fire, Mr. Bailey? If you have, you ought to realize that your solicitude on my account is uncalled for. I am going. Shall we leave our luggage here?"

He made no further protest but took the traveling bag and the suit case and asked the telegraph operator to take charge of them. Hanchett, when informed that Miss Summers was to accompany them, seemed nonplused.

"The professor hasn't had any word about Miss Summers," he said. "He's over at the pueblo in rather primitive quarters, and I don't know how he'll feel about receiving a lady at such an hour. Can't your business wait until to-morrow, Miss Summers?"

"It is going to be attended to to-night," she said calmly.

"All right, then, if that's the way you feel about it," Hanchett returned. "This way."

He led them the length of the platform, then on by a well-worn path past the huddle of houses that comprised the town. Beyond the houses was a wide level of bare ground backed by the In-

dian pueblo. Out of a clear sky, moon and stars looked down on a scene that had a primitive, alien splendor all its own. The girl halted and drew a long breath of wonder.

"It's almost like being in some Far Eastern country!" she murmured.

Away from the station lights the night was filled with a soft brightness that brought out near and distant surroundings with the clearness of a silver print. The community house, rising in terraces like three gigantic steps, was etched against the dark in fairylike lines. Even the ladders that led up from terrace to terrace could be plainly seen.

"Some little view in this moonlight, eh?" said Hanchett, over his shoulder. "The professor is fair daffy about that mud castle. Everybody's asleep, over there, but him. He's waiting up."

They crossed the level ground like spectral figures, and came presently to what might be called the "riser" of the first step. Hanchett halted at the foot of a ladder.

"You'll find the professor on the first terrace, Bailey," Hanchett went on. "I'll wait here for you."

"These are strange diggings," Bailey protested, "and I feel as though I should like to be personally conducted." He turned to the girl. "I'll have the professor come down and talk to you, Miss Summers," he added, "so it won't be necessary for you to do any climbing."

"Oh, this is easy!" she said, and started lightly up the ladder.

"After you, Bailey," Hanchett remarked.

Bailey followed Miss Summers; and he had no sooner reached the terrace than the ladder slipped sidewise and fell to the ground.

"There!" spoke up Miss Summers. "That's the first proof that your telegram was a forgery."

"What's the idea, Hanchett?" Bailey called down sharply to the man below.

"Ask us, Mr. Worthington Bailey," came a voice from behind.

Bailey whirled to an about-face. Two forms emerged quickly from the shadow of the second terrace; and one was large, while the other, almost a head shorter, minced along as a cowboy walks in his high-heeled, pinching boots. Moonbeams glimmered on the blued steel of revolvers. Two of them were leveled—and at Bailey.

"Another proof!" scored the girl.

Bailey realized that he had walked into a trap. Some one, working against him, apparently knew as much about his business as he did. Miss Summers drew closer to his side, and he marveled at her composure.

"Jerry Daller," said the girl sharply, "I'm surprised at you!"

"I guessed maybe you'd be surprised," returned the cowboy easily, "although I can't just figure what business you've got here. This party was planned for Bailey; so you stand back and keep out of it, Miss Summers, and you'll be more comfortable."

"You threw that rope, last night——"

"And got back on the train again, by luck, after you made the bobble for Red and me," went on Daller. "A moharrie sure mixes up things. If a freight wreck hadn't held up the Limited——"

"Cut out the chatter," grunted Red. "'In the hand or on the person,'" he continued, addressing Bailey. "That's the condition, eh? Well, pull that box out of your coat and toss it to me—I can see the bulge in your heart-side pocket from here. Be in a rush, Worthington Bailey. If I shoot, all the Pueblos will come boiling out of this apartment house. I don't want to make a scene; but, if I have to, Jerry and me'll make our get-away—and take the box with us. Having a lady along, you can't afford to rough things."

"Be as rough as you please, Mr. Bailey," urged the girl, "and don't mind me. I'll do what I can to help. Drop the gun, Red!" she ordered. "Jerry Daller, you haven't the nerve to shoot a woman!"

This most amazing girl had suddenly conjured a revolver of her own into her small fist. She held it steadily, and looked over the sights of it at the large man who was threatening Bailey.

There was a neat little automatic at Bailey's hip, and he might have drawn it while Red and Daller, caught at a disadvantage by the girl's maneuver, were giving her their momentary attention. But he did not care to start any shooting that would endanger Miss Summers. He chose rather to use his hands, and hurled himself at Red with all the agile quickness for which he was noted.

A heavy blow staggered the big fellow. He dropped his revolver, but caught himself before he could fall and closed furiously with Bailey. Now that Red was being looked after, the girl swerved the point of her weapon to cover the cowboy.

"Throw away your revolver, Jerry Daller!" she commanded sternly. "I'll have a fine story to tell Marie about you! Do you hear? Let go of the gun!"

"Aw, say——" The cowboy started to temporize, but a suggestive movement of the girl's caused him to have a change of heart. "Well, there it is!" he snarled, dropping the revolver. "What're you along with Bailey for, anyway? What's your game?"

Hanchett was manipulating the ladder again, and the top of it could be seen rising at the edge of the first terrace. The girl placed herself so that she could command that avenue of danger, in addition to holding Daller inactive.

Meanwhile, Bailey and Red had been rolling about the roof of the pueblo's first story, smashing crockery, water jars, and other fragile domestic utensils scattered about in the way of their furious struggle. Red was larger and stronger than Bailey, but not so quick. Again and again the ex-service man barely saved himself from disaster.

At the edge of the second and third terraces odd figures were appearing in clear-cut silhouette. Indians, men, women, and children, were aroused by the strange clatter on their lower roof top, and were flocking to view the disturbance with wide and startled eyes.

"Come down!" Miss Summers called. "Please come down and help!"

The Pueblos, however, made no move to come down. Evidently they were content to watch from a distance. All they could see was a dim phantasmagoria of struggling forms below, comprising a vague tumult so strange that they did not care to be involved in it.

Disaster at last came to Bailey—and to Red, as well. Their wild struggles carried them to the edge of the terrace, and they rolled over and dropped the length of the first story. Hanchett, whose head and shoulders had just appeared above the flat roof top, gave vent to a yell and hastily descended. Miss Summers, who had so wonderfully seconded Bailey in his one-sided battle, had her mounting hopes submerged abruptly in a flood of apprehension.

"Come on, Jerry!" cried the voice of Hanchett, out of the nether gloom. "Red's got it! We're all to the merry, now. Hustle!"

Daller was already on his way to the ladder. Another moment and he was on his way down. The girl hastened to follow him. From the foot of the ladder she saw three forms making off—not toward the town, but in the direction of open country beyond the pueblo. Red was limping painfully as he ran, and Hanchett and Daller were on either side of him and supporting him.

Miss Summers hastened to Bailey, who was sitting up on the beaten sand and leaning his back against the wall of the community house.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Bailey?" she demanded.

"Not much," he answered; "jarred, that's all. Might have broken an arm or a leg, but luck was with me."

"Luck!" echoed the girl darkly. "You can talk of that when those three scoundrels made off with that valuable pasteboard box!"

"Valuable?" he repeated. "Just how valuable is it—if you know?"

"I do know," she told him; "it's worth a hundred thousand dollars, at the least! And you've lost out, Mr. Bailey. I warned you, but you would not listen

to me. Oh, it is too bad—after all my work!"

Bailey got slowly to his feet, then bent over to pick up his new Fedora. He brushed his hair back thoughtfully, put on his hat, and casually measured the height of the wall at his side. In her disappointment and chagrin the girl's remarks were illuminating. But his mind seemed to be elsewhere.

"Yes, that was quite a drop," he mused. "The big fellow was underneath and he must have had a terrific jolt. Speaks pretty well for him that he was able to come through it, get what he thought he wanted, and make off."

"Let's hurry back to the station," Miss Summers urged; "perhaps we can get men and horses and stop those robbers! There's a chance, Mr. Bailey."

"We're well rid of them," he told her; "don't bother—let them go."

His coat was unbuttoned; and he now opened his negligee shirt at the breast, and presented for his companion's inspection an oblong carton that swung from his neck by a cord.

"Mr. Bailey!" gasped the girl. "Is that—can that be——"

"It's the carton given me by Phineas Thorpe," explained Bailey. "I got a similar box in a drug store, before I started on this trip, and filled it with odds and ends so it would match the weight of the other one. Stratagems are not all for the lawless, Miss Summers. Warned by my experience in the park I took precautions. Red was satisfied and did not look further when he found what I had in my coat pocket looked——"

"Oh, you overseas man!" cried the girl delightedly. "And I thought you had blundered!"

"I'll admit I went wrong on the telegram," he said, as they made their way across the level ground toward the station, "but I had to take a chance in order to make sure I did not go contrary to instructions. You understand?"

"I do," she told him happily, "and I think you are wonderful!"

"Check!" he returned. "That's just what I am thinking about you."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LUCKY ONE.

THIS affair at the pueblo, inspiring a mutual trust and appreciation in Miss Summers and Bailey, inclined them toward the confidences which they had thus far withheld. Back in the lighted railway station, while they waited for a westbound train—the one they had been on had proceeded—due at three-fourteen in the morning, they engaged in a frank discussion of the work upon which each of them was engaged.

They were alone in the waiting room. The night operator, in his cubby-hole of an office, was snoring so gently that his familiar station call could not fail to arouse him. Bailey was not unmindful of dangers that might still threaten when Red and his confederates opened the counterfeit box. He and the girl seated themselves on a corner bench, facing the door and with no windows commanding their position. His automatic lay on his knees, and Miss Summers' revolver was on the bench beside her. The hint of peril drove sleep from their eyes and kept their minds alert.

"It is plain, Miss Summers," said Bailey, "that you know more about the pasteboard box than I do. And Red, Daller, and Hanchett are also better informed. I was told nothing by the four gentlemen in the Travelers and Explorers Club, by whom I was hired, except that I was to take the carton to Professor Purcell and bring it back. It is rather extraordinary, don't you think, that they should trust a perfect stranger with so valuable a parcel?"

"No," returned the girl. "If I am correct in my surmise, not one of your employers has the least idea that the box's contents has any intrinsic value whatever."

This was a queer statement, and Bailey's eyes widened. "So it happens that you know more than they do about it!" he exclaimed.

"I think—I am positive—that I do," she said confidently. "But let me tell you a little about myself, Mr. Bailey, and we shall understand each other bet-

ter. I am Mrs. Nathan Putnam's social secretary, and have been for two years. She and her husband treat me more as a daughter than as a hired employee. Last ladies' night at the Travelers and Explorers Club, when a reception was tendered to Doctor Thorpe, I was invited to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Putnam.

"At this affair," the girl went on, "Mrs. Putnam wore her famous Braganza pearls, which were lost or stolen somewhere in the crowded club parlors that night. The matter is being kept very quiet, and even the city police were not advised of it. The house committee, privately but thoroughly, is doing everything possible to recover the missing gems."

The girl paused a moment, and Bailey's thoughts went back to the conversation he had overheard in the private dining room of the club. Miss Summers continued:

"The pearls, at a most conservative estimate, are worth one hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Putnam is many times a millionaire, and his wife would not have taken five times that for the famous sautoir. It was an heirloom, you see, in the Putnam family, and came to Mrs. Putnam from her husband's mother. My employer was very much distressed, as you may believe. It is said that the house committee has offered its private agents a five-thousand-dollar bonus if the pearls are found and restored to their owner within a reasonable length of time. And Mrs. Putnam told me that she would gladly pay ten thousand dollars to have her pearls back."

A slight flush tinged the girl's cheeks as she went on. "Now it so happens that I need ten thousand dollars very much. My brother has a ranch in Wyoming, and he will lose it this fall on a mortgage unless he can raise that exact amount. I would not ask Mr. and Mrs. Putnam for a loan—I couldn't do that—but I did ask them if they would let me try my hand at recovering the lost pearls. They tried to laugh me out of the idea, and then to dissuade me; but, as I still insisted that I wanted to undertake the work, they told me to go ahead.

"The moment Mrs. Putnam discovered that the pearls were gone, she notified her husband, and he went to the house committee. The doors of the clubhouse were guarded secretly, and every attaché of the club was searched. Each guest also underwent a quiet but most effective surveillance. Every nook and cranny of the building was given a thorough examination. Not a trace of the pearls was found.

"I have always been rather proficient in character analysis," Miss Summers continued, "and something happened on this ladies' night that haunted me as a possible clew. After the pearls were found to be missing, I came quite abruptly into the room where Doctor Thorpe's West African collection was on display. It was growing late, and the guests were beginning to leave. There was only one other in the room besides myself—a man called Jonas, who had been a body servant of Doctor Thorpe's in the African wilderness, but is now an attaché of the club.

"The back of this man Jonas was toward me as I entered the room. He was bending over a certain piece in the collection; and, when he heard me, he straightened hastily and whirled around. Mr. Bailey," said the girl earnestly, "if ever guilt was written in a man's face Jonas' expressed it at that moment. I could not be deceived.

"I told Mrs. Putnam of my suspicions. She repeated them to her husband, and he carried them to the house committee and to Doctor Thorpe. The doctor was highly indignant. He declared that suspicion might as justly fall upon him, as upon Jonas. Besides, humiliating as it was, Jonas had been among the first to be searched. Mr. Putnam told me that Doctor Thorpe knew his former servant thoroughly and vouched for his character, so it followed that I must surely be wrong. But I did not admit that it followed. When I was given carte blanche to play the detective, all my work centered upon Jonas.

"A woman—what could I do? A

man can proceed in so many direct ways unquestioned, that I found my sex a decided disadvantage right at the beginning. However, I took what I conceived to be my most promising course: I went to the park every day with my tatting, and I always found a bench from which I could watch the employees' entrance of the clubhouse.

"The four gentlemen who hired you to go to Tarantula Springs meet at the club every week day for luncheon. Jonas, by special request of Doctor Thorpe, always serves them. I could see the four come in their cars, and, later, I could see them leave. And every day, after they left, Jonas would come down to the servants' entrance and give a package—of food, I suppose—to a large, red-haired man who looked like a tramp. This——"

"The man on the footbridge," interposed Bailey, intensely interested; "the man on the train; the man who helped with the reata in Kansas, last night; the Red of the Indian pueblo! Is that right, Miss Summers?"

She nodded. "He was always hanging about the park," she proceeded, "when I happened to be there with my tatting. And there were two others—the man in the cap whom you chased along the bank of the lagoon—I saw that from the canoe—and Jerry Daller, who offered you something to drink and was refused. Red would have brief conversations with each of them after meeting Jonas. I heard him say once: 'Grub! Come on, you guys, and get your whack.' But I believe this was only a pretext for them to get away together."

"I believe," murmured Bailey, his memory suddenly spurred, "that the man who called himself Hanchett here to-night was that fellow in the cap."

"I am as sure of him as I am of Jerry Daller," said the girl. "All three were on the train with us, but you encountered only Red and Daller. Hanchett was kept in the background. Last night, Red and Daller made their attempt to get the box and lost out. By luck, they succeeded in overtaking the train. They tried another plan. A telegram was sent, let us say, to Jonas; he acted upon it and sent the forged message to you. Red, Daller, and Hanchett got off the train at Lacoma when we did. Perhaps they dropped from the observation platform, on the side away from the station. Anyhow, they got off unknown to us.

"Hanchett appeared with his plausible story," Miss Summers went on, "and led you directly into the trap at the pueblo. I did not recognize him, dressed as he was; all three of the men, in fact, are as different as possible from the loafers I had seen in the park. But now that we know Hanchett is working with Red and Daller, there can be no doubt of his identity. But I am getting too far ahead with my theories.

"Now, Mr. Bailey, there are some things connected with that pasteboard box which developed into a difference of opinion between Messrs. Putnam, Gainbridge, and Burt on the one hand and Doctor Thorpe on the other. What these were, Mr. Putnam told his wife, and she, in strictest confidence, passed along to me.

"I cannot tell you about these matters; but I will inform you of one angle of the affair that seems to have considerable interest for both of us in our work. Messrs. Putnam, Gainbridge, and Burt each had—that box, let us say—for one day; and an attempt was made to rob all three of them.

"Now, please listen: Did Jonas play the part of eavesdropper during the luncheon hour at the club? And did Jonas, learning which of the men was to have the box, as I have called it, convey the information to Red at the servants' entrance? And were systematic attempts made to secure the supposed box? I firmly believe that the suppositions I have put to you are correct. There is a quartet of schemers at work to secure the box. Jonas, or perhaps Red, is the captain of the rogues. And what is it they are so interested in? What, I ask you, if not Mrs. Putnam's sautoir of pearls?"

"By George!" muttered Bailey, amazed at the girl's clever reasoning.

"The perplexing point is how and why the pearls happen to be in the box," Miss Summers continued. "No one knows that but Jonas. Trusted by Thorpe, as he is, I conceive that it was possible for Jonas to cover that point in some manner of which he alone is aware. I may secure a little light on this later. Our business now is to be careful of the box until it is placed once more in the hands of the four gentlemen at the club.

"I learned of the arrangement whereby you were to take the box to Tarantula Springs and back. Mrs. Putnam told me. The box undoubtedly contains the pearls. I feared Jonas might have juggled with the box and removed the pearls before you left on your journey. I could not, without perhaps spoiling everything, have you stopped and the box examined. I chose to accompany you into the Southwest, watchful of your every move. You will forgive me for saying, Mr. Bailey, that I was not sure of you. As I read your character in the park, over my tatting, I believed you to be honest, and capable, and fearless. But you were needy; and needy men are often tempted to accept bribes."

"I don't blame you," said Bailey. "You didn't know me."

"I know you now," observed the girl. "Your fight at the pueblo, and your cleverness in substituting a counterfeit box for the real one, has convinced me of your resourcefulness and integrity. I knew you would leave at once on your trip, and I was certain you would take the most direct route to Tarantula Springs. But which train? I telephoned the city ticket office. There was a reservation in the name of Bailey for the ten-thirty Limited.

"I called myself lucky in securing that information," Miss Summers went on. "You might not have made a reservation, you know, but have taken your chances at the Pullman window after buying your ticket. In that event I should have had no clew, and you would not have had me as a traveling companion."

"I am the lucky one, Miss Summers!" Bailey averred whole-heartedly.

She smiled. "Well," the girl proceeded, "the pearls must still be in the box. If Jonas had juggled with them before your start, why are his confederates continuing their frantic efforts to rob you? Since last night in Kansas, and to-night in New Mexico, I am fully convinced that you have in your possession Mrs. Putnam's property." Her voice fell to an undertone. "We could make sure of that by an examination, Mr. Bailey."

He straightened and stared. "No," he said. "If you know so much about my work, you will understand that the box is not to be opened until it is once more in the hands of Doctor Thorpe and his friends. If there was a million dollars in that bit of a carton, I wouldn't —I couldn't—fail those generous men who hired me. I am very sorry, Miss Summers, but that is the way I stack up."

She reached out her hand impulsively and grasped his. "I am more sure of you than ever, now," she told him. "You have four thousand, and I have ten thousand dollars to win. It is a great deal of money and, as I told you, you must be very careful. I am here to help, Mr. Bailey."

He told her about himself, his work in the box factory, his overseas service, his hard luck when he got out of the army. He went on by describing his sister, Laura, now happily married and living in St. Paul; Sister Laura, whose work with the tatting shuttle he remembered so well, and how that remembrance had drawn on his fancies in the park.

"That fancywork," he declared, "made us friends right from the start. I'll confess, though, that I was somewhat shocked when I saw you canoeing with Jerry Daller," he added, as the thought came to him.

"Jerry Daller is the brother of one of Mrs. Putnam's maids," explained Miss Summers, "and he called once or twice at the Putnam home. That is where I met him. Marie, his sister, is a very conscientious girl. Do you think she told Jerry that Mrs. Putnam was to wear the Braganza pearls that night?"

"I would give her the benefit of the doubt, I think," Bailey suggested.

"I have done so; but in the park, when Jerry asked me to take the canoe ride, it occurred to me that I might learn something if I went with him. Was that canoe accident really an accident, or merely designed to give Red a possible chance at the box? I have thought of this; and the complication of motives and designs is so puzzling that I have not been able to decide."

"It would take a Philadelphia lawyer to decide that," said Bailey with a laugh, "and even then he might not be able to get anywhere near the real truth."

He went on to tell about his plans in case he earned his four-thousand-dollar honorarium. He would go ranching in the West, in a modest way. That had always been his ambition. Perhaps Miss Summers' brother, in Wyoming, might know of an opening in that part of the country?

"Well," he broke off before the girl could answer, "I sure am rambling. I'd better earn that money before I think of making any investments. And I intend to earn it, for your sake as well as my own. If I fail, you stand to lose a lot more than I do. But, when it's all done and over with, we can't say that it has been easy money, can we?"

Just here the snores ceased in the operator's room. They gave over their talking, and the click of the telegraph instrument reached them loudly in the stillness. When the clicking stopped, the operator's head appeared in the ticket window.

"Are you Miss Mildred M. Summers, ma'am?" the operator inquired.

She told him that she was.

"Well," the night man said, "here's a message just come for you."

She walked to the window, secured the message, and brought it back to Bailey.

"If we had received this when we got off the Limited," she remarked, "we should have been saved that rough experience at the pueblo. But, honestly, I'm rather glad we had the experience, Mr. Bailey, for it has led to a better understanding between us. Read it, if you like."

The message ran as follows:

MISS MILDRED M. SUMMERS,
Lacoma, N. M.

No telegrams sent Bailey. Purcell still at Tarantula Springs. Tell Bailey message forgery and to disregard.

NATHAN PUTNAM.

"All's well that ends well," said Bailey, handing the message back. "I'll put this Lacoma adventure in my letter to-morrow. It's hardly necessary for me to wire."

The three-fourteen train could be heard rumbling in from the east. With his suit case in his left hand and his right hand in his coat pocket, gripping the automatic, Bailey escorted the girl to the station platform.

The three men who had made the trouble at the pueblo were not in evidence. As the headlight bored brightly into the dark and lighted up the station surroundings, Bailey was able to make a comprehensive survey of the vicinity.

"Red and his pals will not bother us any more this side of Tarantula Springs," he said to the girl. "They are afraid to show themselves."

The operator, carrying a lantern, emerged from the station and started along the platform. Bailey halted him.

"We were over at the pueblo, a little while ago," said Bailey, "and smashed up some of the Indians' crockery. Here's twenty dollars. Will you see that the chief of the outfit, over there, gets the money?"

"Surest thing you know." The night man laughed. "A double-X note would buy all the crockery in the pueblo. You're altogether too generous."

"I like that, Mr. Bailey," murmured the girl as he helped her aboard the train. "You don't overlook the little things, do you?"

CHAPTER IX.

ROUGH COUNTRY.

THERE were just two berths to be had on that early train through Lacoma—a lower for Miss Summers in one of the regular Pullmans and an upper in a tourist sleeper for Bailey.

"Any one else get on at Lacoma?" Bailey asked of the conductor when giving up his ticket.

"Just the lady and yourself," was the answer; "No. 9 don't get many from there."

Bailey had been fairly certain in his own mind, but to be reassured by the trainman filled him with a deep contentment. Red, Daller, and Hanchett might follow him and Miss Summers, but it was a comfort to know that they were not on the same train.

At two o'clock next afternoon the junction point was reached, and at two-twenty the travelers bound for Tarantula Springs started southward through Arizona. By five o'clock they were getting off the branch-line train at Agua Fria, the nearest railroad point to the professor's temporary headquarters.

There were two hotels in Agua Fria, and Bailey was told confidentially by a drummer that "if you go to one you'll wish you'd gone to the other." The town, Bailey discovered, was scarcely large enough to support even one good hotel; so the attempt to support two was a strain that told on the accommodations.

Miss Summers went to the Delmonico and Bailey to the Plaza. In a town where a shake shanty store was "The Bon Ton," and a battered adobe gambling den "The Palace," the travelers found that high-sounding names meant nothing at all.

After eating his supper Bailey made some inquiries of the Plaza's proprietor. How far was it to Tarantula Springs? "Six mile as the buzzard flies, but fifteen in the saddle." Was it an easy road to follow? "Up and down mostly, and so blind in spots you couldn't see it with a mikerscope." Then a stranger would need a guide? "He would, if he wanted to git where he was goin' without fallin' off'n a clift."

Did the proprietor know a man named Professor Purcell? "Shore did! Perfesser allus stops with me when he's down from the hills. Tried the Delmonico wunst and it nigh killed him, so now he's froze to the Plaza." Did the proprietor know of a reliable guide who could furnish riding horses and take Bailey and a lady to the professor?

The proprietor went into action, at this. A wiry little man was tilted back in a chair in one corner of the office, sound asleep with his chin on his narrow chest. The proprietor shook the sleeper into wakefulness.

"Job for you, Splinter," the proprietor announced, as the little man sputtered and rubbed his eyes.

"What fer sort of a job, Giddings?" asked Splinter.

"Pilotin' a couple o' tenderfeet, one a moharrie, to Purcell at Taranch Springs."

"Gosh-all-juniper, Gid," barked the little man wildly, "you know I ain't no ladies' man! I wouldn't pilot no moharrie ten jumps through the hills fer a fifty-case note."

"I'll give you a hundred dollars," put in Bailey, "if you'll make an early start in the morning and furnish two riding horses."

Splinter blinked.

"Bailey," said Giddings, "this is Ham Tully, better known as Splinter. Splinter," he added, "if you know easy money when you see it you'll land on this."

"How long d'y'u want to be gone to the Springs?" Splinter asked.

"Just long enough to have fifteen minutes with Professor Purcell," answered Bailey. "We'll leave in the morning and get back in the afternoon. A hundred dollars for the day's work, Tully. Here's twenty on account if you say yes."

Splinter looked longingly at the twenty-dollar bill extended in his direction. "And I git eighty more when I land you and the skirt back safe from the Springs, to-morrow afternoon?"

"You do."

Splinter grabbed the bill. "Stranger, y'u bought something," he asserted. "Two cayuses, one fer you and t'other fer the moharrie. But th' ain't no side saddles within a hundred miles. The dame rides man-fashion or she don't go."

"There'll be no trouble about that,"

Bailey said; "just see that her horse isn't a man-killer, that's all. When shall we start?"

"Sunup. I'll be here with the ridin' stock and you two be ready."

He went out with the dogged air of a man whose prejudices have stranded high and dry on a hundred-dollar reef. Giddings chuckled.

"He married a biscuit shooter in a railroad restaurant, years ago," he explained, "and she shore made him jump through the hoop, walk lame, and play dead. But this thing called Justice came lopin' up. Mrs. Splinter eloped with a hardware drummer, leavin' Splinter free, but loaded to the guards with prejudices agin' the fair sect. Reg'lar woman hater, Bailey, but that hundred in the long green hooked him. And le'me tell you, you can bank on Splinter both ways from the jack. He has his failin's, but fallin' down on a job ain't one of 'em. He'll see you through safe if for nothin' more than them eighty bones."

Bailey called at the Delmonico that evening, and told Miss Summers to be ready for a horseback ride into the hills by sunrise. "Get an early breakfast," he told her. "Can you ride in a man's saddle?"

"I couldn't ride in anything else," she said. "You haven't seen or heard anything of Red and his outfit, Mr. Bailey?"

"No, Miss Summers. It would be strange if I had, don't you think? They are far away on the back trail and the coast is clear for us."

"Well, we're delayed here for the night," she reasoned, "and they'll have plenty of time to catch up and carry on with their scheming. You don't imagine that they have quit?"

He shook his head. "All I ask is to get to Tarantula Springs and back to Agua Fria without interference," he returned, "and I believe we'll make it. When that's over with, and we're homeward bound, we can snap our fingers at Red and his tricky crowd."

The beds at the Plaza were hard, but Bailey was too tired and sleepy to mind that. He passed a comfortable and refreshing night, and was up with the dawn and eating the early breakfast Giddings had made ready for him. The first rays of the sun had no more than shown themselves above the eastern hills when Splinter let off a whoop in front of the hotel.

"All set, inside there!"

Bailey went out, carrying a cloth bag packed with sandwiches. "Maybe we'll get hungry on the road," he explained to Splinter.

The latter took the bag and made it fast to the back of his saddle. "Where's the dame?" he demanded.

"Over at the Delmonico—waiting."

"After we pick her up don't you let her talk to me none. If she's the faintin' kind and falls off o' Pinto there, I ain't responsible. Get that, Bailey."

"She's not the fainting kind."

It was clear to Bailey that Splinter was riding the best of the three mounts. But that, undoubtedly, was his prerogative. Bailey's horse was a roan and looked dependable; and the "calico," designed for Miss Summers, was small but neat and handsome.

Splinter watched Bailey as he rose to the saddle; and he continued to watch, even more keenly, while the roan contorted himself, lowered his head, and lifted his hind legs in the air until he almost lost his balance. Bailey wasn't troubled in the least. In fact, while the roan wriggled and bucked, he was fishing in his pocket for a cigar.

"'Pachie allers celebrates like that afore he starts," explained Splinter, with a rush of friendliness inspired by the Easterner's quietness and calm. "But he don't mean no harm. Reckon you've sot a hoss before."

"I can ride a little." Bailey brought out two cigars. "Have one, Splinter. Any train get in from the north last night?"

"One, about eleven."

"Passengers?"

"Nary, that I know of. No one blowed into the Plaza, anyways. I was playin' poker in the office till plumb midnight. This town ain't much fer passengers. Them that's outside don't

want to git in, and them that's in ain't got dinero enough to git out."

He rode off leading the pinto. Miss Summers was waiting on the veranda of the Delmonico Hotel, clad in a riding skirt, a blue blouse, a mannish little Stetson, and high tan shoes with spurs at the heels.

"Buenos, amigos!" she called.

Splinter turned around and stared as she ran lightly from the veranda and approached her horse.

"Fine little horse you've got for me," she remarked; "I'm a bit partial to calicoes." She swung to her seat with bird-like grace, then swung down again to readjust the stirrups. "No," she said to Bailey, who would have done it for her, "I'm used to this."

"Mr. Tully, Miss Summers," spoke up Bailey.

Splinter grunted. "Glad to know you," remarked the girl.

Splinter grunted again and used his spurs.

"Not what you'd call sociable, is he?" Miss Summers said to Bailey as they started after the guide.

"Woman hater," explained Bailey. "He was married once and had a dog's life. He asked me particularly not to let you talk to him."

"My sympathies already are with Mrs. Tully," returned the girl with a laugh. She lowered her voice. "There was a train from the north, last night, but no one came to the Delmonico. Any guests arrive at the Plaza?"

"No."

"Then, in all probability, the coast is clear. I feel as though I am going to enjoy this part of our trip, Mr. Bailey. The air is like wine! Really, I believe I could ride a thousand miles."

The rough going began right at the edge of town. From a "hogback" which they crossed they could see nothing but bare peaks and tumbled ridges ahead of them. Giddings was correct in stating that the trail was mostly up and down. The ridges grew steeper and higher as they advanced, and when the horses were not climbing they were slipping and sliding in some fearsome descent.

At one place they threaded a high pass, so narrow that they had to travel in single file; and, at another place, they wound around a mountain's scarp by a two-foot path, a steep wall on their left and a dizzy abyss on their right.

"Don't you look down!" Splinter called from ahead.

"Why not?" inquired the girl.

"'Cause you might git dizzy an' go over!"

"Not I," cried the girl. "Oh, what a glorious view!"

Splinter turned in his saddle for a rearward glance. Miss Summers was looking down, and up, and in every direction, entranced by the panorama of sky, mountain, and valley. The rugged face of Splinter took on a puzzled expression.

"We've come ten mile and it's took us three hours," he announced a little later. "When you're tired, mum, jest speak up and we'll stop and give you a rest."

"You don't have to stop for me," said the girl enthusiastically. "I could ride like this all day. Why, it's a rest just to breathe the mountain air and look at the scenery! But if you think the horses are tired, Mr. Tully——"

"Huh!" he gibed. "They're mountain hosses and could travel this way fer a month. You never worked in a short-order house, did you?" he asked.

"No," said Miss Summers.

"I didn't reckon so. They say a short-order house is right tryin' on the nerves. Her that was Mrs. Tully couldn't climb a stepladder without gittin' dizzy."

Just what was at the back of Splinter's mind to start his talk in that direction did not appear. He settled himself in his saddle, eyes front, and gave all attention to the growing difficulties of the trail.

Keen air and exercise whetted the appetite. Bailey halted the guide long enough to get a supply of sandwiches; then he and the girl lunched as they traveled. Half an hour later they dismounted and had a cool, refreshing drink at a mountain spring.

Miss Summers was enjoying every

moment. During their brief acquaintance, Bailey had never seen her so full of life and sparkle. Positive that their only dangers had been left behind, she seemed bent on turning this journey to Tarantula Springs into a holiday.

Although Bailey was more cautious in measuring the resources of Red and his schemers, he met the girl's high spirits in a corresponding mood. No other woman had ever told him that she thought he was "wonderful." He knew he was anything but that, but it thrilled him to have his companion take such a high view of his modest abilities.

He had never met a girl who appealed to him as did Mildred Summers. An army nurse, a social secretary, and now a detective! She had proved, too, that she could think in an emergency—and follow up her thinking with intrepid action. There was no mistake about her being wonderful!

"And right here," Splinter half turned to remark, "is where we take to Caballo Blanco Cañon. Topokola Clifts and Taranch Springs ain't more'n a mile off now."

They entered a gorge with high, wide-spreading walls. The rock formations resembled castles, with turret piled on turret. Creepers and hanging vines masked the rock faces almost from top to bottom, bordering the trail as with a green arbor. A small stream splashed and gurgled along the cañon bed, and the horses had to pick their steps among giant bowlders.

They came presently to a turn in the defile, and here Splinter drew rein. "There," he remarked, with a sweep of his arm, "is Taranch Flat and the Springs, the perfesser's shack that was toted into the gulch in sections and put together without ary blamed nail, the picter clifts, the stagin' the wise old owl used in studyin' them old drawin's, and the yaller tent where he has what he calls his dark room and fusses with his fotygraffs."

The flat was snugged away in the elbow of the turn—a broad, triangular-shaped section of rising ground, dotted with cottonwoods. The house was a neat, half-portion bungalow, overhung by one of the largest of the trees.

The tent was at the rear, and to one side. Back at the foot of the cliff was a small growth of mesquite, cut away partly and giving a view of a limpid pool fed with a trickle from the mossy rocks. To the left of the spring was a movable wooden staging, twenty feet high and holding platforms at various elevations. This framework hugged the cliff so closely that the professor, working from the platforms, could reach out and touch the rock surface with his hands.

Topokola Cliffs were the marvel of all that region. At this point they were five hundred feet high and, for the greater part of their extent, nearly as smooth as a schoolboy's slate. They formed a prehistoric picture book; and great drawings, done in faded primary colors, appeared to cover the walls completely.

"The perfesser don't seem to be lookin' at the picters from that there stagin' o' his," remarked Splinter, "so more'n likely he's in the shack, writin' or figgerin'. His man Norris ort to be around, though. I'll jest look after the hosses while you two attend to yore business. We can stop an hour or two. About all we got to plan on is coverin' the back trail afore dark."

Bailey and Miss Summers dismounted.

"If I were rich," said the girl, "I'd like to have a summer home in a cool cañon like this. Beautiful! And those pictures! Well, I don't wonder Professor Purcell thinks them worth studying."

They moved on toward the house. Back at the edge of the flat, Splinter was off-saddling and preparing to picket the horses near water and forage.

Bailey and Miss Summers, standing before a wide-open front door, looked into a cluttered room and saw a youngish man bending over a table, writing. He looked up.

"Visitors!" he exclaimed, dropping his fountain pen and getting to his feet. "Well, this is a novelty. Come in, you two!"

CHAPTER X.

MAN TO MAN.

THE man at the table was spare of frame, lean-faced, and of a middle height. He wore heavy, tortoise-shell glasses. Evidently he was near-sighted, for he removed the glasses as he stood and peered at his visitors.

"Professor Purcell?" inquired Bailey.

"The same, sir, the same," was the answer.

"My name is Bailey, sir, and this lady is Miss Mildred Summers. I have come here, professor, on a rather peculiar mission. I want to get your signature."

"Well," and the other chuckled, "so long as you don't want my signature to a check, or a promissory note, I guess you can be accommodated. I have been asked for my autograph a good many times. Sit down, please. I'm a good deal of a hermit, out here in the wilds, but I certainly enjoy company."

There were two rooms to the bungalow. The front room, in which the visitors were received, was evidently the professor's sleeping room and study; and in the rear, no doubt, was the necessary kitchen and dining room.

"You are acquainted with Doctor Phineas J. Thorpe, professor?" Bailey went on.

"Thorpe?" echoed the other. "Acquainted with him? Why, my dear young man, he's a fellow scientist and one of my best friends. You know Thorpe?"

"He sent me to you." Bailey unbuttoned his coat and the breast of his shirt, and lifted over his head the looped cord from which swung the pasteboard box. "All Doctor Thorpe wants," proceeded Bailey, "is for you to sign your name on the side of this little carton, and affix the day and date."

"What's the idea?" queried Purcell, taking the box in his hands and staring at it curiously. "Anything inside for me, Bailey?"

"No, professor. The box is not to be opened. Just sign your name, put down day and date; and you might state the hour of your signing, if you will."

A thumping sound, as of something striking against the wooden partition that separated the two rooms, was heard at this moment.

"Quiet there, Bruno!" cried the professor sharply. "Drat that dog! I've had to tie him up to keep him from going into the creek, getting all wet, then coming in here and shaking water all over me. He's a pest, I'll tell the world."

Thump, thump, thump, came the sounds in redoubled volume.

"Just a minute, friends," said the professor; "I'll go out in the kitchen and give that kyoodle a kick in the slats."

Box in hand, he started for the closed door leading to the kitchen; but Miss Summers, quick as a flash, reached the door ahead of him.

"Oh, let me quiet Bruno, professor!" she begged. "I just love dogs!"

Her hand was on the knob, and she had the door partly open when the professor caught her by the arm.

"Not for a minute!" he cried. "Bruno's that savage he'd——"

The speaker broke off abruptly with a most unscholarly imprecation, for the girl had wrenched away from him and darted into the other room. Almost at once her voice, high pitched with excitement, came back to Bailey:

"The box! That man isn't the professor——"

Right there events began to happen. Bailey, on his feet in a twinkling, was blocking the outside door. The counterfeit professor, however, dived through an open window in the side wall. Bailey leaped through the open door and rushed around the side of the house. The man with the box, by that time, was traveling at speed toward the chaparral by the spring. In that direction Bailey could see a saddle horse, half hidden by the bushes.

"What's ter pay, Bailey?" whooped a familiar voice.

It was Splinter, putting in a timely appearance midway between the house and the growth of mesquite.

"Stop that man, Splinter!" shouted Bailey. "He said he was Purcell——"

"Which he ain't!" the guide yelled.

"He's 'Orn' Hawley, a wildcatter from Agua Fria. Cut it out, Orn! What sort of a game o' muggins you tryin' to work here, anyways?"

Bang! barked a six-gun in the hand of Orn Hawley. "Get out o' my way, Splinter," he roared, "or I'll hurt you!"

Splinter was small, but game as a hornet. "Spell able, you minin' shark!" he flung back, and rushed at the armed man with his bare hands.

"Get the box, Splinter!" cried Bailey. "The box!"

Hawley was not in a killing mood; probably there was not enough in the roguery to pay him to go to extremes. Swerving his line of flight he raced toward the professor's staging.

"Hey, Red!" he yelled wildly. "Daller! Where are you two hangin' out?"

With Bailey close behind him, Hawley gained the staging and began climbing a ladder that led up its side. He had placed the looped cord, to which the box was attached, over his head, and shoved his revolver inside a belt that girded his middle. With his hands free, he was climbing the framework with remarkable speed.

Bailey, feeling that he was sure of his man, was making the ascent more leisurely. He paused at one of the platforms to survey the surroundings below. Red and Daller! So they were around! He saw the big fellow emerging from the yellow tent in which the professor had his dark room.

Jerry Daller was right at his heels, and both were laying a course in the direction of the staging. From the kitchen window of the house came a sharp report that echoed and reëchoed between the wide-flung cañon walls. A bullet must have passed very close to Red, for he halted and whirled in sudden trepidation.

"Keep away!" called the voice of Miss Summers. "If you don't, I'll shoot again!"

"That blamed moharrie!" exclaimed Daller wildly. "Mixin' things up, same as usual."

"We'll stop that mighty quick!" said Red savagely. "Take care o' that box, Hawley!" he added to his confederate on the staging. "Don't let Bailey get hands on it. As soon's we get through here we'll be with you!"

He ran back toward the tent, left Daller to guard the kitchen door, passed to the front of the house, and inside by that entrance.

"Don't come down, Mr. Bailey!" cried the girl from the window. "Get the box—I'll take care of myself!"

It was a tense situation. Splinter, for the moment, had disappeared in the direction of the horses he and his companions had ridden out from town. Bailey was apprehensive for the safety of the girl, but he knew that all her worries were wrapped up in the valuable little carton. He went on after Hawley. The latter was kicking off his shoes on the top platform of the staging. As Bailey neared the top, he saw him step from the platform to the pictured wall.

Two fissures angled upward across the wall; and Hawley, his fingers in one and his stockinged toes in the other, was working his way upward across the face of the cliff. It was a dizzy performance of the human-fly variety, and designed to place Hawley well out of reach until Red and Daller could get matters in hand on the flat.

With his automatic, Bailey could have shot the man off the wall. Hawley must have understood that, but was probably counting on his confederates to prevent such a calamity. As he climbed, his revolver slipped from his belt and dropped rattling to the foot of the cliff. A grim smile wreathed Bailey's lips.

"Come back, Hawley," he ordered, "or I'll come after you!"

"You be hanged!" snarled the man on the wall.

Bailey pulled off his own shoes and tossed aside his coat and hat. Thirty feet above and to the left of the staging the rock strata had crumbled away and left a granite shelf. This was a dozen feet long, but just how wide Bailey, from beneath, could not estimate. The twin fissures led directly to the end of it, and certainly there was room for a man to rest in comfort and be secure

until the excitement had died out on the flat.

Bailey's fear was that Hawley might tamper with the box, and he was not losing sight of it for a moment. But if Hawley gained the ledge, there was no guessing what he might not do with the little carton. The ex-steeplejack stepped from the uppermost platform, across space, and attached himself to the fissures.

Footholds and handholds were firm and solid. They were not particularly roomy, but for one who was strong limbed, steady nerved, and clear headed they would serve. So Bailey crossed the face of those prehistoric pictures, emulating the ancient heroes of war and the chase, whom they were designed to commemorate.

Hawley reached the end of the ledge, pulled himself over it and knelt and looked downward. His face paled under its tan, and he picked up a loose stone and held it poised above his head with both hands.

"Go back," he threatened, "or I'll knock you off the cliff!"

Bailey paused in his climbing. Loosening his right hand, and straining every muscle to hold himself to the wall with his left, he groped for the automatic in his hip pocket and leveled it across his tense left arm.

"Throw that—straight out into the flat!" he ordered. "It's your one chance, Hawley!"

The threat in the voice, and the menace of the upturned muzzle, were enough for Hawley. He tossed the stone harmlessly from the shelf and flung himself backward and, for the moment, clear of danger. Bailey put aside his weapon temporarily and hand-over-handed his way upward. At the brink of the ledge he held himself with his left hand and again produced the gun.

Hawley had retreated as far as the cramped limits of his narrow aerie would permit. He was the very image of fear as he crouched, eyes glassy and his gaunt face a pasty white. The man clinging to the wall was a Nemesis not to be denied. He had followed where Hawley believed no man in Arizona had the skill and courage to follow, and was even daring a fall in order to free one hand and use an automatic!

"Don't shoot!" Hawley begged.

"I won't," Bailey said sternly, "if you'll obey orders. Come close, remove the looped cord from your throat and drop it over my head. Then we'll both get down from here, Hawley, and with no harm done. Be quick, though; I'm none too comfortable here."

Hawley began crawling forward on hands and knees. He had covered no more than a few feet of the distance separating him from Bailey, when a raucous, full-throated command drifted up from the flat:

"Throw it down, Hawley! Drop it over!"

That was Red, as Bailey knew only too well. The ex-service man felt that he was looking squarely into the eyes of defeat. Because of his precarious position he could not turn to look down, but must keep his gaze and the automatic leveled at Hawley. Red and Daller, apparently, were having their own way below. The girl! What had happened to her? And where was Splinter?

"He'll—he'll shoot me if I do!"

Hawley's voice was unsteady as he gave his answer to Red. He had lifted the looped cord over his head and was holding it uncertainly in his hand.

"And I'll shoot him if you don't!" roared the irate Red.

He exemplified the ease with which the shooting could be done by cutting loose with a bullet. The explosion dinned through the cañon, and from the ancient mural decorations a piece was chipped no more than half a yard from the quivering, straining left hand that held Bailey to his lofty perch.

Swiftly the deadlock had developed and plunged Bailey into an impossible situation. A few seconds more and his flagging muscles would yield and drop him at the foot of the cliff, even if a shot from Red's revolver failed to turn the trick. There was but one course to be taken, and Bailey accepted the hazard. Releasing the automatic and

letting it fall, and summoning every ounce of his reserve strength for a last desperate effort, he heaved himself at the end of the projecting ledge.

A roar of reports, following each other with almost machine-gun rapidity, surged through the cañon. That was Red, meeting viciously with every full chamber in his six-gun a maneuver that threatened to rob him and his confederates of their spoils. Pictures of rare anthropological value were marred and irreparably injured by the flying lead. Chips of rock flew wide and far, and bullets glanced singing into space. But the luck that favors the brave and attends upon a forlorn hope at times was with Worthington Bailey.

He came unscathed through the fusillade, and both his hands had a strong grip on the ledge. For a second his feet swung above the chasm between the lower fissure and the outthrust rock of the cliff, and then he pulled himself up and over and stood breathless on firm footing.

Hawley faced him, on the alert and crouching forward. At Hawley's feet lay the box with its attached cord.

"I always was gun shy," Hawley shouted, "but now we're man to man, with no hardware at all to give either the advantage. One or t'other of us, Bailey, is going to take the short cut to the flat!"

CHAPTER XI.

THAT FIGHTING PROFESSOR.

THE character of Orn Hawley was a strange combination of fear and daring. All his roguery was not worth the price of a point-blank shot at Splinter, the guide; rather than face Bailey on the staging, he intrepidly consigned himself to the blank cliff wall and two cracks that radiated downward from a treacherous shelf, fifty feet in the air; he shrank, pasty faced and white lipped, from the automatic in the hand of a man who clung precariously to the sheer wall; and now, on the projecting stone, no more than two feet wide and ten feet long, he launched himself into reckless battle with his pursuer.

Bailey, as he fought, remembered the terrace of the pueblo. That was a child's leap compared with the fall that awaited him here, if his tired muscles failed him or if he found himself outclassed.

It was plain that Hawley had supreme faith in his physical prowess. His gaunt form, as Bailey discovered, was tremendously powerful. One step from the pictured wall was the lip of the shelf overhanging the flat; and only five times this width was the length of the battle ground! Outside these straitened bounds lay complete destruction at the foot of the cliff.

They wrestled upright at first, Bailey on the defensive and keeping his back to the wall. He was resting his muscles as best he could and making ready to put forth his best efforts.

"Fight!" jeered the wildcatter. "Why don't you fight?"

However, Bailey was content, at the beginning, to fend off the clutching hands, or to wrench away from them if they succeeded in getting a hold "catch as catch can." Then, in the space of one quick breath, he leaped to the offensive, caught the grip for which he was maneuvering, and bore Hawley down lengthwise of the shelf.

They rolled to the edge, and the eyes of both looked down at the tops of the cottonwoods, far below. Twisting clear of the common danger, they writhed and fought back to the sheer wall. Bailey kicked the box into the angle formed by wall and shelf, to get it out of harm's way.

This movement came within one of costing him dear, for Hawley gained a kneeling posture and flung Bailey from him, straight in the direction of the flat. For a split second Bailey hovered on the brink, slipping and clutching wildly. His hand, by good fortune, came in contact with the stockinged foot of his enemy and gripped the ankle hard. With this support, he regained the shelf.

Then he turned the grip into the famous toe hold—and had Hawley gasping, weakened and at his mercy.

"I'm done!" whispered Hawley. "Let go!"

"Hands behind you!" Bailey ordered, panting.

Hawley, flat on his face, pushed back his hands convulsively. With both knees planted on his prone body, Bailey unbuckled Hawley's belt and bound his wrists with it. Then he rolled away, and sat resting with his back to the wall, as nearly spent as he had ever been in his life.

As the roaring diminished in his ears and his breathing grew less stertorous and more normal, he got on hands and knees and peered downward from the shelf. He met the eyes of Red and Daller, who were standing side by side in tense attitudes, and looking up.

So absorbed were Red and Daller in events taking place above them, that they were heedless of dangers threatening them from behind. A slight man with gray hair rushed out of the yellow tent and left one corner of it sagging behind him. He had a tent pole in his hands and his manner suggested indignation and fury.

From the front of the bungalow, too, came Miss Summers, armed and supporting the gray-haired man in his rushing attack. The sight of the girl, unharmed, was a huge relief to Bailey. But what had become of Splinter? And where was the man Norris, whom Splinter had mentioned? That was the time, if ever, that they should have been on hand.

"We've got you, Bailey!" shouted Red. "If you want to come down it'll cost you the box. Throw it over to us and we'll leave the flat."

Bailey could have laughed at the overconfident villain. At his back, and almost upon him and Daller, was the gray-haired man with the tent pole. And from another direction, approaching as quietly, was the girl.

Bailey dangled the box downward by its cord. A hundred thousand dollars never swung more tantalizingly in the air. Red slipped his gun into his pocket and Daller took his weapon under his arm; both put out their hands to catch the box, if possible, when it should fall.

At that instant the tent pole, describing a vicious circle in the hands of the gray-haired man, struck Red and staggered him. Falling sidewise, he collided with Daller and caused him to topple. Daller's revolver dropped from under his arm, and the gray-haired man gathered it in with an exultant shout.

Red and Daller whirled to discover themselves looking into the muzzles of a pair of revolvers.

"You scalawags!" cried the old gentleman angrily. "You dare to come here, into this peaceful cañon, and stage a Wild West performance! I shall have the law on you. And the damage you have done to the cliff!" The old gentleman's voice became a wail. "Oh, you vandals! I'll trouble you for that weapon in your pocket, you big rogue. If you try any chicanery, I shall explode this firearm, no matter what the consequences to you."

"Careful with that trigger, sir!" begged Red, withdrawing the revolver from his pocket. "I didn't guess you were a fighter, professor, or I'd done something more to you than tie you up."

"Retreat to the cliff, face forward!" the professor ordered. "Miss Summers, you are a most extraordinary young woman! I commend you, here and now, for your courage. It is most unusual, I am sure, in one of your sex. Can you overawe and hold in subjection the ruffian at whom your weapon is pointed?"

"Very easily, Professor Purcell," said the girl.

"Then victory rests on our banners. Please summon your friend from that dangerous position, up there."

"Coming right away, Miss Summers!" Bailey called down.

Once more he swung the box from his neck by the looped cord, then turned back to remove the belt strap from Hawley's wrists.

"Your jig is up, Hawley," he remarked. "Will you go down peaceably?"

"I will, you know," was the answer. "I reckon I've had enough of this."

"Then I'll let you lead the way."

Hawley, greatly chastened in spirit,

gave a glance at the flat and sat down on the end of the ledge. With care and skill he reached out feet and hands for the twin fissures.

"You're a capable climber, Hawley," said Bailey. "Just an amateur?"

"I used to be a structural ironworker before I came West," was the answer. "You're as good or better than I am. How's that?"

"I was a steeplejack once."

"And Red thought we could handle you!" muttered Hawley, on his way down. "Next time I walk into a game of his open-eyed, he'll know it!"

Bailey followed Hawley across the cliff face, to the staging, and on down to the flat by the comfortable ladder. At the foot of the cliff he picked up his automatic and examined it carefully.

"I—I was holding my breath, Mr. Bailey!" murmured the girl. "It was awful to be so helpless and watch a battle like that on the ledge. Easy money, indeed! I wouldn't go through all that again for all the pearls in the world. Professor Purcell, Mr. Bailey," she added; "the *real* professor."

"Yes, the real professor," spoke up Purcell, "who lay bound and helpless in his own kitchen and kicked the wall with his feet while you were talking with the man, there, who impudently tried to pass himself off as Hannibal Purcell. He'll pay for this indignity; they shall all pay for it."

"What has become of your man, Norris?" Bailey asked.

"He took our only horse and went up the cañon, early this morning. So I was alone when these scoundrels arrived and began their lawlessness."

"What happened to Splinter, Miss Summers?" Bailey went on. "Did he run away——"

The guide, at that moment, came over the edge of the flat. He was leading a prisoner at the end of a picket rope.

"Sure I run away!" he gibed. "Anybody as knows me'll tell you that's my style. This here cimiroon sure gave me a chase. I bagged him, though, two mile up the cañon, and here he is. Know him?"

They did know him. He was Hanchett, who had posed as Professor Purcell's secretary at Lacoma.

CHAPTER XII.

OUT OF BUSINESS.

A REVOLVING cylinder, with a steel barrel at one end, and a hand grip and convenient trigger at the other, is about as persuasive an article as one can find in the list of personal property. It has wrested from the helpless a tribute of right or of wrong; it has protected the weak, and it has been an instrument of tyranny in the hands of the powerful; it has cut short, in midcareer, the world's brightest and best; a slug of lead winged with a few grains of powder, launched on its lethal flight by the touch of a finger!

This, in substance, was the peroration delivered by Professor Hannibal Purcell as he presided over the binding with ropes of Red, Daller, Hanchett, and Hawley. A tent pole might be useful in a preliminary skirmish, but for winning the day against such a quartet, only a surprise with guns could be reckoned on with certainty.

The professor was not a believer in firearms. He had come in peace to White Horse Cañon, and had neither brought a gun himself nor allowed Norris to bring one. He pointed his moral by indicating the prehistoric pictures, chipped and damaged by the bullets of a Colt's forty-five in the hand of a graceless freebooter.

His voice grew shrill and trembled with passion when he spoke of this vandalism. He admitted, nevertheless, that the devil can only be fought with fire, and that he and Miss Summers would surely have failed in their attack if she had not brought a gun to bear on the invading desperadoes.

In his bungalow, while the prisoners lay bound under the alert eyes of Splinter, the professor told of his memorable forenoon in detail. Norris had gone up the cañon, planning to make a day of it; and the professor was in his bungalow, writing copious notes for his forthcoming work on "The Aztec in

Arizona," when the man, called Red, and the ruffian, called Daller, entered quickly by his open door and laid violent hands upon him.

He was lashed hand and foot, half suffocated by a gag that rendered speech impossible, and dragged bodily into his own kitchen. A third rascal called Hawley appeared, and put on the professorial spectacles, and took the professor's chair, and began pawing over the professor's written memorandums. And there was yet the fourth villain, referred to as Hanchett, who was directed to put off along the cañon, and hide the horses and look out for them. One mount alone was secreted in the chaparral by the spring, to be used in case of need by Hawley. Daller went on guard at the bend of the defile.

When Daller brought word that Bailey was coming, Hawley adjusted himself to his rôle of professor, and Red and Daller beat a retreat into the photographer's tent. It was Purcell's unpleasant fate to lie on his kitchen floor and listen to the conversation between Bailey and Hawley—the latter in his assumed character. The professor could only beat his bound feet against the partition.

"And that rogue talked about a dog Bruno in the other room!" he cried. "All credit to Miss Summers," he added gallantly, "for not being deceived."

The girl explained that she became suspicious because of certain lapses of speech on Hawley's part. No man of learning could possibly have used some of the expressions that fell from Hawley's lips. And when Hawley excused himself to go into the rear room to quiet "Bruno," and seemed determined to take the box with him, Miss Summers' suspicions reached the stage that called for action. One look at the form on the kitchen floor and there was no longer a lurking doubt of treachery.

She released the professor; and when Red and Daller ran from the tent to take Hawley's part against Bailey, she posted herself at the window and tried to stop their advance. In this she was partly successful, for the two turned upon her. Red came charging into the bungalow from the front, and the girl and the professor bolted the door between the two rooms and piled kitchen furniture against it. It was a moment of strain, with evil plans working toward success or failure, and Red could not waste much time in the house. He went out to take personal charge of operations.

From the kitchen window, Miss Summers and the professor watched the thrilling battle on the ledge. The girl shuddered as she referred to it. Daller, during the excitement, left his post at the kitchen door, and the girl and the professor escaped to the tent and hurriedly laid their plans. There was one revolver between them—the girl's—and they were one pacifist and one woman against two desperate ruffians.

But the professor, on seeing his beloved cliff decorations marred by bullets, was changed forthwith from a pacifist into a warrior hungry for desperate reprisal. He suggested that Miss Summers, with her revolver, come upon the two-gun fighting vandals from around the front of the bungalow, while he approached them craftily with a tent pole from the direction of the canvas dark room. This attack from the rear was carried out with the most astounding success.

Meanwhile, Splinter had been one busy man. After heading off Hawley in his run for the horse, Splinter happened to think of a revolver of his own which he had left beyond the flat with his riding gear. He ran to secure the gun; and as he straightened, after getting his hands on it, he saw Hanchett just rounding a patch of greasewood brush on his way to the professor's camp from up the cañon.

Splinter gave chase; and a great chase and fine little fight he had of it. He wasn't so big as some, Splinter wasn't, but, by gorry, he wouldn't take no back seat for any hombre in a scrimmage! Hanchett pitched over a bowlder in his flight, and before he got up, Splinter had landed on him like a road runner on a horned toad.

There was some grand and lofty tumbling, but enough said. Splinter got the

best of it, when, by a sudden move, he captured Hanchett's gun. Then he roped Hanchett with one of the gang's own reatas, and marched him back.

From the three—Red, Daller, and Hanchett—Bailey tried to secure a little information. What was in the box that they were so anxious to get possession of it? And how had they managed to get to Agua Fria from Lacoma so soon, and put such an extensive scheme into operation at the professor's camp?

The three would not answer a word. The traditional clam was garrulous in comparison with them. They merely glared at Bailey and said unkind things. Orn Hawley, however, was not so close-mouthed. He talked a good deal, but was plainly not "in the know" to any great extent.

He was aroused from slumber, the night before, in the wee small hours. Red was at his door and demanding an interview. What Red said, according to Hawley, was that he had been robbed of a pasteboard box by a man named Bailey, and that a Professor Purcell, at Tarantula Springs, was in on the deal. What Red wanted was for Hawley to show Red and his friends to Tarantula Springs and help recover the stolen box. For this work, Red would pay five hundred dollars—one hundred down, and the rest when the box was recovered.

Hawley, of a man whom he knew in Agua Fria, had secured mounts for all. It appeared, from Hawley's story, that the man Red and his two friends had come in on the eleven p. m. train from the north; and they were all so busy during their night hours in Agua Fria that they had not had time to hunt up a hotel or a lodging house. Hawley allowed them to sleep from two to four in his bachelor quarters; then at four they had breakfast, and at four-thirty they were all making their way over the dangerous trail to the cañon.

"I don't know why that tough outfit picked on me," complained Hawley. "I was an innocent bystander, as you might say, and now you can see what they've done to me!"

"You're a lovely squealer, ain't you?" Red broke his silence to inquire, with venomous sarcasm. "I'll tell you why we picked on you. Coming down from the junction on the train, a card sharp told me that you was a wildcatter, and a crook from the ground up. We needed a guy of that caliber, and that's how we happened to go looking for you. And that's fine, the stringin' you're giving this crowd about helping us recover a stolen box. The five hundred bought you, soul and body. Hawley, you're yellow clear through; and if you'd handled your end of it right we'd none of us be where we are now."

Hawley's attempt to make out a case for himself was not an unqualified success. What he had to say, however, let in some light on the operations of Red and his confederates. There was only one way in which they could have reached Agua Fria from Lacoma so soon after Miss Summers and Bailey, and that was by the eleven p. m. train. They had secluded themselves in Agua Fria, and had left for the cañon nearly two hours before Bailey, the girl, and Splinter had taken the trail. This had given them ample time in which to prepare for the reception of the man with the box.

Professor Purcell insisted that the four prisoners should be turned over to the authorities and punished to the full extent of the law. Life sentences, in his opinion, should be meted out to them for injury to the cliff pictures.

Bailey knew, of course, that a mere chipping of the cañon wall with bullets would not be considered an offense by the law. But the assault on the professor was a charge on which the prisoners could be held. If they were kept in jail for a few days, Bailey would be able to make his return journey without further interference; and if Miss Summers could establish her theories regarding the Braganza pearls, Red, Daller, and Hanchett could be taken East and brought to book for a very serious crime.

Professor Purcell wrote his name on the pasteboard carton, and added the date and hour of his signing. The

horses of Red and his accomplices were brought to the flat, and Splinter dexterously lashed the four prisoners to their saddles. Seven riders, all told, were to make the return journey, and Splinter roped the horses one to another in such a way that the cavalcade could proceed in single file.

He was at the head of the procession, and behind him trailed Daller and Red. Following Red was Bailey, so placed that he might watch constantly the resourceful leader of the gang. Hanchett and Hawley brought up the rear, under the wary eyes of Miss Summers.

Certainly it was an odd pack train that left Tarantula Springs and filed off down the cañon. It had been agreed that the professor should come next day to Agua Fria and lodge his complaint against the prisoners. "Rest assured that you will see me to-morrow, in town!" he called from the flat, as the seven riders slowly disappeared around the bend.

The return journey consumed six hours, and it was nine in the evening before the prisoners had been turned over to the local deputy sheriff and lodged in the Agua Fria jail. Bailey escorted Miss Summers to the Delmonico Hotel, then paid Splinter eighty dollars, left him in charge of all the horses, and made his way to the Plaza.

For two days he was tangled in the legal machinery of the county. Concho City was the county seat; and Melrose, the sheriff at Concho, thought it best to remove the prisoners to the more substantial jail at that point.

Bailey and Professor Purcell had an interview with Osborne, the county prosecuting attorney. That gentleman assured the professor that the pictures on Topokola Cliffs were not in any way protected by statute, and that Red and his men could have destroyed them entirely without incurring a penalty.

The professor rose up at this and aired emphatic opinions of a law that would not guard such immensely valuable treasures. He was so incensed, in fact, that it was difficult to get him to make any charge against the prisoners on his personal account.

He finally yielded to Bailey's persuasions, however, and Osborne agreed to hold all four of the men without bail for a week. This would give Miss Summers her opportunity to implicate at least three of them in the affair of the Braganza pearls.

At last came the hour when Miss Summers and Bailey boarded a night train at Agua Fria for the junction, en route for the East. The only dangers that could threaten the last half of their journey were being left behind, held harmlessly back of stone walls and iron bars.

"Now, as they say at the race track," Bailey remarked to the girl as the lights of Agua Fria flashed past them into the dark, "it's all over but paying the bets."

"Well," said the girl, "the end of your work may be in sight, Mr. Bailey, but I have still to make out my case against Jonas."

"You haven't any doubts about doing that, have you?"

"No," she told him confidently; "not a doubt in the world. All my evidence is circumstantial, but it is convincing. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," he answered. "Mrs. Putnam is sure to get back her pearls—because of your wonderfully clever work."

"Had you not been the resourceful man you are, Mr. Bailey," she murmured, "I should have failed. The credit for success is as much yours as mine."

CHAPTER XIII.

NOT INVITED.

AT their daily meetings following the departure of Bailey for the Southwest, Putnam, Gainbridge, and Burt experienced a deep and growing interest in the progress of their experiment. Doctor Thorpe, whose ideas on a certain subject would have clashed with theirs, was away; so the three reassured each other in a common cause, as events developed, until they were positive of the baneful effects of the ivory image.

There were the facts, known to all of them, connected with Bailey's unlucky start upon his pilgrimage. He had barely missed collision with a motor

car. Burt had witnessed that from the upper window, had called his companions, and they had seen the man in the cap run away with the little carton, Bailey in hot pursuit.

Thereupon the four friends had gone down to the park, searched for Bailey, and found him hatless, coatless, shoeless, and drenched from his bath in the lagoon. His story of the canoe incident, the pilfering of his apparel from the bridge by the red-haired tramp, and his lucky recovery of the box in the tennis court, certainly indicated that already he was under the evil spell of Edju, otherwise Old Calamity. Even the mounted policeman, who had held the box in his hands for only a moment, had been thrown from his saddle!

Why had Thorpe merely laughed at these early incidents?

Bailey was started upon his mission Friday. Saturday there was no word from him; but Burt had a letter Monday, and Putnam had a telegram which he had received Sunday night, and to which he had sent an answer.

The letter had been mailed at Kansas City. Bailey had written:

> Everything lovely. My only adventure, so far, was to have a redcap leave the wrong grip in my sleeper section. Found the grip's owner on the train, with no trouble at all, and exchanged the grip for my own suit case.

Putnam's telegram read:

> Worthington Bailey has message signed Burt, Gainbridge, and Putnam, telling him Purcell is at Lacoma and to stop there. Is this correct? Wire me Lacoma, N. M.
>
> MILDRED SUMMERS.

Putnam explained to his friends that he had answered this message, telling Miss Summers that no telegram had been sent to Bailey, and requesting her to inform him to that effect.

"Who is this Mildred Summers?" demanded Burt. "And how does she happen to be traveling on the same train with Bailey?"

"Miss Summers is my wife's social secretary," Putnam explained, "and as fine and clever a young woman as you'd care to meet. She has gone on a still hunt for my wife's pearls."

"That still hunt, Nat," remarked Gainbridge, "seems to be taking her along Bailey's route. Why?"

"Give it up," said Putnam; "why Miss Summers is where she is, or how she happens to know Bailey, is beyond me."

"Well, Old Calamity is working right along," commented Burt; "that's the main thing."

On Tuesday the second letter arrived from Bailey. It told briefly of the attempt to lasso him and drag him from the train in Kansas; also stated that he had just received a telegram telling him to stop off at Lacoma, and that he would obey orders.

"More trouble for him!" exclaimed Burt. "Let's hope that your telegram to Miss Summers, Putnam, will do its part to soften the blows of Old Calamity."

There was no word from Bailey on Wednesday or Thursday, but on Friday Burt received a delayed letter sketching in few words the adventure at the Indian pueblo. During the discussion aroused by this bit of news, Gainbridge fancied he heard some one at the door of the private dining room. He opened the door rather hurriedly and discovered Jonas just outside.

The waiter was carrying an empty tray, and was stooping downward in the attitude of an eavesdropper. He explained calmly that he was trying to find out whether the banker and his friends were through eating so he could remove the dishes. Gainbridge told him that the better way would have been to open the door and look into the room, or make an inquiry. Jonas was so cool and plausible that he disarmed Gainbridge's suspicions.

Another letter was received from Bailey late Friday afternoon. It was held at the desk in the lobby and delivered to Burt when he reached the club about one-fifteen p. m. Saturday. It merely apprised the gentlemen interested that everything was proceeding smoothly, and that the writer was leaving for Tarantula Springs early the following morning.

During luncheon, two telegrams were passed in at the door of the private

dining room. One was from Thorpe, and notified his confrères that he would be with them for luncheon on the following Monday, and asked Putnam to return the *allangiddi* at that time.

The other message was from Bailey. It read:

All serene and en route home. Had a high old time at Tarantula Springs, but the little box is O. K. Will be with you Monday next, one p. m., T. and E. Club.

"That sounds good to me," said Putnam, in a tone of relief. "I've been doing a lot of worrying about Bailey the last few days. Now if his train isn't wrecked, he and Phineas will be here about the same time."

"And we'll have a bunch of elegant reports for Phineas!" chuckled Burt. "Has the innocent stranger proved that the ivory boox is bad medicine? I'll say so."

This also, most emphatically, was the opinion of Gainbridge and Putnam.

Monday found the banker, the merchant, and the broker at their week-day rendezvous by half past twelve. Never before had they arrived so early for luncheon, but this was a red-letter occasion and promised to be mildly exciting. Putnam brought with him the kit bag, intrusted to his care by Doctor Thorpe ten days previously.

Meeting in the lobby, Burt, Gainbridge, and Putnam proceeded together to the upstairs apartment in which they held their conclaves. A waiter was laying the table for five—and the waiter was not Jonas.

Gainbridge stepped to the room telephone and called the club steward. "Where's Jonas, our regular waiter?" he demanded. "Doctor Thorpe will be with us to-day, and he won't be pleased to find another man serving us."

"Jonas hasn't shown up," the steward reported; "and they tell me, at his lodging house, that he hasn't been seen since yesterday noon. I am very sorry, Mr. Gainbridge. Will you kindly explain to Doctor Thorpe?"

Gainbridge turned from the telephone to meet the doctor, who arrived at that moment. He was cordially greeted by his friends, informed that Bailey was due at one o'clock with his report and the box, and was apprised of the absence of Jonas and given the steward's explanation.

Thorpe seemed more concerned about Jonas than over the news regarding Bailey. "Something queer about this!" he muttered. "I'm sure Jonas wouldn't drop out of sight without telling me something of his plans."

"But you were out of town!" spoke up Putnam.

"I returned to my apartment Sunday morning—yesterday," said Thorpe; "and Jonas did not leave his lodgings until——"

He was interrupted by a knock on the door. The new waiter had finished his work at the table and had gone away. Burt stepped to the door, opened it, and a policeman entered the room. He brought Jonas with him.

"What does this mean?" Thorpe demanded.

Jonas spread out his hands helplessly. "I'm by, Doctor Thorpe," he answered. "As I left my lodging house about noon yesterday, an officer stepped up and demanded my name. When I gave it, he put me under arrest. Until a short time ago I have been in the police station—held, what they call, incommunicado. I am very sorry, sir. I call it an outrage."

"What's the idea, officer?" the doctor indignantly asked of the policeman.

"Search me," said the bluecoat. "This man was pinched on wire orders. Chief said he was to be brought here at one o'clock."

There was another rap. Burt opened the door again, and admitted Worthington Bailey—and a trim, graceful young woman with auburn hair and blue eyes. Mystery seemed to be piling upon mystery.

"Why, Miss Summers!" gasped Putnam.

The girl smiled brightly. "I was not invited to this meeting," she said, "and I know you are surprised. But I have something that is very important to bring before you. My work, Mr. Putnam, was closely connected with Mr. Bailey's; and that is why we are here together."

"Was it you who had Jonas arrested?" inquired Putnam.

"Yes." The blue eyes wandered in the direction of the prisoner. "He is the man who stole the Braganza pearls."

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Doctor Thorpe.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PASTEBOARD CARTON.

THE little experiment of the four club members, it appeared, had developed strange complications. These, Doctor Thorpe asserted, would have to be dealt with systematically. The new waiter was called and instructed not to serve luncheon until later.

"Now then, young lady," said the little doctor, bristling as he turned to Miss Summers, "what is all this folly about Jonas and the Braganza pearls? Kindly explain."

"Let me get rid of this first," interposed Bailey, and pulled the looped cord over his head and placed the important box in the hands of Thorpe. "Observe, please, that the seal is unbroken," he said; "and kindly note the signature of Professor Purcell."

The carton was carefully examined, and the signature on its side noted and vouched for by the doctor. The latter chuckled grimly as he placed the box on the table, and left it there in full view of all. Miss Summers was studying Jonas, who seemed to be restraining his excitement with a very pronounced effort.

"That box, I am sure, contains Mrs. Putnam's lost pearls," observed the girl.

"Nonsense!" exploded Thorpe. "If that is the case, Miss Summers, then I and not Jonas am the thief. The contents of the package passed through my hands last."

"I am sure you have been deceived, Doctor Thorpe," continued Miss Summers earnestly.

She presented her theories regarding the pearls just as she had done once before, to Bailey in the railway station at Lacoma. She was followed with closest attention by every one in the room.

"You will admit, will you not," the girl summed up in finishing, "that there must have been collusion between Jonas, and the three men known as Red, Daller, and Hanchett? Why have they tried so desperately to secure the box if it did not contain the pearls?"

"My dear young lady," returned Thorpe, "you are all at sea."

"Let me explain," put in Putnam, "and you will discover at once, Milly, where you are in error. Now that Bailey has passed successfully through his troubles, he has every right to know why we sent him on that journey to Tarantula Springs."

Thorpe nodded for Putnam to proceed. There followed, then, a statement concerning the Yoruban idol, and the differences of opinion regarding its baneful effects on one who carried it "in the hand or upon the person."

"We told Bailey nothing about the image being in the carton," Putnam went on, "for that touched upon the very heart of our disagreement with Thorpe. It was his contention that if Bailey knew of the evil influence exerted by Old Calamity he would have misadventures; and, if he did not, he would have an easy and uneventful journey. Well, he had his troubles; and Gainbridge, Burt, and I maintain that they were due to the image—and to nothing else." He faced about to address the little doctor. "We have you hipped, Phineas," he asserted.

"There can not be the least doubt of that," supplemented Gainbridge.

"Clear case," spoke up Burt.

"All I have to do," said Thorpe calmly, "is to prove that the Yoruban idol had nothing to do with Bailey's troubles. That was the agreement?"

"Yes," answered the three other club members.

"In proving that," added Thorpe, "I shall also disprove Miss Summers' contention regarding the pearls. That will establish the innocence of Jonas. Putnam, open the box."

The merchant removed the cord, broke the paper seal, and pulled up the cap of the carton. All eyes were upon him—save the eyes of Miss Summers.

Her attention was fixed upon the prisoner.

Putnam triumphantly drew forth the alligator-skin sack, released the silken cord at the top and shook out of the sack—a white celluloid cylinder, two inches in diameter and six inches long! Putnam dropped cylinder and sack and fell back in his chair astounded. Gainbridge gasped; and Burt's hand darted out and recovered the cylinder from the table top.

The most astonished person in the room was Jonas. He was leaning forward, staring with blank, glassy eyes.

"What sort of a fool proceeding is this?" Burt demanded. "Thorpe, what in the deuce were you up to?"

He had slipped off the cover of the cylinder, and drawn forth a toothbrush, a shaving brush, a shaving stick in a nickel-plated case, and another case containing tooth powder. These articles had been wedged firmly inside the cylinder.

Thorpe was beaming mischievously upon his friends. "Part of my toilet outfit," he said. "I'm a gay deceiver, am I? Well, it was all in a good cause. When I prepared that carton, I had juggled the ivory image from the sack and replaced it with that celluloid cylinder—working before your eyes with my hands in the kit bag. So we have the remarkable proof, according to the contentions of you gentlemen, that my tonsorial and dental equipment caused Bailey's misadventures. There wasn't room for your wife's pearls in the celluloid container, Putnam; but still you might look, just to be sure."

Mechanically Putnam took the cylinder and examined it further. He shook his head mutely. Miss Summers' face was a study.

"See if there is anything else in the sack, or in the carton, Mr. Putnam," she requested tensely.

"Nothing else, Milly," said Putnam, after a careful examination.

"Why, I wonder," queried the girl, "is Jonas even more startled than the rest of you at not finding Old Calamity in the box?"

With attention directed at him, Jonas drew back and tried to appear more at ease. But the girl had made her point.

"You infer that Jonas believed, just as Gainbridge, Putnam, and Burt did, that the ivory image was in the box, Miss Summers?" Thorpe demanded. "Why, that was a close secret between the four of us."

"Nevertheless, I am positive he felt sure the idol was in the carton," the girl insisted; "and that, if he had not been so sure, his confederates would not have tried so desperately to get the idol—as they supposed—from Mr. Bailey."

"I can't follow your reasoning at all," returned Thorpe. "If this crowd of thieves wanted the pearls, why were they seeking to secure the ivory idol?"

The girl fell silent.

"Putnam," pursued the doctor, "did you bring that Yoruban doll?"

"Yes, Phineas," was the answer, as the merchant waved his hand toward the couch in the corner where he had placed the kit bag. "Nearly every night I have taken that wooden doll somewhere; and I have read your brochure so many times that I know it almost by heart."

"You had no accidents while you were transporting the doll to various places about the city?"

"No."

Thorpe got up, went to the bag, and secured the *allangiddi*. A ghost of a smile played about his lips as he began, with his fingers, to twist at the lower part of the toy. The bottom of the wooden base came away in his hands; then, after the manner of a conjurer, he slapped the doll in an upright position on the table and waved the wooden cap above it.

"Hocus-pocus!" he said, lifted the doll—and there, on the tablecloth, was Edju!

A tense silence filled the room. It was broken by a wild exclamation from Burt.

"By Jupiter! Phineas, as a practical joker, you're entitled to a medal. The base of the doll is hollow; and the ivory image, which we thought was making the trip to Tarantula Springs and back,

was really in the hands of Putnam all the time. And nothing happened to Putnam! I call that doll a hollow mockery, Phineas. You win; and I'm glad of it. I'll have more horse sense and less superstition, from now on."

The little doctor was rubbing his hands delightedly. "Also, poor Jonas here is exonerated," he said. "I think you owe him an apology, Miss Summers. And, of course, steps must be taken at once to give him his freedom."

"Where are the pearls, Jonas?" demanded the girl, rising to her feet and confronting the prisoner.

"That's more'n I know, ma'am," was the defiant answer.

Miss Summers stepped to the table and picked up the ivory image; then she bent and laid it on the floor in front of Bailey.

"When I give the word, Mr. Bailey," she requested, "crush the image under your foot."

Putnam started forward with a protest on his lips, but Thorpe put out a hand and restrained him.

"This is interesting," said Thorpe. "Miss Summers is trying an experiment of her own, and I want to see her carry it through."

With the shoe of his right foot resting on the heel, Bailey lowered the sole to the small image, awaiting the signal to bear down with his full weight.

"You are not helping yourself, Jonas, by denying any knowledge of the missing pearls," continued the girl. "Will you tell us about them?"

The face of Jonas had gone white, his features worked convulsively, and his eyes were almost starting from his head.

"Yes," he whispered through drawn lips. "Don't destroy that idol! I was told in the Shango temple, when joining the League of the Ogboni, that if ever I allowed an image of the Bringer to be injured or destroyed, then I would suffer in exactly the same way."

He drew the back of his hand across his moist forehead. "I don't know whether the Massadogu in that heathen temple was right or wrong but"—here his voice grew husky and reflected his wretchedness of spirit—"I can't take the chance. Put the image back on the table, and listen to me."

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN ROSES BLOOM.

IT was almost uncanny, the way Miss Summers had brought Jonas to that pass. Thorpe knitted his brows as he watched and listened. He and Jonas had been closely associated for months, and yet this girl apparently knew the man better than he did. In a silence that was tense and dramatic the prisoner began to speak.

"Doctor Thorpe, when I joined the Ogboni League I came into possession of more knowledge about the Yorubans than you could ever hope to acquire. But a horrible fate was held over my head if I ever revealed any of the mysteries. Those penalties restrain me now, and I shall reveal but little here, and that only because injury threatens the image if I do not.

"On ladies' night at the club," Jonas went on, "you will remember that I was in charge of your collection in the writing room. Late in the evening, when the writing room was deserted, I picked up from the floor the wonderful sautoir of pearls which I had seen sparkling about the throat of Mrs. Putnam."

"Jerry Daller had told you they were to be worn that night?" interjected the girl.

"Yes," admitted Jonas. "He and the man you call Red came to my lodgings in the afternoon and said Mrs. Putnam was to wear the pearls. The clasp, I was told, had been tampered with so the sautoir would come away easily. Admission to the club parlors was by card—and Red had secured the card of a member and was planning to use it.

"What he wanted," Jonas continued, "was to pass the sautoir along to me when he secured it, and I was to wrap it in a handkerchief and drop it from one of the upper windows of the club building. Some one below would be watching for it. I was to receive an

equal share in the proceeds, after the famous pearls had been disposed of. But Red, in his evening clothes and carefully made up for the occasion, was turned back at the clubhouse door.

"I had opportunities, during the crush about the doctor's exhibit, to secure the pearls—but I lost my nerve. The defective clasp, however, gave way, there in the writing room. Do you tell me it is proved that Edju does not bring calamity?" he asked passionately. "Why, I had the image in my hand when I saw the pearls glistening just under the edge of a writing table on which some of the curios had been placed! I picked it up—I concealed it—and not a moment too soon. You came, Miss Summers, and I turned away from my work to see you watching me suspiciously.

"Mrs. Putnam had discovered her loss some time before; and, even then, the club rooms and the club employees were being searched. Miss Summers had no more than left the writing room when members of the house committee came, questioned me closely, and went through my pockets. To drop the pearls from the window, after that, was impossible. But, in the days that followed, they traveled all over the city. I played the part of an eavesdropper when Doctor Thorpe and his friends were at luncheon; and I managed to get word of developments to Red, every afternoon, when I handed him a package of food at the employees' entrance.

"I was absolutely sure," Jonas went on, "that the pearls were in the carton when Mr. Bailey was sent with it to the Southwest; and after I had served him a meal, in this room, I signaled to Red, in the park, and told him at the servants' door what Mr. Bailey had been hired to do. Red sent me a telegram, asking me to have Gainbridge, Putnam, and Burt overtake Bailey with a wire, stating that Professor Purcell had left Tarantula Springs and had gone to Lacoma, to study the Pueblo Indians, and ordering Bailey to stop off in New Mexico. I forged the message.

"That is all I have to say. I am sorry, Doctor Thorpe, that I have betrayed your confidence in me. I found the pearls; but that makes little difference. Instead of returning them, as I should have done, I concealed them and tried to help Red carry out his plans. How Miss Summers has been able to discover all she did is more than I know."

"You're a thief, Jonas," snapped the doctor, "and we may as well call a spade a spade. What is more, I tried to defend you against suspicion. I can never forgive myself for that. Just where are the pearls?"

Jonas moved to the table, took the ivory image in his hands, and twisted at the ivory base.

"You knew, doctor, that the Yoruban *allangiddis* were hollow," he said, "but you never thought that these Edju images were constructed in the same way. This information came to me when I was initiated into the Ogboni mysteries. The hollow interior of the idols is filled with the sacred kola nuts. I had just finished concealing the pearls in the idol when Miss Summers entered the writing room."

"I remembered just a few minutes ago," remarked Miss Summers, "that you were bending over the image when I saw you that night. That is what gave me my winning idea, Jonas. Mr. Bailey, if necessary, would have broken the idol for me."

With the base of the image removed, Jonas shook the idol over the white tablecloth, and the Braganza pearls fell shimmering out of it! Doctor Thorpe caught his breath sharply, and, with Gainbridge and Burt, pressed close while Putnam picked up the wonderful gems and laid the St. Andrew's cross upon the back of his bare hand.

"They are my wife's," he said; "I'd know them among a thousand! And I've had them, tucked away inside that wooden doll, for the last ten days! More than that, they were in my hands when I fell into the coal hole, broke the choice vase, smashed my meerschaum pipe, and was held up on my way to the doctor's!"

"Gainbridge and I," put in Burt,

"also did our share of running around with them. But how did this man Daller know Mrs. Putnam was to wear the pearls on last ladies' night?"

"His sister," explained Miss Summers, "is one of Mrs. Putnam's maids. But it isn't possible," she went on, turning to Putnam, "that Marie intended to be an accomplice of the would-be thieves. In giving information to her brother, Mr. Putnam, I am sure she did it innocently."

"We shall give her every chance to prove that, Milly," said Putnam. "Officer," he went on, "you may as well take your prisoner back to the station. I'll drop around at headquarters, later in the afternoon, and we'll consider what's to be done with Jonas and the men who are being held in Arizona. I must see Colonel Rysdal of the house committee at once. I'll not be fifteen minutes, Thorpe."

Policeman and prisoner left the room, followed by Putnam. When the door had closed on them, Thorpe walked over to Miss Summers and shook her hand warmly.

"I have never known a more clever or resourceful young woman than yourself," he declared, "and I congratulate you on clearing up a mystery that has puzzled some of the best sleuths in the city. We have not heard Bailey's story as yet, and I am quite sure it will not be complete if you are not here to help him tell it. Will you have luncheon with this select little party, Miss Summers?"

She hesitated. "I had not intended to intrude on your——"

"The invitation comes from all of us, Miss Summers," put in Gainbridge; "we shall be highly honored!"

Thorpe, taking the girl's acceptance for granted, summoned the waiter, told him to lay an extra cover, and to serve luncheon without further delay. By the time Putnam returned everything was ready.

Bailey would have sketched his experiences merely, but Miss Summers, who knew almost as much about them as he did, would not have it so. She contrived tactfully to draw him out, and where he failed in spite of her prompting to give all the details she supplied them herself.

"Jonas and his three confederates ought to be severely dealt with," said Putnam, when the last word had been said by Bailey and the girl, "but I have left everything in the hands of the house committee." He looked at his watch. "Rysdal and I are due to leave the club for police headquarters this very minute, and I presume he is waiting for me now. I have just one thing to do before I leave."

He took a check book from his pocket and uncapped a fountain pen. After writing for a few seconds, he tore out a check and handed it smilingly to Miss Summers.

"Ten thousand dollars, Milly," he remarked, "and I never paid out that amount of money more gladly."

The girl took the check and drew it thoughtfully back and forth through her slim fingers. "Mr. Bailey, I think," she told Putnam, "should have part of this."

"Not a cent of it!" declared Bailey vehemently.

"Here's something for Bailey," put in Gainbridge, taking a check from a long pocketbook and passing it over. "Four thousand dollars. I've been holding that for ten days."

"Lucky stranger!" exclaimed Thorpe. "I called him that before he started for Tarantula Springs; and"—he looked quizzically from Bailey to the girl—"I'd like to ask any man here if I didn't tell the truth."

"We'll all hope so, at any rate," said Burt, with an easy indirection that brought the roses into the girl's cheeks.

"My car is at the door, Milly," Putnam continued, "and I'm going to send you to the house in it and let you deliver the pearls to Mrs. Putnam in person. As it may be dangerous to carry the Braganza gems from here to the South Side," he added, "I shall ask Bailey to escort you home."

"I shall be very glad to do that, Mr. Putnam," Bailey returned promptly.

"By the way, I have some of my expense money left——"

"Add that to the honorarium," cut in Gainbridge; "you deserve all you are getting, and more. If you want a job at any time, come to me. There is always a place, at our bank, for a man of your caliber."

Ten minutes later, Miss Summers and Bailey were driving southward along the avenue. The park benches were occupied—but no longer by a girl with a flying tatting shuttle or by a young man in seedy clothes scanning the "want ads."

"At last," murmured Miss Summers happily, "I can save Albert's ranch for him. Oh, I have dreamed of this moment, Mr. Bailey, but hardly dared to hope the dream would be realized!"

"You won't have any trouble, with your ability," he told her, "in realizing any ambition. You are going to Wyoming?"

"Very soon. And what will you do?" Her blue eyes were upon him, searching his face.

"Probably I shall go to St. Paul and visit my sister for a while," he said.

"Were you really in earnest when you told me, in Lacoma, that you wanted to buy a ranch?"

"Yes, I meant that; but I guess four thousand dollars won't buy much of a ranch. Why, your brother has to pay out ten thousand dollars just to clear off a mortgage on that ranch of his."

"He went into debt to buy more land, and a couple of bad years came on. And just now, as you know, Mr. Bailey, times are hard for everybody. Albert is a practical person, and his biggest and best asset is unflinching faith in the future. I believe he would be glad to have a man like you to help him—perhaps to buy an interest. How would such a proposition appeal to you?"

"I'd jump at the chance; that is," he qualified, "if you have any idea of remaining in Wyoming yourself."

There followed a long silence while Miss Summers looked steadily out of the window of the limousine. They crossed a bridge, weaved their way through a stream of traffic, and after a time glided out into another wide avenue.

"What has my remaining in Wyoming to do with your business prospects, Mr. Bailey?" the girl at last inquired.

"It has everything to do with all of my prospects!" he declared. "I love you, Milly, and that's the reason."

Once more the roses bloomed in her cheeks. She held up both hands, the fingers outspread. "Ten days, count them!" she said. "We have known each other for just that long, Mr. Bailey."

"As time runs, yes," he acknowledged; "but according to experiences, which are really all that make up life, I have known you ever since tatting was invented. You and your shining shuttle, week before last in the park, picked up the threads of my existence and wove them into a very wonderful pattern—two hearts pierced by an arrow."

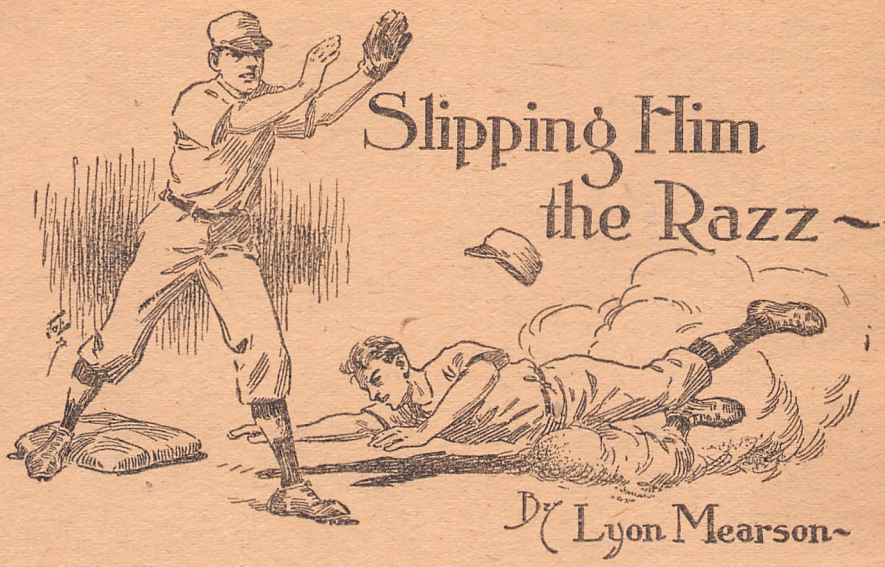
There was another silence; and, before it was broken, the car drew to a halt in front of the stately Putnam home.

"This car will drive you to your hotel," said Miss Summers, as Bailey leaned forward to open the door for her. Then she added, putting out her hand; "Worthington, my address, in two weeks, will be Ransom, Wyoming. Will you come out there, after your visit in St. Paul? You can talk business with Albert; and you and I will discuss further this—this other matter."

The driver had got out of his seat and approached the door, but his attention was suddenly called to the front end of the car. It was a propitious moment and the red lips were tempting. "I'll come, Milly," Bailey whispered, and drew her close and kissed her.

She escaped from the car, fled to the broad marble steps, and turned there to wave her hand. Leaning forward breathlessly, Bailey watched until she had vanished inside the house.

"'Lucky stranger!'" he said to himself, his heart aflame. "And it was an ivory idol I never had that did all this for me!"



Slipping Him the Razz~

By Lyon Mearson~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

HIS BRIGHT IDEA.

THE manager of the Moles, Dan McGuire, saw that his star left-hander was determined on that point; he would refuse to sign for less than twelve thousand dollars for the season. McGuire did a little rapid calculation. "Tell you what I'll do," he said at last. "Since you're so sure of winning thirty games this season I'll make your contract contingent on your winning 'em. I'll give you seven thousand dollars this year—and a bonus of one thousand dollars for every game you win over twenty-five. If you win thirty games you get your twelve thousand, see? It's up to you—and it's a protection to me. I don't mind your gettin' all that jack if you deliver the goods—but you gotta deliver the goods. Get me?"

Morton thought for a moment—it looked right to him. "It's a go," he said at last. They signed on that basis.

McGuire could have hugged himself for that bright idea, and with good reason. There are very few pitchers who win thirty games a year, and the chances were very much against Morton pulling off the trick. If he did—why, it would be worth it. Thirty games would probably mean the pennant.

Also, their agreement would have the effect of keeping the eccentric left-hander steady; though he had led the Moles' pitchers last year, with twenty-five wins, Morton was not to be depended upon.

His name was Mordynski before his flight into big-league company. To accommodate the reporters and the club stenographer—who had to type his name into a contract—said name was transmogrified into Morton. They called him Rube because he looked the part, upon his entry into the big league, but he was no rube when in the center of the diamond. That is, if he felt like pitching and his mind wasn't on other things, such as puzzling out a successful defense to the Evans gambit or the Ruy Lopez opening.

One of the things Morton inherited from his Polish father was a love of chess and a fair ability at that diversion of kings. This was one of the reasons why sometimes, when he should have been at the ball park, a careful search would find him in some disreputable coffee house, murky in atmos-

phere, deep in a game with some bearded old patriarch who did not know he was playing with a nationally famous pitcher, and would not have known a pitcher from a fielder's mitt, anyway.

In a word, Morton was irresponsible. He was apt to turn up at game time—or he was not—no one could tell. Yet he had won twenty-five games, and the Moles had won the pennant last year.

The Moles started the season like a house afire. Wilson and Stephenson, the other two first-string pitchers, were in wonderful shape. Rube Morton was never better, and the second-string pitchers were winning an unusual proportion of their games.

They jumped to the head of the league immediately, and it began to look as though they would never be headed. As for Morton, for a while it seemed as though he was never to drop a game. He won ten games in a row before the Goliaths stopped him, more on account of lack of support than lack of good pitching.

He was a man to be depended upon now; he reported at every practice and at every game. He was always ready to go in there and pitch; he was anxious to step into the box. In action he was a whirlwind; the team played behind him as a unit of perfection, in much the same manner as the old Giants used to play behind Mathewson in the days of his glory, when he seemed unbeatable.

It was a runaway race, with the Moles leading the league by an even ten games at the end of August, and their pitchers getting better every day. The pennant seemed a certainty; it was difficult to see how they could be stopped; if they could win half their games from now to the end of the season, it would be mathematically impossible to head them. Rube Morton, with more than a month of the season still unplayed, had won twenty-five games, thereby almost hanging up a league record for that stage of the season.

It was just about the first of September that the canny, penny-grabbing mind of McGuire began to get busy. "From now on," the manager said to himself, "that port-sider's goin' to nick me an even thousand bucks for every game he wins—and we don't need the games as badly as all that." He pondered upon this for a while.

CHAPTER II.

DREAMS OF GLORY.

THE next day was an off one for the Moles. They were playing the Goliaths, and Ransome, second-string hurler for the Moles, had got off to a bad start. The heavy-hitting Goliaths pounded him for four runs in the first inning and got to Ransome for four additional scores in the second before he could be yanked out. Of course the game was nothing but a forlorn hope now, and the usual move would have been to put in another second-string pitcher to finish out the remaining seven innings. In fact, several of these pitchers were already warming up in the shadow of the right-field stands.

Ransome looked toward McGuire for relief—he had enough and he knew it. It was time for his exit. McGuire jerked his head shortly, in the direction of the clubhouse, and Ransome made as quick time in getting off the field as his flat-footed mode of travel permitted.

McGuire looked slowly at the men resting on the bench, and his eye fell at last on Rube Morton, reposing gracefully near the water cooler and dreaming of a chess game with Capablanca in which he checkmated that master in less than a dozen moves. It would be a masterly game—one that the papers would all print and——"

"Go in there and finish the game, Rube," interrupted McGuire shortly.

Morton awoke from his dream of glory suddenly. "Eh—what's that?" he demanded.

For answer the stocky little manager jerked his head in the direction of the pitcher's mound.

"Who—me?" Morton asked incredulously. "Pitch?"

"No, I'm askin' you to entertain the fans with a pianny solo," remarked McGuire with heavy sarcasm to cover

whatever feeling of uneasiness he might have had. "Or maybe ye'd like to give the crowd a lecture on chess or old maid?"

"But my regular turn is to-morrow?" protested Morton.

"Your regular turn, Rube, is when I say it is—and it can't be to-morrow for the simple reason that it's to-day. Get me?"

The umpire and the crowd were getting impatient by now, and there were many shouts that indicated that a little more ball playing and a little less arguing would be acceptable to the assembled multitude and the arbiter in blue.

Puzzled, Morton made his way into the box and pitched a good, steady game, though—as the contest seemed already lost—he did not extend himself to any marked extent. In any event, it would not go down on his record as a lost game. He shrugged his broad shoulders. McGuire, undoubtedly, was crazy with the heat, and the newspapers would give him "what for" the next day.

They did that; they gave McGuire the "razz," as Morton himself put it, for wasting his best pitcher on a lost game. McGuire grinned quietly to himself and said nothing. He simply credited himself with a thousand dollars, velvet.

Those were the tactics pursued by McGuire for the next two weeks. He gave no explanation to Morton or to any one else on the team. He simply kept him on the bench most of the time, or allowed him to finish a game now and then. In spite of this, however, Morton won two more games—games that had been considered lost, but in which the Moles had suddenly come to life and batted out two victories, the credit going to Morton, the rescue pitcher.

Of course, if there had been any doubt as to who would win the pennant this course of action would never have been taken by the manager. McGuire was too astute an old bird not to know on which side his bread was buttered; a pennant was worth far more to him and to the Moles than a paltry few thousand dollars—but as long as the pennant was won anyhow, why not save the money? That was the way he reasoned, and it was sound, if you care nothing about the ethics of the case.

Fate, however, decided to take a hand in the game. In the first place, Morton "got wise" to what his manager was trying to do. His was an unsuspicious, guileless mind, and he was not ready to believe evil of any one; he was slow to suspect his manager of double-crossing tactics—but even a half-wit could have seen what McGuire was driving at after a while. The newspapers dismissed the matter shortly; now that the pennant could be considered won, McGuire was simply giving his pitching ace a rest, saving him for the World's Series. That was all right. The team knew, however, and they did not like it, for Morton was a general favorite.

Rube Morton had it out with McGuire one day in the clubhouse after a game. He came over to where the manager was sitting, unlacing his shoes, and sat down mildly next to him on the bench that ran around the walls. McGuire looked at him questioningly.

"Well, what's on your mind, Rube?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing," he answered calmly, "except that I think you're a cheap piker."

The other gazed at him, his face flushing. "Why, you left-handed trick hurler," he sputtered, "just what do you mean by that?" He was trying to bluff it out.

"You know very well what I'm referring to," replied Morton, still mild and unexcited. "I'm referring to the way you're trying to do me outa my bonus, that's what. I made an arrangement with you that would bring my earning power up to twelve thousand dollars this season—I had a good reason for wanting that particular figure—and now you're double-crossing me, that's all. Outside of that, there's nothing the matter at all."

"I don't get you, Rube—double-crossing! I'm running this here ball team in my own way—and any time I

want any assistance from you as to how to run it I'll let you know. In the meantime, I'm pretty healthy."

"Well, you wouldn't be healthy very long if I followed my impulses and handed you a wallop in the map. All I got to say is that if I were you I'd feel so low that I'd have to get up on a stepladder to kick a snake in the chest." With that Morton turned away sadly. Life was very hard, and the world was full of crookedness.

"Now, look here, Rube," began the manager propitiatingly. After all, it wouldn't do to antagonize the man too much. There would be other seasons, and there was still the World's Series. "Looka here, Rube—I didn't mean to——"

"Never mind what you meant, or what you didn't mean!" Morton whirled on him, angry at last. "Listen to what I mean—I mean to quit cold on you—d'ya hear me?—quit cold. I'm goin' to find me a business where I'll be treated square. I'll work for no man who's so crooked he could sleep comfortably on a corkscrew." He stalked angrily from the clubhouse.

CHAPTER III.

THE LUCK OF BASEBALL.

HERE is where Old Lady Fate pulled her justly famous interference act. It was just the luck of baseball, but it did seem as if there was a subtle power pulling the wires. The Moles were ten games to the good—and they were finishing the season with a three weeks' stretch on the home grounds. The nearest team to them on the percentage ladder were the Goliaths—to-morrow they were to start a five-game series with them.

Stephenson started the game next day. In the third inning, with the score nothing to nothing, Stephenson hit a pretty Texas leaguer and made first easily. Wolcott, the next batter, hit to the shortstop; Stephenson put on a little extra speed and slid into second base gloriously, his spikes riding high in a cloud of dust.

The second baseman, intent on catching the sphere, which hurtled from somewhere in the shortstop's direction, tripped on Stephenson, and they went down in a twisting heap. An instant later the second baseman arose. Stephenson lay still on the ground, his face white and drawn with agony.

A hasty examination showed that he had been spiked in the ankle—out of the game for the rest of the season. It was just an accident—just the kind of accidents through which pennants are lost—or won. There was nothing to he done about it. Meyers and Ransome, the relief pitchers, were pounded for twelve hits and eight runs. On their part, the Moles managed to accumulate one lone tally.

The next day fate turned another trick. Wilson, the other star pitcher, came to the ball park in a taxicab—or, rather, he came part of the distance. The chauffeur disputed the right of way with an elevated railway post. It turned out to be bad judgment and poor strategy, because it cost the chauffeur about six hundred dollars for repairs to his bus. What it cost Wilson was: Three broken ribs, one sprained wrist, one dislocated ankle, one chance to play in the World's Series.

On top of this, suddenly, like the famous one-hoss shay, the hitherto invincible Moles fell to pieces; they blew wide open, as the sporting writers say. They had five games to play with the Goliaths, which was the main reason for their only losing five—five in a row. Their fielders couldn't field, their batters couldn't bat, and their second-string pitchers could not pitch the ball past the bats of the enemy. It happens that way in baseball sometimes; everything comes in a cluster.

From having a sure pennant winner, with at least two top-notch pitchers able to stand the gaff, McGuire suddenly came to life and found that he was going to be in a free-for-all to win the pennant. Of course, immediately after the accident to Wilson, the manager started on a hunt for his eccentric left-hander, but it was some time before he was able to find him. It was only after they had lost five straight to the

Goliaths that the manager at last found Rube Morton.

You got off the train at Rivington Street and turned to the right, under the dark elevated structure, while overhead the train shrieked its way into the tenement-lined darkness. On both sides of the street were stores—stores with a foreign flavor: Roumanian, Russian, Polish, Czecho-Slovakian, all retaining their Old World atmosphere. On all sides of you were hurrying throngs, speaking in strange European tongues.

Halfway down the block was a coffee house, two steps below the street. Through the open door you could see a solitary billiard table, where dark-complexioned youths played an endless, strange game of billiards without a sound save the clicking of the balls, counting in a curious manner on shots that would have been called misses by American players. The walls were lined with tables, each occupied by a studious pair of old, bearded men, intent upon a game of chess.

That was where McGuire eventually found Morton, lost in the ancient game and endeavoring to solve the subtleties of the gray-bearded patriarch who sat opposite him. With a nod to McGuire, Morton went on with the game. It was almost as if McGuire was not there, so completely was he ignored. He was a mogul on the ball field; an emperor among his slaves—on the ball field. Here he was simply an intruder who was not important enough to interrupt a game of chess.

When the game was finished, however, and the old man had moved away to another table, Morton spoke to McGuire. "Hello, Mac," he said. "What's on your mind?"

"You know very well what's on my mind," replied the manager. "Don't you read the papers?"

"Sometimes," replied Morton calmly. "I read that the Goliaths have been slipping you the razz."

"They have; you might have seen also that Wilson and Stephenson are out of it, if you had read carefully."

Morton nodded.

"What I want," went on McGuire, "is to have you report back for duty. We need you badly."

Rube Morton shook his head. "You didn't think you needed me so badly a few days ago—when you were busy counting the pennies. I don't care enough about the game to work for a man who——"

"I know, Rube," broke in McGuire. "But think of the money end of it—a thousand dollars for each game you win."

"I don't have to think of the money end of it, Mac. I'll tell you why I wanted money." He leaned over confidentially to the manager. "There was a jane—my girl. I wanted to get married, and I wanted a certain amount to buy a farm. Now it's different." He paused.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked McGuire. "She's——"

"Yes," put in Morton somberly. "She gave me the gate. We had a little quarrel—not much, just a few words. But you never can tell what a jane is liable to do from one minute to the next. That's the way she is. Said I need never come back." He paused again. "So I don't need money now," he said at last. "Money's no good to me."

"But you have to live—it costs money to live," protested the manager.

"Well, I know where I can get a job as a soda clerk, if I want it. I always wanted to be one. Were you ever a soda clerk, Mac?" he asked.

The manager shook his head.

"No?" queried Morton. "Well, you don't know what you missed. There's something about it I like—some—er—fascination about pushing a certain handle and having a nice red stream gush out; something that sorta satisfies me when I hear the plunk of the ice cream in the foaming glass. Seems like I feel—— Oh, well, I guess you don't understand what I mean," he went on coldly. "What would you know about art, anyway?"

The manager was silent now. What under the sun could one do with a nut like this, anyway?

"As for recreation," went on Morton, "I don't need baseball for that. All the fun in the game has gone out for me long ago. It's a business, where the people you work for try to do you outa the money that's coming to you. I play chess for recreation. That's highbrow, I guess, and I think it beats hurling a pill under the hot sun by about a mile. I'm through with baseball—and you can tell that to the woild, Mac."

CHAPTER IV.

A TIME OF ANXIETY.

HE had no one to blame but himself, reflected McGuire sadly. After all, why under the sun should a baseball manager be such a piker? What right had he had, anyway, to be so small about a few thousand dollars in this game where so much more was at stake. He nodded his head gravely. It was retribution, he thought.

All this was not going to get his star left-hander back with the Moles, however, and the time was getting short. Game after game they dropped. The fans were shouting wildly for Rube Morton, and the newspapers were demanding that McGuire make public what had happened to his pitcher—which was the very thing the manager could not do without holding himself and his penny-pinching policy up to public ridicule.

Who would have thought that their safe lead would be so threatened? It had been a big enough lead to win half a dozen pennants, and only a direct intervention on the part of fate, such as had actually happened, could have placed the Moles in the unsafe position at the top that they held at present, a hair's breadth ahead of the thundering hoofs of the rapidly advancing Goliaths. Why, the pennant had been virtually conceded to them by the other clubs!

With two such pitchers as Wilson and Stephenson, besides what had seemed a competent second-string staff, it had seemed as though only a miracle could pull them down. With the pennant race safely tucked away, as he had thought, McGuire's mind had turned to the idea of saving a few thousand dollars on Morton's salary and—then the miracle had happened!

In the meantime, day after day, the Moles played worse ball, ragged, loose, and ambitionless. They could not seem to get together; they missed Morton and that steel-wired left arm of his. He was generally liked, too. It was conceded that if he would return the day would be saved.

He would not return. Day after day the manager hunted up the left-hander in his chess-ridden haunt beneath the noisy elevated road, and day after day the answer was the same. Morton would not come back. It had occurred to the manager that perhaps the girl was the solution to his problem, and with this in mind he endeavored to get her name and address from his erstwhile star pitcher, but to no avail. Rube Morton would not give up the information. If McGuire had known who and where she was he would have attempted a reconciliation, thus giving the southpaw the necessary incentive to play ball and make money again.

Lower and lower dropped the percentage figures of the Moles, and higher and higher crept the Goliaths. Now the end of the season was at hand. Desperately McGuire felt that he would have to take heroic measures. He regretted hourly his stupidity in being so petty about money. What right had a big-league manager, anyway, to be so close? If there were no ball players there would be no manager. The Moles were very close to the heart of the little Irish leader, and not only on account of the money he made from them. He wanted that pennant, and wanted it badly.

One day, three days before the end of the season, he read a certain item in the paper, accompanied by a picture. It made no impression on him at first, but later, little by little, an inspiration grew in his brain, a saving gleam of light.

Every other means had failed—threats, jollying, entreaties, bullying, appeals to avarice. Why not an appeal to pride? The more McGuire pondered

this the more feasible it appeared. The plan was worth a trial at least. The pride of Rube Morton's life was chess—he was proud of his ability at the game as a mother is of her only child, Dempsey of his wallop, or an East Side politician of his "drag" with the authorities. A blow at his pride might shake him—and where was his pride but in his aptitude at chess? That, then, was the place to strike.

In the meantime, they were tied for first place with the flying Goliaths, with only three more games to play. Two of those games were with the Goliaths themselves. To win the pennant, McGuire felt, they must win all three games. The first game, with the Bruins, he thought they could get away with—but then came the fatal two with the Goliaths. This was where he needed Morton urgently.

CHAPTER V.

HIS LAST EFFORT.

INTO the dingy coffee house under the elevated structure stalked McGuire for his last cast at fate, with gloom in his soul and desperation in his heart. Morton nodded as the tubby manager sat opposite him—he was not playing chess at the moment.

"Hello, Mac!" He smiled sadly. He was feeling pretty much up against it himself at the time. He was feeling the loss of the girl more and more keenly as time went on. Yet he knew that all he had to do was to visit her—to retract his former, stiff-necked stand. Somehow he could not bring himself to do this.

"Hello, Rube," said McGuire. "Rube, as a favor to your teammates, if not to me, I ask you not to double-cross us. These here two games with the Goliaths—they mean the pennant to us, and a crack at the World's Series money. The boys have earned it, and it's up to you to put it across."

Morton shook his head. "You're too late with that stuff, Mac. You should have thought of it when you were holding out on me. The boys can blame you for it—not me."

For fifteen minutes the argument raged, with McGuire gaining no ground at all. At last, in exasperation, he rasped: "It's a shame to spoil a decent pitcher for a bush-league chess player."

"Who's a bush-league chess player?" demanded the left-hander. This was hitting him where he lived. He didn't mind being told he was a bad pitcher, but where did this roughneck come off to tell him he was a bum chess player?

"You are," shot back the manager. "I know a bush-leaguer in any company and at any game, and you're it. They're kidding you around here, that's what they're doing. You're a soft mark for them. You a highbrow chess player! Piffle!"

Morton was up in arms at once, red-faced and angry. "I wanta tell you that I'm just as good a chess player as I am a pitcher—and I don't hafta tell you how good a pitcher I am—you've been down here after me often enough."

"Chess player me eye!" McGuire threw back his head and laughed roughly, loudly. "Why, you ain't in the class of a real player—you're a bum at the game, that's what you are. Why, kid"—here he leaned over and looked him right in the eye—"I'd like to bet I could step out of here and pick up the first schoolboy I meet that lives around here—and he'll be able to spot you a couple of horses—or whatever it is you call them things with the horses' heads on 'em—and knock you for a gool at the game."

White with rage, Morton pulled out a healthy roll of yellowbacks. "Put up or shut up!" he demanded. "I'll see what kind of nerve you got. You made a statement just now, and you gotta live up to it——"

"Take it easy—don't get chessy!" The manager had to grin at the bad pun. "I'll take you up. I'll walk outa here and pick up the first kid who can play chess—and I guess they pretty near all can around here. Tell you what I'll do. If he doesn't beat you two games straight, I'll match your roll. If he does—you report at game time to-morrow and pitch. Get me?"

"I getcha," said the pitcher. "Come on—let's find your kid." They walked to the door.

In front of the door a small boy, probably nine years old, dressed in a sailor suit, was watching a desultory game of "cat," played to the great danger of every window in the neighborhood. McGuire addressed him. "Say, sonny, can you play chess?" The boy nodded. As a matter of fact, a large proportion of the children in that neighborhood can play chess. "Wanta play a coupla games?" The boy nodded again. He went inside with them.

"This is all foolishness," protested the pitcher when they were seated in front of the chessboard. "It ain't gonna prove nothing. I'll put it all over him, of course—but it ain't right to——"

"Never mind that," the manager interrupted. "Play ball. You'll see whether it's all foolishness or not."

The boy played the white side, and nonchalantly shoved the king's pawn forward two squares, which Morton answered with his own king's pawn—so far the conventional opening. Hardly looking at the board, so it seemed, the boy moved again—a conventional move—and the pitcher answered with a black pawn. The next two moves were easy. On the boy's fifth move, however, when he took a pawn of Morton's with his knight, Morton bent over the table suddenly.

"What're you trying to do—kid me?" he demanded of the child. "Or don't you know nothing about the game? Look at your queen!" He was too fair to want to take such an advantage of his opponent. The boy had, inadvertently or otherwise, left his queen uncovered by the move, an easy prey to Morton's bishop. This would practically end the game, it would appear, if Morton took advantage of the apparent error.

"You want the queen—take!" the child nodded, speaking with a queer foreign accent.

"Play your game," admonished McGuire. "Never mind him—he knows what he's doing."

The pitcher took the queen with his bishop. He would make short work of the boy then, and be done with this farce. He did not notice a queer gleam of triumph that seeped into the childish eyes of his opponent. The youngster moved a bishop.

"Check!" the boy remarked calmly.

Suddenly, as though he saw a great light, the pitcher sat rigid and fascinated in his chair. He stared unbelievingly at the chessboard. It could not be possible—and yet it was! Mechanically he moved his king—to the only place possible. Nonchalantly still, the youngster moved his knight three zigzag squares.

"Checkmate!" he said.

Motionless, the pitcher sat staring at the board as if mesmerized. It was impossible! No, it was not—he could not doubt the evidence of his own eyes. Slowly it sank into his consciousness that this child had checkmated him—beaten him in seven moves!—before most well-contested chess games are rightly swinging into their stride.

McGuire was pounding the boy on the back, laughing heartily. "Well, do you still think you're a big-leaguer at this game?" he demanded. "Or shall I pick a baby out of the carriage for you? Maybe I can find one that'll be willing to drop his bottle long enough to beat you at this man's game."

"It's a mistake!" burst out Morton, finding his voice at last. "I took him to be too easy; he couldn't do it again."

"I can do it—yes," put in the boy. "Once again—a hundred times—it is all one." A smile in his foreign black eyes, he rearranged the pieces on the board again. "Another?" he asked, making the same opening move as before.

Morton answered by making the proper move in response. He was alert now; there would be no more mistakes.

"Wait, you play white now," said the boy, turning the board around. Morton flushed; it is a slight advantage to play the white, as white moves first. This child was patronizing him!

Yet he was rigid and motionless as a statue, and almost as white when, at the seventh move, the boy moved his bishop forward.

"Check!" said the boy.

Morton moved his king; there was only one square to which he could move it. Again a bishop moved forward under the intelligent hands of the child.

"Checkmate!" he piped boyishly.

Paralyzed mentally, all Morton could do was to sit there and gaze fixedly at the board where he had met his Waterloo; it was more overwhelming than Waterloo even. He had played a child, and been handled as though he himself was but a child. Through his haze penetrated the incisive voice of the manager:

"Will you report in time to-morrow afternoon, Rube?"

He nodded mechanically. That was all the manager wanted; Morton always kept his word. Once given, he could be depended upon to carry it out. Motioning to the boy, McGuire made his way out under the shrieking elevated, leaving Morton to gaze at his chessboard, at the wreckage of what had been his glory.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN HE CAME BACK.

EVEN so, the manager pondered in the clubhouse the next day, Morton in his present state of mind—depressed over the loss of his girl—would not be the Rube Morton of old. Even half a Morton, however, was better than the things that called themselves pitchers on the team at present, he reflected.

In the stands the greatest crowd that had ever seen a ball game in this town was gathering—an anxious crowd, worried about the fate of the Moles in these two deciding games with the Goliaths. They had to win one out of two to remain tied with the Goliaths for the pennant—both games to carry off the bunting in their league.

The crowd was doubtful, but loyally the clan gathered. Morton had not yet appeared. McGuire looked anxiously about him, at the grim, morose players in his charge. They did not appear too confident of victory—you can't win without pitchers, and pitchers the Moles had not.

A glad cry arose from the players as a gangling, awkward form bulked big in the doorway. It was Rube Morton—a smiling, joyous Morton, as they could tell at a glance, with the fire of battle in his eyes and the joy of life in his heart.

"Hello, Rube!" they shouted.

"Hello, fellers!" he shouted back. They were around him in an instant, pounding him on the back and shaking his hand.

He tore himself loose in a few minutes, and drew the manager into a quiet corner.

"Rube, you look happy," said McGuire. "Do you feel as good as you look?"

"Better—I could lick the whole league to-day. If I felt any better I'd be sick. I——"

"But yesterday——"

"Yesterday was different. After that kid walloped me at chess, I decided that maybe I was a thick-headed boob, anyway—and if I could be wrong in chess I could be wrong in my argument with the girl; so I went to see her and we made it up. Happy! Say, if happiness was a nickel I'd have enough money to pay the Allied war debt. But I want to ask you something."

"Shoot."

"You know our agreement—about a thousand dollars for every game I win over twenty-five?"

"Yep—it goes still."

"It does not—you broke it," the left-hander said swiftly. "I want to pitch both games—to-day and to-morrow—and I want two thousand dollars for each one I win. Is it a go?"

The manager opened his mouth to protest—but a look at the dangerous eyes of his pitcher warned him. "Yes," he said. "Can you pitch two days in succession?"

"The way I feel now," said Morton, "I could pitch both games this afternoon. I——"

There was a sudden silence in the clubhouse as the booming of many voices and the tramping of thousands of feet came to them like the roar of

angry surf. "Listen!" said one of the players.

"Rube Morton! We want Rube! We—want—Rube!" the bleachers and the grand stand were demanding in unison. "Give—us—Rube! Rube! Rube!"

Morton smiled happily. "Let's go, boys!" He turned to the men clustered about them. "We'll show these here bushers something." The manager nodded, the door opened, and they trooped out into the white sunlight, under the excited gaze of thirty thousand eyes. They had not trotted far before Morton was recognized.

A shout went up that rent the high heavens. A glad shout—a shout of joy and appreciation.

"Rube! Rube! Rube Morton!" the collected throats screamed themselves hoarse. It was an ovation such as had never been given ball player before—a tribute from the fans who had supported the team so loyally and who looked to Morton to save the day for the Moles. Higher and higher rose the frenzied screams of gladness, and repeatedly Morton had to doff his cap, with the funny, reluctant motion that ball players affect. At last it died out, and the players spread over the field for practice.

That day's practice sizzled with fireworks. The infielders made impossible stops and wonderful throws, the outfielders pulled down terrible flies that they had no business reaching at all, and into the heart of McGuire a sudden calm peace descended.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DECIDING GAMES.

THE players settled themselves grimly to business when the game started. It was to be a hard game—the Goliaths were the hardest hitters in their league, and they were riding high upon the topmost wave of confidence. They felt the pennant almost within their grasp. They could not be stopped——

"Strike!" announced the blue-clad arbiter behind the bat as Morton sizzled the first ball over almost before the batter was set. A yell went up from the stands.

Without a wind-up the next ball came over, almost smoking with speed.

"Strike!"

After an elaborate wind-up the next ball floated up slowly, looking almost as big as a balloon to the batter—floating lazily on the wind. He gripped the bat more tightly and took a terrific swing at the ball, almost falling to the ground with the momentum of the missed swing.

"You're out!" Amid catcalls from the stands the batter made his way back to the bench, struck out on three pitched balls.

"That's the way to treat 'em!" shouted the second baseman in glee. Short, joyful cries of encouragement snapped in from others of Morton's teammates.

It took five pitched balls to retire the next man on strikes, and five for the man after that. Without an effort almost he had struck out the side. Another ovation was his as he walked to the bench, under the adoring eyes of the frenzied stands. In their half of the inning the Moles got a man around to third base, but could not bring him home.

In the second inning the Goliaths' batters managed to accumulate two pop flies to the infield and one strike-out. It was not much, but it was about as much as they got the rest of the day. Until the eighth inning Morton held them hitless. A scratch hit in the eighth netted the Goliaths the only hit for them of the day, and this batter died ingloriously on first when his teammates could not advance him.

In the meantime the pitcher for the Goliaths was going well, and it was not until the seventh inning that a Mole was able to cross the pan with the one and only run of the day. For Morton the ninth inning was almost a replica of the first. The first two men were struck out with seven pitched balls—it took five for the third man.

"You're out!" announced the umpire as the last Goliath batter fanned the air, but nobody heard him in the tumult

that arose. With one accord the Moles turned and dashed for the clubhouse, not caring to be mauled by the good-natured, jubilant crowd that surged upon the field, myriads upon myriads.

The next day, before as large a crowd as could squeeze itself into the Moles' park, the Moles made merry at the expense of four of the Goliaths' pitchers, rolling up a total of twelve runs. They were invincible, and no pitcher in the world could have stopped them that day. One after another the Goliath pitchers were batted out of the box by a bombardment of singles, doubles, and triples. Morton was working like a well-oiled piece of machinery, and no Goliath got any farther than second base. Few managed to get that far. The Goliaths accumulated three hits—and a headache.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE CLUBHOUSE.

WHEN the jollification had died down in the clubhouse after the game, McGuire drew Morton aside.

"Rube," he said, extending his hand, "I guess I was pretty much of a piker—but that's past. It won't happen again. Your next contract calls for fourteen thousand a year—for three years. Satisfied, old kid?"

"Yep," Morton said with a smile. "Sure am." He took the manager's hand and they gripped without a word. There was a brief silence.

"Mac," Morton said at last, smiling again, "about that chess game. It seems sorta funny, now that I think about it, that you should have been able to pick up a kid like that by just goin' out an——"

The manager smiled. "I picked him up, Rube, because I left him there waitin' to be picked up. He cost me two hundred berries——"

"M-m-m!" Morton pursed his lips. "So that was it, eh? Who——"

"I'll tell you who he is. Didn't you read in the papers about that Polish kid, nine years old, who played twenty-five men at West Point at the same time—and beat them all?"

A light burst into the eyes of the left-hander. "Is that——"

"Sure—that's him."

The two men smiled at each other.

"If that's the case," said Morton, "then my game isn't so bad after all, if it takes a champ to put it on me—eh, Mac? And say," he grinned genially, "you had to go out and get yourself a Pole to do it, too."

Golfers, Beware!

YOU can't keep your eye on the ball?" remarked a golf instructor to his pupil. "I can easily understand why you fail to do so. You have on white shoes. In ordinary circumstances there is no reason why a normal person should ever fail to keep his or her eye on the ball while on the links. A bright color on the grass near the player or a quick movement of a bystander are the only two reasons why a player should ever 'lose his eye.'

"White shoes are very distracting. They are generally brighter than the ball itself, and are often the cause of an expert failing to keep his eye on the little white sphere. Some men play splendidly for a long stretch at a time, and then one day they get off their game. In many instances this is due to the fact that they have put on a pair of white shoes."

Making Speed

PETERS: "I hear Randall got kicked out of the house when he asked old Walters for the hand of his daughter. Was he hurt much?"

Poiser: "Yes. He reckons he came out so fast that he collided with himself going in."

Not Remarkable

A BOY of eight was dining with his father at a hotel where the manners of the guests were not remarkable for their elegance.

Soon after they had seated themselves at the table, the youngster piped up with:

"Daddy, why do all the men say 'whoop' to their soup?"

At Any Rate —

By Louis Schneider

HAMILTON lived in the country and had a telephone on a party line. How many people do! The name of the girl in the case was Mary. How many Mary girls there are in the world! Even the sister who kept Hamilton's house for him was named Mary.

Hamilton's ring on the line was three shorts, while the residence call of the girl in the case on the same party line was three shorts and one—— But wait: The girl in the case didn't know—or wasn't suspected of knowing—that she was the girl in the case. That was the kind of fellow Hamilton was—on both counts. How many poor fish there are in the world!

Away from her Hamilton rehearsed a thousand cunning little ways of sweeping her off her feet and into his life to have and to hold. Near her—— Bah!

Would Mary never land him? Pardon! Would he never win her?

Hamilton drove his car past her home needless numbers of times on the chance of seeing her, and, seeing her, stepped on the accelerator and roared by. Eavesdropping on the telephone to hear the tinkle of her voice became an indoor sport with him. How many foolish things are done in the world!

Who can tell how the great idea ever fell into his head. Of course, Hamilton often called up his sister when he was in town and talked to her. Frequently she had called him there. Many, many times he had heard the crackle of a dozen receivers as the eavesdroppers on the line got busy. Always it had put him on his mettle as to persiflage. The keen, cunning little nicknames he called Sister Mary—"Bright Eyes," "Sweet Woman"—oh, what not. The other Mary might be listening, and appreciate him, what!

II.

WELL, at any rate, pop! came the idea into Hamilton's head. Did he act on it at once? Oh, you know Hamilton.

Nevertheless, he couldn't get rid of it. He didn't want to. The more he played with it, the more the idea possessed him. And play with it he certainly did, until in fancy he became letter-perfect in meeting every possible contingency that might arise.

And then the poor fis—— No. Let us not apply the slang term to him again. But, just the same, he could not wittingly drive himself to put in operation the scheme he had thought out for the winning of the one girl

in the whole big world, even though he had made several special trips to town when he knew that all the conditions were just right.

And then one day the big idea ran away with Hamilton. He was in town. As he was on the point of leaving for home, his grocer—whose store Sister Mary knew Hamilton would visit—told him that Mary had telephoned in some time before and asked that Hamilton call her before he came home.

It was some little errand, of course, forgotten until after he had left home, Hamilton thought, and—both heart and body gave a great leap as he happened to see all the other Mary's home folks pass by the grocer's door.

With a sort of panicky haste Hamilton hurried to the grocer's telephone. Oh, the great opportunity! At last! He would—— No; he wouldn't. Yes, yes!

"Number," said central.

"Three shorts and one long on C Sixteen." Hamilton spoke through his cupped hand about the transmitter, and his lips, answering the idea's imperative voice. Of course, "C Sixteen" was also the number of his own party line.

III.

EVEN as Hamilton spoke he gulped hard, backed away, and looked guiltily about him, almost hanging up the receiver. He was foiled by the uncertain jerkiness of his hand.

"Hello!" came a thin voice from the receiver.

Automatically he brought it to his ear again. Answer he found none.

"Hello!" the voice repeated, clearly, invitingly; and again, "Hello!" Of course it was the voice of the Mary girl in the case. Whose else? There was no one else at her home except Mary, Hamilton felt certain.

The great idea swept him away in an instant. All the weight of the points he had whipped into line through the days now whipped him into line. "Hello!" he called back. "Hello! This you, Mary?"

Naturally the answer was "Yes."

"Hello! Shake up your phone a bit. I can just barely hear you. . . . Hello! No, it's no better, but maybe I can make out what it is that little bright eyes wants if she'll speak sweetly."

There was a pause. Then Hamilton asked: "Well, Sweet Woman, can't you remember what it is you want? . . . Why, I declare. Has something struck you, little honey bug, all of a heap? Hello, Mary girl! Hello!"

"I'm afraid—I guess," hesitated the voice from the far end of the wire, "that I'm—that you're——"

Hamilton heard at least a half score of feminine titters at this juncture. Not a single one of the receivers he had heard come down had gone back up.

"Darn this phone service!" he barked into the transmitter. "I can't hear you at all, Mary. Listen. I'll come on out, and if there's anything you want from town, I'll run back in and get it. I'm yours till death do us part. You know that."

IV.

QUICKLY Hamilton hung up the receiver. He almost had to cling to the telephone for support, now that he had dared the thing.

Well, that was that, at least. This would be too good a thing for folks to keep. They would tease the Mary girl in the case, and him, unmercifully, apart and together—anywhere, everywhere, without end.

He would act as if he were innocent. How could he have known that he hadn't been talking to his sister? Such miserable telephone service, you know!

The things he had called her! And that "till death do us part" at the last. Keen? He'd say! People would simply make the situation, not unbearable, but irresistible. At any moment he wished he could—— Already Hamilton could hear the strains of June's most popular march, and smell, actually smell, orange blossoms.

And did the poor fi—— No, not fish. A promise is a promise. Did he live up to his hand-forged opportunity?

Ah, you know Hamilton. The first time the verbal gaff of the boisterously inclined chaffers struck at him he swished aside swiftly. Even the fathomless laughing eyes of the Mary girl in the case, who was present, seemed to have no holding power upon him. He wilted, shrank, disappeared.

For a week he booted himself all around the rim of his dream world. Then he announced that he was going West. He did this at a dance, when the Mary in the case wasn't listening—of course not; of course not.

And did he go West? Was he never to win Mary? Pardon! Would she never land him?

Hamilton didn't go West. After his, oh, very casual, announcement he went out into the moonlit garden to boot himself about some more. Ac-ci-den-tal-ly, with primerlike simpleness, if you please, Mary, the girl in the case, met him there, alone.

She said nothing. She only looked. Meeting her look, Hamilton knew that she surely knew, but never would she admit it.

Why proceed? As was stated before, Hamilton didn't go West.

DOWN IN OKLAHOMA

By Ben Ellis Mosby

DOWN in Oklahoma when the coyotes roam,
The prairie dog skedaddles to his dugout home;
The prairie rabbit scampers to his dog friend's lair;
The turkey buzzard circles to the upper air,
The horned toad sits blinkin' by the spider's nest
Till sand and dust comes boilin' from the great Northwest,
And wind comes on a-howlin' ere the day is done
Sometimes, in Oklahoma, when the coyotes run.

Down in Oklahoma where the Plum Buttes lie
The farmin' life is risky when the streams go dry;
It's just a mile to water—either up or down,
But still it seems unhandy to the man from town.
The rattlesnake gets groggy when the hot winds blow,
And corn blades curl and blow away, like drifting snow.
We know not why the Maker left these drifting sands;
Perhaps He never finished up the Plum Butte Lands!

Down in Oklahoma when the redbirds sing
Ev'ry girl is a princess, ev'ry man's a king;
The people go to preachin' and to Sunday school,
And fellows "tote" a weapon called the Golden Rule.
They treat a stranger kindly if he acts half right;
This keeps a fellow thinkin' of his honor bright.
There may be finer countries than the one I sing,
But Oklahoma's bully in the early spring.

Down in Oklahoma when the wheat is ripe
The white folks and the Indians smoke the big peace pipe.
When farm hands come to dinner, then their faces shine,
For, spread upon the table, is a meal divine!
Of course there are bad people, and some barren soil,
But I have seen such barren spots just spout rich oil.
So, mix the good up with the bad, and, Bud, just mind,
That Oklahoma's there with any State you'll find.

Ruined Biscuits!

By Stephen W. Meader~

(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

HIS UNIQUE REPUTATION.

NEAR the head of the straightaway, Larry Larkin lay comfortably on the grass. His head was propped against an overturned bench. His complacent eyes traveled down over his bright-blue bath robe to the toes of his spiked running shoes, nearly six feet away. With a deliberate motion, he reached out and plucked a spear of grass which he inserted in his mouth and chewed ruminatively. Then he settled back to watch the half dozen other sprinters on the squad as they danced up and down the turf beside the track.

There were reasons for his being called "Lazy" Larry and "The Work Dodger" by the rest of the senior class. Probably you have never heard of Columbine College, unless you happen to live in the big mid-Western city near which it is situated. Though it is by no means a large institution in point of numbers, it bears a unique reputation in one respect at least.

Columbine College is known as an exceedingly comfortable and easy-going place. There is not one of the three hundred young men on its roll who is not something of a master in the art of loafing. When you hear that Lawrence Larkin had achieved the name of being the laziest man in college you may believe that the title was earned in the face of strenuous competition.

Indeed, if the truth were known, Larkin found inventing new ways to maintain his supremacy in this field one of the most irksome duties in his college sojourn. It had, for instance, become a point of honor with him never to rise until five minutes before the doors of the dining hall closed in the morning. His room was a marvel of completeness in the way of labor-saving devices. Without rising from his morris chair Larkin could reach, by means of strings, pulleys, and electric wires, nearly anything that he wanted. On such inventions, and on his carefully cultivated pose of indolence, his fame depended.

Perhaps the pinnacle of Larkin's career had been reached two nights before, when he was suddenly faced by the necessity of reading eight minor Elizabethan plays which he was pledged to cover as part of his outside work for English XXI. He had looked a while at the printed blank he must turn in next morning, certifying that he had read the plays, then ruefully regarded

his fifth-row tickets for that evening's presentation of "The Follies." At last his eye had fallen upon a line of small type at the bottom of the certificate blank which read:

Note: As the library contains only a limited number of copies of the above-named works, it will be satisfactory if a student has heard a play read aloud throughout.

Larkin had gone out whistling and in a moment had returned with eight pop-eyed freshmen in green-buttoned caps, whom he had ranged in rows on the couch and floor. To each he handed one of the pile of books on his desk. "Now," he had ordered, taking his pipe and his mandolin and settling back in the morris chair—"now read 'em—aloud—throughout."

The thought of the immortality of this feat among future generations of Columbinians brought a smile of contentment to Larkin's face as he lolled upon the grass. An exasperated hail reached his consciousness. The nervous group of sprinters had finished their practice starts and now were drawn up along the line. The coach was waving his pistol and shouting himself hoarse. Larkin rose, slid out of his blue bath robe, and walked over to the track. Without more ado he sank his spikes into the toe holes.

"On your marks! Get set! Bang!"

With the gun Larkin changed, for ten seconds, into a flying antelope. None of the others had a ghost of a chance. He sped away from them, his clean legs flashing in seven-foot strides—faster, faster, till he hurled himself in a long leap for the tape. Usually he won these practice dashes by five yards or so, but to-day the margin was greater.

Billy Winslow frowned, looked a second time at his stop-watch, and gasped. Nine and four fifths was what it said. He put the watch in his pocket and walked after Larkin, who was going back for his bath robe. William Winslow was not only an admirer, he was also a friend of Larry Larkin's. He was one of those rare rich men who know how to live.

In Winslow's plain, chunky body he combined a philosophical mind, an excellent taste in all things, and a sense of humor. He still clung to a belief in what his friend might be some day, and loved him, meanwhile, for what he was. He overtook Larkin on the path to the gymnasium.

"Larry," he said, "I caught you in nine-four to-day. Do you know, you big loafer, that if you would train hard for just one month you could go East to the Intercollegiates and leave 'em all so far behind that—why, darn it, you could bust the world's mark if you would do a little work!"

"Sure," laughed Larkin, "and I could beat Man o' War's record for the mile. But work—work? Where have I heard that word before? Not interested, Bill, old dear."

They plunged together into the dim coolness of the locker room. Winslow stood by, silent, while Larkin prepared for the showers. "Gad," Winslow was thinking to himself, "if that boy had ever waked up! Lungs and legs for a quarter miler—arms for a pole vaulter—grit, too, I'll bet, if he'd ever test it out. It really wouldn't take long to make a man of him, if—oh, well!"

Half an hour later Larkin emerged from the dressing room and drifted across the lawn toward his dormitory. Dressed and freshly groomed, he made an attractive figure, despite the slouch in his carriage. He was a tall youngster, with dark hair which he parted in the middle and brushed back sleekly. A wisp of brown mustache failed to spoil entirely the really strong lines of his cheek and chin. His eyes were gray and merry, and his mouth was mocking. He had on not too well-pressed flannel trousers and a Norfolk coat of some soft fuzzy gray stuff.

CHAPTER II.

IN A SPORT ROADSTER.

THE hoarse yelp of a motor horn on the drive interrupted Larkin's stroll. He turned with a quick gesture of attention, and as his eye lit on the big Craig sport roadster that was gliding to a stop, his cloak of lassitude dropped from him in a twinkling.

He jumped into a long, loping trot that brought him, a moment later, to the side of the car. When Lois Graydon smiled it always made Larkin think of the glinting ripple of the west wind on a mountain pool. She was smiling now, as she leaned toward him.

"How awfully lucky!" she cried. "I've been trying all day to get you on the phone, Mr. Lazy Larry, and now I've caught you. We're going to have a few people in to dance to-night —just half a dozen couples—because Caroline Scott's visiting me. So won't you come over and bring Billy Winslow? Carol thinks Billy is—but there, I promised not to tell."

Larkin bowed low. "Miss Graydon," he said, with extreme politeness, "it would afford me great pleasure to accept your invitation were it not for the fact that I must prepare to-morrow's recitations." As her face fell, he burst into a whoop of laughter. "Don't worry, Lois," he cried. "Can you see Bill and me staying away from a dance at your house? You cannot."

She shook her head, serious still. "Larry," she said, "you said you'd really work, this last term—remember? I wouldn't have thought of asking you such a——"

"Just a minute," he interrupted. "Truly I am working, Lois, and I'm sure, now, of graduating. Only it would never do to spend a whole evening grinding. The gang would think I'd lost my mind."

She smiled again, a little doubtfully. "All right then, Larry, we'll count on you," she said, and the great Craig car started with the quiet rush for which it was famous.

Lois Graydon was eighteen, a débutante of that year. Having neither father nor mother, she lived at Ivy-Lynn, the big suburban house of her uncle, Alexander Craig. She was the apple of his stern old eye—a fact which should not cause surprise. Lois was slim and beautiful of body and exactly the height of a fairly small angel—say five-feet-two, or thereabouts. Her hair was wavy and dark, and her eyes were limpid brown, full of laughter sometimes, and sometimes of tenderness. The pretty, curved line of her cheek ended in a determined little chin.

The party frock she wore on this particular evening detracted in no way from the charms we have just recounted, and Lois knew it. She was standing by the open French windows, talking to Billy Winslow and Caroline Scott, when Larkin entered the drawing-room.

"Ah," laughed Bill, "here's the Laziest White Man."

Larkin bowed. "I was detained," he explained loftily, "on affairs of state. Miss Carol, how do you do?"

Carol Scott was a gentle-faced little lady with soft blond hair and wide eyes of blue. She settled cozily into the curve of Winslow's sleeve as the music started, and smiling over her shoulder at Lois, drifted away to the measure of a haunting fox trot. Larkin, shining eyed, held out his arms, and he and Lois followed after.

It was later—eleven o'clock perhaps —and the moon was high above the garden, when Lois stopped once more by the French windows and looked out into the warm May night. "Let's go out, Larry boy," she said. "I've danced enough, for a while." They wandered down a little path between box hedges and came to a stone seat beside the lily pool. For a time they sat quiet. Two big bullfrogs challenged each other across the pool like bassos in an opera. The sudden liquid cadence of a whippoorwill came from the tall poplars by the wall. Larkin leaned close, drinking in the soft scent of Lois' hair. She put her hand over his. "Larry," she said, "when are you going to decide what you'll do—after college?"

He shifted a little uneasily. "Why think about it on a night like this?" he asked. "Oh, I suppose I'll go into some stuffy office in town. When a man has all he needs to live on, it's hard to get excited about earning more."

She looked up at him, and spoke earnestly. "Oh, but, Larry," she said, "don't you see? It's not the money—it's living, being something in the world. Don't you care about that?"

"Sometimes——" he began, and stood up. His voice was a little husky. "I think, Lois," he said, "there's one thing that would make me wake up, as you and Bill call it. If—if you—loved me, Lois——"

She, too, had risen. Her eyes looked deep in his, as she came slowly to him. "I do, Larry," she whispered, and their lips met in a kiss.

Alexander Craig had come down from his library to watch the young people dance. He was a striking-visaged old man, this builder of ultrafine automobiles. His eyes were fierce under his shaggy brows, and the strong outthrust of his chin and the sweep of his gray hair gave him the look of an old lion of the desert. He stood in the doorway, looking appreciatively at the scene in the drawing-room. Then he realized that something was lacking. Lois—where was she? He walked across to the windows, paused a moment to light one of his tremendous Havanas, and strolled quietly down the first path he saw.

His niece, Craig was just reflecting, was an unusually sensible girl. None of this silly calf-love business for her! Perhaps some day she would marry one of her many admirers, but that was time still ages away and—he stopped suddenly in the middle of a stride. The hand with which he removed the cigar from his mouth trembled a little. There in the moonlight, by the lily pool, stood a man and a girl in a close embrace. Even as he watched, they drew a little apart, and the girl's happy, upturned face caught the light. It was Lois.

Alexander Craig stepped forward, and cleared his throat. "My dear," he said, "will you go to the house, now? I should like to speak to this young man alone." Lois started to speak, then looked back at Larkin with a frightened little smile, and went away up the path. Larkin stood waiting, respectful.

When the sound of Lois' footsteps on the gravel had died away, the old man drew a deep breath, locked his hands behind him and began to speak. "After what I have just witnessed," he said, "I consider it my right to ask you a few personal questions. First, how old are you?"

"Twenty-two," replied Larkin.

"I presume your intention is to marry my niece?"

"That is what I hope to do."

"Aren't you perhaps a trifle young to be considering such matters?"

"I love her," was the quiet reply.

"Doubtless you think you do. Now, another point. If I were to permit such a step, have you at present any prospect of being able to support Lois as she has a right to expect?"

"There is the money from my father's estate," Larkin answered. "It pays me in the neighborhood of ten thousand a year—I'm not sure how much, exactly. Of course, as soon as I am through college I shall go into some business or other."

"Humph!" rejoined Craig. "Well, that will do for to-night. Please remember, however, that for the present I shall not tolerate anything in the nature of an engagement between you two. Good evening, sir!"

Larkin secured his hat and went out through the garden wicket. As he passed the front of the house a window was raised very softly somewhere above, and a voice that he barely heard came whispering through the shadows: "Good night, Larry, dear!" He stood a moment, both arms stretched out to her, then turned and took his way home.

It was only a mile along the quiet suburban avenues, but even in that distance Larkin had time to think. Something changed in him as he strode through the warm, sweet-scented dark. When he came at last to old Graham Hall he stopped in the shadows and squared his shoulders with a mighty resolve that was too holy to put into words. Then he started in. "Now," he muttered, "watch me!"

CHAPTER III.

UNEXPECTED NEWS.

CARRYING an important-looking brief case, a short, fat, middle-aged man got off the train at Columbine the next morning. He wore eyeglasses with a wide black ribbon attached. Ob-

viously, he was a lawyer. He went first to Billy Winslow's room in North Hall. Ten minutes later, he emerged and proceeded to Graham Hall, making a considerable detour in order to come up the walk as if he had proceeded directly from the station. He knocked on Larkin's door, and was asked curtly to come in. To the man's apparent surprise, Larkin was exceedingly busy with a mass of history notes. He did not seem to relish the interruption.

"Er—Mr. Larkin, I presume?" the visitor said. "Mr. Larkin, I have been sent by the Trust Company to advise you that the investments selected by your late father have been wholly wiped out in the recent market disturbances, and that——"

Larkin stood up. He was pale, but his voice was steady. "You mean," he said, "that I no longer have any income?"

"I am sorry to say that there is nothing left of your father's estate—nothing whatever," answered the lawyer.

"I see," said Larkin. "And—are there debts?"

"Fortunately not," the visitor replied. "Here is the detailed financial statement, if you care to see it."

Larkin waved him away impatiently. "Never mind," he said. His eyes were fixed on the opposite wall.

The lawyer rose to depart. "It is possible," he said, rather hurriedly, "that there may be some papers to sign before the matter is entirely settled. If so, I will notify you. Sorry to have been the bearer of such bad news. Good day, Mr. Larkin."

Five minutes later Billy Winslow opened the door. Larkin did not turn or look up until his friend stood squarely before him. "Oh, hello, Bill," he said then, in a detached voice. "Sit down, I want to talk to you."

"What's up, old son?" Winslow asked quietly.

"I'm leaving college this afternoon," Larkin replied. "Lawyer just broke the news to me that I'm a pauper." He smiled a little feebly.

"Now hold on a jiffy," said Winslow. "You mean your father's estate is all gone? Look here, Larry, your board and tuition are paid up to the end of the term, aren't they? Don't you want to graduate, man? Besides, I can lend you all the money you——"

"Nothing doing," Larkin answered shortly. "I've got a hundred and ten dollars. That'll keep me going till I can land a job."

Winslow's pleadings were in vain. He ended by helping Larkin pack and walking with him to the station. As they shook hands on the platform, the taller chap hesitated a moment, and the color came into his face.

"I shan't see Lois," Larkin said, "until I've landed somewhere. But you'll go there, probably, Bill, and—well, you'll know what to tell her, I guess. Good-by, boy, here comes the train."

When the last car had swung out of sight around the curve, Billy Winslow turned slowly in the direction of the college. A smile was spreading on his face. "Good Lord," he said to himself, "that is one stiff dose for a man to receive! But he's starting well—beautifully, in fact. Go to it, Larry, my lad!"

CHAPTER IV.

"THUMBS DOWN!"

LATE that evening Lawrence Larkin stood before the mirror in his little furnished room in the city and looked seriously at the distorted reflection of himself. In one hand, he held a lather-covered shaving brush. The particular object of his regard was his small dark mustache. It seemed in some way symbolic of the old Larkin whom he had come heartily to detest in the last twenty-four hours.

"Thumbs down!" he muttered, and splashed a daub of lather on the offending upper lip. When his razor had done its work, Larkin turned his attention to his sleekly parted hair. He had worn it differently once—how was it, now? He tried an experimental part or two on the left side. That was better. Really, he hardly recognized himself. Within ten minutes he was sleeping as soundly as he had ever slept in his life.

On the following day Larkin took the city directory and started on a systematic list of businesses where he thought he might fit in. He had decided that he would go through with this thing by himself, and he strictly avoided the inclusion of any offices where he had friends. When he had a string of nearly a hundred names prepared, he set out.

Three weeks later Larkin had come to the last name on his list. He stood on the pavement outside the big office building and looked at the folded paper in his hand. He glanced up at the towering wall of concrete and made a little grimace. Then he squared his shoulders and entered the elevator.

Going into an anteroom on the twelfth floor, Larkin nodded brightly at the office boy and started through the gate. "Mr. Milan is in, isn't he?" he remarked.

The office boy regarded him suspiciously. There was something almost too buoyant in his air. "Got 'n appointment?" the youth asked, in a cold tone.

Larkin was forced to take one of the seats that were placed in an uncomfortable row for such folk as he. After a time, the office boy yelped, "Mr. Milan'll see you now!" and pointed the way to an inner office behind a glass door. Larkin stood still, faintly amused at the chilly scrutiny he had come to know so well.

Milan evidently had on his best manner for employment seekers. He did not ask Larkin to sit down. At length he spoke, sharply. "Looking for a job?" he asked.

"Yes."

"H'm. What can you do?"

"Anything—try me."

"Ever sold goods?"

"No."

"Ever worked in an office?"

"No."

"What experience have you had?"

"Well—four years of college——"

"Nothing for you now. Can't afford to make experiments. Come back when you've learned to do something."

Larkin bowed, went out of the office, down in the elevator, out into the street. He looked back at the building once more, with a faintly humorous twinkle in his eyes, then extracted the paper from his pocket and carefully crossed off the one remaining line on the sheet.

Wearily he boarded a trolley car and jolted back to his rooming house. When he had climbed the last of the three flights of stairs and unlocked the door of his small, untidy room, he tossed his hat on the bed and lighted his pipe. Then he stood for a long while looking off across the roofs.

His reverie was broken by the sound of feet on the stairway and a knock at the door. He opened it and stepped back with a whoop of glad surprise, for there stood Billy Winslow, smiling at him. The last three weeks had made his college life seem a thing of the dim past. He had not realized how much he missed his chum until that moment.

Winslow was looking at him earnestly. "How's it go, Larry?" he said.

Larkin shrugged his shoulders, and smiled. "Oh, fine, Bill," he answered. "No job yet, though. Let's see—Class Day was yesterday, wasn't it? And you got your sheepskin this morning! How's it feel to be an A. B., Bill?"

"Never mind all that," said Winslow, still serious. "Listen, you crazy man—everybody knows that June is the worst time of the year to hunt a job. If you're so darn determined to land a place by yourself, why not wait till fall? There are sure to be openings then. So come on—pack up your things and come aboard the yacht with me. I'm going on a three months' cruise."

Larkin shook his head. "No, Bill," was all he would say, "I've got to stick now." Before Larkin could bring himself to ask the question he had been yearning to ask ever since his friend appeared, Winslow was gone.

CHAPTER V.

A SURPRISING FACT.

ON an afternoon in late July, Larry Larkin stood on a downtown street corner with a vacant look in his eyes. He had on his one remaining suit, unpressed for many days. His cheeks were pallid under the stubble of a neg-

lected beard. Meals bought in the Busy Bee Lunch are not apt to produce the ruddy glow of health, and Larkin had long been patronizing that home of five-cent coffee and sinkers. He turned and walked aimlessly down the street. His shoulders seemed to droop and his feet to drag a little. Perhaps the only remaining vestige of the old Larry Larkin was his slightly sardonic smile.

A motor horn shrieked close to his left ear, and he swung about startled by something familiar in the sound. A big roadster had stopped by the curb. Out of it, as Larkin stood open-mouthed, stepped Lois Graydon. She walked by, a yard from him, unconscious of his nearness, and entered a department store. Larkin started to follow her. Then he paused, looked down at his clothes, and went slowly away.

He scarcely knew where he walked that afternoon—nor did he care. It was after four o'clock when he pulled himself together and looked about him. His feet had carried him down into the region of big factories. Right across the street from him loomed a high, many-windowed brick wall, and a huge sign, black with gold letters. "Craig Motor Works" was what the sign said.

The coincidence brought a twisty smile to his lips, and he started to go on. Then a thought stopped him, and with an involuntary glance downward at his hands, he moved over toward the little wicket gate marked "Employment."

A man's face appeared at the window. "Well," said the man, "what can you do?"

"Nothing," answered Larkin doggedly. "But I've got a good strong pair of arms."

"Right," the man said. "Start in the assembling room to-morrow—five dollars a day—seven o'clock sharp. Here's your badge."

Larkin reached out mechanically and took the bit of brass from the man's fingers and came out to the sidewalk. There was a dazed look on his face. He glanced up at the factory, then down at the badge in his hand. "No. 1174," it read. Slowly the realization came to him that at last he had a job. Somebody actually wanted him. He straightened his back, and his jaw set hard.

It was strange how that badge seemed to change the color of things. After one look at it the landlady was almost civil—she had intended to issue an ultimatum—and on the strength of its possession Larkin blew himself to a real supper, including ham and eggs. The meal sat behind his belt with a solid, satisfactory feeling. As he tumbled into bed he murmured ecstatically, "Oh, gee—five dollars a day!" and instantly fell asleep.

He went past the checker-in at the works next morning, with the brass badge prominently displayed on the lapel of his coat. A sneaking fear that they might have found out overnight that he was a white-handed interloper was dispelled at once by the matter-of-course manner of the assembling-room foreman.

"Here, you," remarked that individual, "you can start here at No. 3 table. Svenson'll show you what to do." They did not even ask his name. If they should, he had already decided to play safe and offer a noncommittal alias.

Larkin's first impression was one of surprise at the simplicity of the work he was to do. It was a matter merely of adjusting six small bolts, at one end of the motor. Yet the big-framed Scandinavian, Svenson, spent nearly half the morning ponderously repeating his instructions, regardless of the fact that Larkin had grasped them perfectly the first time.

"Now," Svenson would say, "Ay ban show you yust vonce more," and he would leave his own operation and laboriously perform Larkin's in perhaps twice the time that it would have taken his pupil. After the first two hours Larkin had reduced the setting of his six bolts to an exact science. It was part of his make-up to seek at once the quickest and easiest way to do a thing. At college he planned his every activity on that basis.

His dictionaries, for instance, he had indexed by a unique system that enabled him to turn to a word with a

single lazy gesture of the hand. It was inevitable that Larkin should rearrange the case of bolts and nuts before him to such positions that he saved both motion and time on each bolt he put in place. By mid-afternoon he found himself resting a few minutes while Svenson finished his own part of the work on each motor.

The big Scandinavian looked at him once and scowled. "Don't work so fast," he said in a low tone. "The other fellers won't like it."

This presented a new idea to Larkin's mind. Thereafter he did his resting in little bits after each bolt, instead of finishing all six at once.

By four o'clock he found that his back ached surprisingly. He had been standing in a slightly stooping position all day, except for the frequent "carries" when the motor changed tables. These carries were really the hard part of the job, as he soon understood. The completed motors left the assembling department for the chassis floor on a schedule of one every fifteen minutes.

The motors started at one end of the room in the shape of eight-cylinder double-block castings, fresh from the machine shop. At a series of tables, twenty in all, the various parts were put in place. There were two men working at each table. Fresh parts were delivered at the different tables by an electric truck four or five times a day.

Meanwhile, the operations were so divided as to occupy about the same length of time at each table—normally fifteen minutes or less. As each pair of men finished their work on a motor, they would first help the next pair farther along carry it to the latter's table, then go back and help the pair back of them bring a new motor to their own bench.

Even though the Craig motors were made of a special alloy of light, strong steel, the eight cylinders were heavy. Each one journeyed through the room mounted on a plank bed with four protruding handles, like stretcher poles. By the time Larkin had carried his corner of a motor twenty or thirty times he was tired. Still, thinking of his five daily dollars, he labored manfully, and at last came the welcome hoot of the five-o'clock whistle.

Svenson had already washed up, and at the first sound of the signal he seized his hat and coat, and departed. Larkin gave his weary muscles the joy of a mighty stretch, then started to follow.

As he took his hat from the peg, Larkin turned and looked quizzically at the row of deserted benches. Then he pulled a piece of twine out of his pocket and measured the height of his own table, tying a knot in the string to mark it. Thoughtfully smiling, he left the factory.

That night he staggered into his rooming house with a bundle of two-by-four lumber and a bulky package of hardware, and the landlady complained several times during the following week because of the noises he was making in his room. She was pacified when, on Larkin's first pay day, he gave her two weeks' rent in advance.

CHAPTER VI.

THAT WEIRD CONTRAPTION.

ON a morning early in his second week at the works Larkin sprang his little surprise. When Svenson arrived, Larkin was already busy with something beside the table.

"Mornin', Yim," the Swede greeted him.

Larkin enjoyed Svenson's dialect so much that he had introduced himself as Yim Yones, and the name had been adopted in all seriousness. "Morning, Ole," replied Larkin. "Bet you can't guess what this is."

The contraption he had been working on stood by the end of the bench. It was a stout, braced platform the exact height of the worktable, mounted on heavy casters. Larkin laid a three-foot section of plain iron pipe on the table just in front of the motor which stood there. "Now, Ole," he said, "I want to show you something. Give us a hand on that stretcher."

Together they lifted one end of the motor an inch or two and laid it on

the pipe. "Now a little push, this way," said Larkin. The heavy casting slid easily along till it balanced across the improvised roller. Thereupon, Larkin placed a second piece of pipe under the end, and rolled the casting forward. In a second the motor rested firmly on the square top of the wheeled platform. "All right," Larkin nodded, "I'll take it now." He wheeled his invention rapidly away with its load.

Returning after a trip halfway up the room and back, he proceeded to roll the motor into its original position on the table without assistance. "Well, what think you, Ole?" he asked.

Svenson, it appeared, was delighted. "Good yob, good yob!" he said. "Only the boss, mebbe he ban tink different."

The day's work began. At the first shift of motors Larkin calmly waved off the two men from the table ahead, and made the carry alone with his truck. "There, Ole," he said, when he returned, "we'll take turns. You go get the new motor."

There was a considerable stir along the floor as the device attracted the attention of the other men. They came alone and in groups, and their comments ran the gamut from cheers to jeers. "Yones' baby carriage," somebody called it, and the name stuck.

About ten o'clock the room foreman appeared. He seemed to notice something unusual. At No. 4 table, next beyond Larkin's, the men returned from carrying forward the motor they had adjusted, and instead of going to No. 3 table they fell to work at once on a fresh motor which seemed to have mysteriously appeared on their bench while they were absent.

Then the foreman's eye fell on Larkin, who was sitting on a box, his mouth pursed in a thoughtful whistle. The man came up angrily. "Why aren't you carrying your motor?" he demanded. Before Larkin could answer, Svenson arrived at the table with the "baby carriage" and proceeded to unload. The foreman's jaw dropped. "See here!" he said. "What do you call this thing, anyhow?"

"Yim, here, he made it to save work," explained Svenson, with a wide smile.

The foreman looked at the truck for a moment. "Well, get to work!" he said, at last, and hurried away. Ten minutes later he returned with a short, keen-faced man in tweed clothes—the shop chief, Svenson informed Larkin under his breath. The two executives stood at a little distance and talked in a low tone. Then the time for the shift came.

The men at No. 4 table started off with their motor, aided by the two from No. 5. Larkin slid his own onto the truck and pushed it over to No. 4, unloaded it there with his pipe rollers, brought the truck back to Svenson and sat down on his box.

Svenson seemed a trifle uneasy under the gaze of such an august personage as the shop chief, and he went through with his task somewhat clumsily. As Larkin helped him ease the motor into position on the bench the two onlookers drew near. The foreman was speaking. "This is the man, Mr. Galloway," he said, "—the younger one. Let's see, er —what is your name?"

Larkin turned. "Why—Jones," he stammered, "James Jones."

Galloway jerked his head abruptly. "Come into the office, Jones," he said.

Larkin followed with a slightly hollow feeling at the pit of his stomach. Was his one chance going to be taken away from him just because he couldn't learn to let well enough alone? He was prepared to be apologetic—anything—to keep his job. They entered the shop chief's roomy oak office. Galloway indicated a chair, and Larkin sat down. The superintendent's sharp gray eyes studied him constantly, a trifle disconcertingly.

"Jones," he said, after a moment of close scrutiny, "I think after this you'll have to work where I can watch you." Larkin's teacher in the sixth grade at grammar school had talked to him that way sometimes. He shifted a little on his chair, uneasy at the memory. The next words reassured him, however.

"I like the way you worked out that carrier-truck idea," said Galloway. "We

have considered belt conveyers and overhead cranes from time to time, but the volume of work in the assembling department has not seemed to justify the expense. These small rolling platforms will cost very little, and at a first guess I should say they ought to save —let's see—five per cent of the time?"

"In the long run nearer fifteen I think," said Larkin. He leaned forward eagerly. "Have you a piece of paper, Mr. Galloway? You see, as it is now, if one table gets behind for any reason it slows up the whole line. With the trucks each table gang can go ahead and move the motor as soon as it's done —no need to wait for help from the slow table ahead. That means the slow gangs will have to hustle or they'll have two or three motors piling up on their benches. The pace will be set by the fastest-working table, not by the most inefficient one."

Galloway was looking at him rather oddly, Larkin thought, as he finished.

"Let's see," the shop chief said, "you said your name was——"

"Jones." Larkin colored.

"College man?"

"Yes—Columbine. I didn't graduate, but I——"

"Never mind that," the older man interrupted. "You seem to have brains. To-morrow I'm going to start you in another department. I want you to do your work, say nothing, and learn all you can about that branch of the shop. Your pay will be ten dollars a day. That is because, later on, I'll expect you to point out to me some places where you think we can save time or labor. All right, Jones"—he put out a cordial hand —"go back to your table."

Larkin finished his day's work with a light heart. Tunes kept singing themselves inside him, and he broke out once or twice in a mournful tenor with——

"Ah been wukkin' on de ra-a-a-ilroad
All de livelong day——"

As five o'clock drew near he offered Svenson a soiled hand. "Well, so long, Ole," he said. "Guess you'll have a new helper to-morrow."

The Scandinavian's honest face grew long. "What!" he exclaimed. "You ban fired? An' you ban doin' fine, too!"

"They're sending me to another department, where I won't get into so much mischief." Larkin laughed. "That baby carriage was too much for the boss, Ole. He doesn't want a good, hard-working squarehead spoiled by having a lazy man like me around." He put on his coat and hummed as he went out:

"Cain't yer hear de whistle blowin'—
Rise up so early in de morn—
Cain't yer hear de cap'n shoutin'
'Dinah, blow yo' horn?'"

CHAPTER VII.

FROM A TELEPHONE BOOTH.

AT ten minutes after twelve on the second Saturday in August, Larkin moved in the long file of men that shuffled, jostled, laughed, and rough-housed past the pay window. His turn came. He exhibited his badge, took the little manila envelope and eagerly ripped open one corner. As he went out of the yard he examined the contents. Yes, there they were, sure enough—five big beautiful tens and one five, crisp and new.

Larkin had waited one whole long week for this day. He had made a promise to himself. Now, as he walked uptown he watched for a drug store with a pay telephone. At the first one he found he hurried in and entered the booth. He deposited his nickel, called a number and waited.

The incongruity of his surroundings brought a smile to his lips. It was a little, dirty drug store in a poor street, and through the dingy glass of the booth he could see a clutter of bottles and a little Italian girl trying to select four pennies' worth of candy from the show case.

A maid's voice came over the phone, and Larkin asked for Miss Lois Graydon. He could imagine the tilt of the maid's nose if she had been able to see him. "Yes, ma'am—a rough-looking man without any collar, sitting in a place called Rocco's Cut-Price Drug Store—working class by the looks of him——"

"Hello," said a cool, sweet voice, "this is Miss Graydon."

"Lois——" began Larkin, and had to pause because his throat felt tight, "Lois, this is——"

"Why, Larry!" she cried. "Where have you been, all this time? Didn't you know I wanted to see you?"

"Then you'll let me come and call—to-night?" he asked breathlessly.

"You deserved," she replied judicially, "to be punished. But—yes, I think you may come—if you'll come early."

As Larkin left the drug store he withdrew from his pocket a sheaf of varicolored pawn tickets and selected one. Three blocks farther up the street he entered a shop marked "A. Levy—Collateral Bank." "All right, uncle," he said with a smile. "It's been mighty good of you to keep those evening clothes for me. I'll take 'em off your hands now."

The footman at Ivy-Lynn observed that there was a good deal of an air about the young man who handed him hat and gloves at barely eight o'clock that evening. He could not, however, recall ever before having seen that square-jawed, clean-shaven face. And he was almost sure he caught a glimpse of a moth hole in the back of the dress coat, but this suspicion vanished as he heard the warmth of Miss Lois' greeting.

This young man, the footman decided, must be a member of one of the first families of some other city. Though he looked discreetly into the drawing-room afterward he was afforded no further glimpses of the caller, for Larkin and Lois had long since gone into the dusk of the garden.

Naturally they had a great deal to say to each other. First of all Larkin told her the great news of his job. "It's rather odd, too," he said, "but it's at the Craig Motor Works that they took me on—as Yim Yones."

"Oh, what perfectly gorgeous fun!" she laughed. "Why, it's almost romantic, isn't it, Larry boy?"

"Bill told you, then, about—my losing my income?"

She looked at him with a half-suppressed twinkle in her eye, but he was too much in earnest to notice it. "Yes," she said. "It was a little rough at first, wasn't it, Larry?"

"Well," he answered, "I put in some pretty hard road work for a couple of months, but it conditioned me—morally, I mean. As things are now, I'm eating my job alive. You see I learned, among other things, that five dollars a day was a rather princely fortune. I'm getting ten, now," he added proudly, "fifty-five a week!"

"Isn't that perfectly great, Larry?" Her enthusiasm was genuine. "And the job itself—do you like it?"

"It's what I was made for," he said. "It makes me want to burst out in roars of laughter, sometimes though, when I think how old Bill used to call me 'Work Dodger' and lecture me on my sins. You see that's exactly what they're paying me for at the shop—discovering ways to get jobs done with less effort. It sounds silly at first, but it's really tremendously worth while. I'm getting interested in the men, too. They're first-rate chaps, most of them."

Larkin paused and looked thoughtfully across at the lily pool. Then he began again, a little hesitantly. "One night, oh, a long time ago, Lois," he said, "I told you there was one thing that I thought would—wake me up. And you—remember? I just wanted to tell you that it was you who started me—not the loss of the money." He kept himself rigidly in hand and did not look at her as he continued. "Now that I'm poor, Lois, I can't ask you, as I did before—unless—you'd be willing to wait——"

It was rather a cool night for the time of year. She drew closer to him. "I think," she said, in a grim tone, "that fifty-five dollars a week is ample for two people to live on, especially if the girl can cook as well as I can."

Two hours later Lois bade Larkin good night in the hall and turned to climb the broad staircase. At the first landing she met her uncle. He was standing with feet wide apart, his cigar tilted upward at an angle she had long

since learned to recognize as a storm signal.

"Lois," Craig began abruptly, "the back of that young man's head looked familiar. Would you mind telling me who he was?"

Lois' color deepened. "That," she said quietly, "was Lawrence Larkin."

Alexander Craig's eyebrows twitched, ominously. "Humph! I thought so," he growled. "Now, my dear, I wish you to have nothing—you understand, *nothing*—more to do with that young man. He is both worthless and penniless—an adventurer. All he wants is your money. I rather expected him around here again, and after what happened in the garden a few months ago, I had him investigated. Here's the report—read it!"

Lois was white, now, but she took the piece of paper he thrust into her hand. What she read was as follows:

O'BRIEN'S DETECTIVE AGENCY.

Report on Lawrence Larkin:

Character: At Columbine College where he was until recently a student, he was said by all interviewed to be extremely lazy—by some regarded as the laziest man ever to attend that institution. In his studies he obtained fair marks, and showed some aptitude for athletics.

Finances: None. At present he is reported by several who know him to be wholly without resources, and idle.

As she finished reading, the color came back into Lois' cheeks. "Uncle Alec," she said, "you don't understand at all—he's changed——"

"They don't change—that sort! I know best, my dear. We'll say no more about it." With a sweeping gesture of finality the old man replaced his cigar in the corner of his mouth and tramped up the stairs.

Lois stood still on the landing and looked after him, flushed and rebellious. Hot tears smarted in her eyes. At last she turned and went to her room where she sat down to write a letter. The letter read:

DEAREST LARRY: I have just had a scene with Uncle Alec. He has had you looked up by detectives and, of course, what they were able to find out about you at college doesn't make a very good impression on him. He has forbidden me to see you again, so you mustn't come any more to the house. But I love you more than ever, and I'll wait for you, Larry boy. I'll be nineteen next year and then I shan't be a minor child any longer. That's the law in this State.

I think letters are safe—but not too often—and we can arrange to meet each other sometimes, downtown. Remember, Larry, dearest, I love you—— Always, LOIS.

When she had mailed it, she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

ASTONISHING INFORMATION.

ON Monday night, Larkin reached his rooming house several minutes earlier than usual, and he ran all the way up the three flights of stairs. When he opened the door there lay Lois' letter, as he had hoped. There was some other mail, too, but the rest of his mail could wait. He tore the pretty sheet of note paper from its envelope almost hungrily. As he read his face fell. His new-found confidence dwindled. He had never even considered the possibility that his past might rise up to mock him. What chance would he have now to make good in Craig's shop? And make good he must, or Lois was still as far away as the moon.

He was still sitting gloomily in the chair where he had first dropped, when Billy Winslow opened the door, ten minutes later.

"Bully for you, Larry, my son!" shouted the visitor. "I saw Lois yesterday, and she told me about your job—why, what the deuce is the matter?"

Larkin's frown had given place to a momentary smile at the sight of his friend, but it returned now, blacker than ever. He explained the situation briefly. "Old Craig's bound to spot me some day, down at the shop," he wound up, "and when he does, out I'll go. He seems to have me labeled as a chronic moron, thanks to my record out at Columbine."

"Nonsense," Winslow said positively. "If he's as fine an old boy as everybody says, he'll give you a cheer when he knows you've reformed."

Larkin shook his head. "I'll stick, of course," he said, "but down at the works

it's a byword that if the old man gets an idea into his head it takes dynamite to get it out." Listlessly he picked up another letter, and ripped off the end of the envelope. A dignified, familiar letterhead met his eye—"The Market Street Trust Company." Underneath he read:

DEAR MR. LARKIN: The inclosed check for six thousand two hundred and forty-two dollars and thirty-one cents represents the semi-annual installment of the income guaranteed to you under the will of your late father, et cetera, et cetera.

Larry gasped and fell back in his chair. "Well, what——" He choked. "Look here, Bill!"

William Winslow took the letter and glanced at it. He nodded in an embarrassed way. "Yes, Larry," he said. "You see, I—came around to-day to tell you about this. I decided, last May, that only desperate measures would work with you, Larry. I knew you had no idea in the world how your inheritance was run, so I got a friend of mine—an actor, in town—to come out and pass you that bunk about losing all your money.

"I thought I knew what you needed," Winslow continued. "It turned out a little harder on you than I expected. In fact I shouldn't blame you in the least if you now proceeded to throw me downstairs——"

Larkin's amazed expression had given way to one of mirth. He lay back and laughed until he was weak. "Don't worry, Bill, you old son of a gun," he said, at last, "I know what's good for me. Only—your experiment worked so well that I haven't an idea what to do with this money now I've got it!"

Within the next few days, however, Larkin did discover some uses for his wealth. He moved to a more comfortable room in a slightly better neighborhood, and he purchased a new and shiny flivver. In it, on the next clear Saturday afternoon, he traveled a good many miles through the pretty suburban country, and once or twice it must be recorded that he stopped in front of cozy, brand-new bungalows with "For Sale" signs.

Lois had gone north to a lake resort in Wisconsin, but her letters came regularly. There were suggestions in them of moonlit, balsam-scented nights that filled Larkin with an aching desire to follow her. Nevertheless he stayed at the factory and worked harder than ever. He was studying books on shop management in his evenings now, and he discovered with delight that the text frequently bore out the conclusions he had reached in his own way. The books gave him something of a scientific background for his thinking.

For the most part, however, he depended upon his almost intuitive faculty for picking the easiest way to do a thing. There were men at the works—some of them graduate engineers—who looked on him with respect. If Larkin had not preserved a sense of humor and a hearty dread of coming to the notice of Alexander Craig, he might have overestimated his success. As it was, he rather went to the opposite extreme.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH WINSLOW'S ASSISTANCE.

ONE morning early in September, Larkin sat in the little coop of an office they had recently given him. He smiled as he worked on one of his charts. Lois would come back to town to-day! In his last letter he had arranged to meet her that evening in a little park, not far from Ivy-Lynn. He would tell her, he thought, about the beautiful six-room bungalow he had found——

The ringing of his desk phone interrupted this meditation. To his cheerful "Hello!" a girl's voice answered. "This is Mr. Williams' secretary," said the voice. "Mr. Williams would like you to come up to the office at once, if you will—yes, the general manager. Thank you, Mr. Jones."

Larkin brushed some dust from his trousers, pulled on his coat, and walked quickly through the shop to the central office building. The general manager was waiting for him behind a great, square glass-topped desk. "Sit down, Mr. Jones," he said.

He pulled toward him a typed memorandum of several pages, which looked familiar to Larkin. "Mr. Jones," he continued, "this report of yours contains some pretty sweeping suggestions. In fact, if they are to be put into effect they should cover the whole plant—not merely Mr. Galloway's section. For that reason, he passed the report on to me.

"I considered it," the general manager went on, "then put it up to the board of engineers. They have passed on your report and O. K.'d it, with some minor changes. That being the case we shall start to work on the plan at once." He paused and looked at his watch. "Let's see," he said, "I guess Mr. Craig has come in by now. Suppose we run up there."

Larkin tried desperately to think of an excuse, but none came to him. He followed Williams into the elevator with trembling knees, and a moment later they stood in the long mahogany room where the old lion had his den. Alexander Craig had just sat down in front of his morning mail and now was lighting an eight-inch cigar. He looked up and nodded as he saw Williams.

"Good morning," said the general manager. "Mr. Craig, this is Mr. Jones—the man we spoke of yesterday." He smiled at Larkin, turned, and went out.

The president motioned with his head in the direction of a chair. As Larkin sat down he continued to regard him with piercing eyes. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he asked, with a brusque suddenness.

Larkin steeled himself and returned a level gaze. "Perhaps my name is merely familiar," he said steadily.

"Hm—perhaps." The old man's tone grew more cordial. "Well, Mr. Jones, I understand you've been accomplishing things in the shop."

Larkin bowed. "Thank you for saying so, Mr. Craig," he answered.

Craig leaned back in his chair and watched the smoke from his great cigar. "For fifteen years," he said, "we've been building the best car in America because we didn't try to standardize and turn 'em out cheap. I've always believed in letting my mechanics keep their individuality, and that's why we haven't overspecialized in our shops.

"Now I believe the time has come," Craig went on, "when we can put more system into things, organize for bigger production to meet the demand, and still keep the old spirit of fine workmanship. For some time I've been looking for a man to fill a new position I want to create—the position of efficiency manager." He swung suddenly to face Larkin. "I think you're the man," he finished. Larkin said nothing, but his eyes glowed.

"First, however, Mr. Jones," said the old motor builder, "there are some things I want to ask you. I have some rather peculiar ideas. One is that I like steady men—men who have an incentive to stick. Are you married?"

"No, sir," said Larkin.

"Engaged?"

"Well—I'm not quite sure—you see—yes, I guess you'd call it that—as far as the girl herself is concerned, anyway."

"Oh, her parents object, eh? Matter of money?"

"Partly that, I think," Larkin admitted.

"How much have you been making?"

"A hundred a week—since last week."

"All right—it'll be two hundred, beginning Monday. That'll fix 'em! Now go get that girl and marry her, and take a week off for a honeymoon. Can't spare you any longer for we need your brains in this business. Your new office will be all ready for you when you come back." He rose, smiling, and grasped Larkin's hand. "Good luck, my boy," he said.

Larry got to the door somehow and pulled it shut behind him. He even succeeded in keeping his face straight till he reached the flivver, in the factory yard. Once he was out on the street, however, such a convulsion of mirth shook him that he had to stop the little car by the curb until it subsided. Then he started uptown, thinking fast as he drove. At the bank he stopped long enough to withdraw a

plump roll of bills, and then sped on to the office of a real-estate broker.

Larkin had the key to the six-room bungalow in his pocket when he came out, half an hour later. His next stop was the city hall. In reply to his query the elevator boy winked knowingly and indicated a big office on the third floor. Larkin found others waiting there ahead of him. He ensconced himself in a telephone booth and called Billy Winslow. Their conversation was brief, but it would have been interesting to almost any hearer.

"All right, Bill," Larkin finished, "but you'd better call that minister up first of all. Now, I'll get the ring, but I wish you would run down to one of the big stores and order some furniture—oh, just things to sleep and eat on at first. The clerks'll know. You've got the address, haven't you—yes, No. 224 Garden Boulevard, Avalon—right. You know where to be at eight-thirty. I always said you'd make a whale of a best man—good-by, Bill!"

CHAPTER X.

THE NEED FOR ACTION.

AT eleven o'clock that night a rather ashen-faced butler knocked timidly at the door of the library at Ivy-Lynn. Craig's voice responded in a gruff summons. The man opened the door and stepped forward hesitantly, holding out a bit of folded paper.

"Er—beg pardon, sir," the butler said, "but one of the maids was in Miss Lois' room just now, and she found this."

Craig got quickly to his feet, snatching the paper from the butler's hand. It was a brief note, written hurriedly, in pencil. It read:

DEAR UNCLE ALEC: I am leaving to be married to Larry Larkin. It hurts me to have to do it this way, but some day you will know that I have chosen the finest man in the world. Your loving niece, LOIS.

Momentarily the old man stood speechless. His eyes misted and he swayed a little, catching at the table for support. Then he shook his great head like an angry bull and plunged into action. He caught up the telephone and roared a number into the transmitter. The answer came quickly.

"O'Brien's?" Craig asked in a hoarse voice. "This is Alexander Craig. I want you to get a man up here, quick. My niece has eloped with that young Larkin. The girl's not yet of age—dammit! I'm not going to let that rascal steal her so easily. Eh? Yes, send him at once!"

At that very instant, five miles away in the pretty little suburb of Avalon, the moon shone down on two people who stood hand in hand before a wide-porched bungalow.

"Oh, Larry, dear—what a love of a place!" whispered the girl.

Lois had not boasted unduly when she said that she could cook. So, at least, thought Larkin—and being a wise husband, so he said—as he rose from the breakfast table, seven days later. She kissed him. "For that," she said, "I shall get you a most marvelous dinner to-night. But, dear, you must be sure to remember the steak—and have them cut it thick——"

He laughed and sealed his promise in the only proper way, then backed the flivver out of the tiny garage and waved farewell to her.

At the works he spent a busy morning arranging the new office which he found awaiting him. At noon he telephoned Lois. "No," he said, "haven't seen your uncle yet, but he may send for me any time. What? Yes, darling—thick. Will three pounds be enough—sure? All right—just as early as I can make it——" The conversation did not end there, but the rest may safely be left to your imagination.

It was twenty minutes to five when Larry's plant telephone rang, and he was requested to come up to the president's office at once. He straightened his necktie a little nervously and went.

A glance at Craig's face reassured him, for although the old man looked somewhat worn and tired, he smiled a genuine welcome to Larkin across his desk. "Hello, Jones, my boy!" he said. "How's the little bride? Be good to

her, son——" His voice seemed to catch. "Here, have a cigar," he added abruptly. "Now, about this new job of yours——"

The phone at his elbow buzzed softly. "Excuse me a second," he said. "Hello —yes—what? You've found her? Yes —oh, he's away, now, is he! Listen— take another man with you and go and watch the house. I'll get there just as fast as the car will take me! Garden Boulevard, you say? Two, two, four?"

Craig had stood up as he talked. Now he rushed across the room for his hat, flinging a word of apology over his shoulder at his gasping visitor. Before Larkin could take two steps he heard the old man's roar in the corridor, "Going down!" and the bang of an elevator door.

Larkin ran to the stairs, leaping downward, half a dozen steps at a time. In the yard, as he dashed out, the smothered bellow of an exhaust sounded, and he saw the old motor builder shouting in the ear of an astonished chauffeur as the great Craig limousine got under way.

Larkin went out of the yard perilously rocking on two wheels, and twisting through the cobbled streets in the wake of the other machine, he straightened the little car out at last on a broad, smooth avenue. Grim of mouth, he pulled open his throttle.

They left the city proper and flew through a mile or so of open country. Then the scattered cottages of Avalon began to appear on either side of the highway. Far ahead, Larkin saw the big Craig car swing south on Garden Boulevard in a cloud of dust. At that instant he heard a sudden knocking under the hood of his flivver, and a second later the engine stopped dead.

He threw out his clutch and coasted half a block, then scrambled over the side and ran.

CHAPTER XI.

SOMETHING FORGOTTEN.

AS he raced up the steps, hatless, breathless, Larking caught a glimpse through the open doorway of Alexander Craig, waving a frantic arm. Two solid-looking citizens in black felt hats stood by rather helplessly. One of them held a coil of rope in his hand. Lois, in a pink bungalow apron, sat on the edge of a chair and wept disconsolately.

"I tell you she's got to come!" the old man was roaring. "She's under age, and——"

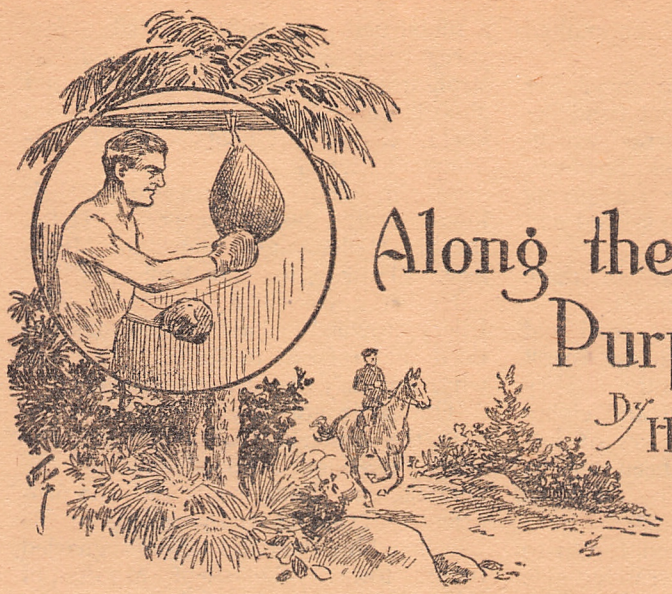
Larkin stalked into the room. He pushed one of the detectives out of his path with a rough hand, and went to Lois. In another instant she was laughing, half hysterically, on his shoulder. "Oh, Larry!" she cried, "I—I c-couldn't make them understand. Uncle Alec was so determined——"

The old man's eyes were fixed on Larkin's face. His massive jaw dropped. He took a step backward, encountered the edge of a chair and fell into it. His tongue sought thickly for speech. "What—you—Jones! Well, I will——" He paused, and as if finding words wholly inadequate to the occasion, thrust into his mouth the battered black remnant of the cigar he had been holding in his fingers. Then he rose and turned on the expectant detectives. "Get right out of here!" he bellowed.

As the two stalwarts made a hasty exit, Lois raised her head suddenly from her husband's coat sleeve. She sniffed. Then a fresh wail burst from her. "My biscuits!" she cried. "They're ruined!" and she dashed for the kitchen.

The two men, left alone in the living room, looked at each other somewhat sheepishly. Craig broke the silence. "I —I'm sorry, my boy," he said, "all my fault. You try and make it up to her for those biscuits. Guess I'd better be clearing out."

A look of startled recollection came into Larkin's face. He seized the old man's arm in a tense grip. "Nothing doing!" he said. "You've got to stay to dinner, now, and keep her mind occupied for the next ten minutes, while I run out." His voice sank to a hoarse whisper and he leaned closer. "I forgot the steak!" he explained.



Along the Purple Road

By Hapsburg Liebe

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

IN A MANILA ENVELOPE.

WISHING to be where nobody knew him, he came to Longleaf, a tiny town down in the pinelands cattle country of Florida. His name, on the register of the small and unpainted hotel, was Johnny McEllery, which was his true name, though he was far better known in the world as the "Mississippi Kid"—his intimates had shortened it to "Mississippi." He was a lightweight prize-ring artist, and the escutcheon of his pugilistic career was blotted with but a single defeat. He was a hickory sapling of a young fellow, with Scotch gray eyes and the thoughtful and sensitive face of a dreamer.

Johnny McEllery was blue, exceedingly blue. He had almost stopped talking. Two garrulous Longleafers had driven him hungry from the supper table the evening before, and he hadn't gone to breakfast at all because he didn't want to be a target for their curious questioning. When one refuses to talk in a tiny town that doesn't know him he becomes mystery itself, and mystery, of course, always beckons.

Then one of the ultrainquisitive Longleafers cornered him on the hotel's veranda.

McEllery wheeled with an angry eye. "You old woman!" he snapped. He vaulted the railing, and walked off gloomily.

A mile without glancing to right or left walked the Mississippi Kid. When he came to himself again he noted absent-mindedly that the sandy road was lined on either side by a beautiful green wilderness of tall pines and low, fan-shaped palmettos. A cardinal shot from one tree to another like a scarlet meteor. In the sky a mocking bird was chasing a shrike, and on the ground a sleek, purple grackle, Beau Brummel among birds, was strutting vainglorously.

"Some class to them, I'll tell the world!" the Kid commented. "They don't ask questions!"

Soon he became aware that he was looking toward an official-size manila envelope that lay not far away at the roadside. He strode over and picked it up. It was not sealed, and on it was written, in strong but uneven chirography, the name of James Devine. The Kid opened the flap and took out—a thick sheaf of bank notes and three thousand dollars in government bonds!

"Some class to my luck," he exulted "when at last it comes!"

He was looking at the currency. He had never seen a government bond before. He had seen and owned worthless oil-well and mining stock, however, which explains his reason for giving the bonds only the most superficial and disdainful of glances.

"I wasn't the only fool in these United States," he told himself.

After a sly look up the road and another down, he stole into the forest and counted the bank notes. They amounted to three hundred and eighty dollars. He choked back a cry of joy, and no wonder, for he had been nursing his last tenner—and it is no picnic to be penniless in a strange land!

Johnny McEllery had been forced to bring himself up, and life's seamiest side had been his lot. He was, therefore, not on very close terms with some of the finer things. To him findings meant keepings; that which one found belonged to the finder by the highest law he knew, a law that has to do with survival. It was his nearest approach to downright crookedness. He never could have been induced to commit robbery in the ordinary sense of the word.

He put the big envelope into an inside coat pocket, and returned to Longleaf by way of the woodland.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW LIGHT.

THE hotel's middle-aged and bespectacled proprietor was reading an old newspaper on the veranda when young Johnny McEllery sat down on the upper step and began to mop perspiration from his forehead.

The rich find was forgotten now—fear of the proverbial wolf of poverty was not the greatest of the Mississippi Kid's worries—and he was brooding again. The hotel man spoke in his customary cordial manner, and McEllery ignored it utterly. Why wouldn't they leave him alone?

Two minutes later the soft thud of hoofs in sand came to the melancholy fighter's ears. He looked up slowly as a sunburned pony came to a halt a few yards from him. Sitting the saddle as straight as any pine tree was a tall and almost gaunt, white-bearded man in khaki, high-laced boots, and broad-brimmed Stetson hat.

"Hello, Tom!" the newcomer bellowed at the hotel's keeper. "Hello, there! Hello, young man!" to McEllery. "Howdy, and good mawnin'!"

He had a voice like a foghorn. McEllery frowned at having been thus noticed, and refused to speak. Why, oh, why, wouldn't they leave him alone?

The caller got down from his horse with the nimbleness of a boy, left the reins hanging, stamped up to the veranda, and shook hands with the proprietor. Then he narrowed one of his jewellike blue eyes and jerked a gnarled thumb toward the silent Mississippi Kid. "'Smatter that feller, Tom?" he demanded, rather than asked. "Ain't sick, is he?"

He had seen them, hundreds of them, come down from the frozen North in the winters in search of health for both body and spirit. In spite of the fact that he was more or less illiterate, he was a man of great human understanding, and properly sympathetic.

Tom Flowers drew him into the broad hallway of the hotel. "Name's McEllery," Flowers whispered. "No, he don't 'pear to be sick, though he didn't eat much supper last night, and didn't even come to breakfast this mawnin'. If I was guessin', Uncle Jim, I'd say he's had some trouble, somehow, and is about broke in the bargain, the way he herds his coin."

Now the Kid had keen ears, and they caught that. "Humph!" he muttered sourly. "Guess again, old-timer!" He rose and walked to the farthest end of the rough veranda, and there dropped disconsolately into a creaking wicker rocker. Soon there were heavy footsteps behind him, but he didn't turn his head. Then a two-dollar bill fell over his shoulder and into his lap, and he heard the foghorn voice, which was now low and kindly:

"Mebbe that'll help a little, buddy. I'd ha' made it more, but I've jes' had

some awful bad luck. I'm a-wishin' you the best, buddy, shorely. If it comes to the wo'st, come out to the Big-D Ranch and see me. Don't fo'git it, buddy."

He stamped away. Johnny McEllery said nothing; he sat there as if he was in a trance. With the two dollars clutched tightly in his iron-hard fist, he watched the white-bearded man swing himself lightly into the saddle and ride his sunburned pony toward the middle of the little town's business section.

The Kid rose and went to the hotel keeper. His face, which as yet bore no disfiguring mark of battle, seemed rather fine in the new light that was upon it. "Who," he asked almost tenderly, "was the old bird?"

"The 'old bird!'" Tom Flowers echoed resentfully. "Son, you mustn't never call Uncle Jim Devine a 'old bird' any more. He's the best man in the State, and he's 'Uncle Jim' to everybody. The number o' hairs in his head is the number o' down-and-outers he's put on their feet. The only enemy he ever had is a brute named Arch Curtice, who owns cow land all around his ranch and is a-tryin' to freeze him out.

"If Uncle Jim had one tenth o' the money he's throwed into the laps o' the pore," Flowers went on, "his ranch'd be clear o' debt. Now he's lost most o' the money he had some'eres betwixt here and his place four miles down the south road; he was goin' to pay his boys off and take up a note on his ranch two months ahead. It shore is tough luck."

Flowers turned away with an imprecation under his breath. The Kid remembered that the big envelope in his inside coat pocket bore the name James Devine, and his heart became a leaden weight in his breast. It was hard to give up so much money when he didn't have to do it, when he was down to his last tenner. If only Uncle Jim Devine hadn't given him that two dollars!

He went to his little upstairs bedroom and had it out with himself.

The battle was of short duration, but old Jim Devine had already ridden homeward when it was over. Johnny McEllery, his countenance lighter than it had been for a long time, set out down the sandy pinewoods road that led past the Devine place. He was going to be honest, if he never was anything else.

In due time he arrived at the ranch house. It was big and square and low-roofed, and it had a magnificent setting of cabbage palms and bamboos, flaming hibiscus, fragrant night-blooming jessamine, and royal purple bouganvillea. A veranda ran all the way around on the outside, and in the center there was a patio, or court, filled with lilies of a dozen kinds and pepper trees. Back of it stood the bunk house of the cowmen and two great barns.

A Seminole house boy of fifteen, wearing bright clothing and an engaging grin, answered McEllery's rap at the door. "Me Willie Big Hat," he said. "You wanna see Unca Jim; him gone chase bad cow. You come in, wait see Unca Jim, huh?"

McEllery smiled amusedly. "All right, Willie," he agreed.

The Indian youth ushered him into a big room that served as both living room and office, the floor of which was almost covered with the untanned skins of deer, panther, and black bear. On the walls were several pairs of antlers and a number of pictures of horses. In a corner stood two repeating rifles and a repeating shotgun. Willie Big Hat pointed to a rocker, and faded like a shadow. The Mississippi Kid sat down and waited impatiently.

CHAPTER III.

FIVE SECONDS OF SURPRISE.

IT was a long wait. The chuck-will's-widows were beginning to call over in the woods, and the guttural cries of nighthawks filled the sky when the sound of footfalls came from the veranda steps. The Kid half turned in his chair and shot his gaze through the open front doorway; he saw, not old Jim Devine, but his one daughter,

a young woman of about McEllery's own age.

She was dressed in tan riding clothes and high tan boots; she was slender but roundish of figure, blue-eyed and brown-haired, and exceedingly pretty in spite of her sunburn, an out-of-doors girl, if one ever lived.

Beside her appeared a man whom Johnny McEllery disliked even at that first glance at him, a big and coppery sun-browned man in the Florida cowmen's regulation high-laced boots, khaki shirt and trousers, and wide-rimmed Stetson hat.

"Some class to her!" the Kid whispered involuntarily to himself. "I'll tell the world that!"

Miss Devine had halted a few feet from the doorway and faced the cowman. Seeing, but himself unseen, the Kid watched and listened closely. Miss Devine's voice was as clear as a cardinal's song, and it held notes of suppressed anger; it had much of the musical drawl so noticeable in mountain folk, and it was as feminine as Eve. "But I don't want to marry, Dink," she said. "I'm happy jes' like I am. When I'm on my Spot hawss and a-gallopin' through the big woods, I feel like I own everything I see. And don't fo'get this, Dink—the next time you mention marryin' to me I'm li'ble to turn loose and hit you!"

Kid McEllery almost clapped his hands. He began to admire the girl immensely. The voice of Dinkle Burris, foreman of the Big-D Ranch, came then, but it was so low that the Kid didn't catch a word. A moment later McEllery saw that Burris had caught the girl's wrists in his big brown hands. She went pale.

"Le' go o' me!" she ordered.

He wouldn't. He appeared to be exulting in his brutal strength. The Mississippi Kid, ever a creature of impulse, rose like a cat, and like a cat sprang to the doorway, and he had fight in his Scotch gray eyes.

"Let the lady go, you big beef!" he clipped, and he had taken his old ring crouch. "Don't, and I'll sure bust you loose from her!"

Burris looked upon the stranger as a rank intruder. He slackened his grip somewhat, though McEllery didn't know that, and the young woman was too much taken by surprise to jerk her hands away. For some five seconds the two men stared at each other, Burris smiling peculiarly, and then it happened—and it was done so quickly that Nan Devine, when she later called the scene to mind, didn't know which hand the Kid used.

An uppercut to the chin it was. Burris freed the girl's wrists and staggered backward to the steps, amazement mingling with rage on his now ashen face. Then he reached toward a hip pocket.

"Don't you dare to fetch out a knife, Dink!" cried old Jim Devine's daughter.

Burris said nothing, dropped his hand, walked down the steps and around the house.

Miss Devine turned to the visitor. "You done it," she said, "like a reg'lar prize fighter. I don't know whether to thank you or not. I'm purty much upset now. Did you want to see dad?"

"Yes. And I am a prize fighter, lady."

She straightened until she seemed very tall to McEllery. Her comely face became a mask of scorn. "So you are a prize fighter!" she flared contemptuously. "You'll find him back there at the barn—dad, I mean. Not—not that I think so very much o' Dink Burris. Go ahead and hunt up dad." Her nose was high when she walked into the living room.

Johnny McEllery, wondering, feeling somehow rather small, went slowly across the veranda, down the steps, and around the house. It was almost dark now. The chuck-wills-widows and nighthawks were holding an orgy.

As he side-stepped a century plant to avoid its spines, a heavy figure bobbed up before him as though by magic, and a blow like the blow of a piledriver landed full on his temple. The world rocked, and the early stars went out like candles in a high wind. The Mississippi Kid knew no more.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LEAST THING IN THE WORLD.

WHEN McEllery came to, some hours later, a great golden moon was rising. He heard indistinctly the hoarse, weird cry of a swamp owl and the far-off baying of a dog. He sat up dizzily, his head throbbing, saw that he was in a palmetto-filled woodland, and tried to remember how he had come there.

Gradually his brain cleared sufficiently for him to reason. He had no doubt that the blow had been struck by the big man who was talking with the girl on the ranch-house veranda. He came to the conclusion that the big man, believing his swift blow a fatal one, had carried him into the palmettos and hidden him, which was a correct conclusion.

The Mississippi Kid rose, staggered, and caught the trunk of a tree. "That bird sure carries a punch," he mumbled, smiling grimly and gamely. "But he had to do it when I wasn't lookin'!"

Slowly he realized that he was listening to the faint, soft chords of a guitar. A man wouldn't play like that, he told himself, so it had to be a woman. Then he heard a woman singing an old Spanish song.

Not a word of Spanish did the Mississippi Kid know. For that matter, this one song included the most of the Spanish that the singer knew; one of the Big-D cowmen had brought it from Mexico. The Kid recognized beauty in anything, however, and he recognized beauty in the voice, and he knew it was Nan Devine's.

Then it couldn't be far to the ranch house. McEllery tightened his grip on himself, and turned toward it. Soon he came to a gate in the yard fence, and he felt to see whether he still had the big envelope that contained old Devine's money and bonds. It was gone!

"That bird—got it!" McEllery moaned.

A sudden dizziness came over him. He fumbled at the latch and opened the gate, and then fell his full length into the path that led to the veranda steps. He heard the roar of a foghorn voice:

"Hello! Who's that?"

The Kid sat up, his head whirling. A moment, and Jim Devine was gathering the limp figure into his strong old arms.

"Light a lamp, Nan!" he bellowed. "Here's a man bad hurt! Tell Willie Big Hat to roust out Dink to ride fo' the doctor!"

When he carried the inert form of the Kid into the living room, an oil lamp was burning brightly on the desk, and Nan was waiting with a bottle of spirits. He put McEllery down on a panther skin, shoved a chair cushion under his head, took the bottle from his daughter's hand, and forced a swallow of the fiery stuff down McEllery's throat.

"Ow!" cried the Kid, and he sat up with a wry face, his wits clearing again. "Ow! Say, but that's man-size hooch! Didn't I hear you tell somebody to go for the doctor? Well, you needn't. I'm all right, absotively. Countermand the order, please, Uncle Jim!"

"Well, well, well!" Devine boomed. "Nan, he seems to be a right smart better a'ready; tell Dink not to go jes' yit. Buddy, you—why, I'm a lizard if it ain't the same young feller I seen at the hotel in Longleaf this mawnin'!"

At this instant the gaudily dressed Seminole lad entered hastily. "Misser Dink him been gone long time," Willie Big Hat announced; "ride him hawss off and say him not never come back."

Devine began to claw at his full white beard in a puzzled fashion. McEllery's gaze sought the face of the girl. She was looking down upon him in more ways than one; he knew that it was because he was a boxer, and he wondered why. His brows puckered into a frown. He had been very proud of himself and his ring victories—so proud that a single defeat had broken his heart, as he told Devine that same night.

McEllery rose from the tawny skin, stepped unsteadily to a chair, and dropped into it.

"Tell me about it, son," said Devine. He, too, dropped into a chair.

"I'm ashamed," the Mississippi Kid

blurted. "I found that money you lost, and I was so awful blue and so near broke I figgered to keep it. But you come along and hand me two dollars to help me out, apologizin' for that, and I simply couldn't stand it. That Dink feller hit me like a gov'ment mule kickin', and took the envelope off'n me——" He gave a detailed account of his affair with Burris.

Devine heard it with his customary lack of perturbation. Then he laughed a great laugh. "Why, buddy," said he, "money is the very least thing in the world. I reckon Dink didn't mean to hurt Nan. Jes' unload yore trouble on ole Uncle Jim; eh? What was it made you so cussed blue?"

Johnny McEllery came out with it briefly: "My dad was a steamboat cap'n on the old Mississip'. My mother was dead, and I lived aboard with him. One day he was racin' a boat dad hated, and he filled the furnaces with bacon out o' the freight and hung a man on the safety valve, which is the best way I know o' flirtin' with the angels. The boiler went up sky-high.

"Dad stuck to his boat," McEllery continued, "and died with her. From that time on I was on my own, and I kept to the old Mississip'. It was always a fight to live. I got right handy at it. I whipped a bully one evenin', and a boxing promoter who was aboard saw me. Bill Urhart was his name. He pulled me to the rail to talk to me.

" 'You got the real stuff in you,' says he, 'for a corkin' lightweight. I'll take you to N' Awleens,' he says, 'and train you and back you up.'

"I wasn't stuck on the idee, but there was no gettin' away from that Bill Urhart. 'What do you want to stick to this darned old river for?' he says. 'I'll put your feet in the purple road—the road to money and swell things and high old times—the road to purple and fine linen.' And all along I've thought of it as the purple road.

"Well, he took me down to N' Awleens and trained me. I won over ever'body they put me up against. My backer was awful good to me; there was sure class to Bill Urhart, some class, I'll tell the world. I traveled along the purple road, all right.

"Then Bill asked me if I'd care to tackle a lightweight who'd been lickin' all comers down to Jacksonville, the same as I'd been lickin' all comers in N' Awleens, and I told him I would. So we got a match with the 'Jacksonville Terror,' and I trained down to a gnat's eyelash, and we went over there.

"It was an awful crowd that night," the Kid went on, his countenance gloomy at the memory of it. "It wasn't only me fightin' the Terror; it was N' Awleens fightin' Jacksonville. My friends was all there, and they had big money up on me, and so had Bill Urhart. I felt fine when I stepped into the ring. The first five rounds was all my way, though I sure had to fight like a wild cat for 'em.

"Then the Jacksonville thousands went wild yellin' for the Terror and raggin' me, and I got rattled," the Kid continued. "I got to tryin' to listen to what they said, and the first thing I know this Terror boy has put me to dreamin' o' the little birdies singin'. You see, boxin' at home, with the crowd in your favor, is different from boxin' in a strange place with the crowd against you.

"Bill Urhart was so mad I was afraid he'd bite hisself," McEllery went on, "and so was my purple-road friends. They said I laid down like a wee lamb, quit on 'em cold. I handed Bill my loser's purse and left 'em, and I don't never want to see any of 'em again."

Johnny McEllery bent his melancholy face to his hands. "Uncle Jim," he muttered, "I hope you can understand. It simply broke all the heart I had."

After a full minute of silence, the old ranchman drawled soberly: "Willie Big Hat, find the little mister somethin' to eat."

"I'll do it, dad," said Nan, and she hastened after the Seminole.

The Kid ate, with the youthful Indian standing at his shoulder to help him, and soon afterward was shown to a white bed in a very comfortably situated bedroom. Sleep overtook him along a darksome lane of his mental ramblings,

and the liquid song of a mocking bird in a cabbage palm outside awoke him at sunrise.

CHAPTER V.

A NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH.

BREAKFAST over, McEllery went with Devine to the woods and to the spot where Dinkle Burris had left him unconscious the evening before. They found no sign of the manila envelope.

At the ranchman's invitation, McEllery agreed to be a guest of the Big-D for a week. Nan had softened somewhat in her attitude toward him, and he began to feel at home. That afternoon he picked up an old-fashioned photograph album from a table in the living room, opened it idly, and straightened, with half an imprecation in his mouth, at sight of the first photograph in it.

"That's the same bird!" he cried out. "The same bird! It's sure him!"

Nan Devine, unnoticed by McEllery, had just come into the room. "Who——" she said uncertainly. "What're you a-talkin' about, anyhow, Mister Kid?"

"This feller here." And with a forefinger he tapped the likeness of a youthful and finely molded face. "It's that same Jacksonville Terror, the guy that put me to sleep that night I told you and your dad about. Is he from down in here some'eres?"

Nan's answer was a simple nod.

"I see," Johnny McEllery went on, "there's wrote on it, 'With love, Danny.' I didn't know his name was Danny. I always heard him called the 'Terror.' I—I guess you know him, and like him."

"You bet I like him!" said Nan. Her eyes became a little disconcerting. They asked as plainly as her lips could have asked: "What're you going to do about it, Mister Mississippi Kid?"

"Nobody ever could—er—take his place?" asked Johnny McEllery, his cheeks pinkening a trifle.

"Not while there's water in the sea," answered Jim Devine's daughter.

"Then why is it you hate prize fighters?"

"Because it was prize fighters got Danny to be one," she told him promptly. "And he'll shorely go to the bad, with the fast company he keeps. He ain't the right kind o' timber fo' a prize fighter, you see; he's too fine strung, and he's got too much temp-temp'rament.

"Lots o' men it wouldn't hurt," she continued, "but Danny's dif'rent. He's the kind that's easy led away. He's too good to everybody but hisself. Some day he'll be all broke down and disfiggered and not good fo' much of anything. D-don't you understand what I mean?"

"I believe I do, little lady," said the Mississippi Kid.

In spite of his calling, the winsome ranch girl soon gave McEllery a very respectable place in her esteem. Two days spent mostly in riding the range with Nan, and he forgot that his future outlook was what it was and finished falling hopelessly in love with her. At the end of his week as a guest of the Big-D, he told her about it and begged her to throw Danny down for him—and she laughed at him.

Since he had never been used to women and the ways of women, it upset him greatly. He told himself dramatically that he knew now why men sometimes resorted to rivers and pistols and poison. Then old Jim Devine reached down into McEllery's gulf of despair and gave him a copy of the Jacksonville *Times-Union*, which had among its personals a paragraph of more than ordinary interest to the fighter. The item was as follows:

J. McEllery—Get in touch with me at once. Very important. BILL URHART.

"I wonder what it is, buddy?" said Devine, smiling. "Reckon he wants you to box ag'in?"

"If he wants me to box some pork-and-beaner, there's absotively nothin' doin'," said McEllery with a frown. "If he's got a chanst for me to make enough money to pay back that money o' yours I lost, I'm his huckleberry. I'll go to Longleaf and wire him right off. Ain't heard anything o' Dinkle Burris yet, Uncle Jim?"

Devine shook his head. "I don't hold you responsible fo' that money, buddy," said he. "Don't think it. If you got to go to Longleaf I'll drive you over in the buckboard. Mebbe I'll haf to lose the ranch, but I'll git along somehow. The rabbits has holes and the birds nests, and ole Uncle Jim will find a place somehow shorely. The Lord never failed to take keer o' his own yit."

He drove McEllery to Longleaf, and McEllery tried to thank him for all his kindnesses. When he was out of sight on the homeward journey, McEllery went to the little telegraph office and wired Bill Urhart in New Orleans.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRONGEST ARGUMENT.

TWO days later Urhart, a heavily built, dark man with a short black mustache and eyes that missed little, stepped from a southbound train at Longleaf. He found McEllery without difficulty, and the two went immediately to the Kid's room upstairs in the hotel. The Kid gave his backer the one chair, and himself sat down on the bed.

"Tell it," said McEllery.

After much thought, Urhart had come to an amazing conclusion as to how the Jacksonville fight had been lost. "I got it figgered out, Mississip'," he said, "that one o' our men sold out to the enemy and doped the water you drank at the end o' the fifth round. You broke all of a sudden, you'll remember, just when you had victory in your hands. Well, I can get a return match with this same Terror for you, and you're goin' to win it. Jacksonville is crazy about him now, and they'll put up odds o' three to two on him against any lightweight south o' the Mason and Dixon line.

"The winner'll pull down a big purse," Urhart went on, "on account o' heavy gate receipts; Jacksonville is full o' Yankee tourists, and they'll sure fall for our 'Championship o' the South' dope. There won't be more than a month for trainin', so get your trappin's ready, Mississip', old Kid."

The Kid rose half angrily. Box Nan's sweetheart again, and whip him? Not he! He worshiped Nan Devine. "You sure ain't talkin' to me!" he snapped. "I'm out o' the game! But I wasn't doped, Bill. It was stage fright. I got a antidope for stage fright now, but I've done quit the game, I'm tellin' you."

"Stage fright!" Urhart exclaimed, wide-eyed. A light seemed to be shining on the subject. "Maybe so, maybe so. You hadn't been on strange ground with a raggin' crowd before, had you? Old Basher Dick Murphy used to chew gum as an antidope for stage fright, when he was beginnin'. I remember he had to swallow it several times."

"Chewin' gum—that's my idee," the Kid said with a smile. "But I've done quit, Bill, I'm tellin' the world."

Urhart took a minute for deep thought. When he spoke again he went at McEllery's weakest point—or his strongest, as one sees the matter. "You was always square, Mississip'," he said measuredly. "Did it ever occur to you that you've took up lots o' my time and money, to say nothin' of busted hopes, and that you owe it to me to fight this return match with the Terror—and win it?"

It was the strongest possible line of argument. The Kid promised at last, because he was convinced of the enormous debt. As for Nan Devine—he winced when he thought of her, tried to put her out of his mind and couldn't. The silver lining to the cloud was that by paying his debt to Urhart he would also be able to pay his debt to Nan's father; with the winner's purse he could replace the more than three thousand dollars that he had lost.

The next northbound train bore them toward Urhart's training camp at the outskirts of a New Orleans suburb.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN THE GONG SOUNDED.

AT ten minutes of two in the afternoon of a clear day a month later, Bill Urhart stole from the Mississippi Kid's dressing room in Munger's Auditorium for a look at the crowd. He

came back with a beaming face. "It'll bust all records for this place, Mississip'!" he cried in a low voice. "They're sellin' standin' room now. Everything I could get I got up on you, old Kid, and you're sure goin' to win the fight!"

"Sure I am," Johnny McEllery agreed. "What did you do with that chewin' gum, Bill—on the table there? I see it. No gettin' rattled for me today. I'm goin' to show you some real class!"

"I know it, I know it," Bill Urhart jubilated. "Are we ready? It's almost time to go out. The prelims are about over."

The Kid began to chew gum as though the fate of the nation depended upon it.

Not long afterward the locally famous Terror, idol of Jacksonville's realm of sports, entered the squared ring with his seconds. He wore a wine-colored bath robe over his fighting trunks, and on his face was a bright, confident, and expectant smile that had a touch of the patrician in it. A wild roar of applause rose and shook the roof.

The Mississippi Kid and his seconds came then, and the Kid's face seemed a little hard; there was weak applause that had no effect whatever on him. Both fighters stepped to their corners. Then came the inspection of knuckle bandages, the examination and tying on of gloves, the speech of the announcer, and the instructions of the referee—which Johnny McEllery knew already by heart.

Then came the gong. The fighters stepped from their respective corners, touched gloves, and sprang back. It was the intention of each to carry the battle to the other, and they mixed immediately. The majority of the crowd was shouting for the Terror and ragging the Kid. A moment, and they were in a clinch. McEllery broke it, sent a wicked short jolt to his adversary's throat, and ducked a left swing meant to do him real damage.

Ten seconds later McEllery hooked in a lightninglike left to the Terror's ribs and made an opportunity to strike for the face—and for Nan's sake refused to avail himself of it. The Terror smiled gamely and rushed. The Kid side-stepped him nimbly. A little sparring, a few body blows, and the gong stopped the first round.

Back in his corner for the minute's rest, McEllery's seconds raked him mercilessly for throwing away the chance for a knock-out blow, and McEllery gave no sign that he even heard them. Just as the gong sounded for the next round, Bill Urhart noticed wonderingly that his man was *not* chewing gum.

The Terror began his rushing tactics again. The Kid darted aside, and the Jacksonville fighter met a quick left hook to the ribs. Then came sparring and feinting and body blows that amounted to little, after which the Kid took a jaw punch that sent him reeling into the ropes. The favorite stepped back, smiling, as a volley of yells split the air.

"Pound him, Danny! Slug him! Send for the undertaker! Flowers for the Mississippi Kid!" Scores of voices shouted encouragement to the Terror.

Bill Urhart watched with his heart in his throat. To his joy he saw that the ultrasensitive McEllery was not in the least affected. The Kid turned upon the Terror, forced the fighting, and sent home a solar-plexus drive that drew a groan from the crowd. Then the crowd began to rag the Kid again. It ragged him as never boxer was ragged before. The Kid showed no sign that he heard, however. A little sparring—mostly for time—and the gong sounded.

The third round was a repetition of the first. Again McEllery's seconds raked him for missing an opportunity to plant a blow on the Terror's face, and again McEllery had nothing to say about it. The fourth round was much like the second.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh rounds were hard fought, and favored the Mississippi Kid slightly. Then came the gong for the eighth, and the thousands who watched bent forward breathlessly in their seats. It was almost as though

they knew the next three minutes would bring a decision.

The fighters approached cautiously, breathing hard. The muscles of the Terror's legs quivered a little, and he had lost much of the look of confidence he had worn into the ring. McEllery assumed the offensive, and a slugfest promptly took place.

Anxious Bill Urhart kept growling under his breath: "Amateur stuff!" The Kid kept hammering at the Terror's ribs, and the Terror placed blows where he could. The crowd kept up its cheering for the favorite and its ragging of the stranger, and the stranger continued to be unaffected by it.

The Kid's face was marked now, and the Terror's wasn't. For Nan's sake, the Kid had avoided striking his adversary above the neck all through the fight. Nothing was farther from his wishes than to be the author of a broken nose or a cauliflower ear, for Nan would then hate him during the rest of her life.

Unconsciously the Terror had grown careless of his face. Then Johnny McEllery sent a sledgehammer blow toward the other's throat—the Jacksonville fighter inadvertently fended it upward, and the blow landed on his jaw; he fell heavily, moaned, and turned face downward.

"One, two, three," the referee counted, and McEllery watched the steady rise and fall of his hand through battered eyes as though it were the hand of fate. "Three, four, five——"

The Terror took the count. McEllery sank weakly back into his corner, and one of his seconds quickly mopped the stains from his face with a wet towel. The seconds of the worsted fighter had sprung to him with restoratives, when a young woman slipped through the ropes and pushed them away; she sat down on the resiny canvas and took the Terror's head into her lap, and shot a glance of contempt unspeakable toward the victor—it was Nan Devine!

"You beast!" she said.

The blue eyes of her gave to Johnny McEllery, winner of the so-called "Championship of the South," the hardest blow of that fight. Dazedly he knew that he was being helped into his dressing room, patted affectionately on the shoulders by dozens of hands, and all but hugged by the joyful Bill Urhart.

"I didn't see you chewin' gum, either!" Urhart laughed.

"What?" the Mississippi Kid shouted thickly. "What? I can't hear you! Gee, I had a awful time with that gong! I put the chewin' gum in my ears! Dig it out, Bill, will you?"

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE BIG-D RANCH.

ASTRIDE a hired horse, three days later, Johnny McEllery rode from Longleaf down to the Big-D Ranch. He had paid his debt to Urhart, and he had come to square himself with Uncle Jim Devine. The sun had set, and the chuck-wills-widows were calling over in the woods; the sky was filled with the cries of nighthawks. McEllery left the horse at the gate, walked to the veranda, and rapped on the upper step.

The tall, almost gaunt figure of a white-bearded man appeared in the dusky doorway, and a foghorn voice boomed: "Hello, there! Hello! Johnny McEllery, as shore as I'm knee-high to a hoppergrass! Come in, Johnny, and le' me tell you how glad I am to see you!"

He wrung the Kid's hand, drew him into the living room, and lighted a lamp. They sat down, and the Kid produced a certified check for three thousand three hundred and eighty dollars; he passed it into the ranchman's hands.

"What's this? Oh, I see! Why, Johnny, we found that money." Devine passed the check back. "Willie Big Hat was a-cleanin' up the yard, and found it a-layin' under the edge o' the house in the weeds, where it had fell out o' yore pocket that night when Dink Burris hit you. But that ain't the best thing. The best thing is, you sent my boy back to me—Danny, I mean—it was him you fought.

"I'd ha' told you about it," Devine went on, "but I—— He'd been wild, and had left home fo' that same purple road you took, and I didn't like to talk about it. When I told him about you fightin' him to clear my place o' debt, it mighty nigh killed him. He's quit the ring, he says. He wasn't cut out fo' that sawt o' work, Johnny. He's a dreamer, and not a fighter, and you, Johnny, unless I'm a heap mistaken, you're a dreamer, too."

"D-Danny——" stammered the Kid. "Your boy! But I thought—— Say, I want to see Nan before I go back."

Old Jim Devine's blue eyes twinkled. "I think I jes' heard her and Danny step up on the side v'randa out there, Johnny."

Danny rose from beside Nan in a double wicker chair and shook hands warmly and admiringly with McEllery, and soon developed enough of human understanding to walk off and leave the two to themselves. Though it was almost dark, McEllery could see that Nan's countenance held no ill feeling for him.

"I'm hopin' you'll fo'give me fo' callin' you a beast," she said. "Hadn't been fo' you, we wouldn't had Danny back."

McEllery fidgeted for a moment, then he blurted: "I'm up a tree, sure. I been wonderin' and wonderin' if it'd be worth while for me to stick in this country and start up a cow ranch in the hopes you'll marry me some day. If you was me, Nan, would you do it? Would you?"

"This is a great country, Johnny McEllery," smiled Nan Devine. "There's room enough in this chair for you. Won't you set down with me?"

DO YOU KNOW HIM?

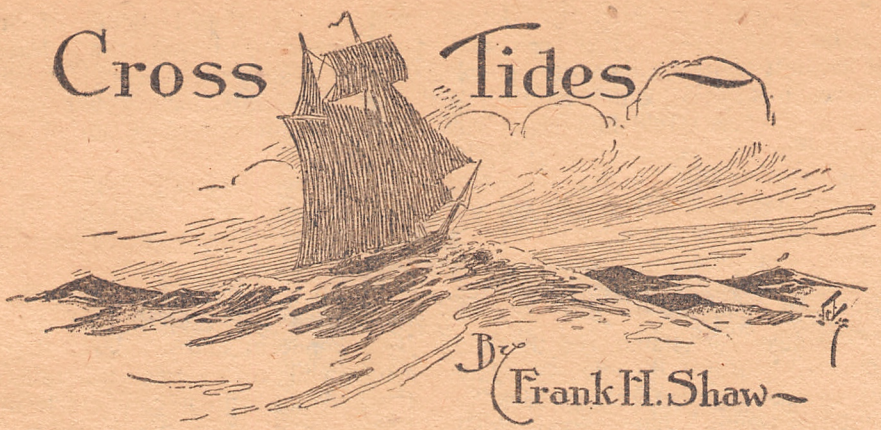
By G. G. Bostwick

HE never says "This life is sure a grind!"
He falters not when others drop behind.
He doesn't mind the days of cloud and rain
Nor wish he had the other fellow's brain.

He never says "I'm worth a darn sight more
Than half these chaps that boast a pretty score!"
Complaint is never on his firm-set lips
And when a grim, back-handed clout life slips
This steady chap, he grins and looks ahead
Nor wastes regrets on past mistakes. Instead
He builds a ladder from them leading up
Unto his goal; unshrinking drains the cup
And finds it has a most alluring kick
That makes him strong to do; doesn't want to lick
The "hull durned shootin' match," and might-have-beens
Are naught to him. He sports no sprouting fins
O'er chances lost—the woods are full of such.

He's not a paragon, nor saint, nor much
To look at, but you bet he's quite all there
Whenever needed; quick to do his share.
Who is he? Why, that quiet chap, you know—
Who's always busy, ever on the go.
That man you like, boys, yep, the fellow you,
Whene'er he's mentioned, always call "true blue!"

Cross Tides



By Frank H. Shaw

WHEN John Fleming, certain that he had caused the death of Bruce Mildmay during a quarrel in which the name of Marjory Merryweather had been mentioned, decided to flee from England, by mistake he boarded the *Quadroon* instead of the *Euryalus*, with the captain of which he was acquainted. It was night, and Fleming mistook one boat for the other.

The fugitive was seized as a stowaway by Drinkwater, captain of the *Quadroon*, which was bound for Southern seas. Fleming, who had done much sailing, soon proved valuable aboard the ship. During a storm he saved the life of Miriam Gascoigne, a young woman passenger. Later Miss Gascoigne heard a sailor named Fullarton tell Fleming that he was wanted for murder. The girl saw by the stowaway's change of color that he felt himself guilty. She was shocked by what she had heard and seen.

CHAPTER XIV.

SPORT OF FATE.

THE *Quadroon* ran through the trades, and hung for two days motionless in the calms that fringe the southern tropic. Then she picked up a head wind that drove her steadily away to the westward; she lost it and found a favoring breeze that freshened into a gale, and drove the *Quadroon* hotfoot down toward the Cape of Storms. Tristan da Cunha was passed, and the even, rolling majesty of the seas rose up to welcome the ship with boisterous playfulness.

Miriam Gascoigne saw Fleming frequently; the stowaway took his regular trick at the helm, and, as the young woman could not bear the sultriness of the cabins, she spent much of her time on deck. However, even when the quarter-deck was deserted by the officers she never made any effort to engage Fleming in conversation.

Long hours spent in sleepless mind searching had filled Miriam with a sense of shame. She knew, although she refused to confess it even to herself, that she had been perilously near loving this tall, clean man with the clever face and the ever-brooding eyes.

Near to loving him! There were times when Miriam knew that all the love of her heart had gone out to Fleming. Often she felt impelled to go to the man and ask an explanation of the terrible mystery that seemed to engulf him.

"It can't be true that he is a murderer," she said to herself, in the solitude of the night hours. "It can't. And yet—it must be true. Everything points to it; his very presence aboard here is a suspicion; and—yes, it must be true. Oh, Miriam, what a fool you are—have been! First you give your love unasked, and then you find you have given it to a man who is not fit to——"

But a little voice whispered to her in the gloom: "He saved your life. Let him be a murderer a hundred times over, he saved your life. A life for a life; the debt is paid."

Doubts grew, until out of sheer depression in revolt a wave of cold mirth grew and possessed her. She saw the grotesque and appalling humor of the situation, and wondered between her

spasms of laughter whether her mind were reeling to its undoing.

A desire to scream aloud against the awfulness of Fate floated to her; she thrust it aside, and steeled herself to endure what time might be pleased to send.

"He'll vanish out of your ken when the voyage is ended," she said. "He doesn't know—thank Heaven for that! You will never see him again when the *Quadroon* has cast anchor at Iloilo; he'll go his way, you'll go yours, and the end will be—will be——" What would the end be? Could she ever forget those days when love had come to her, alluring, entrancing?

Fleming lived in a strange dream, too. Fullarton, recovered from his fit of drunkenness, made no further reference to his statements; they might never have been uttered. The sailor had served his turn; Fate had used him as Fate does use the most unpromising material in her deep-laid schemes.

The stowaway worked when work was necessary, slept when he could, and because the fears that the hastily spoken words had aroused refused to be set at rest, threw himself into his duties with a passionate zest that won him the further commendations of his superiors.

"Never knew such a voyage in my life," said Captain Drinkwater, one day when the foam-circled islands of St. Paul lay under the ship's lee. "Head winds all the time; we'll be lucky if we make the passage in four months. Might be five at the rate we're going. Well, I'm getting sick of this dodging about, and if things don't improve I'll make for the Straits and run through that way."

The mate ventured the opinion that such a course might spell disaster. The obvious route to take was to round the southern extremity of Australia, and by dint of fetching a wide compass to the eastward, arrive at the Philippines in good order.

"You're getting cautious, Jewel," grumbled Drinkwater. "Time was when you'd take risks with the next man. We're a month behind as it is, and we shan't be loved by our owners if we don't get a move on some time. What's wrong with working up through Timor and then through the Molucca Passage?"

"It's risky; it isn't well charted, and the lights aren't worth a cent," demurred Jewel. "Besides, think of the currents."

"Now, look here," Drinkwater brought a thunderous fist on the table; "look here; I'm master of this ship, and if anything happens to her I'll take the responsibility. Mark that. I know those seas and those currents as well as any man afloat; because I've been in steam up there as a young man. And I'm going through."

There was everything to be said in favor of the proposed course. The wind, that at present was foul, would, by turning the *Quadroon's* head to the north of east, become fair; and a greater speed might be got out of the ship. Also, the lengthy journey around Australia would be unnecessary; and the chances of meeting foul winds up by the Barrier Reef annulled. It was decided to try the more intricate navigation of the Passage; and Drinkwater applied himself to chart and compass, laying off a fresh course.

"As for risks," he muttered to himself as he worked, "there aren't any. It only needs a good lookout to be kept on the steering." But he had forgotten the mate's still-unhealed brain, and its occasional peculiar aberrations.

In the months that had elapsed since the *Quadroon* left port, Fleming had become a capable seaman; and the fresh, open life had made him physically a giant. But for the lurking fear that brought him up with a sudden shock whenever he so far forgot himself as to rejoice in his muscular well-being, he might have been almost happy.

To be sure, there were tyranny and downright brutality aboard the *Quadroon*, and he suffered with the rest; he had to work like a slave, and endure insults that, before his chastening, would have driven him into such a passion as might have prejudiced the safety of the insulter; but beyond that he

found much to love in the life he was now leading.

"Good heavens!" he said to the wheel spokes, as they spun beneath his strong hands. "Was there ever such a mess made of life as this? To think that but for one moment's madness I might now be a self-respecting man, with a promising future, with the chances of a comfortable home at no very distant date!"

And he fell to thinking of that prospective home. But though he could conceive a permanent dwelling of his own he could not place Marjory Merryweather within it. She would not fit into the picture; he could not recall her likeness; he understood now that for days and weeks at a stretch he had forgotten her.

"I can't have loved her—it's all the same, anyhow, so what's the use of splitting hairs? I was infatuated, that's the word. And if——" But why think thus? He had killed a man for the sake of a woman he did not love, and the woman he might have loved with all his heart knew him for what he was. For he had no delusions on the matter.

He had seen Miriam shrink from the word murderer as from an actual blow; he knew his face had paled and the true story of his terror had lurked in his eyes on that day of Fullarton's outspeaking.

And in the meantime, there was the mate coming aft with anger in his face, for the ship had swerved from her course, and the head-sails were flapping thunderously.

CHAPTER XV.

BELOW THE HORIZON.

THE *Quadroon* had run past low-lying islands in broad daylight, and strange, subtle scents had been wafted to her deck. If the wind held fair there was nothing to prevent her negotiating the difficult passages between islands and mainland, and winning out to the safety of the open seas.

Captain Drinkwater was well content. He knew that he had saved probable weeks of delay; the *Quadroon* would arrive at Iloilo before the full five months were out; and though his owners might reprimand him for the risks he had run they would admire his courage and foresight in taking the slight risk attendant on venturing through the narrow seas.

It was evening, an evening full of rushing winds and crashing seas. This wind was free, well abaft the beam, and promised to become a half gale before the dawn; but the chart had shown a clear stretch of water ahead of the darting bow.

Ahead and to leeward New Guinea stretched, unseen, below the dark horizon; to port were smaller islands, but there were occasional screw-pile lights that would warn them of a too close proximity to the shore. The *Quadroon*, with every sail set and drawing full, was cleaving the black mystery of the sea at an even ten knots.

Captain Drinkwater emerged from the chart room with parallel rulers in his hand. "Keep her up to N.N.E.," he said. "Let her go at that till midnight, and then call me. It's clear water for another fifty miles or so, and I want a nap."

"Very good, sir." Jewel repeated the course to the helmsman and saw the ship steadied upon it; he walked to the break of the quarter-deck and gave the necessary orders for the slight readjustment of the yards, and saw them carried out. Captain Drinkwater went below and flung himself down on a settee, ready to rouse at a moment's call.

What Jewel's thoughts were that night must ever remain a mystery. It seemed to him that a finger constantly beckoned him to the eastward, an enticing finger that would not be denied.

He felt sharp pains shoot through his head, and in imagination scented rich odors that promised to lull his senses to rest. He laughed uncertainly; walked aft and studied the compass, walked forward again, and still that beckoning finger was there, luring him on to rest and peace.

"Keep her northeast." The helmsman repeated the course, swung the wheel over, and steadied the wavering lubber's line on the desired compass point. It

was no affair of his; he was only there to obey orders from his superiors, and if the ship was steered due south it meant nothing to him.

The wind freshened briskly; up aloft the royals cracked, and Jewel remembered his responsibilities. He shouted to the watch to clew up and furl the lofty sails, and it was done. If Drinkwater heard he made no appearance on deck.

Her speed unchecked the Quadroon dashed forward, and the deadly, unseen currents caught her gliding keel to drift her still farther to east. Jewel smiled into the darkness, and the beckoning finger ceased to urge; little by little his natural mind asserted itself; and he forgot the trifling unconsciousness. When eight bells were struck and the second mate was due to appear, he walked aft to the binnacle. The wheel was being relieved; the newcomer repeated the course given to him in a singsong voice.

"Northeast, sir," he said to the mate, as he slouched away to rest.

The mate repeated it automatically, and then turned to the new helmsman. "Gave you northeast, did he?" he queried sharply.

"Yes, sir." The man was still half asleep; he looked up in injured surprise.

"He made a mistake. North-northeast's the course. Why, your head's northeast."

"Yes, sir; he gave me that."

Jewel had entirely forgotten everything, but he made amends. He steadied the ship on north-northeast, and intended to tell the second mate of the mistake that had been made, but a fresh and agonizing pain shot through his head when Stewart appeared, and he did no more than merely mumble the real course.

He made no mention of the captain's command to be called at midnight, and Stewart did not notice the omission. Jewel slipped down to his room and sat with his head between his hands, rocking to and fro in agony. His brain had suffered in the accident of months ago.

Presently he remembered that in a small bottle in his locker remained a little drop of chlorodyne that he had been given long before. It promised him ease for his suffering; he took out the vial and drank its contents. Then he crouched down on the settee and slept profoundly.

The *Quadroon* leaped away from the thrust of the wind; but she was by now a clear fifteen miles out of her course —fifteen miles that spelled all the difference between safety and disaster.

At two o'clock John Fleming awoke suddenly. He stared about the darkened forecastle, saw no signs of movement in his companions, and turned over again. But sleep had forsaken his eyelids. The forecastle was stuffy and ill smelling; a shower that day had filled the place with reeking oilskins.

The steady gush of wind without enticed him to the deck; many a time before, when sleep had been denied him, he had paced the planking with feverish restlessness, seeking for some outward distraction that would set thought at bay.

There was a strange, deep roar from a point some little distance ahead. The lookout man was silent on the matter; that he could smell his burning pipe was but a figment of Fleming's imagination. The man was fast asleep, his chin pillowed on his folded arms.

The roar of the ship's canvas effectually drowned that other roar ahead. Stewart noticed nothing; he stood by the compass and watched the swinging lubber's line carefully, until the companionway disgorged a wrathful figure.

"Why the devil wasn't I called? Here it's past two—and—good Heaven!"

It was a strange, tearing crash that shook the *Quadroon* from stem to stern. She stopped in mid-career, lurched back, and leaped forward again. There was a sickening sound of smashing spars aloft; the foretopmast carried away at the doublings, and fell over the side, taking with it the main-topgallant mast.

A wave surged over the arrested bow and broke along the decks; others leaped up hungrily, striving to drag down their prey. The forecastles disgorged frantic forms that sped hither and thither aim-

lessly, crying out in strange, high-pitched voices. Terror and uncontrol filled the *Quadroon's* decks, and for the moment there was none to speak the seasonable word.

Captain Drinkwater had been flung to the deck as the ship struck for the first time. Stewart was caught on the shoulder by a falling block from aloft, the sickening pain drove all other thoughts from his brain.

The crew had lost their heads; they realized from the forward slope of the decks that imminent danger was all about them, and with one accord they flung themselves upon the lifeboats.

One was sound, the other was a wreck, for after the great gale that had swept the decks clear, the carpenter had never repaired the damage. But the hopeless condition of the boat was forgotten as the men tore at the tackles, yelling discordantly, while others flung themselves on the covers and ripped them heedlessly away.

"Stand by, all hands!" It was the voice of the captain, cool and resolute.

Instantly Fleming darted to his side, alert and capable, holding himself in readiness to obey. He had instinctively recognized the danger.

"Come away from that boat!" It rang out like a pistol shot, but it was unheeded. Drinkwater dashed into the mob of struggling figures, and with a blow leveled one man to the deck. He was unarmed; there had been no time to possess himself of his revolver. A man behind him struck him savagely with a handspike that he had been using to lever the boat clear, but the blow passed almost unnoticed.

"That boat's dangerous! Cast loose the lee boat." He was among them again, striking furiously, dragging them back, but they would not heed him until the boat swung clear. It was lowered, several man sprang into it; it dropped into darkness.

There was a cry, but the tackles unhooked themselves, and the boat vanished—forever. The rest of the crew turned to the starboard and busied themselves with the tackles, but they crowded one another so that no real work could be done. And the *Quadroon* lifted herself wearily, plunged forward again, and slid back.

CHAPTER XVI.

OVER THE SIDE.

SUDDENLY Fleming remembered the women aft. He deserted his post at the thought and darted toward the quarter-deck. Two dim figures showed above his head; they were alone, but Miriam was cool and collected.

She knew that women were out of place in the work that was going on forward. Stewart had vanished; he was probably among the crowd about the remaining lifeboat, endeavoring to reduce order out of chaos.

"What is it?" It was Mrs. Berry's voice, hysterical, afraid.

Fleming darted up the ladder. "The ship is sinking; they're getting the boat over," he cried, and shook off Mrs. Berry's hysterical grasp on his arm.

"Is there danger?" It was a steady voice that spoke now. Mrs. Berry had dissolved into shrieks and sobs, her hands were before her face.

"Yes, I fear so. Trust to me; I'll do my best."

Miriam had forgotten that the man stood self-condemned as a murderer; there was a ring of confidence in his voice that quieted the fears she would not express. Her hand went out to meet his in the darkness; it was clutched tightly for a moment, then it was released. He was vowing silently to save this woman's life again; it was his one chance of evening the debt.

"They'll come aft when the boat is clear," Fleming told them, and remembered the life belts in the chart room. He dashed within; a light still burned dimly; he dragged the canvas-covered things from overhead, and dashed back to the deck.

The slope of the *Quadroon's* hull was now terrifying. There was no light on deck, but he made shift to pass the belt over Miriam's head and tie it round her; as he was about to perform a similar office for Mrs. Berry there came a loud cry from forward.

It was in vain he attempted to re-

strain the almost distracted woman. With a cry she leaped from the quarter-deck and ran to the foredeck.

The boat was free and swinging in the tackles; already the men had crowded into her. Captain Drinkwater stood on the rail, guiding and directing; his had been the summoning voice.

"Look alive!" he roared.

"Wait! I insist! Save me!" Mrs. Berry shrieked the words and tore forward. She was caught up bodily and flung into the boat; some one lowered away. Drinkwater saw the craft disappearing into the darkness.

He might have had some idea of hurling himself upon the men to stop their cowardly abandonment, but just then the *Quadroon* gave a sick lurch; he was pitched head foremost into the lifeboat; the tackles were released, and a wave leaped up.

The boat was caught like a feather and flung ahead; a splinter of rock planed away a plank as if it had been wet paper; she filled and sank, and a loud, horrible cry rose high above the crash of the breakers.

But the lashing foam quieted the cries; the serrated teeth of the rocks dashed the life from floating bodies swiftly; almost before the yell had reached the ears of those on the quarter-deck the sea had claimed its percentage of life.

The ship was sinking fast. There was no time for clear thought, no time to prepare for an emergency.

"Trust me; I'll save you."

Miriam said nothing as Fleming tore the gratings from the wheel box and lashed them together with the end of a rope that he had stumbled over. Nor did she speak as he caught her roughly and dragged her to the rail.

"Be ready; I'm going to jump," he shouted, for anything less than a shout would never have carried to her ears above the harsh grinding of steel and the thunder of the breakers. He steeled himself for what was coming, knowing that a single mistake now would be fatal to one if not to both; there was no time for thought; all was blind, swift, instinctive action.

"Now!" He caught her, and with her sprang outward, praying as he went that no rocks might meet them in their descent. A moment's horrid uncertainty, a rushing through thunderous space; then the breath was thrust out of his body violently; with a gasp he rose to the surface. She was still in his arms; she made no attempt to struggle, but lay quiescent.

"Make for the raft," he cheered her, and struck out as strongly as he could. Was it his fancy, or had the *Quadroon* already slipped still farther back? No fancy at all; the screech of tortured metal was rising even above the crash of the surf. The ship was in her death agony, wrestling fiercely at the bonds that held her—tearing herself loose from the land.

He hauled himself on to the raft, and felt it rock menacingly beneath his weight. Plainly impossible to support two, he must trust to his own powers of swimming.

He reached down and dragged her upward from where she clung to the grating's edge; and a second later he had hacked the painter through. Then he slipped over the side, and waited.

They were caught up and flung back by a rush of swirling water; they were borne forward again; a vast mountain of white loomed up before them; Miriam closed her eyes with a queer little gasp of fear; a racking jolt, a sensation as if every bone in her body were being articulated; a stunning crash, and then an ineffable peace—a peace that endured only for a moment.

The raft had been flung clean over a ridge of rock into smoother water, a pool between the ridges; but as it went forward again with the impulse it had received from the hurling waves outside, it was seized again and flung high. It was a miracle it was not shattered to matchwood, but it held together, crossed another ridge, and floated in a long stretch of smooth water.

Fleming swam on, conscious of an agonizing pain in his shoulder; he did not know how it had come about, but he felt as though something had broken inside.

"Hold fast!" he contrived to warn, as the raft was once more lifted and launched forward with meteoric speed; a whirl, a lift, a swooping descent, then the blackness of the hither void; a blissful peace out of strife; a numbing of agony; a slow falling into space.

Fleming opened his eyes wearily and gazed about him. Something warm was on his face—the sun must have risen and scourged the world with a whip of heat. No; the day was only breaking; the sun had not yet risen. Then he saw Miriam's face, and marked how the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she said a little hysterically. "I thought you were dead."

"Never less," he assured her. "Where are we? What's happened?" It was undoubtedly pleasant to lie there while consciousness slowly reclaimed its throne, to listen to the girl's half-breathless explanations, to know, as he did vaguely, that he had saved her still once more.

"I think your head must have struck something—it was when we went over the last ridge—it was horrible." She stopped to shudder and cover her face with her hands. "The raft was broken; I thought I was killed; I called to you, but there was no answer—your head hung down. Then we were thrown up here, and—I managed to pull you ashore. That's all."

Looking at her young slimness he marveled at the strength she had been given for the work. To drag an unconscious man out of the clutch of a raging undertow was no child's work, but she had done it.

The sea lashed and foamed a good twenty feet away from where he lay: lazily, because even to think was an effort, he imagined her frantic striving to bring him into safety. His blood warmed in his body at the thought, and when next she looked at him she could not meet the gaze of his eyes.

Presently he made an effort to rise, but sank back with a groan. Inadvertently he had rested his weight on his left elbow, and the limb had been unequal to the strain.

Miriam gave a little cry as he lay back, his face white and his teeth set in his lower lip.

"Afraid I'm hipped a bit," he told her. "No, don't attempt to move me yet. I'll try—again." This time he turned so that his weight should be on his right arm, and contrived to struggle to his feet. He stood there for a moment, swaying weakly, and his face betrayed his suffering.

"Sit down again; you're not fit to move." He obeyed her, and felt her hands busy with his shoulder.

There was need for action; he must find some shelter for the girl, some protection from the elements and also from possible human beings. He remembered that the islands about this neighborhood were reputedly inhabited by savage tribes.

"I'm afraid the shoulder's dislocated," said Miriam. "I want you to trust yourself to me, please. My brother knew a lot of surgery and he taught me something. Set your teeth and——"

The pain careered through his entire frame; it thrilled him to his toes, the hair lifted on his scalp. He could endure it no longer; he must yell his suffering aloud. There was another agonizing spasm that made the world reel round him; then a blessed peacefulness, and a piteous face close to his own.

"I know I've hurt you—it was awful; but it had to be done."

"Yes," he told her shakily, wishing he could still the trembling of his lips; "yes, it was necessary. Let's think everything out from the beginning."

"No need to go back to the beginning, is there? We're here, and there doesn't seem any chance of getting away." The strain under which she had been for so long was telling at last. She buried her face in her hands and her shoulders shook to her passionate sobs.

"Oh, those poor men—Mrs. Berry! Oh, it was cruel, cruel!" she moaned. She rocked to and fro, careless of appearances, a simple woman swept from her calmness by a burst of primitive grief.

Fleming let the tears have their way—he was learning fast, and he under-

stood that only by their flow could calm be won. But presently he reached out his hand and touched her on the arm.

"Bear up," he said. "We are saved; there's still a chance we might find them alive. Yes; they'll have been washed up somewhere higher on the beach—I'll go and see presently." But neither moved for some time. The enormity of the catastrophe had stunned them for the moment; there were only the shock and the sense of their own helplessness.

"This won't do," said Fleming at length.

His shoulder was still painful; a dull, gnawing ache had taken the place of the agonizing pangs, but he made shift to rise and explore the surroundings. There was but little to be seen, save the fretting sea, and a beach strewn with wreckage.

In those latitudes the beginning of the day heralds glowing warmth; already the sun was above the low hills to the east, flooding them with its genial rays. Their clothes, wet as they were, proved no discomfort; but for his own part Fleming was aware of a growing sense of hunger and thirst.

Search as he might he could find nothing that would alleviate his desires. The fringe of refuse on the beach was useless for his purpose; there was not even a biscuit to be seen; broken spars in plenty, still bearing tangles of rope; a few planks, an empty cask, and vast masses of seaweed, they were all he could find. He went back to where he had left Miriam sitting on the sand, and he saw with satisfaction that she had regained her self-control.

"It's no use," Fleming said. "There isn't a bite of anything to eat. If this was in a book we should have found stores enough to last us a year already. As it is, we'll see if the land is more kindly than the sea. We shan't be overburdened with luggage, that's one consideration." He whipped up a faint smile, but Miriam did not respond. She was studying his face intently.

"I wonder if it can be possible that we are the only two saved!" she said, and the man's conscience smote him.

She had shaken off the effect of the shock and was thinking of herself. He saw with her eyes; she was alone with a man whose name was clouded; and with a quick photographic action his brain recalled the scene that had ensued that day when Fullarton had dubbed him "murderer." Even here, where the reign of civilization ended, his crime was following him remorselessly.

As a matter of fact, Miriam was not thinking of the scene on the *Quadroon's* deck; she was wondering whether Fleming's shoulder was sufficiently in order to permit of further journeying.

At the moment he was the only living being to whom she could turn for help, and the white suffering of his face seemed to bite deeply into her heart.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE DELUGE.

PRESENTLY the young woman and Fleming found a tiny streamlet that had its birth in some unseen pool on the hilltop, and lost itself in the sea. Here they drank thirstily, lifting the water in their palms. When they had drunk their fill they laved their faces, and grew conscious of keen hunger.

"That's a plantain tree," said Miriam, pointing.

They were on the edge of what was almost a jungle; trees were everywhere. A brawling river leaped in cataracts down a steep hillside to the right; before them waved that ocean of treetops; the sea, with all it stood for, was lost to view.

Fleming tightened his belt and ran down the slope. The plantain tree was full of fruit; he snatched the great growths down, and flung them recklessly to his companion.

"Let us eat, drink, and be merry," he cried, "for to-morrow we—find help. I trust." And they ate.

Food brought a revival of courage; the clouds that had beset them vanished; the sun's warmth was greater, the sky

clearer; the leaping cataract shone like diamonds.

"I haven't the faintest notion where we are; whether in Asia or Australia," said Fleming presently, lying back on thick jungle grass with a sigh of repletion, "but I see that the world is good. That plantain tree would keep us alive for a month at least."

His conscience was for the nonce at rest; he swore that he would banish the accursed weight of his sin. He had atoned for it thrice over; for his prayer had been answered.

All that he had asked for was that he might save this woman's life, losing his own in the effort; but his life had been spared as well; a sure sign that Heaven's mercy was extended willingly toward him.

"As for that, I believe I know more than you of our whereabouts," said the girl. "Captain Drinkwater told us last night that we were running past New Guinea; he reckoned that we ought to be up in Dampier Strait by daylight."

However, it is difficult to locate one's self in a country one has always known only as a name on the map. Fleming was but little wiser than before. It was sufficient in the meantime that they were free of the sea, with food in view, and now a great weariness was growing upon his senses.

"The lookout is reassuring," he said. "We can't do anything at present until we've searched the beach. Which shall it be—stay here or go back?"

He yawned violently, and the pain in his shoulder made him shudder involuntarily. The quick eyes of womanhood detected the spasm.

"We'll stay here," said Miriam. "You look worn out."

Fleming made no demur. He cradled his head on his arms and slept like a log, with the sun baking the exhaustion from his bones. She watched his face intently for several minutes; then she slipped away.

It was three hours later when she returned, and her appearance personified neatness. She had utilized those hours to dry her garments and bind up her disheveled hair; so that when Fleming opened his eyes again, to blink weakly at the blinding sun, he was met by as fair a vision as man might wish to gaze upon.

"Getting shipwrecked seems to suit you," he said point-blank, and the girl flushed a little. "You look remarkably fit, considering everything," he went on.

"Trust a woman to study her appearance first," she countered. "Now, if you're rested, don't you think our first duty should be to examine the beach for traces of the others?"

He agreed, and rose; they went back the way they had come, and for the remaining hours of daylight examined every clump of seaweed and every tangle of wreckage earnestly. Miriam found nothing; but Fleming found that which he carefully hid from sight beneath the weeds.

It was Mrs. Berry's body, but not Mrs. Berry as he had known her. The sea and the rocks had taken a grim toll.

He placed a spar upright in the sand to mark the place where the body was hidden, and resolved to return when night was fallen and Miriam was asleep, that he might bestow the body out of harm's way. Then—for they had separated—he went to rejoin his companion.

"Nothing," said Miriam wearily—her mind had been busy during the search, and her quick imagination had shown her what she might very readily find in actuality. "I don't think any one has survived."

He told her as gently as he could of what he had found; and because of the expression of his face she betrayed no wish to verify his discovery.

"Poor woman—I couldn't like her; but—she has a boy waiting for her at home—she went to England to put him to school," said the girl. "And she was so afraid of death—I hope it was swift."

"I think it was," said Fleming, remembering the awful thing he had seen. "Yes, I'm sure it was swift. But that was all I found; the sea has claimed the rest."

It was useless to remain longer where they were. The beach offered them no shelter for the night; inland promised

much. Tired now, and borne down by a sensation of slow horror, that was yet tinged with a vague relief for the escape they had had, they went back to the forest.

The night descended upon them as they went; but a moon arose and lighted their path; it was not difficult to find the plantain tree. They ate again and drank from a little pool they found, and then Fleming busied himself in making preparations for the hours of night.

Plantain leaves can be used effectively to construct a shelter, especially when one is an engineer and a sailor, capable of making much out of little. It was an easy matter to tear down a few thickly covered stems and interlace them in such a fashion as to construct a rough hut, that might turn off any small shower of rain.

The undergrowth of the luxuriant jungle provided Fleming with armfuls of leafy twigs that promised an effectual couch, and he stood back later to admire his own work with satisfaction working at his heart.

"If only we had a fire," sighed Miriam, who had helped him nobly. "I don't know why I want one, because it is still hot, but just now I'm hungry for a fire."

And he made one. It was a thing he had never expected to do, but ancient stories came to his mind, and with the aid of his sheath knife and a stone which he found, he struck sparks that, falling on some plantain pith, teased out fine, resulted in a flame.

"And now look after your own comforts," said Miriam, feeding the fire with dry sticks that she had collected.

"Comfort enough for me here," said Fleming, waving his hand around generally. "You seem to have forgotten one little thing; we don't know anything about the natives here, and if there are any they might not welcome our intrusion. So, go to sleep, please."

"That means you will keep watch all night. No, I shall not allow that." She suddenly stamped her foot, and a fine color came to her face that was not the reflection of the firelight. "Why can't men understand that women are not toys? I'm willing and ready to take part and lot in whatever has to be done. I intend to keep watch with you."

Remembering how she had tended his hurt, he was minded to humor her—for the time. "Then, if you insist on taking your share, I shall insist on your sleeping for the first watch," he said, and she tried to outface him. But he stared at her coolly, until the rich red flush again rose to her cheek.

"Very well," she said meekly, and disappeared under her shelter. She put her face out presently. "And supposing these problematical savages do come, what then?" she asked. "You have no arms, have you?"

"A knife and a piece of stick," he cried, flourishing them. "Empires have been won with less."

Her last remembrance of him was seeing his face turned smilingly toward her, with the firelight dancing on his features. If recollection came back to her there in the awful silence of her sleeping place, if Fullarton's words echoed in her brain, if the vision of Fleming's suddenly blanched face burned like a searing flame, Fleming did not know.

Nor did he know that she sobbed herself to sleep, hopelessly, knowing that her love was given to a man whom the world would deem unworthy.

The shame of the thing convulsed her; she, Miriam Gascoigne, who had established for herself a standard of manhood which meant perfection, had given her love unasked to a man who was stamped with the worst sin in the decalogue. It was unbearable.

The natural reaction from what she had endured swayed her; her strength fled, and left her weak and almost helpless. In a dim, half-understanding fashion she prayed for some light to guide her, and presently calmness came. The tears dried slowly on her cheeks as she slept.

Fleming waited until the night had closed like a velvet pall upon the jungle, and blessed the fate that had deemed New Guinea unworthy the possession

of savage beasts. So far as he knew, there were no wild animals, beyond pigs and harmless rodents.

What he feared was lest some of the wild tribes of the hinterland should suddenly develop a desire to explore in the vicinity of the coast. But though he listened intently he heard nothing save the low sighing of the jungle, the occasional crash of a falling bough, or the sullen thud of a coconut loosened from its holding.

He turned over many things in his mind as he sat there, listlessly feeding the flames with such fuel as he could find. There were times when his imagination pictured a lifetime spent here in these solitudes, with only the woman he had saved for company, and a pleasurable thrill ran through him at the thought.

He had done with the world; they were two humans alone in a depopulated void. Why not take her for wife—by the laws of Heaven—and so forget the past?

But that past would not be forgotten. He could go to no woman with his love, knowing what he knew. An impassable barrier was erected between him and his kind; he said, sitting there in the silence, that he would never bind another to him in ignorance of the truth.

He was no longer afraid of the consequences of his rash act. Fear had given place to a sincere remorse, the outcome of months of brooding. But for this accident of the wreck he might even have surrendered himself to the law when the ship reached port, and taken the punishment the world decreed in reward for his fault.

Repentance worked within him; he would have given his life to restore that other which he had taken. And that which had given birth to repentance was his love of the woman to whom he was not, and never could be, plighted.

For, despite everything, he was betrothed to Marjory Merryweather. He thought a lot of the girl in England that night, comparing her, not to her credit, with the woman now sleeping in the paltry shelter near.

How would Marjory have accepted this difficult situation? She was a high product of latter-day civilization, hemmed in with a thousand conventions, helpless.

He wriggled his shoulders sympathetically as he pictured the situation. If Marjory alone had been there his dislocated joint must have remained dislocated for all time. Now and then he smiled at the grim humor of it all. Marjory would have made a hundred stipulations to order his conduct; she would have held him off, that their loneliness might not give him an advantage over her.

She would have bred fancies out of her own mind, imputed motives to him to which he was a stranger, allowing nothing for his personal honor. No; Marjory could never have borne a test like this.

He vowed silently into the night to be worthy of the trust imposed on him by force of circumstances. Never, by a word or look, would he betray the faith the girl had in his honor. She trusted him, and yet she must have heard Fullarton's words.

The moon was setting when he arose and made his way down to the beach, but the stars gave sufficient light for his purpose.

When he returned again Mrs. Berry's body was safely bestowed, the blade of a broken oar had served him as a spade, and despite the pain in his shoulder he had made shift to inter her decently, reciting over the grave such passages of the burial service as he could remember.

He resumed his watch and saw the orderly stars roll proudly across the purple vault of the sky; and the vast sense of space about him purged his soul.

When it was almost morning, weariness overcame him; his head sank on his breast, and the dawn was on his eyes before a laughing voice awakened him.

"My intentions were good," said Miriam, "but my senses were the traitor. Why didn't you call me?"

"Because there was no need," he said slowly. And he smiled at her in a way that made her catch her breath sud-

denly. For the beginning of a great peace showed on his face.

That morning the rain began; solid sheets of water. It was necessary that they should shift their camp at once, and all that day Fleming, with Miriam as a willing assistant, busied himself in making their lot more pleasant.

He found a thicket that was almost waterproof, and here he erected another hut, using the broad leaves lavishly, thatching it with skill, until it was as dry as a house. Another shelter was erected for himself, a third to shield their little fire, and so they began their life in the wilderness. It was impossible to venture inland in the midst of that drenching deluge.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN DANGER CAME.

IT was three weeks later that Fleming and Miriam Gascoigne heard shrill yells in the forest to their right, and looked about them with a quick instinct of defense. Three weeks had been passed in their first settlement, for the rains had endured without cessation for so long.

They had existed as best they could —miserable and happy alternately; living on such fruit of the jungle as they knew, avoiding all that were unknown, dreading lest they should contain poison.

They were an unsightly pair enough, for constant drenchings had reduced Miriam's clothing to a burlesque of its former self; while Fleming, unshorn and unshaven, was more like a wild man of the woods than a civilized Englishman. But they had grown accustomed to each other's appearance in those weeks, and saw nothing ludicrous in the sight.

These three weeks of companionship had restored Fleming's usual sanity. He had kept an iron restraint on himself, and had never given a hint to the girl that she was more to him than a fellow castaway, relying on his honor and integrity for her very life.

Miriam, too, had helped him. Whether because of the shame that had come to her that night at the thought of giving her love unasked, or whether because of circumstances, she had never allowed her love to express itself in look or gesture. But a strange friendship, a sort of impersonal comradeship, had sprung up between them. Miriam demanded that she should take her share of the work; because it was her will Fleming consented.

And now this shrill yelling had come to warn them of the near presence of mankind. For there is no mistaking the sound of a human voice; be it savage or civilized, it differs from all the other cries of the earth as night differs from day.

"We've been looking for men, and now we might not wish to meet them," said Fleming, gripping the loom of an oar firmly in his hand, and handing his knife over to Miriam. "What do you say? Shall we go on and meet them, or shall we turn back while there is still time? It might be better to trust to the tender mercies of the sea than to throw ourselves on these people."

"Better to take the risk," said Miriam. "When all's said and done, a moment's danger is better than weeks of uncertainty."

"Right! It's my own opinion. But keep that knife handy—there's no telling how useful it might be."

He looked at her and she understood. The savages of New Guinea were capable of torturing their captives before they destroyed them, and a sharp knife thrust might open the door to the weary soul.

The forest about them suddenly disgorged strange figures, dwarfish, unreal, like the creations of a dream. Small, black men, twisted and stunted, low-browed, and unintelligent of feature, clad in little save their scanty loin cloths, appeared in sight.

They numbered less than a score; in all likelihood they were but a hunting party.

As Miriam and her companion stood there, arrested by the sight, a few wild pigs broke past them with many gruntings and disappeared into the undergrowth.

The hunters were as amazed as the whites. They halted irresolutely, and then a stone whizzed past Fleming's head. He saw another man whirl a sling above him.

As the band of natives closed in about John Fleming and Miriam Gascoigne, the man said quickly to the intrepid young woman: "For Heaven's sake use your knife if there's real danger! I will aid you."

With that calmness she had shown on the sea before their ship had been wrecked, leaving the girl and Fleming the sole survivors, Miriam nodded; then she stood out in front of Fleming. She was an appealing, heroic figure, one hand outstretched; behind her back she held the knife that had been ground down to the likeness of a dagger.

"I think that I recognize some of their words," Miriam said hastily. "I may be able to——"

"You?" For a moment Fleming looked incredulous. "Oh, I forgot! Your brother is a missionary."

Miriam Gascoigne said something in a high, clear voice, and the dark faces of the nearest natives contorted strangely. For a little while they jabbered among themselves; then one dwarfish man, who seemed to hold some small authority, stepped forward and laid his palm on his forehead, around which was bound a contrivance of cord and skins that could only be such a thing as the other native had used in his attempt on Fleming's life.

Within a spear's length of Miriam, the man bent himself in an uncouth bow and rapidly spoke some words. The girl listened carefully, and a smile came to her crimson lips.

"I understand what he says," Miriam told Fleming. "It's not unlike the language they speak up in the Solomons. He wants to know where we came from and where we're going."

"It isn't the sort of question one can answer in a sentence," said Fleming, with forced gayety. "And I suppose it wouldn't do to proclaim ourselves as spirits from the sea, would it?"

"Hardly! They might want proofs of our supernatural origin, and they'd be hard to find. What shall I tell them?"

"They must know there are white people in the world. Tell them we are representing a great country which sends its sons all over the world in search of people whom it might befriend."

Miriam translated. During her residence with her brother she had picked up a fair working knowledge of the strange conglomerate of tongues spoken by the natives of the various islands about—dialects that differed as much in inflection as in actual formation.

"He says that if we come in peace he will take us to his master, who seems to be the reigning chief about here," translated Miriam, after the leading savage, who, in addition to his other deformities, was possessed of a monstrous squint, had talked rapidly for several seconds.

Fleming shrugged his shoulders. "It's a case of Hobson's choice, anyway," he said. "If we attempt to break away they'll do for us as sure as fate, and even if we did get clear it would only be a repetition of what we've already endured. If you're agreeable, I vote we accept their hospitality."

"Yes; it's the only way." She smiled at him before she spoke again to the petty chief, a smile that quickened his pulses because of its mingled trust and pathos.

For all Miriam knew, that day was to be their last; but she did not fear death so long as they died together. It had come to that. Despite everything, she loved him as a woman loves the one man of her life. It did not matter to her what he had been; she knew him for a heroic, self-sacrificing man, a man who had spared himself nothing that he might further her comfort.

"I should think they've been in contact with whites before," said Fleming, as they moved along. "It's only natural some exploring party has been here before. I sincerely hope they treated these fellows well, for everything depends on that. We shall have to suffer for others' sins as well as our own." And he flinched a little, remem-

bering that this innocent companion of his might be called upon to pay part of the price of his own misdoings.

The news of their advent had gone on before them, the edge of the clearing was crowded with a mass of perspiring humanity, women predominating largely. There were innumerable children, fat of paunch, and wonder-filled of eye, who shrank away when Miriam smiled upon them, and hung to their mothers' insufficient aprons. But through this crowd the attendants broke with scant ceremony, and conducted Miriam and Fleming to a place where a cluster of grass huts stood.

"We seem to have discovered the only original tree dwellers," said Fleming, looking upward. A fringe of trees around the gathering bore on their boughs small shelters, also built of grass, and twisted ropes of grass or some similar material depended from the boughs. But the large cluster of huts seemed to point to a higher degree of civilization than the dwellings in the trees.

"Sh! They are calling out the chief," said Miriam in a low voice, as the leader of their guards began to croon in a weird voice.

There was no reply for some time, but at length the largest hut ejected a figure that almost drove Fleming into a frenzy of laughter, despite the precarious nature of their position. It was a man, but such a man! Not more than four feet six in height, he carried the head of a giant and the paunch of an alderman.

He was naked save for a loin cloth, but his hair was dressed high above his head in fantastic fashion, and pieces of polished wood were thrust through his ears. Mud seemed to have entered largely into his hairdressing scheme; the whole towering edifice was thickly caked and matted.

A ring of brass was through his nose, and a circular disk had been let into his upper lip, but none of these things made Fleming smile. The chief was the possessor of a squint beside which his underling's was nothing. Moving slowly, the vast masses of his flesh swaying grotesquely, this chief approached the pair, and the guards respectfully stood back. He coughed out something unintelligible to Fleming, and Miriam interpreted.

"He says that we are not like the other white men who came many moons ago," she said. "So he must have seen whites before. He wants to know, as the others did, what brings us here."

"You have a better chance now, you might tell him."

Fleming blessed his companion's knowledge of the dialect the natives spoke, and marveled at her fluency. Miriam spoke swiftly, using her hands freely to gesticulate, and from time to time the chief nodded in grave understanding. When, for want of breath, she ceased, he spoke again gutturally, eying her with approval.

"What does he say?" asked Fleming.

"He says that he has already as many wives as he cares to keep, so that if you have brought me here to sell to him, he cannot buy."

"The brute!"

"Hush! Our lives are in their hands, and any show of anger might bring the world about our ears. We must humor him yet a while."

"Oh, all right. Tell him you're not for sale, then. I'd give four years of my life to understand his language, though."

The chief was delivering himself of a lengthy monologue; he pointed to the east; he pointed around the clearing; he threw his hands toward the sky.

"He says that a white man came here many years ago; a brave man who taught them to fight. Since he died they have lost many men in their tribal wars, and he looks on your presence here as a special answer from the gods. Don't be angry, please, because everything depends on the next few minutes."

"I'm not angry; I'm only amazed. I know my own language and a little French and Spanish, but I'm ignorant to the core. What is he saying now?"

"That if you will stay here and teach their hands to war, you shall meet with much honor and have many wives. He ignores me altogether."

"Tell him that I cannot do anything in the matter until your safety is assured. Whatever else happens, you must be cared for."

Further conversation ensued, and presently Miriam turned to him again.

"He will give you my life on condition that you remain here with them, and help them. This other white man seems to have made himself generally useful."

"We'd better accept. I'd do more than that for you; and we can always try to escape later. I think I hear a river somewhere near. Tell him this: 'I'll stay here forever if he'll give you a safe conduct into some white settlement. It's your safety I'm thinking of.'"

Miriam shook her head. "We mustn't ask too much," she said, with a quick little smile, and Fleming understood. She had no wish to be separated from him yet.

"I accept their terms," Fleming told her; "later we'll do our best to modify them. Good heavens! And I know no more of warfare than I do of Chinese! Still, one can always learn."

The chief listened to Miriam's words, and then clapped his hands. Instantly the crowd yelled, but a moment later they became as silent as statues as the chief, whose name, he informed Miriam, was Boriabolo, spoke to them in a strong commanding voice.

"He is informing them that we are under his protection for the time," said the girl. "I think we may congratulate ourselves on having made a good impression."

They were taken among the cluster of huts, and into one of these they were ushered. It was a place about twelve feet in diameter, and contained a rude table and a ruder chair; also, standing in one corner was a rifle. It was rusted, and looked anything but serviceable, but Fleming, eying the weapon, and also a case of what appeared to be cartridges, rubbed his hands.

"I fancy I know why our unknown white friend held such a command over these people," he said. "This rifle explains everything. This must be his hut." The natives thronged about the low doorway, gazing curiously within the place; and Fleming lowered the grass curtain.

"Since we're honored guests we'll exercise the rights of privacy," he said, and then flushed.

The simple natives had never reckoned on the code of civilized morality; if the chief had thought of the matter at all he had taken it for granted that they were man and wife. Two white people of opposite sexes could be nothing else.

"Unless we can convince them that we need further comforts, I intend to use this place only for meals," Fleming said, taking up the rifle and examining it. Though rusty it was still serviceable, and the case disclosed its contents to be some two hundred rounds of ammunition.

"An old Martini. Probably this unknown man was a runaway from a man-of-war," suggested Fleming. "With a drop of oil and a little overhauling it's a good piece. One might fight his way to freedom with it. But I was forgetting."

He laid the weapon back in its place, and before he could say anything else a voice shouted without, and two girls appeared with bowls of food. There were no eating implements, but neither thought of the niceties of the table. They had escaped with their lives, and somewhere or other freedom lay beyond the forests.

CHAPTER XIX.

INTO THE MIDST.

STEALTHY rustlings sounded in the forest, and Fleming threw his rifle to his shoulder as an arrow glanced from a tree trunk near at hand. A moment before one of the friendly natives had fallen with a similar arrow in his throat, and now lay gasping his life away at the Englishman's feet.

A quiet anger was burning in Fleming's breast; not the mad, blind passion of the past, but a cool, calculating anger that showed him danger and taught him to avert it. This was the second time the tribe that had maintained a never-ceas-

ing warfare with his own tribe of the Guka Groyas had attempted to wipe out the village since Fleming's advent, and Miriam had told him in simple, graphic language of how these bloodthirsty demons put every living soul within a captured village to death in the most fiendish way.

Fleming realized now something of the spirit that had actuated mankind in the past when those they loved were menaced by an enemy. Miriam was somewhere there behind him, and on his skill and courage depended her very existence. If the enemy contrived to sweep the defenders before them, those in the village were lost.

A dark form showed for a moment against the bole of a palm; another arrow missed the Englishman's head by an inch. The Martini bred up tumultuous echoes that were answered by a fearful scream, and Fleming was aware of a queer, bloodthirsty sensation. He slipped another cartridge into the breech of the rifle, and dropped behind a fallen log.

Another form flitted from tree to tree, and the muzzle of the rifle covered it every inch of the way. Fleming tried to draw the trigger, but as yet he was not heated up to the lust for killing in cold blood.

A second later he regretted his indecision; an arrow stuck quivering in his arm, and the keen pain bit him to fury. Regardless of exposure he rose to his feet, and let drive at a rustling shadow, heard an appalling shriek before him, and then saw the forest disgorge a horde of yelling fiends.

One of his own men had been cut off from the rest of the party and captured by the enemy. They were murdering him in their own fashion in plain sight of the white man.

"You hounds!" he shouted, and dashed forward. They had driven a spear through the captive and so pinned him to a tree bole; half a dozen naked demons were hewing pieces from his body with strange swords made of hoop iron.

Into the thick of them all plunged Fleming, firing once, and then clubbing the rifle. They drew back at his approach; the butt dropped on one laggard and crushed his head in; arrows rattled everywhere, but the white man hardly heeded their flight. He was tugging at the impaling spear with all his strength; desisting only to charge into the gathering knot of savages again, and brought two of them to their knees by deft and terrible blows.

"You devils!" he cried, as he saw clearly the evil thing they had done. The friendly native was dying—a horrible sight. Fleming thought hard, and slipped a fresh cartridge in. It seemed the commonest humanity to put the suffering wretch out of his misery, but—the muzzle was not lifted. Once before, Fleming reflected, he had shed innocent blood.

The man settled the difficulty out of hand by plunging forward and lying quite still in the undergrowth. Fleming raised his voice in the tribal yell of the Guka Groyas, and wizen little figures flocked toward him, whooping joyously.

From their shelter in the forest the natives had watched Fleming's desperate actions, and named him in their simple minds for a god. The arrow in his arm he took no further notice of beyond plucking it out and hoping it was not poisoned.

He had acquired a smattering of the tongue from the chief and Miriam, and now he issued his orders. The inimical tribe of the Burra Deyls had been checked; it was necessary further to break it completely and keep it on the run, lest it should form again and deliver a further attack on the village.

Two hundred warriors gathered to obey his behest, and Fleming led them as fast as they could travel through the undergrowth. A keen-eyed trailer ran ahead, marking the evidences of the enemy's passing; and in a little while the trees spouted fresh arrows.

"Clear the scrub!" said Fleming, himself plunging into the thickest of it. He shot a man who rose from behind a breast-high bush with an arrow drawn to the head; he swung the butt and dropped another who was crouched almost at his feet; he heard the striving

yells of his followers, and realized that life was his at last. Primitive man asserted itself within him; he laughed a trifle hysterically as he understood that he was happy, with the shadows of the past blotted out.

There was another breathless pursuit through the forest, more snapshotting at half-seen forms and then a halt in an insignificant clearing. The tracker assured him that half a day's march to the north and east would bring him to the village of the opposing tribesmen, and Fleming was tempted to make an end of the task once and for all by burning the savages out like rats and dispersing them over the face of the country.

But he reflected that to advance so far from his base was to precipitate catastrophe. The village behind him was practically defenseless, and that village contained the person of Miriam Gascoigne, the woman he loved. He admitted the fact to himself now without hesitation; he loved her, and he would ask no greater boon of life than to die in doing her service.

He roused himself from his momentary aberration, as the tracker voiced a question, and answered sharply in the negative. Then he turned and led the way back.

That night a feast was celebrated in the village: a feast of mingled woe and rejoicing. Many of the Gurka Groyas had died that day, and the widows were wailing loudly down by the muddy banks of the river, laving their heads with the yellow waters. But a victory had been won, and for the time being the tribe was at rest.

Wild pigs by the score had been slain in the jungle and baked in clay; their roasted bodies exhaled an enticing perfume. Fires were lighted in the open space before the chief's huts, and as the forest gathered the darkness to itself naked and ghostly figures climbed down from the trees and began a wild, weird dance.

The savages declaimed aloud the many virtues possessed by their white leader; they smote themselves on the breast and howled their praises of him; the fat king waddled from his wattle palace, and gravely led a triumphal procession that halted only at the door of the hut where Miriam Gascoigne had taken up her abode.

Fleming was seated outside, vaguely aware of a sensation of listlessness creeping over all his being; never, from the day of their arrival at the village, had he entered that hut save on Miriam's distinct invitation.

"They're coming here," he said lazily. "I wish they wouldn't bother me. All I ask for now is to be left alone."

"Hail, white man!" The chief of the tribe had halted before the pair, and Fleming made shift to rise to his feet. "We bring you greetings, oh, thou who art more brave than a thousand. Our enemies came thickly upon us, but thou didst breathe upon them, and lo! they were as water running downhill."

Fleming's acquaintance with the language was not sufficient to enable him to understand every one of these compliments, but Miriam pieced out his imperfections with a glib tongue and the beginnings of a smile in her eyes.

"The white man gives his thanks, oh, chief!" said Fleming slowly. "Verily he did breathe fire and brimstone upon the enemy, and they were not. A strong man hath arisen in thy midst, oh, chief; but lo! he is now weary and would fain rest."

"Rest is for women and babes," said the chief, with a fine disdain. "For strong men there is feasting and the dance."

But Fleming shook his head. "I ask a boon, oh, chief," he said at last. "The tribes are no longer to be feared; a time of peace comes to the Guka Groyas. Let us depart whence we came. Our hearts grow sick for a sight of our own people, we weary as we sit, and dare not lift our faces to the stars.

"I'm going to play on his gratitude for all I'm worth," he said, in a swift aside to Miriam. "It's time we got out of this—three months of captivity isn't wholesome. I wish I could collect my thoughts a little, though."

"We cannot lose thee, white man," said the squinting chief affably. "The

Guka Groyas have come to much richness since first thou camest among us from the skies. Thou hast broken our enemies, yes, but they will come on again. And without thee we are but as little children, our hands are idle and our hearts are water. No; we cannot let thee go."

"I was afraid not; if I'd let them get a drubbing they might have been only too glad to see our backs. But I couldn't hold off, when I knew that if the others won out they'd burn the village and murder every soul in it." He looked hard at her, and she could not outface the intensity of his gaze.

"Chief, I speak with a single tongue. No harm will befall the Guka Groyas when we are absent. Let us go. This white woman grows pale and ill, and always she sighs for her home. Let us go."

"No, white man, we dare not. The white woman—what of her? Let her dwell in peace with her chosen man. One place is like another; she speaks our tongue, therefore she must have lived in this land. Let her be content to settle here. Thou shalt have riches; we take no heed to those things which men find in the mountains; but if they appeal to thee they are thine."

Fleming heard him as if from a vast distance. His pulses were drumming loudly in his ears; the forest clearing seemed to be closing in about him. The fires were fading into a strange mistiness, and even Miriam seemed to fall away from beneath his eyes.

Her voice was still ringing in his ears, however, she was translating the last remark of the chief, first carefully modifying it. But Fleming understood enough to know that she had censored the message.

"Well, it matters little," he said, watching the figure of the chief dilate and contract strangely. "Here or there, it is all one. Let me sleep now, for I am weary."

Savages, clearing, fires, all died away—all save Miriam. She was there before him; her face grown suddenly white; it was her arms that received him as Fleming tottered and fell.

Then a great blank shut down on his senses, a blank that was peopled with strange fancies. He fought that old grim fight with Mildmay again; he struck out at pallid, crimson-streaked faces which grew out of the darkness; he winced away from other faces and mocking, pointing hands. Then he awoke.

A shaft of sunlight reached in at the door of the hut, and revealed a seated figure near by. He tried to speak, but strangely enough his voice would not come. But, after surprising efforts, he contrived to move his head, and the faint rustle of the woven grass attracted Miriam's attention. She bent over him gently, and Fleming felt something warm and wet fall on his cheek.

"Don't try to speak; drink this," she said, and held a cup to his lips.

Too weak to argue, he sipped the contents. They were acrid and harsh to the taste, but they cleared away many of the mists in his brain.

"I shan't tell you much," said Miriam softly, enunciating every word clearly. "You've been very ill; very, very ill, and once or twice I thought you would die. It is three weeks since that night."

Three weeks! He accepted the fact since she had stated it, but his consciousness almost refused to believe. It had been but as the nightmare of a single night.

"They have a witch doctor here, and he was going to do a lot of strange things, but I kept him away," she went on. "It was difficult, but a thunderstorm sprang up in time to help me; I swore it was the powers on high showing their anger at his interference. So then I had it my own way, and because my brother had taught me a little, and because—well, my woman's instinct, I suppose—taught me more—I found herbs that served my purpose, and now you will live."

"Then you've saved my life?" he whispered softly, accepting this marvel gratefully.

"What of that? I said you were not to speak, and if you attempt to do so again I shall leave you. It was the

least I could do. You saved mine several times; I should have been an ungrateful brute if I had let you die."

He reached out and grasped her cool white hand that was pressed firmly on his forehead. Somehow he contrived to carry it to his lips; she made no effort to withdraw it. He remembered nothing save that he owed her a vast debt of gratitude. Recollection would come soon enough, but meanwhile they were together, and that was enough for him.

"The natives have loaded you with gifts and attentions," she said presently. "I take it as a mark of favor—and the lesson you administered to the others was salutary. They have not troubled us since."

Puzzling over what this would mean as concerned their future welfare, Fleming fell asleep, still holding the girl's hand, and not until she was overtired from maintaining one position did she release her fingers from his clutch. She looked at him and sighed heavily; then she sat down to wait again—to wait endlessly, as seemed her portion forevermore.

"If they won't let us go," said Fleming later, still weak and white, "we must contrive to get away ourselves. One thing's certain, I don't intend to let you spend the rest of your life in this wilderness. No, I've made up my mind—I've been thinking things out a lot; convalescence is a good thing for one's thoughts. We're prisoners here—say what you will to the contrary. They may treat us as honored guests, and load us with attentions, but you may have noticed that we're never allowed to pass out of bounds. Our movements are watched closely—I've noticed it a score of times. Here comes the chief—I wonder what's in the wind now."

The squinting chief was approaching with signs of haste, and at the grotesque leader's back marched his retinue of spear-armed savages. There seemed to be something strange, perhaps ominous, about the hurrying natives, especially in the expression of the grim little chief.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next number of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out December 15th; it began in the November 1st issue. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

WHEN WINTER'S HERE

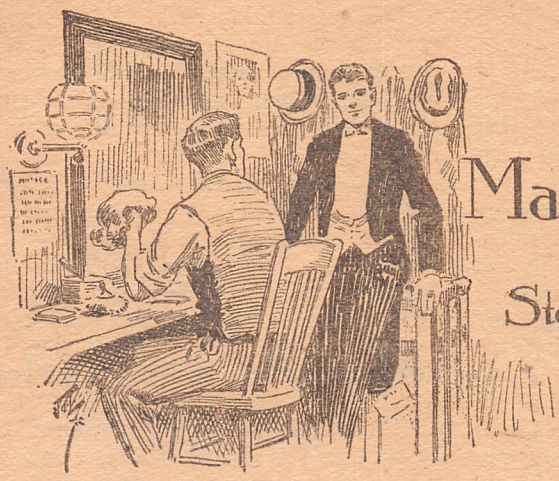
By Everett Earle Stanard

I THINK that we are really tired now
Of all the long procession of fair days,
And maybe we shall not be sorrowful
To walk again the austere winter ways.

The world has been a garden place so long
That scarcely now we'd care to pluck a rose;
And those white petals, falling, turned our thoughts
To drifting blossoms of the coming snows.

The lark's glad song that once we held so dear,
The thrush's trill in the far vale that rings,
Became a cloying music in our ears,
And we are ready now for other things.

The fretted frostwork and the rare designs
That tiny workmen of the winter hang,
Will soon succeed the summer's leafiness
In those wide woods "where late the sweet birds sang."



Magic Mascot~

By Stephen Dakeyne~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

A WEIRD AFFAIR.

A SHINING shell case of brass caught my eye. It stood among the grease paints on the dressing table of my friend, Joseph Kelly, in his room at the Frolic Theater. I had met him in Chicago when he was on tour, and we had become very friendly. So of course I sent my card round to him when I was seeing the new revue, in which he was playing the comedian's rôle in New York last winter. The attendant brought back a message, "If you'll step round, sir, after the curtain is down, Mr. Kelly says he'll be real glad to see you again."

At the conclusion of the performance I was shown round to his dressing room, and at once noticed the shell case.

"A grim souvenir for an actor, eh?" Kelly remarked, after greeting me heartily.

"Yes," I answered, "I can't help wondering why on earth you should keep it here."

"It's my mascot," he said, "and it's more mysterious than it looks. In fact, I owe my life to it."

"How's that? It looks just like an old German shell?"

"That's no ordinary shell," observed Kelly gravely. "Mars must have cast a charm over it when it was turned out of Krupp's in 1916. You see there. The date's marked on it."

He handed it to me, a glowing piece of burnished brass, so brightly polished that it reflected the electric lights as in a mirror. It stood eighteen inches high and was five inches in diameter. It was, I should guess, about two or three pounds in weight.

"A pick-up on the battlefields, eh?" I asked, putting it back on the long dressing table beneath the photos of the many colleagues of the stage with whom Kelly had acted during his forty years of work behind the footlights. "But, tell me, how did it save your life?"

"It's too long a yarn to tell you here," he said, pulling off the comedian's carroty wig that he wore; "but if you like to come round with me after the show to the Tom Tom Club, I'll tell you the whole business. But I shall be surprised if you believe me. It's a queer story, and I really can't explain it myself."

I accepted the invitation, and we strolled round together to his bohemian club, where he gave me more details:

"After the armistice," he began, "I was in England. Some actors went over to France to entertain the troops who were chafing to get home again. I got off for a fortnight, and found myself performing every night in the half-

ruined hall of a convent near St. Quentin. You know the spot?"

"Yes," I replied, "only too well. I was with one of the American divisions that tried to take Bellecourt and that part of the St. Quentin Canal in September, 1918."

"That's the spot," he said—"close by the tunnel where the canal runs underground. I'd gone out to look at the battlefield. Just outside the mouth of the tunnel a number of shell cases lay waiting collection by the salvage corps with quantities of other débris. From one of the dumps I picked up that empty shell case covered with verdigris and full of mud. Well, I threw it into my kit bag. When I got back to New York, I handed it to my dresser, Jones; he brought you up to-night."

"Yes—a quiet-spoken fellow."

"A thundering good dresser," continued Kelly. "Well, he applied plenty of elbow grease and polished it up until it glistened as brightly as Broadway at night, reflecting lights and shadows. I took it back to my apartment and put it on the table which stands close to the armchair where I always rest after getting back late at night.

"I had a particularly heavy part just then, eight different characters in the revue 'Bubbles'—a fat part, but it meant eight hurried changes, and a hurricane dance, which fairly knocked me out. About that time, too, Ethel—you met my wife, I think—caught the flu, which turned to pneumonia. She was run down at the time." Kelly stopped his story, catching his breath.

"I hoped she pulled through?" I said anxiously.

"She was terribly sick. For weeks she stood at death's door. And then—I lost her. If it had not been for the need to keep my boy at school, I should have thrown up my part, and gone away. As it was, I stuck to the theater through the spring and summer, feeling more and more done every night. It was late in August that I first noticed something strange about that shell case, which still stood by my chair.

"It must have been between two and three in the morning—I had not gone to bed. I couldn't sleep. Yes, insomnia; an old trouble with me. I was smoking, and thinking, and brooding. My boy, Robin, was asleep in the next room. He's a stout lad; no nerves about him.

"My eyes, half closed, looking through the haze of smoke were attracted to the twinkling curves of the shell case. The lights on the surface appeared to be dancing, and then the shell clouded over just like a mist descending on a lake. Then the fog lifted, and I distinctly saw on the brass a figure.

"Of course it sounds nonsense, but as sure as I'm Joseph Kelly, I saw the figure of a woman—a trim French girl, I thought. She was driving some sheep along a road, the usual broad French road which ran by a canal. On the horizon among some trees was a church, which, as the mist cleared, I recognized as the Cathedral of St. Quentin. She waved to some one on a barge on the canal. Then the mist descended again. There were dark clouds of smoke, and I saw the girl lying stiff. I should have said it was a nightmare, but I'm sure that I was still biting my pipe in my chair, and looking intently at the shell case. Queer, wasn't it?"

At this point the door of the smoking room opened, and a cheerful, if somewhat husky voice, broke into his tale. "Hello, Kelly, old man. You've hidden yourself away to-night. Cut in at bridge?"

"No, thanks, not to-night. Just having a quiet chat with a friend of mine, who's in the city for a week or two. Let me introduce you—Mr. Sutherland—Mr. Robert Parsons, of Philadelphia."

A man with a Falstaffian exterior shook hands with me.

"Glad to meet you, sir! Any friend of Joseph Kelly's a friend of mine! Sorry we're only one out at bridge, but if you prefer poker, or anything else, I'm always ready for a little friendly flutter!"

"Thanks very much," I assured him. "Not to-night. I must get back to my hotel soon."

"Well, some other night, then. We're always glad to see visitors here; bohemian club, you know! Souls of sociability! Any kind of game you like to propose. If you change your mind, I'll be close at hand. Bridge or poker or any old game!" He lurched out, still muttering to himself.

Kelly waited till the door had closed behind him, then said: "He was in the front rank of American tenors once, and now!"

"A cheery soul! But tell me some more about the shell case. Was that the only time you saw curious reflections in it?"

"No; a few nights later—I believe it was the eve of Labor Day. At least Margaret Cracow says that was the evening."

"Margaret Cracow?" I asked.

"Oh—I can see you are one of those folk who don't study your program. She was acting to-night. Took the comic old woman's part. Well, I just mentioned it to Margaret and gave her the date. She was frightfully excited. I saw the shell case cloud over, and then clear. This time there was no solitary figure, but a jumble of figures—men in blue and men in khaki—French, British, and Americans, all in a throng, holding hands. I could hear nothing, but I felt strangely uplifted. It was the tableau of an alliance. The men were comrades advancing shoulder to shoulder toward the canal, which was ever in the background of my visions. There was no sign of death. The shapes moving on the brass were, I knew it, eternal, for they were the shadows of the troops who together had broken the Hindenburg Line.

CHAPTER II.

JUST LIKE A WOMAN.

NIGHT after night I saw these reflections. Sometimes they were of sturdy French peasants plowing fields, driving sheep, gleaning ears of corn; at other times the scenes were of war, vivid and horrible in their reality. After a fortnight of this I consulted my old doctor.

"He listened with sympathy, gave me a nerve tonic and told me to take a holiday. But expenses were heavy just then—doctor's bills and nurses. So I took the tonic and not the holiday.

"Then, craving for sympathy, one evening I told the whole story to Margaret Cracow."

"Ah, I remember her now! Surely she was the original woman in that 'Prehistoric Peep?'" I questioned.

"Yes, that's the girl," said Kelly. "She's dead nuts on spiritualism and all that sort of thing."

"Wouldn't think it to see her dance!" I observed with a laugh.

"Well, Margaret declared that the shell case must clearly be a new kind of crystal, into which one had only to gaze to see the future. So we looked into the shell together. But she could see nothing. And I could only see the past—never the future. It was the real past, though—of that I'm sure. Somehow that brass, in my judgment, had taken the impression of the scenes around it.

"But I'm only wearying you with my theories. Let me give you some facts! By November this looking into the brass had become a craze with me. Almost every night I hurried back from the theater, put the shell case in front of me, and smoked and gazed. At last one morning about two a. m., as I looked I saw a new face appear. It was a dark face with eyes that gleamed and teeth that were clenched. There was a scar, too, that ran across one cheek. That I could see quite plainly.

"I looked at this new appearance with a certain shrinking. I felt a cold draft. The steam heat was off, and I may have been dozing. Then far away I heard a steeple clock strike two. The face moved, so that I realized that this was no visionary phantom, but the reflection of some one living, actually in my room, behind my chair. Quickly I leaned forward, partly to get farther away from the haunting face, partly to avoid what I felt was coming.

"I was not mistaken. Something heavy fell with a thud upon the back of my armchair. just on the place where

my head had been half a second before. The nearest weapon available was the shell case, which I seized, and, turning round, hurled it with all my strength into the face of the intruder. The heavy case struck the burglar sidewise on the forehead, and slipped aside through the window down into the court below. I was wide awake by now, and grasped the club which the man, who had aimed at me from behind, had dropped in his surprise on the chair. He was so startled by the sudden blow on the head that for a moment he hesitated. Then with a shout to my boy, Robin, I closed with him.

"He was a tough customer, but stage life, especially that of a comedian who has to be a bit of an acrobat, too, is pretty strenuous, and I was able to keep his hands from my throat. We rolled on the floor, throwing the table over with a crash. Robin told me afterward that he woke, hearing a noise like a dog fight. He was out of bed in a twinkling, and picked up his hockey stick. With this he tried to join in the fray, but declares that we were rolling over and over so quickly that he dared not hit at the burglar for fear of hitting me.

"So he did the wisest thing by running to the door of the apartment and shouting for the police. Here again the shell case had done me a good turn. By breaking the window and falling noisily on the pavement outside, it had attracted the attention of a policeman, who, for a wonder, had just entered the street. He ran along, and, hearing Robin's voice, dashed up the stairs; the door had been opened for him.

"No, there's not much more to add. The cop shouted to me to get off, and to the burglar to get up. Then in a twinkling he had the handcuffs on the man. Poor chap! He turned out to be an Australian, who had gone to the dogs in New York after being demobilized. Ashamed to return to Sydney, he had evaded the military authorities, and got into bad company. That's how the shell case saved my life. Now do have another cigar."

"Thanks, very much," I said. "Not another cigar at this time of night. As it is, I shall probably dream about your story. But just tell me one thing more. Why do you keep the shell at the theater?"

"Doctor's advice!" said Kelly. "He told me that I was an imaginative old fool, and that the sooner I got the thing out of my home, the better for my health."

"Something in that, no doubt!" I agreed.

"Robin backed him up, too. But he said that I should keep the shell case as a kind of mascot, and so stuck it among my grease paints. Margaret Cracow rather objects."

"Why?" I asked. "What does she advise?"

"Well, she thinks it has magical qualities." Kelly laughed. "Just like a woman! She would like to use it at one of her spiritualistic séances, but I'm not having any. No fear!"

"I should never have imagined that woman was keen on that kind of thing," I observed. "She looked so severely practical on the stage."

"Make-up! Pure make-up! She's as sentimental a little thing as any of 'em under the gray wig!"

The door again opened. We both looked round and saw the would-be poker player, Mr. Sutherland, standing swaying in the doorway.

"Hello, Tommy," exclaimed Kelly, "what luck with the cards?"

"Ten to the good, old boy. Better business than you two gossiping away. Talking about women and wine, I'll be bound. I warn you, Mr. P-P-Parsons, don't ever believe a word Joe says about women! They are all angels to him—every one of them!"

He stood leaning against the table, and I saw it would be better to make a move, so got out of my chair. But he went on babbling and I turned to Kelly.

"I'm afraid I really must be getting to bed—why it's well after one o'clock."

"I'll come along with you," said Kelly, "that is, if we go at all in the same direction."

Sutherland by this time had taken

refuge in the armchair which I had just vacated, and Kelly and I left him there settling himself down to sleep.

As we moved out down the stairs I told Kelly I'd like to have another look at the shell case. "I never appreciated the fact that it had a story like that."

"Come round any time after the show. Now I'm alone in the world, I'm never in any particular hurry to get home. Any night you are in front, just send your card round and I shall be delighted to show you my find. By the way, where do you stay? Perhaps we might walk along together, if it is not too far."

"I shall be very glad to have a walk and some fresh air," I said. "I live in a little private hotel in Seventy-fourth Street when I'm over here. Is that in your direction?"

"That would just suit me," answered Kelly. "My place is in West End Avenue, so we can go the same way home."

CHAPTER III.

ALONE WITH THE SHELL.

IT was a fine starlight night. We walked together from the Tom Tom Club up Broadway. Joseph Kelly was silent until we had passed Columbus Circle. Then he asked me suddenly:

"Did you notice Margaret Cracow especially when you saw the show tonight?"

"No, not specially. I laughed at her a good deal. She's a clever little thing. Rather ugly, though, I should imagine."

"That's where so many of the public make a mistake." Kelly spoke rather abruptly. "She's really quite a good-looking woman, but she makes up so cleverly to play these comic parts that she hides all her good points."

"What's her history?" I asked lightly.

Really I had not given her any special thought. She had danced quaintly and sung a patter song in the part of an old woman who sold balloons at the entrance to Central Park, and beyond applauding with the rest of the audience I had given her no special attention.

"She did soubrette parts until recently—she's still under thirty," Kelly went on. "In fact, she only took up these comic old-women parts about two years ago. Her point is that the salaries for comedy parts are much higher; also she finds character acting much more interesting."

"Married?" I questioned.

"Not so far as I know. She lives in Harlem, where she keeps the proverbial mother or something. I've purposely not inquired too closely."

"Why?" Something in Kelly's tone piqued my curiosity.

"Well, there's always a lot of talk in a theater like ours. A month or two ago I gave Margaret Cracow a dinner at Molinar's, and we arrived at the theater together. That started the tongues of the scandalmongers. In fact, one scurrilous newspaper man suggested a coming stage romance, at the Frolic Theater, between us."

"Nothing in it, of course?" I asked.

"Not a scrap of truth," said Kelly emphatically. "The truth is—may seem rather old-fashioned to say it—I believe in a love match. I always told my wife that I should never marry again if she went first, and, by Jove, I meant it. Ethel was my real mate, and now she's gone—well, really—I mustn't bore you with my personal affairs."

"I'm interested," I confessed. "I think the same as you. I've never married, for just the reason that you do not intend to marry again."

Kelly lighted a cigarette. He threw down the match and remarked shyly: "Love's the really big thing in the world. It's the thing that really matters."

"That's what I felt and feel still," I agreed. "There was a girl once in my life, who meant all that to me. You may have heard of her. She was on the stage about eight years ago—Isobel Duncan. Have you heard of the name?"

"Yes," Kelly answered; "I kind of remember it. But—so many come and disappear in theater life. You met her in Chicago?"

"No, in New York. We were about to be engaged, and then we had a ridiculous quarrel."

The silence of the night, the sympathy of my companion, the emotions raised by his story of the shell case—all contributed to make me tell Kelly—a comparative stranger—why I searched eternally for Isobel Duncan, but in vain.

"I was a young man in 1913, and she was young, too," I went on. "She was a curious mixture—clever, enthusiastic in her work, and at the same time a bit of a mystic; a doctor's daughter from the North, I believe. He died practically without a penny. So she took to the stage to make a living, and threw up her ambitions of becoming a doctor. After our row she left New York. I tried to follow, but not a trace!"

"Still looking?" asked Kelly.

"Always."

"Ever tried putting in an advertisement in a personal column?"

"Wasted hundreds of dollars on that game. No replies except from sharps!"

"Detectives?" questioned Kelly.

"Tried private inquiry agents galore! They produced various stranded females, and started many wild-goose chases, but all to no purpose. I could fill a volume with their reports and their supposed clews, but I got no nearer to my objective."

"I suppose you've tried the theatrical agents?" Kelly suggested.

"Letters were sent to every reputable theatrical agency in New York, London, Paris, and Vienna. But not one of them has had the name of Isobel Duncan on their books since 1913."

"Of course she may have married, or be playing under another name," conjectured Kelly.

"Of course—that makes it so difficult. But I've not given up hope."

"That's the stuff," said Kelly. "Well, I'm afraid our ways part here."

We had reached the corner of Seventy-fourth Street; so we shook hands and said good night.

"Mind you run round any night you like and see the shell case again," Kelly called after me as I crossed toward my hotel.

Probably I had smoked too much, but I simply could not get to sleep until after four a. m. When at last I dozed off, my dreams were a muddle of selections from the Frolic Theater revue, and memories of the Hindenburg Line, all set amid the environment of the Tom Tom Club. At the conclusion I saw Isobel coming toward me. I stretched out my arms, and she changed into a burglar with a black mask over his eyes, who threw a jimmy at my head.

At that I woke to find the sun creeping in through my blinds and the chambermaid knocking at my door. It was after ten o'clock, and so when I had dressed and finished my breakfast it was time to think of my luncheon appointment with a business friend at the Ritz-Carlton. At Fifth Avenue I ran into Mr. Sutherland, who seemed to be none the worse for his late evening.

"Good morning," he said gayly. "You remember me. Kelly introduced us—at the Tom Tom last night; or was it this morning? Have a cocktail before lunch?"

"No, thanks. Truth is I rather overslept myself, and I'm due at the Ritz at one p. m."

Sutherland laughed. "That comes of late nights with Joe Kelly. Great fellow, Kelly! Heard about him and Margaret Cracow?"

I had no wish to gossip or hear scandal from him of all people, so I abruptly wished him good morning and passed on. Nevertheless, all the afternoon the thought kept haunting me as to what he hinted at. What was there between Margaret Cracow, the droll little comédienne, the dabbler in spiritualism and Joe Kelly? However, I determined to lose no opportunity of seeing the shell case again.

I was dining that night at the Savoy at a banquet followed by tiresome speeches which lasted till well after eleven. So I slipped across town in a taxi to the stage door of the Frolic Theater, and sent up my card. Jones the dresser came down to me.

"Mr. Kelly says, will you please to step up, sir. The curtain rung down about ten minutes ago, and he's almost ready to go."

He showed me the way up the iron stairway, and led me amid a maze of passages to Kelly's snug little dressing room. The popular comedian had already cleaned his face of make-up and was almost ready to leave the theater.

"Sit down," he said, greeting me heartily. "Glad to see you. Have something to drink." He waved me to sit down in an armchair facing him with my back to the door. "Here, Jones, get this gentleman something."

The dresser left to fulfill this mission, but was called back.

"Jones—I forgot—bring two, and have one yourself."

"Thank you, sir."

"Hope you weren't too tired after our midnight talk," Kelly continued, lacing his shoes.

"Not at all. I was deeply interested."

At this moment there was a knock at the door and the call boy popped his head in. "Pardon me, sir," he said; "but Mr. Carey would be obliged if you would step up to his office for a moment."

"Excuse me for five minutes," said Kelly. "It's the old man. He wants to speak to me about a charity matinée. Society is to be present, and we're to give selections from this show. Carey's very excited about it. Have a look at the shell case while I'm away. Good! Here are the refreshments."

Jones entered with two tall glasses, which he placed on the table, then withdrew.

"There, make yourself at home," said Kelly, "I won't be long."

I took down the shell case, and lying back in the high-backed armchair with the light just above me, examined it closely. Certainly Jones had polished it with wonderful skill. As I looked at its burnished surface, I thought that I would test its magic properties. Why should I not see a vision? So I gazed intently.

As I looked, I lost count for a minute of the noises of the city outside—the bustle of automobiles, the throb of the electric-light dynamo close by. The shadows of the room behind me took weird shapes in the brass mirror. Then out of the darkness came a face, a face I had known of old—the face of Isobel. I could not stir. Her eyes seemed to be fixed on mine—half afraid, half wondering. The world appeared to stand still.

CHAPTER IV.

QUIET NO LONGER.

UTTERLY amazed I could not move, but sat transfixed, hardly daring to breathe for fear the vision should fade. How long I remained thus I could not tell. It could only have been a few seconds, then it blurred over with a dark shadow. The noise of the traffic again buzzed in my ears, and I heard the door click. I turned round quickly to see if I was alone, but found that the high back of the chair hid the door from me. So I got up and looked round, but the room was empty. It seemed to me, however, that there was in the air the fragrance of violets.

I stared at the curved surface of the shell case with bewilderment. In it certainly had appeared the face of my sweetheart, wearied maybe, but with the same lustrous eyes that I had known so well. Was that glimpse of paradise merely a hallucination? Or had the shell case some magic power? Or had some one entered the room very quietly, and failing to see me in the deep chair, retired quickly, leaving a fragrance of flowers behind?

While I was searching for answers to my questions, Kelly burst into the room. "Hope you've not been bored all alone," said he. "Carey was dead keen to fix up a rehearsal, and I had to wait while he telephoned to the musical director to make sure of the time. Hope you've not been bored?"

"Oh—no—very interested in your souvenir." I could not speak of the ghost of the past.

"That's good. Well, I'll soon be free. Carey fixed up eleven a. m. to-morrow for Miss Cracow to try over our songs with the orchestra for this charity matinée. Suppose she didn't look in here? She was waiting to hear the time fixed before going home."

I shook my head.

"Oh, then, I'll just run to her room and tell her. Excuse me again for half a minute."

He ran off, and I heard his steps pattering along the stone passage. So Isobel was Miss "Cracow." What a fool I'd been! And what a mimic she was to have so completely disguised her face, her voice, her manner when she took to character acting! I saw it all in a flash.

I seized the shell case to prove my theory. Yes, by holding it in conjunction with the mirror I could see in its burnished surface a reflection of my own reflected face. It must have been Isobel who had looked into the room seeking for Kelly.

Then came a flood of fears. Was I too late? What had Sutherland meant about Kelly and Margaret Cracow? Were the two engaged or perhaps secretly married? Stage folk had curious ways of keeping their domestic life a secret from the public. Why did she come so freely to his room unless there was some intimate understanding? A thousand thoughts rushed through my brain.

I was working myself into a frenzy of thoughts and wild imaginings, when Jones came in. He went straight to the stage costume that Kelly had thrown off, and folded it neatly without a word, or in fact, without so much as glancing in my direction. I continued to examine the shell case while I tried to collect my thoughts. If Isobel had adopted the stage name of Margaret what harm in that? Had I any cause for jealousy? Had I any right to be jealous even if there was cause? But my head and heart were in such a whirl that I could not think clearly. I decided to try to draw out Jones.

"You've been with Mr. Kelly for some time? So he tells me."

"Yes, sir; twelve years, with an interval of eighteen months when I was in the service." He swept up a powder box which had fallen from the table.

"What is your honest opinion about this mysterious shell case?" I went on. "Mr. Kelly tells me you were the first to polish it up."

"Yes, sir, and a hard job it was, too!"

"Do you agree with Miss Cracow that it possesses magical properties?"

"Can't say as I do." Jones looked at me with a questioning look in his eyes as if he was calculating how much I was good for. "Not that I pretend to be an expert on spirits."

"Miss Cracow has talked a good deal to Mr. Kelly about it, no doubt?"

"Quite a lot," remarked Jones.

"She thinks the shell case has psychic powers?" I asked.

"Don't know nothing about what she thinks. She's too stand-offish to talk to a fellow like me. But I do know that bit of brass nearly put the boss on the blink."

"Really?"

"Yes. He kept worrying about his missus that died of flu. Kept seeing angels and all them sort of things. All these funny men have their funny points. I was dresser for one once that sang comic songs twice nightly, and preached religion in a tent every Sunday. But if I start talking, I'll never get home to-night, and Mrs. Jones is a bit particklar about me not being late! Good night, sir."

He left me sitting there, my thoughts in a maze, my heart throbbing, my lips dry with emotion. Had I arrived at my goal, only to find that another had got there first?

While I hesitated I heard footsteps in the passage outside and then two voices could be clearly heard:

"That settles it, Miss Cracow. At eleven to-morrow morning at the Hippodrome."

"Yes, Mr. Kelly, I'll be there on time."

The two stood talking in the doorway. I wanted to get up, but something held me to my chair. The voice of one I had often heard in my dreams, but hardly hoped to hear again. The perfume of violets was again perceptible.

"Well, good night, Mr. Kelly. I must be on my way home. I'll try not to be late to-morrow.

"Wait half a minute," said Kelly, "I'd like you to meet a friend of mine from Chicago."

"Really? What's his name?"

"Parsons."

"Mr. Parsons. Why, I once knew a man of that name."

I could remain quiet no longer. I let the shell case fall with a crash to the floor, and springing from the chair, turned round. Yes, it was Isobel, just the same, though with a beauty more wistful than of old.

"You here, my dearest?" I exclaimed, holding out my hands. "Why, I've been searching for you all over America and Europe."

"I never dreamed you cared for me as much as that," she whispered.

I seized her hands and drew her to me. "I never dreamed that you would take all those foolish, hasty words of mine to heart so much, Isobel."

Kelly murmured with a twinkle, "Look here: I forgot to tell Carey something. I won't be gone more than a quarter of an hour."

He rushed out and left us alone together. Before he came back, Isobel had kissed that old shell case, and I—well—that brass reflected something more cheerful than war or burglars.

Old-Timers' Big Day

BASEBALL stars of a past age got into the game once more in Cleveland last summer when a team of old-time professionals defeated by a score of eleven to six an aggregation of veteran sand-lotters. The event was a feature of Cleveland's one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary celebration.

To the thousands who looked on it seemed as if the clock of the years had been turned back as they saw "Cy" Young, the only pitcher who ever won five hundred major-league games, step into the box for the old-time stars. Behind the bat was "Chief" Zimmer, who caught for the inimitable Young when the famous twirler was in the heyday of his skill. Zimmer and Young are now well over fifty years old.

The well-known battery of other days worked two innings, Young allowing the sand-lotters as many hits. He fanned two batters and gave one base on balls. "Heinie" Berger, who later pitched for the revived stars, also did well.

The infield of the former professionals was the one that played for Cleveland in 1902 and 1903. It did not make an error in the anniversary game. Charlie Hickman was on first base, "Nap" Lajoie on second, Terry Turner at shortstop, and Bill Bradley on third. Among the one-time stars who played during the game in the outfield were Elmer Flick, Ollie Pickering, Harry Bay, and Jess Burkett, now coach of the New York Giants.

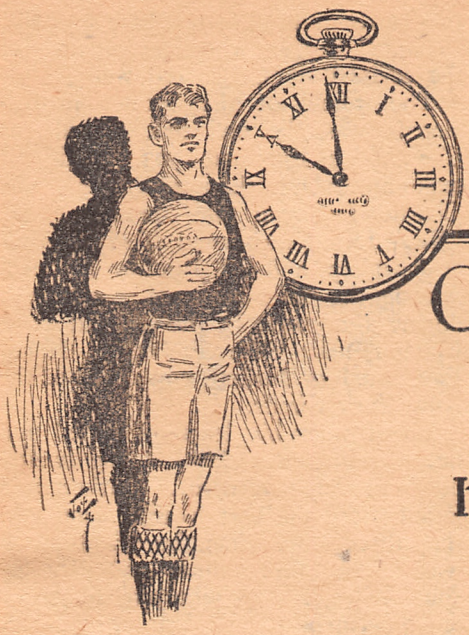
The former big leaguers batted and fielded with much skill, making twenty hits and only one error. Burkett and Bradley did the best batting, each getting three solid hits; the Giant coach was at bat three times and Bradley four. The ex-stars who pitched struck out nine men.

How Poets Live

A NEW YORK newspaper recently made a census of poets living below Fourteenth Street on Manhattan Island with the result that when not following the inspiration of the muse, poets were found engaged in a variety of secondary occupations as follows: Banker, longshoreman, printer, book reviewer, school-teacher, executive work in a garment shop, copy writer in an advertising house, dishwasher, member of staff of an export magazine.

Masefield once polished beer pumps in a saloon, which has since become a shrine, but no one regards with reverence the dishes which a rising young poet washes in a cheap New York restaurant.

This holding down a job as an aid to writing poetry gave a young girl in New York the thrill of her life. She was engaged as a copyholder in a printing office when she came upon one of her own poems which she had sent to a weekly some time before. Since then she has sold many other poems, but she still works as a copyholder, having a considerable amount of respect for her weekly pay envelope.



One Minute to Go—

By

Howard Philip Rhoades

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

THAT EXTRAORDINARY FIVE.

THE basket-ball rooters of State University were passing through the most extraordinary experience of their career. They had come to laugh at what promised to be the climax of the funniest joke ever perpetrated at the school. Instead, they had remained to wonder!

Swiftly, certainly, they were watching the junior-class team, which had won the championship of the interclass league, go down in defeat before the most singular basket-ball outfit that ever played the game—Tommy Strimple's Side Show. It was as if the comedian of the play had suddenly taken matters into his own hands and chased the hero off the stage.

Again those strangely assorted players, upon whose breasts burned the scarlet "Triple S," were off! The smack of the bat-off, the swift pounding of feet on the vibrant floor, a shout, a pass, a dodge, and the trick was done. The juniors had agreed to this game so that the school might have a final orgy of merriment. They had dawdled through the first half, amused with the earnestness with which the five Side Show men were playing. The half ended with no great margin in their favor.

Then, in the second half, the Side Show team turned; now, with but three minutes to go, they were scoring at will.

"Twenty-three, rah-rah! Twenty-three, rah-rah!

"Who-rah! Who-rah? Twenty-three, rah-rah!"

It was the rallying cry of the class-league champions' supporters. In response the men of "Twenty-three" came back with the hottest fight of the half. One goal they scored, then another. A wild, discordant scream went up from the junior section. Only one more was needed. The time had dwindled to a minute.

Encouraged by his rooters, Long, captain of the juniors, tied the score. One goal by either team would win. Junior supporters, and those who had come to laugh at the Side Show, but remained to cheer its brave battle, shrieked out their encouragement in a pandemonium of sound.

Above all, however, could be heard the booming voice of Bill Bates, the Side Show barker. He was as much

a part of the odd outfit as Tommy Strimple himself. Now, with the team wavering between going down as the most colossal joke in the State University history, or being its best example of the worm which turned, Bill Bates outdid himself.

Through a megaphone he bawled: "For the price of one ticket, ladies and gents, a ticket which you buy to keep our varsity team going, you have the treat of your life! See Lawrence, the Tennessee giant; Badger, the little man from Montana; Hager, yclept Georgette, because he's so thick; and Light, who weighs only two hundred and fifty pounds! See Bolo, the wild man from Borneo! He eats juniors alive! Strimple's Side Show, folks. The original show that made all the crowned heads of the faculty laugh!"

Inspired by the stentorian war cry of their famous barker, the Side Show rose to a supreme effort. Lawrence went a little higher than usual; Hager, painfully thin, but quick as a flash, got the ball; Badger, who was but little more than four feet in height, took his pass, and sent it swiftly to Light. The latter, who was the very opposite of his name, held the ball above his head, Gibraltarike, defying any one to take it.

Light had more than brute strength. With two juniors assailing him in front, he made a clever play. Behind him sounded a peculiar hiss. It suggested the swift, deadly action of the far-off jungle, not distant from the native home of its author. By this sound Light knew of the presence of Bolo, an East Indian student, whose unpronounceable name had been thus shortened by the school. He was a quiet student, doing post-graduate work, altogether so clever and reserved that his presence in the Side Show had won him the sobriquet of "The Wild Man from Borneo."

With the passive smile which never left his dark face, Bolo took the ball over Light's shoulder. It rose in a high, perfect arc, and passed through the hoop, an irreproachable goal. The timer's whistle sounded. Strimple's Side Show had won by a goal!

CHAPTER II.

WITH ENVIOUS EYES.

ON every side as he entered the locker room in the wake of his men, Tommy Strimple was congratulated. This tall, light-haired youth, with his laughing blue eyes and his friendly ways, was the favorite of the school. He took part in many activities, and whatever he touched seemed to prosper wonderfully. Now, as he entered to pat his players on the back, and congratulate them on their success, every hand was out to him—every hand except one.

Across a bench a stocky young man, with dark eyes which burned malignantly, was glowering at Strimple. As the latter became aware of the presence of Ed Garvin, captain of the varsity basket-ball team, he smiled. Garvin did not return the smile. "What does Bill Bates, that barker of yours, mean by slurring the varsity?" he demanded.

"What did he say?" Strimple asked.

"He made the statement that people came to this game to give the varsity financial support."

"I think they came to see how well the Side Show can play."

"That's right, Tom," admitted Long, captain of the defeated juniors. "Your bunch played fine. We put up a poor game, and deserved to lose."

"But that doesn't answer my question, Strimple," Garvin insisted, his dark face showing plainly the irritation he felt at being forced to hear the praises of Strimple's team sung. "Bates has no right to say anything like that in public."

Bates, a compactly built young man whose pert, saucy ways and quick wit made him a power back of the megaphone, appeared at the mention of his name. The ill nature and machinations of Garvin were no secret in the school, and Bates, who intuitively sided with justice, had long been aching to speak his mind. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"I want you to shut up about the varsity being kept going by this miser-

able team of freaks!" cried Garvin, completely losing his temper.

"It's true," Bates countered. "Got it from Professor French. It's going on the sport page of the *Lantern*. The receipts of the five games which the Side Show team has played are more than twice what has been taken in at varsity games."

"French's figures!" said Garvin contemptuously. "He's been backing this carnival freak show all season and giving the varsity the worst of it!"

"Listen, Garvin!" Tommy Strimple spoke quietly, but firmly. "You can't say things like that of the Side Show. I admit that it was merely started as a joke for the Holiday Carnival. Then——"

"It's still a joke!" snapped Garvin hotly.

"Then it was the hit of the carnival, and the school demanded that it be kept together, and brought in teams to play us. It hasn't always been pleasant for these five chaps, who are human like you and I, to be treated as a joke. But they found that the school liked the team, took the laughter good-naturedly, and went on, creating a good deal of merriment, and making some money."

"That's it!" cried Bates. "The freak team made money, Garvin, and didn't the varsity need it? The bone-headed way in which the Circle Club hogged the basket-ball team last year disgusted the school and discouraged support. You didn't have the money for that fancy outfit for the varsity until the Holiday Carnival came along, with this Side Show as its feature, and made you some cash. All season it's beat the varsity as a drawing card. If you chaps up there at the Circle Club ever would learn——"

He ceased abruptly to dodge a blow which Garvin, his eyes blazing revengefully, had aimed. Before the varsity captain could swing again Strimple had him by the shoulders. The tall youth, who had given the school so much fun with the Side Show team, was not its manager out of lack of athletic ability. He was a varsity football man, and leader of the boxing squad.

Garvin struggled only a moment. He knew he could not afford to resist. Although a tolerable basket-ball player, Garvin was not a match for Strimple. What was worse, he achieved his ends by questionable means, as was proved by the fact that he had virtually purchased the captaincy of the varsity, which had been controlled the year before by the Circle Club, through his tacit agreement to favor Circle Club men.

This monopoly was by no means a usual thing at State University. It was merely one of those political conditions which grow worse until they destroy themselves. Already such forces as the firm power of Tommy Strimple, and the fearless denunciation of Bill Bates, threatened this shortsighted domination of the Circle Club men.

Discreetly avoiding Strimple, Garvin snarled at Bates: "There'll be a time and place to make you swallow that!"

"The truth will stand investigation anywhere, Garvin," said Strimple. "Now run along. The team want to get dressed and out."

Garvin saw Doctor Court approaching, one of the three faculty members who formed the board in charge of student athletics. As he waved his hand to Doctor Court, he repeated to Strimple and the others: "There'll be a time!" as if to intimate that he could call down the wrath of the faculty management at will. As Garvin turned to meet Doctor Court, Strimple smiled. Doctor Court he knew to be a young professor, in student days a leader in the Circle Club, and who had now hopelessly involved himself in the political ring which Strimple hoped was destined for early destruction.

Before the pair were out of earshot the group about Strimple heard Doctor Court ask: "Then you're not going on the Pine Institute trip?"

"No. It's easy. I'll rest up for the Westmoreland game," Garvin answered.

"Rest up!" said Long, of the juniors, who was standing by. "He didn't mention that letter from the eligibility committee, warning him to improve in his studies or drop off the team. I happen to know all about it."

"I really can't envy any one that trip to Pine Institute," said Strimple. "Two hundred miles up in the woods on that dinky railroad in the dead of winter."

"But it's a mid-week game!" said Bill Bates. "They start Wednesday, play that night, and take all day Thursday to come back. Two whole days free!"

"True enough. Still, I think it was bad schedule making. They no sooner get back Thursday night than they start again Saturday for Westmoreland. That's three hundred miles, and the big game of the season. It was wrong to have those two hard trips so close together."

"We should worry!" Bates philosophized. "We're not going."

"No—even if some of us should be. Didn't they play wonderfully to-day, Bill?"

"Sure did! Here comes the Tennessee giant himself. How are you, Lawrence?"

"Fine!" drawled the tall youth, who led the procession back from the shower room, and who looked smilingly down on them from an altitude of six feet six. "Just hitting our stride!"

"I'll tell the universe so," piped a voice beside him, that of Badger, the little man from Montana, who was nearly lost in a huge bath towel. His contrast was just as great against the vast Light, who now demanded, florid-faced: "Tom, why don't you get us a game with the varsity?"

"I believe Garvin's afraid I'm going to ask him. What do you think, Bolo?"

The dark man, his face lighted by his quiet, passive smile, said in his slow, precise English: "I'm sure, old chap, we could vanquish them."

"Vanquish!" cried the enormous Light, shaking like a hogshead of jelly. "Oh, sweet essence of myrrh! Really, old top——"

"Come, Fat," said Strimple. "Bolo may have learned the language in India under real English masters. But when it comes to basket ball——"

"He plays it like George Lincoln Wilson," finished Hager, the slim.

"Are you out at last, Splinter?" chuckled Light. "But you have so much more space to scrub than the rest of us!"

"Come off!" said the thin chap, who fell in with the good-natured joshing which was so general with the team. "I'll scrub you a race, Fat, any time."

As they finished dressing, Strimple said: "If you can spare a moment, I'd like a word with the team."

"Sure—shoot!"

"I'm sorry our season's at an end," Strimple said, his voice strangely throaty, "for I've enjoyed getting up this team and managing it more than anything else in my college career. We've had a wonderful time, and we've beaten everything under the varsity——"

"Give us a chance at them!" interrupted Light.

"It's been fine, and I want to thank you all. We've learned together the lesson of not being afraid to take a few laughs. We may look funny, but we've won our games. And don't you forget, everybody has some peculiarity, even if it doesn't show. The handsomest fellow might—er——"

"Play the ukulele," suggested Light.

"For that, the drinks all around!" invited Strimple. "On to the corner!"

CHAPTER III.

WINTER TAKES A HAND.

EARLY next morning the State University basket-ball squad, consisting of all the first-team men except Garvin and the entire group of substitutes, entrained for Pine Institute. The train had been on its way several hours when Tommy Strimple and Bill Bates, crossing the campus, noted the first of the inevitable fruit of a leaden-gray sky.

"'"It snows!" cries the schoolboy!'" called the waggish Bill. "Oh, man, for Horn's Hill to-night, with the old red bobsled and a nice little jane!"

"Don't count your geese before they're plucked!" warned Strimple. "We've had no snow all winter, and it's too late now."

He was wrong. He, Bates, and half the school went coasting that night in a

great snow which later swept them off home, white ghosts in a whirling near-blizzard. Next morning, it was estimated, a foot of "the beautiful" was down. Nobody could prove it, however, for a fierce wind had swept some places clean, to pile it up elsewhere in drifts four or five feet high.

At the Physics Building, which Strimple and Bates managed to reach not more than fifteen minutes late for class, Professor French was riding his other hobby besides college athletics. He was forgetting his class in a meteorological revel. With last night's weather report, and the readings of his instruments before him, he said: "We just got the edge of the blizzard. North of here it must be twice as bad. Following it, we are getting not less than five days of zero weather."

"Was it worse farther north, professor?" Strimple asked.

"Much. The *News* tells me that all rail and wire traffic to the north is paralyzed."

"Then we can't find out who won the game," Bates complained.

"Worse than that!" cried Strimple. "How will the team get back to go to Westmoreland?"

"Won't the railroad be cleared?" asked Bates.

"Probably not," said Professor French. "It's walled in all the way by big, high trees. Besides the ones which may have blown across the track, the cut in the trees, made by the road, will act as a protected aisle where it is likely the snow will drift far deeper than if the line were unprotected."

"Then the board, I suppose, will have to consider what is to be done about the Westmoreland game at once," Strimple said.

"We'll first make sure our team cannot return," said Professor French. "If the railroad cannot be opened, it is futile to try to bring the team back by auto. The roads are none too good even in summer. The possibility of using aëroplanes might be considered."

Late that day two wires reached Professor French, who was the chairman of the athletic board. One verified all the fears as to conditions at Pine Institute. Relayed over a circuitous route, this wire imparted the news that the team had arrived, had won, and was likely to be stranded for several days.

The other telegram, from Westmoreland College, read:

> Regret stranding of team, but cannot postpone game. Starting long Western trip Sunday. After that all dates filled. Please send your next best team, as we have the biggest audience of year assured.

"Your next best team," reflected Professor French. Then he made several telephone calls which resulted in a conference in his office next morning. Strimple and Garvin were there, as well as Doctor Court and Professor Strom, the other two members of the athletic board.

"The officials of the railroad," said Professor French, "report this morning that they cannot possibly get a train through before Monday. Going by road is impossible. The only aëroplane in this part of the State at present lacks certain vital parts. In view of the answer from Westmoreland College, I do not think that insistence upon a postponement is advisable. Consequently, the most logical course appears to me to select a team to send to play them. What do you think, Garvin?"

"Looks as if we'd better send one. I could play. Then there's Long of the juniors, and we could pick up three or four others."

"Wouldn't an organization which had played together make a better showing? Haven't we some good team——"

"There's the juniors."

"But Strimple's team beat them."

"Strimple's team!" For the first time a most disagreeable possibility introduced itself to Garvin's mind. His lip curled slightly as he said: "Well, professor, you couldn't seriously send that bunch to represent State University."

Strimple's eyes snapped at the way Garvin said "that bunch." Professor French, an impartial man who thought for himself, spoke for him: "Why not? It's played together all season and

beaten every team we have except the varsity."

A long, hot discussion followed, during which Garvin battled with ever-growing anger against the idea of sending the Side Show team. At last the matter was put to a vote of the athletic board. It passed two to one, French and Strom for, Court against.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED TELEGRAM.

SO it came about that Tommy Strimple's basket-ball team, composed of players so oddly assorted that they started the season merely as a monumental joke, rose in this extraordinary crisis to defend the name of the State University in the year's most important game.

"Of course you'll go with us, Garvin," said Strimple to the varsity captain, who was leaving the room with Doctor Court.

"What? Play with that outfit?" Garvin asked scornfully.

"We'd be glad to have you play any position and boss the team."

"Not on your life. I think too much of myself as a player."

"Too much of yourself and not enough of your school!" said Strimple with fire in his blue eyes as he turned away.

Nevertheless, next morning when they took the train, Garvin was on hand. "Glad you came," Strimple said heartily, hand outstretched.

"Somebody official had to be along," growled Garvin, ignoring Strimple's hand.

When they stepped off the train at Westmoreland, the student manager of Westmoreland College shook hands with Strimple and drew him aside. "I want you to read this wire," he said.

The telegram read:

> Team from State coming to play you to-day not sanctioned. Has played here this season as carnival joke. Any contest with it cannot be counted official.
>
> R. B. COURT, Athletic Board.

Strimple's eyes went over to where Garvin had paused to light a cigarette. As they came back he said with a smile: "I know nothing about that message. But I suggest you examine this."

One of Strimple's precautions had been to get a letter written and signed by Professor French, chairman of the athletic board, fully authenticating his team.

"I do not like the telegram you have received," Strimple said, when the Westmoreland man had finished reading his letter. "Please wire the president of the State University, at my expense, report the receipt of this telegram, and ask him for the truth."

The other protested this would not be necessary, in view of Strimple's letter. The latter insisted, however. He was getting tired of the plots of forces which had outlined their stand against him only too plainly. In this wire he saw the last straw of a foolish, shortsighted political campaign, a final bit of wrong-headedness which would cause the powers at State University to rise and cleanse the institution.

Westmoreland's promises of a big crowd were amply fulfilled. The great gymnasium was packed as the home team in its blue and white, and the oddly assorted five which wore the red and black of State, began warming up. The facts regarding the substitution of teams had spread, and more than one Westmoreland rooter cried out in good-humored raillery: "Side Show!" or "Freaks!"

The five State men gave no sign. Still ringing in their ears were the words of Strimple before the fray: "Forget forever that your team was once a joke. You are the State varsity! Every man will earn his letter by this game. There's only one thing we can go back with, boys. That's victory!"

Still before them was the earnest face of Strimple as they plunged into the game of their lives. If Westmoreland had thought it was matched against a team that was a joke, the smile was knocked off its face forthwith. Swiftly, furiously, the men of State played, varied in their sizes, but uniform in their actions. Hard, fast, evenly the

first half was waged, one of those periods which end long before the spectator wishes.

Eighteen to fourteen, favor of Westmoreland, was the score.

Ten minutes of rest. Then Strimple bent over them again and said: "Remember, fellows, varsity caliber. Play them off their feet, and keep them there. Win for old State to-day!"

The five went in with a vim which produced well-nigh perfect play. Their opponents, by no means poor players, were now awakened. Whirlwind guarding, futile attempts at goals, marked the play as the minutes wore on.

The period was half played when Lawrence, the gigantic State center, shot two goals by enormous leaps. After the second goal the Westmoreland captain protested: "That man doesn't throw goals upward. He's so tall he lays them right down in the basket!"

"Sorry," said the referee, "but there's no rule limiting a player's height, or keeping him from throwing them in from the ceiling if he can jump that high."

The bulky Light may have wanted to share Lawrence's distinction. At any rate he jumped very high—for him—and came down not without results. There was a sound of breaking wood. Light's great weight had been concentrated on one foot and it struck a weak board and went through. Luckily there was another flooring below, and nothing more serious happened than a delay for repairs.

"Never saw such freaks!" panted the Westmoreland captain, who was playing the diminutive Badger. As he and the little man mixed it over the ball he called to the referee again: "Did you see that? How can——"

"I can't keep him from dodging between your legs, old man," reminded the official, concealing his amusement. Another goal sailed through for State. Westmoreland, now two points behind, could see little humor in these incidents. It only began to hope when tragedy stalked beneath the State goal. Badly tangled up with two Westmoreland players, Hager, the thin lad, was hurled to the floor. Twice he tried to stand. Then, his white face revealing his pain, he dropped with a dislocated knee.

CHAPTER V.

HIS INSPIRING VOICE.

A GLANCE showed Strimple that Hager was out of the game for the day. While the worried State manager saw that Hager was given every attention, he had a Westmoreland man, with a megaphone, page Garvin.

"He doesn't answer. Nobody knows where he is," reported the man a moment later. The four remaining players crowded around Strimple.

"What are we going to do, Tom?" panted Light. "Got 'em by two, and less than five minutes to go. What a shame to lose now!"

"We won't lose," said Strimple steadily. "Garvin seems to have deserted us. There's still one other State player here, however."

"Who?"

"Tom Strimpo, the goal eater. I eat them alive!"

What the State men suffered in loss of teamwork through the substitution they made up in inspiration. Now the quiet voice of Strimple, with all its reserve power and reliance, was able to speak to them. All his brain power and judgment was at the disposal of the State team. Another element intervened unfortunately. Strimple was ready to put his fair skill and knowledge of basket ball to a supreme test. His body did not, however, respond to his mind.

Toward him shot the ball—and passed through his fingers on to a Westmoreland player. Two sharp, quick passes, the direct result of his error, and Westmoreland had scored. Hot in the irritation of his failure, Strimple reflected that he had hardly had his fingers on a basket ball for weeks. Here he was putting himself against men in the pink of condition, and who devoted hours each day to practice.

He should at least have asked a moment to get the feel of the ball. It was too late now. He determined it should

not happen again. While the applause of Westmorelanders surged above like a storm, he braced himself, for he knew this break would center their attack upon him.

One minute to go. Score tied!

Strimple's whole mind was upon holding the ball, and, passing it with precision, he was forward in the fight this time. Twice, three times he led the skirmish, throwing a fresh strength into the fray which brushed aside the growing fatigue of the nearly spent foe. He could do anything—for a moment! Like a thunderbolt he tore the ball away, passed, covered his man. Then by a marvel of resistless play he brought the ball the length of the floor.

Thrice he stopped his dribble to find a teammate to whom he could pass. All were covered by frenzied opponents. At last, just under the goal, Bolo hissed.

Strimple shot the ball underhand. Back it came as a Westmorelander leaped the dark man. In Strimple's hand the ball reposed. Then, escaping by an inch the flaillike hands of a man just ahead, Tommy Strimple saved the day and wrote the names of his Side Show team in undying glory. The goal was perfect. Before play could start again the timer's whistle blew.

"You may want to read this, Mr. Strimple," said the Westmoreland student manager as the players poured from the floor.

It was a wire signed by the secretary to the president of State University. It read:

Team representing State official as per letter given Strimple. Court denies knowledge of wire. Student who filed it says Garvin, varsity manager, responsible. Matter to be investigated. Thanks for your wire.

"What on earth could Garvin have expected to gain by such a move?" asked Bill Bates, who had come along to turn his old-time barking into rooting.

"He may have thought to force a delay until the varsity got back," said Strimple. "Send him to me if you see him. I want to advise him to come clean with prexy, cut out this foolish politics, and maybe he can still save his scalp. Now let's give a cheer for the old Side Show!"

"Side Show, indeed!" snorted the huge Light. "This outfit is Tommy Strimple's five-ring monstrous, mammoth circus!"

"Right!" said the manager, with a sly look at the ponderous guard. "Elephant and all!"

Strange Wedding Carriages

BRIDAL parties have frequently selected strange conveyances, one of the latest chosen by a bridegroom being a steam plow. A wedding party appeared in a village in Kent, England, in a traction engine, followed by numerous trucks, all gayly decorated with flags, flowers, and evergreens.

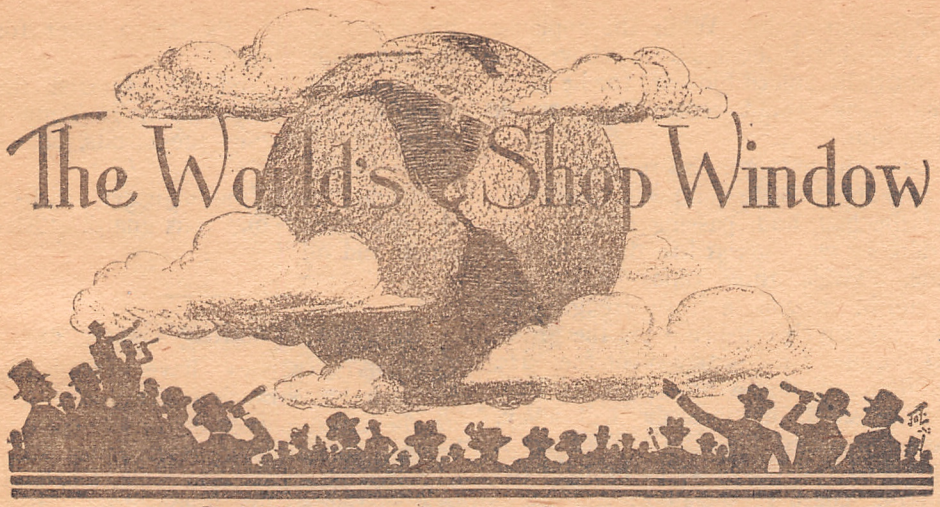
Another English bridal party drove up to St. Mark's Church in Birmingham in mourning coaches, the horses being adorned with white rosettes, while a decorated street car was used in Wolverhampton for another wedding, the driver and conductor wearing white gloves and floral buttonholes. Fog signals were exploded along the car line to announce the approach to the church.

To an Austrian couple, however, belongs the credit for what is perhaps the most novel wedding procession. The merry party slid down a steep hill to the church in seven toboggans decorated with pine branches and flowers.

Baseball's Hall of Fame

LAST season Dominick Torpe, of the George Washington High School, New York City, pitched his way into baseball's Hall of Fame in a game against Evander Childs High School at Dyckman Oval, when he shut out his opponents without allowing a hit or a run, while his teammates accumulated six runs. It was the sixth shut-out victory of the season for the juvenile moundsman.

A no-hit, no-run game is the ambition of every pitcher in the country, but it is one very rarely realized, even in the big leagues.



The World's Shop Window

By Henry Wilton Thomas

Illustrations by Jo Lemon

The New Serenade

IF you mourn the passing of the romantic serenade, when the lovesick youth sang beneath the window of his lady fair, there is consolation for you in Jersey City. There you may find its twentieth-century successor if you take a turn about the residence streets these crisp November evenings. There isn't any romance about it, however. The one serenaded finds it a stern, prosaic reality. The serenaders are tenants protesting against a raise of rents, and the one to whom their voices are lifted is the landlord accused of gouging.

The gentleman who has raised or threatened to raise somebody's rent can never be sure that he will not be favored with a serenade. No one can tell where this brand of Jersey lightning is going to strike. It is a serenade not expressed with thrumming guitars and voices raised in sweet nocturnes. You might call it a meeting of tenants held under the casement of some landlord; their protests fill the air and beat against the windowpanes behind which the rent-boosting gentleman is supposed to be ensconced.

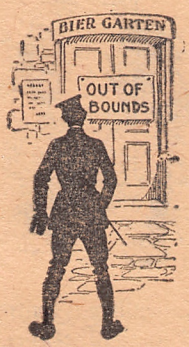
Sometimes he isn't there; he gets word of the projected serenade, puts on his hat and goes to his club or some other place beyond the sound of those protesting voices. It has occurred that the landlord's wife has appeared at a window defiantly, and serenaded back at the speakers. But the demonstrations go on, and their leaders hold that they have put a curb on the rent-raising house owners.

Just Occupying

ONE of the happiest chaps in Cologne, Germany, is the British Tommy. There he has a job to his liking. Just "occupying" the Rhine region is what he calls the right sort of employment for a gentleman and a soldier. The beer is good, though not back to its full prewar strength; the "eats" are abundant and cheap, and the girls at Cologne look so good to him that not infrequently he leads one to

the altar. After that you are quite likely to see him going across Dom Platz with his spouse and one or two wee Anglo-Germans in the party.

The keepers of drinking places in Cologne are fond of Tommy. Most of the Ten Commandments are still recognized there, but it is still a place where a man can raise a thirst. Tommy leads these saloon keepers into temptation, they say. The law forbids the sale of strong waters to men in uniform.



Tommy hangs out his tongue, and the *verboten* of the British Commission of Control is forgotten for the moment. Sometimes this oversight reaches headquarters; then straightaway a sergeant appears at the saloon, orders everybody off the premises, including the proprietor, locks the door, and posts on it a placard reading, "Out of Bounds."

Tourists see these notices about town and wonder what they mean. But for Tommy it is merely one of the interesting events of the job of occupying the Rhine region. In the evening he can go to his own music hall, run by Tommies. There he can see a "turn" straight from Mile End Road and hear "the 'orn of the 'unter is 'eard on the 'ill" sung as it should be, though German musicians accompany the singer.

Boomerang Publicity

IT is one thing for a film actor to use his automatic lavishly on cattle rustlers and rascals of various types, to finish his undesirable neighbors wherever he may find them on the screen, but quite another thing for him to kill people in real life. That is the contention of the owners of motion-picture theaters all over America. It did not take them long to decide that all films showing a certain notorious fat comedian must be relegated to the realm of the unseen.

No action by the State boards of motion-picture censors was necessary. The exhibitors showed what a very effectual board of censors they can be when so disposed. When they decide that a picture should not be exhibited it is not seen by their patrons.

Nobody appreciates advertising value more than your film producer and exhibitor, but he is not friendly to the boomerang type of publicity. He perceived in the accused comedian's trouble a bit of realism that might send some coin rolling into the box office, but not enough to make up for what would roll in the opposite direction. So he decided that the moral sense of the public would be shocked to a disastrous point by an exhibition of pictures in which the portly actor appeared. The public, he knew, stands for much from the picture-theater managers, but that would be too great a strain on its tolerance.

A sensational elopement by film stars, a good, sound divorce proceeding, followed by a speeded-up wedding, all these are sane and sober and safe stuff for publicity. The stars who do such stunts do not make the coin roll in the wrong direction. Those things are just as right in real life as they are on the screen. Film stars in their courses may step lively, but never invite any boomerang publicity. That makes the exhibitor tired.

Prohibition Abroad

THERE is plenty of consolation in Europe for the touring American who was not happy at home wetting his

whistle with ginger pop, near beer, and buttermilk. Far from the domain of prohibition, as he thinks, the Old World looks good to him, sometimes rosy. But it is not long before he finds that there is prohibition on the Continent of Europe.

He orders coffee; the waiter, with a perfectly straight face, says, *"Parfaitement, monsieur,"* goes off to the culinary regions, returns, and lays before the American a cup containing a dark, liquid mystery. The American tastes it, a look of disappointment comes over his face, then indignation; but doubt assails him before he starts to assail the waiter for trying to palm off such a decoction for coffee.

His doubt springs from a probable mistake he has made in language; perhaps the waiter did not understand. But this turns out to be a hopeless possibility. "No," says the waiter; "I understood you perfectly. Monsieur ordered coffee, and coffee I have served." With this assurance, the victim drinks the liquid or a small part of it.

In several countries it is the same—in France, Belgium, Germany, Italy. The coffee bears not the faintest resemblance to the fragrant beverage that the American is accustomed to. It might be fine for tinware or doorknob polishing, but certainly is not good for drinking purposes. Suddenly it dawns upon the American that he is still up against prohibition. Whatever the genesis of it may be, there prevails an influence, amounting to a law, which prohibits the making and serving of real coffee on the Continent of Europe. The time comes when the American turns with longing to the land of prohibition whence he came. It may be good-by to the cup that befuddles, but there awaits him at home, at least, a good cup of coffee.

The Passing of Classes

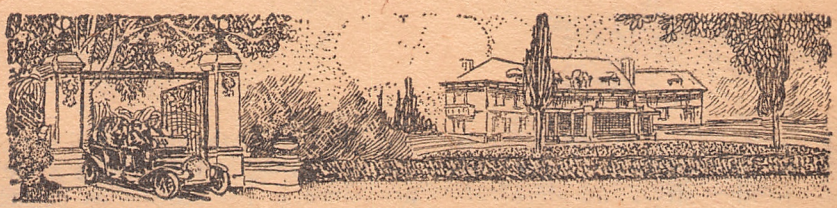
THE marked class distinctions met with in Europe have always hurt the democratic feeling of the touring American. Railroad trains there usually have supplied the first striking example. As soon as the American landed and went to take a train he found a long string of rather small cars labeled respectively first, second, and third class. With the first class only, as a rule, had he any concern. It has been said by Europeans that only Americans and fools travel first class; but that saying has not warrant enough to-day for even such a cheap joke. Now everybody may travel first class; not because the railroad management has abolished the distinctions, but because the traveling public itself has done so. Now the American can see his fellow travelers on European railroads throwing off class consciousness, and all journeying together, just as people do in his own country.

First, second, and third-class tickets are still sold, and the cars are labeled as of yore, but those old formalities have not been taken seriously since the war began its transforming processes in society. In Germany, Fritz and his family, with third-class tickets, are quite likely to park themselves in a first-class car all around the American who has paid a first-class fare. And the American's democratic sensibilities are seldom wounded by seeing Fritz and his party driven out to the class their tickets call for. The conductor may utter a perfunctory growl when he looks at their tickets, but Fritz replies that there is no room in third

class, and there the incident is pretty sure to be closed.

It is the same in France, Belgium, and Italy. There is a perfect carnival of democratic equality in the trains. The old habit of the people in buying tickets of different classes remains; but their old habit of taking cars that conform to their tickets has almost passed away. The crowded condition of trains everywhere has much to do with it all. That furnishes an excuse to the holder of a third-class ticket for placing himself in first or second. As many passengers usually are found standing in the corridors as are seated. To go from one end of the car to another is an exceedingly difficult matter by reason of the passengers and their baggage that block the corridor. If the conductor can get through and collect the tickets he is doing well, without fussing about the class of the tickets that he collects.

Thus it occurs that the American traveling on European railroads to-day does not have to endure exclusiveness because he goes first class; all around him may be peasants and their cooing babies. No longer does he find his democratic feelings rent by the class distinctions that prevailed before the war began setting so many new styles.



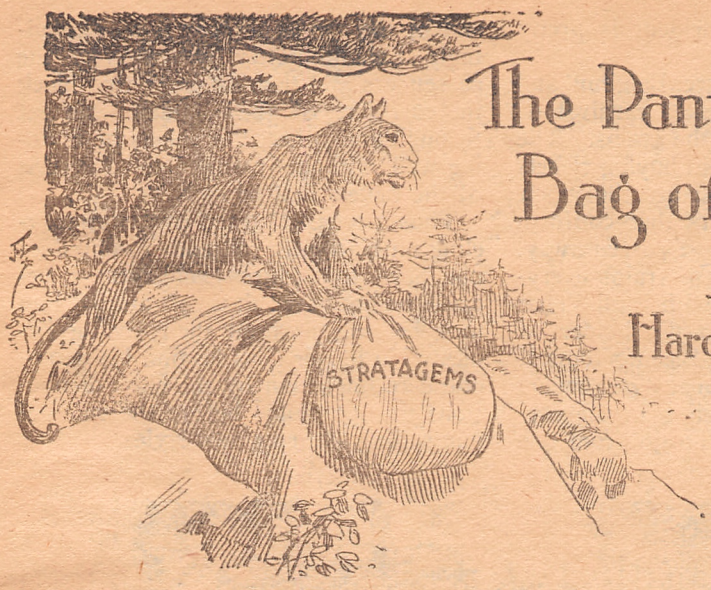
HOUSE AND HOME

By Viola St. Ledger

MAN takes a pile of lumber
And a lot of cement blocks,
With plaster, window glass, and nails
And solid doors with locks,
And builds a house that rises up
As trim as one may see
Until it stands in graceful lines
Of perfect symmetry.

But when the thing is finished,
All painted fresh and bright;
Each part well fitted into place,
And should be right as right,
It's just a simple house—no more—
And not a home at all;
No face smiles welcome from the door,
No laugh rings through the hall.

For after man has done his best
The truth comes to the front—
You must admit that I am right—
Home-making is a stunt.
For man can build a perfect house,
But listen, you who roam,
It takes a woman every time
To make that house a home!



The Panther's Bag of Tricks

By Harold de Polo

EMERGING from his sheltered and inaccessible cave, the panther stood and glared angrily out at the white world that lay stretched before him. It looked, in the gray dawn, even colder and more cruel than it actually was. The winter was a bitter one, and it had been rendered more so by a summer of drought and an autumn during which the humans had seemed particularly active with those glinting sticks that boomed red death at a distance.

Added to all this, the big cat had badly wrenched his left shoulder, some six weeks back, and it was still very painful. The cold, too, made the pain more acute, and now it was a full thirty below zero. It is no great wonder that the outlook did not please him.

However, there is one immutable law in the wild—if life is to be sustained, food must be procured. It is a fact that cannot be evaded, or cannot be put off. The panther, however, did not have to be told this. He was very old and very wise in the ways of the woods, the scars on his powerful buff form bearing mute testimony as to the numerous battles in which he had taken part.

Indeed, his mere presence in the forest, now, proved that he must be a master. None but the fittest had survived. He knew this, and there was pride and arrogance in his bearing as he started dexterously to make the steep descent from his lair.

A hundred yards or so below, where the ground was more even, he found it easier; also, his manner underwent a change. He became simply the hunter. He forgot his shoulder, his annoyance, the cold; he concentrated his every nerve and muscle and brain cell on the task before him; he stalked through those white and silent woods like some grim shadow, with eye and ear and nose all keyed up to what might be termed concert pitch.

Although he was traveling with a definite objective in view, he did not believe in wasting any chance, no matter how slim, of a killing en route. Craftily, he had decided upon a spring, trickling down from a towering ledge, that never completely froze in any weather. There, he was certain, he would find some sort of quarry if any were to be had at all.

II.

ALTHOUGH the movements of the panther had seemed perfect throughout the trip, they now became, when he was perhaps a hundred feet

off from the spring, so almost mechanically smooth that an observer would have instinctively gasped his admiration. But suddenly, as he cautiously raised his head from behind a huge old fallen log, all his exquisite composure went to pieces. He reared, the claws of his forepaws sinking viciously into the rotten trunk, and drew back his lips and emitted a hissing snarl.

One cannot exactly blame him. In full sight, at the water hole, a pair of small yet fierce black lynxes were in evidence. That, however, was not the chief trouble. Between them, they were gluttonously devouring the last tiny shreds of what had formerly been a very giant of a jack rabbit. The kill had been made only a minute or two previous, and once more the two agile felines had outwitted the king of the region.

For more than six weeks, now, this brazen pair had proved to be the panther's Nemesis. They had come down from the more rugged and wilder range of mountains some score of miles to the north, coolly taking up their abode in the region that he had for years ruled with despotic and iron sway. They were not the first that had tried, but they were the first that had managed to remain for so long a period. All others, if they had not dared meet him and thereby pay the supreme penalty, had found it wise ignominiously to retreat and leave him the freedom of his hunting grounds.

At first, the lynxes' victory had seemed incredible, but at last he had found this well-nigh impossible thing to be true. Some six weeks or so back—before the injury to his shoulder, to be precise—the situation would almost have gladdened the old panther. Then he would have relentlessly trailed them, worn them down to a bundle of jumpy nerves, and finished them with one of his furious and incomparable charges. This, now, was beyond the question, and he was shrewd enough to be aware of it. The pain and stiffness in his shoulder, alas, were just serious enough to detract that infinitesimal amount from his speed and endurance that he would need in the encounter.

Eye to eye, for a long, nerve-tautening five minutes or more, the big cat and the intruding two stood glaring. The former made the first move, and it sadly wrenched his pride to do so. Simulating complete lack of interest in his opponents, he got down from the log, slowly yawned and stretched, and sauntered nonchalantly off to the right.

It took a mighty effort to control his fury, for it was exactly the second time in his life that he had ever fled from a foe; and on the other occasion, incidentally, it had been from this same pair.

One of the main reasons for the panther's success in the dangerous life of the wild was his ability to concentrate on one thing, and on one thing only. He wanted food, at the present moment, and on this he settled his mind. So again he became the hunter.

First the crafty old panther visited the swamp in the lowlands, where a muskrat occasionally paid toll to his prowess; after that, he cut across to the shallows of the stream, where trout were sometimes procured even during this bitter weather; at last he took up the tedious task of waiting in a rabbit runway; but, at all these places, it was conclusively proved that the gods of the wild, for some reason, were decidedly against him this morning when it came to his quest of sustenance. Indeed, this seemed so true—and the stiffness of his shoulder became so acute—that he set his head in the direction of his den and wisely made up his mind to wait until the evening.

As he loped steadily along at an even and tireless gait, headed for home, he heard a scratching on the snow behind him. With a spin so rapid that it actually blurred his movements, he had turned. There he saw, some fifty yards back, the pair of lynxes calmly gazing at him. He knew that they had shown themselves merely to annoy him, and that they would not dream of attacking; likewise, he knew that *they* knew that *he* would not start hostilities.

For an instant, the indignity of his position rendered him nearly insane, and he found himself starting to charge.

Almost immediately, though, he regained his control, and majestically turned his back and continued on his way. Nevertheless, he did not go far. The gods of luck took this moment to play one of their pranks, and he suddenly felt the ground crumble beneath his feet and found himself falling, falling.

III.

FOR one of those instantaneous flashes that seem hours long, the panther remembered nothing but a mad scrambling and clawing as he endeavored to gain a foothold in his descent. Then, like the game and crafty veteran that he was, things became clear to him. He learned that he was lying at the bottom of what might be called a miniature gully, possibly a dozen feet in depth and maybe half that in width.

Immediately he placed it in his mind as a spot he had always avoided during the snowy season, and angrily blamed the lynx pair for having caused him to forget it. The fall had not been serious, but it had shaken his bad shoulder and made the pain worse. Scowlingly he looked about for an exit.

At one end, the rocks were laid out so that escape from the hole was possible, though far from simple, especially with his wounded limb. But, as he placed his right paw gingerly on a large bowlder, he drew it hastily away as if the icy stone had seared him to the flesh. Indeed, he even uttered a sharp and shrill cry—a cry that sounded as if he were undergoing agony.

His actions, after that, became extremely odd; in fact, they bordered suspiciously close upon a sudden streak of insanity. He rolled over and over; he made pitifully clumsy efforts to climb up the steep banks; and, through it all, he kept up a weird series of harrowing shrieks that would have made a listener believe he was going through tortures.

Occasionally he would rest from his exertions, and then he would lie on the earth and gaspingly breathe. Again, when he had apparently somewhat regained his wind, he would once more go through the same maddened antics. Through it all, however, a scrupulously close observer would have been able to notice that not once did he put any strain on his left shoulder, that not once did he allow it to come in contact with any hard object. For half an hour he continued these tactics, and at last he was rewarded. As he stretched out for one of his resting spells, his ever-watchful eyes detected a pair of yellowish orbs peering furtively at him from the protection of a bush above.

IV.

THE wily panther did not in the slightest way betray his knowledge of the watcher. He behaved as he had throughout. He remained inactive for about the same period of time as he had on the previous occasions, and again gave the same futile exhibition of trying to escape from what seemed his prison.

There was, perhaps, even more noise made, even more awkward leaps, and this time, when he desisted, he sank to the ground with a dull groan as his left foreleg caved in under him. To all appearances, his limb was practically useless. Once more he was paid for his work—and paid well, as he considered it. Now, as he allowed his body to recline, he caught a glimpse of two pairs of eyes gazing down at him.

Getting to his feet, the panther seemed to be trying to learn how much his injured leg would bear. After several efforts it looked as if the member was hopelessly maimed, at least for any immediate use. Nevertheless, he cautiously made his way, on three feet, to the rocky ascent that was his only method of egress. Here, working with painstaking care, he managed to climb up a foot, two, three—only suddenly to crash back, as he slipped on the icy snow, with a cry of terror issuing from his jaws.

And this time, as he sank, his left foreleg lay limp. What is more, that pair of cruel-eyed cats, up above, were no longer in hiding. Boldly they had stepped to the brink of the little gully and were joyously gazing at him—gaz-

ing at him, in fact, with a joy that verged on madness.

Then it was that he showed his ability. With a leap, he got to his feet, only to crumple down with an agonized shriek as his injured leg seemed to give way under him. Immediately, but this time with more care, he regained his footing. He cringed, ever so slightly, against the wall farthest from the one over which his enemies were peering.

Then at last, hissing, he backed his way over to the stony ascent that was the only way. Here, his eyes constantly on that pair above, he tried to climb—and here, again, he went tumbling down after he had progressed no more than a scant yard.

The female lynx licked her jowls, and her mate yawned, widely and audibly. It was an expressive yawn, for it seemed to anticipate the possible fulfillment of a long and much-desired wish. So, at least, the panther judged, and the shrewd and scarred old battler made few errors of judgment. He drew back, his eyes wide and blazing, his jaws extended, and sent forth a cry more harrowing than any of his former ones. It was, indeed, the cry of a thing gone insane with rage.

Following it, the old panther launched his muscular body at the steep wall at the top of which his antagonists stood. Of course it was useless, for none of his tribe could have made it, yet time and time again he repeated the wild leap. At last he gave it up, and, when he did, he stretched inertly out like a spent and beaten and battered creature.

A generous five minutes passed, and on this occasion it was one of the lynxes that made the first move. The female, with calm and deliberate steps, sauntered over to the rocky end that was the only possible entrance or exit. Here, for maybe a minute, she paused, gloatingly eying the imprisoned king. Then, very daintily, very coyly, somewhat like a bather feeling the temperature of the water, she placed a paw forward as if she would essay the descent. And the water, so to speak, seemed to please her immensely.

With a howl, half fear, half rage, the big cat got up, and made a blind and frantic leap straight at her. She did not even flinch; indeed, as she saw him fall back, and even refrain from making another effort, she nonchalantly placed her other foot on a stone still farther down. What is more, her mate now joined her, standing just behind her, and the two of them stood and viewed what they fully deemed was their victim.

V.

THE panther tried to rise, but it was no more than a pathetic effort. He got to his hind feet, yet seemed unable to bear any weight even on his uninjured right forepaw. With a groan, he sank down, a convulsive tremor going through his body. He looked, if any creature ever did, like one that at last was forced to admit complete defeat. The admission showed chiefly in his eyes; they spoke the proverbial volume. In them, his enemies could read utter hopelessness, utter despair, utter acceptance of doom that had finally come and that could not be combated.

In fact, the panther had given up all efforts to rise, all efforts even to snarl his defiance, and the very lifting of his lips but accentuated his weakened condition. He was simply the picture of one that had lain down—of one that expected death and actually would be grateful when it came.

The lynxes, however, were in no particular hurry. Now that they thought their prey theirs for the asking, they concluded that they might just as well get as much amusement out of the situation as possible. The well-known feline instinct of playing with the mouse came into evidence. Slowly, gleefully, they stalked about the prison of the fallen monarch.

There was that in their air, in their sly grin, in their gloating eyes, that was calculated to drive their victim to the verge of madness. In this, apparently, they failed. He was, it seemed, already too far gone to let anything else matter. He simply lay there, on his side, with glazed eyes and heaving body.

Only twice, during their grim walking around the lips of the small gully, did he so much as raise his head and endeavor to snarl; and, when he did, the defiance was so feeble, so completely without anything behind it, that the thing would have been ludicrous had it not been so pitiful.

However, the grim pair from farther north were eventually satiated with inflicting their tortures. This fact, however, would not have been noticeable to any but an extremely close observer. A sudden look passed between them, a low growl might have been heard, their bodies tensed oddly.

Then, in the midst of their prowling, when the female was at the easier end and her mate at the other, they made their spring. Emitting ghastly cries that showed their lust for the anticipated gorging, they pulled back their sleek bodies, unloosed them like steel coils, and sailed cleanly and savagely through the air straight for the form of the recumbent panther.

It was, to give the lynxes credit, a superb attack—an attack so fierce, so lightninglike, that one would have thought even an animal in excellent condition himself would have been unable to withstand it; the big cat's doom seemed near.

At their spring, at the exact instant when the two lynxes left the snow, a movement was barely discernible that showed the panther pulling back on his haunches and gathering in his sinewy muscles. After that, the action became so rapid that it is difficult to narrate. Suffice it to say that here, in the biggest crisis of his life, the veteran proved beyond the vestige of a doubt the stuff of which he was made. He tackled first the hardest task—the female. With a silent opening of his jaws, he launched his perfect body out to meet her; in mid-air his powerful fangs closed about her neck and sank in. For that veriest fraction of a second, there was an indistinguishable mass of tossing fur. Then it parted. When it did, the smaller cat lay on the ground, her jugular severed. The panther's plan to attack the lynxes separately had been successful.

VI.

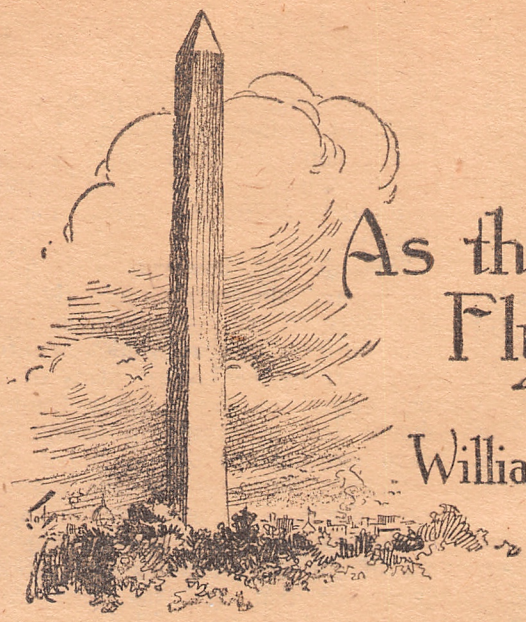
THE aspect of the panther changed. His motions, now, became almost painfully slow. The rôles were reversed, and it was he, at present, that was the teaser of the mouse.

The male lynx knew it—knew that in some uncanny and incomprehensible manner he had been tricked. A shudder went through him, and he cringed back, whining, as the cat that had such a short time ago seemed his victim triumphantly gloated over him. It was all that the big cat did, merely stand there.

Panic overcame the smaller animal, and his eyes went mad. This way and that—this way and that—he looked for some aperture of escape. None came to view, and then for the first time the panther took just one step forward. It was too much, and the nerves of the visitor from farther north went to pieces.

With an insane shriek, he blindly hurled himself at his antagonist—but this time the thing was over in a split second. A buff form swerved to the side, cut through the air, crunched teeth into that other throat—and the male, lifeless, was tossed aside across the form of his mate.

With a gesture that was truly regal, the huge old battler raised his head and looked at the sky above. There was pride in his eye, there was joy in it, there was contentment in it. For the past six weeks and more, he had literally been tottering on his throne, and not much more than an hour ago it had seemed on the point of being taken from him forever. But out of calamity, out of a very grave danger, he had managed to snatch victory—and a victory that would be lasting. Once more he could rule without hindrance, once more his vast hunting grounds would be his very own. And, without so much as another single glance at his vanquished adversaries, he dexterously made his way up the rocky incline and pointed his nose for home.



As the Sparks Fly Upward

By William Wallace Cook

ON the first evening of his three-day stay in London, Robert Stanley, a young American, was handed a card in the street by a veiled young woman, on which were a few lines asking him to follow a man who was trailing her. As a result of this, Stanley was enabled to rescue the girl's hand bag, containing a large sum of money, which the man had snatched from her. The two parted without any exchange of names.

Stanley was staying at Chislett's rooms. Chislett, an American friend, had been called out of town on business, leaving his servant, Jowler, to look after Stanley.

On the afternoon of the third day, Jowler announced Lord Durling, and when the visitor had entered, Stanley recognized his war-time pal, Orth Ponselby, who had saved his life at the Marne. By the death of his father and elder brother, Orth had become the Earl of Durling.

Durling confided to Stanley that a letter had turned up which blackened his elder brother's memory. He appeared to have been guilty of betraying his country in war time. A man named Goswell Gryce offered to sell the letter for five thousand pounds to Lady Barbara, Durling's sister, but refused to allow Durling to act as her agent in the matter. At that moment Chislett's rooms were being watched by a spy of Gryce's, who was on Durling's trail to see that he was not the one to keep an appointment Gryce had made for that evening in Soho.

Being of the same size and build, Durling and Stanley changed clothes, the latter to drive away in Durling's car to Durling's London house, the former, disguised as the American, to endeavor to meet Gryce and obtain the letter.

Arrived at MacKellar House, Stanley met Lady Barbara and explained the situation. After dining together, the girl observed, when a flash of lightning illumined the room across the lobby, that a man in a bowler hat was sheltering in the embrasure of the window. Believing him to be the spy watching, Stanley slipped into the next room, hoping to open the casement window suddenly and capture the man.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIMBLE SPY.

FROM a dark corner of the morning room, a vivid flash from without enabled Stanley to see the man on the sill take a look over his shoulder at the girl in the library.

"He's something of a fool at that," thought Stanley. "He might know that if he can see the girl, from there, the lightning gives her a chance to see him. I'll have to pull this off before that dawns on his mind."

He crept toward the long window on hands and knees; and there, well below it, he reached up to grope for the fastenings. On finding them he turned them slowly and carefully; then stood up at his full height, pulled the two leaves of the window inward, caught the man by the shoulders and tumbled him to the floor.

The sound of the fall brought the girl. She touched a switch, and the morning room was flooded with light.

The spy was not giving up easily. Marshaling all his strength, and apparently not dazed in the least by surprise at his capture, the fellow fought like a fiend. His clothes were wet and slippery, and Stanley found him something of a handful.

As they struggled, Stanley made the surprising discovery that the man was not the same one who had watched Chislett's rooms in Adelphi Terrace. He wore a similar bowler hat, but his face was swarthy and beaklike, and he was of stout build. He was the person, in short, whom Stanley had encountered in Old Bond Street.

A sensation akin to dismay gripped Stanley. Could it be that two men were watching MacKellar House? If so, by capturing one of them he had probably alarmed the other. And what would that mean to Lord Durling, masquerading as Bob Stanley in Fetter Lane? But there was no use theorizing about possible disasters to his lordship. Stanley had gone so far in the present matter that he must see it through.

"My word!" exclaimed Lady Barbara, cool and self-possessed as she watched the struggle. "It is the man who made that try for my five thousand pounds! This is amazing—no end! Don't put yourself out too much, Mr. Stanley. Release the fellow. I hold the whip hand. That violent exercise is uncalled for."

She had found an automatic pistol somewhere and, with a steadiness marvelous to behold, was training the point upon the furiously struggling prisoner. Stanley freed himself and leaped to his feet. The stout man likewise heaved himself to an erect posture. His defiance took on a milder form as his shifty eyes met the threatening muzzle.

"What y'u tryin' to put over?" he demanded. "I'm tryin' to keep out o' the wet, and first thing I know I'm grabbed from behind and overended into this place. Nice way to hand it to a peaceful guy, jest waitin' for this shower to pass!"

Lady Barbara smiled in a tolerant way. "I fancy," she remarked, "that you are still on the track of my five thousand pounds. You followed me night before last, you know. Do you think I don't remember you? You are a suspicious person, a would-be thief, and should be turned over to the authorities.

"We do not, however, wish to be too severe," she went on adroitly. "If you were to tell us something about your business in that window, confess your part in the lawless plans of the man Gryce, and be perfectly frank, I should feel warranted in letting you leave here unhindered. Would it——"

Jenkyns fluttered into the morning room, drawn to the scene by the sounds of the brief struggle. His eyesight was not of the best—Stanley had already discovered that—and he drew close, stared, and his face filled with consternation. "My lady!" he exclaimed, horrified.

"You may go, Jenkyns," said the girl crisply.

"Shall—shall I summon a constable, my lady?"

"Certainly not," she told him decisively. "If we need a constable later I will let you know."

He left the room apparently against his better judgment, shaking his head in disapproval as he went. The girl had not shifted her gaze from the prisoner, nor the point of the automatic.

"Would it be well, Mr. Stanley," she asked, "to barter this man's freedom for such information as he may have?"

"That depends on the quality of his information," Stanley said. "What do you call yourself?" he demanded, turning on the prisoner.

"Bill Whitley," was the response.

"What do you know about Goswell Gryce?"

"He's a new one on me; never heard o' him."

Bill Whitley's manner was greatly subdued, but it was merely a foil for the maneuver he had in his scheming mind. The girl was deceived. Stanley, however, was not, and he began moving forward. Before he could come close

to the man, the latter hurled himself backward through the open window.

The automatic barked wildly. "I'm sure I hit him!" cried the girl. "He'll not make off very fast, Mr. Stanley!"

The young man was already plunging through the window in pursuit. The farcical outcome of the affair had aroused his temper. But the girl was wrong, for her bullet had not hit the fellow. He laughed huskily and jeeringly as he gathered his powers and rushed into the street.

The storm had lulled, and the thunder now rumbled at a great distance. Stanley, fearful that the escape might prove more disastrous to Lord Durling and his plans than the capture had done, was grimly determined to overhaul Bill Whitley.

As luck, or ill luck, would have it, Detective Sergeant Briggs of the Criminal Investigation Department, was abroad in the neighborhood at that hour. Stanley, as he sped toward the square in hot pursuit of Bill Whitley, was seized suddenly by this official.

"Where away so fast, my man?" rapped out the detective sergeant. "Steady it is now, or I'll be rough with you!"

Stanley was blocked. In the flicker of a street lamp he looked around into the face of the man in the dripping waterproof whose hand had closed on his arm with a viselike grip. Hatless and with his clothes in some disorder, Stanley realized that he must be an object of suspicion as he raced through the chill dampness of that London street.

"If you're an officer," he said breathlessly, "help me catch that fellow——"

"Lord Durling!" exclaimed the detective sergeant. "Why, your lordship, we know each other very well. What is wrong?"

"That rascal there—he's a thief!"

Stanley pointed toward the dark form, swiftly receding into the shadow of the trees.

"Ha!" exclaimed the detective sergeant. "Well, I'll look to him."

He released his hold on Stanley and sprang away toward the square, his waterproof slapping soggily against his swiftly moving legs as he ran.

"Fooled him, too!" muttered Stanley. "But I doubt if I'd stand a closer inspection. My cue is to finish my part in the chase right here." He turned back toward the house. "Tough run of luck!" he growled. "I'm fixing Orth in fine shape with the police! What's this flash in the pan going to mean to him, over there in Fetter Lane?"

He was discontented and filled with self-reproach as he regained the house and was admitted at the front entrance by Lady Barbara herself.

"I've made a neat bungle of things!" he remarked sadly, as he dropped into a chair in the library.

"In what way, Mr. Stanley?" asked the girl. "If there has been a bungle, as you call it, it seems to me that I'm the one mostly responsible. I should have let you keep hands on that slippery rogue; but I thought, with the pistol, he would not dare try any tricks. Don't blame yourself, please!"

She seemed genuinely distressed over the generous way in which he was shouldering responsibilities.

"Oh, I don't mean that, Lady Barbara!" Stanley explained. "You were splendid! I'd have overhauled the man if a policeman hadn't butted into the chase. He grabbed me. What's more, that policeman knows Orth. He called me Lord Durling the moment he got a look at my face; and then he let go and rushed after this Bill Whitley. If Whitley makes a clean get-away, it will be about as bad for Orth as if he didn't. Suppose Whitley escapes and telephones to Gryce? Whitley knows, now, that I'm not his lordship, so that cat will be out of the bag. And if the policeman captures Whitley and brings him back here, as he will, then I'm discovered by the law in the act of impersonating an earl—with your assistance! That will hardly be pleasant for any one, will it?"

"I'll send you away, Mr. Stanley, and do all the talking myself if the officer recaptures Whitley and brings him here," returned Lady Barbara promptly. "I can manage that very easily. What

I can't understand," she continued, knitting her fair brows in a puzzled frown, "is how Whitley can be working with Gryce and yet attempt to rob me of the money I was taking to Gryce the other night."

"That's not a hard one," Stanley theorized. "If Whitley had succeeded in getting the five thousand pounds, then you or Orth would have to give up another five thousand in order to get what you wanted. That would double the pickings. I'm fairly clear on that point, but what really bothers me is this: Whitley is not the man who was shadowing his lordship—not the one who trailed me to MacKellar House."

"Perhaps the original spy was relieved by Whitley, so that the first man could report to Gryce in person."

"I hope that's the way of it; but, hang it, we can't be sure of anything! I'm worried stiff about Orth."

Inspired by a sudden thought, the girl lifted her eyes to a clock on the mantel. An exclamation of relief and joy escaped her.

"Why, it's half past nine, Mr. Stanley!" she cried. "It must have been nine, or later, when you opened the casement and dragged Whitley into the room across the lobby! Don't you see what that means? Orthie was to meet Gryce at nine o'clock. What we've done, or haven't done, will make very little difference with Orthie's plans. He should be through in Fetter Lane by this time. I think——"

What Lady Barbara was thinking further in the matter did not appear. The sound of a motor car was heard in front, its dry brake bands squealing to a halt. The girl started erect, listening intently and with a sudden hope glowing in her eyes. Stanley pulled himself up, staring through the wide doorway and in the direction of the front entrance. The motor could be heard buzzing away down the street; then came the rattle of a latchkey in the front door. In another moment his lordship appeared, his face a grim study and his manner one of extreme weariness.

Lady Barbara ran to him, flung her arms around him, kissed him. Quietly but firmly he put her away.

"Bob is here?" he asked.

"Yes; in the library," she answered in a tense voice. "Did you succeed, Orthie? Oh, but I can see you didn't! What has happened?"

"A peg of something strong, Babs," said Durling; "I need it. Ring for Jenkyns."

He went on into the library and dropped into a chair facing Stanley.

"How about it, old chap?" inquired the American.

"Rotten luck, Bob," was the gloomy answer. "I—I killed him." Durling pressed a hand to his forehead. "And it couldn't be helped," he added; "plain accident—but how could I prove it? It—it's horrible!"

He lifted a hand uncertainly and brushed it across his eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

AN AGREEMENT SEALED.

DURLING was a pathetic figure as he sat there in his rumpled gray tweeds, white and weary and shaken. Lady Barbara herself brought in the tray, poured her brother a strengthening draft, and put it in his unsteady hand. She placed the tray on the table and Durling set down the empty glass.

"Gryce won't bother us any more, Babs," he said; "he's done for."

The girl went white, but her nerve did not desert her. Moving to her brother's chair she seated herself on the arm, leaned over him, and smoothed the hair back from his brows.

"Of course, Orthie," she murmured, "it's very terrible. I've been afraid of something like that. Everything will come out now, I suppose. We shall have to do something, perhaps quickly. Tell us about it, Orthie."

"He knew I was Durling the moment he set eyes on me," said his lordship. "In an eye wink he had a gun out. I jumped for him; we struggled. In the mix the gun was turned on himself. There was a thunderclap. At the same instant the gun exploded. And Gryce

slumped to the floor and lay in a huddle. I searched him and ransacked the place, trying to find what I wanted. It wasn't there; I don't believe Gryce had the letter at all. It all came out just as it did the other time. I got down and away. No one saw me. My cab was waiting for me around the Holborn corner, and it drove me to the Ritz. Went through to a side entrance, got another cab and drove here directly. I did my best to cover my tracks, Bob," he finished drearily, "for *you*."

"Don't fret about me, Orth." Stanley's wits were buzzing, not on his own account, but on his friend's.

"Good heavens, man, why shouldn't I be concerned about you?" returned Durling, fierce regret shivering in his voice. "I left Chislett's chambers openly. Apparently it was you who went out. The cab picked me up in front. If inquiries are made that will be remembered. Glad I was thoughtful enough, badly confused though I was, to have the same driver drop me at the Ritz. It was lucky, too, that I walked from Gray's Inn Road to Fetter Lane. I never stopped to think that something like this might happen. Had I even dreamed it, Bob, I should not have considered impersonating you for a moment."

"What sort of place was it? I mean, in Fetter Lane."

"Looked like a small shop, but the blind was up and it was dark. I tried the door and found it locked. Immediately some one opened it from the inside. It was Gryce, although I did not recognize him in the dark. Nor did he have a good look at me—then. Neither of us said a word; and he led me up a narrow stair and into a lighted room. It seemed like an office of some sort. The moment we reached that room the—what I have told you happened straightway. I got to the place in a downpour, but the cabman had lent me an umbrella. When I left only a few drops were falling. That clap of thunder, timed for the exact moment when the gun exploded, no doubt saved the situation—for the time being, at least. Men from Scotland Yard will probably be on the job—when the tenant of the shop finds what he is sure to find there—to-morrow."

"When was this? At what hour, Orth, as nearly as you can remember."

"A few minutes after nine."

Stanley pounded a fist in his palm. "Then, old son, you don't need to worry!" he declared. "At that very minute you were seen in the street, close to MacKellar House, by a policeman who knows you."

Durling stared. "That sounds a bit balmy," he remarked. "How could it be that——'

"Listen, Orthie," put in Lady Barbara, and went on to explain about Bill Whitley.

His lordship tossed his hands. "That establishes what is called an alibi for me," was his comment, "but you overlook the fact that Bob may be the one who needs the alibi."

"I could furnish that," said his sister quietly, "if it were necessary."

"No, Babs," returned Durling sharply; "you shall have no part in this whatever. If circumstances bring us to a pass where Bob is in danger, I shall go straight to the chief inspector and shoulder the whole sorry business."

"Sit tight, Orth," urged Stanley; "that's your play. What happened was, as you say, an accident. This Gryce ought to have been snuffed out, anyway. He was bad medicine, and the world will be better off. His game is spoiled, and your hands are clean. To-morrow I'm starting home——"

He was interrupted by a smothered jingle of the doorbell.

"That," murmured Lady Barbara, in a strained voice, "must be the policeman you met, Mr. Stanley."

"Yes," said Durling; "and if he is bringing this Whitley——"

Stanley jumped up. "There's a way out, Orth, and a good one." He spoke hurriedly. "Have Jenkyns say his lordship is here, Lady Barbara," he instructed. "Hold that bobbie. Orth and I are going to get back into our own clothes; then he can meet his friend on the force and everything will be O. K.

Where'll we go, Orth? Get a move on."

The girl intercepted Jenkyns on his way to answer the bell. While she was instructing him, Durling and Stanley hastened to the stairs and on to an upper chamber. The exchange of garments was made as rapidly as possible.

"What a bally mess!" groaned his lordship. "And to think, Bob, that I got you into it."

"Cut out the sob stuff! We're all to the good, both of us. Let this bunch at New Scotland Yard go hunting for the man in gray tweeds—if they're foxy enough to simmer it down to that. They'll have to come after me, and I'll face 'em on my native heath. Promise you won't go to the chief inspector; promise you won't make a move toward spilling the beans till I give you a distress signal. Think what it would mean, man, to the tenth earl of Durling—yes and to the ninth earl—and the whole MacKellar-Ponselby family if you scrambled things with a wild explanation. Will you promise——"

"But I can't stand for having you dragged into this," cut in Durling. "I have caused you enough injury as it is. I'll not let you be suspected! I'll not let you be hunted for like a common felon!"

"I'm asking you to hold off, that's all; just to hold off until I'm backed into a corner and yelling for help. Chances are that nothing at all will come of this. And you know mighty well you can't afford to drag the family honor through such a mire unless it's a case of last resort. Sit tight, keep mum, and let things drift—until I cable you to come to my rescue. Is it a promise?"

"Why, if you insist on it, yes," agreed his troubled lordship; "but I'll watch developments from here; and if you're pushed too hard, and don't cable, I'll take everything in my own hands."

"I suppose that's the best I can do with you," growled Stanley. "Now go down and meet your police friend. If Whitley is with him and tries to make out that you're Stanley and not Lord Durling, it's a cinch he'll have the time of his life. I'm staying here. When the policeman clears out, let me know, and I'll come down."

In just ten minutes Stanley was summoned to the library. The nervous tension, inspired by dread possibilities, had passed. Lady Barbara, who evidently considered herself her brother's mainstay in that hour of evil fortunes, cast herself for a cheerful part and carried it off well. Her brother had brightened considerably. He must have reasoned that, after all, what had happened had been in self-defense; and also that if he was right in his own mind, sparing his family was a duty so long as the law did not actually threaten his war pal.

"Bill Whitley made good his escape, Bob," reported his lordship, "and that eased off the strain quite materially. The officer was a detective sergeant, Briggs by name. His father is gardener at Ponselby Hall. Briggs took a description of Whitley, but I fear it was not very accurate. I was just telling Babs of the promise you wrung out of me, and she thinks you're a brick. The question now is, what shall we do with you for the night?"

"Do with me?" Stanley laughed. "Why, I'm going back to Chislett's rooms to sleep as soundly as ever I did in my life. To-morrow morning at ten I'll take the boat train, and by late afternoon this tight little isle will be dropping away behind me. Lady Barbara, I'll depend upon you to see that he doesn't rock the boat. I shall want to know how things progress here in London. Would you mind sending me an occasional report if Orth happens to forget it?"

"That is a slight request, Mr. Stanley," answered the girl, "and I should be very ungrateful if I refused it. I shall see that you are kept fully informed."

"Phone me," begged his lordship, "if anything happens to you at Chislett's."

"Just to ease your mind, old chap, I'll say yes; but nothing will happen."

For an hour longer Stanley remained with Durling and Lady Barbara, reviving war experiences in an effort to get his lordship's mind off the grisly epi-

sode of the evening. The girl found an opportunity to tell her brother how fate had maneuvered weirdly in that adventure of Old Bond Street. Durling was quite properly amazed by the strange juggling of chance.

"My sister and my best friend!" he exclaimed. "When the Weaver of Destinies selected you two, out of all London, for that meeting he certainly played a long shot."

"Let's call it a good omen, Orth," suggested Stanley.

When Durling called the car to take Stanley back to Adelphi Terrace, he elected to go with it. Leaving the house in advance of his friend, the latter had a moment's confidence with Lady Barbara.

"Don't let him do anything rash," Stanley requested earnestly. "He has his brother's good name to clear, and a confession to the police would be the quickest and surest way to spoil everything. He's thinking too much of my part in the deal. As long as I'm free and happy, his long suit is to play a waiting game. Make him see that, Lady Barbara."

"You're splendid, Mr. Stanley!" murmured the girl. "It is not so hard for me to understand, now, why Orthie thinks so much of you. Good-by, and a safe voyage!"

"It will be safe enough—so far as New Scotland Yard is concerned," he told her. "Remember, you're to write."

"It must not be one sided," she suggested, a touch of color rising in her cheeks. "We shall be very anxious, here in England, to know how everything goes with you."

She gave him her hand, and the thrill of her soft touch was so real to him that a quick thought of the Other Girl sent him from the door of MacKellar House in a hurry.

"Whenever I catch a whiff of violets," he said to himself, "I shall think of—oh, splash!" he broke off. "This line of bunk would be lovely news for Kitten!"

He climbed into the car beside Durling, and tried to be very thankful that this was his last night in London.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERY PERSONAL.

STANLEY was as good as his word. That night, at Chislett's, he slept like a log; he slept so hard and so long, in fact, that he glided over seven-thirty and was awakened by a splash of water. Then he realized that Jowler had succeeded, at last, in drawing his bath. That Jowler considered this a triumph was very evident.

Chislett's man had other triumphs, too, on Stanley's last morning in London. He shaved his master's friend; he pressed the gray tweeds; he grilled a chop in the usual perfect manner; and set out as neat a breakfast as a hungry American could wish for. Also, he helped Stanley pack.

Chislett sent a long telegram stating that an extended business session, the importance of which to his firm could not be overestimated, still chained him to Birmingham. He bewailed his inability to reach London, begged Stanley's forgiveness, wished him good luck, and bade him farewell. Stanley returned a cheerful answer, crossed the palm of the delighted Jowler with five pounds, and set out for Liverpool accompanied by Lord Durling.

The morning papers contained nothing sensational from Fetter Lane. This seemed odd, but was nevertheless a theme for congratulation. His lordship continued to worry, not for himself, but for Stanley. It was a positive relief when the liner left the dock with no delegation from Scotland Yard to complicate the departure.

Stanley had several days with nothing to do but consider his personal affairs. Into these reflections the untimely end of Goswell Gryce did not intrude. The sputtering wireless was a link between Fetter Lane and the ocean greyhound, but Stanley failed to develop any interest in it whatever. His anticipations had all the thrills of a future steeped in an uncertainty rooted in his past.

Now and then a vague thought of Lady Barbara flashed through his reveries, but it perished forthwith in a

smother of sentiment that involved one Katie Berdyne; Katie, fondly addressed as "Kitten" by those near and dear to her teasing, purring, altogether charming self. Kitten, playing with his destiny as though it were a ball of yarn, had achieved a most awful tangle.

The celebrated case of *Romeo* and *Juliet* is founded upon circumstances that have led more than one pair of lovers, before and since, to echo the sentiment "a plague o' both your houses." Although not so celebrated, the case of Robert and Kitten had encountered similar depressing circumstances through the warring interests of the houses of Stanley and Berdyne.

These warring interests were political. Zenas Jasperson Stanley and Brixton, otherwise "Spike," Berdyne, were affiliated with the same political party. But they were harmonious on one point only: the agreement to disagree. They had fought each other tooth and nail in their youth and their middle age, and they were at it as keenly as ever now when drawing on toward sixty.

Zenas Jasperson Stanley was in his teens when he allied himself with the common people; and, about the same time, Brixton Berdyne began coyly to flirt with what are shadily known as the "interests." It developed that Stanley had picked the winning number in the lottery of power and success; but, as he rose higher and higher toward the summit of his ambitions, there was always Berdyne, backed by the interests, to drop obstacles in the upward path, strew thorns in his present course, and pour grease on the ground below, so that Stanley, if he made one bad stumble, would slide to oblivion with certainty and dispatch. But the "grand old blacksmith," as Stanley was called by his friends, caught his enemy's every bolt on his lightning rods and grounded it harmlessly.

Arrived at the acme of his powers, Stanley knew that his seat was secure so long as he kept faith with his humble but honest and exacting constituents.

He had kept that faith for more than forty of his almost sixty years, and he had done this by showing himself a man of the people. He would lay aside his frock coat and wide-brimmed felt hat, on occasion, and shoe a horse in the shop of a man whose allegiance might be wavering; or he would take to the field, in haying time, and ply an able pitchfork in behalf of the farmer who had been listening to the siren song of Spike Berdyne and the interests; or, in the mining and milling sections of his district, he would hang up the stamps and dress down the plates of a mill for employees who seemed to be slipping away from his support. He was a royal handshaker, a fine old mixer, a ready talker in words of one syllable, and he had made a record of kissing two hundred and sixty-three babies at one barbecue.

Senator Stanley had amassed wealth honestly and legitimately, but he hid the fact surprisingly well. At home in his district, he lived in the same little two-story frame house that was among the first dwellings to be built in Cherryvale. The old smithy was just around the corner, and Stanley still had an interest in it, and when home from Washington it was his delight to put on a leather apron and point a plowshare, or calk a horseshoe, or set a tire on a lumber wagon.

"Same old Jass," the neighbors would say fondly and proudly. Had they dropped into the language of the day and said, as Berdyne and his hirelings did, "Same old jazz," they might have come nearer the mark.

And Senator Stanley had a couple of millions carefully concealed. In spite of that, he clung to his modest Washington flat, wore clothes that were just on the verge of being shiny and threadbare, smoked cheap stogies, thundered from the forum about the people's rights, and was apparently to remain the same rough diamond clear through to the end of the chapter.

Now, Brixton Berdyne was of a different sort. He had amassed wealth, too, and made a show of it. He mingled with the high and mighty; and in Gordon City, where he lived, his motor cars were the most expensive, his house the finest, and his way of living the

most splendid to be found in that part of the country. Katie was his only child, and through his influence she had come into the best dinners, balls, receptions, and other social functions that Washington had to offer.

Her father disdained public office, although he might have had a seat in the House of Representatives had he said the word. He cared nothing for such honors, since with his power and backing he could confer them. In his State his influence was second only to that of Stanley. This was a bitter pill, but he swallowed it. The vague interests which he represented seemed content to have him foot-loose and free. But if he wanted no high honors for himself, Brixton Berdyne was bound that he should have them for his daughter. His favorite pastime was to scan the list of embassy notables of title, in quest of a worth-while son-in-law.

Into this complication of cross purposes entered suddenly the romance of Robert and Kitten. Bombs exploded in the modest flat of Senator Stanley, and fireworks fizzed in a stately dwelling above Dupont Circle. Cherryvale and Gordon City caught rumors, and gossip began to work disastrously with the fortunes of the senator and the Western political leader. Both Senator Stanley and the Honorable Spike Berdyne stepped hard on the budding romance. Kitten was sent back to Gordon City for a period of retirement, personally conducted, guarded, and disciplined by her scandalized mamma; and Robert Rutherford, following a stormy séance with his governor, was headed for Europe, Asia, and Africa, given a liberal letter of credit, and told to keep moving, get over his foolishness, and report back at headquarters in just one year. Meantime, Robert Rutherford was not to endeavor, by cable, wireless, letter, or mental telepathy, to communicate with the daughter of Spike Berdyne; and if he did so endeavor, and the senator discovered it—well, there would be happenings such as Robert Rutherford had never before encountered in his young life. Senators know a thing or two about being ruthless!

Robert Rutherford, nevertheless, wrote to Kitten. Love's young dream cannot be disturbed, even when capitalism and power take a drive at it. So Robert wrote from Paris, expressing undying devotion and so on, and he waited in Paris for a response. It came several days before he expected it—and by cable. "Your letter intercepted. Considered an insult. Have sent to your father with warning. Brixton Berdyne."

Robert proceeded hastily to Naples, Rome, Athens, and Cairo, followed by a scorcher of two typewritten sheets that overtook him at Shepheard's Hotel. After that he never wrote again to Kitten, but just waited and hoped, secure in the idea that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and that silence is golden with dreams not confided to paper.

This was not because of the scorcher from headquarters. No; there was too much of the grand old blacksmith in Robert Rutherford. He laid aside his ready pen because his effusions were not for the alien eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Berdyne.

Now, headed Americaward, he was returning to Washington, after drifting about the Old World for a year, to report to his father. There would be no satisfaction for the senator in that report. And in this was wrapped up all the uncertainty and prospective thrills.

The day came, then, when Stanley found himself in New York; and on the twentieth, a year to a day from the time he had started his globe-trotting, Stanley dropped off a train in the capital, and with feelings somewhat mixed, but very resolute, took a taxi to the Stanley flat.

Jupiter, how natural everything looked! It was almost as though he had merely left the place on May twentieth of the preceding year, walked around the block, and stepped into the dingy brick-and-stone building again. The three letter boxes under three speaking tubes on each side of the little square vestibule had not aged a day, and the vestibule certainly looked as if it had not been scrubbed in the inter-

vening twelve months. The senator's card, under a glass above the second letter box on the left-hand side, had slipped askew before Robert had started abroad. And it was still askew. The returning prodigal expelled a lusty breath into the tube; and the familiar voice of Jude, the colored cook, trickled down from the second floor.

"Senator home?" inquired Robert.

"Mah goodness, Mister Bob, is dat you?" Jude was quick to recognize the voice. "Sho'ly yo' pa is here, Mister Bob. Come right up, honey."

The bolt clicked in the door, and Robert pulled it open and leaped up the stairs.

The senator's wife, like the wives of many other famous men, had toiled in poverty to help her husband get his start; and then, just when the way grew fair with a promise of ease and comfort, had laid down her burden and gone to a richer reward. The senator's widowed sister, Mrs. Hesther Hallowell, had come from New Orleans to take charge of the Stanley home; and she had brought Jude with her. For the better part of Robert's life Aunt Hesther had been as a second mother to him. And with Jude he was always a prime favorite.

The door of the flat was swung wide, and the senator stood waiting at the threshold. "My boy!" he exclaimed, and took his son affectionately by both hands.

Senator Stanley was square set, smooth faced, and had iron-gray hair and a probing, determined eye. Rugged and fine was that face of his; and, although winning and genial now, in a half second it could cloud stormily and relentlessly.

"Dad, old boy, how are you, anyhow?" shouted Robert.

"Never better, son," was the hearty answer. "I was wondering if you'd get here on time. It has been a long year, albeit a busy one. You are looking A 1, I must say!"

In the room the senator called the front parlor Aunt Hesther was waiting. She took her nephew in her arms, just as his own mother might have done.

"A long year, Bob, a very long year," she said brokenly, in the soft Southern drawl that had displaced the burr of the Middle West after long years in New Orleans. "It was the war all over again," she went on, a little catch in her voice; "and—and your father was nearly as worried."

"Worried, Hetty?" boomed the senator. "Not a bit of it! I knew he'd see the light, give him a year, so I didn't lose any sleep on his account. Well, Jude," and he laughed, "this wouldn't be a real home-coming for Bob if you weren't in on it, too. What the blazes are you crying about?"

"I's so happy 'count o' Mister Bob gettin' home," Jude sniffled, making a pass at her eyes with the corner of her apron.

She had all the privileges of an old mammy in the senator's household and was considered one of the family. Robert greeted her affectionately.

"Got something for you, Jude," he announced, "straight from Paris."

With that, he opened his suit case and began passing out his little remembrances. For Aunt Hesther a beaded bag; for the senator, an ornate silver-trimmed case to hold half a dozen stogies; and for Jude, a pin set with showy brilliants and a string of rose beads. There was another small parcel, neatly wrapped in pink paper, which Robert deftly sidetracked.

The senator, however, got his eyes on it. "Something for Judson, Bob?" he queried, lifting the sofa cushion under which his son had slipped the pink packet.

Judson Brander was the private secretary; and between him and Robert there was no love lost.

"No, dad," the son answered; "Jud would be highly insulted if I tried to give him anything. He knows blamed well it wouldn't be a mark of esteem."

Storm warnings showed in the senator's face, but quickly faded into an expression at once grim and satirical. "Kitten, eh?" he said. "So at the end of the year you haven't really forgotten Kitten after all."

Jude's wild joy over her glittering

pin and her rose beads was suddenly hushed. A pained silence settled over the group in the front parlor. Aunt Hesther cast an imploring look at her brother.

"Now, Jasperson," she begged, "don't spoil everything for Bob when he has just come back to us."

The senator laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh, but one which he reserved, in forensic affairs, for the opposition which he was about to blight and wither. Aunt Hesther turned away, and Jude retreated toward the kitchen.

"I'm not going to spoil anything, Hetty," returned the senator, "but Bob has a pink package for Kitten." He looked at his watch. "There's time to deliver it before supper, and it would be mighty sad to keep the faithful Kitten waiting. I'll call a cab, son," he added to Robert, "and we'll run around there. Don't worry; I'll sit in the cab while you deliver the goods."

Keeping a wary eye on his sister, the senator stepped to a table and picked up the telephone. He was a man of direct methods—whenever such tactics would best serve him; and he was going straight to the heart of his son's problem now.

There was no protest from Robert. He knew his father too well to cross him, at such a time, with protests or suggestions. Less than half an hour had passed since he had returned to his Washington home; and already the thrills were beginning.

Lieutenant Robert Rutherford Stanley had been in the war long enough, however, to learn how to stick to his guns.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE ON BERDYNE.

THAT, in the parlance of the day, there was something up the senatorial sleeve Robert had no doubt. The thought fretted him, although he dissembled his real feelings and endeavored, with a good deal of success, to appear unperturbed and even lighthearted. It was an astounding maneuver, this of the senator's in personally accompanying Robert on a call upon the daughter of a hated political enemy.

The young man considered this while sitting in the cab at the senator's side. The grand old blacksmith, his face sphinxlike in expression, calmly filled the new cigar case with stogies taken from the pocket in which he usually carried them.

"They must have charged you a lot for this trinket, son," he observed.

"Not a whole lot, dad," Robert answered with a laugh; "about a hundred francs, if I remember. At the present rate of exchange——"

"Oh, well, it was enough," his father cut in. "Altogether too fine as a cache for nickel stogies, but I'll only use it on state occasions. Never forget the old man, do you?"

"Never," said Robert, with hearty emphasis. "Say, where are we going?"

He noticed suddenly that they were not proceeding in the direction of Dupont Circle, but were laying a southeasterly course.

"Why, to call on the fair Kitten, Bob." His voice only partly concealed the chuckle that accompanied the words. "There have been some changes in this neck of the woods during the last year."

"You mean that Berdyne has struck the toboggan?"

"Exactly, although perhaps not in the way you imagine. Kitten is deeply involved in some of the changes."

The pet name for Katie was one which the senator rolled under his tongue as a choice morsel. On his lips it had a foolish sound, as of a parody rather than a term of endearment. Robert resented these liberties with a word that meant so much to him, but smothered his temper as unseemly at such a time.

The cab turned from Massachusetts Avenue around Lincoln Square, and then bore away southward. It halted at last in front of an apartment house which was even dingier and more down at heel than the one in which the senator lived.

"You used to own this building, dad," remarked Robert, all at sea.

The senator was lighting a stogy.

"I own it now," he said, flipping away the burned match. "Got the pink packet all secure? Good! You'll find Kitten in the first flat. She is staying there. Parkinson, I think the name is."

Robert, with quickened emotions, had begun to theorize. Kitten had quarreled with her father and mother about *him;* finding the situation too unpleasant at home, she had taken refuge with friends. Such a sacrifice lifted Robert's soul to heroic heights. He would show Kitten that he, too, could make sacrifices. Together, hand in hand, they two could face the world, leaving the hard-hearted Berdynes and Stanleys to make the most of it. He straightened his shoulders and, with a determined look in his brown eyes, strode along the walk, up the steps and into the flat building.

"Parkinson, Elijah Quincy." Yes; there it was, hand-written on a card over the letter box. Robert pressed a button. There was a stir beyond the door, and a rattle of the knob as the door opened. A dramatic moment followed, for just across the threshold, neatly clad in a bright gingham house dress, stood Kitten. Her blue eyes grew wide and startled; and then her composure seemed shaken, and she paled.

"Why—why, Bob!" she gasped.

"Kitten!" he exclaimed, and pressed forward, both hands outstretched.

She retreated into the little hallway of the flat, her confusion growing. He continued on, seized one of her hands and would have kissed her had she not warded him off.

"No; not that!" she cried, withdrawing to a distance. "Haven't you heard what has happened? Hasn't your father told you?"

"I haven't been told anything," Robert answered, "and all I know is that I have returned after being abroad a year to keep the promises we made each other before I went away. What has happened?"

Plainly, and to Robert's great astonishment, the situation was painful to Kitten. She retreated into a little, box-like parlor, cheaply and meagerly furnished—a setting that travestied all the luxury to which she had been accustomed. Evidently she was at a loss for words.

"Poor kid!" murmured Robert commiseratingly. "How long have you been in this place? Had a row with the pater over me, eh? We'll soon straighten that out."

"Bob," returned the girl in a trembling voice, "this is my home."

"You were driven to take refuge here because——"

"I was not driven; I came here of my own choice. Can't you understand? I—I am Mrs. Parkinson—now."

Robert stiffened in his tracks. "Mrs. Parkinson?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes," she went on, still pale but growing deadly calm; "Lije and I were married three months ago. You never wrote to me from abroad, and you never came back. What was I to think?" She forced a short laugh. "That little affair of ours was never serious, was it? Please don't make this any harder for me than it is. You have come here as an old friend to congratulate me, haven't you? Really, Bob, I am very happy."

Robert's brain grew dizzy, and he collapsed into a chair. Kitten—married! It seemed incredible. After a year of wandering, with vows to be faithful and true ringing constantly in his ears, he had returned to Washington to find this state of affairs!

"So that's it!" he exclaimed dumbly. "It's clear the affair wasn't serious, so far as you were concerned. As for letters, how could I write? I tried that, and your father got my letter and sent it to the governor. If I had come back, I knew it would only make the situation harder for you. I just rambled around the Old World, waiting and hoping for something favorable to turn up. How long have you known Mr. Parkinson?"

"Six months—ever since mamma and I came back to Washington from Gordon City. Oh, he's wonderful, Bob!" she cried, with shining eyes. "He's so——"

A key rattled in the front lock, the

door opened, and a slender young man came running into the hall.

"Hey, Kitten!" he shouted boyishly. "Where are you——"

His voice failed suddenly as he discovered the two in the front room. He stood at gaze, uncertain and wondering. His wife ran to him, kissed him, took him by the arm and led him toward Robert.

"Here is Mr. Stanley, Lije," she said, "just back from abroad. He came straight here to wish us joy. Isn't that just like him?"

Parkinson's face cleared. "I saw the senator in the cab out in front," he spoke up, "but I thought he was here on some business connected with the building. His agent usually attends to such things, but now and then he has a way of dropping around himself. Mighty glad to meet you, Mr. Stanley," he added; "Kitten has told me a lot about you."

There was nothing of the cad about Robert. His fond dreams had gone glimmering, but he bore up well under the shock. He smiled and shook hands with Parkinson.

"I wish you all the happiness in the world, Parkinson," he said.

And then, after a few minutes, he got out of the room somehow and returned to the cab and the waiting senator. The latter reached over and took his hand in a fervent, sympathetic clasp.

"You didn't deliver the pink packet, I suppose?" he queried. "Perhaps, after all, Judson will come in for it?"

"If you think Judson would appreciate a gold brooch," said Robert grimly, "he can have it, and welcome."

"Desperate diseases require desperate remedies, son," the senator went on, his face softened and his words gentle. "Perhaps you think I was a little severe? But it's all for your own good. The Berdynes, root and branch, are all like that. As for this business of Kitten's, everybody reckons it as one on Berdyne. He wanted a duke or a marquis for Kitten"—the acid of sarcasm bit deep into the senator's voice—"and what did he get? Why, a fine young chap from the pension office!"

He sank back in his seat and laughed jeeringly, triumphantly. "That was a blow for the Honorable Spike! Kitten eloped with Parkinson; papers were full of it, at the time; and Spike and his wife washed their hands of her. The affair has given me ammunition that will blow Berdyne's prestige and influence into smithereens. Everybody is laughing about it, back in the home State. It's a comedown, for Spike, and he hasn't a comeback! There's nothing proud or conceited about the Stanleys. We're common folk, son, and will live and marry and die like all of our people."

His stogy was growing small, but he opened a penknife, impaled the fragment on a blade, and continued to whiff at it.

"The only objection I ever had to Kitten," he pursued, "was her father and his ridiculous pretensions. The girl married well. Parkinson is a fine young man. Kitten is an only child, and some day her people will accept things as they are, and Parkinson's fortunes will look up. But you are my main concern, son," he added anxiously; "how does this sorry affair leave you?"

"It was a shock, dad," answered Robert gloomily, "but I'll get over it. I'm going to be a bachelor to the end of my days."

"Yes, you are!" said the senator, with another chuckle. "There is still John Madden's girl, out in Cherryvale. You used to go to candy pulls with her, Bob. And Old John is a power! I can't begin to tell you how many votes he has in his vest pocket. Guess I'll have John come to Washington for a visit, and bring Rosalie with him."

"Not on my account, dad," returned Robert hastily. "I've got to do something. Loafing is all right, but I'm finding it mighty monotonous. Fire Brander and let me be your private secretary."

"Worst move I could make," protested the senator. "Brander's father is my right bower in Gordon City, as you know. I'm holding him largely through Jud's job with me."

"Maybe I'll turn up in Cherryvale for

a while," went on Robert. "Washington doesn't look very good to me, and I've been thinking of the home town a lot."

"Buck up!" grunted the senator. "This jolt is the best thing that ever happened to you, son. You'll see it that way before you're much older."

CHAPTER X.

FLINT, STEEL, AND SPARKS.

THE following week was a hard one for Robert. He felt as though every prop had slipped suddenly out from under him. For a year he had drifted about the Old World, with each passing day hardening more and more his determination to cling to Katie Berdyne. He had returned to his native land firm in the resolve to marry Katie —and let the senator do his worst. Now that dream had been shattered; and by Katie herself.

He wanted to get away somewhere by himself, and preferred Cherryvale to any other place. But the senator, for some reason, was against Cherryvale. So Robert struck out for New York, and for seven days he lived like a hermit in that teeming, noisy metropolis.

Women were a faithless lot, he persuaded himself. It was "out of sight, out of mind" with them. Robert Rutherford Stanley was done forever with the whole sex. He would remain a bachelor to the end of his days. Toward the end of the first week in New York he began to feel sorry for Parkinson. With such a flirt for a wife, and with such a man as Berdyne for an enemy, Parkinson would have a hard time of it.

In due course, Stanley began to congratulate himself on having escaped a fate that was probably equivalent to martyrdom. Having brought himself to the point where he could consider his recent affair of the heart in this light, he ventured out of his retirement and plunged into a reckless round of shows and revels.

He kept this up for another week, and then the folly of the course he was pursuing dawned upon him. Pulling himself together, he cut loose from the gay life and went back to Washington. He believed that the affair with Katie had been a good thing for him. The passing of that dream, he imagined, had left him hard and cynical so far as women were concerned.

Coming down from Philadelphia on an early train, he dropped in at the flat to discover that the senator had gone to the capitol. Probably, at that time of day, he was in his committee room, or in his office attending to his correspondence.

Aunt Hesther was very anxious about Robert. She looked at him in a worried way, and inquired tenderly about his health and his state of mind. Robert reassured her, declared that he was all right and feeling fine, laughed in a worldly way, and then set out for the Senate office building.

There were two men in the outer room; one of these was Judson Brander, and the other was Jimmie Hills, the stenographer. Brander nodded distantly, but Hills jumped up and grabbed Robert by the hand.

The private secretary was a thin-faced, secretive sort of person. For no very valid reason, he and Robert had disliked each other for years.

"Where's the senator, Jud?" Robert inquired.

Brander jerked his head in the direction of a closed door. "In there," he answered. "He's alone, and maybe you'd better go right in. I happen to know that he has been wanting to see you for the last two days."

There was a disagreeable significance in the secretary's words. He had a vein of sarcasm which he liked to manifest whenever he came in contact with Robert; and he made it plain that he was particularly pleased to find it in his power to be unpleasant just at this moment. Robert went on to the other room.

The senator sat at his desk reading his mail. He looked up, then leaned forward to reach out his hand. "Back again, son?" he called cheerily. His eyes scanned Robert's face sharply. "How are you feeling?"

"A 1," Robert told him. "Brander

says you've been wanting to see me for the last two days. Glad I got here this morning."

"Close the door, Bob, and draw up a chair," the senator went on. "I'm due at a committee meeting in half an hour, so we'll not have long to talk." He sat back and lighted one of the everlasting stogies. "Have you made up your mind, son, that the jolt was a good thing for you?"

Robert had closed the door and seated himself close to his father. "Yes," he answered briefly.

"Good!" the other exclaimed, with undisguised satisfaction. "You're a Stanley, after all, and I felt sure you'd see that affair, in time, just as I have seen it from the first. Your native horse sense has got in some pretty good licks—and in the record time of two weeks." The senator chuckled; then he drew down his brows grimly and pursed up his lips. "While you've been abroad, son, the political game in our State has got into a snarl. There's an election, this fall, and Keeding, our ex-governor, is after this job of mine."

The frown on the senator's face deepened into a scowl. "But the people of our part of the State are still with the old blacksmith," he continued. "Keeding had tied his fortunes to the tail of Berdyne's kite, and since Kitten eloped with the pension-office clerk, Berdyne's prestige has been slipping. As I told you, they're laughing at Berdyne out where we come from. But you and I, Bob, have got to walk the people's chalk line and make sure that my constituents don't get a thing on me."

"What have I got to do with it, dad?" inquired the young man curiously.

"You?" returned the senator. "Well, figure for yourself. Berdyne's girl had a lot to do with his political fortunes, hadn't she? Spike Berdyne is a snob and a pretender. His girl's performance has made a laughingstock of him; and nothing, in politics, is so fatal as ridicule. If the primaries were held tomorrow, I'd win hands down. I don't want to suffer, through you, as Berdyne has suffered through that girl of his."

"Well," said Robert, with a laugh, "you won't. Whatever got it into your head that I'd come a cropper and smash your chances of getting back to the Senate?"

The senator seemed pleased. For a few seconds he pulled reflectively at the stogy.

"Berdyne and I both stood to lose, a year ago when your affair with Katie Berdyne was running its mad, unbridled course," he remarked. "Now that he's down, he's after me; and I believe that he is after me, through you. I'm of the common people, and there's no pose about it at all. We're plebeians, son, and mustn't get out of our sphere. And that brings us to the point."

He opened a drawer of his desk and took out a mauve-tinted envelope, square in shape and very foreign looking.

"Day before yesterday," he went on, "this came to you in my care. Jud, as you know, sorts over my mail, passing on to me everything that should have my personal attention. This," and he held up the letter, "went through his hands." He turned the letter around and around with evident distaste. "It's from London, England. It bears the stamp of nobility"—scorn tinged his voice—"and it's a mighty disturbing thing to come to one of my family at such a time as this.

"Ponselby Hall, Essex," he grunted. "Where's Ponselby Hall, Essex, and who the devil lives there that knows you and writes to you? And on the back there's a coat of arms stamped into the wax with which the letter is sealed."

He displayed the small seal, which was of wax, colored a faint lilac tint to match the stationery. The senator threw the letter down on the desk in front of him. "What in Sam Hill does this mean, Bob?" he demanded sharply.

Robert's heart had skipped a beat. He was conscious of a mild happiness growing inside him. "Great Scott, dad!" he exclaimed. "How the deuce can a mere letter from England raise such a ruckus with you? You've heard me talk about Orth Ponselby. If it hadn't been for

good old Orth, I'd be under the poppies this minute instead of here with you."

The senator's face did not soften, but looked a trifle puzzled. "You never told me that this Orth Ponselby was a titled Englishman," he said.

"He wasn't—when we were in France together. His father was an earl, I've discovered since then, and when he died, and Orth's brother was killed in the war, that made Orth an earl. That war pal of mine is now Lord Durling, and he's the tenth earl."

"Then you mean to tell me that you've been hobnobbing with the nobility," proceeded the senator scathingly, "staying at this Ponselby Hall, fox-hunting, I reckon, and carrying on with English lords and dukes and barons? By gorry, Bob! A story like that would be nuts for Berdyne."

"You're too quick on the trigger, dad," protested Robert, amazed that one small letter from abroad could cause all that commotion. "I never stopped at Ponselby Hall; in fact, I didn't see Orth at all until I was in London, on my way home. He hunted me up, and we were together for a few hours on the last day I was in the city. That's all. The letter is from him, of course; just a—an ordinary letter such as one friend would write to another. There's no sense in getting wild over it."

"But it's addressed in a woman's hand!" snapped the senator. "How do you account for that?"

Robert craned forward to look at the letter where it lay, address side up, in front of his father. He experienced a slight thrill. His father was right for, clearly enough, the writing was in a woman's hand. Also, there was a faint odor—so faint it was perhaps little more than a memory—of violets surrounding the mauve-tinted envelope.

"That is perhaps from his lordship's sister, Lady Barbara," Robert remarked.

The senator winced. "You met Lady Barbara on your last day in London, too?" he inquired grimly.

"Well, yes," said the other; "by a chance, dad."

"You must have been pretty industrious," was the senator's scathing comment, "to have her writing to you like this. And all this came about at the very time when you were devoted to Kitten! You've got to cut this out. I'll not have such letters coming here in my care; I'll not have them coming to you at all. We're commoners, and we'd look like a couple of hypocrites playing Berdyne's game." The senator picked up the letter and tossed it angrily to his son. "No more of 'em, Bob, and that's my last word."

Flint had struck steel and sparks began to fly.

"Orth Ponselby is one of the finest fellows that ever breathed," averred Robert, his voice cool and steady, "and I'll not turn on him and his sister because your fool politics shies at the shadow of British nobility."

"We'll see about that," said the senator, with sharp finality. "Go home and think it over."

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERIOUS MEETING.

ON leaving Capitol Hill, his letter in his pocket, Robert did not return directly home. His flash of temper had unsettled him, and he wanted to walk and think and subdue his ugly feeling of rebellion against his father. He found himself presently in B Street and The Mall, more firm than ever in the conviction that his rebellion was justified.

Orth Ponselby had pulled him out of a bad hole, on that day of hot fighting that now seemed so far away. Death had been rubbing elbows with Robert, and Orth had pushed the dread specter aside and coolly carried the unknown American to safety. King's son, duke's son, earl's son—no matter what Ponselby's station had later proved to be, the fact remained that the war pals had sworn their abiding friendship. The senator had no right to demand that Robert forget all that and turn against Ponselby. And the demand was based on political expediency!

"Peanut politics!" Robert muttered, with a jeering laugh; "that won't go down with me in a case like this."

He looked up, just here, at the glistening shaft of the Washington Monument. This reminded him of Boston, and Bunker Hill, and of another monument that suggested independence and the rights for which Washington fought.

"I'll be independent, too," he said to himself, suddenly heartened.

He turned with a freer, more confident step to skirt the executive grounds on his way toward home; but his pace slowed again as the letter in his pocket brought a sharp reminder of other difficulties.

For the past three weeks the tragedy in Fetter Lane had been practically forgotten. Now it rushed at him full tilt with all its disturbing possibilities. Suppose a ferretlike person from Scotland Yard were to descend upon Washington and arrest the son of Senator Stanley for the slaying of a man in far-off London! Robert's lips, so far as explanations were concerned, would be locked and sealed out of loyalty to Orth. What a trump that would prove for Berdyne!

Orth, of course, would rush in with his own explanations as soon as he got the news. He would clear his pal at the expense of himself and his family. The whole story would come out, involving Robert in the personal affairs of the Earls of Durling, and that would be almost as satisfactory to Berdyne.

Robert winced as he thought of his father while these disastrous undercurrents were flinging themselves to the surface. If the senator knew what he was talking about, the home State would be rocked as by an earthquake, and the tremors would reach the capitol and topple him out of the seat which he had occupied for three successive terms.

"He can't be right about that," thought Robert, wiping the beads of moisture from his forehead. "The old blacksmith is too solidly intrenched to be pried out of the Senate by any little mishap of his wandering boy. But gosh, it's a tough old prospect—for me."

He rounded the corner of the Treasury Building and made for Lafayette Square; there he settled himself in a seat and drew the mauve-tinted envelope from his pocket. He was conscious of a pleasant thrill as he thought of Lady Barbara. She had remained true to her promise of writing to him; although, in her innocence, she had raised a storm by sending her letter in care of "The Right Honorable Zenas Jasperson Stanley." Probably she had got all that from Orth who, in his turn, had received the information from Chislett.

The seal, though very small was very clear, and held a lion couchant above the quarterings, with a six-rayed coronet over all. Obverse and reverse, the letter carried so unmistakably the atmosphere of the *noblesse* that Robert could not wonder it had aroused the grand old blacksmith. He broke the seal and removed the folded sheet.

"My dear Mr. Stanley," the letter began. Quite correct and conventional, but it brought another tingle to Robert's nerves, and caused him to lift his hand to the cheek which the lips of the fair writer had touched in a mistaken "sisterly outburst."

It was not a "blue" letter, not one in which fear had come anywhere near mastering hope and optimism. Here and there were bright little Americanisms, slang, and catchy bits of the Western spirit. Both Orth and his Sister Barbara, Chislett had told Robert, had traveled extensively in the United States, East and West, and had prided themselves on getting very close to the people.

Orthie had gone to Berlin, tracking something or other of importance, but of which Lady Barbara knew nothing, and had asked his sister to inform Bob of the amazing news from Fetter Lane. On the very morning Bob had sailed, a fire had completely destroyed the shop in Fetter Lane in which Orthie had his dismal experience with Gryce. The charred embers had yielded no trace of a casualty, and this had proved greatly inspiring to Orthie. Lady Barbara hoped it would prove a relief to Bob as well. "You might answer this," she added naïvely, "and let me know if you are relieved. I am so overjoyed myself that, if you were within arms' reach, I should perhaps shock you with an-

other outburst—not at all sisterly." And then she signed herself "Babs."

A sort of elation filled Robert as he got up from his seat, tenderly stowed the letter away in his breast pocket, and laid a direct line for home. His affair with Katie Berdyne seemed a thousand years away.

The senator, busy with State affairs, lunched at the capitol, so Robert and Aunt Hesther had the dining room in the flat to themselves. Aunt Hesther was plainly cheered by the serene expression on her nephew's face.

"You have no regrets, Bob, for—for what has happened?" she inquired.

"I'm calling myself lucky," he told her, and went around to her and boyishly kissed her cheek.

After luncheon he shut himself in his room and put in two hours writing to Lady Barbara. He destroyed several attempts, but at last engineered the right start and dashed along through several pages. Then, in a postscript, he requested Lady Barbara, in answering, to send her letter in care of Mr. James Hills, and gave the address of the boarding house in which the stenographer made his home.

"That will pull the sting of this correspondence so far as dad is concerned," he thought, "and my letters from the nobility will not be handled by Judson Brander—consarn him!"

The senator arrived home about four, with one of the congressmen from the home State. This representative's name was Broadwell, and, as his district fell within the senator's bailiwick, the two were on very friendly terms. They went into executive session in the senator's small study, presumably over the activities of the ex-governor who was after the senior senator's scalp. The two emerged from the study for dinner.

Apparently the senator had forgotten his little clash of the morning with his son, for he was in a genial frame of mind. The dinner passed pleasantly, stogies were produced, and the two statesmen slipped back into the study again for further conference.

Robert, however, was not deceived by his father's agreeable mood. He knew very well that the senator had meant every word of the remark that had closed their morning interview. He had given his orders and expected them to be obeyed.

It was eight o'clock when Robert slipped away from the flat with the idea of hunting up some of his Washington friends and so passing the evening; but, as he came through the front vestibule to the walk, a figure started up before him in the half dark.

"Bob!" exclaimed a voice. "I've been waiting here for an hour—and it seemed like a year."

"Jimmie!" returned Robert. "Why the deuce didn't you come upstairs if you wanted to see me?"

"The senator is up there," was the odd answer, "and I didn't want to take a chance. Let's walk; I've got something mighty important to tell you—something amazing! There's treachery on foot, I'm convinced, and we're going to prove it to-night."

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out December 15th. It began in the November 15th issue. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

Conservative

AN elderly examiner was putting a young medical student through his paces.

"Supposing," he began. "there was a gunpowder explosion and a man was blown into the air. You, as the nearest doctor, being called in, what would you do?"

"Wait for him to come down again," was the prompt reply.

Really!

WE'VE been having a regular clearance at home," announced Jones on arriving at his office. "I've been throwing all sorts of old things away. I put one of my wedding presents on the fire this morning."

"Did you, really?" asked a colleague. "What was it?"

"A copper kettle!" replied Jones.

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the Editor and Readers.

DECEMBER 1, 1921.

THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER

IT has never been our pleasure to present to you a longer list of holiday stories than you will find in the Christmas number to come to you on December 15th. What is more, we have never had better stories, taking them as tales written for the occasion, or as tales built just for your entertainment at any time of the year. But it occurs that as Christmas stories those in the number so designed are of the real spirit, we feel sure you will agree.

THE place of honor falls to John Milton Edwards, who is author of the long, complete novel that will lead the issue. It is a Christmas story, of course. The title is "Glory of the Day." The editor is tempted to run on and say too much about this splendid piece of work; there is so much in it to talk about. No matter how much might be said, however, one who has read it feels that it would never be as much as the story will say for itself. So we will let the case stand there, and leave you to the full enjoyment of this delightful Christmas tale.

Other Christmas features are:

"Too Many Kris Kringles," a newspaper tale of San Francisco, by Jack Casey; "When the Clock Struck Thirteen," a light romance of the Day overseas, by Lyon Mearson; "Hide and Seek," a tale of the glad season in its relation to theatrical life, by George Edgar.

And now the poets, who always have a seat by the TOP-NOTCH yule log: Among their songs will be:

"Home Again For Christmas," by Ted Olson; "Uti Videt Poeta," by Elizabeth G. Crane; "Bring Home Your Ships," by Elias Lieberman.

There will be a generous spread of good things not intended to have what is called the Christmas flavor. Among these is a baseball novelette—and a bully one—by Burt L. Standish; it is called "Batter Up!" Frank Richardson Pierce gives us a fascinating yarn of the sea titled "At the End of the Cruise." From Petterson Marzoni there is a laughable affair called "Logic Victorious." Gilbert Patten and Gerald Duffy contribute a clever romance of the picture players—"For Heart and Art." L. P. Brown has cut out a bit of Oriental life and made it into an entertaining tale called "After Three Moons."

That international sensation which

began in the last number—"As the Sparks Fly Upward," by William Wallace Cook—will be presented in one of its most interesting phases in the next number. There are three more installments of this splendid novel. Frank Shaw's tale of deep-sea adventure will launch one of its most absorbing situations.

Well and Good

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Have just read another Western story by the Dorrances, which is all well and good. But while I like Western stories I think it's time now that a few serious detective or mystery stories should make their way into T.-N.

The time is coming when we like to sit up nights reading a crackajack mystery novel or a stirring detective story. Of all the stories I've read in T.-N., there are two that stand out among the many others, and they are "The Call of the Clan" and "The Green Jade Hand." Let's have more stories on that line.

"That Man from Nowhere," was a serial worth while. I like B. L. S. stories on baseball; also like stories of the sea.

Best wishes for the continued success of TOP-NOTCH. Yours truly,

CHARLES WONDRACK.

Wagenen Place, North Bergen, N. J.

[Detective and "mystery" stories, as the correspondent terms them, will continue to be features of TOP-NOTCH. There has never been any cessation of them.—ED.]

What He Notes

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

MY DEAR SIR: It's been so long since I dropped in for a chat that I fear it may be necessary to be acquainted all over again. Perhaps you have not forgotten this scribbling of mine after all.

I have from time to time noted an increase of better material in your magazine—and it appears you have not only kept abreast with the times, but succeeded in giving readers more value than is usually associated with purchases to-day.

It is the hour of big prices and little value; but in your magazine, I am happy to say, you give big value for little cost.

Reading matter, more especially magazines, are far too important as educational factors to boost in price beyond the reach of ordinary people.

I think—and I read many magazines—yours is exceptionally human. It has characters, action, and plot, typical of life, and has writers who can picture things few of the commonplace ever see or hear of. The atmosphere of romance, adventure, and life is found from "kiver to kiver"—plumb through—top, bottom, and sides. What more can one expect reasonably? Sincerely yours,

JOHN EDWARD BARNETT.

Cumberland, Ind.

Clouds on the Horizon

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have been a steady reader of your magazine since its birth, and it rends my heart to note a falling off in the quality of the stories recently. Sometimes I have wondered if it is not I who am falling off in my power of appreciation; but I have decided that such is not the case. The fault is with you, the authors, the printers, the electrotypers, the elevator man, or somebody. If you don't buck up and improve things you are going to lose a constant reader. I guess a hint to you is as good as a kick, which this isn't. Believe me, in all well-wishing. JACOB A. STALKER.

Brockton, Mass.

Aboard the U. S. S. Semmes

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: We have just found one of the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINES, dated September 1, 1920, which has been kicked around for some time. I happened to pick it up and look it over. The very first story, entitled, "Lights Up," by John D. Emerson, struck my eye first, and I have read it so far six times. The more I read it the better I like it. My pal and I sure think it a real live story of theatrical life. As far as your magazine goes, it is the best of the bunch. We have read and reread it so often that nearly all of the stories in it are like some of our old school lessons. We can almost tell the stories in this book by memory.

I take great pleasure in praising the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE every time I see one. Yours very truly, JOSEPH C. GUDDEN.

Norfolk, Va. U. S. S. *Semmes*, 189.

Breeze from Monterey

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Dad takes you by the year, and as I have just come home from a trip and have failed to read you, in the meanwhile, I am greatly enjoying myself with all back issues.

Some of your stories are poor—no one is always perfect; but you have one of the best assortments of stories. There are none better.

Come again with more of your Canadian Mounted tales; they are ever welcome. Sincerely yours, R. REED.

Monterey, Calif.

All the Way

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I think T.-N. has got them all beaten, and I have read them from the Mexican border to the trenches in France. My wife joins in praising T.-N. Yours truly,

Ashville, Ohio. JOHN S. HOOVER.

Hears from a Pal

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have been a reader of your magazine for a long time. Any time I am around where I can see it, I always make a grab for it, and always get it either by fair or foul means.

I am at present working on the G. T. P., away up in northern B. C., and the other day I had to go into a box car to make some repairs. In doing so I happened to notice an old and worn magazine on the floor. I gave it a kick into a corner, and the cover happened to turn, and I noticed it was a T.-N.

Well, right then I made my grab. It was an old issue. I took it home and read everything in it, and found it like all the rest—up to scratch

In the Talk I see a letter written by one of my old pals out of the Forty-third Battery, C. F. A., named Rob Skinner; and it was dated June 23, 1918. Well, sir, I remember quite well where we were when that letter was written. Believe me, it sure made me feel good when I saw it. So if any of the boys out of the old Forty-third Battery should happen to see this letter in your magazine, I would be only too pleased to hear from them. I wish you and your magazine the best of luck. Sincerely yours, T. L. JENKINS.

1015 Semlin Drive, Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

A Fair Average

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Although I take your magazine regularly, it is in spite of some of the stories you publish, rather than because I like them all. Of course, you can't please everybody with everything. Still, if I were given to slang, I think I should stamp some of your stories "inexcusable punk."

I'll admit, however, that it is all a matter of opinion. You keep up a fair average of good stories, I must say, and I guess I won't run away from home yet a while. Very truly yours, G. S. GERSTER.

Newark, N. J.

Asks and Wonders

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I don't see many letters from New York readers, but here is one. Just a line to ask when we are going to have another serial as good as "Oh, You Baseball Romeo!" That story was a peach in every particular. I always read C. S. Montanye's work first, because I am always sure of a good laugh. I'd rather read one funny story by him than ten deep ones by others.

Next to Montanye, William Wallace Cook is my favorite, and Ralph Boston. What has become of Ben Bolt? Standish is an ace up. Give me the amusing stories every time and plenty of C. S. Montanye.

T.-N. couldn't be improved, no matter how you try. It's the *best* magazine on the market to-day regardless of price. Yours truly,

STANLEY COOPER.

[We are going to have many serials in TOP-NOTCH, but it is for our readers to say whether they are as good as "Oh, You Baseball Romeo!" Ben Bolt is still alive and, we believe, kicking—or writing in England, which is his home.—ED.]

As Time Advances

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Allow me to express my pleasure and satisfaction in your TOP-NOTCH stories of "Ranchmen, Beware," "A Ranger's Strategy," and others particularly interesting and attractive. I have been following out the serial now in progress with considerable in-

terest in the technique with which this story has been prepared. You may rest assured that I shall look for more of the Dorrance material as time advances.

At present I desire to congratulate you heartily upon the successful output of your TOP-NOTCH. Yours sincerely,

EDGAR DUBS SHIMER,
Associate Superintendent of Schools.
New York City, N. Y.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1921.

State of New York, County of New York, (*ss.*)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Henry W. Thomas, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Grace H. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,
of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1921. Francis S. Duff, Notary Public, No. 239, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1923.)

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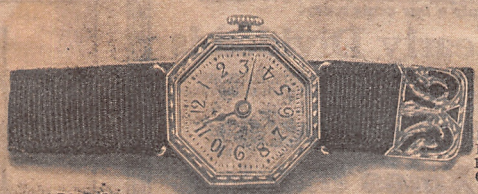

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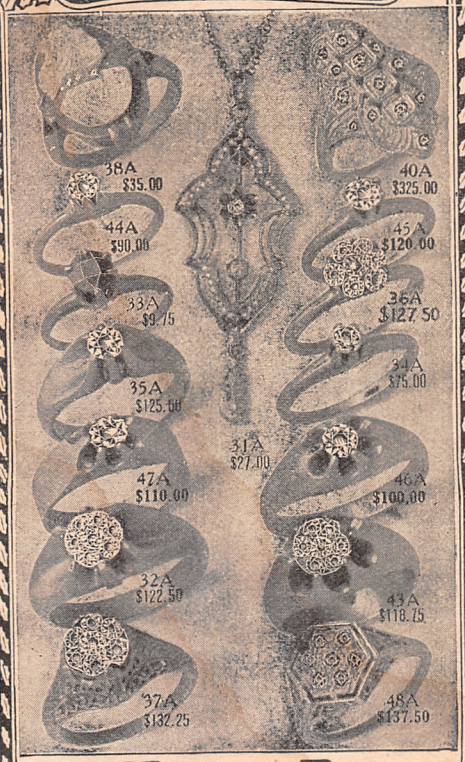

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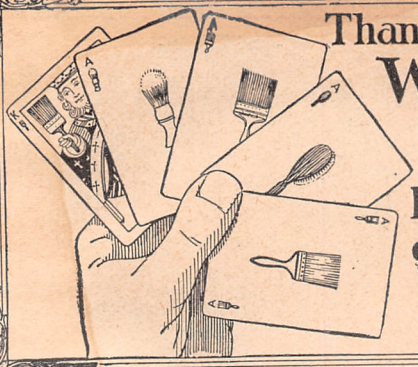

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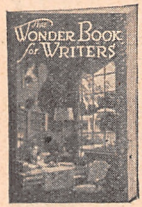

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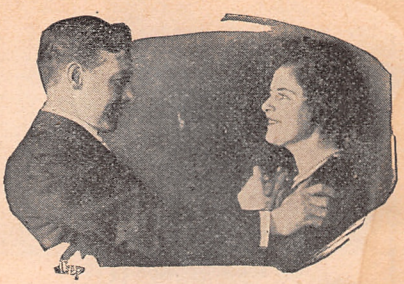

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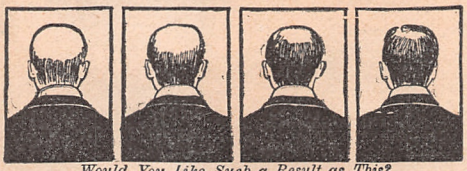

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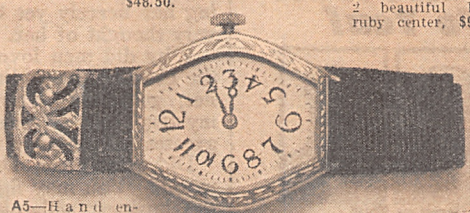

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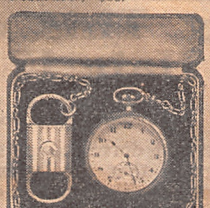

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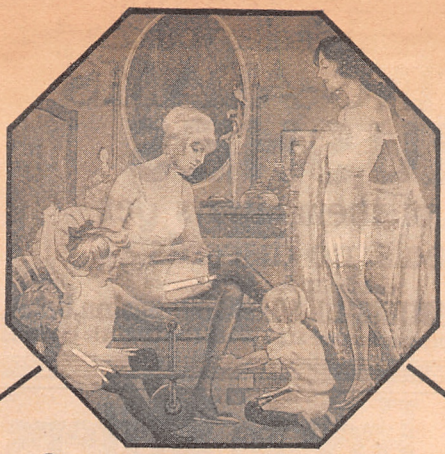

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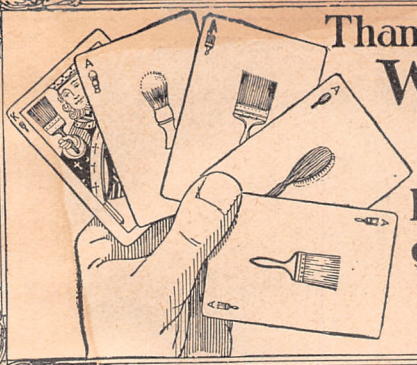

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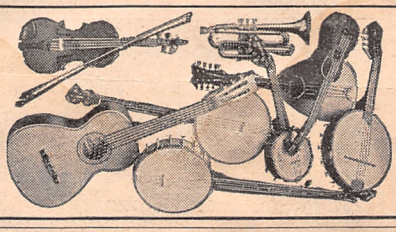

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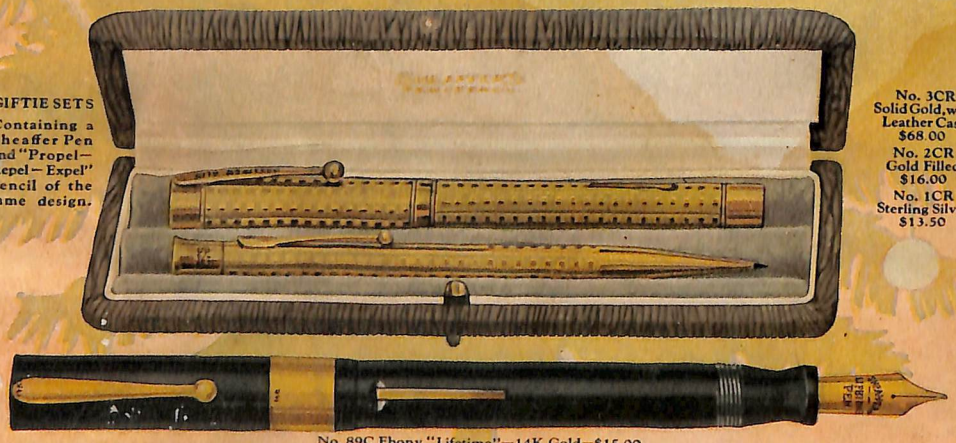

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