

TWICE-A-MONTH

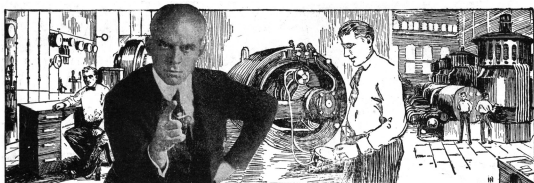
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Top-Notch

Magazine

JULY 1, 1922





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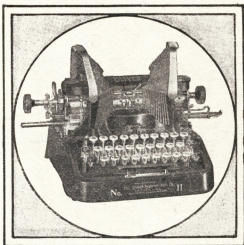
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TOP-NOTCH

TWICE -A-MONTH MAGAZINE

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Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 73-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. **OSMOND G. SMITH**, President; **GEORGE C. SMITH**, Treasurer; **GEORGE C. SMITH, JR.**, Secretary. Copyright, 1922, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1922, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, January 8, 1915, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$4.72. Foreign, \$5.44.

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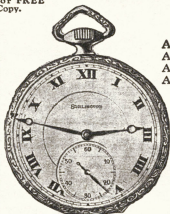
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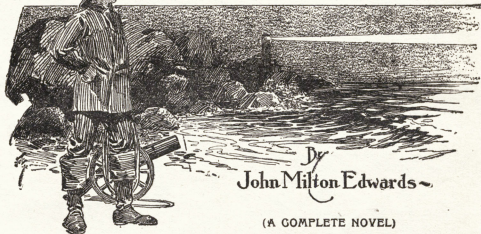
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The Coast Guard Riddle~



By
John Milton Edwards~

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN ON THE BEACH.

SANDY," the surfman, kicked open the door of the Smugglers' Cove Life-saving Station and staggered in with a man on his back. Immediately there was a scraping of feet and a pushing back of chairs by the men off duty, for here was a ripple of excitement in what had promised to be a quiet evening.

Stafford, breaking off a game of checkers with Bill Tryner, the Number One surfman, ran to help Sandy put down his burden. It was a very limp burden indeed, and showed not so much as a flicker of consciousness.

"Found him halfway to the Inlet, cap'n," Sandy reported to the keeper, Amos Blodgett; "he was layin' all crumpled up on the beach, and I fair stum-

bled over him. I done what I could to bring him 'round, but when he failed to show any signs of life I cal'lated I'd better get him back here in a hurry."

Blodgett studied the unconscious man gravely for a moment. He was of medium height, slender, fairly well dressed, and apparently in his early thirties. Sand had been ground into his clothing, but it was dry, although in much disorder. His thin face was bruised, and a little trickle of red showed vividly against the white of his face.

"There's life in him," said Blodgett, his fingers at the pulse of the man's left wrist. "Get a basin of water and a towel, Sandy. Some of the rest of you get busy and rub his hands."

The keeper opened his medicine chest and took out a bottle and a first-aid kit, and for ten minutes there was brisk work over the form on the couch.

"He's been slugged," averred Bill Tryner, his big fingers buried in the man's hair. "There's a lump at the back of his bean as big's a goose egg, cap'n."

"He's had rough treatment, that's a fact," agreed Blodgett, as he twisted a bandage about a wound on the brow of the injured man, brought it back of his head over the swelling discovered by Tryner and made all fast with a couple of safety pins. "Hear any sounds of a scrimmage, Sandy?"

"Nary a sound," Sandy answered. "Fust I knew he was on the beach I stumbled over him."

"Ease him down, Hugh," the keeper went on to Stafford, who was holding the man in a sitting posture by the shoulders; "we've got him coming now."

As the man's head touched the pillow the white lips began to move. "Don't hit me with that!" came from them in a frenzied half whisper. "Take what I've got, but don't—don't—"

The voice died away, and the white face twisted into an expression of fear; then the man's eyes suddenly opened, and the fear in his face was reflected in them as he put up a hand and cringed.

"You're all right, neighbor," said the keeper in a kindly voice; "we're all friends here. Take a swig of this and it'll help you."

The tense features slowly relaxed and a look of bewilderment crossed the man's face. As the bottle touched his lips he raised himself on one elbow and took a swallow of its contents. The stimulant had an almost magical effect.

"Where—where am I?" came the query.

Blodgett told him. "You were picked up by one of the crew on the sunset patrol," the keeper went on, "about a mile this side of the Inlet. Who are you? And what happened to you?"

The patient showed relief; and then his clearing faculties reflected anxiety. "Where's the case—the big box?" he asked.

"Did you see anything of a big box, Sandy?" asked the keeper.

"Nary a thing, cap'n," was the answer. "How much of a box was it,

mate?" he inquired of the man on the couch.

"Five feet long, full of equipment, and weighed one hundred and fifty pounds! Have I been robbed?"

An eager hand groped in his vest. He had his watch. The hand flew to the breast of his coat and drew out a long bill book which was hastily examined.

"All here—everything here except the box!" muttered the man. "It must be back there on the beach. What could a couple of thugs want with a line-throwing gun?"

"Ah, ha!" muttered Stafford, pushing closer to the side of the couch. "Is your name Martin Hodges, and was it the Zymo portable line-throwing gun and equipment in the box?"

"My name is Hodges, yes," said the man; "and you are Lieutenant Stafford of the coast guard, to whom I was to deliver the gun, here at the Smugglers' Cove Station, for preliminary tests. But it has been stolen! That heavy box has been taken by the scoundrels who beat me up!"

"How did it happen?" queried Stafford, drawing up a chair and seating himself at the couch side.

"I came over from Boston and got to Stony Point on an afternoon train," Hodges explained; "had my supper, and got a man with a one-horse cart to drive me to the life-saving station. As we came down to the beach we were stopped by a couple of men. They said they were from the station, that the wagon couldn't get any closer to the station on account of a recent storm blocking the road, and that they had been sent to carry the box the rest of the way.

"I took their word for it," Hodges went on, "and we unloaded the box and the man with the wagon drove back toward town. The minute he was out of sight the two thugs jumped me. One of them had a revolver, and I thought he was going to shoot; but he used it as a club and hit me over the head with it. That—that's the last thing I remember till I woke up here."

"What could a couple of holdup men want with a line-throwing gun?" in-

quired Keeper Blodgett incredulously. "Come with me, Sandy, and we'll go back toward the Inlet and see what we can find."

Sandy picked up his lantern. The keeper took an automatic pistol from a locker and shoved it into his pocket.

"You've volunteered for the eight-to-twelve watch with Bill," Blodgett told Stafford, "and your beat will be to the halfway house at the Inlet. You can follow later, but right now Sandy and I will get a little quick action and see if we can find the box. It's hard for me to believe a couple of beach combers would want a thing like that."

"They'd have taken my watch and money if they'd been just a couple of footpads," insisted Hodges; "they must have wanted that line-throwing gun."

When the keeper and patrolman had gone, Stafford lighted a lamp and climbed the stairs to the crew's sleeping quarters. Opening his suit case, he unbuckled a flap and sorted out a certain letter from a number of papers in the pocket. The communication was from Commander Parmenter, Eastern Division, U. S. C. G., and was dated at Boston:

LIEUTENANT HUGH STAFFORD, U. S. C. G.,
SMUGGLERS' COVE LIFE-SAVING STATION.

SUBJECT: Informal preliminary tests with Zymo portable line-throwing gun.

SIR: During your month's leave of absence at Smugglers' Cove, I am directed to request that you make some informal preliminary tests with the new Zymo portable line-throwing gun. This has been offered to the service by the patentee and manufacturer; and a representative of the Zymo Company, one Martin Hodges, will deliver the gun and equipment in person to you for these tests within the next few days.

You will pay particular attention to the regulations (Par. II) which require that "Any gun or device in which explosives are used shall be fired with at least three rounds of the maximum charge by its exhibitor as a safety test before any tests are undertaken by the board."

It is desired by the Board of Life-saving Appliances that your informal tests be as varied and under as trying conditions as may be had at the Smugglers' Cove Station; and the result of your tests you will embody in a detailed report to be submitted to the Board on Life-saving Appliances at its next meeting in Boston, at 10 a. m., October 26.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMANDANT.

This letter had been waiting for Stafford on his arrival at Stony Point on a month's leave from active duty. Gun-nery, and particularly that branch of it that had to do with line-throwing devices, was his hobby. He had specialized in it, to a certain extent, at the Coast Guard Academy. The modest fame he had acquired in this line had no doubt brought him this extra duty while he was enjoying a vacation with his uncle, who had spent thirty years in the coast-guard service and was now keeper at the Smugglers' Cove station. Stafford folded the letter and put it back in the suit case.

Here was Hodges, representing the patentee and manufacturer of the new portable gun, arriving at the life-saving station in a blaze of mystery. His story was straight enough, and he had been victimized by a pair of plotters—thugs, with no designs on his money or personal valuables. Those holdup men were after the line-throwing gun. But why?

Zymo, the inventor of the gun, was a foreigner. The device had been evolved in a country beyond the Atlantic. Was some American trying to steal the invention? Stafford dismissed the idea almost as quickly as it occurred to him. It was to be presumed that Zymo, or the manufacturer who made the gun for him, had seen to it that the device was properly protected in the countries where efforts were being made to introduce it. That would have been a matter of plain business and not to be neglected.

Stafford was "stumped." He had no explanation to offer for the rough work of the thugs who had assaulted Hodges and, perhaps, made off with the hundred-and-fifty-pound box. He was hoping against hope that the box would be found by Blodgett and Sandy, and that the attack on Hodges would find some other logical explanation. Bill Tryner, coming up the stairs to the lookout station, pushed his head into the bunk room.

"You're my watch mate to-night, lieutenant," he said, "and your beat is south to the Inlet, right over the ground Sandy

covered. The cap'n and Sandy haven't got back yet, so ye're likely to meet 'em. Better stick a gun in your pocket. That old Smugglers' Cove used to be a bad hole, and it looks like it was tryin' to live up to its early rep'tation."

Jim Perry, one of the station crew, had a sick daughter over in Stony Point. He had gone to the town to spend the night and Stafford had volunteered to stand the eight-to-twelve watch in his place.

Taking a small gun from his suit case, Stafford slipped it into his pocket, laughing as he did so. "If those beach combers got what they wanted, Bill," he remarked, "they'll not be hanging around the Cove."

"This here's Friday, lieutenant," returned Bill ominously, "and I've noticed that unexpected things are likely to happen on Fridays, so don't be so blamed cocksure ye won't fall in with troubles."

Down below, in the sitting room, the off-duty men were playing cards and keeping their ears peeled for the jingle of the telephone. Hodges, sore and bruised, had fallen asleep on the couch. Stafford stuck a patent torch in his inside pocket, lighted a lantern and, with a cheery "Good luck, lieutenant!" from the men he was leaving, opened the door and let himself out into the night.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIDDLE OF THE COVE.

THE life-saving station was snugly berthed behind a breakwater and a reënforcing ridge of beach stones heaped up by the tide. The patrolman covering the southern beat to the Inlet followed the crest of a pebbly ridge—the same surf-made barrier that flung a protecting arm between the station and the stormy seas.

For nearly half the two-mile beat flooded marshland lay on the right of the ridge and stretched to high ground a quarter of a mile inland. This high ground, in a wide curve, struck the coast in bold, precipitous headlands where a narrow trough of the sea broke through to form the little, landlocked cove.

The Inlet, with its "halfway house,"

marked the southern limits of the patrol from the Smugglers' Cove Station. Across the Inlet was a "key post" where the patrolman from the next station to the south registered his arrival on his clock dial. When the tide was setting in, the Inlet was a tumbling rip, across which the patrolmen from each station were wont to signal back and forth with their lanterns.

There were no summer cottages in the vicinity of Keeper Blodgett's station, as the marsh was a bar to resorters. A large hotel had been recently built at the back of the Cove, however, in the hope of popularizing the spot; but, as yet, the enterprise had not met with much success. Something had gone wrong with the hotel project, and the building had not been thrown open to sojourners on that part of the coast.

With the Cove headlands towering blackly ahead of him, Stafford swung off along the ridge beat, bracing himself against a brisk wind that quartered down on him from the east. Clouds scurried across the sky, now revealing and now obscuring a bright moon. It was not a night when much trouble to seaward was to be expected. Stafford came at last to the spot where his uncle and Sandy were standing just below the ridge.

At this particular spot the road from Stony Point to the life-saving station came down to the ridge from the higher ground. At best it was a rugged track, and on its last mile to the station the boulders of the ridge made it extremely difficult for a wheeled vehicle.

"Here's where Sandy found Hodges, Hugh," remarked Blodgett, indicating a place at the edge of the ridge, "and there's no sign of a hundred-and-fifty-pound box. We have hunted all around here, and it can't be found. Those two footpads made off with it; and just why they wanted the line-throwing gun is a big conundrum. If they had an automobile, which is a possibility, the Zymo apparatus may be a dozen miles from here by this time. Hodges can thank his lucky stars he got out of that pinch as well as he did. As for the gun—well, he'll have to get another one."

"And if he can't get another gun here before I have to report for duty," said Stafford, "it means that I can just loaf around for the rest of my month's leave."

Blodgett laughed. "Well, I wouldn't grumble about that if I were you; you couldn't call your vacation a vacation if you had to put in some extra licks for the coast-guard service. I'm going back to phone Stony Point about the robbery—if Hodges doesn't beat me to it—but I don't think there's one chance in a hundred that the thieves will be found. Come on, Sandy."

Keeper and patrolman struck off along the ridge. Stafford spent a few minutes looking over the scene of the robbery and then continued on. He was conscious of a mild sense of disappointment, for it was always a pleasure for him to experiment with new life-saving apparatus; however, he had to take things as he found them, so he put the Zymo gun out of his mind and moved onward toward the Inlet.

The ridge lifted itself high under the two-hundred-foot wall of the cliff. Here, in bad weather, was as treacherous a beat as could be found anywhere on the coast. Driving seas had been known to sweep the path, to pound a patrolman against the rock wall, and then to drag him off in the sucking undertow. But there was no such danger for Stafford that night.

He reached the shack called the halfway house, answered lantern signals of the patrolman from the south across the heaving Inlet, and then went into the little building to call up the station and report. There was a bench by the telephone instrument, and he sat down for a few minutes.

The theft of the Zymo apparatus seemed to be a closed incident, so far as the Smugglers' Cove Station was concerned, but it was not easy for Stafford to drop it out of his thoughts. Again and again the knotty question took shape in his mind: Why should a couple of crooks want a line-throwing gun? He could evolve nothing satisfactory in the way of an answer, but he lingered longer in the halfway house than he had

planned to do, debating the little mystery. At last, realizing that he must be on his way back to the station, he jumped to his feet and caught up his lantern.

At that moment, above the booming of the surf, the sound of a report struck faintly on his ears. It reminded him of a cannon firecracker exploding in a box—a Fourth of July stunt that had been a great favorite of his when he was a boy. Hastening to the door, he stood there waiting and listening. The sound was not repeated.

He judged that the dull explosion had fought its way out to him against the wind from somewhere in the Cove. It was possible that a rock had crashed downward from the cliffside, although the nature of the sound was against such a supposition. It was something to investigate, anyhow, and Stafford left the shanty, crossed the ridge, and descended to a narrow strip of shingle at the base of one of the towering bastions that shouldered the Inlet.

He made haste around the base of the cliff to a point where the Cove opened out before him in a circle, as round and quiet almost as a South Seas lagoon. Here was a stretch of water scarcely more turbulent than a mill pond, with the four-story hotel perched at the crest of the farther slope.

A fine, smooth beach ran all around the Cove; and the moon, clear of clouds at the moment, flooded the sheer-to wall immediately on Stafford's right. Surrounding objects were brought out with the clearness of a silver print. Stafford, unable to see or hear anything of a suspicious nature, proceeded onward around the beach close to the base of the cliff.

One of his rubber-booted feet caught in something. He halted, bent down, and laid hold of a small line. It was a stout bit of cordage, measuring, he judged, a sixteenth of an inch in diameter. There was a weight at one end of it. He hauled in the line and presently there was a long, slender projectile in his hands, to which the end of the cord was attached.

"By glory!" he muttered, as an idea

suddenly dawned upon him. "Was that report I heard made by the discharge of a line-throwing gun? Was it the Zymo gun?"

Thrilled by a discovery that promised such weird results, he followed along the line for a distance of perhaps a hundred yards; and there, under his lantern's rays, lay a cylinder to which that end of the line was attached—a cylinder fitting over the end of a gun!

He picked up the odd contrivance and knelt down to examine it more closely in the light. With intense interest he opened the breech, extracting from the chamber a shell that was still warm. He noted a plumblike arrangement on the rear sight. That, he figured, was for getting the elevation. The cylinder in which the line had been packed was attached to the barrel by a catch. With thumb and finger he opened the catch and the cylinder dropped clear. On a silver plate let into the stock of the gun was the one word, "Zymo."

Amazed, Stafford put aside the gun and lifted his lantern. A cloud had drifted across the moon, and a curtain of darkness had fallen over the Cove. But the lantern served. A few feet from where he stood was a long, wooden case with stout handles at each end. The case was open. Nested within it were four more of the cylinders, two of larger size and no doubt packed with heavier cord. With the cylinders there was also a box in which cartridges were stowed; and in a rack in the lid were three more projectiles, with a space from which a projectile was missing. Unlashing the line, Stafford slipped the projectile that had just been used into the lid rack.

Here was the Zymo gun, and it had recently been fired. Stafford recalled that he had signaled the patrolman from the Kettle Shoals Station, reported to his own station by telephone, and then had wasted several minutes in the half-way house, after which he had been startled by the firing of the gun.

His theory was that the thieves had seen him signal the other patrolman across the Inlet and then had waited

until they thought the patrolman from the Smugglers' Cove Station was well on his way to the north; then, for some reason, the thieves had used the gun; but for what purpose was more than Stafford could understand. Where were the two men who had halted Hodges, beaten him up, and then made off with the Zymo apparatus?

No one was interfering with Stafford. If the rascals who had captured this queer loot were in the vicinity they were keeping themselves very much in the background. Stafford's concern was for the gun, however. He would get all the equipment into the box, drag it to the half-way house, and then call up the station and have his uncle come out with the horse and cart.

While he marveled over his good luck in finding the box, with its apparatus all intact, he was busily stowing away the gun, the container, and the long length of line. He had almost finished his work when the startling events of the night reached a climax in a cry—a shrill cry in the voice of a woman—coming with the wind along the Inlet from the ridge: "Help! Oh, in mercy's name——"

He heard that distinctly, and the call lifted him from his knees beside the box as though he were propelled by springs. It was an amazing thing, that cry of distress from a woman on the lonely beach at that hour. He snatched up his lantern, dug under his oilskins for the automatic pistol, and charged back along the beach toward the half-way house.

His keen ear untangled from the familiar sound of the surf a crunching of swift footsteps, diminishing in the darkness along the ridge path. He would have followed had not a stifled half sob caught his attention and drawn him in the direction of the shanty. The moon, emerging from the clouds at the moment, gave him a glimpse of a form sitting up under the lee of a boulder. He moved close, raised the lantern, and found himself looking down into the wide, frightened eyes of a young woman.

She wore a cape with a hood, and the

hood had fallen back, baring her head. Soft yellow hair, in wild disorder, was whipped about her face by the wind. Her face was white, almost ghastly, in the moon and lantern light. She was young, not much over twenty, Stafford guessed.

"What happened?" he inquired. "Are you hurt?"

"No," was the faltering answer, "I'm not hurt, but—but I—I might have been. You are the beach patrolman from the life station?"

"Yes."

The girl was struggling to get to her feet. Quickly Stafford set down his lantern, shifted the automatic to his other hand, and helped her.

"How is it that you are here on the beach at this time of night?" he asked.

Leaning against the boulder, the girl cast frightened glances to left and right. "I—I heard the report of a gun," she answered distractedly, "and I wondered what it—it could mean."

"Come into the halfway house and rest for a few minutes," suggested Stafford; "you'll be safe enough there. Here, you can take this gun——"

"I have a revolver of my own," the girl answered, and bent down to pick up a small, nickel-plated weapon, "but that man set upon me before I could use it. I—I do feel a little unstrung. Look in the Cove, please!" she begged. "I am sure there is some one else there."

Stafford supported the girl to the door of the shanty. "Wait there till I come back," he said. For the moment, it was the Zymo gun that worried him most. He could question the girl further later on.

Leaving the lantern with the young woman, he whirled and made his way back into the Cove. It was black dark again, and he groped his way to the place where he had left the heavy box, but could not find it. Taking his Coston light from his pocket he struck it sharply, and a red glare lighted up the beach and fought luridly with the gloom.

The box was gone.

He raced up and dower the beach during the four minutes the torch served him, but without catching so much as

a glimpse of the men who had spirited away the heavy case with its Zymo apparatus. He would question the girl, he thought, and she might be able to give him a clew.

But when he got back to the halfway house he found it deserted. His lantern was on the beach; and the girl was missing.

CHAPTER III.

SUSPICIONS AROUSED.

WHAT Keeper Blodgett called "the riddle of the cove" was an absorbing topic in the life-saving station next morning. The most interested person, naturally, was Martin Hodges, although Stafford was conscious of a tense and growing absorption in the weird adventures of the Zymo apparatus.

"That girl beats me," mused the puzzled keeper. "Where in thunderation she came from is more than I can guess. Old 'Jed' Dornley used to have his dory in the Cove, and there was a shanty where he lived a part of the time and stored his nets and lobster pots. His girl, Susie, wasn't more than twenty-odd. Now and again she'd keep house for Jed in the Cove shanty, or go out with him in the dory, and many's the time she's been around the ridge path and north as far as the station; but her hair was black and not yelluh. And, anyway, Jed and his girl haven't been nigh the Cove, to my knowledge, since the hotel people started operations. I'm up a stump regarding that girl, Hugh, and that's a fact."

Hodges had eaten a good breakfast and was feeling better. He still bore the marks of his unpleasant night's experience, had a piece of court-plaster the size of a dime decorating his forehead, and complained of an aching head, but he was able to use his wits.

"That Zymo gun is the only one in this country," he observed gloomily, "and there won't be time to get another one here before Lieutenant Stafford is due to leave the station. Tough luck, I call it! If that apparatus is anywhere around the Cove, though, strikes me we ought to be able to find it."

"Find the woman," put in Bill Tryner, with a wise look, "and ye'll find the gun."

"Meaning what, Bill?" demanded the keeper.

"Meanin' just this, cap'n: She yelled for help so'st to get the lieutenant away from the box and give the rest of the gang a chance to make off with it. She was one of 'em, I'll tell the world. If she wasn't, why didn't she wait for the lieutenant there at the halfway house?"

"I wouldn't be so sure, Bill," Stafford put in; "she didn't look like that kind of a girl to me."

Tryner, however, continued to insist that the young woman was an accomplice of the men who had robbed Hodges, and he handled the circumstantial evidence so well that he won over Blodgett and Hodges to his theory.

"Another case of 'find the woman,'" asserted the Zymo representative, wagging his head knowingly. "I wish you'd called me, last night, so I could have helped search the Cove."

"I thought of it," said the keeper, "but made up my mind you needed your rest. Three of us answered Hugh's telephone call from the halfway house, and we sartainly combed the Cove looking for the box and the girl and the thieves. Didn't have a mite of luck. I'm going over to Stony Point this morning and I'll have a talk with Noah Harper, the constable. If the girl's at the Point, Noah'll find her."

"He won't find her," averred Bill Tryner, "because she's foxy enough to keep away from the P'int."

"She must be staying somewhere near the Cove," put in Hodges. "According to her story, she heard the report of the gun and that drew her to the beach. She must have been pretty close——"

"Gammon!" jeered Bill Tryner. "That was jest a yarn to pull the wool over the lieutenant's eyes. She came to the beach with the rest of the gang, and now she's prob'ly gone away with 'em. If she stayed anywhere in these parts—which I doubt—it must have been across the Inlet in some of the cottages nigher to Kettle Shoals."

"Maybe she is at that big hotel Cap-

tain Blodgett has been telling me about," said Hodges.

The keeper shook his head. "No one there but a caretaker named Garner," he returned; "the hotel isn't open for business. I hear the company that built it is in some sort of trouble, and a case is being tried in the courts. 'Hobie' Garner is from Stony Point, and he's straight as a string—I know him."

"Well," asserted Hodges, "I'm going to have a look around that Cove myself this morning. Daylight may reveal something you fellows couldn't find at night."

"Good idea, Hodges!" exclaimed Stafford. "I was planning to do that very thing myself. Suppose we go together?"

It was about nine o'clock when they left the station and struck out southward along the ridge. At the place where the two thugs, representing themselves as Blodgett's men from the station, had halted the wagon and unloaded the box, Hodges stopped and described the attack on him in detail. The thugs had carried the heavy box to the Cove, no doubt, before Sandy came south on his sunset patrol. What the robbers wanted the line-throwing gun for was still the big mystery, and second only to the whereabouts of the gun itself.

Proceeding on their way, the two investigators passed between the frowning cliffs of the Inlet and entered the Cove. For the benefit of Hodges, Stafford thereupon related his own experiences of the preceding night on the very spot where they had occurred. Here was where he had tangled a foot in the line, here was where he had picked up the gun, and here was where he had found the opened box. Hodges, anxious and mystified, peered about him eagerly.

The high cliffs that shouldered the Inlet ran back for some distance along the circle of the Cove, dwindling to lower heights and changing into sandy slopes with patches of beach grass and bayberry bushes. Through a marshy notch the waters of Smugglers' Creek spilled into the Cove, with a grove of scrub oak and pitch pine just visible

and forming a sort of background for the big hotel.

This hotel capped the sloping bank directly opposite the Inlet. It represented a large idea, set in a somewhat difficult environment. There was a sort of tower on the two front corners of the building, and a long porch crossed the lower story. A wide descent to the water had been planned and partly executed in a series of steps and terraces. At the foot was the beginning of a wharf, a beginning of a row of bath-houses, and a beginning of a large boat-house. These beginnings, however, had been halted before they made much headway.

"Around there," said Stafford, pointing, "is what used to be Jed Dornley's shanty. The contractor building the hotel used it as a place to store materials. Dornley's catboat and dory were about the only craft in these Cove waters, except now and then a stray motor launch."

"Plenty of places where that box could be hidden," remarked Hodges. "What happened to this hotel project?"

"Money difficulties, I'm told. The builder ran out of funds, borrowed to the limit, and then had to quit."

"As I understand it," Hodges went on, wrinkling his brows suspiciously, "the caretaker, up there, is the only man around here. Maybe he's not so honest as Captain Blodgett thinks. Garner is his name, eh? Have you talked with him?"

Stafford shook his head. "Garner didn't show himself last night, and we didn't go near the hotel."

"Even if he's square himself he might be able to tell us something about the girl. Let's have a talk with him."

They made their way around the half circle of the beach, climbed the slope, and came at last, through heaps of building material, to the hotel porch. The building itself seemed complete save for a coating of paint, interior decorations, and furniture. The windows were uncurtained, and through them could be had glimpses of bare rooms.

"It's a shame all this is going to

waste," remarked Hodges, turning on the porch for the view through the Inlet and out to sea. "Sightly place, all right. Regular cliffs over there, eh? And what a neat little harbor for small boats! With a little pushing this could be made a popular resort."

He moved to the wide doors and drummed on the unpainted panels. The sound of his knuckles echoed cavernously through the bare rooms beyond. The summons was not answered. Hodges tried the doors but found them fastened.

"Garner may have gone to Stony Point for supplies," Stafford suggested.

"And then again," Hodges put in, "he may be inside there and have the rest of the crooks with him. I've a hunch, lieutenant, that the box we're after is in there, too. I'm going to have a look. If Garner has gone to town, no harm will be done, and if he's really inside there, then we'll be getting wise to something we ought to know. Let's see if we can find an unfastened window."

Window after window was tried, but in vain. The sashes had been nailed down. At the extreme end of the porch, however, a window was found that yielded a little to their efforts. A few minutes' persistent work freed the sash, and they raised it and propped it open with a piece of lath. Hodges climbed in across the sill and Stafford followed him.

They were in a large room evidently planned for a public parlor. Not a stick of furniture was in evidence, and the raw newness of boards and walls flaunted itself on every side.

"We'll have a look into every corner," said Hodges briskly, "and then we'll get out by the window again, and Garner, if he's away, will never know when he gets back that we've been here. You take the left side, lieutenant, and I'll take the right."

They were in a corridor, with doors opening on either hand. Stafford opened door after door, giving a hasty glance into rooms designed for sleeping purposes, into a huge apartment planned evidently for a dining room.

and into another that was plainly the kitchen.

Only in the kitchen was there a sign of occupancy. Here there was a small cooking range, a table spread with a white oilcloth and laid with two plates. Two wooden chairs flanked the table. The two plates and two chairs rather puzzled Stafford. It might be, he reasoned, that Mrs. Garner had come to help Hobie in his caretaking.

"Find anything?" queried Hodges, as he and Stafford met in the hall.

"No," replied Stafford.

"In the office there are a couple of easy-chairs, but nothing more. Garner is well supplied for his own comfort, strikes me. Let's try the second floor."

They proceeded above just as they had done below, each taking the rooms on one side of the long hall. A vast emptiness greeted them, but no furniture, no signs of life. Hodges started up the second flight.

"No use going up there, Hodges," said Stafford; "that hundred-and-fifty-pound box wasn't carried to the top of this hotel."

"I'm going to make sure, anyhow," returned Hodges.

"While you're about it, then, I'll go down and have a look around outside."

More and more that stealthy search was impressing Stafford as an unwarranted intrusion. Hobie Garner was an honest man, and he would have shown them over the place willingly. They should have waited, Stafford thought, until he had returned from the Point. Coming to the large room at the front, designed as the lobby, Stafford was minded to sit in one of the two easy-chairs and wait for his companion; but he was brought up with a short turn the moment he stepped into the lobby from the hall.

A woman faced him, a young woman with a small, nickel-plated revolver in her hand. At sight of him she dropped back a step, suddenly unnerved.

"You—you are the man from the life-saving station!" she gasped. "Why are you here? What do you want?"

Stafford pulled himself together. It was a disagreeable contretemps and, in

spite of himself, aroused suspicions which he had firmly pushed aside up to that moment. "Why didn't you wait for me at the halfway house last night?" he asked sharply.

CHAPTER IV.

SHADOWS OF DOUBT.

THAT Garner, the caretaker, had a wife but no children Stafford was aware. This girl, however, might be a relative of his from Stony Point. She had unlocked the front door and entered while Stafford and Hodges were on the second floor; now, as Stafford stood facing her, the door was ajar with a key on the outside of the lock. Certainly the girl must have Garner's confidence to be trusted with the key.

Suddenly confronted as a house-breaker and an intruder, Stafford felt decidedly uncomfortable. If the girl were guilty of helping or shielding the men who had stolen the Zymo apparatus, then Stafford and Hodges had a legitimate excuse for their high-handed methods. The fact that she seemed so much at home around the hotel rather fostered the impression that she might know more about Hodges' troubles than Stafford had been willing to admit.

As on the previous night, the girl wore no head covering. She was clad only in a crisp gingham house dress. The masses of light hair, he now discovered, had tints of bronze; her eyes were blue, and her face was decidedly pretty. Being young himself, he found it hard to hold black suspicion against such a girl.

She did not answer his question at once, but, in a voice shaken with some wild emotion countered with a query of her own: "Is that—that other man who climbed through the window a—a detective?"

"No," he told her; "he is agent for the manufacturer of a new line-throwing gun, a device he was bringing to the life-saving station for some practical tests. On the beach last night the apparatus was taken from him by a couple of thieves. I found it on the beach inside the Cove; and I had no more than

found it when I heard your call for help. After leaving you at the halfway house, I went back, but the box with the gun and its equipment had disappeared. You had vanished, too. We came here this morning to see if we could find the gun."

An expression of relief crossed the girl's face. "What reason had you for thinking the gun might be here in this hotel?" she demanded.

"We had looked all around the Cove and were not able to find it anywhere else."

"So you forced open a window and made a search?"

"Garner did not answer us when we pounded on the door," he explained, "and it was a matter that couldn't wait."

"Mr. Garner isn't here any more," said the girl. "My father is the caretaker now, and he and I have been here for two days. I—I am Eunice Maitland," she added, "and my father is Enoch Maitland. We are strangers in this part of the country, and I am sorry if you think we are in any way connected with the theft of that gun. Why should we want such a thing?"

Stafford's discomfort was growing. He introduced himself, explained that he was only a visitor at the life-saving station, that the keeper was his uncle, that he had volunteered to patrol the beach on the preceding night in place of one of the regular crew, and that he had been ordered to make tests with the new life-saving device.

"I am pretty well acquainted with Garner," he went on, "and I knew he would not object if I broke into the hotel with Hodges and made a search. If I had known a new caretaker was in charge, however, we should have waited and told him what we wanted."

A smile touched the girl's lips. "That's all right, lieutenant," she assured him; "I didn't understand, of course, when I saw two strange men getting in at one of the windows. You are in the coast-guard service, and that is enough for me to know."

"Where is your father?" Stafford asked.

"He will be back after a while, and I

hope you will come up from the station some day and meet him. He——"

Just here, hurried footsteps echoed in the hall, and Hodges appeared in the lobby. "Two rooms are furnished on the top floor, lieutenant!" he called. "I thought just this man Garner was——"

Catching sight of the girl, Hodges' voice failed him suddenly. Stafford introduced him to Miss Maitland and told how her father had taken Garner's place as caretaker.

"I have tried to explain to Miss Maitland why we pried up the window and were looking through the hotel," Stafford went on.

"You did not find the missing gun, of course," said the girl, "because my father and I know nothing about it."

"Didn't you see it last night on the beach in the Cove?" Hodges took on the air of an inquisitor, and it was plain that he still had his suspicions of the girl.

"No," answered Miss Maitland. "I heard the report of a gun and left the hotel to investigate. When I——"

"Your father let you do that, alone?"

"Dad wasn't feeling well when he went to bed, and he was asleep and didn't hear the report. I thought I wouldn't bother him, but would just find out myself what the shooting meant, if anything."

"It was rather unusual," commented Hodges. "Why should you have been interested in the report of a gun? You are not a great way from the life-saving station and might have guessed that the beach patrol had something to do with the sound."

Stafford thought that Hodges' sharpness was uncalled for. The girl's explanation seemed to cover the matter, and he could see no sense in trying to pick flaws in it.

"Miss Maitland is helping her father in his work as caretaker, Hodges," put in Stafford; "and I think it quite natural that she should be interested in the report of a gun near the hotel. Her father was ill, and she showed a good deal of courage in going to the beach alone to investigate. I don't see how her motives can be questioned."

The blue eyes turned gratefully upon Stafford.

Hodges, however was not to be silenced. "Why didn't Miss Maitland wait for you at the halfway house?" he asked.

"I was afraid dad might wake up and miss me," the girl explained; "and I was frightened and didn't stop to think. You see, I went on around the beach and——"

"You must have passed Lieutenant Stafford, for when you called you were on the beach ridge, close to the halfway house."

"I did see somebody kneeling beside a box, but I hadn't any idea it was some one connected with the coast guard," said Miss Maitland. "I hurried past, hoping to meet the beach patrol; then, when I reached the Inlet, some one ran toward me and caught me by the arm. That was when I screamed and Lieutenant Stafford came.

"Don't you think I am telling the truth, Mr. Hodges?" she asked with a show of spirit. "Why in the world should dad or I try to help a gang of thieves steal your line-throwing gun?"

"I beg your pardon if my line of inquiry has seemed unpleasant, Miss Maitland," returned Hodges, his manner softening, "but finding that apparatus means a lot to me and the men I represent. The misadventures of that Zymo gun are so out of the ordinary that the whole thing has left me up in the air. Why should a gang of crooks want the gun? You see what a riddle it is, all around."

"I give you my word, Mr. Hodges," said the girl with a frankness which Stafford thought there could be no questioning, "that neither my father nor I know anything about your missing property."

"How did the man look who appeared on the ridge path and caught your arm?"

"It was moonlight, but I could not see him very distinctly; and, as I said, I was frightened. I'm afraid I couldn't give you any description that would help you to identify the man."

"I think we have bothered Miss Maitland long enough," interposed Stafford.

"We climbed into the hotel through a window and made a search, and she is willing to overlook that. We couldn't find the Zymo apparatus, and she assures us that she knows nothing about it. We shall have to look somewhere else, Hodges. My friend and I have appeared in rather a sorry light, Miss Maitland," he added to the girl with a smile, "and we were the ones to explain and not you. Good morning."

He passed through the open door, left the porch, and began descending toward the beach.

"Something queer about this, all the same," remarked Hodges in overtaking him. "That girl was keeping something back."

"Why not?" asked Stafford shortly. "You and I have no right to pry into her personal affairs, Hodges. We couldn't find the box in the hotel——"

"Probably she and her father thought the hotel would be searched and they have had the box hidden away somewhere."

Stafford, out of patience, faced Hodges squarely. "Does Miss Maitland look to you like a girl who would be mixed up with a lot of crooks and tell a deliberate lie?" he asked.

"I'm older than you, lieutenant, and perhaps a pretty face doesn't fool me. Miss Maitland plays her part well; I'll give her credit for that."

"She told us the exact truth," insisted Stafford, "when she said that neither she nor her father knows anything about the Zymo gun. She was square with us, and I'm old enough to see a thing as plain as that. You are off soundings entirely with your suspicions."

"Her story won't wash," returned Hodges obstinately. "She went alone to investigate that shot in the night, she passed you on the beach by the box without saying a word, she encountered a man she can't describe on the ridge path, and she left the halfway house without waiting for you to come back. Does that look right to you, lieutenant?"

"Her bare word is enough for me," answered Stafford firmly.

CHAPTER V.

READY FOR USE.

ALL the way back to the life-saving station Stafford and Hodges argued. Neither could convince the other that his attitude regarding the Maitlands was wrong. The girl, Hodges continued to insist, had not told a straight story; it was full of inconsistencies—an explanation that did not explain, but left very clear the one fact that she was trying to conceal something.

Stafford, on the other hand, prided himself on his ability to read human nature, and he had found nothing but honesty and truth in the blue eyes of Eunice Maitland. She may not have been as explicit in her statements as Hodges would have liked, but she had found two men forcing their way into premises for whose safety her father was responsible, and her state of mind in the circumstances was ample excuse for a story that might have been unconvincing in spots.

If she was trying to conceal anything, certainly it was not a guilty knowledge of the whereabouts of the Zymo gun. Stafford would stake his head on that; and he declared that he thought Hodges was most unjust in continuing to harbor suspicions after the girl, for herself and her father, had denied point-blank any knowledge of the missing apparatus.

When Captain Blodgett got back from Stony Point, Hodges laid the matter before him. Stafford, believing that Hodges was unfair in some of his statements, registered his own version with his uncle. Blodgett had already gone on record, with Bill Tryner, as suspecting the girl who had vanished from the halfway house of underhand methods, but he was slower now to take Hodges' side of the argument.

"Two or three strangers have been drifting around the Point," remarked the keeper, "and Noah Harper says they looked like Western toughs to him. Noah cal'lates that maybe they might be mixed up with the disappearance of that Zymo gun. I saw Hobie Garner in town, too, and he says that watchin'

that old barn of a hotel had sort of got on his nerves and that he had resigned as caretaker. Hobie got to hearin' funny noises in the night"—here Blodgett grinned in an amused way—"and he was under the fool impression that the ghost of Jordan Dyckman was stumbling around in the empty rooms. Explaining to Hobie that ghosts are supposed to be light on their feet and to glide around without much noise was just so much wasted effort. He was scared out.

"But he had only a good word for the man that came to take his place and for the girl who came with him. A lawyer in Boston hired 'em and sent 'em down to take over the care of the hotel. If Maitland wasn't all right, Hobie says, that lawyer wouldn't have had a thing to do with him. Like enough, Hodges, we were wrong in thinking the girl was up to anything crooked."

"I'd have to have something more than Garner's word for that," returned Hodges obstinately. "Who is this Jordan Dyckman you mentioned?"

"He's the man who built the Ocean View Hotel. His money ran out, and he had to borrow right and left; then, after a while, he got in so deep that his creditors called a halt on him. Everybody seems to think that Dyckman was honest but misguided. He was found dead in the place by the contractor one morning last spring, a six-shooter in his hand. You see, he had taken a coward's way out of his troubles.

"A letter, postmarked somewhere in the West, had come for him the day before, but it couldn't be found. Nothing in the way of papers could be turned up, so it has been supposed that Dyckman destroyed everything in the way of clues before he killed himself. Now everybody with a lien on that big, empty building is fighting to get what belongs to him; and Hobie Garner," the keeper added with a laugh, "thinks Dyckman's ghost was coming back to make more complications."

"Who is this Boston lawyer that hires the caretakers?" queried Hodges.

"Give it up. You can get his name

and address from Garner or, from the Maitlands."

"I won't bother the Maitlands," said Hodges, "but I'll go over and talk with the former caretaker, cap'n, if you'll let some one of your men drive me into town this afternoon."

"I'll take you," spoke up Stafford.

They started, for town immediately after dinner, Stafford driving Baldy, the keeper's horse. Baldy and the cart comprised the station's only means of transport. Hodges, after a conference with Hobie Garner, expected to go on to Boston. What he expected to learn from the lawyer who hired the caretakers of the hotel was more than Stafford could find out. If Jim Perry's daughter was well enough so that Perry could return to the station, then Stafford was to pick him up for the return trip.

Hodges, in carrying out his plans, was not making a confidant of the lieutenant. Evidently the agent for the manufacturer of the Zymo life-saving apparatus did not feel that he could trust a man of such pronounced and opposite views in the matter of the Maitlands.

Stafford had no quarrel with him on this account; and the two rode the five miles into Stony Point, talking in a friendly way about anything and everything except line-throwing guns and caretakers of empty hotels. Hodges dropped off the cart in front of the Westover Arms, Stony Point's summer hotel.

"I'm going to Boston, lieutenant," he remarked significantly, "but I shall be back."

"Fine!" exclaimed Stafford cheerily. "I wish you luck, Hodges."

Jim Perry's daughter, it developed, was no better. Stafford persuaded him to stay another night in town, or as many nights as he thought necessary, volunteering to take his place at the station.

It was four o'clock when Stafford got back to headquarters, unhitched Baldy and put him in the shed that served for a stable, and reported to Keeper Blodgett. And at eight he started south on Perry's beat to the Inlet. Stafford's first

night as a substitute patrolman had yielded unusual adventures, and he hardly expected that his second night would furnish any excitement.

It was about nine o'clock when Stafford waved his lantern in greeting and farewell to the other patrolman across the Inlet and went into the halfway house to report to the station by telephone. For perhaps ten minutes he lingered; and then, on emerging from the halfway house, his attention was caught by a faint glow of light playing on the clifflike walls that shouldered the Inlet. His curiosity was aroused, and he made his way into the Cove just as he had done on the preceding night. What he saw, when the curving beach opened out before him, brought a startled exclamation to his lips.

The big hotel was on fire. The lower floor, at one end, was ablaze, and the fiery tongues were leaping higher and higher with every passing minute. Stafford whirled and dashed back to the halfway house.

"There's a fire—the big hotel here at the Cove is going up in smoke!" he announced excitedly over the wire. "Have Cap'n Blodgett turn out all hands, Tryner, and get here in a rush! I'm going into the Cove now to see what-I can do."

He raced back along the beach, and in the few minutes that had elapsed since he had first discovered the fire it had made terrific headway. The full length of the lower floor was now aglow, and the blaze had fastened upon the long porch. A huge volume of smoke was rising and, whipped by the northeast wind, was rolling inland.

The building was doomed; there was no doubt about that. But what about Maitland and his daughter? This was the thought uppermost in Stafford's mind as he bounded up the slope from the beach.

A frantic figure was silhouetted against the fire. "Jeanne!" cried a man's voice wildly, reaching Stafford above the roar and hiss of the flames and the crash of falling timbers. "Jeanne! Are you there, girl? Oh, Jeanne! Jeanne!"

This man was near the north end of

the blazing building. He had a coil of light, stout rope in his hands and was staring upward as he shouted.

"Who's up there?" demanded Stafford, coming close to the half-crazed figure with the rope.

"My girl, Jeanne!" was the answer. "She was in the tower room—moved to that this afternoon, and—and—" The man's voice broke huskily. "I tried to get to her, but the smoke and the heat drove me out. If she's trapped up there—"

"I'm from the life-saving station," broke in Stafford, "and the whole crew will be here as soon as they can come. You are the caretaker?"

"Yes," was the answer; "I thought if Jeanne would show herself I might somehow get the end of this rope up to her."

"You couldn't—if she's in that tower room, Maitland."

"Jeanne! Jeanne!" the caretaker kept shouting, almost beside himself.

With the heat of the fire beating in his face, Stafford stared upward. For a moment the pall of smoke blanketed his view of the upper floors of the building; then a gust of wind drove it away, and he could see the small tower at the front corner of the roof. There was a door and an iron balcony; Stafford made note of these in the ghastly, wavering light, and then he saw the form of the girl who had given her name as Eunice stagger through the door and reel to the support of the balcony rail. The whole lower part of the hotel was a seething furnace, and it was plain that the girl was trapped in the tower room.

"Are there any ladders around the place, Maitland?" demanded Stafford. "There's no chance for her to get down through the hotel, or for us to get up to her in that way. We must have ladders. Man, stop that! You can't throw the end of that rope up to her."

Fear for his daughter had robbed Maitland of his reason, and he was making frenzied efforts to toss the rope upward. His casts carried the rope no higher than the second floor.

"Ladders won't help," Maitland

shouted. "There are some ladders in the shed, over there, but what good will they do?"

There was a forlorn chance that by using ladders Stafford could get high enough to be able to toss the rope into the girl's hands. He did not stop to explain this to Maitland, but hurried to a shed some distance in the rear of the hotel.

By that time the fire was making the surroundings as light as day. The shed was locked, but Stafford caught up a piece of timber, used it as a battering ram, and crushed in the doors. The interior of the shed was dark, and he broke out one of his Coston lights.

He saw a number of ladders lying in a pile against one of the walls of the shed. Several barrels of lime were in his way. He crawled over them and dropped on some object covered with a square of canvas. As he tugged at one of the ladders, the canvas slipped under his feet and he fell backward against the barrels. As he looked down, the red glow of the torch glimmered upon the object that had been concealed by the canvas—a long, heavy box with handles at each end.

Stafford was dazed for a second; then, kneeling, he opened the box lid. If he had entertained any doubts as to the identity of the box they now passed out of his mind. Here was the missing Zymo apparatus, the equipment he had found on the Cove beach the evening before. How that box happened to be there, back of the barrels of lime and concealed by the canvas, was a mystery to be solved later. Stafford's one thought was this, that now there was a way to get a rope up to the balcony of that tower room. Nothing else mattered at the moment.

He snatched up the gun and thrust a cartridge into the breech; then he slipped one of the cylinders over the barrel and, working swiftly, attached a projectile to the end of the line and dropped it into the muzzle. In another second he was on his way out of the shed, the Zymo gun in his hands and ready for use.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE ANGLE OF THE AFFAIR.

OWING to the isolation of the hotel, an efficient fire-fighting apparatus would no doubt have been part of its equipment had the builder's plans been carried through to completion. So far as Stafford could discover, Maitland had not brought even a hand extinguisher into use. The nearest fire department was at Stony Point. It was possible that Keeper Blodgett had telephoned a hurry call to the Point, but by the time the fire fighters reached the Cove with their apparatus it was plain that the hotel would be a mass of smoking embers. It was feeding the flames like so much tinder.

When Stafford rejoined the distracted caretaker, the smoke was eddying thickly around the north end of the doomed building. Through rifts in the acrid, swirling fog Stafford could see the girl leaning over the high balcony railing and looking downward. He shouted to her as he lifted the gun to his shoulder.

"What's that?" demanded Maitland. "Where did you get that?"

Stafford did not take time to answer. He was sighting the awkward piece as carefully as he could. If his first shot failed there would probably not be time for another. In a storm, with a vessel lying close inshore among the breakers, if necessary he could have tried again and again to shoot a line aboard; but here, he realized, he could count on only one good chance at reaching the tower room with the life line.

Miss Maitland seemed to realize what he was endeavoring to do, for she staggered backward and crouched down. There was a dull explosion, and the projectile darted upward on its angling flight, the line uncoiling from the cylinder and paying out smoothly and swiftly. With eyes that were red and smarting from the smoke and heat Stafford and Maitland watched breathlessly the flight of the projectile and its trailing cord. A second or two told the story; and luck, rather than skill with the unfamiliar device, carried the pro-

jectile across the balcony and on through the doorway at the back of it.

Stafford dropped the gun, threw aside his oilskins and sou'wester, snatched a knife from his pocket, and severed the line.

"Now that other rope, Maitland!" he cried. "Lively!"

The caretaker in his excitement fumbled with the larger rope, but managed to get the end of it into Stafford's hands. Stafford secured it to the thread-like line, stepped back, and shouted for the girl to "haul away."

In the light of the reddish blaze reflected from the rolling and twisting smoke clouds he could see Miss Maitland working desperately. The heavier rope jumped upward under the pull of the girl's quick hands, and at last she could be seen making it fast to the balcony.

"What will she do now?" groaned Maitland. "She must be nearly overcome as it is, and if she tried to come down the rope she—she would surely fall."

Stafford had tossed aside his coat and was now kicking off his rubber boots. He had already foreseen the difficulty mentioned by Maitland and was prepared to meet it in his own resourceful way.

There was no doubt about the girl being nearly overcome; nevertheless, she was making a plucky effort to get over the railing.

"Keep back!" roared Stafford. "Wait!"

The girl toppled and fell to the balcony floor, even while the shout was on his lips. Now, if she were saved, it was up to Stafford. He seized hold of the rope and began climbing hand over hand, his stockinged feet walking up the smoking hotel wall. It was a long, hard climb, but Stafford was young and agile and strong, and soon he was at the balcony and climbing over the railing.

The heat, borne to the tower in an upward rush of wind, was terrific. Stafford unfastened the end of the rope, passed it once around the balcony railing, then tied it firmly under the girl's

arms. She was unconscious and lying in a crumpled heap. As carefully as he could under the spur of haste, he lifted her over the railing and began lowering her downward. The twist of the rope around the railing gave him a good purchase, and he lowered away rapidly.

It was now impossible for him to see anything immediately below, but when the rope suddenly went slack he knew that the girl had reached the ground. His own safety demanded quick action, for the tower room was roaring with flames and he was almost stifled. He made the rope fast, lowered himself clear of the little balcony, and began his descent.

A few yards from the ground his strength failed him and he fell. A strong hand laid hold of him and dragged him out of the stifling heat and smoke. He looked up to see Bill Tryner.

"A neat job, I call that, lieutenant," said Tryner. "Was it that line-throwin' gun you used?"

"Yes," Stafford answered.

There was a bucket of water near him and he got to his knees and thrust his head into it.

"You're scorched a little, lieutenant," Tryner went on, "but you come out of it better than a person might have expected. Firemen from the P'int are on the way, but they might as well turn around and go back. There won't be anything left of this hotel when they get here."

"Where's the girl?" inquired Stafford.

"She's all right, too. The cap'n took charge of her."

"And the gun? I hope that hasn't got away from me again."

"Sandy picked it up, lieutenant. You better sit there a spell and rest. I'll go and see if there's anything I can do."

As soon as Tryner left him, Stafford got to his feet and made his way to the shed. The water and the cool air had revived him, and he felt as fit as ever. Inside the shed he rolled the barrels of lime to one side, closed the lid of the long box, caught one of the iron handles, and dragged the box through the door.

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There was a chance, of course, that flying firebrands might set the shed on fire. This, however, was not the principal idea in Stafford's mind when he went after the box. He dragged it for thirty or forty feet and left it in a tangle of low-growing bushes. Men from Kettle Shoals had joined those from the Smugglers' Cove Station, but all were busy in the vicinity of the burning building. Stafford's work with the heavy box had passed unseen by any of them.

The girl had told him her name was Eunice, and her father had called her Jeanne. Stafford reasoned that she might have two Christian names—most girls did—and it was very likely that her father preferred the one she had not mentioned. This was a small point and easily explained; but finding the lost Zymo equipment in a locked shed, of which Maitland, as caretaker, must have had the key, was more of a problem.

How was it possible for the box to be in the locked shed and Maitland know nothing about it? Probably he had known about it, and very possibly Hodges was correct in his suspicions of the caretaker; but the girl, Stafford continued obstinately to assure himself, was innocent of any guilty knowledge regarding the box. Stafford had dragged the box to a spot where its discovery by the other men from the Smugglers' Cove Station would not involve Maitland so deeply as it would have done if found in the locked shed.

Why had he made such a move? Well, it was for the girl's sake. He wanted to spare her father until he could have a frank talk with her. Until that time he would keep his own discoveries to himself.

At this juncture half a dozen automobiles from Stony Point were parked at a safe distance from the big blaze. The fire engine and hook-and-ladder wagon must have been experiencing difficulties, for they had not yet arrived.

Stafford found his uncle. The crews from both stations and the men from the Point were standing back, helpless to do anything to save the hotel.

"It was as good as done for, Hugh, before we got here," the cap'n remarked. "There goes the roof!" he exclaimed.

With a tremendous crash the walls crumpled and the flaming roof collapsed. A great tongue of flame darted skyward. So intense became the heat that the spectators had to move back, and the owners of two or three of the automobiles had to drive them to a safer distance.

"Total loss, Cap'n Bloodgett," remarked a long, lean townsman glumly. "Two of the companies I represent had risks on that hotel."

"I suppose the lawin' will be stopped now, Whitcomb," said Blodgett to the insurance agent.

"I don't callate it will," Whitcomb answered; "the creditors will all be fightin' for the insurance money. What's become of the caretaker? I'd like to get his idee as to how the fire started."

"A man took him and his girl to town in an automobile. He was nigh crazy—clean batty—and the girl couldn't be brought back to her senses. They went to the Point huntin' a doctor."

"Where'd ye find this, lieutenant?" inquired Sandy, approaching Stafford at that moment and handing him the line-throwing gun.

Stafford was disappointed to learn that Maitland and his daughter had left. It would be next day, at the earliest, before he could have a talk with the girl or her father.

"I stumbled upon the box by chance, Sandy," Stafford answered. "If there is nothing more we can do here, Uncle Amos," he went on, "perhaps Sandy and Bill will help me get the box to the station?"

"Show me where the box is, Hugh," the keeper said, "and I'll see that it gets to the station. You've done enough for one night, and Sandy here will finish the eight-to-twelve watch for you. Bill, you go back with Hugh and take your north patrol."

Stafford led the way to the clump of bushes and showed his uncle the box.

Blodgett whistled. "Right there all the time, hey?" he muttered. "If it

had been a snake it would have bitten some of the men who've been lookin' for it."

Stafford might have corrected his uncle, but he was still swayed by a desire to shield Maitland on the girl's account. At least, he decided, he would keep the facts involved in finding the Zymo equipment in the background until Maitland had a chance to explain.

Just as he and Bill Tryner were leaving for the beach the firemen from Stony Point began to arrive.

"Not a thing they can do," commented Tryner; "the cap'n might have guessed they couldn't get here in time to do any good. I'm beginnin' to change my mind regarding the caretaker being mixed up with the loss of that line-throwin' gun. There are a lot of places in that hotel where he could have hidden the box away, and he sure wouldn't have planted it in a bunch o' brush. What's your idee, lieutenant?"

"My ideas are rather mixed, Bill," returned Stafford, "but it will need a lot of evidence to convince me that Miss Maitland would do anything crooked."

"Well, anyhow," observed Tryner, staring at the gun which Stafford was carrying over his shoulder, "we'll have to tally one for Mr. Zymo this round. His portable apparatus certainly stood up under a purty stiff test. The girl would have been buried in them blazin' ruins if you hadn't happened to find the gun jest when you did."

Here, at last, was one angle of the affair for which Stafford could be truly thankful. There were some things connected with the fire which puzzled him and aroused his distrust, but he was glad that chance had thrown it into his power to help the girl. And he would keep on helping Miss Maitland by shielding her father until he had the opportunity to speak for himself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN FROM COLORADO.

THE long box was brought to the life-saving station that night, and next morning Keeper Blodgett and his men examined it at their leisure. The first informal "test" of the apparatus had

proved so successful that all hands were deeply interested. The gun, equipped with cylinder, line, and projectile, ready to fire, weighed less than fifteen pounds. Hodges had declared that, at a thirty-degree elevation, the one-sixteenth-inch line could be thrown five hundred and forty feet, and the three-sixteenth-inch line three hundred and thirty feet.

"If that's so," said Tryner, "the gun is certainly a useful thing to have around. Suppose we give it a trial for distance?"

"No," said Stafford. "I fired the gun last night, but that was in a pinch and there was nothing else for it. The regulations require that before any tests are undertaken a line-throwing device must be fired three times with its maximum charge by the inventor or the inventor's agent. We'll put the gun away in the box, Bill, and wait for Hodges to get back."

About nine o'clock that morning Stafford set out on a hike to Stony Point. He did not follow the road around the marsh, but made his way along the beach to the Cove and so gained the main road in the vicinity of the smoking ruins which were all that remained of the big, barnlike hotel.

The shed had been saved, and the door Stafford had broken had been repaired and nailed fast. The scene on that side of the Cove was altogether a cheerless one. Stafford did not linger many minutes but set off with a swinging stride toward town.

It was after ten when he reached the Point and began making inquiries regarding Maitland and his daughter. They had lodged at the Westover Arms, he discovered, but had left there immediately after breakfast. Miss Maitland had recovered from her ordeal of the night before and seemed as well as ever. She and her father had lost everything in the fire but the clothes on their backs. No; the clerk at the hotel had no idea where they had gone. Whitcomb, the insurance agent, had also been looking for them, and it was suggested that if Stafford would look up Whitcomb he might possibly get some more definite information.

Whitcomb, however, had little to add to the meager array of facts. The Maitlands had left the hotel and vanished. The insurance agent had not been able to get the slightest trace of them. "I'll be hanged," he declared, wrinkling his brows in bewilderment, "if I can understand it! Something about the movements of those two that looks sort of fishy."

Stafford, more and more puzzled, continued his fruitless investigations until noon; then he went to the Westover Arms for his dinner, and met Hodges, and a man whom Hodges introduced as Kennedy, eating their noon meal at the same table where Stafford was given a chair.

Hodges had returned from Boston at eleven o'clock that forenoon. There was an air of confidence and satisfaction about him which indicated that his trip had not been barren of results.

Kennedy was square-built and keen-eyed, and there was about him a Western flavor. "This is the coast-guard man you was tellin' me about, Hodges?" he remarked. "Then I call this meeting a lucky one. Lieutenant, I want to palaver with you for a spell after dinner. It's about these two you know as the Maitlands."

Stafford had the feeling that something portentous was on the way, and, an hour later behind the locked door of Hodges' room, he had a conference that developed a rather astounding situation.

"You know, lieutenant," said Hodges by way of preface to Kennedy's disclosures, "that I went to Boston to have a talk with the lawyer who hired Maitland to take Garner's place as caretaker. It was in the lawyer's office that I met Kennedy. He was there fishing for information about Maitland the same as I was. You see, Kennedy's a deputy sheriff from Colorado, and he has a professional interest in Maitland. In fact, he's here to arrest the caretaker and take him back West to answer a charge of robbery. You see I was right in sizing Maitland up, don't you? He's got that gun of mine, or he knows where it is, and Kennedy is going to help me get it back."

"Don't worry about the gun, Hodges," returned Stafford. "The box, with all its equipment, is now at the Smugglers' Cove Life-saving Station. I found it last night."

This was pleasant news for Hodges. He began asking questions, which Stafford, still intent on shielding Maitland, answered indefinitely.

"Well, you've got the apparatus, anyhow," said Hodges in a tone of relief, "and I call it a stroke of luck. They tell me the hotel at the Cove burned to the ground last night, and I was afraid that, in spite of our search of the building, the equipment might have been secreted about the place and destroyed in the fire. You've taken a lot of worry off my shoulders, lieutenant, and that's a fact."

"What have you got against Maitland, Kennedy?" Stafford inquired.

"My home town is Cañonville," began the deputy sheriff, "and in order for you to savvy the whole layout I've got to put all my cards on the table. I'm plumb willing to do that, lieutenant, seeing as how you're an officer in the coast guard and bound to uphold the laws of the country. It's like this:

"Cañonville is thirty miles from a little wart of a settlement in the Colorado mining and cattle country known as Rock Pass. Morley and Dyckman had a general store at the Pass. They——"

"Dyckman?" echoed Stafford. "He's the man who built the hotel at the Cove?"

Kennedy narrowed his eyes and smiled shrewdly. "You've got your bean on the right number, straight off," he went on, "only you're jest a little bit shy of the real situation. It was Dyckman's son who had the general store in partnership with Morley. Well, to get on:

"Morley and Dyckman started their Rock Pass store with small capital. They were heavily in debt on the establishment when the big trouble happened, but they were prospering and hoped soon to be square with the world. Cañonville, thirty miles from the Pass, was the nearest town with a railroad and banking facilities. Morley and Dyck-

man had a big, burglar-proof safe; and it was their custom to keep valuable property in the safe for miners and others, making a small charge for the accommodation.

"A man from the East named True-man Holbrook arrived in the Pass to buy the Burgin mining property for a syndicate of Easterners. Holbrook brought with him twenty thousand dollars in cash and thirty thousand dollars in gilt-edged negotiable securities. But he had John Burgin to deal with, and anybody in that part of Colorado will tell you that John Burgin is a queer case of measles. His price for his property was fifty thousand dollars cash; and he would only accept two United States government bonds for five thousand dollars each out of the securities Holbrook brought with him. This put Holbrook in something of a hole. Burgin was laid up with a case of rheumatism at the time and couldn't go back to Cañonville with Holbrook to get cash on the other securities and close the deal. So Holbrook had to go back alone. Before he started, though, he deposited his twenty thousand dollars and his ten thousand dollars in government bonds with Morley and Dyckman for safe keeping until he made the round trip. Get the idea? Morley and Dyckman had never had a quarter of all that money in their old safe before, and I reckon it was a big temptation for Morley.

"While Holbrook was away, the bonds and cash disappeared; and Morley turned up missing at the same time. And Holbrook, having turned his securities into cash at the Cañonville bank, was held up and robbed in the mountains on his way back to Rock Pass. Morley again, see? He had helpers, of course, but Morley is the prize tinhorn we're after."

Kennedy sat back in his chair and relighted the cigar he had been smoking.

"What became of Dyckman, Morley's partner in the store?" asked Stafford.

"Funny thing about that," continued the deputy sheriff, "but straight as a string. Morley had sold out his interest in the store to Dyckman, as it tran-

spired, the very day before he—Morley—disappeared. So Morley wasn't a partner when he used his knowledge of the combination of the safe to get at Holbrook's cash and bonds. See? He double crossed Dyckman good and plenty. Dyckman sold out the store, realizing enough to pay all indebtedness on building and stock and a few hundred dollars on account to Holbrook. For, having made a charge for storing Holbrook's cash and bonds, Dyckman was responsible when the property was stolen. A good man playing in hard luck is the way you can size up Dyckman."

"I can't see how this has anything to do with Maitland," observed Stafford.

Hodges chuckled. "That's where the surprise comes in," he returned. "Spring that on the lieutenant, Kennedy."

"Maitland is Morley," said Kennedy. "After robbing the safe, Morley had to travel under false colors in makin' his get-away."

"What makes you so positive that Maitland is the alias of Morley?"

"That's where the girl, Jeanne Morley, comes in," explained Kennedy. "While her father was running the store at Rock Pass with Dyckman, Jeanne Morley was teaching music in Denver. Pretty soon after her father slid out of Rock Pass between two days, the girl gives up her music teaching and slides out of Denver. Joined her father, of course, to help him spend the money. It was my idee to stop lookin' for Morley and begin lookin' for the girl. Holbrook fell in with that notion, and the Easterners he represented took it up. They hired a detective to hunt for the Morley girl; and this detective found that she had come to Boston with her father under the name of Maitland, and that her father had hired out as caretaker of that hotel at the Cove. The Cañonville sheriff got a wire to send a man on to apprehend Morley, and I was the man he sent."

These surprising disclosures had a naturally unpleasant effect upon Stafford. The situation looked very dark for Maitland, although Stafford still

clung to his faith in Maitland's daughter.

"And the girl," Kennedy added, "has been calling herself Eunice Maitland. Her real name is Jeanne, Jeanne Morley."

This bit of evidence added still further to Stafford's discomfort. He could have told Kennedy about finding the missing Zymo apparatus in the shed to which Maitland held the key, but decided to keep that small item of information to himself. The evidence was not really important, so far as the Colorado deputy was concerned, anyhow. Kennedy seemed perfectly sure of his ground.

And there were queer angles to that theft of the line-throwing gun. What could it possibly have to do with a robbery in far-away Colorado? Why should Maitland be sufficiently interested in the gun to attempt to steal it and hide it away? Why had the gun been fired that other night in the Cove? Stafford was threading a maze, and until he found a clear path to something definite his resolve remained firm to shield Maitland so far as he could. The influence exercised over him by the girl Eunice, or Jeanne, was strong. He could not think her guilty of any complicity in that Colorado robbery.

There was the odd circumstance, too, that Maitland had hired out as caretaker of an empty hotel built by the father of his former partner in the general store. That certainly was not a coincidence. A fugitive from justice, traveling under an alias, would not have risked entanglement with the law by acting as a caretaker on the Atlantic coast unless he had a very strong motive.

"We get here," pursued Kennedy, "to find that the hotel was burned to the ground last night, and that Maitland has once more pulled off his great disappearing act. Maybe he heard I was hot on his trail; maybe he set fire to that hotel himself; and maybe I've got another long chase ahead of me. But I'll get him finally, and you can gamble a blue stack on that."

"Why have you told me all this, Kennedy?" queried Stafford.

"Well, Hodges tells me that the girl put something over on you the other night——"

"That's Hodges' idea," cut in Stafford; "it was never mine."

"Well," said Hodges, "you agree with me now, don't you?"

"I'll agree with you," returned Stafford, "when you can show me a good reason for Maitland's wanting that line-throwing gun—a reason connected with some crooked work. Maitland may be a thief, as Kennedy says, but I can't understand why he should want to steal your Zymo apparatus."

"Every man, lieutenant," put in Kennedy easily, "is entitled to his personal opinion. That's all right. It's up to me to find Maitland, and I'm going to work out of Stony Point. You and Hodges have your own business to attend to, and all I ask of you is this: As an officer of the coast guard, I want you to tip me off if you corral any information that will be helpful to me. Can I count on that?"

"You can count on me to do whatever I can to help straighten the matter out," Stafford promised.

"That's all I want to know," Kennedy said, getting to his feet. "Now you'll have to excuse me, as I've got to start operations. Where can I find this Noah Harper?"

Stafford told him, and the three left Hodges' room and went downstairs to the hotel office.

"I've ordered a car to take me out to the life-saving station, lieutenant," announced Hodges. "Do you want to ride back with me?"

Stafford accepted the invitation and they were presently on their way. But Stafford was not at all talkative. His thoughts were busy with these new and startling complications concerning Maitland.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OTHER SIDE.

WITH the recovery of the line-throwing gun and its equipment, Hodges seemed to lose interest in Maitland and his daughter. At the station he said nothing at all about the Colorado

deputy sheriff and the business that had brought him to the eastern part of the country. The caretaker, even though he had played a guilty part in the theft of the Zymo apparatus, had now ceased to trouble Hodges, and the way was cleared for the tests Stafford had been asked to make. These tests were a matter of business with the Zymo representative, and apparently he was thinking of nothing else.

The use Stafford had made of the line-throwing gun in rescuing Miss Maitland from the burning hotel was a story repeated to Hodges by Bill Tryner and, later on, by Keeper Blodgett. Hodges was immensely pleased.

"That was a real life-saving test, lieutenant," he said exultantly; "you were unfamiliar with the gun and yet you used it successfully the very first time. Why didn't you tell me about this on the way out from Stony Point?" He laughed good-humoredly. "I suppose you thought it was too much like starring yourself, eh? Well, it was fine business, and this portable line thrower must already have made a good impression on you."

Before supper that afternoon Hodges fired the gun three times with the maximum charge. This, technically, agreed with the regulations and left Stafford officially free to handle the gun himself. He arranged with Blodgett to have a drill on the beach next day to see how quickly a line could be thrown and the breeches buoy rigged—"according to Zymo and not Mr. Lyle," as Tryner jokingly remarked. By "Mr. Lyle" Tryner had reference to the Lyle line-throwing gun in use by the coast-guard service.

Jim Perry telephoned from town to ask if he could remain away another night. His daughter was greatly improved, but not yet out of danger. He received the keeper's permission, and once more Stafford was to patrol the beach on the eight-to-twelve watch. The weather was fine, the sea peaceful, and the chances were about one in a thousand that any misfortune would overtake a ship on such a night. Nevertheless, the patrol was a matter of rou-

tine, just as much as the lighting of the lantern on the Kettle Point Lighthouse.

What Hodges wanted was a spell of dirty weather and a chance to try the portable gun under the hardest service conditions. A drill on the beach was all well enough so far as it went, but one real test at passing a line in a driving gale would do more to show the quality of the Zymo apparatus than a hundred mere drills.

Hodges, of course, wished no harm to the craft plying along the coast; but if trouble had to come, and some vessel were fated to encounter difficulties, he hoped it would happen while Stafford was at Smugglers' Cove trying out the new life-saving device. Fine weather, consequently, made no particular hit with Hodges, and he went to bed early in the station sleeping quarters.

Stafford went over the ridge path to the Inlet, watching the twinkling eye on Kettle Point. This lighthouse warned of the Shoals, and of Scylla and Charybdis—two fancifully named reefs lying off the mouth of the Inlet. Under the moonlight, Stafford saw the twin reefs creaming white as they shouldered the incoming tide.

At the Inlet, Stafford signaled as usual to the other patrolman; then, as he turned back to report by telephone from the halfway house, a figure upstarted from behind a heap of bowlders.

"Who's that?" Stafford called, lifting his lantern high.

"A very grateful friend, lieutenant," came the answer in a woman's voice.

"Miss Morley!" The name had been running through his mind, and it now dropped unwittingly from his startled lips.

The girl came on steadily and halted in front of him. There was a sharp tang in the autumn air, and the girl was wearing a warm stocking cap and a man's coat so much too large for her that it reached below her knees, and the sleeves had to be rolled back to allow her the use of her hands. There was something forlorn and rather pathetic about her, standing in front of Stafford in that baggy old coat and with a sudden, haunted look in her eyes.

"So you have been talking with the man hunter, Kennedy! You have found that my father's name is Morley, and that I am Jeanne and not Eunice! You have been told that my father is a thief and a fugitive, and that I have been helping him evade the law! Can you believe such things of him and me, lieutenant?"

She had poured out the words breathlessly and with a touch of bitterness, save at the end where she launched her point-blank question. With that, her slender form straightened and she tossed her head defiantly.

"Kennedy made rather a long story of Morley and Dyckman's troubles," Stafford told her.

"He made a story about the fire, too, didn't he? It would be like him to say that father started it purposely. Than Kennedy is like that; for when Than Kennedy once makes up his mind that a man is a crook, he'll believe him guilty of whatever happens. He'll tell you, I'm sure, that my father and I stole that line-throwing gun."

"I found the Zymo outfit in the shed near the hotel——"

"And just in the nick of time to help me with it! I came here to-night hoping you'd still be making this patrol, and that I'd be able to see you and thank you. I was penned up in that tower room by the flames, and there is not the least doubt that you saved my life, lieutenant. And you dragged the box with the Zymo apparatus out of the shed and into a thicket of bushes. You did that because you wanted to be a friend to father and me; and you must have done it with black suspicion in your heart for both of us."

"No," said Stafford; "I have never suspected you of being dishonest."

Her voice softened as she went on: "I am more than grateful for that, too. It seems a long time since any one has had faith in me. Now, please, let me tell you the other side. It will not take long, and if you like I'll walk with you while you travel your beat."

"Come into the shed, Miss Maitland. I'll report to the station, and then we can sit down for a few minutes."

She followed him into the halfway house and waited while he reported over the telephone; then, sitting on the hard bench, the lantern swinging above them from a nail in the board wall, the girl gave Stafford "the other side" of that Colorado affair.

"My father did not sell out his interest in the store at Rock Pass to Lon Dyckman. The papers Dyckman showed were forged. When Holbrook left his money with Morley & Dyckman for safe-keeping while he went back to Cañonville, you have been told that twenty thousand dollars in cash and ten thousand dollars in bonds disappeared, and that father disappeared at the same time. He did; but he was taken away by force, in the dead of night, and kept a prisoner in the hills for days. He tried to escape, and was shot by his jailors and supposedly killed. But he was only badly wounded. He managed to crawl for two miles down a mountain trail to the shack of one of his best friends, Jerry Pryne, a miner; and Jerry hid him and nursed him until he was well, and then sent word to me in Denver.

"Lon Dyckman, lieutenant, had carried out a fiendish plot, seemingly with the utmost success. The real culprit, nevertheless he had cleared out of Rock Pass with something like honor, while my father was being hunted by the law all through the West. Only Dyckman and his confederates believed he had been killed, and they kept that to themselves; to have stated what they thought to be the fact would have started some unpleasant questions regarding the how and the why. As soon as I heard from Jerry Pryne I gave up my work in Denver and devoted myself to helping father find Dyckman. He thought, and no doubt still thinks, my father unable to trouble him in any way, and this has been a point in our favor.

"But we had to take other names. You can see that, can't you, lieutenant? Maitland was my mother's maiden name, and Jeanne Eunice Morley is my own full name. As Maitland and his daughter we came to Boston, on our way to Smugglers' Cove. Father knew

something of Dyckman's affairs; for instance, he knew that Dyckman's father was building the hotel, there in the Cove. He knew the name of the elder Dyckman's lawyer, also. We called on the lawyer in Boston to see if we could get any information about Lon Dyckman. Of course, we posed as the Maitlands and did not breathe a word of our real reason for wanting to find the man we were looking for.

"There, in Boston, we had what we thought was our first stroke of luck. Lon Dyckman had come East months before, but the lawyer had not seen him and did not know where he was. Dyckman's father had killed himself, his affairs being so badly involved that he could see no way out. This happened at about the time Lon Dyckman appeared in Boston. A caretaker was in charge of the Smugglers' Cove hotel, and the elder Dyckman's creditors were fighting in the courts. A new caretaker was needed, the old caretaker having resigned. The lawyer offered father the job, and it was just what we both wanted.

"My theory is this, lieutenant: Lon Dyckman's father was hard put to it for money; his son, out in Colorado, got it for him through a robbery in which suspicion was cast upon my father. Lon Dyckman, as soon as he could leave Rock Pass, came to Boston and to Smugglers' Cove. He found his father dead, and all his business affairs in a sorry tangle. Well, what did Dyckman do with all that stolen money he brought from Colorado? We know that he did not pay off any of his father's debts, and he seems to have vanished completely. Lieutenant, it has somehow been impressed on me that Lon Dyckman concealed Holbrook's money somewhere in the hotel. With father as caretaker, we had the best chance in the world to search for the money. That is what we did and were doing when the fire broke out last night and trapped me in the tower room. If the money was really in the hotel it is now gone forever.

"You have had faith in me, lieutenant, and now you can see how I am trust-

ing you. If some things happened that you could not understand, you know now that, my father being a fugitive from the law, we had to proceed sometimes by indirection. As to that line-throwing gun, I'll tell you again that father and I had nothing to do with it. We know you found it in the storage shed, but how it got there is a mystery. What I believe is this:

"Holbrook's money is somewhere around the Cove, if it was not in the hotel, and Dyckman and his confederates are after it. For some reason they need the line-throwing gun in their operations. They stole it from Hodges, came near losing it the other night when I heard the sound of a shot on the beach, recovered the gun again, and then, by some means, opened the locked door of the shed and secreted the heavy box inside. There you found it when you went for the ladders."

The girl drew a long breath that was half a sigh of hopelessness. "It is all very puzzling, very baffling, lieutenant, and it seems next to impossible to get to the bottom of the plots and counterplots. But my father is an innocent man, hounded by the law, and we will keep on hunting for Lon Dyckman. Kennedy's coming is a terrible handicap, for at any moment he may find my father, and that will cut short our work. Jerry Pryne sent father a letter stating that Kennedy was on the way East, and we got that letter early this morning. That was why we left the hotel so suddenly. Jerry Pryne's cousin, Abner Joyce, is the lighthouse keeper at Kettle Point. He has taken us in there for a few days, although I suppose he is risking his job by harboring a fugitive from the law. But Abner believes in father and me, and he has a big heart."

The girl got up from the bench. "I'll not keep you any longer," she said. "I have told you my father's side of the story so that you can balance it against the information you got from Than Kennedy. It may be in your power to do something to help father; if it should turn out that way, will you do what you can for him?"

There was a note of wild pleading in

the girl's voice. Stafford thought of her father, a fugitive with a deputy sheriff crowding hard on his heels, working under so many disheartening circumstances in the hope of proving himself innocent of any wrongdoing—a forlorn hope, at the best. It was easy to see that Eunice was her father's inspiration in his desperate struggle, and Stafford was touched and thrilled by the hard fight the two were making. He got up and took down his lantern, then followed the girl through the open door.

"I will do what I can, Miss Maitland," he said, "and, whether I can help you or not, you shall have no reason to regret giving me your confidence. I——" He broke off abruptly, his eyes seaward.

A large motor boat, with all ports dark and only the long gleam of a searchlight leveled forward from the bow, was making the turn between "Silly" and "Carib," as the life-savers called the twin reefs, evidently bound for the Inlet and the Cove.

"Who—who can that be?" cried the girl tensely.

"Perhaps it is some one who had an interest in the burned hotel," Stafford answered. "If you are going back to Kettle Point, Miss Maitland, I will walk with you around the Cove. If the launch ties up at the hotel wharf, I'll try to find out whether it's an honest boat or a rum runner."

They descended from the beach path and started along the beach leading into the Cove.

"I'll call those fellows down for not showing the proper lights," Stafford added; "that's the only thing that makes me think they may have contraband aboard."

CHAPTER IX.

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING.

WHEN around the cliff at the entrance to the Cove, Stafford extinguished his lantern and moved into the shadow of the sheer wall. The motor boat came roaring through the Inlet, the searchlight dancing over the quieter Cove waters.

"You didn't want them to see us!" murmured the girl excitedly. "Why?"

"Nothing more than a precaution, Miss Maitland," he answered. "If those aboard are up to anything unlawful, I want them to think they are free to do as they please. We'll continue on around the beach, keeping in the shadow as much as we can."

A glow suddenly flashed at the cabin ports, the steady rhythm of the motor ceased, and the boat glided to a halt. There was a clatter and a splash, and the craft, at anchor, swung lazily with the tide. A dory was put over, and two dark figures clambered into it. The dory moved shoreward, grounded on the beach, and the two men got out and moved up the slope toward the blackened ruins of the hotel.

"This is getting interesting, Miss Maitland," remarked Stafford. "We'll climb the bank about here; then you can go on to the road and get back to Kettle Point in that way."

"But I'd like to know more about those men!" the girl protested eagerly. "Their presence here may have some bearing on my father's affairs——"

"I don't think there's a chance of that," he cut in, "so I shouldn't worry. Ah!" he exclaimed, a moment later, "they're going to that storage shed."

The two from the dory had produced a lighted lantern, and it was easy to follow their movements by watching the light. They passed the cheerless heap of debris that had once been the hotel and made straight for the little building to which Stafford had gone for the ladders the night before.

"You had better stay here, Miss Maitland," suggested Stafford; "I'm going to creep up on those fellows and see what they are doing. It isn't a very pleasant job for a woman."

"I haven't had many pleasant things to do for a long time, lieutenant," the girl answered, "so I don't mind. Please let me follow after you!"

"All right, if you really want to come; but be careful."

They were at the top of the slope, some distance to the north of the shed. In front of them the ground was dotted

with shadowy brush clumps. Stafford, dropping to his knees, crawled from one bit of brush cover to another, at last halting behind a thicket within twenty feet of the two men. They were at the door of the shed, one of them lifting the lantern up and down so that its light would serve their examination better.

"By thunder!" exclaimed a voice. "The door has been broken, Chris, and nailed back in place."

"Smash it, Nick," a second voice answered; "we've got to get in."

Nick lifted a foot and smashed it against the door. After two or three attempts the boards splintered and crumbled. Both men went inside with their lantern.

"They're looking for something, lieutenant," the girl, crouching at Stafford's side, whispered to him.

"They are," agreed Stafford, "and they don't seem to find it."

From inside the shed came a great racket of overturning barrels and boxes and a rattle of ladders being moved about. Either Chris or Nick began to swear; then both of them emerged into view.

"Well, it's gone, slick and clean, Chris," came a voice.

It was Chris, evidently, who was using the strong language, for now he exploded a full-throated imprecation. "You and Spence ought to've had more sense than to put it there, in the first place," he said. "Any fool would have known better."

"You ought to have been here and taken care of the job yourself," was the spirited rejoinder; "then everything would have been all right and no kicks comin'. Spence and me did the best we could. I reckon you never tried pullin' off a piece of shady work right under the noses of the coast guard. It ain't so blamed easy; take it from me. Spence had a key to the lock on the shed door, and he swore the shed was never opened—only buildin' material and such stuff being inside. It looked like a good place to us. That fire last night was what queered us. Now what'll we do?"

"We'll have to try the other scheme

—to-morrow, if everything looks promising. We'll go back to the launch and turn in."

With that, the two started down the slope toward the dory.

Miss Maitland was trembling with excitement, and she laid a shaking hand on Stafford's arm. "I believe," she whispered in a choking voice, "I do believe that one of those men is Chris Whaley!"

"And who is Chris Whaley?" asked Stafford.

"He used to work for Burgin, of Rock Pass—a mining engineer. Burgin discharged him because he was dishonest. I was with father, one summer, and met Whaley then."

"Well, if that fellow was really Chris Whaley, then we've got hold of something. You can guess what they were after, can't you?"

"The Zymo apparatus!"

"No doubt, Miss Maitland. Your father's affairs may be involved in this business, after all. Leave the matter in my hands for to-night and you go on to the lighthouse. I'm going down there to talk with those men, and it's better that I should go alone."

"You—you'll let me know if you discover anything of importance?"

"You can trust me," he assured her.

Without a word, she caught one of his hands in both her own and pressed it convulsively; then, rising to her feet, she faded away into the night shadows, laying a course toward the road.

Stafford relighted his lantern, started up, and hurried down the slope. The two men were already at the dory, and he shouted to them.

"Wait a minute! I want a word with you!"

The two dark figures drew together in a startled way, evidently exchanging opinions as to what the unexpected appearance of this third person might mean.

"Who are you?" demanded the man called Chris as Stafford drew close.

"I'm a patrolman from the life-saving station," said Stafford.

Chris took a hand out of his coat pocket and seemed to feel easier. "What

can we do for you?" he inquired, his manner more affable.

"You came down the coast without running lights," Stafford went on, "and you are anchored without a riding light."

"Our ignition system went wrong," was the answer, "and there's one of our men working on it now. Sorry, but it was just a case of accident, nothing more."

"What boat is that?" asked Stafford.

"The *Aurora*, of Boston."

"And you are——"

"I haven't a card with me, but my name is Burton. I had a lien on the hotel that used to be up the bank, there, and I ran down to Smugglers' Cove to look the situation over. We expect to be here for two or three days."

"If you don't mind," said Stafford, "I'll go aboard with you and look around."

"Glad to oblige, but you are barking up the wrong tree if you think there is anything crooked about us."

A short row brought them to the side of the *Aurora*, and the three clambered aboard. There were only three in the party, it seemed, and the third man, got off a deck chair and surveyed Stafford wonderingly in the half gloom.

"One of the coast guard, Alf," explained Burton; "he saw us coming in without our lights and wants to look us over. Got the lights fixed?"

"Sure!" Alf turned to a switch and gave it a pull. "There you are," he went on, as the port light broke out its red eye; "and there!" There was a green blink to starboard. "I clean forgot about the riding light, this Cove was so deserted." He touched a third switch and a white light showed overhead.

Burton slid back the companion door and led Stafford down into the cabin. There were bunks, lockers, a gravity table—merely the equipment of a pleasure launch and nothing more. Stafford took a look at the engine room and thrust his head into a miniature galley. He saw nothing suspicious.

In the electric lights of the cabin he gave Burton and his two companions

a keen sizing. Burton was tall and lanky, with towlike hair and faded blue eyes. Judging by his general appearance, he was a man of some means. His Western origin was suggested by a nugget pin in his scarf. Nick was built more solidly and, plainly, was of a rougher sort. Alf was the engineer, to judge from his greasy overclothes.

"Oh, well," observed Stafford, laughing easily, "I guess you're all right, Burton. We have to be pretty careful these days. Sorry to have bothered you."

"Don't mention it," returned Burton. "Here, try one of these with my compliments."

He presented an open cigar case and Stafford helped himself to a perfecto; then, bidding Burton and Alf a cheery good night, he got overside into the dory and Nick rowed him ashore.

"I'll bet something handsome," Stafford reflected as he made his way back to the ridge path, "that Burton is really Whaley, and he's here for something more than just to look over the burned hotel. Nick, if I've got this right, was one of the men who stole the Zymo apparatus from Hodges. The other of the two thieves was Nick Somebody-or-other. And Burton is after the line-throwing gun. Why?"

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF THE BLUE.

NEXT morning Jim Perry came out from town. His daughter had passed safely the crisis of her illness and was now on the road to recovery. In returning to take up his duties, Perry had brought out the station mail. There was a long envelope for Stafford, but it was addressed in a strange hand and bore no marks of being official.

"As I came along the marsh road, cap'n," Perry remarked to Blodgett, "I saw a couple o' men on top of the clift by the Inlet. Seemed real queer to me. Got any idee what they could be doin'?"

The keeper laughed. "Remember that old chap that was here two summers ago, Jim, studyin' rock formations along the coast?" he asked. "Well, he was all

over those cliffs, and for a couple of months he gave us the heft of our work. Once he got marooned up there, and in order to get him down we had to pass him a line with the Lyle gun; next he fell into the ocean, and we had to fish him out and work over him for an hour to bring him to; and then, when he was leavin', his automobile got stuck in the sand and we had to pry it loose. I'll bet those men you saw are some more of these geology sharps, Jim."

"Like enough," Perry agreed.

Stafford was opening his letter and gave only casual attention to this talk; nevertheless, it must have impressed him, because part of it bobbed up in his consciousness later on. For the moment, however, his letter was claiming his amazed attention. In order that he might read it and consider it carefully, he climbed the stairs to the station sleeping quarters where he could be alone. The letter was rather bulky, and with it was an inclosure of a single sheet. This sheet was in the nature of a deposition, and contained statements sworn to before a notary in Ockersburg, a town six miles from Stony Point. But it was the name of the deponent, clearly signed on the document, that struck Stafford like a bolt from a clear sky. That name was "Alonzo Dyckman!" The deposition was to this effect:

I, Alonzo Dyckman, late of Rock Pass, Colorado, and junior partner in the firm of Morley & Dyckman, make this statement of my own free will, my only motive being to ease my conscience and do justice by my former partner, Enoch Morley. I thought Morley had been killed, and for months I have been haunted with the idea that I was the cause of his death; but now that I have discovered him to be alive, out of gratitude to fate for having been spared the crime of murder, I make this statement.

The thirty thousand dollars in cash and bonds which Holbrook left in Morley & Dyckman's safe was taken by me, with one Christopher Whaley planning the robbery, and three others known as Elias Spencer, Alfred Mings, and Nicholas Antwerp helping; and I, alone, held up Holbrook on his way from Canyonville to Rock Pass and took from him an additional twenty thousand dollars which he was taking to John Burgin. Of the men I have named above, I know Whaley's name is an alias, and I think the names of the others are aliases, also.

My deed to the store and stock was forged. Morley disappeared the night the safe was robbed, Christopher Whaley and the others taking him from Rock Pass by force, in the dead of night, and holding him a prisoner in the hills. Morley tried to escape and was shot down by Spencer and, as was supposed by all of us, was killed.

I now know that Morley was not killed; but that, under the name of Maitland, he has been acting as caretaker for the hotel which was recently burned to the ground—a fire which was deliberately set by Elias Spencer.

ALONZO DYCKMAN.

Here followed the notary public's statement and seal, all in due form.

It was an astounding document. Stafford read it twice, his amazement growing. The deposition was of tremendous importance to the man he knew as Maitland, and to the girl he knew as Maitland's daughter. But why had it been sent to him? Eagerly he picked up the sheets that comprised the letter and began to read:

"LIEUTENANT HUGH STAFFORD,
"SMUGGLERS' COVE LIFE-SAVING STATION, VIA STONY POINT.

"DEAR SIR: Last night my father's hotel burned to the ground—the hotel which ruined him financially and finally killed him—and the fire was deliberately set by one known as Elias Spencer out in Rock Pass, Colorado. I saw Spencer, in the night, as he forced his way through a first-story window, and I saw him when he came out, but I did not know at the time what deviltry he was up to. I fled back to the old hunter's camp on the creek, where I had been in hiding for weeks. Morley and his daughter were caretakers at the hotel, and Whaley and the rest wanted to get them away from the Cove. This, I am positive, was the sole reason for setting the hotel afire.

"When the fire was at its height, I watched it from a distance. I saw you, lieutenant, save Jeanne Morley. I infer from this that you will have an interest in the Morleys, and will find them and deliver into their hands this letter and the sworn statement inclosed. I would send this to Enoch Morley direct if I knew where to reach him. As for me, I am bound for the port of missing men, to begin life all over and see if I

can make something better of it. Than Kennedy will find Morley, but he will never find me.

"Whaley worked for Burgin, out in Colorado, and he knew all of Burgin's business affairs. He knew a syndicate of Easterners was to take over one of Burgin's mines and that Burgin would demand the cash. I know now that Whaley, who had left the East under false colors to dodge a crime committed there, planned to waylay Holbrook between Cañonville and Rock Pass; but Holbrook escaped by arriving two days before he was expected. He did not escape for long, however.

"Holbrook brought twenty thousand dollars in cash and thirty thousand dollars in securities as good as cash. But Burgin, influenced by Whaley, would not accept all the securities. Two United States government coupon bonds for five thousand dollars each were acceptable to Burgin, but he insisted that Holbrook should go back to Cañonville and turn the other securities into cash before completing the deal for the mine. Holbrook left his cash and the government bonds in Morley & Dyckman's safe for security and started back to Cañonville, thirty miles away.

"Whaley came to me and suggested that I take Holbrook's funds, and fasten the theft upon Morley. He promised to see that Morley was spirited away in the night and kept a prisoner among the mountains, incommunicado, so that all of us could make a clean-up. Whaley was shrewd and clever, and he knew that in me he had a good man to work on.

"Morley and I were not on particularly good terms. He was too honest for some of the deals I wanted to put over to help our firm. Then, when his daughter Jeanne spent one summer in Rock Pass and I lost my heart to her and wanted to marry her, neither Jeanne nor her father would give me any encouragement. Whaley knew about that. But there was something else that Whaley knew which inclined me even more to fall in with his plans.

"When I was a boy my father was in good financial circumstances and lived

in Boston. He had a cottage near Kettle Shoals, and we would go there every summer. I had a catboat in the Cove, and when I was not sailing I was climbing all over the cliffs. I was daring and venturesome, and I found a niche and an overhang on the face of the North Cliff which none of my boy friends had the nerve to try to reach. I will refer to this overhang later.

"The lack of hotel accommodations at Kettle Shoals and Smugglers' Cove had long impressed my father. For years he had it in mind to popularize the Cove as a resort and to build a hotel. But his plans did not take shape until after I had been expelled from college, and was sent West 'to find myself,' as dad put it. I had always been wild and restive, and he thought a Western experience might be good for me. After a time I reached Rock Pass, met Enoch Morley, and arranged with him to start the general store. Dad sent me two thousand dollars. We had to go deeply into debt, but at last our establishment was well under way.

"Meanwhile, dad was building his hotel at the Cove. He was wrong in starting the project when he did, for the cost of building material was at the peak, and the enterprise cost him twice what it would have done in ordinary times. When he was once in, though, he had to see it through. He would have won out, hands down, had not some of his war stocks taken a big slump. Like myself, out in Colorado, he presently found himself head over heels in debt. All his creditors were pressing him. Fifty thousand dollars would have saved the day for him, he wrote me, but where was he to get the money?

"Whaley knew about this state of affairs. It was one of the levers he used in persuading me to fall in with his plans and help annex Holbrook's money. There was fifty thousand dollars of it—just what dad needed. I began scheming myself to help Whaley and then to double cross him and the others and get all the loot. In a year or two, dad said, he would be on Easy Street if he had a little temporary help. I reasoned that when this happened I

could return Holbrook's money to him in some way. This, however, was a very shadowy thought at the back of my mind and merely a sop to my conscience.

"I took the money and the bonds out of the safe. That same night, Whaley and the others saw to it that Morley disappeared. Holbrook was to be met by Whaley and his crowd on his return from Cañonville. I knew the place, but I cut in on the plan by holding up Holbrook before he reached that particular spot.

"I had the money now, all of it, but Whaley and the others were like a pack of wolves, and my business was to keep what I had for myself. I forged the deed to the store and sold the property; then I slipped out of Rock Pass and came East, fooling Whaley for once in his life.

"Black treachery such as mine, however, never wins. Spencer and Antwerp were guarding Morley in the hills. Before I left the Pass, Spencer got word to me that Morley had been shot and killed while trying to escape. That news caused me to begin losing my nerve. But, like my father, I was in on my project and couldn't turn back.

"My mother had died while I was in Colorado; and when I reached Stony Point a funeral procession was making its way to the cemetery. My life in the West had changed me, and no one in the town had the slightest idea that I was Lon Dyckman. The second bit of information that got my nerve was the statement that the funeral I saw on leaving the train was my father's. I was too late with my stolen money, and he had taken the easiest way out of his money troubles.

"It was a dazing blow. Dad was a square man, but unfortunate; and I, his son, was a murderer and a thief, and equally unfortunate. And dad had all the best of it.

"I went out to Kettle Shoals. A family with a lot of children were occupying our old cottage. I went to the hotel at the Cove. Garner, who was the caretaker, did not know me from Adam. He told me about my father, showed

me the room in which he died, and never dreamed that he was talking to the dead man's son.

"I knew of the old hunting camp on the creek, and went there. I had the fifty thousand dollars in a tin box and, although hard pushed for funds, I never touched a cent of it. At night I used to see my old partner, Morley, rising out of the dark to point an accusing finger at me. I was in deadly fear of Whaley and his men, too; and of Holbrook and of detectives who, although looking for Morley and not knowing he was dead, might find me. I was at my wits' end when, one day as I came sneaking from my camp on the creek, I saw Spencer and Antwerp loafing around the Cove.

"I was scared stiff, for I knew that they had tracked me and were after the money. No matter what happened to me, I was determined to keep Holbrook's money out of the hands of Whaley and his crowd. The idea of restitution was sincerely in my mind, but I feared to do anything because I might be arrested and held for the killing of Morley. There was one place where I could hide the tin box and where it would be out of Whaley's reach. The niche in North Cliff!

"It was not possible to reach the niche by night, or I should have got to it under cover of darkness. But I went in the early morning, climbed the heights from the marsh side, fastened a long rope to an iron pin I had planted in the brink of the cliff during my boyhood days, and lowered myself down. I clung to the rope and hung seventy-five feet in mid-air over the lip of the overhang. In order to reach the niche I had to swing like a pendulum until I could get my feet on the shelf. I had not the nerve of my younger days, and it was a hair-raising piece of work, but I was goaded to desperation by that sight of Spencer and Antwerp. Somehow I wanted to save that money, and in some way I wanted to have it returned to Holbrook.

"Conscience is a terrible weapon when it fights for the right. And, of course, it fights for nothing else.

"I won to the niche, put the tin box

away in its farthest corner—the left-hand corner, lieutenant, where it is safe, although in plain view. Then I swung out and began climbing the rope. When I had passed the overhang, I discovered that the rope had been worn nearly in two, sawing across the sharp lip of stone. A deathly chill swept through me. One or two more swings at the niche and I should have been hurled to the foot of the cliff and killed outright. I had been spared, I thought, for the one purpose of making restitution.

"And when I crawled over the brink of the cliff, gathered up my rope, and started off, I saw Spencer and Antwerp! They had been watching me from below! They had hurried around by the Inlet and were coming to intercept me. But I knew that country too well. They fired at me twice. The bullets went wild and I got away.

"Nevertheless, they knew what I had done. The logic of the situation must certainly have been all too clear to them. They had seen where the Holbrook money had been placed, but I felt sure they would not have the courage to go after it. However, I was fearful, for all that. I continued to stay in my hunting camp, alert, watchful, and venturing out only by night. Whaley was summoned from some place, and he and Spencer and Antwerp hunted for me. Many a time I saw them, skulking around in the dark, but they never got a glimpse of me.

"It was impressed on me that fate was approving my course with the money by keeping me safe from that pack of wolves; and then, when I saw Morley in the rôle of the new caretaker, I could scarcely believe my eyes. A load was lifted suddenly from my shoulders. I ran back to that old camp and blubbered like a baby. Morley, the man whose blood I had believed was on my hands! Morley, alive and acting as caretaker for my father's old hotel!

"I was tempted to go to him at once and make a clean breast of everything; only the ferret eyes of Whaley and his gang held me back. Any one of that crowd would have killed me on sight.

"Something I could not understand

was going on by night in the Cove. I saw two men carrying a heavy box. I heard a report and, in the moonlight, I saw something like a trailing line shoot upward. There was a prong of rock outthrust from the shelf of that niche of mine, up the cliff wall, and the two men—Spencer and Antwerp, I believed—were trying to shoot the line over it. They failed; then they ran. I saw some one coming with a lantern along the Inlet. There was a woman's cry, and the man with the lantern hurried away toward the beach path. The two men returned, and I saw them carrying the box to the locked shed back of the hotel.

"What happened by day in the Cove I could not know, but I managed to keep track of affairs pretty well by night. Antwerp did not seem to be around any longer, but Spencer was constantly on the job. I saw him, on the night of the fire, climb into the hotel and out again. I have sworn to that, and it may be valuable testimony when inquiries are made as to the cause of the fire. I was drawn from my camp again later by the glare. Lurking in the woods, I saw Jeanne Morley in the tower room, and I watched your work in saving her. What would I not have given to have been in your place, Stafford! It would have helped a little in squaring my debt to Morley.

"Given time, I knew that Whaley and his crowd would surely devise some means for getting at Holbrook's money. I decided to take a desperate risk, see Morley, and tell him in substance what I have written here. Jeanne always had a wise little head, I reasoned, and would succeed somehow in beating Whaley to the niche and securing the box. I went into Stony Point openly, only to learn that Morley—or Maitland as he was calling himself—had vanished with his daughter, no one knew where. In coming away from the Westover Arms I almost brushed elbows with Than Kennedy in the street. Not knowing how guiltless the Colorado deputy held me by this time, I decided to pull out for Ockersburg and send my explanations to Morley by mail, in your care.

"Sooner or late, I feel sure, you will get in touch with Morley. If you don't, Kennedy will; and if that happens you can spring this long letter and the deposition on the Colorado deputy. No one in Ockersburg remembers Lon Dyckman; and the notary public there did his work without reading the statement to which I was making oath. I covered everything but my name with a blank sheet of paper. He certainly was curious, and no doubt suspicious; but fifteen minutes after this is mailed I shall be on my way to parts unknown, with a vow to go straight and wipe the past out of my life.

"But I urge you, lieutenant, to help Jeanne get that tin box from the niche in the cliff. If you do not know where she is, and if you cannot find her quickly, then get the box yourself and turn it over to Kennedy with this letter and inclosure.

"You can't miss the place. It is the North Cliff, only a short distance from the Cove end of the Inlet. From the beach you can see the overhang, seventy-five feet straight up; and under it is the outthrust stone tooth. Use the gun with which you saved Jeanne on the night of the fire. But I don't need to advise a man in the coast-guard service. You will know what to do. Get the money before Whaley has a chance to work out his plans.

"If you can't do this as a matter of simple justice to Enoch Morley, then certainly you could hardly refuse to do it for a girl like Jeanne.

"LON DYCKMAN."

Stafford finished the reading of this long and amazing letter, drew a sharp breath, and sat back in his chair. Could he believe what he had read? The writer had uncovered his culpability step by step with meticulous care. If not a hoax, then the writing was done by a man wild to undo a grievous wrong; so eager that he did not shrink from acknowledging every detail of his crime.

The text of the letter, here and there, bore evidence of its truthfulness. There was mention of events that had happened on the night the Zymo appara-

tus was stolen; a mention of the shed in which it had been placed; and the name of Whaley had been given to the man calling himself Burton by Miss Maitland, which squared with information in the letter.

The way to prove the sincerity of the letter and the honest motives of Lon Dyckman was, manifestly, to get to the niche and see whether the tin box with Holbrook's money was there. And this must be accomplished without delay. There was no time even to go to the lighthouse and talk with the girl and her father.

Stafford started to his feet, refolded the sheets of the letter, placed the deposition with them, and returned the whole to the long envelope. This he placed in the breast pocket of his coat. Then he went downstairs.

"Uncle Amos," he said to the keeper, "I want to borrow a hundred and fifty feet of light, stout rope."

"What now, Hugh?" queried Cap'n Blodgett.

"A little private business; that's all." Stafford turned to Hodges. "I'm going to give the gun a test this forenoon, Hodges," he went on; "this afternoon will do for that other test. Give me the gun and a cylinder packed with the light line."

"Where do we go, lieutenant?" queried Hodges.

"I'm going alone. Didn't you hear me tell the cap'n this is a private affair?"

Hodges looked disappointed. He got the gun, however, and affixed a cylinder to the barrel; then he handed the gun to Stafford, together with a projectile and a cartridge.

"You had better make it three cartridges, Hodges," Stafford suggested. "I've an idea that I'm going to find my work difficult. With three cartridges I'll have three tries. If I succeed, the test will figure largely in my report to the president of the board on life-saving appliances."

Hodges, puzzled but nevertheless pleased, secured two more cartridges and handed them over. Stafford at once left the station and started south.

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CHAPTER XI.

TREASURE-TROVE.

AS Stafford came along the beach at the edge of the Inlet, he saw the *Aurora* still at anchor in the Cove. As seen by daylight, with all her brass-work glistening, she looked very trim and speedy. There was no one visible about her decks, but a muffled sound of pounding came from her engine room.

"They're making repairs of some sort," thought Stafford; "hope it will keep them busy while I'm at work here."

Burton, if he was really Whaley, might come ashore at the sound of the firing on the beach. With Stafford seventy-five feet up the cliffside, Whaley could do some unpleasant things if he was so minded. Hodges, if he had been along, might have guarded the lower end of the rope if Stafford succeeded in placing it; but it had not seemed wise to bring Hodges or anybody else. The only man at the station who had faith in the Maitlands was Stafford, and it had seemed poor policy to enlist a second person in a project so vital to the fugitives.

At the exact place on the beach where he had first discovered the missing Zymo apparatus, Stafford halted. For over one hundred feet the sheer wall of the cliff towered above him. His eye ran over the smooth rock surface, weathered by the ages, and halted at the overhang. Certainly it was a queer formation. Under the lip of rock, three quarters of the way to the top, was a black shadow. That was the niche mentioned by Dyckman, undoubtedly. Only a narrow, oblong hole could be distinguished from the foot of the cliff. The stone tooth, wide and thick and substantial looking, was in plain evidence, outthrust from the lower jaw, or shelf, of the niche.

This projection was perhaps five or six feet across at its greatest width, and at least ten feet in length. At its point it angled upward, exactly in the right shape to catch a line and prevent it from slipping off.

Stafford chuckled. "One secret is out,

anyway," he muttered; "now we know why Spencer and Antwerp wanted the gun. They were shooting at that projection up there. In the moonlight they had but one chance in a thousand of getting a line over it."

He made the line fast to the projectile and dropped the projectile into the barrel; then he loaded the piece and backed along the base of the cliff, step by step, nicely calculating distance with respect to the elevation of the gun. The cliff wall was one side of the right-angled triangle, the base was the ground along the cliff, and the hypothenuse must be the angle of elevation.

Stafford halted, shifted his position two or three times, and then planted himself at what he conceived to be the right position for the trial shot. As he lifted the gun to his shoulder, he heard a light, swift step behind him, lowered the piece, and whirled to an about-face.

"Miss Maitland!" he exclaimed.

Yes; there in front of him stood the girl, in her ill-fitting man's coat and stocking cap and with face flushed with eagerness and eyes wide with curiosity.

"Lieutenant!" she exclaimed. "What are you trying to do?"

Stafford flung an uneasy glance toward the *Aurora*. There were still no signs of life about her decks.

"I don't think this is a very safe place for you," he said.

"I wanted to find out something about that boat," she answered, "and I have been hanging around the Cove for an hour. It was Chris Whaley we saw at the shed last night," she went on, "and the man with him was Nick Antwerp—another Rock Pass character. I saw them both on the launch. They are fixing the engine, I think, because that pounding has been going on for quite a while. Lieutenant, they're not here for any good, I am positive."

"So am I," he told her. "Read this letter, Miss Maitland, while I am at work, and you will understand what I am trying to do. And keep an eye on the *Aurora*; if any of these Westerners put off in the dory, let me know at once."

He took the letter from his pocket

and handed it to her. Her surprise was great as she took it from his hands, and then he heard a stifled cry from her as she caught the import of the letter. It was necessary for Stafford to work quickly, and he gave all his attention to the business before him. He sighted the gun carefully and pulled the trigger.

The dull explosion was caught up by the cliffs and flung in echoes across the Cove. Stafford watched the snapping line as it rose in the air. He muttered disappointedly as the projectile struck the cliff above the tooth of rock; and then he laughed exultantly as the projectile fell downward, on the farther side of the tooth, striking the beach with a thud.

His first shot, promising failure, had turned out a success. He had a thin line reaching from the cylinder, up and over the stone tooth and down to the beach again.

"Bravo, Zymo!" he exclaimed. "So far, I have nothing but good things to say about this gun of Hodges'. It works like a charm."

There was no response from the girl, and he gave her a quick look. She was reading the letter of Dyckman's, so absorbed in it that she was oblivious of everything around her. Her face was flushed and her eyes were glowing. Stafford smiled to himself as he released the end of the line from the cylinder and made it fast to the rope he had brought from the station.

Directly underneath the overhang, he began to pull down on the smaller line. The heavier rope moved upward, crossed the tooth, and came downward on the opposite side. He separated the heavier from the lighter line, rove a noose, and once more began pulling downward. The noose knot traveled toward the tooth, snuggled tightly below it, and a way to the niche lay open to the agile, clear-headed, coast-guard man. He began divesting himself of coat and shoes.

The girl looked up presently to find Stafford in front of her. He had removed the cylinder from the gun barrel and had dropped the projectile, minus the line, into the muzzle.

"By an oversight, Miss Maitland, I failed to bring my automatic pistol with me," he said. "I have loaded this gun with a fresh cartridge, however, and you could put that projectile through a man if he tried to make any trouble. I'll leave it with you."

"You're going to climb up there?" murmured the girl, her fearful eyes on the face of the cliff.

"It's a lot easier than scaling the side of a burning hotel," he answered lightly.

"And it's for father and me!" she whispered. "Lieutenant Stafford, we'll never forget this! And this letter!" She pressed the sheets of it to her heart. There was a choke in her voice as she went on: "Could there be anything more wonderful? It's all we need to prove father's innocence!"

"The tin box with the money will help prove to Kennedy that the letter is genuine," returned Stafford, "and here goes for the box. Keep an eye on the motor boat," he warned, as he began climbing.

He climbed with strength and skill, searching out small footholds as he went up and relieving the strain on his arms. The girl watched him breathlessly, gasping for fear as he reached the tooth, swung out over space, and crawled up and over the projection. Halting there, a masterful figure in clear relief against the wall of the cliff, he waved cheerily down to her.

Then he flung a look at the *Aurora*. The mysterious lifelessness remained in evidence about her decks. Those aboard must surely have heard the report of the gun, but if they were watching proceedings on the beach it was from the cabin ports.

Stafford was puzzled; the business in hand, however, was his immediate concern. He turned to the niche. The opening was no more than five feet in height by about a dozen in width. He glanced overhead at the stone roof that covered him, and he thought of Dyckman, suspended from the brink, swinging inward and sawing his rope against the sharp edge of the lip.

"He was right about its taking nerve for that," Stafford muttered. "No won-

der those Colorado schemers wanted the line-throwing gun."

He crawled into the niche. The floor was almost level, but with a slight downward and outward pitch. It penetrated a scant two yards into the cliff. Striking a match, Stafford stared about him. The rocks were bare and smooth, and the whole interior was open to the eye. There was no tin box. But on the floor of the niche he saw the burned stumps of two cigarettes—fresh stumps and recently thrown aside. Then Stafford thought of the men Jim Perry had seen on the brink of the cliff that morning.

A black frown knotted Stafford's brows. "Too late!" he exclaimed; "a few hours too late. Whaley and his gang have beaten us to it."

He was sorry to return to the girl with such discouraging news. "But I know where that box is, and I'll get it!" he vowed to himself grimly, as he crawled out on the projecting tooth and lowered himself over and downward.

"Where is it, lieutenant?" came the girl's voice wildly, as he dropped from the rope.

"It wasn't there, Miss Maitland."

She fell back with a stifled cry. "Then this letter of Dyckman's was—was a hoax?" Her voice shivered and broke with a sob. "Why, oh, why—"

He laid an encouraging hand on her shoulder. "It was there, I am positive," he told her, "but Whaley and his gang were ahead of us."

Miss Maitland took hope. "Then you can get help from the life-saving station," she cried, "and make them give it up?"

"No time for that. While we were going for help and telephoning from the halfway house, Whaley and his crowd might finish their tinkering and get away. So long as we keep the launch under our eyes, Miss Maitland, we have got them."

He got into his coat and put on his shoes; then he began thoughtfully packing the smaller line into the cylinder, and forcing the cylinder down to the catch on the barrel. The projectile he started to put into his pocket, but changed his mind as another idea took

hold of him and he dropped the projectile into the gun muzzle.

"You go to the halfway house and wait there, Miss Maitland," said Stafford.

"But where are you going?"

"Aboard the launch, and I can't very well take you along."

She drew a sharp breath. "You are going after the box!" she cried. "And there are three Western ruffians on that boat! Lieutenant, they will kill you!"

"I don't think so," he answered, with a faint smile. "There is a good cartridge in this gun and another one in my pocket."

"Let me telephone to the station!" begged the girl.

"Only as a last resort," he said; "we don't want too many mixed up in this until we know absolutely that Whaley and his gang have the Holbrook money. I am almost positive they have it, but we want that proof before we spring that letter on Kennedy and tell him too much of your father's affairs. Go to the halfway house and wait and watch. Don't fret about me."

He walked away along the curving beach while the girl, worried and anxious, started for the beach path beyond the Inlet. When he had come to the hotel landing, Stafford halted and trumpeted through his hands.

"Ahoy, the *Aurora*!"

The noisy repair work seemed to be going forward in redoubled volume, and Stafford had to repeat his hail three times before Whaley showed himself.

"What's wanted?" he called.

"Send the dory, Burton; I want to come aboard."

"Right away," was the prompt response.

This ready compliance was more than Stafford had expected; but, on the whole, it pleased him.

CHAPTER XII.

THANKS TO ZYMO.

IT was the man Nick who came after Stafford. In broad daylight he had a face full of rascality, even now when he seemed trying to show at his best.

"Burton's plannin' to leave," he ex-

plained as he rowed toward the launch, "but somethin' went wrong and we all have been helpin' Alf fix it."

"Got it fixed?"

"Jest about."

While Nick was securing the dory's painter to a chock, Stafford climbed overside with his Zymo gun. Whaley met him with a smile and a curious glance at the gun.

"That's an odd-looking blunderbuss you have there," he remarked.

"It's a reliable old sniper," Stafford declared, "and could put a projectile right through a man. Perhaps you know, Mr. Burton, that I am Lieutenant and Stafford of the United States coast guard?"

"I can't remember whether you gave me your name last night, but I am just as glad to see you now as I was then. What is your pleasure, lieutenant?"

Just here Alf came up through the sliding door of the companion, wiping his grimy hands on a bunch of waste. "She's all ready, Burton," he reported; "fuel pipe's cleared and all the other repairs made."

"The *Aurora*," put in Stafford, "will stay right here until I give you permission to leave the Cove. Burton, I want a word with you in private."

Whaley shot significant glances at Alf and Nick. "Always glad to oblige the coast guard," he said to Stafford; "come down into the cabin, lieutenant."

As they went down the companion steps, Stafford followed Whaley and closed and fastened the companion door behind them.

"What's the idea?" demanded Whaley coolly as he dropped down on one of the berth cushions.

"I'm to make a search," replied Stafford. "Open every locker, Burton."

"Great guns!" exclaimed Whaley humorously. "You don't think for a minute that I'm a rum runner, do you?"

"It makes no difference what I think," was the sharp response. "Open the drawers of that gravity table."

Whaley obliged him. Nothing in the shape of a tin box was revealed. The larger drawer contained navigation charts and some odds and ends of smok-

ing material, cards, and poker chips. The lockers under the berths revealed nothing but clothing. Stafford ordered Whaley to shake out each piece of wearing apparel.

"I'll be hanged if this isn't a funny stunt," remarked Whaley with an air of bored amusement.

"Now, forward, Mr. Burton," said Stafford calmly, nodding toward a narrow door in a bulkhead. "I can see other lockers under the curving seat in the bow. We'll try them."

Obediently Whaley passed through the door. Stafford followed him, but had no sooner set foot across the threshold than he was jarred and hurled from his feet by a heavy blow from behind. The Zymo gun dropped from his hands; but, in an instant, he staggered up, and, his brain dizzy, whirled to confront a fourth man, one who must have been lying in wait there at the bulkhead door. This last person was short and stout and wore an ugly leer; also, he had possession of the line-throwing gun.

"Elias Spencer, lieutenant," came mockingly from Whaley; "you overlooked a bet. Now, don't get rough. I'd hate to shoot a coast-guard man, but you see how it is."

In Whaley's right fist was a neat little automatic. He held it close to his side with the point covering Stafford.

"Yes, Whaley; I see how it is," returned Stafford, recovering quickly from the shock that had bowled him over; "every man of your Colorado crowd seems to be here."

"Except our dear friend Lon," qualified Whaley, a sudden glint rising in his pale eyes. "Lock the bulkhead door, Spence," he added, "and put the key in your pocket. Hang on to the blunderbuss, and if the lieutenant tries to bother, put the projectile through him."

Spencer grinned as he locked the door; then, when he was warily covering Stafford, Whaley turned away to unlock a drawer under the cushioned seat. From the drawer he took a battered tin box, and smirked and patted it as he held it up for Stafford's inspection.

"We got to that hole in the cliff a few

hours ahead of you, lieutenant," he explained. "Nick used to be a structural ironworker; his nerves were equal to the job of swinging in under the overhang and recovering the loot. How did you learn it was there? If you figured that out from the misadventures of the Zymo gun, allow me to compliment you on your perspicacity."

"Perspicacity is good," commented Stafford, sinking down on a seat across from Whaley and gently caressing the back of his head; "just see what it has done for me."

"I watched your work on the cliff from that port beside you, lieutenant," proceeded Whaley; "it was rather interesting. I could take it calmly because I knew it wouldn't get you anywhere. Also, it took up your time while we were getting our machinery in order. My only regret is that we couldn't bear away from the Cove while you were roosting in that miniature cave. We shall have to be rather rough with you, I fear."

"Use good judgment, Whaley," admonished Stafford; "it may mean a lot to you."

"You are going with us, but you're to be put ashore at a certain point up the coast. We settled all that while Nick was going after you in the dory. This is what you wanted, eh?"

The lock of the tin box had been broken. Whaley flung back the lid and took out a thin packet held together with rubber bands. He removed the bands and spread out on the cushion beside him a collection of thousand-dollar bank notes and two government bonds.

"Pretty?" Whaley laughed. "And Dyckman was fool enough to think he could double cross me. I'll admit he did well in getting out of Rock Pass. He had me thinking that some one else besides himself had held up Holbrook on his second trip out from Cañonville. There's fifty thousand here, all told."

Whaley gathered up the bank notes and the two bonds, put them carefully in a sheaf, and once more snapped the rubber bands around them.

"Elias, there," he continued, "has been staying for a few weeks at Garner's

house in town. A boarder, if you please. He managed to secure a key or two from Garner that possibly helped us some. The key to the storage shed was a mistake, and putting the Zymo apparatus into the shed was childish. Still, I can't find fault with Spence. I wouldn't have advised setting fire to the hotel just to get rid of Morley and the girl, since it placed the shed and the box in danger. However, we're over those slight errors of judgment and have clear sailing ahead. You're interested in the Morleys, eh? Well, you haven't helped them much this afternoon."

Knuckles drummed against the other side of the bulkhead door. "Everything all right, Chris?" called a voice.

"Right as a trivet, Alf," answered Whaley. "Get going; you know the course."

Another moment and the big engine of the *Aurora* stuttered into action, and the hull vibrated as it took up a steady roar. Whaley had laid the automatic down beside him while manipulating the contents of the tin box. The gun was shaken to the floor. Whaley bent down to recover it; and, just at that instant, Stafford made his leap. One foot kicked the weapon into the bows; almost at the same moment the coast-guard man grabbed Whaley, jerked him from the seat, and flung him bodily at Spencer. The latter was struck and overset; Whaley, carroming on, struck a metal drawer pull under the long seat with his head—a hard, sickening blow that laid him in a crumpled heap, quite still and motionless.

With a savage oath Spencer leaped at Stafford. They came together, toppled, rolled with the swaying of the boat. Stafford, uppermost, grabbed at the automatic on the floor, caught its short, thick barrel, and once, twice, brought the stock down on Spencer's unprotected head. It was not a time to be squeamish, for the *Aurora* was foaming toward the Inlet.

Stafford was now in full possession of that part of the boat. He began to work with even more celerity and precision. First, he grabbed the packet from the tin box; next, he recovered the

Zymo gun, sat down with it across his knees, and made the end of the cord fast to the projectile. Pulling out a workable length of the light, flexible line, he rove it in cunning sailor fashion securely around the packet; then, moving to the extreme forward port on the port side, he opened it.

Spray dashed in, for the *Aurora* was carrying a bone in her teeth. Unmindful of the flying spoon-drift, he stared outside to get his bearings. They were close to the Inlet. By the half-way house stood a slender figure in a stock-ing cap and ill-fitting man's coat. That was Eunice Maitland, watching the motor boat and, no doubt, fearing the worst for Stafford.

Cuddling the line-throwing gun close to him, Stafford knelt on the heaving floor and pressed the cylinder against the open port. The seat was in his way, and he could not get the elevation he desired, but it was a case of doing the best he could. He lowered the gun to take a knife from his pocket and cut the knot holding the end of the line to the cylinder.

Once more he forced the gun against the open port. He watched keen-eyed; and, when the right moment came, he tucked the packet, swinging a foot from the projectile, through the opening; then he pressed the trigger.

A thunderous roar filled the small cabin. He could hear the whir of the line, paying out, as the projectile carried it and its fifty-thousand-dollar treasure toward the girl by the half-way house. After a minute, he dropped the gun and stared.

He had a glimpse of the girl standing near the projectile on the beach. He fell back, drawing his hand across his moist brows.

"If this Zymo apparatus never did anything more," he muttered, with a laugh, "its fame would be secure."

Again his fingers closed on Whaley's automatic, and grimly he sat and waited for the two men on the floor to revive and pick up the chain of events where they had dropped it.

"Mr. Whaley is going to be surprised," thought Stafford.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOST IN A GOOD CAUSE.

EUNICE lingered on the beach at the Inlet and watched until the dory had taken Stafford to the *Aurora* and he had climbed aboard and vanished into the cabin with Whaley. Knowing the powers for evil of those Colorado plotters, the girl was intensely worried and anxious.

She could not go into the halfway house; in the excited state of her feelings she could only walk back and forth on the beach, waiting, listening, watching, her heart filled with dread.

Under the ill-fitting coat, in the bosom of her dress, she had the wonderful, the precious letter that meant so much to her father and herself—if its sincerity could be proved by the recovery of the Holbrook money.

She lived over again, there by the Inlet, the torturing ordeal of the past few months: the heartless victimizing of her father, the brutality he had endured in the hands of his jailors in the Colorado mountains, the almost fatal injury he had suffered at the hands of Spencer, the faithful friendship of Jerry Pryne, who had nursed her father back to life, and the wearing, heartbreaking experiences she and her father had encountered as fugitives from the law.

Her music teaching had prospered in Denver, and she had laid by a little nest egg out of her earnings. But all that had gone to finance her penniless father in his fight to clear his name. How lucky they had thought themselves when the post of caretaker of the big, empty Dyckman hotel had been given to her father! The forlorn hope was theirs of discovering something about the big building; and what they had hoped to find had not been in the building at all, but, if Lon Dyckman's letter was honest, in that niche of the cliff from which it had disappeared.

She thought of her father at the lighthouse, his liberty in the keeping of Jerry Pryne's cousin. Now that Kennedy was in that part of the country, Morley dared not venture abroad at all. He was a prisoner of hope, stayed by the

indomitable courage of his daughter. The lightkeeper would prove true, but he could be no protection if Kennedy came searching to the lighthouse. Even the lightkeeper might lose his place if the superintendent of the district discovered that he had been harboring a supposed criminal.

The path of Enoch Morley had been beset with growing dangers, up to that very moment the lieutenant of the coast guard had placed Dyckman's letter in the girl's hands. A bow of promise suddenly flamed in the stormy skies; but it would fail unless Dyckman's sincerity could be proved by the recovery of Holbrook's money.

Eunice clasped her hands convulsively, and a prayer for help in that crisis went up soundlessly from her white lips. She stared at the *Aurora*, and she strained her ears in the hope that she might hear something to apprise her of what was going on aboard. But no sound came to her.

After a time that seemed interminable, two men on the motor boat's deck began taking in the anchor. She heard the engine sputter as it took up its cycle, and then the boat got under way with a roar.

What did that mean? Where was Lieutenant Stafford? If, in trying to help her father, the lieutenant himself had come to harm, the girl felt as though her will must surely break and that she could not go on.

With bated breath and wild eyes she watched the *Aurora* booming toward the Inlet with the white spray lashing her bow. The boat was bound outward, and the lieutenant was going with it, somewhere in the little cabin whose ports flashed in the sun. What was the situation behind that gliding wooden wall? Was Lieutenant Stafford a prisoner in the relentless hands of Whaley and Antwerp and the others?

The *Aurora* came rushing on. Antwerp was at the wheel. He saw her standing on the beach and waved a hand derisively. By then, the *Aurora* was almost abreast of her, pointed for the clear space of water between the twin reefs.

In a moment, with a suddenness that startled and bewildered the girl, the report of a gun shivered the air. She saw a line leap from a port near the bow, rise over the tumbling waves, and plunge in her direction. The projectile thudded to the ground, well up the beach.

It was the Zymo gun! And Lieutenant Stafford must have fired it to let her know that he was in difficulties. She turned and, with flying feet, made her way toward the halfway house. When almost at the door, she was confronted by two men, and drew back with a wild cry.

"Than Kennedy!" she gasped.

With the deputy sheriff was Hodges, the man she had met in the hotel—a man whom she knew to be no friend of hers or of her father's.

"Well, Jeanne, the game is up," said Kennedy firmly but not unkindly. "Where's Enoch? I don't want to be rough with you, but you must tell me."

"And where's Stafford?" put in Hodges. "He came this way and you must have seen him. He—stop her, Kennedy!"

Eunice had darted in between the two men. Kennedy had reached for her, but she had evaded him.

"None o' that, Jeanne!" shouted the deputy sheriff sternly.

He lumbered after her, and was surprised when she raced through the open door of the halfway house.

"She didn't go far, Hodges," puffed Kennedy. "What the blazes do you think of that move?"

The two men came to the open door; they stood there, listening in amazement to the girl's voice crying almost hysterically into the telephone receiver:

"The *Aurora*—motor boat—just left the Inlet—going north—Lieutenant Stafford a prisoner aboard! Oh, save him!"

She dropped the receiver, staggered to the bench, and fell upon it with a sob, her face in her hands. The grief of the girl, in that old coat and stocking cap, softened the hard lines in the deputy sheriff's face. But through that

sudden show of feeling ran an expression of bewilderment.

Hodges was more matter of fact. "What happened to Stafford?" he demanded sharply.

"He—he climbed the cliff, looking for the Holbrook money," Eunice explained, lifting her tear-stained face, "but he didn't find it. Mr. Kennedy," she went on brokenly, "Chris Whaley, Alf Mings, Nicholas Antwerp—were aboard that boat in the Cove. Lieutenant Stafford thought they had taken the Holbrook money, and he sent me here to the halfway house while he went alone aboard the *Aurora*."

"He took the Zymo gun with him, Mr. Hodges," here she turned to the other man, "and when the boat passed through the Inlet the line was fired to the beach from a cabin port. It was a signal to me to let the keeper at the life-saving station know that the lieutenant was in trouble. I have just telephoned the station. I—I——" She snatched at the breast of the coat and brought out Dyckman's letter. "Read that, please," she finished breathlessly, and thrust the letter into Kennedy's hand.

"By glory," muttered Kennedy, "there seems to have been a lot goin' on here in the Cove this morning. Whaley here! That certainly is news to me. Why in blazes should he be fool enough to abduct a coast-guard man?"

"Read the letter! It came to him for my father and me. Mr. Kennedy, please read the letter."

Hodges had no interest in the letter. All his worry was for the Zymo gun. Would the misadventures of that fated life-saving device never cease? Was it gone for good, now, along with Stafford? Hodges went to look for the line and the projectile. Kennedy took the bulky letter out of the envelope, stepped to the open door where the light was better, and began to read.

He whistled, he muttered under his breath, he looked incredulous, but nevertheless he continued to read. His eyes traveled rapidly over the pages. His incredulity grew to a point best described as exasperation. When he read the statement made under oath, frank skep-

ticism alone was mirrored in his weatherbeaten face.

"Jeanne," he remarked, "I never reckoned your father would try to put over anything like this. He didn't seem to be that kind of a man; but when a hombre goes wrong, I reckon he goes the limit."

"Than Kennedy," cried the girl, "what are you thinking?"

"What can I think, Jeanne, but that your daddy mixed this beautiful dish for me? John Burgin's man, Whaley, wasn't that sort of a hairpin. Enoch ought to have picked a more likely chap for his chief villain. Lon Dyckman has disappeared; but he was too clever to come out with anything like this, even if he was guilty. No, Jeanne; it won't wash."

The girl came to him and stood at his side erect, her eyes flashing. "Do you think, Than Kennedy, that I, or my father, would make up such a story? Go to Ockersburg; talk with the notary public there who acknowledged that statement and its signature. Ask him to describe the man who made the deposition."

"Listen, girl," returned Kennedy. "You say Stafford climbed the cliff to this niche in the rocks and failed to find the tin box with the Holbrook money?"

"Yes; it wasn't there."

A kindly, tolerant smile crossed the deputy sheriff's rough visage. "That alone proves there's nothin' to the letter," he said.

"But Lieutenant Stafford thinks Whaley has the Holbrook money—that he got to the niche first——"

"Splash!"

Eunice could see now, exemplified thoroughly, the difficulty which Stafford had immediately recognized. Proof of Lon Dyckman's sincerity was necessary before the deputy sheriff, or any one else, would take any stock in the confession.

"If the money is on the motor boat," murmured Eunice dispiritedly, "then perhaps it will be found when the crew from the life-saving station rescue Lieutenant Stafford."

"While we're waitin' for that to hap-

pen, Jeanne," said Kennedy, "you take me to your father. I'll make sure of him, anyhow. I'll——"

Hodges, at that instant, came rushing around the halfway house. In his hand he held the Zymo projectile. Below it trailed the light, strong line; and firmly attached to the line was a thin packet rolled lengthwise.

"Look here!" Hodges shouted. "What in Sam Hill is this? Money, Kennedy! Money hitched to the Zymo line! Thousand-dollar bills! This is the blamedest thing I ever heard of!"

Followed, then, a brief period of silence, while all stared. Kennedy took the line and the packet in his own hands, bewildered and at a loss for words.

"That line was shot ashore from the *Aurora* as she went through the Inlet!" cried Eunice, half crying, half laughing. "It's the Holbrook money, Mr. Kennedy! Lieutenant Stafford got the money from Whaley; he knew I was here at the halfway house, so he used the Zymo gun to send it ashore to me—to me, do you hear, Than Kennedy?"

The deputy sheriff got his wits back. "If that's really so," he muttered, "then I'd call it a prize performance. We'll have a look at these thousand-dollar bills."

He unknotted the coiled line, slipped the packet clear, and sat down in the doorway. He thumbed the bills. There were forty of them. He looked at the two folded papers that had been secured to the line with the bank notes. Bonds, government bonds—two of them—each of a five-thousand-dollar denomination. In his excitement, Kennedy swore.

"Beg your pardon, Jeanne," he said, "but this is something that certainly rattles my spurs. Fifty thousand—just the amount Holbrook was done out of. Hold your broncs a minute."

He took a memorandum book from his pocket and compared the numbers on the bonds with the numbers in the book. Then he put away the book, removed his hat, and ran his fingers through his long hair.

"By the jumpin' horn toads," he whispered huskily, "they're the Hol-

brook bonds!" He turned to the Zymo representative. "Hodges, wouldn't that knock you a twister? Here's plunder, stolen in Colorado, hitched to a bullet and fired ashore on this here Atlantic coast! I'm clean beat! Jeanne, I reckon that little fairy story is the goods. You win! Hey, where you goin', Jeanne?"

She had leaped past him and was running for the beach path. She was not on her way to the lighthouse, but was traveling north.

Hodges took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his brows. "She's going to the life-saving station to find out whether Stafford is rescued from that motor boat, Kennedy," he hazarded.

"I'm pretty much interested in that myself," said Kennedy. "Let's both go."

"If that Zymo gun is gone again," began Hodges wearily, "I'll——"

"Oh, hang the gun!" snapped Kennedy. "If it's lost it has been lost in a blame' good cause."

CHAPTER XIV.

TRAVELING TOWARD A BEACON.

ONCE again some one pounded on the bulkhead door. "What's the idee of shootin' that line ashore, Chris?" came the voice of Alf Mings.

"What line?" This was Whaley, minus his smooth aplomb, sitting up on the cabin floor and shouting his question savagely. "Who shot a line ashore?"

"I did," said Stafford, manipulating the automatic persuasively. "As we came through the Inlet, Whaley, I fired from the port there. The line was hitched to the projectile, and Holbrook's fifty thousand dollars was hitched to the line. I dropped money and projectile at the feet of Jeanne Morley—with your compliments."

When this clever performance had dawned fully upon the mind of Christopher Whaley, even what remained of his poise went by the board. He gave an exhibition of unrestrained anger that might have been shocking and certainly would have been dangerous in other circumstances. Spencer, reviving in time

to overhear Stafford's explanation, joined with his chief in a frank and full expression of his feelings.

To all this Stafford listened unmoved. The automatic was a trump card, and he was taking all tricks. Then, as if still further to cap a disastrous climax on the operations of Whaley and his gang, a booming voice made itself heard from a point in the near vicinity of the *Aurora*:

"Aho, the motor boat! Heave to till we come alongside!"

That was Captain Blodgett's voice, and Stafford knew at once that Miss Maitland had telephoned to the station from the halfway house. The *Aurora* did not slacken speed, but there was yelling back and forth by Mings and Antwerp, the latter at the wheel.

Again Mings banged on the door. "A motor lifeboat is after us with half a dozen men from the Smugglers' Cove Station!" he shouted.

"Keep going, Alf!" roared Whaley. "The *Aurora* can show any motor lifeboat her heels! You know what it means to heave to!"

"Reverse yourself, Whaley!" Stafford ordered. "Tell Mings to shut off the motor. Now!"

Captain Blodgett was determined. A shot was heard, coming evidently from the motor lifeboat; then, without further parley, the *Aurora* began to slow down. Presently she had no more than steerage way. From various commands that were given, Stafford knew that a line was being passed between the two boats. A little later, a surfman from the Smugglers' Cove Station was at the *Aurora's* wheel, and three others of Blodgett's crew were aboard.

"Hey, Lieutenant Stafford!" roared the voice of Bill Tryner. "Where are you, lieutenant?"

"Here, Bill!" shouted Stafford. "Spencer, unlock that door!" he added. "Sharp's the word!"

There was nothing else for it, and the baffled Westerners yielded with what grace they could muster. Tryner and Jim Perry rushed into the cabin.

"Put ropes on those two men, Bill," said Stafford. "The law has a bone

to pick with them. What about the rest of the *Aurora's* crew?"

"They're herded aft, lieutenant," Tryner answered. "What was their game, anyhow?"

"We'll go into that later, Bill. Get lashings on the other two as soon as you can. When we get them ashore they are to be turned over to a man named Kennedy, a deputy sheriff from Colorado. Who gave you a line on the *Aurora*?" he asked.

"That's a conundrum," said Tryner. "A woman's voice came over the wire from the halfway house."

"I knew it," muttered Stafford; "I was sure of it."

Half an hour later captors and prisoners were all ashore, and Miss Maitland, Kennedy, and Hodges were telling all hands of events on the beach by the Inlet.

"You're a corker, lieutenant," averred Kennedy; "the way you shot that boodle ashore is sure something to remember and talk about. I drifted out here on my hunt for Morley, half suspectin' you were helping the girl and her father. I wanted to pump Hodges some more. I don't want Morley now, but I'd sure like to add Lon Dyckman to this foxy crowd. Oh, you Chris Whaley! Everybody slipped a cog, out in Rock Pass and Cañonville, when they failed to suspect you."

"You haven't got it on me yet, Than," returned Whaley with easy nonchalance. "Dyckman's the guy you want, and no one else. We were trying to get the money for Holbrook."

"For a raw blazer," returned Kennedy, with a wide grin, "that throws a wide loop. Was you helpin' Holbrook when you stole that line-throwing gun? And when Spencer set fire to the hotel? And when the whole bunch of you abducted Stafford? Say, you ought to have had more sense than to try to abduct an officer of the coast guard."

"I told him he was makin' a misplay," growled Spencer, "but when he gets his mind set there's no headin' him. Stafford was more'n a handful."

"Oh, cork, cork!" said Whaley with weariness. "The more you talk the

worse you make it. You got a tip, Than," he added. "Who gave it to you?"

"Stafford got it from Dyckman, passed it on to Jeanne Morley, and she turned it over to me. Lon goes on record with a full confession, Chris, duly subscribed and sworn to before a notary."

Whaley was startled. "That cimin' room swore to a bunch of lies," he protested, "just to put something over on Alf, Nick, Spence, and me. Can't you see it?"

"I reckoned I saw it at first; then, when the boodle came ashore from your boat, I changed my mind. Dyckman told part of the truth, that's proved; and if he told part, I'm ready to gamble he told it all. There'll be a nice little party movin' back to Cañonville, Chris."

"I must go," spoke up the girl in the stocking cap and the bizarre coat, "and tell father."

"If you'll allow me, Miss Maitland," said Stafford, "I'll go with you."

The blue eyes sparkled. "I was hopin' you'd come, lieutenant!" cried Eunice. "Father will want to thank you for all you have done for him—and me."

"Tell me where he is, Jeanne," Kennedy requested, "and I'll trail along, myself."

She shook her head. "I can't do that, Mr. Kennedy, but tell me where and when you want to see father, and he'll meet you."

The deputy sheriff smiled and patted the girl's shoulder. "You don't need to fret about me any more, Jeanne," he told her; "there's only some formalities to go through with, so far as your daddy is concerned, and then he'll be out of the woods. Have it your way, though. Bring him to the Stony Point hotel this evening. And say, Jeanne! A reward was offered for the recovery of the money Holbrook lost—ten per cent of whatever was found and returned. That means five thousand dollars——"

"For Lieutenant Stafford," cut in the girl. "How could I take it, or any part of it?"

"It belongs to her, Kennedy, and not

to me," Stafford insisted, "and I shall count on you to see that she gets it."

"I reckoned you'd stack up that way," remarked Kennedy.

"Get back for the test this afternoon, lieutenant," said Hodges. "Everything's ready."

"I am ready now to urge the adoption of the Zymo gun by the United States coast guard," returned Stafford. "No life-saving device ever had the tests that gun has had, and it has answered handsomely every demand made upon it. But we'll go on with the tests, merely as a matter of record."

It was a long walk to Kettle Point, but no happier girl than Eunice Maitland, or more correctly Jeanne Eunice Morley, ever walked the beach by way of the Cove to the shoals.

"For your faith in me, for your kindness, your courage, and your help, lieutenant," said the girl, as she and Stafford passed the ruins of the hotel, "how am I ever to thank you?"

Romance is never far from two young people who meet as Eunice and Stafford had met, and pass through adventures such as had fallen to them. The projectile of fate was flying, unwinding its golden line as it rose toward heights where hovered one sprightly version of the old, old story.

"Some day, Eunice," returned Stafford, "I shall find you, and we'll talk further about that. Are you going back to Denver?"

"I suppose so. My work is there, you know, and father and I are Westerners. There'll be a report to make in the matter of the hotel fire, and we are not done with Than Kennedy yet; but I feel, I know, that everything will come out right, and that the world will make up to my father for the injustice done him. From now on, though, we are free and can hold up our heads. We can go and come as we please, without that terrible, crushing fear of the law. Yes; as soon as we can we shall go back to the West."

"Then," declared Stafford, "the next time I get leave I shall go West myself—west as far as Denver."

There was a veiled significance in the

words, a significance that brought roses into the cheeks of the girl and caused her eyelids to droop. She stopped, spread out her arms, and surveyed herself with a faint smile.

"You would come to Denver to see a girl whom you will remember as wearing an old pilot coat and a stocking cap that some one left at the lighthouse?" She laughed softly. "Our acquaintance has been brief, lieutenant, and the circumstances not particularly happy."

"But they have been romantic, haven't they?" he answered, with a half smile that reflected her own mood. "And I shall not remember you in that way at all. In my mind's eye, Eunice, I shall have a picture of a brave girl, fighting her father's battle against almost hopeless odds; a girl in whom I had faith from the very first."

Her lips trembled, and a glow came into her eyes. She reached out and took the lieutenant's hand. No word passed her lips, but there was a silence more eloquent than speech.

So, hand in hand, they walked on around the curving beach, toward the beetling crag on the south side of the Inlet. The beach before them was a field of the cloth of gold, and they trod it with youthful feet and with romance, warm and uplifting, in their hearts. Beyond the crag lay Kettle Shoals, and beyond the shoals was the point and the lighthouse. The girl and the lieutenant were traveling toward a beacon, a beacon that not only warns of dangers, but leads to the brightest destiny.

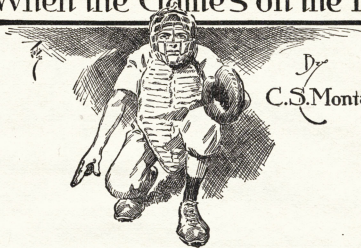
How did this story strike you? A few words about it, if you will be good enough to write them and send them to the editor. We ask you to say, without reserve, just what you think of it. And in the same letter, please give us your opinion of TOP-NOTCH in general.

Poor in Winter

INSURANCE agent: "But what facilities have you for coping with a fire in your village?"

Farmer: "Well, it be a terrible showery place."

When the Game's on the Hook



D
C.S. Montanye ~



HEN Bella, the wife's sister, got married I sort of imagined that Grace and I would have a little rest and peace.

Isn't it funny how you get foolish ideas like that? What you expect never happens, and what you don't expect comes along and give you a soak on the bean with the club of circumstance. After we had hurled rice and old shoes at Bella we left the church, believing all our troubles were over.

Three days after Bella and her newly wedded husband had gone to a watering place known as Niagara Falls, the wife got a letter from Rosie, her other sister. Rosie didn't like the State of Ohio and wanted to trade it for New Jersey. She said there were no eligible young men there, and so she wanted to come to Trenton.

Well, talk as I would, it did no good. The wife sent Rosie a letter and sixty dollars of my money, and about two weeks after that I went down to the railroad station, collected Rosie, two trunks, and four hand bags, and brought them out to the bungalow.

After that the fun began.

II.

IT was the middle of August. Baseball, mosquitoes, ice-cream cones, open-air movies, and moonlight spooning were at the top of their form. Au-

gust in Trenton meant that the Tigers, Joe Bain's hard-hitting baseball team, were beginning to slump, that business at my sporting-goods emporium was rotten, and that Grace, the wife, frequently mentioned some place known to the world at large as Atlantic City.

It was the second Tuesday night in the month, and Grace and I were sitting on the porch of the bungalow. We usually sat there when we didn't disagree or argue. When we did that we went inside. We looked at the moon once in a while, smelled the honeysuckle, yawned, and got an earful of our neighbor's latest phonograph records for nothing. At this time Rosie had been with us for two weeks.

It seemed like two years.

"Ed," the wife said, after we had rocked and knocked for an hour or so, "don't you think Rosie is a pretty girl?"

"I don't know," I answered.

"Why don't you know?" Grace asked.

"Because," I replied, "I've never been able to see her with the war paint off. Ask me again some time after it rains and she goes out without an umbrella."

The wife looked at the moon and sighed. "I'm very fond of Rosie and I feel it is my duty to see that she marries well. I admit that she dresses a little fancy and tries hard to look like a movie vamp, but she doesn't mean a thing by it. She's just at that impres-

sionable age. She's a dear girl. She's got a good heart."

"But poor judgment," I said. "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but personally I think she's a dumb Dora."

Grace stopped rocking. "You are prejudiced, Ed. She is a little silly and a trifle man-crazy, but all girls are like that at seventeen. But she'll be getting married soon and get over her nonsense. I wish that Joe Bain would like her."

"From what he said to me yesterday," I cut in, "I didn't get the idea that he despised her."

Grace waited until the car of the family across the street got a little quiet. "I wish we could find Rosie a little something to do to keep her mind occupied, Ed. She's a very clever girl, if I do say so myself. You'd be surprised. She went through business school—"

"In the front door and out the back?" I interrupted.

"Rosie knows stenography and type-writing," Grace continued, paying no attention to what I said. "I've been thinking it over. I believe it would be a splendid idea for you to take her down to the store and give her a job."

"Business is bad enough as it is," I said.

"We won't argue about it out here on the porch," Grace returned sharply. "You heard what I said. I have already spoken to Rosie and she rather likes the idea of earning twelve dollars a week."

I threw half of a good cigar out on the lawn. "Twelve dollars a week! Who has she been working for—Rockefeller?"

"You can pay her the money out of my allowance," the wife snapped.

"Well, that makes it different," I answered. "Tell her to be on hand at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Now that I think it over I have got a letter to be typewritten."

I had finished speaking when the front gate opened. Three people came across our two square yards of lawn and climbed up on the porch. One was Rosie, one was Joe Bain, the John McGraw of Trenton, and the other was

Harry Hurley, the best catcher on the Tigers.

"Hello!" said the wife. "Isn't it a pleasant evening? So few mosquitoes to bother one."

Everybody lied by agreeing with Grace.

"It's a bear of a night," Joe Bain said.

Rosie flopped down in the porch swing. It was near the front screen door. The light from the hall came out. I looked at Rosie. She was worth a glance from anybody. She wore an orange-colored sport sweater and a very short black-silk skirt. Her hair was dressed like the Hopi Indians and disguised her ears. She had two red spots of color on each cheek that made her look as if she had a fever. Her lips were gummed up with carmine, and she had beaded her eyelashes. She looked more like Times Square than Trenton.

"Where have you all been at?" I asked.

"I was taking a walk with Rosie," Harry Hurley explained, "when we ran into Joe down at Coogan's ice-cream parlor."

"I had a nut sundae that was a wiz," Rosie chirped.

"It's funny," I said, "but that's the very dish I'd expect you to order."

"It's getting warmer," Joe Bain said, looking at the moon. "I wouldn't be surprised if it rained some time."

After this amazing prognostication, Hurley threw a glance at his watch. "I guess I'll go back to the hotel and turn in," he said. "To-morrow we open up with the Englewood Eagles. They're a tough bunch. I'll need my strength."

"Yes," Bain agreed, stealing a glance at the porch swing, "you'd better be getting along."

I put the bee on Joe by speaking to Rosie. "You'd better slip up to bed, too," I said. "We open the store at nine o'clock sharp. If you're going to work for me, nine o'clock means nine o'clock and not ten minutes after eleven."

Rosie jumped up, excited. "Fine! Boys, beginning to-morrow I'm a fifteen-dollar-a-week wage slave!"

"How much?" I asked, when Hurley

and Bain got through congratulating her.

Rosie handed me a frown. "Fifteen per! I wouldn't work for a cent less. My business course cost father an awful wad of jack."

Rather than come to blows, and inasmuch as I wasn't paying it, I let it go at fifteen. When we finished the fight Harry Hurley said good night and ducked. Then Joe Bain woke up to the fact Rosie had to retire and did the same thing, dragging a pair of lazy dogs down the path to the front gate.

"I'm so excited!" Rosie exclaimed when we were alone. "I never thought much about going to work before."

"Neither did a lot of people," I said. "Married men, for example, who had been used to finding good jobs for their wives."

III.

ROSIE showed up at the store around half past nine. It was earlier than I expected. I gave her the letter to typewrite and in less than an hour she brought it to me. There wasn't a single mistake on the first line.

Because she was a fan and liked baseball she took a deep interest in sporting goods. To show she had the good of the firm in mind she read a catalogue in her odd moments. During the next two hours she used a powder puff, the mirror, made a date with a salesman from Philadelphia who dropped in, vamped two truckmen, and talked baseball for twenty minutes with a bill collector, while I hid in the back room.

Rosie decided it was too hot to walk back to the bungalow for lunch. She managed to struggle along on a pair of dill pickles, a half a pound of chocolate candy the Philadelphia salesman went out and bought her, and a piece of French pastry.

About half past one Ray Weeks, the manager of the Englewood Eagles, dropped in to leave some tickets for the last two games with the Tigers to be played in his home town. Weeks bought all the stuff for his team in New York. A dozen times or more I had tried to

hook him on an order, but there was nothing stirring.

"How is everything?" he inquired, looking superciliously at a new fielder's mitt I was featuring.

"If they were a little better you could just begin to call them worse," I answered.

Weeks smoothed out the mustache he wore on his upper lip and lighted a cigarette. "Are you going to be present at this afternoon's fracas?" he asked. "If we don't knock the Tigers for the whole four games it will be the first time in three seasons that they tore our collars off."

Weeks raved on about the Eagles and was talking batting averages when he suddenly stopped as if he had been shot. His face grew red and his eyes began to bulge. I didn't know what was the matter with him until I heard a step behind me and Rosie joined us.

"Excuse me for butting in," she cooed, "but what'll I do now, Ed? I've finished reading all the morning papers."

Weeks straightened out his necktie, smoothed his mustache again, and stepped forward. There was nothing for me to do but introduce them. I did this and then beat it away to answer the telephone.

When I came back in five minutes Rosie and Weeks were smiling into each other's eyes. I heard him telling her that she looked an awful lot like a girl he used to go to school with in Delta, Missouri.

I wasn't sure if he was trying to compliment or knock her.

"Ed," Weeks said, when he got wise I was with them again, "your sister-in-law has kindly consented to be my guest at the game this afternoon."

"Isn't that nice?" I said.

"Yes; it's awfully sweet of Mr. Weeks to ask me," Rosie murmured, giving her powder puff exercise again.

"Get your hat on," the Englewood manager said. "We've got lots of time, and I'd like to take you to lunch before we go down to the park."

"That will be just great," Rosie said enthusiastically. "I haven't had hardly

a thing to eat since breakfast this morning!"

After they had both gone I got the notion I'd have a look at the game myself. I closed up the store, met Grace, and went out to the park, where Joe Bain got us into the grand stand for nothing.

It wasn't hard to discover the whereabouts of Rosie. Even in the mob she stuck out like a chorus girl in a room full of scrubwomen. She was in a front-row box, talking to Ray Weeks, who was lounging beside her. All of the Tigers were giving her the double-o. Harry Hurley looked as pleased as a man whose house has just burned down. And if looks were daggers Joe Bain could have gone in the cutlery business.

"Rosie seems to be writing something," Grace said, when I had pointed her sister out.

I strained my eyes. She had a piece of paper and a pencil and was writing down something that Ray Weeks was dictating.

"She's probably giving him the telephone number of the store," I said.

A few minutes later the game began.

It was a sizzler from the first ball over. The Tigers were on their own lot and full of steam. They fell on the Eagles like seven tons of coal, had them dizzy by the beginning of the fourth chapter, and at the end of the seventh had piled up a dozen hits and five tallies, standing two runs to the good. Weeks threw in a pair of his best twirlers to stem the avalanche. It was like trying to inflict punishment on an elephant with a feather.

When the game was over each member of the Trenton team had some of the Eagles' plumage as a souvenir for the first time in three seasons.

We didn't see Rosie until supper was on the table.

"Well," she said, when she came in and sat down, "I'll tell the world I earned my eighteen dollars a week this afternoon!"

"How much?" I asked.

The wife's sister took something out of the pocket of her orange-colored

sweater and passed it across the table. "Eighteen dollars," she repeated. "I guess I'm worth that much. Here's a sixty-five-dollar order Ray gave me for bats, gloves, and balls for his team. Not so bad for an afternoon, eh?"

I looked at the list of stuff she had written down.

"Do you like Mr. Weeks?" Grace asked.

Rosie pulled a funny smile. "Like him? Of course I do. You don't suppose I'd be engaged to any one I didn't like, do you? By the way, I would have been home earlier if we hadn't stopped off to buy a ring. Pretty, isn't it?"

She stuck out her left hand. On the fourth finger of it was a diamond hock rock that blazed like ice-blue fire.

IV.

THE next day the Tigers took another fall out of the Englewood Eagles. Rosie sat in a box. Weeks lounged beside her. The wife and I sat on our shoulder blades in the bleachers because we had arrived late and couldn't find Joe Bain. After the sixth inning we didn't care who won.

When the game was over Rosie brought Weeks around, introduced him to her sister, and said they were going out to supper together. Before Grace could think up a good reason why she shouldn't go they were halfway across the park.

"It happened so quickly that I can't get over it," the wife said, when supper was put away and we were out on the porch of the bungalow. "What do you think of the ring he gave her?"

"The one on her finger or the one on the telephone this afternoon at the store?" I asked.

Grace let it go at that and delivered a ten-minute lecture entitled, "Rosie Is a Sweet Girl." When the address was over she asked me what I knew about Ray Weeks.

"Not a thing," I admitted, "except that he never bought anything from me before."

Grace kept quiet for a while. "I

knew a girl like Rosie wouldn't last long," she said at length. "She's so lively and pretty. Why, she hadn't been in Trenton ten minutes before Harry Hurley was treating her to ice cream. She's not the kind of a girl who remains single long. Aren't you glad she's engaged?"

"No; suspicious," I answered. "It seems too good to be true."

We talked for a time and then Joe Bain and Harry Hurley came down the street and stopped in. Both of them had a grouch.

"Somebody ought to warn Rosie about this Ray Weeks fish," Hurley said. "He's been mixed up in a couple of funny deals and I wouldn't trust him from here to there. I think he's a crook. Furthermore, I don't like him."

This looked so much like childish jealousy that I had to laugh. "You've got an awful rotten line of comedy, Harry," I said.

He shrugged. "It isn't comedy. I know Weeks is a sharper who would take any kind of a crooked chance. I guess it's useless trying to steer you on him because it does look like jealousy. All I ask is just to wait. Time will tell."

I looked at Joe Bain. "What have you got against him?" I inquired.

"His mustache," Joe snarled. "Can a man be on the level with a thing like that on his upper lip?"

Grace came to the rescue. "You certainly can't judge a man's character by his mustache," she said decidedly. "Personally, I think that Mr. Weeks is a perfect gentleman."

"Time will tell!" Harry Hurley croaked again.

Five minutes later the manager of the Tigers and the catcher departed for the village to drown their troubles in lemonade.

"Jealous!" I said. "The pair of them had hopes of Rosie."

"Of course," the wife agreed. "Ed, let us both go up to Englewood tomorrow and see the two games. We can take Rosie and stay at the Springers'. Don't you remember how they came here last year and sponged on us for a week?"

4A TN

"Am I likely to forget it?" I answered. "One of the nerviest grafting families in the whole State of New Jersey!"

The next day Rosie, the wife, and myself left Trenton with the Tigers. I sat in the smoking car with the bunch and played poker. Before we had reached Jersey City I was out six dollars. This was good proof of how much I expected to enjoy myself. Hurley proved that being lucky at cards means unlucky in love, by winning it.

When we got to Englewood at last we discovered the Springers had probably expected us, because they had moved. It took us two hours to find their new house. When we did, they proved how much regard for the truth they had by telling us they were glad to see us, and that we must stay as long as we wanted.

We had lunch and went straight out to the Englewood ball park afterward.

"So this is the town where I suppose I shall live," Rosie said, when we were in the stand.

"Not live—exist," I said.

"It's a very pretty place," the wife remarked.

"Isn't it?" I agreed. "I'm just beginning to notice how much air there is and what a lot of sky they have."

"You're as funny as a butcher's bill!" Grace snapped.

I thought that since the Eagles were on their own home grounds that they would play better ball than they did at Trenton. I was mistaken. From the first one over the pan to the last strike called they made a miserable showing. The best they could do was to squeeze a single run out of the nine chapters. They only garnered that through a long hit and a brace of errors pulled by the Tiger outfield.

After the game Rosie made an exit with Weeks, and I went down to the clubhouse. I found Joe Bain sitting on the front steps, smelling a four-leaf clover. He looked thoughtful.

"Ed," he said, when I dropped down beside him, "there's something funny on the fire. Weeks has an idea he's going

to walk in with to-morrow's game. He's offering odds on the Eagles, and all the gamblers in town are doing the same thing."

"Then he's a dumb egg," I said. "The Tigers have got his bunch on the hip and what happens to-morrow will be what has happened for the last three afternoons. A person don't have to be any relation to Connie Mack to realize that."

Just at this moment Hurley came out of the showers. He was looking thoughtful. He came over, rolled a cigarette, and sighed. "From the gossip downstairs," the catcher said, "it looks like that crook Weeks had an ace up his sleeve. He thinks he's going to hang to-morrow's game on the hook."

Bain laughed. "I know he does. But he'll have to have more than an ace up his sleeve to do it. He'll have to have a whole deck of cards in his clothes."

"Time will tell!" Hurley sighed.

We had dinner with and on the Springers. After it was over I wandered down to the village to mingle with the local cut-ups. One of them must have known something about hypnotism because before I knew what I was doing I had bet twenty dollars on the Englewood Eagles to win the last game of the quartet. I sort of figured that I ought to make a little wager on the team managed by a person who was going to marry my wife's sister.

"What do you think of Englewood?" Grace asked, when I got back to the Springers.

"Well, I'll tell you better after to-morrow's game," I answered.

V.

THE last game between the Tigers and the Eagles was played on a day made to order for baseball. The whole town had been tipped off that the Englewood crowd was out for a killing and the field was jammed. A fifteen-cent shine was ruined before I had followed Grace and Rosie up to a seat. Then when somebody got a poke in the eye with my elbow I hoped it was the

baby who had wiped his shoes all over my coat.

The game was a fliv. If the Eagles were out to win, nobody would have known it if they hadn't been told so in advance. Of the entire four games they had mixed in with the Tigers, the last game was the sorriest one of the lot. I tried to forget my twenty dollars and watch what was going on, but my mind wandered. I did know, however, that the Trenton nine opened the game up by clouting out two homers and a three-bag hit that was good for another run. They kept up that pace until the fifth, when the Eagles staged a desperate rally that got them nothing but a lot of laughs.

The game ended to the tune of a twelve-nothing score, with Joe Bain's gang dangling on the long end of it.

We didn't get back to Trenton until quite late. Rosie motored down in Bain's new car. She arrived about an hour after Grace and I had finished supper and were out on the porch.

The manager of the Tigers came up with her. "Some game!" Joe said. "And those fat odds the sharks handed out! It was better than poker with the deuces wild! I hope you got yours, Ed!"

"I got mine," I replied. "What about the ace up the sleeve of Mr. Weeks?"

Bain laughed shortly. "Oh," he answered mysteriously, "we played safe by changing our signals. Sometimes it's good to do that. Well, as Harry says, time will tell. Good night, everybody."

I noticed that Rosie was pretty quiet. I didn't think anything of it until we all went into the house. I began to close the windows and had almost finished when I heard the wife give a little scream.

"Rosie!" she cried. "Why, where's your lovely engagement ring? You didn't lose it, did you?"

I looked at my sister-in-law's fingers and saw there was nothing on them except sunburn.

"No; I didn't lose the ring," she replied calmly. "I gave it back to him."

"You gave it back to him!" Grace exclaimed.

Rosie used her powder puff and looked at herself in a mirror. "Yes, I gave it back to him," she said after a while. "The other day I happened to tell Ray that Harry Hurley had once given me a set of the Tigers' signals. Ray said it would be fun if I gave him a copy so we could use them as a code for love letters. Last night I happened to tell this to Joe Bain and—well, Joe said would I believe that Ray was crooked? I told him no. Then Joe changed the signals for this afternoon's game and threw in a couple of the old ones just as a test. When I handed the

ring back to Mr. Weeks he said that everything was fair in love, war, and baseball. I'm glad I didn't marry him. That mustache was awfully foolish looking."

She went upstairs and I locked the front door.

"Isn't it awful?" Grace said.

I turned out the hall light. "Yes, it's awful," I replied. "Rosie can get engaged again. But if Weeks cancels that sixty-five-dollar order, where am I going to get another one?"

Another story in this series will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH.

LONG AND UGLY WORD

By Albert E. Y. Alexander

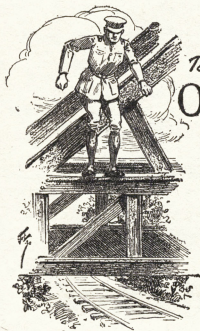
THE editors all know me well,
 They've seen my name a hundred times;
 They've frowned to scan my worthless prose,
 And squinted at my horrid rhymes.
 But though for many moons I've tried
 To write some stuff that's salable,
 It's all returned with little slips
 Which say it's unavailable.

Of course, each editor regrets
 My manuscripts don't meet his needs,
 And hopes I'll favor him again—
 At least, that how his message reads.
 But talks like those won't help a man
 Who's failed in all that's failable,
 And he can't buy his kids new shoes
 With slips marked unavailable.

The postman scowls and cusses me
 Each morning, when my mail he brings,
 And piles against my old front door
 A heap of oft-rejected things.
 I've had a lot of ups and downs,
 Scaled every peak that's scalable,
 But when I try to write for pay
 My work is unavailable.

L'Envoi

I'm not inclosing any stamps
 To make these sheets remailable,
 For old waste paper such as this
 Is mostly always balable;
 So, editor, just bale this up
 If it is unavailable.



Tale of the Picture Players • One More Stunt-

By
Arthur Hornblow, Jr.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

IN THE PRIVATE OFFICE.

SLOWLY, "Baldy" Royce climbed up the circular iron stairs leading to the general offices of the Empire Film Company. Nor did he climb slowly for his fifty-eight years; there was still plenty of go in the firm, thin legs that carried him. It was rather the thoughts that kept crawling around in his head, problems that sought solution before he should come face to face with the chief upstairs.

For weeks Royce had looked forward with small relish to the inevitable order that would send him into this little-to-be-desired interview. Even had his imagination and natural intelligence failed to suggest to him that it was coming with the traditional certainty of death and taxes, the unrestrained hints of directors out on location, as well as stray remarks heard here and there about the big studio plant, would have removed the matter from doubt.

The convicted man entered with a firm tread, as they say in the papers.

Ceremony was dispensed with in his favor.

"Go ahead in, Baldy; he's waiting for you," was the ominous invitation of the metallic young man with patent-leather hair, who sat in the outside room, punching the keys of an adding machine.

Royce marched ahead with a soft, confident smile on his face that belied the trouble his soul was in. An air of sureness, he felt vaguely, seemed appropriate to the occasion, and he would play it as hard and as long as he could. The wooden floor turned into green carpet as he crossed the threshold of the president's private office.

A. Bleeker-Cone was the fat, firm little man who steered the Empire ship of state; he rather fancied he resembled Napoleon, and took care to put that celebrity's characteristics into effect as often as possible to bear out the similarity.

Among other things, Bleeker-Cone knew every employee of his organization's many departments by name, he was aware of their records, their virtues, their faults. Especially well did he know Royce, who for ten years and

more had been on the Empire lot and had seen it grow from a small fry to a large whale in the moving-picture industry.

"Glad to see you, Royce."

"I don't believe it, chief."

Bleeker-Cone smiled. He knew the dry, honest manner of the man; it seemed to go with the strange life the fellow had led, the mad things he had done. "Well, as a matter of fact, I am. Have a seat, I suppose you think that my sending for you this way means I'm displeased—"

"I know darn well it does, chief. You got a right to be, too. Oh, I know. I ain't a fool. I know I've slipped on the job. But I ain't through yet, chief, I ain't through yet."

"It looks as if you were through, Royce, doesn't it? As a matter of fact I've carried you on the pay roll three months longer than I should have because you've been with us a long time—and, well, I thought perhaps you might 'come back.' But you haven't, Royce, and, though I don't like to say it, I'm afraid you won't."

Baldy Royce struggled to keep a calm expression on his face; inside him his blood seemed to be chilling, and his mind tumbled about in an effort to marshal some arguments in his behalf. All too unanswerable was the grim fact that ever since he had balked taking the jump from the top of a moving freight train into an automobile racing alongside several months before, his nerve had seemed to wither.

Ever since that terrible day when Royce had "messed" the big scene of a thriller, and a substitute had to be found for him for a retake at great cost and irritating delay, he had been practically useless in the job he had held so long. He was a "dare-devil," a man who doubled for screen heroes and varlets when it came time for them to do something that would make the unsuspecting world outside catch its breath, and wonder "how they ever did it."

"You see, Royce," Bleeker-Cone said, not unkindly, "you can't expect to be able to keep it up forever. When I found you doing that loop of death on

a bike for Barnum a dozen years ago and signed you up, I don't mind telling you I thought you'd be either dead or finished before we'd done shooting all the episodes of that old 'Thrills of Theresa.'

"But you kept right on going," the president continued, "as if you were made of steel or had some kind of good fairy's blessing. You've done wonderful work, Royce—but you're through now; you're through. Come on now—don't you think so yourself?"

Royce did not answer. He stared at the man who was talking, his small gray eyes seeming to be wandering back over scenes long dead and gone. He had ceased even to listen. Only the word "through" had struck his consciousness, the word he had loathed all his life because he realized that some day it would be applied to him. Through! Through! He wouldn't admit it. It wasn't so! Better far for Baldy Royce to be gloriously dead than ignominiously through! "King of the Dare-devils" was still his title!

Bleeker-Cone talked on, finding it less easy than usual to reach the conclusion that spelled dismissal. "Why, Baldy, it's immense the way you've stuck to the job. I remember only last winter when Elaine Sunshine was supposed to go off that open drawbridge in a car, and her director told me he was going to have you double for her, I said: 'Royce is too old—that stunt and the cold water combined would kill him!' The director declared that 'getting anybody else to do the stunt as long as Baldy's around here would be much more likely to kill him!' And you went ahead and did it! I've never seen such nerve as you have—had."

He made the change unwittingly and was sorry when the word "had" was spoken.

Royce's face remained unmoved. "I'm fired; is that it?"

Bleeker-Cone felt relieved that the reason for the interview had so suddenly been reached. "Well, there's no need to put it that way, Baldy. We'll have to take you off the special pay roll. The stockholders can only be expected

to pay for services they're getting. But there are still odd jobs around the lot——"

Royce rose to his feet. His effort at self-control appeared to be wavering, if one might judge from the slight shakiness that crept into his voice, as he interrupted the small, firm man that was handing down the verdict that placed him in the "has been" class. "I'll have none of your odd jobs. Thanks to you, chief, just the same."

"At any rate, I think you're entitled to a bonus of a thousand dollars for long and faithful——"

"I'll not be wanting that, either."

"Come now, Royce, you're acting and talking like a man who feels he isn't being treated squarely. You must admit you've fallen down on all the stunts you've been asked to do since March. Your nerve's gone. It isn't your fault. But you certainly mustn't blame us. It's cost us a lot of time and money as it is. We've been especially lenient with you, as it——"

"Can't I even go out on to-morrow's job? Seems like if it's gone this long you might wait one more day."

"I didn't know there was a job on to-morrow. What is it?"

"Wiffle's shooting the big scene in Billy Cross' new railroad picture down at the siding in the morning. Told me to be on hand to double for Billy on a jump stunt from the bridge onto a runaway loco."

Bleeker-Cone shook his head slowly. "You'll never make it, Baldy. And if you do you'll kill yourself."

"Well, it's my funeral, chief. Either way I'm through and there's a go."

There was a plaintive note in Royce's voice that found response in his executive's heart. Bleeker-Cone felt for the old man—that was the phrase he mentally employed in looking at him. Old and only fifty-eight. The president sniffed at it struck him that he was putting himself in the "old man" class by thinking of Royce.

Bleeker-Cone was fifty-nine himself, and fit as a filly; fit for his job, that is, his job of brains and desks and finance. But Royce's was essentially a task of

youth; steel-muscled, iron-nerved youth; it was his job that made him old, not his age. Bleeker-Cone recalled for an instant a circus clown he had known in his old press-agent days. The clown was old, and through, and down and out at fifty because he couldn't make his crowds laugh any more. Yes; it was the job and not the age——

"I'm goin' out on that stunt, chief, and I don't care what you say."

It was the dry, straightforward Royce speaking again, and Bleeker-Cone smiled. He liked this blunt, rangy, clear-eyed adventurer for whom life was finished when he could no longer do things that would kill a cat.

"All right, Baldy, go ahead. To-morrow you can tell me whether you're through or not."

CHAPTER II.

"ON LOCATION."

THERE was always plenty of excitement when Billy Cross was out "on location." Straight dramatics and play acting had little to do with that blond and illustrious star's outdoor work. Famous for his dashing, daring speed pictures, his sunlight "shots" invariably contained enough action to keep six cameras and four directors hard at work. The accident-insurance companies were usually represented by two or three apprehensive agents ready to apprise their principals instantly of the worst.

The scene on the occasion of the morning following Baldy Royce's meaty interview with the president was in an even greater flutter than usual. Carpenters, property men, camera men and their assistants and their assistants' assistants swarmed over the lot with an industry, an effort, and a turmoil that would startle a visitor if he learned that it was all for a scene that would take less than a minute in showing on the screen.

There were no visitors to be startled by any such information, however. If there were any rigid rules laid down by the Empire Film Company, they were

those that sought to preserve intact the great Cross' reputation as a super-hero. If the general public became aware that at every thrilling juncture of the "Billy Cross Speed Features" the star retired behind the camera, and permitted an unknown dare-devil to double for him in front of it, his value as a drawing card and general idol of the worshipping masses might suffer a severe decline.

Be it said to his credit that Cross took enough chances as it was and, in fact, might even be willing to take more if he had been permitted to do so. But, while there are ample dare-devils to be found if one only goes to the trouble of looking for them, a moving-picture leading-man type of the Cross variety was a Koh-i-noor among actors and to be guarded as such. In fact, on such occasions as this, no less a personage than A. Bleeker-Cone, himself, descended from his sanctum to see to it that Cross did nothing foolish.

"Bleeky," as the studio called him when he wasn't listening, stood on a hill and surveyed the scene below him. Across a portion of the long railroad siding that had been run down from the main line for scenic and commercial uses, a wagon bridge had been erected for the purposes of the coming scene, a wooden structure painted to resemble steel, and supported on either side of the track by natural swellings of the ground.

Carpenters, still labored hurriedly at completing its crisscrossed railings of laths that, already painted, shone like the hardest, brightest steel rods in the sunshine, while, from below, an assistant director harangued the workers steadily to "hurry up and finish the job—we ain't gon'er live forever!"

Billy Cross, himself, wandered about impatiently near by. The yellowish make-up on his face contrasted strangely with his gold-hued, curly hair, making him anything but beautiful in the strong light. He was already in costume, that of a captain in the United States army, with the castle collar insignia of the Engineers.

Bored, as all picture people come to

be bored by the interminable waits that precede every "taking," Cross strolled over to where Wiffle, the noted director, was explaining the ensuing action to a man dressed and made up so much like Cross as to make the two indistinguishable at any fair distance.

"Then Baldy," Wiffle was saying, "Billy shoots down to the bridge on his motor cycle, see? He sees the locomotive coming down the track crazylike, with the engineer hanging out of the window dead, see? He realizes how the engine's running away, see? And he knows how if it gets past him it'll mess up with the down train that's bringing his girl back from the East, see?"

Cross scowled. When were they going to let him get away from this rubbish and play *Romeo*? That's what he wanted to do, "*Romeo and Juliet*"—but when he had suggested it to Bleeky the latter had said he couldn't see the idea "for dust."

Fortunately for the great Wiffle's equanimity, he was unable to hear what Cross was thinking. This, as a matter of fact, was the director's idea of a great picture and he used enthusiastic gestures as he continued telling Royce what was expected of him.

"Billy jumps off the motor cycle," Wiffle went on, "while it's still moving pretty fast and makes a dive for the railing of the bridge. He gets up onto it and takes a pose ready to jump down on the cab roof of the locomotive when it passes underneath, see? That's where I stop the action and where you come in, Baldy, see? You got to take Billy's pose on the railing and make the jump, Baldy, see? I'll take a medium of you from in back and a couple of long shots out front. Hot stuff, Baldy. You mustn't miss it."

"I won't miss it."

"Oh, no; he won't miss it. Those last two flukes—well, he just wasn't keeping his mind on his work, that's all."

It was Cross who had spoken and, though he said the words with a laugh, there was a sting in them that made Royce wince within. Twice before when out on a stunt for the great star,

he had failed to come across with what was expected of him. One more such incident and its attending difficulties and—well, why think about it? Royce mused. He would come through this time. He would show them.

"Then you climb down into the cab of the engine," Wiffle continued, "and begin messing with the throttle, see? We'll have a car alongside taking it all until the regular engineer we got hidden can stop it. Then Billy'll get in, and your job's over, see?"

Royce pondered. "How fast'll she be coming?" he queried.

"Pretty good clip. I'm startin' her down at the main line so she'll be rocking good when she gets here and really looking like she's a runaway, see?"

"Yes, I see." Royce spoke quietly, but inside of him his heart was behaving as he had never known it to before.

"You'll do it all right, Baldy," said Wiffle reassuringly. "Just take it calm and cool—and jump light and straight. Your nerve's been a little off, but you're all right to-day."

"Yeh, I'm all right to-day."

Royce's eyes turned to the hill where Napoleon stood surveying his empire, his hair waving in the wind over his bare forehead, one hand thrust in the crevice of his vest, the other behind his back. Was this Waterloo? thought Royce, and grinned. And, if so, whose? His father used to tell him in the old days when they used to come down out of the clouds clinging to the same parachute like two insects, one very large and one very small, that Waterloo spelled f-i-n-i-s-h.

CHAPTER III.

WITH COMPLETE CONFIDENCE.

THE last nail had been driven into the bridge, and the corps of workers had spread back on the hilltop out of camera range, where they sprawled about on the grass regarding the operations going on below with a blasé eye. Along the track strode an impatient young man, wearing a reversed red cap on his head, and dragging along the ground a black-and-white flag. An-

other red-capped youth, also with a black-and-white flag, waited far down the track at the bend where it turned out of sight. The second youth would pass a signal along the line that the great Wiffle and the greater Cross were ready and that the engine, already steaming and champing a mile away, should start its frenzied run.

"Now just once more, children," urged Wiffle. "Let's go through it once more—then we'll be good and ready, see?"

Cross, who bore with utter sincerity the expected air of boredom with rehearsals, started to retreat down the road with his motor cycle.

"Member, Billy, you seen this engine and the dead engineer in another shot we're going to take down where the road runs along the track," called Wiffle after the star, who continued his retreat uninterrupted, "so don't look surprised when you head down for the bridge. Give 'em the get-there-or-croak stuff, see?"

Royce stood by, close behind the chalk line that indicated he was out of the picture. His lips were close-pressed, and he had said nothing during the half hour of rehearsing. Even when the jaunty locomotive had puffed slowly up and down beneath the bridge to let him appraise the jump to its cab roof with his eye he had said nothing; it would be ten feet below him, he saw, and the landing place none too large. He noted with some gratification that there were rods running atop the cab which could be grasped for purchase if needed; they would help him in climbing down into the cab, too.

"Ready, Baldy, he's coming!"

Royce did not even turn to watch Billy Cross' trial flight along the road; a roar heralded the motor cycle's approach, a shriek of burning wheel against the roadway rose as Cross jammed on his brake, skidded himself onto the bridge, leaped off and jumped for the bridge railing.

"Baldy!" came the warning through Wiffle's megaphone.

Cross stepped on one bar of the wooden railing, then on a higher and,

peering anxiously at the engine supposed to be approaching, held the pose of being ready to leap down upon it.

"Cut!" screamed Wiffle. "Baldy!"

Cross swiftly descended from the narrow railing and Royce ran forward to assume the pose he had abandoned.

"Quicker, Baldy, quicker! It'll have to be quicker'n an eel. This ain't the usual take-your-time doubling! Remember that loco's still hitting it up and it'll be here before we make the shift if you ain't careful. The whole shot's timed from the bend an' you'll have about no seconds to take your place and take your aim, see?"

Royce climbed down from the wooden railing. He was wishing in his heart they'd start and have it over with. "I'll be there, all right. Don't you bother about me." These were the first words he had spoken, and they appeased the troubled Wiffle.

"Well, then, we're ready, children. We're all ready. Now get it right. No retakes for Heaven's sake! All right, boys." This last was to the camera men and their assistants scattered about, concealed from one another with a science that would honor the camouflage service of any army. There was a flurry among them, a few cranks made preliminary turns, a few last-minute sightings were taken, a few brisk orders passed.

Wiffle retired with his megaphone to a small platform that had been built for him. Interest sprang into the life of the bored youth with the red cap and the signal flag and he stood with the latter poised, ready for action at the word "Go!"

Baldy Royce felt his heart thumping against the buckle of his Sam Browne belt. He fastened the strap of his cap under his chin, and pulled the visor low over his forehead, as much at the angle Billy Cross was wearing it as possible. There was sweat in the palms of his hands, but for all the natural nervousness that tingled through him, he felt imbued with a confidence that seemed as strong as ever it was in the old days.

"Ready?" cried Wiffle, peering back

along the road where Cross had again retired with his cycle and stood waiting for the cry of "Camera!"

"Go!"

The black-and-white flag waved sharply from left to right and back again. Its mate far down the track repeated the signal to an invisible link in the chain of signalmen that carried Wiffle's order to the concealed engineer of the waiting locomotive.

CHAPTER IV.

A MOMENT OF SUSPENSE.

IN the tense silence that followed, Wiffle kept an anxious, eager eye on the black-and-white flag at the bend. Royce watched Wiffle. Cross, back on the road, suddenly wondered, to his annoyance, whether he would be able to hear the cry of "Camera!" above the noise of the rushing engine.

Then, gradually, there came to Cross, out of a maze of instructions to which he had scarcely listened, the recollection that Wiffle would fire a shot for him to start. His nerves tugged at him and drew lines on his face. It was aging him, this wretched tomfoolery; now, *Romeo*, there was a part he could— He paused in his thought and listened.

He could hear the engine now, and for all its being a half mile off he could tell, from the agonized, staccato puffing that faintly came to him with increasing volume every second, that the runaway had already struck a pretty clip.

Royce shifted his gaze from Wiffle to the bend. His hands, for all their sweating, were cold as ice. The thing coming at him had an ominous sound, it carried terror with it as it grew from the most remote of noises to a swelling roar.

"Sounds like it's coming right along, Baldy!" cried Wiffle. "Keep your nerve now!"

A. Bleeker-Cone, still on his private hill, felt a thrill swelling his bosom and indulged in rapid-fire ideas of a morbid character, having principally to do with whether the engine would leave the track when it reached the curve. "The

imbeciles probably never thought of that!" he groaned.

The increasing roar became also a great rattling and banging. It was near at hand now. Billy Cross slung a leg across the saddle of his motor cycle which chugged madly and fretfully to be off.

A shot rang out. A small cloud of black smoke wavered above Wiffle's head, as the director watched the bend where the red-capped signalman waved his flag frantically.

The locomotive shot around the curve with the impetus of a snapped whip.

CHAPTER V.

IN A WISP OF TIME.

ROYCE, watching eagerly, intently, as ready as any hair trigger, felt the call of action surge within him as the careening, smoking monster veered into full view far down the track. All about him, imperturbable youths with unlit cigarettes clinging to their lips, turned steady camera cranks. Royce stood at the very limit of his chalk line, watching, waiting, longing to be off, a mass of jumping, anxious nerves.

The wheel of Cross' machine screamed on the roadway just behind him and there was an unexpected report as a tire burst and helped the star's explosive rush to the bridge railing.

"Baldy!" Wiffle's yell cracked in its effort to be heard against the pandemonium of the onrushing runaway.

There was no need for the warning. Royce, feeling an unexpected calmness and coolness descend upon him, kept a keen eye on Cross who was climbing the railing.

"Cut! Baldy!"

The camera crank near the bridge halted. Cross leaped vigorously down and made way for Royce who had shot forward to assume his rôle and posture.

"Camera!"

The crank started to turn again.

It hardly seemed that a moment had elapsed and Royce stood balancing on the thin wooden rail painted to resemble steel that Cross had relinquished to him.

Trained to heights and precarious perches, Royce's sole interest was the massive engine, rumbling mightily and swaying from side to side, that catapulted toward him. A few long seconds now and it would be beneath him for the infinitesimal fraction of a moment. In that wisp of time he would have to connect firmly and permanently with its roof.

All of his old-time confidence and nerve seemed to be bulwarked in his heart; he was going through, he knew it. He had come back. He would take this one in a cinch—child's play.

His eyes noted for an instant the body of the engineer bouncing heavily against the side of the cab, and Royce smiled inwardly at the thought that his job was easier than that fellow's at that. And he got big money for it—and he was going to stay on it now—for keeps, as long as he wanted to; he was back, he'd tell Blecky and hear the little guy say as how it looked that way.

"Ready, Baldy! Keep your nerve now, old boy!"

That did it. Wiffle's cry did it. Called from a fortress of strength and courage back suddenly into a world that had nerves and frights and fears did it. Royce felt his heart wither like a dead flower. His will to jump crumbled like a house of wet clay. Dread pinioned him, froze him. The realization that he couldn't make it swept through his brain like some frightful physical pain.

The engine was near enough for him to feel the warmth of its heated body. Petrified, Royce held his position, knowing agonizingly that it would pass beneath him and he would still be on that silly wooden rail, like a fool. Like some silly contemptible old fool who thought he wasn't finished when he really was. He wished he was dead. He thought to throw himself down on the thing, any old way, and kill himself, and die gloriously, at least. Then, he would still be "King of the Dare-devils." But he couldn't. He was through. He would climb shakily down the mock-steel laths, be properly berated, and go away and never come

back. Fear had come to the soul of Baldy Royce.

He could feel the blast of the engine's stack on his face and the tremendous shaking of the earth and the bridge as the locomotive swept terrifyingly forward. There were the handles, the rods of the cab roof, there they were—right before him—those rods he had planned so calmly to catch hold of.

"I'm through!" he screamed, but above the roar of the flying monster no one heard.

Instead, A. Bleeker-Cone, standing in a veritable frenzy of excitement, and dread, and hope, on his private hill, saw the King of the Dare-devils "come back."

With the neatest, most extraordinary forward jump, something between a slide and a fall, Baldy Royce achieved the most remarkable stunt in all his experience. With a nonchalance that was breath-taking and a form that outshone that of the greatest, youngest acrobats, Royce lighted upon the cab roof, sitting on it square in the center, calmly reaching out to the thin rods on either side of him to get a good grip while the shaking juggernaut tore beneath the bridge and was taken up by the cameras waiting on racing autos beyond.

Bleeker-Cone heaved a massive sigh. "He's a wonder, that old man!" he exclaimed. Then he caught himself and frowned. "Old man? What am I talking about. He's the youngest man on the lot. And I'm next. We're good for another twenty years at this game, both of us!"

It was Wiffle who greeted the hero as he clambered down from the halted, steaming, reeking engine. "Baldy, if I were a Frenchman I'd kiss you!" he cried.

"An' if you did I'd bite your nose off," answered the King of the Dare-devils. Then more pensively—strangely pensive, even for Baldy, he added: "And, hey, Wiff, if you ever sing out about me keepin' my nerve right when I'm going to pull a stunt I'll

bite your nose off anyway. I remember now you always yelled that before when I was foozled. It sorter puts me in mind that there's something to be scared of. It near got me to-day, too. Cut it out, Wiff; lay off that give-me-courage bunk. It gets my goat. Just leave me be an' I'll be all right!"

As he wandered alone up the road back to his dressing room, Royce wondered what they'd think about the crack in that mock-steel railing, the break in the laths of that hurriedly built bridge that hurled him before he knew it onto the engine's roof. It's a wonder the vibration didn't smash down the whole thing, he thought. But it hadn't. Just one swift split in the rail that had sagged and shot him off his balance; just the part of it Royce was on and at the moment he needed it most.

He watched himself do the stunt all over again in the little projection room over Bleeky's office a few days later.

"Wonderful!" murmured Bleeky, "You were born with a horseshoe hanging over both ears, Baldy!"

"Luck nothing, chief! Skill, that's what it is! And here only a couple of days ago you was saying I was through!"

Bleeky said nothing. Inwardly he felt ashamed for his lack of judgment.

And so Baldy Royce "came back." He's still working on the Empire lot, and what he doesn't do—say! He's better now than he was ten years ago, and that is saying a good deal. Everybody knows now about the need for silence when Baldy Royce is about to "come across with a big one." "Temperament," they call it, and tell Baldy he's brought death defying into the fine arts.

Look him up if ever you're out there, and ask him to tell you how he did the big jump to the runaway engine for Billy Cross in the wonderful feature, "Love and a Locomotive." He has a great yarn about it, but be careful not to ask him if the steel bridge was made of wood. He might smell a rat and come after me for telling all this, and—well, there's an awful wallop in that ancient right arm of his!

Get 'Em Hot!

By Freeman Harrison



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

AT CONEY ISLAND.

TO use a metaphor that perhaps should belong only to the sea—not to mention cigar makers—gray-haired old Andrew Weber was about at the end of his rope. He was out of luck with a vengeance.

And speaking of the sea, Weber for upward of thirty years had been within hearing distance of those ceaseless waves that some landlubber of a poet has called sad. He ran a merry-go-round and Ferris-wheel establishment at New York's cyclonic seashore resort known as Coney Island. For a long period of time Weber had run it, and now, due to the proprietor's old age, or dull times, or just perverse fate or something else, the business seemed about to go on the toboggan—there was one next door. It was mid-July and far too hot.

The picturesque proprietor, who was large of frame and whose ruddy, good-natured face was devoid of beard, with the exception of a notable mustache, had been fairly prosperous and had saved money, but the reserve funds gradually had been eaten away when misfortunes came.

With the passing years Andrew Weber worshiped more and more the gaily painted carrousel he had ordered

built when, soon after having emigrated to America, he had started in business years before. To him each prancing horse, each crouching lion, each bristling, tawny tiger, seemed a thing of flesh and blood, a part of his very life.

There was much of the artist about Weber. He loved the old tunes, a curious assortment running from "Sweet Rosie O'Grady" and "The Sidewalks of New York" up through the semiclassic, that were played by the riotous musical contraption around which the giddy carrousel revolved.

He loved his majestic Ferris wheel, glistening by night with hundreds of incandescents, each swinging car bearing the name of a fair city of Weber's adopted country. The giant wheel rose through a rectangular aperture in the low roof of a little building, one whole side of which opened directly into the large frame structure in which the gaudy merry-go-round was housed. There was also an entrance from the sidewalk.

The best shall be last. The gray-haired proprietor had one other object of love, if a word so dull as "object" can be used for so altogether charming a young woman as Miss Rose Miller. She was Weber's niece and sold tickets to prospective voyagers on the Ferris wheel.

Rose cannot be described as dainty—

she was of the tall, buxom type—but, in the name of old Mr. Coney himself, what a beauty she was! Why, it made Charley McRorie fairly dizzy to gaze at her crinkly blond hair and smiling blue eyes. He was in love with Rose.

McRorie had a Frankfurter—to use the technical terms—ice cream, and popcorn stand in Weber's merry-go-round building. He could yell, "Get 'em hot!" with more zest than any other salesman on the merry island. His training was excellent, since for several seasons he had been a side-show "barker." His public-school education was not extensive, but with a ready wit and the desire to learn he had picked up much knowledge during his twenty-five or so years in the practical school of life. He was a delver into the mysteries of nature, a student of astronomy and the occult. But there was nothing bookish about him. Freckle-faced, bluff, check-suited, bubbling over with the proverbial "pep," he seemed a living symbol of Coney Island itself.

Weber's Nemesis was one Otto Sills, a Brooklyn coal dealer and real-estate speculator. Financially speaking, Sills had got the whip hand over the amusement veteran, and now he demanded payment within a week; if it were not received he promised to come down on Weber's business with such momentum that—figuratively speaking, of course—the report would be heard from Sandy Hook Light to Canarsie bottoms.

"How much money will you have to get, Mr. Weber?" McRorie asked the proprietor on the Saturday morning the tall, slender Sills had delivered his ultimatum.

"Three thousand, Charley." There was hopelessness in Weber's tone.

McRorie, behind his counter, whistled but looked serious; he took his eyes from a large calendar near by. "Three thousand dollars! Some jack, Mr. Weber! If I had that much I'd try to catch the real Wild Man in Borneo or the Living Stone Man—I've always wanted to see them gents!"

"Sills ain't bluffin', Charley," Weber said, "and he's not goin' to take a cent less than the three thousand. A few

years ago I could have gone to a bank and got the money on a note; but it's different now. The bank people say they haven't got the money, but it ain't that—they're only tryin' not to hurt my feelings. The reason is they're afraid of me, especially now when I can't get indorsers. I'll do the best I can to find a way out of this trouble, Charley; but the time is short and things are runnin' against me."

McRorie, a smile on his large, freckled face, looked toward the crowds that passed by on the Surf Avenue sidewalk. "Three thousand iron men—joy, oh, joy!" Rosie's *Romeo* had led a precarious existence, and to him the amount Sills demanded seemed bigger than Weber's Ferris wheel with the Woolworth Building to boot. "I'll do all I can to help you, Mr. Weber," he said.

CHAPTER II.

A CONFIDENTIAL WARNING.

OUTSIDE on hectic Surf Avenue—Coney's leading thoroughfare—a strange, heterogeneous crowd of visitors made its way. Some evidently were enjoying themselves; others in their tired, trouble-worn faces seemed past all hope of pleasure. Life was on parade.

A wonder-filled lad, smacking of some up-State hamlet, making his first visit to "The Island" of which he so often had heard; an attentive young man and his girl, both from Jersey, who had just come down on the boat from New York—on *Cygnus* or *Perseus* or some other of that noble fleet which carries the lovelorn from Gotham to Coney and back again; a dark-faced mother, probably from the sweltering, humanity-teeming East Side, with a troupe of laughing-crying children, eating lollipops and popcorn; a dignified foreign visitor studying American life in the making, and really wearing a monocle—these and a thousand others surged along the turbulent sidewalk, just as others like them have been surging summer after summer for more than half a century.

Some stopped at Weber's. They bought their tickets for the merry-go-

round from Henry Pulis, a small, dapper man of perhaps thirty, who had worked for the old proprietor since the beginning of the season. Clang, clang, clang! The music ceased, the gay carrousel slowed down; then it stopped. New patrons—mostly children—got on; the bell sounded again; the next dizzy ride began to the bewitching strains of "Sweet Rosie O'Grady."

With a smile, Albert King, ticket taker, jumped aboard the circling craft; when he had collected all the small pasteboards—it cost ten cents to ride on Weber's carrousel—he would manipulate the ring-catching device, with the elusive brass prize that entitled its lucky captor to a free ride. "Get 'em hot!" McRorie was shouting to a group of newcomers.

"I'll dislike very much to leave this place," Weber said later to McRorie, who had just covered a sizzling grate with an imposing array of what soon would be "hot dogs." "It's everything to me, and I don't know what I can do without it. I guess, Charley, I couldn't get along not watchin' these people, especially the children. I miss 'em winters, but then I always says to myself that spring ain't far off and I'll soon see the smilin' little kids again.

"My wife was just like that—she loved the children, too," he went on. "For more than twenty years she sold the merry-go-round tickets in the same booth that Pulis sells 'em now. She'd never let any one else but herself in the booth."

"Get 'em hot! Right off the grate!" McRorie cried. Then he turned toward Weber. "Don't worry too much about leaving this place until you're sure you've got to go. Maybe something will happen before your week is up; maybe—" He stopped as a group of visitors came up to his counter. "Six right off the grate, did you say? Yes, sir. Thank you. There's the mustard; help yourselves."

Weber walked across the smooth floor to the ticket booth. "How're they goin', Henry?" he asked the suave Pulis.

"Not anything extra, Mr. Weber."

Pulis shook his small, well-barbered head. Then he went on in a confidential way: "There's some things going on around here I don't like, boss. Certain folks are putting things over on you; putting them over pretty slick and nice."

Weber looked up quickly. "Who do you mean?"

"Well, I don't like to say anything about another, but, to be frank, I mean McRorie, boss. Why, he don't give us a chance. Just as soon as anybody comes in here he begins yelling about his confounded hot dogs, and by the time people have bought from him they don't always want to spend more money for rides on your merry-go-round or Ferris wheel—not in these days when men are out of work and can't give their families much for amusements. McRorie's a great little barker, he is—for McRorie."

Weber said nothing; he seemed impressed.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Weber," Pulis went on, "you'd be a whole lot better off if you'd get rid of that McRorie fellow. He's playing you for an easy mark, and the sooner you tell him to go the more money you'll make. Take my word for that, boss."

"I'll think about it," the proprietor said. After a minute or so more of conversation he turned away.

CHAPTER III.

A DIFFICULT TASK.

IN one respect at last Fate was being kind to old Andrew Weber in his trouble. As Saturday and Sunday passed and Monday came there was no let-up to the torrid spell that drove thousands beachward to seek whatever little relief they could find; indeed good weather for Coney. Although Weber's business did show some improvement, the veteran proprietor felt sick at heart when he thought of the three thousand dollars Otto Sills demanded.

The task of raising so much money seemed well-nigh impossible, and there were only five days left. Then, almost before Weber realized it, there were

only four—then three. The days never had gone by so fast before. The gray-haired amusement man worked hard to stem the tide against him; he visited banks and other money lenders in an effort to get a second mortgage on his property, but he was without success.

A few miles away, in Wall Street, men lost or won three thousand dollars—or ten times that amount—in a few minutes and scarcely considered the matter; to Weber three thousand dollars meant almost everything that he held worth while.

Thursday night McRorie and Rose, after their work was done, walked east toward Brighton Beach, to a little park the quietness of which was in strange contrast with the turmoil so near at hand. There were trees and shrubbery and dew-covered grass. With evening and the cooling of the land there had come a refreshing breeze off the ocean; it played in the leaves of the trees. A yellow moon shed its enchanting rays over Coney Island.

Of course—for the city fathers once had been young themselves—along the walks in the park were benches convenient for every *Romeo* and his arm-clinging *Juliet*. To one of these, the one they had come laughingly to call their own, McRorie and his ladylove repaired.

"What's going to happen to Uncle Andrew?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know, Rose. I've been thinking of something for the last couple of days, but—when I remember how much your uncle has to have I begin to fear I'm just kidding myself, after all. So I'm not going to kid you with a little scheme I've thought of; but I'll help your uncle all I can. Three thousand dollars, blooie!"

Despite her woman's curiosity—men have none, of course—Rose did not urge her escort to disclose the scheme he had mentioned. Adroitly McRorie changed the topic of conversation, and began to talk on what philosophers and poets say is the oldest subject in the world. What mere man could have avoided the theme with the lovely Rose sitting by his side,

in the moonlight, and at Coney Island, of all places in the world?

She listened, pleased. The bluff, good-natured McRorie was her hero, her Lochinvar, although he had come out of Long Island City, which was far more north than west.

McRorie could sing like the proverbial lark. Soon he was singing softly a snatch of a song, even the thought of which made his heart beat faster:

"Dear little Rose, with your heart of gold,
Dear little Rose, may your path unfold;
My secret sweet I will trust you to keep
Deep in your heart with repose."

"Sing it again," she said when he had finished. "The words are silly, and I guess they're about a flower, not a girl; but the tune is nice. I don't know why it is, Charley, but I always feel kind of thoughtful and melancholy when I listen to pretty music. Why should that be?"

"I don't know exactly, Rose, but I'm the same way myself. I kind of think that it's because beautiful music, like everything else that is truly beautiful, fills a person with awe, and when a fellow's that way he don't laugh or shout, but just becomes thoughtful. And being thoughtful is something like being melancholy, I guess."

"You must have been reading a book again, Charley."

Once more he sang. Then the two, arm in arm—as all Coney Island lovers walk at night, strange habit!—started toward the board walk that skirts the strand. But before they got out of the moonlit park McRorie and Rose saw two persons whom they knew just quitting one of the benches; they were Henry Pulis and Albert King of the Weber institution. The two men seemed to be in deep conversation, and they didn't see McRorie and the blond girl of his heart.

To reach the board walk the latter two had to pass the bench which the Weber employees had just left. McRorie, as he passed by, casually picked up from the bench a small, neatly wrapped package and put it into his pocket.

"Guess Pulis or King left it there," he said to Rose. "I'll return it to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

ONE DAY LEFT!

WHEN they reached the board walk McRorie and the girl found that the salty breeze coming off the choppy, moonlit water was cool enough almost to make even lovers wish for extra wraps. To the south the revolving Sandy Hook Light was throwing its message to those far at sea.

"What a wonderful night!" Rose exclaimed. "Just look at those waves in the moonlight and that twinkling light across the water. I don't see how people can be selfish and mean with things like that to look at."

"Usually they don't look at them, Rose—I don't myself very much. You know, there's a keen struggle for existence going on pretty much everywhere on this earth, and most people haven't time to look at lights. But I hope they'll get a chance to do some moon gazing to-morrow night. If it rains then, Rose, I'm going to sue the weather bureau for damages, and——"

"What difference will it make to you if it rains?"

"Don't ask me, Rose. I'm only dreaming. Three thousand bucks—gee whilkens!"

Friday morning came, with Andrew Weber still far from possessing the amount of money the inevitable Sills would demand on the morrow. One day left! The old proprietor looked worn and tired out.

As for Charley McRorie, he seemed to have much on his mind. Several times during the morning he went to the sidewalk and gazed anxiously at the rather threatening sky. In the afternoon he was gone for a long while, leaving his stand in charge of "Rube" Connors, a trusted handy man along Surf Avenue.

When he got back a hot sun was throwing its rays upon Coney. With him had come two dusky young porters, their eyes shining, bearing an immense wooden box which at McRorie's orders they placed near his counter.

During the early evening patrons of Andrew Weber's attractions were few.

To the east, over the lights of Brighton Beach, a great yellow moon, full and radiant, rose slowly, and perhaps it was due to its age-old influence that not many of the Island's younger set came to try the pleasure of Ferris wheel or carousel.

Somewhat after ten, when thousands of home-goers already were surging toward the whirlpool-like station of the "L" and surface lines which was near Weber's, McRorie said to the proprietor:

"I'm going to let Rube Connors run my stand for a while. I've got a little stunt to perform."

"Stunt? What do you mean, Charley?"

"Just watch me, Mr. Weber."

McRorie pulled to the edge of the sidewalk the big box—which Weber judged to be empty from the ease with which the other yanked it about—did a handspring, and jumped to the top of the box. With a lively gesture he began in a voice that carried far through the din of Surf Avenue:

"See the e-clipse from the Ferris wheel! Step right in, la-dees and gentle-men, and see the moon in e-clipse! Only fifteen cents! An un-ob-struct-ed view of a g-reat his-tor-ical e-vent from the highest wheel on the Island. Buy your tickets inside. See the re-mark-able e-clipse of the moon! Each car will stop at the top to af-ford the best view. Come right on, la-dees and gentle-men! Come right on!"

CHAPTER V.

HIS SURPRISING DISCOVERY.

THE crowd came. Probably not more than one in ten of those who thronged the Surf Avenue sidewalks had known of the celestial phenomenon so far above their heads, but McRorie took care that knowledge of it became general. As the "e-clipse" could not be observed well from the street because of the glare from countless lights—also, buildings helped to block the view—Weber's Ferris wheel seemed the means of getting a view of what was happening to the far-distant moon.

Rose Miller sold tickets till her fin-

gers grew tired and her brain became so fagged that she no longer was able to make change. Weber, trembling with excitement and joy, took her place for a while. McRorie, deserting his post for a few minutes, improvised a temporary booth and got a lightninglike young man, who seemed to be on hand by arrangement, to sell tickets to a second long line of patrons.

With an eye to business and the help of a half dozen or so policemen, McRorie soon had the crowds entering the Ferris-wheel building direct from the sidewalk and leaving by way of the merry-go-round palace. In the deluge the carrousel's patronage became large, and Pulis and King were having the busiest evening of their lives. Connors, too, was kept on his mettle.

When the eclipse was over and the debris in Weber's establishment had been cleared away, McRorie and the proprietor walked to the open door of the booth in which Pulis sat. King was there, too.

"Well, what did you take in to-day, Henry?" Weber asked.

"Fifty-nine dollars." Pulis pointed to the money drawer and handed Weber a partly used roll of tickets.

The proprietor looked at the number of the first ticket on the roll, then compared it with some digits he had in a worn little notebook—the number of the day's first ticket. "Fifty-nine dollars seems to be correct," Weber said after a little figuring.

"Seems to be' is good," McRorie spoke up. He beckoned to a couple of quietly dressed men who, Weber then recalled, had been standing near the booth most of the evening.

When they had come up, McRorie continued in a calm voice: "Pulis, these two plain-clothes men have kept track of your sales since nine o'clock to-night, and they're willing to bear witness that they've seen you sell nine hundred and ten tickets. That's ninety-one dollars, not to mention what you sold before nine o'clock. Where's the money?"

The small eyes of Pulis blazed defiance. "Don't the tickets prove I'm right? What are the numbers for?"

5A TN

"But how about the other tickets?"

Henry Pulis had good control over himself, but at McRorie's question he became white and began to tremble. "The oth-er t-tickets? I—I don't understand."

"Too well you understand, Pulis. How many have you sold to-day of the tickets Mr. Weber never has seen, the ones you've had printed and sold, keeping the money through King's connivance?"

"I—I don't know what he means, Mr. Weber."

McRorie took from his coat pocket several rolls of small, greenish tickets, bound together by a rubber band. "You left these on a park bench last night, Pulis, and it was careless of you; but don't blame yourself too much, for I was just about wise to what you and King were doing even before——"

"I never made nothin' out of it," King interrupted in a frightened voice. "He only let me give me friends free rides, and——"

"Keep quiet, you fool!" Pulis made a rush toward the ticket taker.

"No rough stuff, Pulis," one of the officers said, laying a heavy and detaining arm on the would-be assailant. "Say what you want to, King."

The ticket-taker's story was brief. For several weeks Pulis had been looting the merry-go-round funds by means of bogus tickets—similar to Weber's except that they had no numbers—which King had kept separate and given to his crooked mentor when the day was over.

Confronted by King's confession, McRorie's evidence, and some suasion from the plain-clothes men, Pulis at last made a clean breast of his guilt. He handed Weber seventy-one dollars, most of which had been concealed in a spacious inside vest pocket.

CHAPTER VI.

BESIDE THE SEA.

AFTER Pulis and King had been led away by the officers—later that night McRorie arranged that the ticket-seller's confederate, who really was only a boy, obtained bail—Weber figured the total from the sales of Ferris-wheel

tickets. Then he added to it what had been derived from the merry-go-round and the amount he had saved during the week.

He shook his head and said tremblingly to Rose and McRorie: "It—it's not enough. I can't pay Sills. It's only two thousand seven hundred and eighty dollars. He won't take a cent less than three thousand."

"Sure you'll pay Sills," McRorie declared. "You forget that this afternoon you told me that if your business was saved you'd like to have me for a partner. You need two hundred and twenty dollars. Rube Connors took in almost that much for me to-night, and I've got enough besides to put three hundred in your business. I'll try to be an active partner, if you let me in."

"You're admitted, Charley." Andrew Weber took the big hand of his young friend.

"Too late for a walk?" McRorie asked Rose when the lights of Weber's establishment had been put out and the old proprietor was preparing to start home.

"Sure it is, Charley," Rose said, smiling, "but I'll go just the same."

Quietness had come over Coney Island after another day of tumult. The salty air was cool, the moon clear and

bright, all evidence of her late eclipse long since having disappeared.

They walked through the little park, shimmering in the yellow moonlight, on out to the almost-deserted board walk. There McRorie and Rose found a convenient bench.

"You saved everything for us, Charley," she said. "Your scheme was great—who'd ever known of a coming eclipse but you!—and now just think of your being Uncle Andrew's partner. Oh, it's fine! And you'll be my boss, too—won't you? Will I have to call you Mr. McRorie?" She smiled and let him take her hand in his big, strong, rough one.

Soon he was singing softly:

"Dear little Rose, with your heart of gold,
Dear little Rose, may your path unfold;
My secret sweet I will trust you to keep
Deep in your heart with repose.

"And I mean just that, Rose," he said. "My secret you know—that I love you and always will." Both of her hands were in his now.

Across the gleaming water the bluish light on the end of Sandy Hook appeared and disappeared, throwing its beams of hope and guidance to those far upon the sea. And Rose Miller, taking heed of the fact that she wasn't a mariner, for at least once in her life failed to look at the twinkling light.



GRAY AND GOLD

By Elias Lieberman

IN gray and gold the moments fly;
Like desert sands they pass us by.
Simooms of time sweep to and fro
The gold of dawn and sunset glow,
The gray of dust and sodden sky.

And we who ask our tragic "Why?"
Now cast too low, now raised too high,
Are part of Fate's queer puppet show
In gray and gold.

When dreams of love charm mind and eye,
When days of dole give love the lie,
When trusted friend turns sudden foe,
When moons of mirth rout clouds of woe,
The looms of Heav'n our patterns ply
In gray and gold.

With the Seven Million

By Ralph Boston



(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING STRANGE.

T was during her third week out of work that Sally Williams first began to realize the gravity of the national unemployment question—at least, inasmuch as it applied to New York and herself. Sally had held a lucrative and interesting position as secretary to a French banker. It had seemed entirely too easy to be true, and she had felt no great surprise when her employer decided to return to that dear Paris and dismissed her with two weeks' extra salary, an extravagant reference praising her services, and his best wishes.

At first she had not been unduly alarmed about being jobless. She had read of the unemployment problem, but never had thought of it in connection with herself. She was a capable and efficient stenographer and had studied Spanish and French—assets which she counted upon to get her into some export house. But positions were pitifully scarce, and after she had tramped wearily from office to office, Sally decided to abandon the export idea and take whatever she could get.

It was when Wednesday of the

second week had passed that she realized the chances of getting anything at all were extremely slim. But she persevered and kept at it until the middle of the third week. It was then that she decided to risk a precious five dollars and register with an employment agency where, on the occasion of an earlier call, she had been informed that a situation would be found for her if the initial fee was paid.

This agency was on narrow Nassau Street, at the lower end of the city. A number of girls and young women were in evidence when Sally entered the office. She parted with the five-dollar bill and was given a blank to fill out. When she had dutifully answered the printed questions she was told to wait. After an hour or more she was ushered into a private office where a plump little woman with horn-rimmed spectacles eyed her briefly before waving her into a chair.

"Please be seated, Miss Williams."

Sally sat down.

The woman studied the application blank, then laid it down, and swung around in her swivel chair. "I see that you have listed your lowest salary as twenty-five dollars a week," she began. "The unemployment question, as you doubtless know, is very grave, Miss

Williams. I have young women on file here who are expert stenographers with years of experience. Some of them are willing to take as little as twelve or fifteen dollars to begin with. Others will accept almost anything so long as they can get work. I'm not trying to discourage you. I just want you to know what conditions are."

Sally's heart sank.

"I have a call," the other went on, "from a Mr. Lopez, who is a lawyer in the Higman Building, on Trinity Square. The salary depends entirely upon the applicant, and perhaps your knowledge of Spanish will help you to obtain it, although nothing was said about that language by him. Please ask Miss Train, in the outer office, to give you a card to Mr. Lopez and advise us by telephone as to what success you have."

Sally fulfilled the instructions, and at half past twelve to the minute was opening a ground-glass door on the twelfth floor of the Higman Building. Stenciled upon the door were the words "Delgado Lopez," and, in a lower corner, "The Benardo Fruit Company."

Sally unlocked the door and stepped into a fairly large office where a swarthy young man with a pointed mustache was reading a midday paper. He removed his feet from the desk and stood up when she came in.

"Mr. Lopez," he informed her, when she gave him the card of the employment agency, "is at present out to lunch. I expect him back in a few minutes. Will you please have a chair and wait?"

Sally thanked him and seated herself.

The office was meagerly furnished and had a connecting room shut off by a door. It contained a typewriting desk, a roll-top desk, a filing cabinet, and a table. Sally looked for signs of a law library, but saw none.

Spread across one wall was a large map in colors of Benardo, a small but prosperous republic. Sally looked at the map. She remembered that a year previous Benardo had been a kingdom where, after a comic-opera revolution, its king had been politely removed by

the aid of bombs and the place taken charge of by the revolutionists who had promptly made it a government for and by the people.

Sally remembered having read an article about Benardo in a magazine. The place was famous for its mines, many of which were American owned. She remembered that the king had been Eduardo Third and that his reign had been characterized by oppression and the maneuvering of some man who was a power behind the throne.

She was still eying the map when the door opened and Lopez entered.

The attorney was a small, wiry man with a thin, brown face and liquid black eyes that were singularly penetrating. Patches of gray were at his temples; his teeth were crooked and tobacco-stained. He was expensively dressed and possessed of a brisk, nervous manner that hinted of an inner restlessness.

"Who is this, Ferdinand?" he asked the young man in Spanish.

Sally felt uncomfortable.

"A girl from the employment agency that you telephoned yesterday," Ferdinand replied in the same tongue.

Lopez nodded. "Do you wish to see me?" he asked Sally in perfect English. "Please come in here."

He opened the connecting door and ushered her into a private office, where he pulled out a chair beside a flat-topped desk and waved her into it.

Again Sally looked in vain for evidences of the well-equipped law office, but there were none to be seen. The room was bare save for a few articles of furniture.

Lopez lighted a thin, round cigarette and sat down before the desk. "I am sorry," he began pleasantly, "but the position I had open has been filled. I have, however, a situation of a different kind that might interest you. The salary is forty dollars a week including room and board, and the duties are to teach English to a young Spanish girl and to be a companion to her. Do you think you would be interested?"

Sally felt a tingle. Forty dollars a week with room and board! No more of the necessity of giving twelve hard-

earned dollars each week to Mrs. Madigan, the proprietress of the Forty-eighth Street boarding house!

"Yes," she said as steadily as possible; "I think I would be interested."

Lopez looked at her with his bright, penetrating eyes for a minute and then picked up the telephone. "I am only an agent in the matter," he explained, calling a number. "You will pardon me while I find out when it will be convenient for you to be interviewed."

There was a pause while the connection was being made.

"Is this Manuel?" Lopez inquired in Spanish after an interval. "This is Delgado speaking. Listen carefully. There is a young lady here in the office now who appears to be just the person we are looking for. I am sending her up to you in a little while. The salary will be forty dollars a week. I have not questioned her very closely, but I feel sure she has nothing to do with the enemy. Take her on, but keep a close watch. One never can be sure. You understand?"

Evidently the speaker at the other end did, for Lopez hung up the receiver with an air of satisfaction.

"It will be convenient," he said, "for the people to whom I am sending you, to see you at three o'clock. I will write you a note of introduction. I will say nothing about the salary, so you must tell them what I have promised you."

Down on Broadway again, Sally felt curiously perplexed. What did Lopez mean by the conversation carried on in Spanish? She looked at the letter he had given her, her brows drawn together. Was there something sinister behind the situation? What did he mean by speaking of the "enemy" and suggesting that they watch her? Should she tear the note in half and go back to the agency or should she not?

Sally walked slowly and thoughtfully north. It seemed impossible to forget the lure of the forty dollars a week and board, particularly when she remembered what the plump little woman at the agency had said about the low sala-

ries paid expert help. And she had been out of work for three weeks! Argue with herself as she would, Sally knew in her secret heart of hearts that she had every intention of doing her best to obtain the position.

She used the subway, took a local, and got off at the Ninety-first Street station. In a few minutes thereafter she was walking past the house whose number was on the envelope in her beaded bag. It was situated between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues. It was a four-story-and-basement building of brownstone, differing not at all from the other houses of the aristocratic row. She saw the delicate tracery of expensive curtains glimmering in the windows, potted evergreens on either side of the outer vestibule door.

Sally looked at her wrist watch and saw that it was only a few minutes after two o'clock. She determined to spend the intervening minutes in the park and walked east. She reached the corner and almost collided with a tall, red-headed young man who had come down the steps of the elevated railroad and who, steadying her with a hand, apologized profusely.

The incident was of only an instant's duration, yet Sally saw a lean, attractive face, ingenuous blue eyes, the head of a young god, and a figure that was patterned along the lines of a Hercules.

She went on to the park, still remembering the young man's appeal, sat down on a bench that was in the path of the May sunshine, and gave herself up to speculations concerning a Mr. Lopez and a law office that didn't resemble a law office.

At three o'clock precisely she mounted the steps of the brownstone house with the potted evergreens before the outer vestibule door, rang a highly polished bell, and after a minute gave her letter to a small, colored maid.

"This is from Mr. Lopez," she explained.

The maid nodded respectfully and opened the door wider.

With an odd quiver of apprehension Sally entered.

CHAPTER II.

A PERPLEXING TRIANGLE.

THE man who received Sally in a beautifully appointed reception room was swarthy, suave, and dressed in a French-silk lounging suit. His black hair was flung back in ripples from a high, studious forehead. His eyes were large and black, but free from the searching stare that was in the eyes of Lopez. There was an air of elegance and dignity about him that Sally could not overlook. She guessed that he might have been in the early forties, or was possibly somewhat older. Yet in his carriage there was a youthful spring and buoyancy.

And his name, it seemed, was the same name that Lopez had written on the envelope—that of Manuel Sanchez.

He asked Sally a number of courteous questions and explained briefly that he had come to New York from abroad with his daughter and wished to have a companion for the girl who might teach her more English than she knew. The duties, it seemed, were pleasant and simple. Sally learned that she was expected to entertain the daughter of the house, accompany her on shopping pilgrimages, go to the theater, to teas, and make calls with her. The salary would be forty dollars a week.

The explanation was so clear and simple that Sally felt reassured and relieved. She displayed the extravagant reference the French banker had penned for her, answered a few personal questions, and then was asked to come the next day to begin her duties.

"I should like you to meet my daughter, Señorita Lolita," Sanchez said, when the interview was over. "I shall bring her in to you."

He left the room and returned in a few minutes with a young girl who came shyly forward and spoke in broken English.

Lolita Sanchez was a small, delicately made young person with a wistful, Madonnalike face, sad brown eyes, and hair that was as black as midnight. Her skin was of the tint and smoothness of

old ivory and her lips as red as poinsettias.

Sally wished it was possible for her to make known her knowledge of Spanish. She hesitated, feeling that somehow Lopez or Sanchez would not wish to employ one who knew their tongue. And, oddly, some sixth sense of intuition seemed to tell her that understanding what was spoken might, some time, be of vast assistance to her.

When Sally left the house on Ninety-first Street she walked to a corner drug store where she telephoned the employment agency on Nassau Street. After that she returned to her boarding house. There she informed the landlady that she was giving up her room on the morrow, packed her small trunk, and changed from shirt waist and skirt to the blue taffeta frock she wore when she dined at the corner restaurant.

As Sally rearranged the modish pile of her lustrous brown hair, she eyed herself surreptitiously in the mirror. She did not have to be egotistical to know that she was prepossessing, youthful, beautiful. The eyes that gravely regarded her from the depths of the glass were brown, velvet stars; her cheeks were smooth and warmly flushed; her lips were a red fire.

She was a well-built girl, whose figure was symmetrical and curved, whose square little chin denoted firmness of character, and whose poise was graceful, charming, but shadowed by a calm graveness that was all her own. She resembled a person who was capable of taking care of herself, one who never gave up a battle regardless of the odds against her. But still she was essentially feminine—a girl for whom any cavalier might have entered the lists.

Attired in blue dress and with a chic little straw turban on her well-shaped head, Sally dusted her cheeks with powder and drew a breath of relief. At last she did not have to worry about what promise to-morrow held, how long it would be before her last dollar would be spent!

With another sigh she turned out the gas and went down the steep stairs of the boarding house. She made arrange-

ments with a local expressman to call for her trunk, and then directed her steps toward Broadway and the restaurant where she usually dined.

The Rialto was a rainbow of light that set the May night on fire with its multicolored gleams. Its fluent movement was made vibrant by the dinner-seeking throng, the traffic flood. Sally felt that on this night she would like to be gay, to celebrate the forty-dollar-a-week job. She visioned herself beside some attractive youth—some one like the good-looking young man she had so forcibly encountered that afternoon—and felt a little pang.

Too long had she steadfastly barred her heart to romance. Still, she thought, there was never a chance for it. The men of the Madigan establishment, a cheap run of clerks for the most part, had never appealed to her. And she had no way of meeting or becoming acquainted with any one who might have pleased her fancy.

Sally entered the popular-priced restaurant at the corner, found her usual table was vacant, and pulled out a chair. The waitress, a flaxen-haired, freckled young person, smiled as she usually did.

"You look happy to-night, dearie."

"Do I?" Sally returned kindly.

"I wish," the waitress murmured, "that I was in love! But these nickel nursers that come in here! They think they own you if they part with a dime tip, honest!"

Faintly amused, Sally began the methodical business of dining. She was down to the homemade pie the menu boasted when she became aware that a man had seated himself on the other side of the table. She absently glanced up and received a decided shock.

The person across from her was the same red-headed, blue-eyed young man whom she had collided with that afternoon on the corner of Ninety-first Street and Columbus Avenue.

He met her frank stare with a faint smile. "This isn't coincidence," he said easily. "The fact is I've been following you around all afternoon and this is

the first opportunity I've had to speak with you, Miss Williams."

Indignation and surprised bewilderment blended within Sally. She laid down her fork and gasped.

"Perhaps," the other went on, "I had better introduce myself. My name happens to be Carrick, Michael Carrick. There really isn't any mystery to it. I happen to know that our friend Sanchez has been looking for a young lady. After our encounter I loitered around the other corner. I saw you go in at three o'clock and suspected you might be an applicant. I was certain when I stood behind the booth in that Amsterdam Avenue drug store, heard you call up an employment agency, name yourself and say that you had obtained the position. What more simple? After that I trailed you to your boarding house up the street, hung around until you came out, and then dropped in here."

There was something reassuring in his smile for all of the cryptic statement.

Sally recovered from her first surprise. "But why?"

Carrick's blue eyes narrowed. "Do you know who Lopez is?" he asked, disregarding her question. "Do you know who Manuel Sanchez is? Do you know who the girl is whom he is passing off as his daughter? Do you know what their plans are? Have you any idea?"

Sally shook her head.

"I thought not," Carrick went on. "I cannot explain just at this minute, but I can tell you this much: There is trouble brewing for Lopez and Sanchez. Of course it's not my business what you do, but—well, when I bumped into you this afternoon I told myself that you were too nice a girl to be mixed up in any dangerous undertaking. That's why I followed you and waited to have a word with you in private. Personally, if I were you, I'd give up the idea of playing chaperon to Señorita Lolita. These Spaniards are a bad bunch. You probably don't know it, but Lopez had the reputation of being the most feared man in Benardo. He's a devil!"

Sally tried not to smile at the melodrama in his words. "Are you a detective?" she queried faintly.

"Lopez knows me as a gun runner, if that means anything to you," Carrick answered shortly. "But we're getting away from the subject. Will you throw up your job?"

Sally shook her head. "No; I'm going to stay. I thank you for your warning, but I'm not in the least frightened. I'm in the habit of taking care of myself. And this is New York."

Carrick moved his shoulders. "I'm sorry," he said simply. "I had hopes of steering you clear. You see, your presence at the house might complicate things."

He stood up, his attractive face rueful. "I have a feeling that we shall meet again, so I will say au revoir rather than adieu, Miss Williams. Oh, yes; just a word of advice: If you need help at any time you can depend on Jeff."

With a bow and a friendly smile, Carrick moved away. Turning in her chair, Sally saw him enter a touring car that stood at the curb outside.

She pushed away the cut of homemade pie and pondered the words that had been poured into her ears. What was a gun runner? What did the warning mean and who was Lopez really?

The riddle of it was too much for Sally. She shook her head as if to rid her mind of its perplexing tangle. Then she settled her check, laid a quarter down for the freckled waitress who longed for love, and went out into Broadway.

When she reached the steps of Mrs. Madigan's boarding house, excitement was like a creeping spark within her.

CHAPTER III.

THE WARNING LETTER.

THIS excitement, however, waned and flickered out after the first three days of her new employment. Sally's routine was as orderly and untroubled as it would have been had she worked in a well-kept business office.

As Manuel Sanchez has instructed her, she motored with Lolita in the morning, lunched at some Westchester or Long Island tavern, gave the girl English lessons in the afternoon, and amused her in the evening.

There was nothing mysterious or suspicious about either the house that was her new home or its occupants. The only thing that might have cast a shadow was a surly Cuban who acted as a butler and a stalwart Spaniard whose name was José. This José attended the front door and acted as a handy man about the premises. The other servants were two colored maids and an American who piloted the sedan on the morning trips through the suburbs.

Despite the peace of the establishment, however, Sally had not forgotten the warning of the gun-running Michael Carrick. By day she kept her eyes and ears open, and at night she securely locked the door of the spacious third-floor bedroom to which she had been assigned.

It was on the fifth day of her employment that Sally's old suspicions came back to her. All morning she sensed an air of tenseness that seemed to hang over the house. It increased when Sanchez came in toward ten o'clock and told her that his daughter did not care to motor that morning.

He left the room, and she heard him in the adjoining lounge, speaking Spanish in a voice that was low, but which did not escape her listening ears.

"José attended to him," Sanchez said. "I have the letter here for you to look at. Will you come right up?"

After a moment he hung up the receiver.

At eleven o'clock the front doorbell rang and she could hear Sanchez conversing with some one downstairs. Sally continued with Lolita's lessons, listening absently to the drone of voices below.

After a time steps sounded on the stairs and the door opened. Sanchez entered first, followed by Lopez, who seemed thinner and more restive than ever. He pressed a kiss on the back

of Lolita's hand and turned his penetrating glance on Sally.

"You will go to your room, my dove," Sanchez said to the girl who was supposed to be his daughter.

Sally perceived the flicker of Lolita's glance.

"No harm will come to my kind lady?" she quavered in Spanish.

"Assuredly not!" Sanchez replied smoothly. "Retire at once."

When the door closed behind the girl, Lopez stepped forward and caught Sally's arm. "So you are an agent of the Wrecker?" he said sibilantly. "You are here, working with those forces that seek to destroy us!"

Sally tried to wrest her arm from his grip. "I don't know what you are talking about!" she cried indignantly.

Lopez thrust his dark face close to hers. "Don't lie to me!" he grated. "You are one of the enemy! Now I will tell you something: Detaining you here fits in very well with our plans. I will inform the Wrecker that when he strikes his blow, the brunt of it will fall on *you*! You see? We shall hold you as a hostage! Be warned! You will suffer for whatever the Wrecker attempts!"

He turned to Sanchez. "This girl is a snake in the grass at our feet!" he cried in Spanish. "Take care of her, guard her, see to it that she has no communication with the outside world. And now come, there are many things I must speak of with you, Manuel. The *Feo Gonzales* is ready for us. There is much to discuss."

Both men went out, talking together.

Sally looked down at her small, clenched hands. What was the meaning of it all?

Her first quiver of indignation over, she sank down in a chair and strove to think clearly. Who was the Wrecker and was it possible she was to be detained in the house against her will? She went back over the words that Lopez had spoken, but could not penetrate the cryptic meaning of them. One thing alone was certain: The warning that the gun-running Michael Carrick

had given her in the restaurant that evening had not been an idle one.

Sanchez, when she saw him again, was taciturn and stolid. He said nothing of the visit of Lopez and spoke only once or twice on some unimportant matter. In the afternoon Sally continued the English lessons and toward seven dined. It was a silent, gloomy meal served by the sullen Cuban. In the dim candlelight Sally saw the little Spanish girl look at her with sad eyes and bow her head.

Later, when Lolita retired, Sally determined to learn exactly how matters stood. Putting on her turban she caught up gloves and mesh bag and went down the stairs. She passed the open door of the lounge and was continuing on when Sanchez came out.

"I am sorry," he murmured politely, "but you are not permitted to leave the house."

She looked at him defiantly. "I am going out for a walk."

Sanchez shook his head. "I am sorry," he repeated, "but it is not permitted."

"I am going out!" Sally said.

The mild eyes of the man darkened. He dropped a hand to her arm, a spasm of some inner emotion flashing across his face. "You will obey what I say!" he snapped. "You will obey me, or you will regret it!"

"I am not your daughter!" Sally flared out. "This is New York and not Spain. If you refuse to let me go out I shall communicate with the police. You have no right to detain me against my will. I resign from your employment here and now. Pay me what you owe me, and I shall leave immediately!"

Sanchez smiled. "You may resign, but still you cannot leave. As for the police you speak of, they do not interest me in the least. Señorita, you are a pretty girl, and I should dislike to have you cross my will and arouse my temper. The consequences would not be pleasant—for you. Remember that if you please. And now it grows late, and I have some letters to write. You will go to your room and think well

concerning what I have told you. Good night!"

He bowed and went back into the lounge, but left the door wide.

Still aflame inwardly, Sally turned back and went up to the third floor. There was no logic in crossing swords with her employer at this early stage of the game. It would be far better, she decided, to do what he said for the present and see what impended. There was no sense in inviting disaster.

When she reached her bedchamber she felt more resigned toward the inevitable. She closed the door, locked it, and at the bureau switched on a small, French lamp. As the light came on her narrowed eyes fell on the edge of an envelope that protruded from under the base of the lamp.

She picked it up, found her name written on the envelope, and felt a thrill of excitement. A letter for her! From whom? She ripped it open and read:

DEAR MISS WILLIAMS: I am giving this to Jeff who will try to smuggle it through to you. May I repeat my former warning and ask that you leave the house without delay? My plans are ready to be put in operation and your presence there complicates matters greatly.

I have made arrangements with Jeff to have the basement gate left unlocked for you at midnight. Please avail yourself of this opportunity and make an escape, as personal danger for you will increase within the next few hours. MICHAEL CARRICK.

Sally read the letter twice and bit her lip. There was no question but that the gun runner was advising her for her own good. She had enough experience with Lopez and Sanchez to understand that. And an avenue for freedom would be prepared for her at midnight.

Sally squared her shoulders. "I hate to run up the white flag," she thought, "but I guess it's the only thing to do in the circumstances."

She stretched herself out on the bed and picked up a book. The excitement within her would not permit her to concentrate, and after a time she laid it aside and began to speculate upon the identity of the "Jeff" of whom Carrick had spoken.

Eleven o'clock came at last; then the half hour and the quarter hour of midnight. Street sounds had dwindled. The brazen echoes of a phonograph playing across the wilderness of the back yards ceased, and the night grew hushed.

Then, somewhere, a deep-chimed clock struck twelve times and Sally stirred.

With hands that were not entirely steady she put on a pair of flat-heeled, rubber-soled tennis shoes, changed to a short skirt, put on a turban, and buttoned her trim tweed jacket. No use to take anything with her; she surveyed the room quickly, switched off the lamp, and with the quietness of a prowling ghost opened the bedroom door and stole out.

The house was as silent as the desert.

Opposite, behind the door of Lolita's room, Sally could hear the quiet, tranquil breathing of the little girl with the sad eyes. She felt a stab of regret. It was a task to leave with her curiosity unsatisfied. Once she stole away it would probably never be her privilege to learn what was the mystery. In Gotham, she knew, there were secret battles and combats, intrigues and plots that were never presented to the eyes of the Seven Million. She could never solve the riddle, once the house was behind her, unless Carrick saw fit to enlighten her. And the good-looking Carrick—was she destined ever to see him again?

Speculations were as vain as an interpretation of the whole affair.

On fugitive feet Sally stepped out on the landing and descended to the second floor. Here she halted and looked over the banisters. Below, a small night light burned in the entryway revealing José, the custodian of the door, slumbering heavily with chin tilted forward on his chest. Sally felt a chill of dismay.

To reach the basement it was necessary to go down the last flight of stairs, seek the door under them at the rear of the lower hall, and from there journey down to the cellar. Would José awake? What would happen if it was

discovered that she was fleeing? She could not help remembering the undisguised venom she had seen in the eyes of Lopez that morning.

A glance at her wrist watch showed her that some four minutes had elapsed since the deep-chimed clock had marked midnight. Sally tightened her lips to a crimson thread. There was nothing to do but go on and risk it. Fortunately the stairs were heavily carpeted, and the sleeper at their foot seemed deep in slumber.

Nerving herself for the ordeal, Sally went down the first few stairs, trying to keep her glance from José, fearing that the very power of her eyes would awaken him. With cold moisture dewing her brow and wetting the palms of her hands, she reached the middle landing of the stairs without mishap. There she waited for the pounding of her heart to subside and, with a silent prayer, began to go down the last half of the flight.

The sleeper at the door stirred and sighed thickly. In a panic Sally halted and clutched the banisters. The burly guardian of the door moved and sighed again. But his head continued to remain sunken on his chest, and Sally, after another glance up through the darkness behind her, went down the last steps and reached the hall in safety.

By an effort she kept herself from darting past the figure in the chair. With her heart in her throat she rounded the newel post at the foot of the stairway and tiptoed down the hall to the door at the rear.

In a couple of minutes she was through it and in the cellar corridor that led out to the basement gate and the areaway below the street level.

This passageway was in utter darkness, but Sally did not mind the murk. With a relief flooding her that was greater than that which she had ever known before, she picked her way forward. At the end of the corridor was a door of glass and wood that opened into a brick-built space that was directly under the stoop. This space was lined with empty ash cans and was as black as the inside of a pocket. With

pulses fluttering, Sally closed the inner door and stretched out an eager hand to the basement gate.

It swung open at her touch, and she took two steps forward. But before she could slip through it a curving arm, stealing out of the darkness, circled her waist, a hand that was like a vise was clamped over her mouth, and in the blackness she saw two eyes swimming above her, penetrating and sword-sharp.

CHAPTER IV.

SURPRISE AND WONDER.

IT happens," the voice of Lopez hissed in the girl's ear, "that the letter your friend sent you was opened and read. Señorita, it is impossible to outwit us!"

Resistance, Sally found, after her first hopeless struggle, was useless. For all of his small size and nervousness, Lopez was as strong as finely tempered steel. He waited until this fact was firmly impressed upon her and then whistled softly.

Some one, flitting like an ill-omened bird across the areaway, pushed open the basement door.

"Hold her!" Lopez commanded in Spanish.

New arms and another hand crept around Sally and fastened over her mouth. Before she was able to judge the intentions of Lopez, a thick handkerchief was drawn across her jaws and knotted deftly.

"Now hold her wrists," Lopez instructed. "I will give her a little of the stuff—not too much, but enough to take the fight out of her."

While iron hands encircled her wrists, Sally heard the pop of a cork. Sick with fear she struggled again before a handkerchief with a sweet odor to it was pressed and held relentlessly against her nostrils.

Then a dreamy, tired feeling weighed her down, rendering her limp and sleepy.

As if from a distance she heard voices whispering and felt the cool air of the street. She understood she was being half carried across the areaway and up to the sidewalk. She was sleep-

ily conscious of an automobile at the curb, of sinking down on yielding upholstery, of the hum of a motor, and then of street lamps drifting past.

"When the Wrecker strikes in the morning the nest will be empty!" some one said in a voice vibrant with satisfaction. "We shall be far away, where, he can never unearth us."

"And the others?" some one else inquired.

"They follow at dawn," the first voice replied.

The conversation continued, but Sally was too sleepy to heed it.

With her head against the cushions and the gag cutting her jaws, she slumbered fitfully. She had no idea of the route over which the car traveled, or of how long a duration their journey was. Once when she opened her eyes it was to find the glimmer of dawn on skies that hung shoddy and tattered with clouds. Her eyelids fluttered and she slept again.

Later, the vibrations of the motor ceased and cold air was on her face. Hazily, she felt herself being carried an inconsiderable distance, felt the gag being removed, and then from half-closed eyes beheld the shine of a lamp. Steps sounded on boards. At last she was placed on a couch or a bed. Some one leaned over her, and voices droned again.

After that she sighed and, slipping from the brink of consciousness, fell into a heavy sleep.

When Sally awoke the brassy glare of sunshine was on her face. She sat up with a start. The wrist watch she looked at told her the hour was ten o'clock. Except for a dryness in her throat and a dull ache in each temple she felt no ill effects from the previous night.

Where was she and what had happened? Like lightning her aroused memory flashed back to the house on Ninety-first Street, the space under the front stoop, the voice of Lopez, and the handkerchief with the sweet odor.

A glance showed her that she had been reclining on a brown-canvas army cot. The room in which she lay was

the front part of a rough, decaying, weather-beaten shack. Grimy windows, rag and paper-stuffed, a wooden door that swung to and fro in the breeze and let in the flood of sunshine, were the things she first observed. Next in order Sally beheld a crude table made of planks and a few chairs, an unplastered ceiling, and a dangling ship lamp that hung on a rusty chain from the rafters above.

Across from her was a blackened fireplace with two charred logs; to the left a frowzy curtain partitioned the chamber off from an adjoining room.

Stiffly, Sally got up from the cot. Her turban was missing, but she discovered her tweed jacket on a chair and the tennis shoes under the plank table. She put them on hastily and, conscious that the breeze that blew in was salty and tingling, pushed open the yawning door and emerged into a world made radiant by the morning glamour of May.

Sally stifled an exclamation of surprise and wonder. A hundred yards away from her was the white shine of a broad, flat beach, heaped with sand dunes. It was edged by the turbulent surf of a vast, blue expanse of water that Sally knew was the ocean. As far as she could see were white-capped waves, a faint, far horizon, the bend of a sky filled with puffy squadrons of clouds.

The shack itself stood upon a narrow finger of sand that stretched out from a wooded mainland and was bisected by a dreary, clam-shell road. The road ended before the door of the shack and curved away into woods a mile or so farther on. Back and behind her was the calmer water of a small harbor where a rakish, three-masted schooner, lying low, was anchored a quarter of a mile off to the windward.

Farther away the woodlands merged with swamps and the slaty green of open fields and the quiet countryside.

The aroma of burning wood attracted Sally's attention. A little to the left of the shack a man bent over a charcoal fire where a frying pan sizzled and a coffeepot bubbled. Sally recognized

him at once as the surly Cuban butler of the Ninety-first Street house. No one else was in evidence, nothing stirred, there was no sign of the automobile that had brought her from the city. Only the lazy beauty of the May morning prevailed, serene and untroubled.

Sally's heart contracted. Was she alone in this remote spot with only the sullen Cuban, and what was to be her fate in the future? She looked narrowly at the fire and found the man before it was staring at her.

"Come here and I will give you something to eat," he said ungraciously.

Sally crossed to the fire and dropped down on the sand. The man got up, went into the shack, and returned with plates, cups, and some pewter ware. He presented Sally with a mug of coffee sweetened with condensed milk, some flapjacks that were not unpalatable, and a stale end of unbuttered bread. It was not until she began to eat that she realized how hungry she was. The coffee removed the dryness from her throat, stopped the throb of her temples, and stimulated her.

When she finished she looked across at the Cuban who was rolling a cigarette with one hand. "Where is Señor Lopez?" she asked.

The man gestured casually toward the schooner. "He is aboard the *Feo Gonzales*. He will be ashore soon."

Sally stared at the schooner. A curl of smoke well aft probably marked the location of a galley stove. But there was no other sign of life aboard. She saw nothing of the crew or of any activity.

"What place is this?" she asked.

The Cuban stretched himself out on the sand. "Find out!" he answered sullenly.

Sally was about to make a hot retort, but thought better of it. She closed her lips and turned away. After some minutes she saw that a boat was putting off from the schooner, and even from the distance she recognized the small, wiry figure of Lopez.

The burly youth who had slept before the door of the Ninety-first Street house

when she had crept down the stairs pulled lustily at the oars. She saw him look back over his shoulder and then speak to Lopez who lifted his head to peer at her. The boat crossed the placid surface of the harbor and edged into a rotting wharf. José shipped the sculls, and Lopez stepped ashore.

CHAPTER V.

THE FACE IN THE DOOR.

WHEN Lopez came up toward the shack Sally saw that he was evidently in the best of humors. A complacent smile brightened his thin, dark face, and a cigar was between his teeth.

"So you are up and about," he said to the girl. "Do you enjoy your ocean view and the air? And has Martino here fed you well?"

She looked at him without moving. "Where am I?"

Lopez smiled amiably. "Where are you? You are about seventy miles away from the city. You are down on the south shore of Long Island—still our charming hostage who is to make possible a realization of all our expectations. Is there anything else you would like to know?"

"What are you going to do with me?" Sally quavered.

Lopez winked at the Cuban. "That depends," he drawled, "upon Señor Carrick, better known as the Wrecker. I feel safe in saying we have thrown him off the trail. If we have not we must stay his hand with you! You are still our shock absorber. Our ship"—he waved an airy hand toward the schooner—"is ready to sail. The crew is coming down to-night. If we are untroubled when we weigh anchor you will be left here, but if Señor Carrick presses us, we shall have to bring you aboard with us and take you to Benardo."

Benardo! Sally's mind rushed back to the office in the Higman Building and the colored map that had been on one wall. Benardo, the tiny republic that had risen out of the ashes of empire—the place of plots and counterplots!

An icy coldness swept through her blood. "You would not dare to take me there!" Sally cried.

Lopez flicked the ash from his cigar. "I dare anything!" he replied softly. "Now, señorita, for the moment I must leave you. Martino will keep you company. In fact," he chuckled, "he will not leave your side for an instant."

Had she awakened from her drugged sleep, or was she still in the grip of a nightmare? Sally shook her head as if to clear it. She was seventy miles away from mad Manhattan—on sleepy Long Island—but in the power of villains as desperate and malevolent as those in screen thrillers. It seemed impossible to grasp the whole significance of it at once.

The quiet thrum of a motor disturbed her thoughts. The sedan she had so often ridden in with the little Lolita came down the clam-shell road. Its chauffeur, the mustached youth whose name was Ferdinand, and whom she had first seen in the office in the Higman Building, stopped the car near the shack.

Lopez went to him and received two telegrams which he opened rapidly and read. It was impossible for Sally to judge whether their contents were pleasing or otherwise.

The face of the plotter, when he came back to the fire, was an inflexible mask. "I am going in to the village to telephone," he said to the Cuban. "See to it that our guest does not wander out of your sight."

He rammed the telegrams in a pocket of his jacket, walked back to the sedan and, getting in, was whirled off down the road.

"The señor has a new chauffeur," the Cuban said with a leer.

Sally eyed him dubiously.

"Yes," her guard said idly; "there is one American chauffeur less in the world to-day." He ran a finger significantly across his throat from ear to ear. "The knife does quick work. His bones will be dust before they ever find him. He will deliver no more letters."

Sally felt every drop of blood drain away from her face. In fascinated hor-

ror she looked at the lounging figure before her. "What—what was the name of the chauffeur?" she asked at last.

"His name was Jeff," was the indifferent reply.

Sick with terror, Sally got shakily up and faced the ocean. If anything was needed to tell her the caliber of the men into whose hands she had been delivered, the words of the Cuban proved all that was necessary.

She stared at the ocean with blurred vision. Against these scoundrels Carrick was pitted. Sally felt that it would be an act of Providence if he failed in his plans and let them sail unapprehended for the consummation of whatever schemes were theirs. She shuddered, thinking of a young man whose hair was red, whose eyes were blue, and whose lean face was handsome and boyish. Silently, she voiced a prayer and bowed her head.

After a time her first depression passed and she felt better. She sat down in the shade of a sand dune and looked at the *Feo Gonzales*. A patch of awning had been put up on the after deck of the schooner. Under it Sally saw the small figure of Lolita, sewing, in a deck chair. The Spanish girl's attitude was melancholy and wistful. Every now and again she would look up over the port rail and gaze seaward, as if her eyes beheld, far away, the vista of Benardo.

High noon passed; the sun grew hotter. Martino, the Cuban, served a hasty luncheon and smoked in the doorway of the shack, watching her sleepily. It was two o'clock when Lopez returned in the car and was rowed out to the schooner by the burly José. Sally watched him clamber up the ladder, salute Lolita, and disappear below the deck.

Her thoughts would allow her no rest or repose. Questions beat at the door of her mind. Had Lopez really outwitted Carrick? Was it the blue-eyed young man's aim to keep them from sailing, and would he be successful? On the plans of the gun runner hung her own fate, trembling in the balance,

steeped in a somber mystery that she could make nothing of.

The long afternoon dragged past on leaden feet. The feeling of an approaching calamity deepened within Sally as the hours went by. Twice she considered the figure of the Cuban guard. Once, when Martino appeared to be nodding off to sleep, she contemplated flight. But when she stood up the eyes of the man in the door of the shack flew open and fastened upon her.

"It is warm, eh, señorita?" he said with a knowing sneer. "Too warm for walking!"

It was toward six o'clock when Lopez came ashore again. He said nothing to Sally, but took up a stand at the edge of the clam-shell road, watch in hand. She understood the significance of the position when a sedan and a disreputable station bus, filled with a dozen stalwart men came out of the woods and discharged the awaited crew. Conversing together, Lopez herded them down to the wharf where José and the little boat, after numerous trips, put the last man aboard the schooner.

Then Lopez moved up to the shanty, his black eyes glittering like dark stars in the dusk.

"We sail as soon as supper is over and the gear is assembled," he said to Sally. "It pleases me to tell you that we have baffled your friend. To-morrow, if you will walk three miles or so down yonder road you will come to a farmhouse where some benevolent people live. They will take you to the station. When you meet Señor Carrick again kindly give him my regards. Tell him I shall be pleased to have him visit me in Benardo, and also that his day of reckoning is not far distant. Lopez never forgets!"

He turned to the Cuban. "You will guard the young lady up to the last minute. I shall send a boat ashore to pick you up when we are ready. Adios, señorita," he said, addressing Sally again. "Should you ever come to Aporto I shall be pleased to receive you in the palace." He bowed profoundly and stalked away into the gloom, humming under his breath.

The twilight thickened. A star or two appeared, and lights yellowed the portholes of the *Feo Gonzales*. Sally found herself shivering and went into the shack. The prospect of spending the night alone on the sand bar was not as frightening as the ominous feeling of disaster that she could not put away from her. She sat down on the edge of the army cot and placed the cool palms of her hands against her flushed face.

After a time the sounds of a scuffle, thick breathing, and something that was unmistakably a groan, disturbed her reverie. She jumped up as the door creaked open and a figure glided through it. Then, as she retreated fearfully, the starshine coming through one grimy window fell on the face of Michael Carrick and his hand touched her arm gently.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THREE CHARGES.

SALLY'S heart leaped and pounded.

Admiration fought down the despair that rose within her. So Carrick had achieved the impossible, had picked up the scent, and was at the scene of what must be the final act of the drama.

"Are you safe?" were his first words.

"Yes," she answered softly.

He pressed her arm reassuringly and stepped close to her. "Thank Heaven, I am not too late! It was only at the eleventh hour that I found their trail. I've got to work fast. I've got to get aboard the sloop before she gets under way and have it out with Lopez. My friends are due any minute, but I can't risk waiting. They're coming in from the Point by water, but the nest must not be empty again. Can you—will you help me?"

Sally felt her cheeks grow hot. "You know I will!" she breathed.

"But there will be danger," Carrick whispered. "You will be exposed to peril. Oh, believe me, I would not ask it if there was any other way! But I am alone. I must have a comrade—some one to aid me."

"Let me help!" Sally cried softly.

Carrick gripped her hand. "Then come. I have a boat, such as it is, down

on the beach. The time is propitious. The crew is at supper, and the deck's deserted. It's my only chance!"

The moon was climbing out of the sea, but as yet its light was not such as to paint the harbor brightly. A semimurk prevailed that was accentuated by the flicker of the stars. With her hand in Carrick's, Sally went through the yawning door of the shanty, to recoil from a figure that lay face down on the sand outside.

"Your watchdog," Carrick said briefly. "I had to jump him. He pulled a knife, but I got him with the butt of my gun. This way, Miss Wil—Sally."

He led her down between the dunes and to a point on the harbor beach a little below the rotting wharf. Here, drawn up on the sand, was a skiff. Carrick pushed it clear, placed Sally in the stern, and fitted oars to the locks that had been muffled with cotton waste. He pushed off and rowed noiselessly out across the harbor.

Inwardly aquake, yet buoyed up by a fierce excitement, Sally stared at the dim outlines of the schooner. Shadows passed before the lighted portholes. Conversation was like the distant sigh of the breeze.

"I intend to get the bulge on Lopez," Carrick said in a hushed voice. "I want you to disarm him so that I can hold him at bay until help comes. It won't be long. You won't be afraid, will you?"

Sally gripped the seat and shook her head bravely. "No; I won't be afraid!"

She saw Carrick's eyes glow. He appeared to wish to say something, but thought better of it and rowed on steadily, noiselessly. With soundless oars he pulled in under the port beam of the schooner, caught the ladder and made the skiff fast.

Both listened.

Between decks sounded the muted buzz of guttural tongues, the clatter of crockery, some one swearing fervently in Spanish. Carrick motioned for her to sit silent and he ascended the ladder to reconnoiter. At last he snapped his fingers for Sally's attention and held the ladder steady for her.

She climbed to the deck and slipped across the rail.

"We're in luck!" he breathed in her ear. "Even the anchor watch hasn't been set."

Thrilled with excitement, Sally saw him drop a hand to his pocket and draw an automatic revolver. They stole forward together, listening. Sounds from below told them the meal had been concluded and that the crew was about ready to come up on deck.

"This way!" Carrick whispered. "Softly!"

He touched her arm. Like two phantoms of the night they crept toward a companionway amidships and descended a dozen small steps.

With racing heart Sally halted before the double doors. From behind them, perfectly audible, the voice of Lopez sounded. She drew close to Carrick, who turned to her for an instant, and then steeled herself for the test of courage, as he took the final step and flung the doors wide.

Sally plunged forward, the cabin lights dazzling her, the command of the man beside her echoing and reechoing in her ears:

"Hands up!"

The cabin contained Sanchez and Lopez who, with heads drawn close together, sat at a table on the top of which a sea chart was unrolled and spread open.

As Carrick spoke both men sprang to their feet, Sanchez with an imprecation, Lopez with a rattling intake of breath. The small conspirator was the first to recover. He eyed Carrick's leveled gun with defiant contempt.

"Ah, it is Señor the Wrecker himself and the pretty señorita! Sanchez, we shall have guests to take back to Benardo with us. This is more of a pleasure than I anticipated."

"Up with your hands—be quick about it!" Carrick snapped.

The hands of the smiling Lopez went up immediately. The silent Sanchez stepped back and in a twinkling had ripped open the table drawer. Even as Carrick fired he had whipped out a gun and pulled the trigger.

Dazed, Sally saw Carrick's automatic drop from his hand!

With a throaty cry she shrank back while, heedless of his bullet-torn fingers, Carrick lunged forward and caught Sanchez by the throat, wresting the pistol from him. But before he could lift it to fire Lopez was at him, springing on his back like a wild cat upon marked prey.

Immediately the three went to the floor in a struggling mass out of which came the shrill screech of Lopez:

"Ferdinand! José! Help!"

Trembling in every limb, Sally stumbled across the cabin. She picked up the revolver that had been shot from Carrick's hand, while the battle on the floor raged unchecked. It was useless to think of firing when the chances of hitting Carrick were equal with those of winging Lopez or Sanchez, and she stood poised and breathless until the companionway doors burst open and the burly José tumbled in, followed by Ferdinand.

"Stand back!" Sally cried shrilly, swinging up the gun.

Both came to a dead stop. She drew a deep breath and tried to keep the automatic straight while her ears heard Lopez's cry of triumph ring out behind her. She moved her head slightly as José leaped at her, tried to get an accurate aim, but felt the gun fly out of her hand as she pulled the trigger. Then she was struggling in a clutching grip, while dimly, distantly, she heard feet running on the deck above, the throbbing pant of some motor craft approaching, a staccato fusillade of shots, shouts, and a jar along the starboard waist of the schooner.

Striking blindly at the face of José, Sally strove desperately to free herself. His hands moved to the column of her throat, and his blazing, panther eyes burned into hers. With the tumult on the deck above increasing, she crashed into the center table, upsetting it. Her breath, shut off by the pressure on her throat, made her lungs burn. Blackness swept up before her eyes. Fantastically, as if she was viewing a grotesque ballet, she saw Carrick shake off

Sanchez and lunge at Lopez who had a gun in his hand.

Then the rush of feet sounded on the companionway stairs, voices breaking out were like the boom of surf, the hands at her throat fell away, and she slumped down on one of the locker seats, only half aware that the cabin was full of men, and that Michael Carrick's hand was on the shoulder of Lopez, who stood ringed in by a dozen drawn guns.

"Lopez, I've got you!" Carrick called out distinctly in the eerie quiet that followed. "I've got you at last! You're under arrest!"

The Spaniard drew his lips back over his tobacco-stained teeth. "Is it possible?" he drawled mockingly. "Are you arresting me by order of the Republic of Benardo?" If so I beg to call your attention to the fact that we are within the three-mile limit and your authority is worthless!"

Carrick smiled at the men who had come to the rescue. "I arrest you first, on a charge of conspiracy, secondly, on a charge of running munitions out of this country in defiance of the treaty in effect, and thirdly on the charge of murder—the murder of Jefferson Crane, one of my aids. I have no connection with the Republic of Benardo. My warrants were issued at Washington by the Federal government. It may interest you to know that my connection with this service extends back over a period of five years."

CHAPTER VII.

A JOB IN MIND.

IT was the next day. In the parlor of Mrs. Madigan's Forty-eighth Street boarding house, Sally sat on an ancient horsehair lounge beside Michael Carrick, listening to an explanation denied her since a government automobile had taken her back to New York and the lodging house where her old room had been rented for her again.

"Sanchez," Carrick said, "was former prime minister of Benardo, and the little Lolita is the daughter of the unfortunate Eduardo the Third. Lopez, called the kingmaker, was the power

behind the throne. He, Sanchez, Lolita, and several others were forced to flee when the revolution broke out. As he was getting rich and powerful through his association with the late king, Lopez was naturally reluctant to give up the graft. He had schemed and laid plans for a new revolution to restore the old monarchy. The *Feo Gonzales* was loaded with firearms and ammunition. His object of course was to put Lolita on the throne and get the reins of government again."

Sally nodded. "And your part—you, the Wrecker?" she asked.

Carrick smiled. "Shortly before the revolution in Benardo I was sent down by the government to keep a sharp eye on American mining interests there. In Aporto, the capital city, I ran up against Lopez, a man wanted in this country for a dozen crimes. Had he suspected at the time that I was an American agent I would not have been free to work as I wished to. For this reason I assumed the rôle of a gun runner, and let him presume that I had helped to stage the upheaval that ended forever the cruel oppression of Eduardo the Third. I might say that I have been at his heels for some time, but was powerless to act until Washington sent me the instructions. Lopez will be put on trial immediately, and Sanchez will be sent back to Benardo."

"And Lolita?" Sally asked.

Carrick's face became grave. "Poor child—to be the pawn in the hands of such as Lopez! She has relatives—a maternal grandmother and several aunts who fled from Aporto and who have settled in France. Undoubtedly the girl will be sent to them. It is far better that she be a queen in exile than upon the Benardo throne Lopez planned."

There was a short silence.

"I wonder," Carrick observed thoughtfully after a while, "if you will come and have tea with me this afternoon. Even a man whose enemies call him 'the Wrecker' likes to mingle with the fashionables at times—if he may escort a girl such as you."

Sally's cheeks grew flushed. "I'd like to go," she answered, "only—only this

afternoon I—I'll have to start out to look for a new job. You see I'm one of the army of the unemployed again and—well, I just can't afford to squander precious time."

Carrick laughed. "Come with me and while we're tea battling I'll tell you something about a job I have in mind for you—a lifelong one—which I thought of the very first minute I saw you. Will you come, Sally, and—and let me explain?"

Raising her eyes level with his while confusion assailed her, Sally let him know that she understood. "Yes; I'll go and hear what you have to say," she answered in a low, hushed voice.

Did you enjoy reading this story, or did you not? A word of criticism, favorable or unfavorable, is of value to those who have to get up this magazine. It turns out to be of value usually to the readers as well. Will you tell us briefly what you think of the foregoing story, and in the same letter, please give us your opinion of TOP-NOTCH as a whole?

Revival of the Passion Play

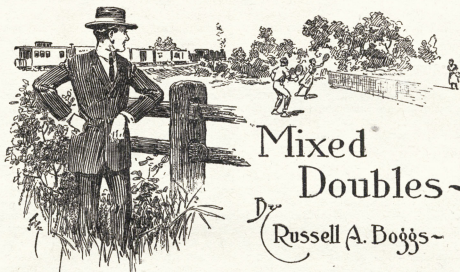
THE Passion Play will be revived at Oberammergau this year, and thirty-two performances have been scheduled to cover the regular tourist season.

Every ten years the play has been presented, but in 1920, when it was due to be held, the villagers were not prepared, and so the present year was fixed.

There are nearly seven hundred performers, one hundred and twenty-two of which have speaking parts. Fifty-eight musicians constitute the orchestra, and there are forty-one singers.

The war wrought many changes in the little village; five hundred and fifty men under forty-five were drafted into the army, and there were many casualties. Anton Lang has been chosen again for the part of *Christus*, the rôle he played in 1900 and 1910.

In 1910 the total receipts were two hundred and seventy thousand dollars, of which ninety-four thousand was paid in salaries, the largest salary being four hundred dollars. The balance was applied to religious work, education, and poor relief.



Mixed Doubles~

By
Russell A. Boggs~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

WANTED—A PARTNER.



T was a battery of pleasing tennis courts—three of them, trim and neat, with straight white lines glaring in the sunlight, and with a gallery stand extending along the western border. The observer on top of the box car nodded approvingly. They would be good courts; hard and fast.

He was something over twenty, the observer; say, twenty-four. Long of body, long of limb, and with an attractive width of shoulders. His face was clean-appearing, grave and pleasant. The main line of the D. & C. passed within fifty yards of the courts and, now that the westbound extra freight on which he journeyed had stopped—delayed by some train ahead—from his elevated perch the observer commanded a comprehensive view of them.

Over beyond the battery of courts he could see a substantial and appealing frame clubhouse, with here and there about it bunkers and little pennants waving. A few players strolled over the fairways, and an occasional club head flashed in the sun. But notwithstanding that the nets were stretched in place, the tennis courts at the moment were deserted.

"A little game would go good," said Lou Payne to himself. He closed the fingers of his right hand, as if about the handle of a racket. "Looks slick. I'd sure enjoy a set or two."

And then, because the freight showed no signs of moving and because tennis courts, good and bad, always interested him, he climbed down from his box car and sauntered over the stretch of green-sward which separated the D. & C. right of way from the courts he had been contemplating.

He walked around the wire screen in front of the gallery stand and stood at the base line. With expert eyes he judged the alignment, the general condition of the surface.

"Very fine!" was his verdict. "Extra excellent! Never saw better. The folks around this Valleyview town must be real enterprising."

It was truly a likely looking town which lay to his right hand: A place of, anyway, fifteen thousand, set in a gently swelling valley; a place of pleasant hills and many wide-spreading shade trees; a town of broad and friendly streets, orderly and inviting. And just beyond the D. & C. tracks flowed slowly a cool, clear stream—Maple River.

"To a man not anchored this looks entirely A number one," Lou Payne re-

flected. "But I guess it's not for me." He grinned a little, having in mind the impending collapse of his exchequer.

He glanced toward the clubhouse and there, coming in his direction and right close to the courts by this time, he perceived a group of three; two girls and a young man. They came to the edge of the court across from him and there paused. All, he noted, were attired for play, rackets in their hands. Discreetly he retired to the shadow of the stand and at one end seated himself.

Bubbling voices reached him, animated talk. One, it appeared, was absent; one called Bill. So much he gathered immediately.

"Think of Bill's getting sent to Seattle this week!" said the light-haired girl who seemed the taller of the two. "Why didn't he tell his boss to have a heart?"

"He did," replied the darker-haired girl. "The boss was sorry, of course. But it was too important to wait; something about a lumber contract. So Bill just had to go."

And now Payne perceived that in reality she was not shorter than the light-haired girl. The two had moved closer together, and he saw that it was the more compact build of the dark-haired girl which had made her at first glance appear not quite so tall as the other.

Payne regarded her with keen interest. "A corking figure for tennis!" he commented. "Speed, strength, and endurance. I'd bet on it!"

"It's the limit," offered the young man, speaking to the dark-haired girl. "We were counting on you and Bill to cop this mixed-doubles tournament." He swelled his chest in mock conceit. "That is, if Bess, here, and I don't. That right, Bess?"

"That's right," assented light-haired Bess promptly. They all laughed a little. "I do wish you could pick up a good partner, Sue. Couldn't you?"

"Who would it be?" asked the dark-haired girl. She swung her racket in a gesture of resignation.

"I'm such a dub or I'd offer to try it with you," said the male member of the

group. "Oh, don't protest! I know I'm fair. But you've got to be more than that to down Skelpy and his sister Vera."

Bess nodded gloomily. "Don't you wonder at them? Everybody knows they're just cup hunting—scooting around from one meet to another. And the worst of it is they usually win. They must have raked in at least a half dozen this season already. Everybody's just aching to see them get a wallop-ing."

"Oh, well, what are we going to do about it?" asked Sue. She glanced about resignedly. "Come on, let's run off a set or two. Don't see anybody else coming."

She paused suddenly, her eyes falling on the unobtrusive Lou Payne lounging quietly in the shadow of the stand. She turned to her companions as if seized with some inspiration. Payne heard the subdued murmur of their lowered voices. Then to his surprise the young man abruptly crossed the court to him. The dark-haired girl followed. Payne rose quickly to his feet.

"Do you play?" the young man asked, waving a hand toward the courts.

The girl smiled a little, and Payne had a passing glimpse of white teeth flashing between glowing red lips. He caught his breath. Glory, but she was finer even than he had guessed!

"I do," he replied with an evenness he did not altogether feel. "A little," he added. He gazed with a sort of fascination into the girl's blue-black eyes.

"We need another partner," the girl put in. "We hate to play three-handed, and my friends would like to get some practice for a doings we're having here next week. So if you'd care to help out we'd be awfully pleased."

He was glad now that down at the river he had but shortly before scrubbed the dirt and grime from his face and hands, while his train delayed. He was aware that his appearance was passing fair; his dark-blue suit was presentable, his gray soft shirt was not oversoiled, his shoes were neat, and his soft felt

hat not at all bad. Riding freights was not his regular calling; it was merely an incident in the course of an existence which unfortunately at present had dropped close to bedrock.

"I'd be glad to," he replied. A faint grin came into his face. "But," he apologized, "I've neither racket nor proper shoes. You see, I am traveling—traveling light, and I just dropped off to look over your courts."

He looked humorously toward the waiting freight train; he had a whimsical desire to see if he could disturb her poise. "My vehicle of transportation," he said with a wave of his hand. "On top of yonder box car; the deep-red one with the double white circle painted near the end."

She looked at the car, plainly surprised for a second. Then she turned back to him and he was gratified to discover that her friendly manner had not altered. If anything, it was more friendly than before.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, "I'll bet that's the greatest sport! I've often wished I could try it some time."

He had a mind to tell her to come along. But he discreetly held his tongue as to that and only laughed and said that if the shacks were amiable and you didn't find a few cinders and one thing and another, it wasn't so bad.

"You certainly get a good view. Tunnels, though—long ones—are not so pleasant. Often make you wish you'd bought a ticket and were inside the fast cars."

"I expect so," she agreed and laughed quietly. "But," she went on, "we can fix you up with racket and shoes. Dozens of them up in the clubhouse." She turned to her companion. "Sam, go get a racket and shoes. I knew I'd get a partner."

The other girl by this time had joined them.

"We'll have introductions all round," asserted the girl who had been talking to Payne as her friend came up. "Sam, you lead off. What's your name?"

"My name," announced the light-haired girl's partner gayly, "is Sam Devoe. Known from coast to coast as

the world's champion tennis-tournament loser."

"My own," responded the man who had arrived by slow freight, "is Lou Payne. Glad to know you." He and Sam shook hands.

"And the ladies," continued Devoe. "Miss Bess Lattee, and Miss Sue Kennoy."

Payne made acknowledgment, first to the light-haired girl, then to the dark one.

Devoe regarded Payne's feet. "What size?" he asked.

"I'm not vain about my feet," replied Payne. "Get them pretty big—nines, say. And about a fourteen-ounce racket, if it makes no difference to you."

"I'll pick you a good outfit," promised Devoe. "Make yourself at home. Be back in a minute."

CHAPTER II.

HIS PRIVATE CAR.

AT the end of the set all four sought a bench in the shade of the stand. "You're great!" declared Devoe to Payne as they seated themselves. He nodded emphatically. "A regular streak!"

Sue Kennoy and Lou Payne had won—six-two.

"Good of you to say it," returned Payne; "but I'm only average."

"No," asserted the dark-eyed girl beside him—his partner. "You're the best player I've seen this year. You can't deny it, because I know. Your backhand, forehand, service—everything is tiptop."

She paused a moment, then continued quickly: "If we—I—only had you here next week we'd give a certain pair a chase in the mixed-doubles tournament we intend to hold then."

"Indeed you would," put in Bess Lattee. "Bill is good; but I know a better player when I see him."

"Bill always has been my partner," Sue went on. "But he's been called away and will not be back in time." And then for some reason she added: "Bill's my cousin, you know."

"Oh, yes," said Payne, as if the statement somehow relieved him. "Yes; I see. Too bad—that he can't be here, I mean."

"If you'd come we'd get along," said Sue with a direct calmness that before had surprised him. She regarded Payne steadily, with no show of embarrassment. There was no mistaking her meaning.

"If I—if I'd come?" stammered Lou, knowing full well she meant just that. "Well, now, that certainly would be interesting."

"Why not?" she pressed. "We'd team up, you and I. There's a fellow named Skelpy and his sister who're expecting to come and carry off the cup. We don't want them to do that."

"Cup hunters, eh?" asked Payne, made wise by previous information.

"Exactly!"

Payne gazed soberly at the tips of his borrowed white shoes. "I'm afraid," he said, with a grave wag of the head, "that I'll not be able to make it." He wagged his head again. "Afraid not—much as I'd like to."

"Oh!" said Sue Kennoy. "That's too bad!" It was plain that her disappointment was very deep.

Bess Lattee and Sam Devoe echoed her sentiments.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Devoe, while Bess repeated Sue's woeful "Oh!"

"I'm like Cousin Bill in a way," Payne explained. "Business, you see."

"Of course you know best," said Sue. "But I'm certainly awfully sorry."

"I am myself." He looked with great earnestness at her. "More than I can say."

A deeper color momentarily tinged the girl's cheeks. A little silence fell on the group.

Devoe broke it. "Well," he said, "somebody ought to be out there on the court." He regarded Sue and Payne. "How about some singles, you two? I'd like to see it."

Miss Kennoy was promptly on her feet. "I'm ready," she challenged Lou.

Payne also stood up. "So am I."

"No ladies' game, now," instructed

Sue. "I want no quarter. Play your hardest. I enjoy that."

"I will," acquiesced Payne.

The first game went to deuce, Sue serving. She drove the ball hard, straight, and low. Payne, swift and far-reaching, clearly did not hold back. She got vantage—lost it. He got it—lost it. He won two points straight, and game.

He won the second game with an unbroken succession of four points. His service was baffling, his placements sure.

"Great!" cried the undaunted Miss Kennoy, flushed a little with her exertions. Her eyes were alight with the sparkle of conflict.

On her service the third game went to thirty-all. And then upon them entered the deep blast of the near-by freight train's engine, calling in the flagman. Payne stopped play abruptly, then hurried toward the bench where were his shoes and coat.

"Got to leave!" he cried. "My private car's about to depart, and I must be on it."

He slipped off the borrowed white shoes and into his own dark leather ones. The three with whom he had played crowded about, protesting. But he was firm. He snatched up his coat and started to hurry toward the tracks.

"Good-by!" he called. "Sure enjoyed it all! Thanks, much, for the sport."

Miss Lattee and Devoe bade him adieu. But Sue Kennoy came running beside him.

"If you possibly can," she pressed, "come back. You don't know how I love tennis, and especially with some one who's better than I."

"If I see any way," promised Payne, "I surely will." But in his own mind he did not see any possibility of his being able to do so.

They came to the tracks and paused. Back at the rear they could see the flagman coming; the train would be moving on. But they still had a few seconds. He turned to her.

"I've been promised a job at the terminal, Crossport," he said to her. "I'm a day late now—was to have been there

yesterday." He smiled slightly. Lack of cash to pay his fare had delayed him; the freight route had been slow. But he said nothing of this. "I need that job," he ended. "If I didn't I'd stop off right now for that tournament."

She nodded to show that she understood. "I hope you get it," she said.

The train began to move. Impulsively she thrust out her hand.

"Good-by, and good luck!" she said. "And if things should arrange themselves, why, don't forget us!"

He held her hand in his an instant, staring down into her dark eyes. It certainly was no easy matter, this hurrying away.

"I'll not forget you," he said, the slightest accent falling on the second pronoun. "You know I want to come. I'll do my best."

He released her hand, turned and swung himself upon the moving train.

CHAPTER III.

ALL FIXED UP.

CARRIGAN, superintendent of the third division of the D. & C., raised his eyes to his caller.

"My name is Payne," said the latter, "Louis Payne. I was told by the assistant trainmaster at Preston Junction that you'd have a job here Wednesday for me. This is Thursday, I know; I'm a day late. But is the job still open?"

Carrigan looked disappointed. "By George," he said, "I'm sorry! There was a fellow dropped in here just this morning and asked for work. Since you didn't show up yesterday I naturally thought you weren't coming, so I gave him the place. Wasn't a bad one, either; down in the yard office."

"Well," said Payne, "I'm sorry, too. Must be my luck, though. I tried to make it yesterday, but it was no go." He reflected a second. "Nothing else open, I suppose?"

"N-no," returned Carrigan reluctantly. "I haven't a thing." He shook his head. "Not in my immediate department, anyway. Any experience as a trainman, or operator?"

Payne nodded. "Yes; both."

"Then you might try upstairs," suggested Carrigan. "See Division Operator Griggs and Trainmaster Barry."

"I will; thanks," said Payne and departed.

He ascended to the next floor of the division terminal building. The first door he came to was labeled "Trainmaster." A moment later he stood in the presence of that official.

"Superintendent Carrigan advised me to try here," Payne said at once, "to see if there were any openings."

"Nothing," advised Barry shortly. "Full up."

So Payne turned and left that office. He hunted the division operator's door and found it.

He entered there with no great expectations. Seated behind a typewriter on a flat-topped desk he saw a young man, probably slightly under thirty; a sort of rarified young man, hair trimmed and parted in the latest mode, immaculate and aggressive collar, expensive shirt of most modern striping, nobby brogues. The lips were a trifle straight and thin; the eyes a trifle too hard and assured. Altogether he looked like a person well satisfied as to his own importance; one who would desire others to consider well and to acknowledge promptly his standing. At least, so Payne thought.

"Well?" the young man jerked out briskly.

"I'm looking for Division Operator Griggs," Payne replied. The manner in which he had been addressed caused his estimation of this person to drop even further.

"Not in." The words were brusque, indifferent.

"That so," returned Payne, still pleasantly. "I'll come back later, then. Expect him soon?"

"Can't say."

"Lunch, I s'pose," said Payne. "All right; I'll drop in after a while."

"Had you an appointment with Mr. Griggs?" asked the other. The question was put like a demand.

"No," answered Payne.

"What's your business with him?"

This was raw enough, Payne thought. Probably the person was accustomed to dealing with job-hunting telegraphers and considered tact and diplomacy a mere waste of time.

"Are you his chief clerk?" countered Payne.

"Yes, sir," asserted the other impressively.

"Oh, I see!" observed Payne mildly. "Well, my business is with the division operator." And with that he walked out, blandly ignoring the angry red which crept into the chief clerk's countenance.

An hour later Payne returned to the division operator's office. This time he found the chief clerk out. But he found Division Operator Griggs in. Griggs was scowling over a slip of paper as Payne entered.

"You an operator?" demanded Griggs, peering narrowly at Payne and speaking before the latter had a chance to utter a word.

"Yes, sir," responded Payne promptly. There was an air of genuine authority about this man, and Payne guessed at once it was Griggs himself.

"Experienced?"

"I am."

"You want a job?"

"I do."

"Then you can have one." The speaker waved the paper he had been scowling over. "This message advises me that our third-trick man at Valleyview has got into some sort of a row there, slugged one of the town cops and pulled his freight. I've got to get a man there by to-night. Will you go?"

Payne could scarcely believe his ears. Here was luck—unbelievable luck! Instantly it flashed through his brain that, working third trick, he would have time for tennis. That black-eyed girl would get an opportunity to carry out her suggestion. It seemed too good.

"Mr. Griggs," replied Payne, smiling broadly, "I'll go."

Fifteen minutes later he had been fixed up; transportation to Valleyview was in his pocket. As he turned to leave the office the door opened and the chief clerk came in.

"I've found a man for Valleyview," said Griggs to him. "This man is going." He nodded to Payne.

The chief clerk turned an unlovely stare on the new employee which Griggs, by that time bending over his desk again, missed. The stare impressed Payne unpleasantly. He knew at once, instinctively, that if the chief clerk had the filling of the place at Valleyview it would not have been filled by Lou Payne. But he said never a word; merely opened the door and went out.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHANGE FOR THE WORSE.

ON Thursday morning of the following week Sue Kenney and Lou Payne walked out onto the middle one of the three tennis courts at Valleyview Club, side by side, rackets in their hands. Five other couples, likewise equipped for play, were in sight. The stand was fairly well filled with spectators. To a high seat directly behind a net post of the middle court a man climbed. At each of the two other courts a man did the same thing. The Valleyview mixed-doubles tournament was about to open.

Near the base line at their end the girl and Payne paused. He considered her appreciatively—a cool figure clad in white, radiant in the sunshine.

"To do or don't," he said, smiling at her. "That's us."

"We're going to do," she declared, returning the smile. "Nothing else! All Valleyview relies on us."

"Oh, sure!" he affirmed, still grinning. "Can't anything beat us. If I was just by myself I wouldn't be so certain about it." He became more sober. "But when you're with me I'm positive nothing can."

Her color for a swift second became even deeper. "Don't be absurd," she said.

"Fact," he assured her.

She regarded him thoughtfully. "Our business now is to play tennis," she said, but not indifferently. "Don't let's mix any—anything in with that."

"Now, or any time?"

"Do I have to answer that?"

"Not if you mean only n-o-w."

She did not answer. They had come a long way since the morning, just one week since, when Payne had dropped from the freight to inspect the courts. She had been wonderfully glad to see him come back; there had been no doubt of that. They had played and practiced together steadily on the courts ever since his return. Progress had been made—not all along athletic lines. There had been evenings together; evenings which ended when Payne departed to take up his duties at the depot telegraph office, his hours being from eleven p. m. to seven a. m.

"I'm afraid it's mixed already," he went on, "even for just now. I know I can't unmix it."

Her eyes met his steadily. "Lou!"

He grinned again, reassuringly. "All right," he agreed. "I'll quit—for a little while." His eyes swept around the courts and stand.

"You told me you knew Skelpy and his sister," he said. "Are they here?"

"They haven't come yet," she answered. "I just heard this morning that Skelpy asked the committee to arrange to let him and his sister play all their matches in the afternoon. Seems that he can't get away from business in the morning. The committee need not have consented, of course, but they thought, considering his reputation, they'd better. So they did."

"Didn't want to seem to show the feather, eh?" said Payne. "They were right. What's his business?"

"He's a railroad man, too. Something with the D. & C., up at Crossport. I've heard it said he has an uncle who's one of the big general officers, and that's where he gets his pull. He must have one to be able to get away for all these tournaments he's been taking in."

"I'll say!" returned Payne. "I've always found the rule to be, 'Work, pull, or ramble.'"

"I understand they'll arrive on the noon train from Crossport and go back each night on the evening train."

"I see," said Payne. "Guess I won't

get a glimpse of them to-day, then. After being up all night I'll have to take my beauty nap this afternoon if I'm to keep in shape."

She nodded. "If you don't see them before, you'll see them Saturday afternoon, in the finals," she said.

"Across the net."

"Exactly!" she cried gayly. "But we must win this one first. I think they're ready."

The Valleyview mixed-doubles meet was no small event. Ten unbroken years had established for it a certain prestige. The entrants represented a wide range of territory—a two-hundred-mile radius, at least. The list was long, necessitating two full days of eliminations, Thursday and Friday, the finals always being scheduled for Saturday afternoon. On this last day the stand and space around were certain to be jammed.

The eliminations were decided on the basis of two sets out of three; in the finals, the team first winning three sets. Thursday morning was given to the playing of the first round in the upper bracket, in which Payne and Miss Kennoy had been drawn. Thursday afternoon the lower bracket, in which Skelpy and his sister were placed, were to have their first round.

For two sets Thursday morning Lou Payne exulted in his efforts with Sue Kennoy. Easily and surely they played together. It thrilled him to note her grace, her dexterity.

Their first match ended. They had won, six-two, six-one. They shook hands with their vanquished opponents, then strolled from the court.

"That looks like a start," Payne said, and Sue agreed, happily.

Friday morning they again won handily. This brought them to the final round in their bracket, scheduled for that afternoon. If they won then, they would meet the survivors in the lower bracket on Saturday afternoon in the deciding round.

Skelpy and his sister had come through in impressive style on Thursday afternoon, Sue told Payne. They were discussing the pair when they

came to the club on Friday afternoon. On one of the courts was a couple Payne had not yet seen play.

He stared at the male member of the team. His hand arrested Sue. "Is that Skelpy?" he asked quickly.

The girl looked and saw whom he meant. She inclined her head affirmatively. "Yes; that's Skelpy and his sister," she replied. "You look surprised. What is it? Do you know him?"

"He's chief clerk to my boss!" exclaimed Payne. "Chief clerk to Division Operator Griggs. Sweet Marie! I'll bet he'll be glad to see me!"

"Why?" she asked shrewdly. "What's the trouble?"

"It's not exactly trouble," returned Payne, laughing. "But if we hook up in the finals I've an idea he'd just about break his neck to swamp me." And he told her of his encounters with Skelpy in Griggs' office.

She smiled at his story, but did not attach much importance to it.

"Too trifling," was her opinion. "Probably forgotten all about it. I don't imagine he'd let a little thing like that influence him."

"Don't you think it," returned Payne. "I've got him placed as just the sort of man who'd let little things like that influence him a lot."

"Well, anyway, you might as well be introduced to them now as later," she said. "Come along; I'll do it."

A moment later they stood beside the chief clerk and his sister.

"Miss Skelpy," said Sue, "this is my partner, Mr. Payne."

Payne bowed to a tall, somewhat angular but energetic girl with a rather narrow face. He judged at once that her tongue would not always be unedged. There was something austere superior about her. But he gave his closer attention to the brother. The brother had been staring. Payne knew he remembered.

"And Mr. Skelpy," continued Sue.

The two men shook hands.

"I believe Mr. Payne and I have met, informally, before," said Skelpy, a trifle stiffly.

"I guess that's right," affirmed Payne easily. "How's everything going?"

"Very well, thanks," responded Skelpy quickly, even eagerly. "Very well, indeed." A jubilant note came into his voice. "No doubt you'll be sorry to hear your present boss, Mr. Griggs, is leaving."

"Leaving?" said Payne. "Yes; that is interesting. Mr. Griggs struck me first rate. Know why he is leaving?"

"Being transferred to the second division," Skelpy replied. "Be effective August first."

"The first," said Payne. This day was July the thirty-first. "Why, that's to-morrow."

"Precisely!" Skelpy smiled. "The general management is making a sudden shift." He seemed to be enjoying something all by himself. He regarded Payne complacently, speculatively. "You might also be interested in knowing who is to be Griggs' successor?"

"I might be," Payne admitted. The chief clerk was so smug about it all that Payne had a feeling there was some reason behind it all. "Do you know?"

"I do," proclaimed Skelpy. "I am!"

"You!" exclaimed Payne, probably putting more expression into the word than might have appeared necessary. He recalled swiftly Miss Kenney's statement as to Skelpy's relationship to one of the high general officials—an official powerful enough, no doubt, to bring about this change.

"That is the intention," returned Skelpy. And now there was almost no effort on his part to conceal his satisfaction. He swelled visibly. There was a triumphant, malignant gleam in his eyes as they rested on Payne. "The bulletins will be out to-night."

CHAPTER V.

A SURPRISE IN STORE.

PAYNE was conscious of a sharp sense of dismay. He did not like the vengeful expression of the man who hereafter would have authority over him. He realized that for him this change in officials was poor business. But he endeavored to submerge his perturbation.

"Congratulations!" he said.

"Thanks," responded Skelpy. He twirled his racket. "It probably means the end of tournaments for me. Once I take up official duties I'll hardly have time for less important things." His voice was oily, suave. "I expect this'll be my last one, so I'll have to win it!" There lurked in his tone already the round authority of a superior addressing an inferior.

Sue Kennoy never before had seen in Lou Payne's face quite the same look as she now saw. Intuitively she knew it would be better to interrupt.

"I think they're waiting, Lou," she broke in. Her fingers touched his elbow. "We'd better go." She waved her hand to Skelpy and his sister while she pulled her partner away. "See you to-morrow."

They moved off to their appointed court.

"For the love of Pete!" said Payne softly as they went. "Did you get what he said?"

"I did," she replied. "But surely he wouldn't be so small as to—to—" She broke off without finishing.

"He sure would!" asserted Payne, knowing what she had in mind. "My chance of holding a job under that gentleman is so small I wouldn't bet a nickel on it! He's got the idea right now that he's going to make things unpleasant for me."

Her face reflected the dismay he had experienced but a moment ago. Her hand again sought his arm. "Oh, Lou!"

"I'm certain of it!" he insisted. "If we mop him up to-morrow afternoon in this last tournament of his, as he says, for me it'll spell good night! Didn't you get his tone when he told me he'd have to win it? It's orders he was handing me—orders to step easy. He could hardly hold himself in—puffed up so he scarcely can keep his feet on the ground."

"Then," she said slowly—"then perhaps we'd better not win it." She halted. Her gaze was averted, fixed on the turf at her feet.

"What!" he cried. "We'd better not

win it! Say, partner mine, just forget that! We're going to clean up this semifinal this afternoon, and then to-morrow afternoon we're going to attend to Skelpy!"

"I knew you'd say that!" She raised her head, and her eyes were shining.

"Of course you knew it! He thinks he's got me where he wants me. Well, maybe he has—from his standpoint. But no little thing like that is going to hold me back to-morrow!"

At four o'clock that afternoon Payne watched his partner send over the net a low, line-cutting drive which ended the set in their favor, likewise the match. And after exchanging customary civilities with the vanquished they watched the finish of the match in which Skelpy and his sister came off victors. They mingled with the crowd from the stand as the exodus from the vicinity of the courts began.

"That settles it," said Payne, speaking low into Sue's attentive ear. "To-morrow official D. & C. will enter the arena against proletariat D. & C.—aided and abetted, of course, by their better—er—partners."

"That D. & C. angle is rather an odd circumstance," she said.

"Isn't it, though? Never do, you know, to let the big boss be defeated by a mere brass pounder. I anticipate a merry whirl, for when he sees we're not easing up I know he'll put in his best licks."

"Doubtless," she agreed. "And not alone for the sake of beating you; there's the trophy feature."

He was silent for a moment. "Speaking of features," he said at last, "I've been pondering things over this afternoon; I think there'll be another one for Skelpy to-morrow that'll surprise him a bit."

"What is that?" she asked.

His eyes were regarding her gravely. He was thinking that probably he had allowed his visions to develop too fast. His feeling toward this girl was different from anything he had heretofore experienced, and quite frankly he recognized its import. But now he believed the matter must rest in its present

state, must go no further. A practically penniless man, a jobless man—or one soon to be—could not presume as he had been beginning to hope. Inwardly he was depressed, his heart heavy. He tried not to consider Skelpy too bitterly. He forced a smile to his lips at her question.

"I'll tell you to-night," he said.

CHAPTER VI.

HIS ANSWER.

THE buzz of talk about the central court subsided as Skelpy stepped to the base line, racket in his right hand, two new white balls in the other. The Saturday afternoon was perfect, a few fleecy clouds drifting lazily across a deep-blue sky, a gentle breeze stirring.

The stand was packed to overflowing, likewise all the temporary seats and space about the other three dimensions of the court. Gay feminine colors twinkled and flashed in competition with more sober male shades. The golf course was deserted. Valleyview and the country for miles around was this day concerned with tennis, with the decision as to where the laurels of the Valleyview mixed-doubles tournament were to rest.

Valleyview regarded fondly their fair favorite, Miss Sue Kennoy. Finely poised, cool, attired all in white, she stood near her partner. The partner was regarded somewhat curiously; a comparative stranger, but one well spoken of by all who had met him. It was rumored that the friendliness between Sue Kennoy and him was remarkable, considering their short acquaintance. He was a rather interesting figure and assuredly a skillful tennis player. Still, Skelpy and his sister had a great reputation, had played together a long time. Could Sue and her new partner come through? Valleyview fervently hoped so, but there were apprehensions.

As to Skelpy and his sister, Valleyview was very fair-minded. Of course they were branded as cup hunters with all that the words implied. But in players of their exceptional ability per-

haps something should be overlooked. Very good! If they could win, Valleyview would bow in acknowledgment.

On the court Sue Kennoy quietly compared her tall, supple-jointed partner with the sleek and elegant Skelpy. She reflected that the gallery saw but the meeting of two sets of aspirants for tennis honors; they had no realization of the more dynamic attributes which lay underneath.

She thought of what her partner had told her the night before, and she rejoiced in his freedom of spirit. He knew that to win to-day was to lose. But he had never faltered. Her pulses beat for a moment more rapidly. This man was no quitter. He had something of a surprise in store for Skelpy. Well, there could be other surprises. Then she saw his level, steady gaze on her, noted the little smile about his lips. He stepped over close.

"Do you know, I feel as if I could lick the greatest of the great to-day," he said quickly. "Something in me says, Go! And I'm going. Watch our smoke!"

"I'll be right along!" she promised.

He moved to his position, she took up hers, and Skelpy sent over the first service. Sue drove it past Vera Skelpy. Her brother got it back over the net. Payne met the ball in mid-air; it burned the surface as it whizzed between Skelpy's feet for the first point.

Payne took Skelpy's second service, streaked the ball back to the far corner beyond the latter's reach. The ball bounded against the netting back of the base line with a vicious chug.

Sue returned the third service to Vera Skelpy's territory. Vera sent it back, just too far to the side for Sue to get, the latter striking at the ball, but missing. But Payne was there. He took the ball on the bound, and sent a vicious shot down the center.

With the score love-forty, Payne banged the next service back. Skelpy returned. Payne volleyed, and Skelpy, caught out of position, nearly tied himself into a knot in a vain effort to save the point and game.

Payne took the service. The ball

whistled over and landed true. Skelpy hit it, but netted. Vera Skelpy sent her chance out of court. Her brother missed completely the third service. And Sue took care of the sister's hurried return of the fourth. So there was the second game gone; and the Skelpys had yet to score a point.

In the third game, however, they scored two. Payne netted one, and Skelpy drove a return from Sue for a point. But with the score at thirty-all, the Skelpys lost the next two points, and the games stood at three-love.

Sue's service went to deuce. Then, with a couple of brilliant smashes at the net, Payne ran out the game. He trotted to his position.

"You're a wonder!" breathed Sue, her face glowing.

"Don't mention it," he returned, grinning. "You've got it on me; I daren't say what I think you are!"

She knew what he meant, and her eyes smoldered with deeper fire as she watched his terrific drive and a rally which brought them the first point in the fifth game. Next he scored with a neat cross-court shot. Then Skelpy, desperate, sent over one that Sue netted. Payne drove the next just outside the side line, making it thirty-all. Sue was compelled to lob the next, and Skelpy killed it with a winning drive to the corner. But Payne made it deuce with a placement down the single-court line.

With the game even, Sue lost, this time to Vera Skelpy. But Payne won with a second placement, this time down center court. Back at deuce, Sue returned one which Vera could not handle. With vantage, Payne stroked a drive which Skelpy netted.

"Five-love," said Payne, gathering up the balls. "Let's take this one."

They did, four points to one. It was plain the opposition could do little with Payne's service.

As the set ended, six-love, there was a burst of handclapping from the gallery. The play had been fast. Skelpy and his sister had striven hard, played well. But the Kennoy-Payne combination had been wonderful. The girl

half of this team had been known of old to be brilliant; but the male half had now revealed himself as simply astounding.

"You're going 'great guns, partner,'" said Payne.

"Don't talk like that to me," she remonstrated. "I'm trying to hang on, but I'm afraid all the time I'll get lost in your dust!"

"I could never lose——" he began, then abruptly desisted. His face sobered. "Let's get us another one."

"Another six-love affair?" she said. "Oh, sure!" he answered, perhaps just a bit grimly.

"But don't you see Skelpy glaring at us? And I'm sure his sister would like to bite us both."

"Wait till this set's over, then look at them," he advised.

And truly when the second set ended Skelpy and his sister were worth regarding. If ever wrath, black, raging devastation, struggled for expression it did in the countenances of that pair. For the second set had resulted as the first—six-love against them. They made slight effort to conceal their feelings. They barked at each other, spoke discourteously and complainingly to the referee, and ignored entirely, as pertained speech, Miss Kennoy and Payne.

"We've done it now," said Sue. "Either one of them is in a fit state to begin smashing things—if it'd do them any good."

"Does look that way," agreed Payne.

"What possesses you to-day?" she queried. "You don't look malicious, and you're not excited or anything like that, yet I never in all my life saw any one play such fierce, deadly tennis."

He laughed a little uncertainly. "I really don't know," he replied. "It's not vengeance, I know; I've too much contempt for Skelpy's smallness to feel that. But something seems to tell me that to be honest with myself I've got to put in nothing but my best. I can't explain it. It's simply that something's driving me."

Her eyes fell. She thought she understood. She flushed guiltily as she recalled her suggestion of yesterday

that perhaps they had better not win. Perhaps he felt called upon to refute to the utmost any suspicion that he might be harboring that sentiment. Then quickly any consciousness of guilt left her and she was aware of a strange serenity of joy. This was a clean man, honest, unafraid. This matchless tennis was his answer—perhaps to her, but assuredly to Skelpy.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING ANTICIPATED.

THE applause which had swept the gallery had abruptly dropped. An eager, animated hum of voices arose. Neighbor told neighbor that this was something unusual in a final round, two successive love sets for one side. That partner of Miss Kennoy's was sure one whirlwind. Voices unconsciously dropped as the eager question was put: "Do you figure there might be another love set—can it be done? Never remember three straight, but—but—"

From no definite point the questions and the conjectures seemed to spread spontaneously. There was a sudden, nervous hitching about as the third set got under way. The gallery became all at once immobile, tense, eyes glued on the players and the flying balls.

With Skelpy serving, the score went to deuce. Sue sent over a tantalizing chop which Vera Skelpy missed. Payne scored with a stroke down the side line, winning the game.

Skelpy sent Payne's first service outside. Vera netted the second. Skelpy never touched Payne's third. And Sue killed the sister's return of the fourth, making the second game.

With Vera serving, Payne lobbed to back court, and smashed safely the return. Sue returned the second service safely, but Skelpy got it and sent the ball back too fast for successful play. Payne drove and counted on the third. Skelpy got and again scored on Sue's return of the fourth; thirty-all. Payne scorched Skelpy's feet for the fifth point, and Sue brought home the sixth with an ungettable drop just over the net—game; three-love.

Sue went to the base line with the balls. She tossed one in the air, swung sure and strong, every muscle moving in unison. The ball skimmed the net without touching. Vera shot it back at Sue, who got it over to Skelpy. The brother shot it straight back at Payne's partner. She made a smooth recovery. With Payne she worked her way to the net. Skelpy again returned, but Sue volleyed it cross-court for the point.

"Great work, partner!" said Payne. He could see that Skelpy and his sister in their desperation were centering their attack on Sue, figuring her the weaker half.

She only smiled and sent one to Skelpy. The latter aimed his return back at her, but Payne, vigilant, slid in at the net and drove it back with a bound that cleared the back netting.

Sue scored an ace on the sister. Skelpy scored a point on a deft corner shot. With the score forty-fifteen, Vera got one back to Sue which the latter netted. Skelpy returned the next service hard at her and again she netted; deuce. Skelpy and his sister were fighting with all they had.

Payne's partner got another ace on Vera. With vantage, Sue shot a swift service toward the brother. He was wary of Payne and tried to keep the ball away from him, but the latter's sense of anticipation sent him to the right spot—and a smashing stroke made a return impossible—game; four-love.

Skelpy's lips were twisted into a grim snarl as he took the balls. For a last tournament, this one was not turning out well. Not only was he faced with defeat, but he was faced with the ignominy of not winning a single game in the entire round. He put all his skill and strength into the ball he served to Payne's partner. It was hard, well placed; Sue netted. Skelpy's speed and judgment on the next, to Payne, was still good; Payne drove outside. Sue got back the third, but Skelpy jumped on it and counted with a sharp cross-court.

With the score forty-love, the gallery awoke to the fact that the unbroken string seemed about to part; the

Skelpys needed to register but one point before the opposition scored three. The first ball of Skelpy's fourth service was good, and Payne slammed it back wickedly at the brother. The latter shot out his racket, but the ball struck the wood and flew out of court. Payne heard Sue laugh quietly.

"My, what a driving wallop you gave that one!" she exclaimed.

She gave Skelpy's next offering nearly as hard a wallop, but directed it at Vera. Vera failed to negotiate the net and the tally stood at forty-thirty.

Payne was equal to the crisis and quickly made it deuce with another bang which tangled up Skelpy. All through it had been a noticeable characteristic of his play, that when able to choose he had invariably put the ball in the brother's territory.

Sue dropped one over Vera Skelpy's head. The brother retrieved, and Payne counted with a hard volley to the far corner. With vantage, Payne took Skelpy's next service with a sizzling Lawford that nobody touched. For the Skelpys, that chance was gone—game; five-love.

It was Payne's service. The gallery seemed steeped in some strained silence. The last two games had been seething; Skelpy and his sister had nearly broken through. If they failed in this next their last chance would be gone. Would three straight love sets this time decide the Valleyview tournament? The crowd was hushed, straining on the verge of a record.

Payne smacked one at Skelpy, who sent it over Sue's head. Payne took it, the ball whipped straight down the half-court line; fifteen-love.

Vera returned the second service directly at Sue. Sue hammered it straight back. Vera drove outside; thirty-love.

After each point a sort of labored sigh went up from the gallery.

The third service came. Payne flipped the ball up, and his racket met it with a peculiar downward-gliding motion. Skelpy was prepared for an ordinary bound. Instead, the ball struck, then scooted swiftly, not bound-

ing an inch above the ground. Skelpy struck frantically, missed; forty-love.

The gallery was absolutely quiet—the quiet of suspense. One more point could do it.

Payne tossed the ball for the fourth service, swung. The ball landed in front of Vera. She stabbed at it; the ball rose high in the air over the net and fell. Payne was waiting. His racket flashed, something snapped, the ball struck Skelpy's base line, zipped into the netting and through the wire mesh.

The thing was finished, the incredible had happened. Game, set, match! Three successive love sets!

Payne looked at his racket. That last tremendous stroke had broken three strings. Some way it seemed to him symbolic.

The tension of the gallery snapped; the quiet ended. A rising storm of applause arose. The stand rocked. But Payne and Sue seemed strangely oblivious of it. They seemed only consciously aware that their late opponents were approaching. Skelpy's face was twisted, working.

"Watch him now!" Payne enjoined his partner.

Skelpy confronted them. He was trembling in his fury, all sense of decency, of good sportsmanship, cast to the winds.

"You—you—you nobo!" he roared in his frenzy. He shook his fist in Payne's face. "You think you can do a thing like this and then work for me! No; not by a dashed sight!"

"I had been anticipating something like this," said Payne quietly. He reached in the breast pocket of his soft shirt and brought forth a folded paper. This he extended to Skelpy. "My resignation," said Payne.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN RETURN.

RISING from his chair, Mr. Sherman Scoville, president of the Valleyview Club, president of the First National Bank and many other things, addressed the other diners. The big club-

room was filled to capacity, brilliant with varihued dainty gowns, white linen, and white shirt bosoms.

"My friends," said Sherman Scoville, gray-headed and genial, "you all know what has happened this afternoon. The victors are with us. Their opponents are absent; unable to wait over, their given reason. Of course we never criticize those who have been our guests, so we shall say nothing further which might recall the unfortunate incident which so many of us witnessed, and overheard, to-day.

"We honor the victors. No such remarkable exhibition as they gave has ever been observed at Valleyview. It was with regret that we learned Mr. Payne has severed his connection with the company he has served since coming to Valleyview. We had feared he might leave us. But I am happy to state—if I may be pardoned for discussing personal matters—that Mr. Payne is offered a not inconsequential connection with the financial institution of which I happen to be the head. We all sincerely trust he will consider this proposition favorably. Valleyview can ill afford to lose him."

Lou Payne, bewildered, looked into the glimmering eyes of his partner. This was news to him. But he knew at once that it was not so to his partner; she was mixed up with it some way. Then he became aware that the president had sat down and that they were calling on him.

He got up, but never afterward could he recall what he said. His mind was not on the things his tongue spoke. But the words seemed to suffice; there were applause, cheers, laughter. There was one thing he did know: he said nothing with reference to Sherman Scoville's proposition.

A half hour later he had maneuvered his partner so that they had their first moment alone together since that afternoon. They were on the balcony, otherwise deserted.

"You did this," he said to her. "Sue, what does it mean—the things Scoville said? He hadn't spoken anything to me

before about a connection with the bank."

"Possibly not," she replied demurely. "He didn't say that he had. Still, that shouldn't matter. You know he has now—and means it. He—he spoke to me about it."

"How did you arrange it?" he asked relentlessly. "I know you are at the bottom of it."

"Does that matter, either?" she returned quietly.

"But don't you see, Sue?" he exclaimed. "I can't—can't accept that way!"

"Can't!" she echoed. "Why not? It's all perfectly honorable—above-board!"

"You don't understand!" he cried. "Why—why did you?"

Her hand fell softly on his arm. Her face was close. "I do understand," she said gently. "If it hadn't been for me you wouldn't have got into this—wouldn't have lost your place. It was up to me to try something in return, to make good to you. And then, too, perhaps—perhaps it was because I was so proud—of you!"

If it had not been that he was looking down instead of up he might have thought he was looking into twin stars, so near to his lips. His hand covered the one on his arm.

"Sue!"

"For my sake!" she whispered. "I couldn't—I can't let you go!"

His head bent lower. "I can't refuse that!" he said, and they returned to join the other guests.

One Drawback

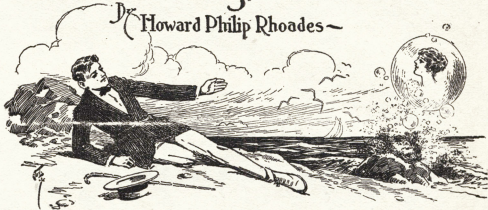
A MORE kind-hearted soul never existed than Aunt Maria. On one occasion a neighbor who had looked in for a call was horrified to see a mouse run across Aunt Maria's kitchen.

"Why on earth don't you set a trap, Aunt Maria?" the neighbor asked.

"Well," was the reply, "I did have a trap set, but it was such a fuss. Them mice kept gettin' into it!"

That Everlasting Bubble—

By Howard Philip Rhoades—



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

IN EAGER HASTE.

AT the great moment when Soroma, the wonder soap, at last was ready to be given to the public, J. Rutherford Brand and George Farnham entered the office of its manufacturer.

Unknown to each other, they had ridden out to the suburb of a New Jersey industrial city on the same bus. Brand stopped to talk on the way. Farnham, walking with his measured but decisive step, was first to reach the little, old faded-brick factory.

He was only at the door, however, his alert blue eyes searching the shabby, old-fashioned office, when some one quickly passed him. J. Rutherford Brand had guessed suddenly that Farnham probably was on the same errand as himself.

Brand pushed his ample frame in panting haste up to the wicket, and in a commanding manner peered through it. Inside were two figures who looked up at him from a desk, entirely unconscious of their picturesque appearance.

One was an elderly man with long, white hair which fell in a shock above his thin, intellectual face. He was frail, his black suit, giving evidence of the carelessness of the dreamer, hung

loosely upon his shrunken body. He was smiling gently at the other figure when Brand appeared.

The second figure was a girl—she hardly seemed a woman, so slender her lines and so young her face—a girl whose features revealed her relationship to the man, but who, while imbued with his gentleness and intellectuality, represented a more active, practical, modern type. Faith Darnton was a girl of beauty whose looks did not overshadow her mentality, but supplemented it.

She rose and came toward J. Rutherford Brand. Through the wicket Faith Darnton saw a smile, which became the more engaging when he noted her beauty, upon the soft pink face of a rather corpulent man, a face suggesting the cherubic rotundity of an infant's countenance. Second only to Brand's ingratiating smile was his necktie, which spoke for itself in tones of red and yellow.

Besides, there were the puffy shoulders of J. Rutherford Brand clothed in a suit of showy checks. The partition hid his heavy cane, his wine-colored spats, and the diamond-set belt which spanned his circumference. But, even from what she could see, Faith Darnton was impressed.

She was more so as Brand said in rounded, well-oiled phrases: "I want

to see Mr. Darnton regarding the position of sales manager."

Without knowing why, Faith Darnton became apologetic. "Well," she explained, "you see we're hardly that far along. We don't want a sales manager—just two salesmen."

"Just a matter of weeks," said Brand, confidently. "I know your soap——"

"I'm afraid you're confusing us with some one else," she said. "Father hasn't had a soap on the market in ten years. He's more or less worked his whole life to perfect Soroma."

"I'm your man to sell it," declared Brand. "If it isn't well known, it soon will be. Atlas Products gave me their hardest territory and in two months I did——"

"Come in, Mr. Brand," Faith Darnton invited.

Then she became conscious of the other man in the outer office. She addressed George Farnham, who was still surveying the place carefully and minutely.

"I came about the position," he explained. His was a modulated voice which impressed her that he might be a good salesman, if not of the sales-manager caliber.

"Please have a seat," she said. "We'll see you in a minute."

That was a rash promise. For J. Rutherford Brand had settled himself for a considerable expository monologue. "Why, Mr. Darnton," he was saying, emphasizing his remarks by tapping his heavy cane, and pushing his pink, cherubic face close to that of the other man, "when they gave me that territory I knew I had the hardest nut in the U. S. to crack. But I just walked into the president's office and said, 'Charlie'—I always called him Charlie and he called me Ruthy—'Charlie, I'm going to get you more business down there in a week than your crack man ever got in a month. I went right in——'"

The white head of Darnton wagged automatically while Brand—verbally—settled the difficulties of Atlas Products, solved the problems of general distributing, and—still verbally—rebuilt

the sales department of the Universal Drug Syndicate.

Then Faith Darnton, watching carefully for her chance, and wisely selecting a small, thin word, managed to insert it edgewise: "But, Mr. Brand, we're too small to interest you."

"Wasn't the Tidewater Sugar Company just a speck when I went over there, and now look at it!"

"But we couldn't pay the salary."

Brand shrugged disparagingly. "Salary—merely something nominal. My specialty is putting small companies on their feet. Usually I accept a salary, then later take over a large share of the business, furnishing money on which to expand. When things are moving right I withdraw from active work, leaving my financial support with the firm, of course."

She nodded with brightening face. Eagerly she said, "You're exactly the sort of man we want. Don't you think so, father?"

As Darnton acquiesced, she went on: "You see, father has been trying to make a perfect soap all his life. Twice he has put soaps on the market, and then withdrawn them because he was unsatisfied. He worked more than ten years on Soroma, and knows it to be perfect. But"—she looked at the elderly man in tender concern—"there are not the years left to introduce it that we would like. We must move quickly."

She laid her small rounded hand upon the pale thin one of Darnton. This picture of daughterly devotion gave Brand his cue for his master barrage.

"Mr. Darnton," he said with superlative assurance, "the Piedmont Coal Company had been losing ground for months. I walked into their office and told them what was wrong. The moment the name of J. Rutherford Brand was printed at the top of their stationery, their battle was won."

Brand was like the Piedmont Coal Company. His battle was won. Twenty minutes later, cane, spats, checked suit, and cherubic countenance, he was bidding Joshua Darnton and his daughter a final flourishing good-by.

Faith Darnton turned to invite in George Farnham, the other applicant. Her recent picture of the rotund, radiant Brand served to accentuate the contrast between the two men. Farnham spoke briefly, decisively. Always he weighed his words, though he was not tiresomely deliberate. He asked several quiet questions. As the interview progressed Faith Darnton began to have the peculiar feeling that she and her father, not George Farnham, were on trial.

His every question was respectful and polite, if detailed. She found no real cause for irritation as she explained all about Soroma from start to finish. "We got the name from 'soap' and 'aroma,'" she told him. "Soroma does the roughest or finest of work. It is a laundry, a toilet, and a shaving soap. It is a shampoo. It washes woodwork or marble; it is a germicide, a disinfectant, a cleanser for the home, the hospital, the workshop, or the boudoir."

Details of price, distribution, advertising were demanded politely but forcefully by Farnham. More and more the applicant's questions led Faith to observe him. Tall, lean, with a rather long face which suggested power and resourcefulness, George Farnham was not a man who demanded instant attention.

His clothes were perfectly but quietly tailored. His blue eyes surveyed his surroundings carefully and searchingly. On first sight his eyes seemed uninterested. It was only when he began to ask questions that they lighted up with a strange eagerness which hinted something of the silent power and efficient concentration of which the man was capable.

After more questions and an examination of the soap, he sat back in his chair, awaiting Darnton's pleasure. "What has been your experience, Mr. Farnham?" the old chemist asked.

"Fifteen years of salesmanship with three houses. I left the last one a month ago due to a general shutdown. Here are certified records of my sales." He handed Darnton letters from his

former employers, adding nothing as the letters were read.

Darnton hesitated after he had read the applicant's credentials. Then he said, "Well, we're not closing up this matter this morning, Mr. Farnham. We've others to see."

"You may give me your decision any time," said Farnham. "Here is my New York address and telephone number." He smiled and bade them good-by.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN THEY RETURNED.

WHEN Farnham had departed Faith Darnton looked at her father, a little surprised. "I know, dear," he said. "You must remember we can't afford to hire the first men who come in. Of course in the case of a man like Mr. Brand—that's different. This Mr. Farnham may be all right, but I want to see some others."

Others he did see. But always he came back to the cold, certified figures furnished by Farnham. Eventually Darnton telephoned the young man and made him an offer. Farnham accepted and started upon a selling trip.

Three weeks later, Faith Darnton was in the office awaiting the first homecoming of the two salesmen, J. Rutherford Brand and George Farnham.

Farnham arrived first with his measured, decisive step and his quiet smile.

"How's business?" she greeted.

He placed his report on her desk.

Her eyes widened. "My!" she cried. "You have been busy!"

"Washed my hands to the bone to show 'em," he said. "That's all you have to do. After that it sells itself. How's your father?"

"Very well," she replied. "I think getting under way has done him good."

"There's something I want to take up with him and with you. The American Distributors, the biggest corporation of its kind in the country, are meeting in annual convention week after next in Atlantic City. For a trifling cost we can affiliate with them. I think the firm should be represented there

with a booth. That will give us a chance to meet and impress such men as Kohler, of the famous chain stores, and Dean of the American Grocers. Then there's Searls——"

"Searls?"

"'Searls the Sport' they call him. An eccentric multimillionaire who picks commercial winners. I'd like to try to interest him in Soroma. Has it occurred to you, Miss Darnton, that you and your father have here a product worthy of the broadest national promotion? You might struggle on for years in a small way and not cover the ground you would in six months with proper financing."

"And this Mr. Searls?"

"He has limitless funds, and an uncanny intuition for backing the right thing. Of course he's bothered by people with inferior stuff, so he has financed few new propositions recently. He's giving most of his time to sports and travel, and his hobby of cultivating men of accomplishment, like statesmen, writers, and scientists. He hangs on their words, fancying he's one of them, as he is—in a sense. Now if we could just——"

He was interrupted by J. Rutherford Brand, his cane beating the floor as he walked in, a porter struggling behind with his sample cases.

"Hello, Brand!" said Farnham. "I see you brought some back."

"Yes; samples," Brand replied. "Most of my orders are for large quantities. You see, I'm known all over that territory. Funny, in Chicago a friend of mine called out: 'Hello, Brand, what you sales manager for now? Don't matter, whatever it is it must be all right if *you've* got it.' See, that's the way I'm known. And——"

"Mr. Brand," said Faith Darnton respectfully, "Mr. Farnham suggests it would be of value to us to join the American Distributors and attend their Atlantic City convention."

At the mention of Atlantic City and a convention Brand was all eagerness. "Didn't you get my suggestion on that?" he asked. "Thought I put it in

a letter. Maybe it slipped my mind; been so busy. We should do it, by all means. I can handle things down there for you fine. Been to a dozen such conventions. Just turn it over to me, Miss Darnton. I'll take care of it."

"I'm going to slip back and see your father, Miss Darnton," said Farnham.

CHAPTER III.

A CHANGE OF PLAN.

AS Farnham went toward the door, Brand sat waiting for him to get out of earshot. Then he drew his chair closer to the girl, adding something more personal to his engaging smile. Brand by no means overlooked the beauty of his employer's daughter which was not diminished by the ever-present anxiety and concern that she felt for her father and his work. Now, Brand admired the golden-brown of her eyes, the gloss of her dark hair, the pink-and-pale tints of her piquantly molded face.

Glancing back once more, to make sure Farnham was gone, Brand said: "Fix it so you and I can represent the firm at Atlantic City, Miss Darnton."

She looked at him in surprise. "I don't expect to go, Mr. Brand. Probably my father will represent us, with Mr. Farnham, as Eastern salesman, dropping in to help him."

"But, Miss Darnton, you don't know what a fatiguing place Atlantic City is. It would be too much for your father. Besides, nobody else could run the factory. Surely you want to avail yourself of my experience, and I can't think of any one who'd get more attention in a booth than you would."

Faith was a trifle embarrassed, but Brand did not wait for her to speak.

"You and I are the logical ones to represent the firm," he said. "We'd have a wonderful time and"—he added quickly as he saw another look in her eyes—"really put Soroma over."

"I'll take it up with father," she said.

"Do," he begged. "And remember, look out for false advice. In every organization you'll find men forgetting

their loyalty to the firm to further their own interests. You know you can rely on me. Don't decide important questions until you've asked me about them. We're going to put this thing over, Miss Darnton, and you know where I stand!"

The Atlantic City which greeted Faith Darnton and J. Rutherford Brand was the glistening Atlantic City of July, fanned by a cooling breeze off the ocean, gay with flags, colorful with the bright dress of vacationing folks, and alive with the million and one activities of the board walk.

They registered at the magnificent Hotel Domain, where convention headquarters were established. Miss Darnton, whose room was two floors below that of Brand, hardly had prepared for luncheon before there was a knock.

"Mr. Farnham!" she exclaimed as she opened the door.

"Not as we planned, I know," he said. "But so many of my people are here at the convention that I decided to come to Atlantic City. I tried a few places vainly. Then I saw a news item and decided to take it up with you personally."

She took the newspaper clipping from his hand.

"Can you see the possibilities?" Farnham asked. "Professor Beaumont, Europe's greatest chemist, is about to leave for home after having got untold publicity in America. In an interview he says civilization is merely a matter of cleanliness, and the man who makes the best soap is the world's most useful citizen. That's your father! Think of what it would mean if Beaumont would indorse Soroma!"

"But—well—would he?"

"We must make him."

"We surely ought to try. I'll take it up with Mr. Brand."

"Let's all three talk it over together, Miss Darnton, and decide how to approach Beaumont, and who is best fitted to do it. I'll be here this afternoon and evening calling upon people in the hotel. When you're ready to take it up, leave word for me at the Shoreham."

Ten minutes later, at luncheon, when Faith Darnton told J. Rutherford Brand of Farnham's visit, Brand's face grew red with indignation.

"Who told him to come here trying to cut in on us?" he cried.

"He thought we'd better talk over together the matter of trying to get Professor Beaumont's indorsement of——"

"We will—you and I. Don't you bother to call him up at his hotel. I learned about Beaumont this morning and was coming to tell you. Farnham probably bumped into some one to whom I'd talked, and got the clipping and—wants to steal the credit. Now he's trying to butt in and——"

By his own unanimous vote Brand elected himself the sole member of a committee to see Professor Beaumont. "I'll know how to approach the man when I see him," he explained. "There are dozens of ways. I'll pick the best."

CHAPTER IV.

A GLORIOUS VISION.

AT five that afternoon Faith Darnton came upon Brand in an easy-chair on the terrace, surrounded by a group of several people who were nodding automatically under the hypnotic flow of the supersalesman's conversation.

When the group broke up Brand, for the first time, saw Miss Darnton, who had taken a seat near by. "Professor Beaumont," he said. "Oh—yes; sure! I've an engagement with him in the morning."

"Was he difficult to see?" she asked.

"I learned from his secretary that he was busy. The secretary begged me to wait. But I declined, and set an hour in the morning. It's best to see a man when he's fresh. By the way, did you see our friend Farnham?"

"No," she said, puzzled at his tone.

"He just went past with something tall, blond and painted up like a fire wagon. If that's what he came over to call on—some class to him!"

Faith Darnton experienced a vague emotion, one she couldn't understand,

and one she didn't like to try to analyze. It was an emotion which didn't make her happy. It added a new force to the swiftly moving stream which was rushing her father, his hitherto obscure little business, and herself—where?

Her feelings of that moment were banished by the wave of light and color which swept over her at the dinner hour. After an afternoon in the Soroma booth in the convention hall, she was wearing a modest evening gown in the huge dining room of the Hotel Domain. Opposite was Brand, in formal evening clothes. Obsequious waiters brought rare dishes. From beyond the palms came strains of music wondrously blended. This was an atmosphere new to the girl, one always hitherto denied her on her infrequent trips to the beach. The fact that Joshua Darnton always held perfection above anything else had kept them poor. Now that perfection had been reached was she to enjoy the fruits of her father's work, to become mistress of every luxury for which she had longed, but had never been given?

Brand's cherubic face seemed so to assure her as he begged: "Just a little dance?" They glided into an adjoining room where myriad couples were whirling. Brand danced well for a heavy man. Within his great arm she felt new assurance of the coming of a new environment in her life, one in which all her hard, anxious years would disappear like mists before a warm, genial sun.

It was a dream glorious in its coloring, surpassingly beautiful as it danced before her eyes. But it was only a soap bubble. Suddenly there brushed past a tall man, dancing with dignity and poise. His partner was a woman of fashion—sophisticated, daring fashion—a woman, blond, rouged, with shaped eyebrows and artificial mannerisms.

Faith Darnton saw George Farnham dancing with this striking woman at the same moment J. Rutherford Brand caught sight of them. As Faith looked at her partner, Brand was eagerly

awaiting her comment. She bit her lip, turning her head away, strangely flushed. The music stopped. She slipped away with Brand, and silently hurried out of a different door from the one taken by Farnham and the woman. In her heart was surging the same emotion which had been stirred when Brand spoke to her of seeing Farnham with the woman. But now it was accentuated.

Accentuated to the point where it demanded and found a swift reaction. After all, what was Farnham to her? He was there against orders, spending the money furnished by her father—part of that precious fund set aside to market the thing to which Darnton had devoted his life. Farnham might go his way. She allowed herself to be led out upon the dark upper terrace of the Hotel Domain's famous garden.

There she listened to the rounded, well-oiled phrases of J. Rutherford Brand. They sounded more convincing than ever. Frankly, it had worried her that his sales were far below those of Farnham. Now she began to see where such a captain of industry as Brand might easily overlook, in his broader vision, such a small detail as the sale of goods. It was greater to direct than actually to participate. She hardly resisted when his left hand took hers and his right arm slipped gradually around her. She was quiet, very quiet, until he mentioned the name of Acton Searls.

"That's the man they call Searls the Sport, isn't it?" she asked. "I think we should try to interest him in Soroma. Do you know him well?"

"Hunted deer with him," said Brand. "But I'm expecting to help you push Soroma. Surely—"

"Still there'd be no harm in seeing Mr. Searls. You know him so well, I'd want you to see him."

Brand didn't jump at the opportunity. "You could do better than I," he said. "Searls falls for the ladies. I'm afraid he wouldn't do much for me in a business way. Once I beat him out on a proposition and— Don't go, Miss Darnton. It's too early to go upstairs yet."

She shook her head. "I want an early plunge ahead of the crowd," she said. "I'll see you at the Central Pier Baths at seven-thirty."

"Does it get light that early? Well, of course, dear——"

He had risen, grasped her hands, and was seeking to draw her to him. He puffed in eagerness as he looked at her soft, pink lips. But, just as he seemed about to implant a kiss, she was away, bidding him good night over her shoulder.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE SURF.

THE sun was just beginning to make real progress through the morning mists as Faith stepped on Central Pier. The Atlantic lay calm, save for long, low, powerful rollers, just strong enough to break with a trace of a "whitecap." There was no sign of Brand as she engaged a room from a sleepy-eyed attendant. As she was ready for her swim, however, she found that she was not alone, after all. Two men, earlier bathers than herself, were swimming toward her from the outer end of the pier.

Behind her, at that moment, a voice sounded. "Be right out, Miss Darn-ton," called Brand, who was hurrying into the Baths.

She stepped out upon the pier, deserted in the early-morning hush, to wait. Then, in a moment, she was surprised. Up the beach, out of the water came the two swimmers she had seen. One was a small, keen-looking man. The other was George Farnham. He was one of those men who wear their carefully cut clothes so close fitting that one fears in a bathing suit they would look entirely too slender. Such was not the case. Admiringly, Faith Darn-ton noted Farnham's breadth of shoulder, his thickness of limb, the easy grace with which he carried himself.

Then, as suddenly, she remembered the night before and nodded to him so casually that he was puzzled. She ran down the beach, resenting somehow that he should have opportunity to inspect her in such a revealing garment

as her chic bathing suit, and swam straight out to sea. Farnham, as he and the small man rested themselves, kept an eye upon her. She was not far from the end of the pier, moving as determinedly as if starting for a transatlantic swim when J. Rutherford Brand appeared.

"Hello!" he said briefly, and passed on to watch the girl swimming.

Farnham went on talking with the keen-looking little man beside him, and was near the climax of his conversation when suddenly Brand shouted to them.

"Hey, Farnham! Come quick. Can you save her, Farnham? I—I can't swim!"

Rushing out on the pier Farnham saw Brand's warning was not a false one. The girl, laboring fifty yards off the end of the pier, was unmistakably in distress. Farnham surveyed the distance for a second, quietly, decisively. Then his toes curled around the tip of the pier, and he was launched into air. Boltlike he gracefully cut the water and, a moment later, reappeared swimming with long, deliberate, telling strokes toward the struggling girl.

Now his arms were about her, and he spoke to her soothingly, reassuringly. Skillfully drawing her into the proper position he started carefully and coolly ashore.

Brand was at the ladder, ready to take Faith from her rescuer. Instead, Farnham had brushed by and carried her into the office of the Baths. There she began to breathe easier, and stimulants brought back the first trace of color to her face.

An anxious life-saver, just reaching the beach, bent over her, and then said: "Let her rest a bit. Probably too much exertion before breakfast."

"Could it have been the undertow?" Farnham asked.

"Not at that point. Either she got a little faint or"—the life-saver smiled knowingly—"I've known them to want to be saved."

Outside, Farnham found his late companion buttonholed by Brand. As they walked off the small, keen-looking

man asked Farnham: "Who was that man?"

"Brand. He's with our company."

"The deuce! He told me lots about himself, but said nothing about your soap. Will you breakfast with me, Mr. Farnham? Then, if you'll get a stenographer, I believe I'm ready to sign."

On the way to the hotel Farnham stopped off to send a taxi containing a doctor back to the pier. For the next three hours he kept very close to the small, keen-looking man. It was after ten when he knocked at the door of Miss Darnton's room at the Hotel Domain. He apologized for not having returned to her after saving her from the water.

"I didn't expect it," she said. "I owe you many thanks."

"Not at all. Will you step out on the terrace with me? I've something to show you."

With a new attitude, strangely mingled with the feeling she first had upon seeing him that morning, she went along. A moment later, rounding the grand terrace, they came upon a group in easy-chairs automatically nodding. Close to them, his back to Farnham and Miss Darnton, was Brand. In his rounded, well-oiled phrases he was saying: "Of course this one I'm with now is just a dinky thing, merely one of many, and I——"

Farnham, quickly pushing Faith past, wondered if she heard. Now they stood just at the corner, in a commanding position high above the board walk. Down its length Farnham anxiously looked as he consulted his watch.

He did not see her face, and, never for a moment, knew the depths to which her spirits had sunk. The whole ship of her hopes was grounded among hidden shoals. Just around the corner was Brand, a hopeless failure, so far as Soroma was concerned. Here beside her was an unfathomable man, far more concerned with others, it seemed to her, than with his employer's business—or his daughter. So she must go back to her father and report. Tears stood in her eyes as she visioned the shrunken

figure in black, his white hair, his gentle dreamer's face——

Farnham was startled as he turned and saw the paleness of her cheeks, the hopelessness of her eyes. He caught her hand and cried: "Miss Darnton, what's the matter? Look; what if your father could see that!"

CHAPTER VI.

A STARTLING SURPRISE.

SLOWLY along the board walk out of the distance came a strange procession. Surrounded and stared at by curious thousands came a row of ten narrow trucks, drawn by teams of milk-white ponies. As the first came closer Faith Darnton almost lost her breath. Each truck held two huge yellow signboards, upon which was printed in enormous black letters, "SOROMA, the Wonder Soap."

Some one clutched Farnham's arm. It was a man Miss Darnton never had seen before. He was dressed as richly and as bizarrely as J. Rutherford Brand would have been, had he been vastly more wealthy and discriminating. This man's face showed that he was a powerful and important person, and his brisk voice carried lasting conviction.

Farnham introduced him as Acton Searls. Searls the Sport hastened to say to Miss Darnton, "Well, what do you think of our little show?"

"I'd kept the secret to surprise her," said Farnham.

"Don't blame you; things moved so fast," Searls said. "I'll tell her myself. It took Farnham just ten minutes to convince Prof. Beaumont that Soroma is the world's greatest soap. I dined last night with Beaumont, and he insisted on telling me about it. So I sent for Farnham. We rushed things during the night with a sign painter and the proprietor of a pony show, and there's your answer. Final details can be closed as soon as we get your father down. That parade's just to tell the convention that Acton Searls is backing another winner!"

Faith Darnton, almost speechless, was standing a step farther out than

the others. Just then a third man, who had seen her and thought her alone, dashed up. "Well, how does *that* look to you?" cried J. Rutherford Brand before he saw the others.

Brand paled and stammered, especially when he discovered Searls. The face of the latter took on a most peculiar look, as if he could have blighted at a glance the poor caricature of his own commanding personality.

Searls' lip curled as he said scornfully: "It appears as though you didn't look, Brand, the time you had the Indian poacher kill a deer which you brought into camp as your own. Still selling self, I see, instead of soap!"

He spoke a word or two to Farnham, then made off in his all-powerful way. Brand somehow disappeared. Then Faith Darnton turned to Farnham with a humble question.

"Easy," he said. "I happened to get a room next Professor Beaumont at the Shoreham. Learning of his presence I pleaded my telephone was out of commission, and asked to use his. That launched him upon a tirade against poor service. He showed me a burned-out electric bulb in his bathroom just when he wanted to wash up after a hard day. I saw my chance, and pocketed all his soap. Coming back with a live bulb I screwed it in, and waited for his outburst when he missed the soap.

"You can bet I had a cake of Soroma ready," Farnham continued. "I had him wash, shave, clean his teeth with it. I knocked a bottle of ink off his table, apologized, and cleaned up the muss with Soroma. He said: 'I've studied soaps all my life, Mr. Farnham, but yours beats them all. It's a perfect soap.' Five minutes later I had that on paper with his certified signature. He was grateful and sincere. He was good enough to tell Searls, and Searls hangs upon the words of famous men. You know the rest."

"All but——" Her voice was shy, regretful, as her hand went out to this man who had made all her shimmering, fragile dreams into a bubble glorious and everlasting. All of her dreams except——

"You wonder why I didn't come back to you this morning. That's like a woman! The keen-looking little fellow was Mercer, of the Federal Drug Syndicate. I was up all night, but I met him for a swim this morning because if I sold him it meant putting Soroma in a thousand drug stores."

"That's like a man!" she said. "But it wasn't the man this morning. It was——it was——"

"It was the woman last night!" he finished for her. "And say, didn't that Madame De Reamer, from New York, walk all over my feet? She thought she was dancing. But it was worth it, seeing she's under contract now to try out Soroma in her national string of beauty parlors!"

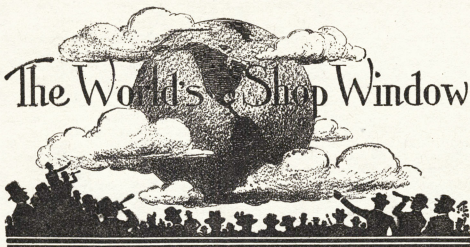
Crowns Go Begging

THERE are a great many instances of men who realized the truth of the old saying: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," and who absolutely refused the honor.

Early in the last century the crown of Greece went begging, and Lord Byron was chosen for this distinguished award. He died, however, before he had a chance to accept. Later on, the then Duke of Edinburgh, Queen Victoria's second son, was invited to become king of the Hellenes, but on account of foreign jealousies he refused. The position was then offered to Mr. Gladstone, and to Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, but both declined the honor.

Napoleon anticipated present-day history by wishing to separate Hungary from Austria, and offered the Hungarian throne to Count Esterhazy. The count, however, refused the offer.

In the early history of Russia the imperial crown was offered first to Prince Mstislavski, and then to Prince Pozharski, but both shrank from the difficult task entailed. And later, when Czar Alexander died in 1825, his brother Constantine should have succeeded him; but Constantine preferred the security of private life, and passed the honor on to his young brother, Nicholas I.



By Henry Wilton Thomas —

Illustrations by Jo Lemon

Dreaming of a King

AMERICAN visitors to Paris are amazed to learn that there is still a royalist party, fighting on the political field for the restoration of the monarchy. The followers of this party—not all persons of the well-to-do class—dream of a brilliant court once more at Versailles; they would like to see the republic thrown on the scrap heap. They would give President Millerand the sack and put in his place a king, with a crown, a throne, and all the rest of a royal outfit. They have their newspapers, their members in the Chamber, even their churches; at least, there are churches in France whose communicants are, to a large extent, adherents of the royalist party.



Although no king is seen in France, a queen bobs up once a year, but she does not do so in deference to royalist desire. She is the Queen of France, chosen to preside at the mid-Lent carnival; her enthronement, which lasts but a day, is effected by the proletariat and the bourgeois; the royalists,

of course, will have nothing to do with the affair. They don't approve at all of this vulgar use of the word queen, beautiful though she who bears the crown and title may be. It happened that the young woman last chosen for the honor—a Mademoiselle Germaine—had plenty of beauty, though she was not very well supplied with regal poise or majestic air.



One was aware of a rather naughty twinkle in her eye as, in her splendid chariot, she rode to the Elysée Palace to pay her respects to the president of the republic. *L'Action Française* is the name of one of the royalist newspapers. The other journals of Paris gave glowing accounts of the carnival, but the king-wanter preserved a dignified silence. The American observer noted this and wondered if the royalist sense of humor had died with the monarchy.



Form in the Discard

THE heroic efforts of the police commissioner of New York to put a crimp in the holdup industry brings up the subject of the great changes in

method that time has evolved. His hope springs eternal that these changes can be met with an increased force of policemen. The holdup operator to-day



works on information rather than on form, as he did in the days before "Hands up!" became a sort of greeting in New York, morning, noon, and night.

Rather unsophisticated, after all, were those gunmen of a by-gone day. If a man or woman *looked* like the possessor of money or jewelry to a worthwhile amount, he or she was marked for attention. Not infrequently the prospect turned out to be a bloomer.

To get seven dollars or a paste-diamond pin or ring, after taking chances on a twenty-year stretch in the cooler, hurt the gunman's feelings. So much for playing the game on form.

The realization dawned and grew steadily that reliable information, and not form, must be the deciding factor regarding the desirability of the person marked for holdup honors. And form now is in the discard.



Information, definite, sure, is required before any breath is wasted, or liberty hazarded, in the command, "Hands up!"

The efficient gunman studies the habits and possessions of his chosen victim as the naturalist studies his denizen of the wild. He knows when his

prospect will be along, and when the amount on his person will be worth taking. Sometimes he has able inside assistance in the obtaining of his information; that is a mere detail. He knows the right hour for entering the place, he knows where the money is kept, he knows whether it is there at the moment he does his little stunt. He plays the game strictly on information.

Far Too Efficient

POLICEMEN are seldom lacking after the holdup is accomplished; then the woods are full of them. It is not their fault that they are not among those present at the ceremony. The crooks do not invite them. Nobody ever heard of a holdup man getting away because there were not enough policemen around after it was all over. But the commissioner has added hundreds of bluecoats and hundreds of plain coats to the force to bowl over the robbers. And they will do so if only the robbers tip off the police on the time and the place of their proposed function.



As it is, their habits of efficiency cause them to snub the minions of the law. They merely go in, put their victim out of business, bind and gag him, perhaps; relieve him of his valuables, and come out just as if they were ordinary people who had gone in to pay a bill or a friendly call. When the victim is rescued the police are summoned and the process of bowling over the distant fugitive is begun. And with the largely increased police force there will be many more among those present after the event.

It is as good as a game of bowls—the kind Rip van Winkle saw those little merry men play in the Catskills. But Rip was awake when that was going on. Grumbling, however, that the police are not awake springs from a thoughtless view of the case.

It is not the police who need reforming. It is the crooks themselves who must reform. They must stop carrying on their holdup business in such a criminally efficient manner. They don't



give the police a look-in. Until the crooks go back to their old, pre-prohibition bumbling way of doing things, let criticism of the police be withheld.



"God of the Hour"

THE high cost of shelter is in Paris just as humorous a fact as it is in any other part of the world. You don't see people exactly rocking with laughter over it in any of the big cities. But the janitor—*concierge*—is such a despot in the French capital that it delights the heart of the Parisian to get even on him for the sins of the landlord. There is no way of getting even except to have a good laugh at his expense. And

even this shaft seems to miss the mark, for the autocrat of the porter's lodge has been seen to laugh over these colossal jokes on himself.

It was truly a colossal one which the tenants got up in a recent parade. The janitor was built in effigy—an enormous figure with a hard, frozen countenance and dressed in the customary garb of the doorkeeper of the cheaper apartment houses. The vast figure, mounted on a float, had hanging from his neck a card inscribed, "*Appartement à louer*" (Apartment to let). He was labeled, "The god of the hour."

The men and women on the float with the huge figure were grave of countenance; they seemed to be imitating the actors in a roaring farce by preserving perfectly straight faces. Doubtless it was a pleasure for them thus to ridicule the janitor, but a pleasure, apparently, that they were taking quite seriously.

It was all in the campaign, of course,

against the high cost of shelter. The shot was intended to be one that might ricochet from the despised janitor to the hated landlord. In the press the guns have been trained directly upon the profiteering owner, and often from the judicial bench he has received a shell shock. But the cost of shelter has not been knocked off its high perch; the janitor is still the despot of the frozen face.



Welcome to Petrograd

THE famous Russian singer, Chaliapin, carried artistic laurels galore with him after finishing his engagement at the Metropolitan in New York and starting for London on his way to Russia. But he carried with him something else—quite a trifling little thing—which he seemed to cherish more than all the tokens of his success. The thing was an American doll.

When he arrived in Petrograd he had it in his arms; he was hugging it tight as he descended from the train, but he did not hug it long after that. There was a mite of a girl waiting for the operatic star. She was not much bigger than the doll which her father had brought to her over seas and a continent. Instantly it was in her arms, and never before in Russia, people said, did any visitor from America receive such a hugging and a kissing.

When Chaliapin reached his home he found awaiting him a large surprise party of friends—artists and others. But suddenly a change came over the assemblage. They caught sight of the doll in little Manana's arms, and from that moment it was the little girl's party, or the American doll's—it was hard to determine which. The new arrival could only squeak "mamma!" Its speeches were more interesting to many Russians than those of Lloyd-George, Barthou, and other statesmen at the Genoa conference.

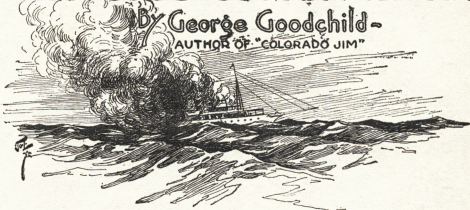


* Career of Captain Crash—Rover of the Sea *

His Greatest Adventure

By George Goodchild—

AUTHOR OF "COLORADO JIM"



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF THE PAST.

LIKE a great sea bird the motor boat flew on the breast of the ocean. Her bows were out of the water and two vast columns of white foam spurted up from either side of her. The noise of the engine was terrific—a high, piercing note that grew even higher as the man at the wheel opened wide the throttle and gave the engine its head.

The woman crouching beside him, with a sou'wester hat tied under her chin, gasped as the blur of land in the distance rushed at them.

"Fifty-two!" she cried. "Jack, we've broken the record!"

"She's got another two knots tucked away somewhere," he replied. "I'll find them to-night or my name's not Arkwright."

The high exhaust note fell as the land came nearer. The pace slackened abruptly and the two columns of water subsided.

"Pick up the mooring, Diana!"

He reversed the engine as she leaned over and grabbed the floating block. A few seconds later they were motionless on the blue placid sea. A dinghy rocked

lazily beside them, painted white and bearing the name *Diana*. Arkwright spread the awning over the motor boat and helped his wife into the dinghy. Yes; Arkwright had again taken unto himself a wife. She sighed as she looked toward the beach with its green palms and its white hotels.

"To think that all our troubles are behind us!" she murmured. "It seems only yesterday that I met you in New York."

Arkwright laughed as he rested on the oars. He could afford to laugh now. He had parted company with Captain Crash and the old life. He and Diana had been married over a month. In that short time much had been accomplished. His great desire had been to make some reparation for his past and to some extent he had succeeded. At that moment he had with him the plans of the John Arkwright Home. It had been Diana's idea, and the capital required to maintain this prospective institution for orphans had taken over half the fortune that she had brought to him as well as most of what he had. But they were both content in the knowledge that it gave Arkwright a certain peace of mind.

"Even now it seems like a dream,

Diana," he said. "Are we really married and staying at Palm Beach? Was there ever such a man as Captain Crash, and such a vessel as the *Zig-Zag*?"

"There was. But we agreed we would never mention that again, didn't we?"

"We did, but he is not the sort of person one can forget. Thank Heaven I met you, or even now I might be assisting him in his nefarious schemes."

"Perhaps he has changed, too. There must come a time when conscience calls with a loud voice."

Arkwright shook his head and pulled gently on the oars. He could not imagine any change taking place in Crash's flinty heart. For some reason unknown he had taken to piracy, and he was too deeply implicated to give it up, even if he desired, which was highly improbable.

"It is curious that such a character can even now command my admiration," he said. "The fact is one cannot forget his good points. He was staunch to those who served him. He hated women, but I never knew him to treat one with anything but chivalry. He was honest, too, in some respects. And yet—— It's no use trying to understand him. He is the eternal problem."

"Please, please forget him! At any rate our lives and his lie far apart now. There are so many things one can do to help others along. We can erase the past completely. We can build where but recently we destroyed."

We! He loved her for the generosity which actuated her into including herself. If any blame still remained she was willing, nay anxious to share it with him. It was that which made life beautiful. Conversely it was that, too, which made him realize his unworthiness. It was that which had brought him to a firm resolution to live down the past, to own allegiance to the forces that make for law and order, and to regard Crash as the enemy of society. Yet despite this there remained a spark of affection for this man of power and resourcefulness—this man who by a trick had cajoled him for a period to a life of lawlessness.

CHAPTER II.

ON HAND, OF COURSE.

THEY walked arm in arm up the palm groves toward the hotel. The sun was setting and the spell of the evening was over everything. Lights twinkled from the windows of the palatial building and the sob of music lingered on the still air. They changed their clothes and came down an hour later to join the merry crowd in the lobby.

Diana was enticed away from Arkwright by a group of ladies, and Arkwright joined some men friends. Among these was a young man of rather lazy disposition whom Arkwright had taken a liking to. His name was Dominick, and it was only recently that Arkwright learned he was the heir of the late Peter Dominick who had amassed several millions in the motor industry.

Young Dominick was in every way a charming fellow, generous to a fault, with a total lack of that conceit which not unusually accompanies twenty million dollars.

"That was a nifty little ship you were piloting this evening, Arkwright," he said. "Want to sell her?"

"No, thanks; it isn't mine. I bought it for my wife. There is nothing quite like it on this side of the Atlantic. It was the plaything of a dethroned king, I believe."

Dominick looked across at Diana who was laughing at some jest made by one of her companions.

"Some men have all the luck," he said.

"Luck! Just because I managed to pick up a royal——"

Dominick laughed and shook his head.

"I wasn't referring to that. I've got enough money to build a fleet of them if I wanted to. I was referring to what money cannot buy."

"I thought money could buy anything these days—even wives," said Arkwright, laughing.

"Of a kind. I am coming to realize it is a bit of a curse. The fact leaks out and all kinds of undesirable people come swarming around. They scare off the desirable ones. By the way, when am I

going to take you both in my new plane?"

"Never. I'll come with you any time, but you'll never get me to consent to Diana going up, with you at the helm."

Dominick looked hurt. "Those tales you have heard about me are wrong," he explained. "I never looped the loop with old Mrs. Rumford. We struck an air pocket, that was all. As for Colonel What's-his-name, the old fellow really believed I did a corkscrew dive just to alarm him."

"But you said you did, and every one saw you!"

Dominick flushed and looked round him cautiously. "The truth is that one of the controls went wrong. When he thought I was playing a giddy joke we were falling like blazes to earth. Great Scott! I saved his life two hundred feet from mother earth, and all he does is to warn people never to go flying with me."

"I should think so, too!"

"But that kind of thing might happen to the best pilot."

"Might it? Thanks. Then I change my mind."

"Then you'll both come?" queried Dominick.

"No, neither of us." He slapped his disappointed friend on the shoulder. "There goes the second gong. Diana is waiting for you to take her in to dinner."

Dominick was off like a shot. Arkwright was making toward Mrs. Rumford when from outside the window by which he had been sitting came a single word, "Pip!"

He turned swiftly and gazed out into the moonlit garden. Seeing nothing, he walked closer to the window. As he reached it a dark form stepped from the shadow of a palm. One look at it was enough. It was Captain Crash, as composed as ever.

"I thought it was you," he said. "Well, this is a coincidence. A very fortunate one too; you can help me."

Arkwright was temporarily rendered dumb. Mrs. Rumford, ruffled at this inexcusable neglect, found another escort and vanished with him into the din-

ing room. Arkwright was still staring at the apparition outside the window.

"Come out here," said Crash. "Don't stand like a statue!"

Arkwright clenched his teeth and choked back a savage retort. Nevertheless, the next moment he said: "I'll come!"

CHAPTER III.

A COOL PROPOSAL.

THEY stood facing each other some distance from the hotel. "Now we can talk," said Crash.

"Talk away."

"Listen, Pip——"

"That's enough," growled Arkwright. "I'm not Pip any longer."

Crash laughed easily. "Very well, Pip, Listen: I have a big thing on and your being here has solved a small problem. In the first place I want to borrow your wife——"

Arkwright gave an inarticulate cry of rage. He stepped close to Crash and brandished his fist.

"For Heaven's sake don't start any heroics," said Crash. "I only want to borrow her for a few hours——"

"Stop! If you mention her again, Crash, I'll knock you down."

Crash raised his eyebrows in mild astonishment. "Have you been drinking, Pip?"

"Drinking! Are you mad, man, to come here asking help of me, and putting insulting proposals? Even if it were possible I should assist you, do you imagine I would permit my wife to be implicated in robbery and swindling?"

"Who said I contemplated robbery or swindling?"

"What else would you contemplate?"

Crash sighed. "You're quite right, Pip. That's the name they give it." His brow suddenly contracted as he threw off his bantering mood. "So you now walk in the paths of righteousness, eh?"

"I am trying to make amends for the life which you by cunning and trickery forced me to lead."

"And we are no longer friends?"

"We are not. While I was with you

I kept faith with you. Now it's different. I warn you——"

Crash laughed mockingly. He shoved his hands deep in his pockets and glared at his former mate. "Do you think I care two pins for your warnings? Somehow I expected to find you reformed, but I didn't expect to find you so ungrateful. So you refuse to help me, eh?"

"I do. You can regard this meeting as a kind of armistice, Crash. We can no longer be anything to each other. You speak of ingratitude. It is because I am not ungrateful for certain little kindnesses that I do not give the alarm now, and let the authorities know that the man wanted by a dozen governments is here. It's my duty to do it."

"Then why the devil don't you?"

Arkwright shrugged his shoulders. He found himself again admiring the cool cheek of the man. He visualized Crash serving a long term with ordinary criminals. The prospect was not pleasant, though it might be just.

"Steer clear of me after this," he said hoarsely. "I want to forget you."

"You do, eh? You'll not find it easy unless you do as I tell you now."

The threat aroused Arkwright's anger. "Get out!" he said. "I'll give you ten minutes to take your ship out of these waters or——"

"Or you'll put them on my track?"

"I will."

"Very well; we shall see. I merely ask you to lend me your wife out of courtesy. I am somewhat conventional in these matters, you know. I fancy I can persuade Diana—that is her name, I believe—to come of her own free will—out of love for her husband. It would be unfortunate if all these delightful people were to learn certain facts about Mr. John Arkwright."

"You infernal scoundrel——"

But Crash was gone. He had utterly vanished from sight. Arkwright looked behind the tree before which Crash had been standing, but found nothing. He thought he heard the noise of feet on the gravel path in the distance, but even this faded away.

It was obvious that Crash was in a

hurry to carry out some deep scheme. His last words were very significant. He had wanted the help of a woman and had chosen Diana because he believed he could blackmail her into acquiescence. It would make things safe for him afterward, for Diana would keep quiet in her husband's interest. It was a very clever plot, but Arkwright knew his wife sufficiently well to feel that it could never come to fruition.

He went back to the hotel very reflective and a little apprehensive. He entered the dining room and found that dinner had commenced long since. At the end of the room was Dominick sitting alone at table. He stared at Arkwright in amazement.

"Did your wife find you?" he asked.

"My wife? I don't understand. Where is she?"

"I thought you sent for her for some reason. We were waiting for you here when a message came. She asked to be excused and went out. I thought it must be from you, and yet——"

Arkwright's face tightened as he heard this. Who could have sent the note but Crash? The meeting with Arkwright had been no coincidence, as he had pretended, but part of the plot to get Diana away in her husband's absence.

"Is something wrong?" queried Dominick.

"I—I don't know; at least, I can't explain." He waved away the waiter and walked rapidly from the room. A brief search of the hotel confirmed his worst suspicions. The porter, upon being questioned, averred that Diana had left the hotel.

He slipped on an overcoat and a cap and ran wildly down the avenue that led to the beach, but there was no sign of her in any direction. What could it mean but that she had been smuggled aboard the *Zig-Zag*, which he guessed was somewhere out at sea? The little dinghy was floating near the shore. He ran to the anchor, caught it up and threw it aboard. A few seconds and he was rowing hard in the direction of the motor boat.

With frenzied haste he clambered aboard, tore away the awning and started

the engine. Far away on the moonlit sea was a dark blur. He made for it full pelt. The sea spurted up, the wind lashed his face and the exhaust shrieked. The blur came nearer and nearer. At last he was near enough to recognize it; it was the *Zig-Zag*.

He slowed down a few minutes, at a loss to know how to act. To attempt to board the ship was foolish and would merely result in frustrating his own plans. Crash would like nothing better than to have him aboard, and yet Diana was there and in great need of him!

He could see smoke ascending from the funnels and realized that before long the *Zig-Zag* would be pelting along with all her prodigious speed. At any rate, he had something much speedier; that was a blessing. He came to a decision at last—a decision that caused his heart to thump a little. He turned the boat and made for the shore.

CHAPTER IV.

STARTING THE HUNT.

DINNER was over when Arkwright reached the hotel, and he hunted for Dominick, but Dominick was not to be found. A prolonged search was out of the question, so he ran to the telephone and put through a long-distance call to Washington. For the next half hour his nerves were on edge. He changed his clothes, and armed himself, and waited impatiently for the telephone bell. At last it came. He found himself speaking to a navy-department official. The gist of the conversation rendered that worthy incredulous to a degree.

"I'm not mad," argued Arkwright. "I know the *Zig-Zag*, and I tell you she is lying off Palm Beach at this moment. This is a case of abduction. Are you going to act or are you not?"

Would he hold the line? He held it impatiently, and the minutes passed. Arkwright grabbed the manager of the hotel who was passing. "We had a fireworks display the other night—have you any rockets left?" he asked.

"I think so."

8A TN

"Good! I want as many as you can provide—red ones, if possible."

"Certainly, but——"

"Please get them. This is a matter of grave importance to me. Hello, is that Washington? Good! What's that—you have a destroyer off St. Augustine? Splendid! You can get Crash this time if you act promptly. Wire the destroyer to proceed toward this place. Crash is bound to make north. I've got a fast motor boat and I'll put up red rockets every half hour. I'll hang on to him until dawn. Your men ought to get on to him before that."

It was done. Arkwright left the telephone with a great sigh. Hard as it was to do this thing, Crash himself had called it forth. It was going to be a fight to the death, and the odds were more or less even. Crash had the speed and the destroyer had the men and the armament. He had no doubts about Crash. When Crash saw the rockets he would know what they signified and would not hesitate to sink Arkwright if capture could be avoided by that means.

A boy turned up with a bundle of rockets. Arkwright took them and made for the beach. When he reached the motor boat he noticed that the dark blur on the horizon had disappeared. Wherever lay Crash's destination it was almost certainly north. He set the boat's nose in that direction and went dashing up the coast.

The moon acted as an ally. Almost at the full it shed a brilliance over the ocean, throwing into clear relief the miscellaneous craft which lay off the coast. In a few minutes he was through all this with nothing but sea and the dim coast line before him.

CHAPTER V.

THE SKIPPER SCORES.

HALF an hour passed and still nothing broke the clear line of the horizon. Arkwright's doubts were assuming large proportions when out of the distance came a small dot. Five more knots brought it up clear and sharp. He uttered a little grunt of relief and put the nose a point to the west.

No ocean greyhound ever ate up space as did this quivering mass of wood and iron in which he crouched. It seemed to possess wings. He overhauled the ship ahead knot by knot until no more than five knots divided them; then he slowed down and contented himself with hanging on. That he had been seen he had little doubt, but the *Zig-Zag* gave no sign and pounded on her way at nearly thirty knots.

The constellations swung across the heavens. The moon dropped slowly into the west. Arkwright waited until it was low on the horizon and then fired his first rocket. It soared high into the air and broke with a dull report, distributing a shower of brilliant red balls, which floated away astern.

Robbed of the illumination of the moon, he crept nearer to his quarry. Only three knots divided them now. He imagined Crash watching the pursuit through his night glasses, and chuckled as he realized the position. Another rocket fizzed and shot heavenward, turning the sea to blood as it broke. A minute later a bright ray smote through the darkness. It fell on the motor boat and then began to flash a message. Arkwright read it.

"Do that again and I'll sink you."

Arkwright immediately throttled down the engine, left the wheel and ignited another rocket. It turned out to be a green one, but it had its effect. No sooner did the glare subside than a bright flash came from the *Zig-Zag*, followed by a boom and a shriek. A shell fell less than a hundred yards away and sent the sea careering heavenward. It drew a little hiss of excitement from Arkwright's lips. The battle was on.

The blood coursed madly through his veins. He wished he possessed some means of signaling a fitting retort to Crash. Then he remembered a powerful electric torch which was in the tool box under the seat. He found it and flashed it until the beam of the searchlight answered. His message was summed up in these words: "The game is up."

The reply came instantly: "Remember who is aboard this boat."

The full significance of the words caused Arkwright's heart to beat apprehensively. In the thrill of the chase he had overlooked one important fact. Crash would fight, and if he opened fire on the destroyer it would surely reply. He set his teeth grimly as he realized the dangerous position of Diana.

Another rocket was fired and yet another. His eyes scanned the horizon while the bright illumination was on, but there was no sign of the destroyer. In another hour it would be daylight, and he had no means of making known his position once the darkness had gone.

He decided to run at full speed with a view to meeting the destroyer. The throttle was opened wide, and the slim craft literally leaped forward. Through the welter of foam he saw the black form of the *Zig-Zag* apparently rushing to meet him. He swerved in a wide curve and was soon level with it. Out of the darkness came the white beam of the searchlight. It followed him in his mad course.

Boom! A shell shrieked in his ears. He turned the boat at an acute angle and narrowly missed capsizing. The shell hit the sea not far from where he should have been had he taken a direct course. Crash was in earnest; that was evident.

The next shell was short, and before another could be fired he was a long distance ahead and out of the danger zone. He noticed that only one rocket remained, and he meant to reserve that for a bit. But fate ordained it otherwise. The power suddenly went off. There was a little misfiring, and then silence and a rapid pull-up. He learned the reason less than five seconds later; the gasoline had run out.

He left the wheel and fired the last rocket. The dawn was breaking, and with it came a low-lying sea mist. Behind him the *Zig-Zag* hove into sight. He sat down, impotent and beaten. The ship bore down on him, and soon he heard a bell ring. She slowed down and a boat was lowered. Arkwright recognized the faces of the rowers as it came nearer—at least those who were unseamanlike enough to look over their

shoulders. They grinned as they recognized him, but one man did not grin, and that man was none other than Sleet.

"So it's you!" he snarled. "Well, you said the game was up, and so it is—for you. Step aboard and keep your hands out of your pockets!"

Sleet had picked up a rifle from the bottom of the boat and was ready to deal with any display of tricks. Arkwright stepped into the boat and was instantly held by strong arms and searched. Sleet took the revolver and put it into his own pocket. The motor boat was taken in tow and the party made for the waiting *Zig-Zag*.

Crash was on deck when Arkwright arrived. He fixed him with his piercing eyes and without a word waved the sailors away. Arkwright stood glaring at him.

"So I win again?" he said with a smile.

"It isn't over yet."

"Isn't it? Quite right. I have yet to drop you overboard for the trick you tried to play on me. I fancy, though, I can use you to good effect. I am playing for big stakes this time, and the more actors the better the result. You shall play a part with Dominick and your charming wife——"

"Dominick!"

"It was Dominick I wanted. Your wife was merely the decoy. She brought Dominick along."

"You liar! She wouldn't do a dirty thing like that."

"Wouldn't she? Follow me and you shall see."

He led the way to his cabin and Arkwright followed. The door was bolted from outside. Arkwright entered and beheld Diana and Dominick. The former ran at him with a joyful cry.

"How—how did you get here? Jack, what does it all mean?"

Crash laughed and went out, slamming the door behind him.

Arkwright looked at Dominick intently. "There is something I don't understand," he said. "Did Diana bring you here?"

Diana looked at him in amazement.

Dominick's appearance on the ship puzzled her even now. To all her questions he had answered scarcely anything. He now decided to explain.

"I got this," he said, and handed Arkwright a letter with which was inclosed a small handkerchief. The letter ran:

DEAR MR. DOMINICK: I am in great trouble. Come to me at once—behind the shrubbery near the beach. Please do not mention this to my husband. I will explain later.

DIANA ARKWRIGHT.

"But Diana never wrote this!" exclaimed Arkwright. "This is Crash's handwriting."

He handed the note to his wife, who gasped as she read it.

"The scoundrel! So that is why he took my handkerchief! And you thought——"

Dominick looked confused. "I—I didn't know what to think. I hunted for Arkwright, but could not find him. I did not guess it could be a forgery, and yet it seemed so mysterious. When I got to the shrubbery I found a seaman there. He said you had gone to a ship in the bay and handed me the handkerchief as a kind of token. What could I do but go with him?"

"When I got aboard I found your wife down here," he went on, turning to Arkwright. "I was insane enough to think she had some motive in getting me here, and I fancied she thought I was the culprit. Mrs. Arkwright, I owe you the deepest of apologies."

"And I you," she replied with a smile. "But what is the real object of this abduction, and how did you get here, Jack?"

"I met Crash just as I was going in to dinner——"

"Crash!" ejaculated Dominick. "You don't mean that man is Captain Crash?"

"I do. He got Diana out of the hotel by sending her a faked message; he knew my handwriting. He got you here, Dominick, by similar means. I guessed what had happened to Diana, and followed the *Zig-Zag* in the motor boat. I ran out of gas and he got me. But it is you he wants, Dominick; he told me so. There is a big scheme in the

wind; what it is I can't guess, but he wanted a woman to play a part, and now he imagines I, too, can assist him to rob you."

"Rob me?"

"It must be that. You own several millions of money and Crash wants it. I tell you that when he wants a thing he usually gets it."

"But I don't carry millions of money with me. It's all tied up in stock, and where do you and your wife come in?"

CHAPTER VI.

A MOMENT OF ACTION.

ARKWRIGHT wrinkled his brows. The problem was beyond him. Somewhere Crash was going to play for high stakes, and he knew enough about Crash to realize he did not waste his time on wildcat schemes.

Suddenly the throb of the engine changed in rhythm. Arkwright ran to the porthole and looked out.

"He's going about," he muttered. "That's queer!"

The turning movement of the ship brought into his field of view the cause of this maneuver. Coming out of the mist was a sleek gray destroyer moving at terrific speed.

"By heavens—they must have seen my signals after all!"

Dominick ran to him. "What is it—a ship?"

"A government boat. I put a call through to Washington and this is the result. Crash is going to run, but look at the speed of the destroyer. He can't get away from her. Dominick, we've got to do something or we'll never see land again."

Dominick, who saw hope of escape in the pursuing boat, stared at him vacantly.

"Man, don't you understand?" went on Arkwright. "The commander of that boat wants to put paid to Crash's account. If Crash doesn't heave to he'll sink us. We've got to find a way out."

Dominick pulled a wry face. Diana came close to the excited figure of her husband.

"Will he fight?" she queried.

"Crash? He'll fight until the *Zig-Zag* is beneath the sea. This is horrible. Diana, I got you into this fix. I was mad, furious with him. I overlooked the fact that every soul aboard the *Zig-Zag* might be doomed."

She smiled bravely. "At any rate we are together," she said.

"Yes—yes. Dominick, try that door!"

He sprang to the porthole and looked astern. He could just distinguish a signal from the pursuing ship. It was a command to Crash to heave to.

"The door's bolted outside," said Dominick.

Arkwright picked up a chair and wrenched off two stout legs. He handed one to Dominick and the latter took it, his eyes flashing with the light of battle.

"What's the game?" he asked.

"We've got to rush things. The door will fall under our combined weight. When we get through make aft where the two guns are. If you are quick you can put them out of action before they get you again."

"How?"

"The sights—smash 'em. He's got no spare sets."

Dominick stared at him, wondering how he came to possess the knowledge.

"What about me?" murmured Diana.

Arkwright took her hands and looked at her wistfully. "This is the hardest part of all, dear. You've got to run great risks, but it's the only way."

"What am I to do?"

"Count twenty after we are gone and then run up on deck and jump overboard. The destroyer will pick you up."

Her face blanched but she inclined her head. "And you?" she asked.

"I have business in the engine room."

"But suppose something happens to you—"

"We've got to take risks. One thing is certain; if we stay here we are doomed. Crash has no choice against that destroyer. It will blow him sky-high. Dominick, are you ready?"

Dominick nodded grimly and Diana relinquished her husband's hand and stood back.

"Now!" said Arkwright.

They ran together at the door. It did not yield at the first assault but shook at its fastenings; the next time it gave way. Dominick ran up the stairs with the agility of a cat and Arkwright made for the engine room. His object was to stop the engine in some way, and he looked about him for some heavy missile which he could hurl into the machinery. He saw nothing suitable, but he was approaching the magazine when a whistle sounded from the deck. He leaped into cover as four men who were handling shells put them down and ran down the corridor.

The magazine door was open and Arkwright dashed toward it. Shells and fuses were all over the floor, but these were useless to him. His eyes gleamed as they fell on some long rolls reposing on a bin. He took one of them carefully and stripped the wrapping from it; it was a stick of dynamite.

A shot rang out from the deck, and Arkwright guessed that Dominick was the cause of it. With a grim face, he made for the engine room, knocking down two men in his course. He flung open the door and beheld the grimy figure of McIntosh with an oil can in his hand.

"Mon, what are ye doing here?" gasped that worthy.

"Get back!" yelled Arkwright.

"Are ye mad?"

"Get back!"

McIntosh saw the black stick raised, and like a wise man bolted down the gallery. Arkwright flung the terrible missile into the mass of cranks and leaped back through the door. A tremendous explosion followed. He fell on his face as the ship lurched, and dense smoke penetrated through the broken door. Then he yelled with delight as he realized that the engine had stopped. Through the smoke tottered the irate figure of McIntosh toward him—a long spanner gripped in his hand.

Arkwright made for the deck. He reached it only to come up against the fierce figure of Crash. His eyes were like blazing coals and his face was pallid with suppressed rage.

"You——" he began.

He put out his hands as Arkwright shot across space toward him. In another second they were clutched in each other's arms in fierce combat.

CHAPTER VII.

PLANNING AN ADVENTURE.

THE fight was terrific. Both men were strong beyond the average. Arkwright had the advantage of youth and agility, but Crash counterbalanced these in sheer physical strength. Somewhere behind came Sleet with a revolver in his hand. He raised it and was about to fire when Crash's foot caught him on the stomach and stretched him flat on the deck.

"Stand away!" he roared.

Several other members of the crew slunk back. Their eyes were filled with horror not at the fight between the two men, but at the pelting destroyer astern. The *Zig-Zag* was almost at a standstill, and they saw prison walls and iron bars approaching. Sleet staggered to his feet.

"They're on us, cap'n!" he yelled.

The terrified note added fuel to Crash's energy. With a terrific effort, he raised Arkwright from his feet and hurled him down on the deck. Stunned and bruised, the former mate lay still for a second.

"Get him below—quick!" ordered Crash. "They're putting out boats. Arm—arm and fight, all hands!"

Arkwright recovered his senses to find Crash sitting at the table staring at him.

He stood up and gazed out of the portholes. The destroyer was standing off, and between it and the *Zig-Zag* were two boats filled with sailors.

"The game's up, Crash," he said quite calmly now.

"And what then?"

"You brought it on yourself. You have only yourself to blame."

"So have you."

"What do you mean?"

Crash laughed bitterly and placed a revolver on the table before him. "Don't get alarmed," he said. "I'm not going to shoot you. Oh no; this is *our* funeral."

Arkwright read the deadly intent in his eyes. The sharp report of rifles rang out from the deck. He turned to see one of the rowers in the nearer boat collapse over his oar. Then came more reports, and a volley from the oncoming boats, followed by groans. Yet Crash sat there watching him coolly. His behavior was amazing.

Crash read Arkwright's thoughts and laughed. "No use for me up there," he said. "Your friend put my guns out of action, and those poor devils of mine are having a last nibble. Let 'em enjoy themselves. They'll be a long time dead."

"Dead! They're mad to resist. It'll put years on their sentence."

Crash's eyes bored into him. "Can you add a day to eternity?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? Do you think I am the kind of man to see my ship boarded and taken in tow? Do you think I could live the life of a felon in a prison cell? Do you imagine those fellows out yonder are going to put me in a cage and gloat over me?" He smiled grimly. "You always had a touch of religion about you, Arkwright. If it still holds good better say a prayer or two. We're very near Davy Jones."

Arkwright glanced at the revolver. "Murder and suicide, eh?"

"Wrong. I have never believed in half measures. There are more dignified methods of writing 'finis.' I have always had a devilish gift for sensing things in advance. I sensed this precise situation last night. Well, I made preparations. Look!"

He pointed to the side of the cabin. Arkwright saw a small white coil close to the electric-light cable. It had a loose end near the floor and ran up through the wall.

"It runs fast," said Crash. "A foot a second and there are sixty odd feet of it—right down to the magazine."

A fusillade of shots came from outside, then a bellowing voice, evidently through a megaphone. More firing—and silence. Crash took out a match box and struck a match. "Finis!" he said.

"Stand still—or I'll shoot you. We go on another adventure together—our greatest."

CHAPTER VIII.

HIS LAST VOYAGE.

CAPTAIN CRASH reached out with his right arm and touched the fuse. It spluttered and the red glow ran up the wall. Arkwright watched it, temporarily paralyzed. Crash flourished the revolver and laughed.

"And it was all through a woman," he said. "She has sent you and me to kingdom come. How do you feel now? I had a wonderful coup on hand when you butted in. I'll tell you now. There is just time. I was going to be king of—"

Arkwright suddenly fell forward and under the table. His hands seized Crash's ankles and pulled him down to the ground. Two seconds later he was through the door. A smell of saltpeter met his nostrils. The fuse was burning far away now. In three leaps he was on deck, battering away at obstructive figures. He reached the side and saw the first boat near the *Zig-Zag*.

"Put about!" he yelled. "Pull for your lives!"

Like an arrow he clove through the air, down, down into the green depths. He rose twenty yards from the ship and struck out with all his strength.

A terrific explosion suddenly rent the air. Arkwright had a vision of leaping flame and hurtling machinery. He dived frantically to avoid being struck by the debris. When he rose to the surface the *Zig-Zag* was gone. In less than a minute the sea had engulfed her.

All around were figures struggling in the disturbed water. The boat nearer the sunken ship had been capsized by the explosion and the second boat was making for the late occupants. Arkwright swam toward it and was dragged aboard. A thick cloud of smoke enwrapped the eerie scene, blotting out the destroyer. One by one the crew of the capsized boat were recovered, but of the *Zig-Zag's* crew only dead men could be seen.

The boat made in the direction of the

destroyer and soon emerged from the smoke pall, under her very bows. Standing on her deck, clad in oilskins, were Diana and Dominick looking anxiously down into the boat. They both waved their hands as they recognized Arkwright's drenched figure.

"Is that the fellow who put the wasp into Crash's engine room?" queried a young gunnery officer.

Dominick nodded.

"Well, he robbed me of the pleasure of trying our new guns. But it comes to the same thing in the long run—and is more economical."

The boat discharged most of its passengers and set out again with a view to recovering bodies. It returned later with eight of them. Of all the crew of the *Zig-Zag* not one remained alive. The majority of them had gone down with the ship never to rise again. Retribution had been swift, and merciful. Arkwright was gripping his wife's hands.

"Thank Heaven you are safe," he said huskily. "And you, Dominick."

"I had a narrow squeak," replied Dominick. "I reached the guns just as they were going to fire, and smashed the sights into smithereens. That did it; they went crazy. Some one let off a revolver and it nearly got me. How I got overboard I shall never be able to discover. I found Diana in the water swimming like a fish. But what happened to you?"

"I was caught by Crash," said Arkwright. "Poor devil! I can't help feeling sorry for him!" He stared at the smoke which was drifting eastward. Two lines of a poem rang in his brain—lines that Crash had been fond of quoting:

Send me a ninth great peaceful wave to
drown and roll me under
To the dark tunny fishes' home, where the
drowned galleons are!

Crash was doubtless there now—under the green waters that he loved so well and on whose bosom most of his roving, law-defying life had been spent. He looked up to find Diana looking at him wistfully. For several minutes they

stood by the rail gazing silently over the waters.

Presently Dominick came forward murmuring an apology. "The captain has sent to say breakfast is waiting below," he said. "Diana—may I?"

She accepted his proffered arm with a smile and walked away. She glanced over her shoulder to observe Arkwright still standing there staring at the wreckage on the sea astern—the last visible signs of the ship of adventure.

"Come!" she pleaded, extending her other arm. He sighed and took it, holding it in a grip which brought to her a sense of infinite comfort.

A few yards away the wireless operator was sending out news that in a few hours would be voiced by a thousand newsboys in a hundred great cities. Captain Crash had paid the supreme penalty. Over him washed the eternal sea.

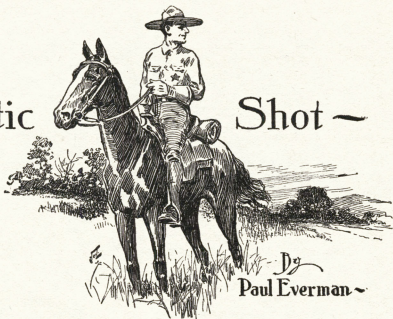
Court of St. James

WHY is reference made so often to the Court of St. James? Why designate the American ambassador by saying that he is sent to that court? The reason is that St. James' Palace is the technical court of the British government. From the reign of William of Orange, which ended in 1702, to that of Victoria, the red-brick building on the north side of St. James' Park was the London residence of English sovereigns. Although the more beautiful and larger Buckingham Palace is now the town residence of the king, many functions are held in the older building, which dates back to the reign of Henry the Eighth, in the sixteenth century.

The use of the term ambassador to England is not accurate, because the ambassador is accredited not to the King of England, but to the king of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Emperor of India, and so forth. An ambassador to the Court of St. James has the right to ask for an audience with the king; envoys and ministers plenipotentiary are accredited to the government and may deal only with the secretary of state for foreign affairs.

Cryptic

Shot -



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

IN THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE.

RIDING a big, bay horse, a broad, grizzled, old man came pounding through Stag City. Before a square building of unplastered, gray adobe that thrust itself to the very edge of the little cattle town's stringy main street, he pulled up his horse. "Fred," he called sharply.

Sheriff Fred Sutherland came springing out of the low doorway—a stocky man with a rugged, young face. "What's the matter, dad?"

"Trouble, son. I've come to give myself up."

"What do you mean?"

"Young 'Bud' Woolsey's on his way to town to swear out a warrant for my arrest. He says I shot his father."

The old man dismounted. He stood about a head taller than his vigorous son, but in appearance the two had much in common: the deep cleft in the chin; the stanch black eyes; the breadth of body and its muscular activity.

The sheriff turned. "Come on inside, dad," he said briefly.

Tossing his big black Stetson in a corner of the room, Carter Sutherland gave a tug or two at his grizzled mustache, and waited stolidly for the other to question him.

The sheriff frowned, and crossed one putteed leg over the other. Then he said abruptly, "How'd it happen?"

"Put me under arrest," his father insisted.

"All right; consider yourself under arrest." The sheriff's voice was grim. "I suppose your trouble with Woolsey has gone from bad to worse."

"Just about."

"You've both been to blame," said the sheriff bluntly. "Woolsey didn't come at you right about the water; and you've been bullheaded with him."

"It's my own business," retorted the other defiantly. "I've got my own ranch, all paid for, and it's a good one, with lots of grama and good water. Am I to blame just because George Woolsey's got no water but a few bad springs and a little crick that dries up

every time there comes a little hot spell?

"No," the old man continued; "and I ain't to blame for that big mortgage that's about to be foreclosed on him. Nor I ain't to blame for this drought that's cuttin' off his Whitefaces like flies. The drought's took a few o' my cattle, too, but I ain't blamin' him for it—though I will blame him if he cuts any more fence and lets any more o' his cattle in on my water."

Fred Sutherland shook his head. "You could have helped him out with a little water. It wouldn't have hurt you much."

"Dang it, Fred, he didn't come at me right. He made me mad; said I'd be responsible for his failure if I didn't let him run in some of his stock on my land."

"I know. Woolsey's so worried that he isn't exactly responsible. But what's this about your fence being cut?"

The old man's black eyes flashed. "Why, Woolsey's men have been cuttin' the fence down by Pasture Five, where my best water is. They let in a couple o' hundred head o' cattle night before last. I sent Titus over to tell Woolsey that if I caught him or any o' his men cuttin' any more fence, I'd blow holes in 'em. Titus said Woolsey talked pretty rough to him, and I'm surprised that some shootin' didn't come off then, for Titus ain't exactly timid. There's a cowman for you, Fred!"

"Titus is a good man," admitted the sheriff, a bit grudgingly. "He makes a good foreman."

"Just as good as you were," declared the old man. "He don't talk much, but I can see that he's had the experience it takes to know the business."

"He's a good man," said the other again; "though he ain't exactly the kind of a fellow one can be sociable with. But go on. I want to know just how you came to shoot Woolsey."

"Well, I sent the boys out ridin' fences all last night. And without tellin' anybody, I slipped down in Pasture Five all by myself. You see, I had a hunch that there'd be more fence cut, and that it'd be right near water. I

hid down there for an hour, and couldn't see much on account o' the dark—it does beat all how it can cloud up in this country without rainin' a drop. Anyhow, I heard a noise down about fifty yards from me, and there I could see somebody standin' by the fence. Why, Fred, I could even hear his pliers snap! So I up with my gun and ventilated him."

"It was Woolsey?"

"I couldn't see who it was. He jumped on his horse and left in a kind o' hurry." Carter Sutherland let out a dry chuckle that shook his thick torso violently.

The sheriff rose, and took a few slow steps about the room. "I suppose you were actin' within your rights. But it's bad business."

"Sure it's bad business, though I didn't mean it to be quite so bad. And I can't quite figure it out—all of it."

"Just what?"

"Well, I heard this morning that Woolsey's got a forty-four bullet in his side. I didn't use no forty-four, Fred; I used a shotgun, and it was loaded with bird shot!"

Fred Sutherland came to an abrupt stop. "Then it wasn't Woolsey you shot!"

"Well, I guess Woolsey claims it was me that shot him. That kid o' his came rarin' down close to the fence this mornin' and yelled to one o' the boys that he was goin' to have me arrested, and that if you helped me skin out o' it, he'd see that I got lynched good and proper."

"Maybe Woolsey's taking it for granted that you shot him, because of your threat yesterday."

"Don't know about that. I don't even know just how Woolsey claims he came to be shot. But I thought I'd better come on in and give myself up, so that nobody could say that I was a privileged character just because my son was elected sheriff by a big majority vote in the election last fall. I want you to do your duty as you think it ought to be done, Fred. I ain't here as your father now; I'm just your prisoner."

The sheriff smiled a bit at the old man's vehemence. "Dad, I don't believe George Woolsey is the kind of a man that'd cut another man's fence. You can't prove that he cut it, can you? You nor none of your hands saw him or any of his men do the cuttin', did you?"

"Don't get foolish, Fred," retorted the old man. "Who else would cut it?"

"Well, I can't believe Woolsey did it—himself. There's only one man in the Woolsey outfit that I'd suspect very much," he added slowly.

Carter Sutherland snorted. "Yes; that young fool might—"

A clatter from the street interrupted him. Four men on horseback swept up to the door, dismounted, and came surging into the room.

CHAPTER II.

CLASH OF FACTIONS.

THE leader of the four men who crowded through the door was a slender young chap with fiery, black eyes glaring from a boyish face. He thrust himself toward the Sutherlands. "You're framin' it all up, are you?" he cried hotly. "Goin' to get the old man off, are you? A man could kill the president and get by with it in this county!—all he'd need would be a son in the sheriff's office."

Fred Sutherland's jaw came upward and out. "Better keep your mouth shut, Bud. You talk too much. It won't help your dad any for you to go blowin' round."

"I'll talk as much as I please. This is supposed to be a free country, though by rights it ain't—not by a blamed sight! But we're goin' to see that justice is done in this case. Ain't I right, boys?"

The three men behind him agreed with him emphatically.

"Well, what you got it in your head to do?" the sheriff asked patiently.

"I want your dad arrested and thrown in jail. And then I want a fair trial. And if my dad dies, I want your dad strung up; if he don't die I want your dad to go to the penitentiary, where he belongs. Sabe?"

The sheriff glanced at his father, who sat grimly by the window, sprayed by the yellow sunlight; at the three Woolsey cow hands, fidgety and bad-tempered; at the slender boy, who returned his glance defiantly.

"Bud, my dad's already under arrest," the sheriff said. "In due time he'll be in jail. The court will settle the rest o' the matter. You can depend on me doin' my duty. If you'll cite me a case where I didn't do my duty, I'll be much obliged."

Bud Woolsey turned on the old man. "Sutherland, why'd you have to lame dad up like you did? Wasn't you satisfied with refusin' him water when his cattle was droppin' off by the fifties every day? Mebbe he'd had a chance to get out from under that mortgage if you'd only helped him with a little water. But you wasn't satisfied even to see him go under. No; you wanted to fix him for good, and you jest about done it."

Carter Sutherland's broad face flushed, but he kept his temper.

Bud Woolsey took another step forward, his hands working excitedly. "But I'm tellin' you," he burst out, "I'm tellin' you that if Fred helps you skin out o' this, you'll get yours! Why, I've got a notion right now——"

There came a rush of steps outside. A thick cloud of dust swirled into the little room, and was followed by a half dozen crowding men.

A tall man with a lean chin jutting out aggressively from a reddish-brown face strode up to the sheriff. "Need any help here, Fred?" he inquired, with a frown in Bud Woolsey's direction.

"No, thanks, Titus," the sheriff answered. "I'm handlin' this case all alone, without deputies."

"I thought maybe this kid here was bothering you."

"No; he'll get out when I tell him to. I don't need any help."

Crowding Bud Woolsey aside, Titus turned to Carter Sutherland. "Hello, Mr. Sutherland!"

"Hello, Jim! I didn't tell you to bring the boys in here, did I?" There was dignity in the old man's tone.

"No, sir," the foreman replied. "We didn't know you had left till Mrs. Sutherland told me just a little while ago. I rounded up the boys and came on in. We've decided that you're not going to be arrested."

"What's that?" the old man said sharply. "This is my business and none of yours. I'm already under arrest."

"Ain't this a swell, put-up job?" came Bud Woolsey's voice, from a corner of the room, where he and his men stood watchfully. "It's goin' off fine, jest like it'd been practiced."

Titus ignored this remark. He faced the old man. "Mr. Sutherland, you only gave Woolsey what was coming to him, and we're not going to let you go to jail."

"And we're goin' to see that he does go to jail," shouted Bud Woolsey, advancing a pace.

Fred Sutherland planted himself stockily between the two factions. Through the open collar of his olive-drab shirt the cords of his firm, full neck stood out, signaling his growing impatience and anger.

"You men," he said distinctly—"all of you—get out! This man is my prisoner, and what happens to him now is none of your business, Titus, nor is it any of yours, Bud. It is some of my business. This is the sheriff's office. I'm the sheriff. Now get out, all of you!"

Titus had turned to his followers. "How about it, boys?" he cried, but the sheriff's big shoulder sent him staggering toward the door.

"Get out! You too, Bud—all of you men!"

Jerking, shoving, he finally crowded them all through the door. In the rush, Titus stumbled to the ground, and Bud Woolsey fell over him.

His face twitching in pain, Titus sprang up. His right fist flashed out. Bud was only halfway to his feet, and the blow sent him sprawling.

Rolling over, Bud Woolsey leaped to his feet. He whipped a gun from its holster. There came a violent roar.

Titus reeled back. A trickle of red showed on his right wrist. Out of the

wild mêlée that followed, Bud Woolsey and his three followers leaped to their horses and thundered away.

Sutherland's ranch hands rushed toward their horses. Out of the dust, Fred Sutherland met them, flinging them roughly aside one by one.

"Stay back, there! There's been enough foolishness for one day. Titus brought all this on himself!"

Holding his wrist, Titus came forward. "I want that young scoundrel arrested, Sutherland! I'll swear out a warrant."

"All right. Swear it out. I'll arrest him. But you and the rest of the U-T boys leave him alone—understand? Get back to the ranch, and stay there."

"It ain't right," growled one of the hands.

"It is right," called Carter Sutherland from the doorway. "Do what Fred tells you. Where did he hit you, Jim?"

"Wrist," answered Titus briefly. "Is there a doctor in town?"

"Is it that bad? Well, you'll find a doctor down the street there."

His reddish-brown face almost calm, Titus turned to the lingering men. "Get on back to the ranch, boys. I'll follow later."

CHAPTER III.

THE OTHER SIDE.

IT was mid-afternoon when Fred Sutherland rode out toward Woolsey's ranch to arrest Bud Woolsey. A pasty smear of sky all but hid the sun—a mock harbinger of the needed rain.

The long spring drought had left its ghastly mark on Woolsey's land. Always dangerously dry in dry weather, now its broad flats lay dun and lifeless, haunted, it seemed by gaunt, staring Herefords.

Sutherland shook his head. "Woolsey's got nerve, breedin' up the way he has. Somebody said he had about two hundred well-bred heifers from last year's crop. But it takes water to raise cattle."

As he galloped on down the flats toward the Woolsey ranch house, he saw a cow struggling in the ashen bog of

dismal Tom Creek, while a calf stood near, bawling weakly.

The sheriff rode on, up to the tumbling adobe ranch house, and went inside.

From his bed, George Woolsey glanced up feebly. He was a thin, tired-faced, little man with snow-white hair. "Well, Fred," he said slowly, "I reckon you come out here after Bud. He told me he'd pinked Jim Titus a bit."

The big sheriff sat down on the bed. "How are you, Mr. Woolsey?"

"Oh, I'll pull out in good shape—with no thanks to your daddy." There was a trace of bitterness in his voice.

"Dad's in jail now. I've heard his side, and now I want to hear yours."

"You're square, Fred."

"And you're game, Mr. Woolsey."

Propping a pillow behind him, the little man began his story. "Of course you know the talk that's been goin' round, about them fences bein' cut. Well, if there was any fences cut, it was against my orders. And when your dad sent Titus over here to tell me that he'd blow holes through me if I cut any more fence, it made me mad. But after Titus left, I got to thinkin'. And that night, I rode down toward the boundary. You see, I thought mebbe some of my boys *was* cuttin' fence. I thought mebbe—well, you know Bud's a headstrong kid, Fred."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, before I got to the fence down by your dad's Pasture Five, I saw a fellow standin' there by 'his horse. I called to him, thinkin' mebbe it was Bud. And the next thing I knowed, I had a bullet plowin' through my side."

"You couldn't see who the fellow was?"

"No, but I had a pretty good idea it was—your dad."

"Because of the threat he had made through Titus?"

The little man nodded. "I rode back to the house and it was about all I could do to make it, for I was gettin' pretty weak."

Sutherland leaned over. "Mr. Woolsey, I'm tryin' to get to the bottom of

this mess. Would you mind answering a few personal questions? All right. Just what condition are you in financially?"

"I'm just about down and out," he answered bitterly. "I've been breedin' up, and it's cost me money. There's a big mortgage on the place, and if I can't pay up within a month, I know I'll be foreclosed on."

"Who's got the mortgage?"

"The Great Southern Land & Cattle Company. If it was just one man holdin' it, mebbe I could coax him to hold off till after fall; but when you're dealin' with a corporation it's different. The company's agent won't give me no time. If I knowed where to go, I'd take up the matter with some of the officers of the company—"

Woolsey went on with his story. Some Hereford raisers in the northern part of the State had promised him help; but he was afraid that because of the drought they'd change their minds. The two windmills he had set up were now useless, for the wells had gone dry. His grass was playing out, and the hungry cattle were turning to the white loco weed.

Sutherland walked to the window, and cast a long glance across the sun-scorched country. "Who is this Great Southern Land & Cattle Company?"

"They haven't been doin' business long in this State. I hear they've got a ranch or two down in Texas."

"Listen here," said Sutherland thoughtfully; "If dad would let you in on his grass and water, you'd still be able to save most of your herd, wouldn't you? Good. Would these Hereford men still help you, in that case?"

"I think they would. But I ain't countin' any on Carter Sutherland helpin' me, after him tryin' to kill me." Woolsey's eyes flashed. "I'm much obliged to you though, Fred. I reckon you'll be goin' after Bud now. You'll find him down at Cuervo." Woolsey's voice showed an attempt at cheerfulness.

"I'm sorry about Bud."

"Well, I'd rather have him in jail than have him up to some more devil-

ment. That's a bad bunch down at Cuervo, and they've got lots o' bad whisky. Don't shoot him unless you have to, and don't let him shoot you. He's got his mad up. So long, Fred."

CHAPTER IV.

HIS SUDDEN ARRIVAL.

IT was sundown when Fred Sutherland returned to Stag City. At his office he found a friend of Carter Sutherland waiting to go on the latter's bond.

"I don't want anybody on my bond," protested the old man, when they came to him at the jail. "I don't want nobody sayin' that I got off easy jest because I'm Fred Sutherland's daddy."

"It's your privilege to get out on bond, the same as any other prisoner's," answered the sheriff. "The judge has ruled that you're to be held to await the outcome of Woolsey's injuries, subject to release on bail. And he's set your bail at five hundred dollars. No use stayin' here. The law treats everybody alike."

After the older Sutherland and his friend had left, the sheriff snatched a bit of supper and rode away toward Cuervo.

"When Bud gets some whisky in him, he may decide to raise the devil more than ever," he thought. "Wouldn't be a bit surprised if he'd try to break into the jail and lynch dad. That Cuervo bunch don't exactly love me anyhow, and they'd be ready to help. So I guess it's just as well that dad's out on bail."

Cuervo was a straggly little Mexican town of low adobe buildings that stretched in interminable rows along the dusty road. As the sheriff rode cautiously into the town, carousing voices led him to a brilliantly lighted room, formerly a saloon, that was part of a long adobe house.

Among the half dozen horses standing outside, he noticed a trim little mare. Its coal-black coat gleamed in the glare of light. It was Bud Woolsey's favorite mount.

Dismounting quietly, the sheriff slipped into the shadows near the door.

Loud voices, shouting and arguing, burst from within. Sutherland listened.

"We won't let no sheriff arrest you, Bud!" came one voice, humid but reassuring.

"That's Gradle," thought Sutherland. He had arrested Gradle two weeks before on a bootlegging charge. "And there's Carson and Bittner—all old friends of mine! Bud, you're in bad company, with these bootleggers and thieves and wife-beaters."

"I reckon I won't need no help from any o' you boys," Bud Woolsey was declaring. "I don't reckon Fred Sutherland cares much for my kind o' medicine, after seein' what I dosed out to Titus this mornin'."

Sutherland crept to the very edge of the door. He could see Bud's back toward him, only a dozen feet away.

"If he'd wanted me very bad," Bud Woolsey was continuing, "I reckon he'd found me by this time."

With a single leap Sutherland sprang into the room. His hand found the gun in Bud's holster, and tore it free. He covered the bewildered men with the gun. With his left hand he jerked Bud Woolsey from the chair.

"Keep your hand off that gun, Gradle! Stand back there, Bittner! This kid's my prisoner."

Keeping a firm grasp on his captive's wrist, the sheriff dragged him to the door. "You're drunk, Bud. You couldn't lick a cat right now. Stand back there, men! Stand where you are till I say the word!"

He backed out of the door with his prisoner. And by the time the cowed men dared to rush outside, they found their horses scattered, while the sheriff and Bud Woolsey had a good start in the direction of Stag City.

CHAPTER V.

STARTLING NEWS.

AS he thought things over the next morning, Fred Sutherland came to the conclusion that he had successfully accomplished the detail work of his office, inasmuch as he had arrested both

his father and Bud Woolsey. He doubted, however, if he had done much toward settling the trouble between Woolsey and his father; and this, after all, was the vital thing.

Over long-distance telephone, he called the State capitol, and of a certain State officer made exhaustive inquiries concerning the Great Southern Land & Cattle Company—its holdings, officers, stockholders, and assets.

"If I knowed where to go, I'd take up the matter with some o' the officers of the company——" George Woolsey had said.

When Fred Sutherland hung up the receiver, he was shaking his head. A curious light shone in his black eyes, and for a moment he sat there thoughtfully.

Then he sprang up, out of the door, and strode rapidly down the street. He had decided to make what might be termed, so far as he was concerned, a professional call.

About fifteen minutes later he galloped away toward the U-T, his father's ranch.

He did not see the man who was watching him from behind an adobe wall. This man mounted a horse and rode north, in the opposite direction from that in which Sutherland had gone. He looked to be one of the same men who had been with Bud Woolsey the night before—the man whom Sutherland had called Gradle.

As Fred Sutherland rode into the confines of his father's U-T Ranch, he could not help noticing the difference between its fairly prosperous prairies and the stricken flats of George Woolsey. The cattle showed it—they were fatter, sleeker, and more contented, though perhaps not so well-bred.

While Woolsey was dependent on capricious springs and a small creek for his water, the U-T had a large equipment consisting of surface tanks, a few productive springs, and five windmills. The grass, too, showed a great difference. Though both grama and salt grass were baked out to some extent by the fiery sun, nevertheless the U-T range still showed green in some

of the draws; but Woolsey's range was a dun stretch of dreariness throughout.

"How many cattle has dad lost to date?" the sheriff asked Titus, the foreman, as he swung from his horse before the U-T bunk house.

"Ten or twelve. All wet cows that got bogged down. We pulled them out, but they couldn't make a live of it."

Sutherland shook his head. "Woolsey's losin' fifty a day. His cattle have turned to loco now, since they haven't got enough grass."

He went on into the ranch house. Carter Sutherland was seated before the empty fireplace, quietly smoking his long-stemmed, black pipe.

The old man looked up. "Did you arrest Woolsey's kid?"

"Yes. Found him down at Cuervo, with a jag on. He's in jail now, sobering up." The sheriff dropped into a chair beside his father. "Dad, I was over to see George Woolsey yesterday. He'll get well; but he's goin' busted unless you let in his cattle on your grass and water."

"No use askin' that, Fred," answered the old man inflexibly. "And there ain't no use goin' deep into the matter. You know how nasty him and his kid have been. You didn't look to see if he had any bird shot in his back, did you? No; if George Woolsey sent you over here to ask me to let his cattle in, jest go back and tell him I said to go plumb to——"

"Listen here." The sheriff gripped the other's arm, his voice low but forceful. "You didn't see Woolsey cuttin' the fence, did you? No. And if I prove to you that Woolsey didn't do it, and that he didn't have anything to do with it, wouldn't you change your mind then? Couldn't him and you make up? Couldn't you let his cattle in then?"

Carter Sutherland shrugged. "But you can't prove that somebody else done it."

"But if I could prove it," the sheriff said insistently.

"Well," his father replied slowly, "I'm square. If you could prove it, and

Woolsey'd come at me right, I'd sure be—"

A sharp, clattering ring drew the old man to the telephone.

"Somebody wants you, Fred."

Fred Sutherland took the receiver. "Hello! Oh, that you, Chapman? No! Well, hold out, Chapman! Hold out!" He turned swiftly. "That Cuervo bunch Bud was with last night is in Stag City! They're braggin' that they're goin' to take Bud out of the jail. Chapman's the only deputy in town. Come on, dad."

He ran out of the house. Carter Sutherland followed.

"Titus," bawled the sheriff, "how many hands around here that you can pick up right away?"

Titus came swiftly from the bunkhouse door. "What's up?"

"That bunch from Cuervo's goin' to try a jail delivery. I may need some help."

Titus turned. "You hands," he called, "Jack, Tom, Mick—come here! Where's Haggerty? Cut a horse apiece—a fast one."

CHAPTER VI.

A BIT OF GUN PLAY.

FIVE minutes later they swept away at a furious pace, eight of them. The Sutherlands and Titus led. Behind came the U-T hands.

"I thought you were goin' to manage this case all alone, Fred," came Carter Sutherland's voice, above the pound and roar of hoofs. "Thought you didn't want none of us mixed up in it."

The sheriff shot up a quick glance. "Never mind. This is a dirty mess, and I'm ready to settle it up good and proper right now."

On they sped, like a great, jagged arrow under a camouflage of pale, thick dust. Two miles, three, four—and Stag City was in sight.

The sheriff pulled up a bit, and turned in his saddle. "Now, all you boys stay 'way back," he cried. "I'll lead this little party, with dad and Titus comin' next. Sabe?"

Down Stag City's main street they

clattered. Before the squat little jail was crowded a small body of men, surging, haranguing, threatening.

The sheriff charged into the crowd. His horse bowled men right and left. His gun swept a large semicircle. The U-T men stayed back and allowed Carter Sutherland and Titus to ride to the side of the sheriff.

The latter turned toward the jail. Behind one of the barred windows stood Bud Woolsey, defiant as usual. At his side was Chapman, the deputy.

"Sobered up, are you, Bud? Your friends didn't quite make it."

"Look out, Fred!" yelled Chapman suddenly, and reached for his gun.

The sheriff whirled. His gun blazed. Far to the rear of the muttering crowd, Gradle the bootlegger reeled back, his weapon falling to the ground.

"Confound it, Gradle," shouted the sheriff, while his horse plunged about excitedly, and the crowd shrank back; "can't you let the law settle this case? Listen here, all you men: I'll tell you about that fence that was cut down at Pasture Five on the U-T. One man cut that fence. He didn't get caught the first time; so he sneaked back to try it again. He was on Woolsey's side of the fence. You saw him, dad, and shot him—with bird shot. He ran away, and met up with George Woolsey, who called out to him. He shot Woolsey, and vanished."

The crowd moved uneasily. Again Fred Sutherland's voice rang out: "This morning I made some inquiries about the Great Southern Land & Cattle Company. They hold the mortgages on Woolsey's place. Among other thing, I found out the name of their biggest stockholder. That man didn't want Woolsey's cattle on dad's water. He wanted to foreclose. And say, that man is the one who cut the fence!"

The sheriff's hands shot to one side. With almost incredible swiftness they caught a pair of wrists and snapped on a pair of handcuffs.

"You crazy fool!" blazed Titus, struggling to free himself. "What do you think—"

"You're it, Titus! You're the biggest

stockholder of that cutthroat company. You came up here and took the foreman job with no other idea than to stir up trouble between dad and Woolsey. That's why you cut the fence. And say, it's no wonder you were so anxious to go to the doctor yesterday morning. As an officer of the law, I called on that doctor a few hours ago, and he talked."

The sheriff whipped out a knife. After a neat slash and a quick tear, Titus' back was bared, showing scattered patches of inflamed flesh.

"Your bird shot, dad," explained the

sheriff succinctly. "The doc told me he picked out over twenty of 'em."

Carter Sutherland stared for one surprised second, then he turned to his men. "Ride back to the ranch," he ordered, "and let Woolsey's cattle in to the water through Pasture Five."

Did you like this story, or did you not? If you liked it, please let us know why in a letter, briefly worded. If you did not like it, let us know that and why. And while you are about it, comment on any other story in this number, or give us your opinion of the number as a whole. The editors will appreciate any letter you may send.



ALASKAN PIONEERS

By G. G. Bostwick

THE Taku wind is blowing, and the Channel tosses whitecaps
With a gay and mocking rhythm of its dance-abandoned waves;
While the mountains seem to hover with their hoary heads a-drooping
As though in friendly spirit they would guard the lonely graves.

The graves—ah, yes, of strong men who dared the dread of wildness,
Of perils glimpsed alone in dreams; of hardship all unknown;
Who held their lives of little worth against the brave adventure
That stirred the blood like bugle call in battle for their own.

The graves in flowered valleys, on the river bars and mountains
Where the awful roar of snowslide cut the silence like a stroke
From the hand of seeming giant, who reached out with ruthless humor
To despoil the human of his life—and chuckled at the joke.

The graves of sudden victims at the mercy of old grizzly
Who, with tender cubs a-playing near, felt man her enemy;
Of those lost in the stormy night who prayed in vain for human aid,
And those who drowned in glacier streams with no one there to see.

The Taku wind is blowing, and the Channel dances gayly,
And the mountains brood benignant o'er the roofs that man now rears;
For Alaska is the coming land, the land of homes and plenty,
Built because of lone and unknown graves of dauntless pioneers.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

WITH FIST AND HOOF.

PAPE'S ride down from the height of No Man's Land was rapid as his devious course would allow—rapid from his desire to communicate his steer-led discovery to Jane with the least possible delay and devious for two reasons. He did not wish to attract the attention of the treasure blasters until after the girl had looked them over any more than to fall into the hands of the police who had taken his runaway steer in charge.

On reaching the meadow where he had asked his fellow pursuers to await him, he could sight none of them. He concluded that they had cut for the nearest bridle path to avoid any such accounting to the park authorities as had been exacted after the previous evening's irregularities. Caution dictated that he do likewise, but the Pape habit of riding roughshod by the short-cut trail had its way.

Some instinct caused him to turn and peer into the mouth of a sort of gulch into which the green tailed off. There he saw some one, dismounted, waiting. It was Jane Lauderdale.

Spurring to her, he found that she and her two companions had thought

it advisable to take cover in a small glen, irregularly oval in shape, that would have served excellently as a bull ring had its granite sides been tiered with seats. Harford and Irene still sat their saddles, the girl holding rein on the horse ridden by Jane, who evidently had reconnoitered that he might not miss them on his promised return.

Pape's heart quickened from appreciation of her fealty. He hoped that he could "cut out" her alone from her undependable "bunch" and show her the discovery to which the fugitive steer had led him—the latest operation of the Lauderdale enemy.

"Why-Not!" The exclamation was Irene's, as she pressed up to him. "So you're safe? But my pet cow! Don't tell me you let him get away?"

"The dar-rling is on the road to the calaboose—pinched for all sorts of crimes," returned Pape unfeelingly. "You'll need a larger crop of bail weeds than you possibly can gather to make good your claim to him."

She remarked regretfully: "That's what I get for not following. A girl's got to keep on the heels of her live stock, be he man or cow, these rapid days. Think of me sitting here, losing out as if I'd been born a hundred years ago—obeying!"

Jane had remounted and now rode up. "But if the steer is arrested," she asked, "how do you come to be free? Did you disown him?"

"Didn't have to." Pape's speech was that of a man in a hurry. "Trail end for the steer was an air pocket over a toy lake. He made a magnificent splash and started swimming for the other shore. In the water he was about as dangerous as a pollywog. Proved easy pickings for that active little arrester of last night, Pudge O'Shay. Another policeman sat in the stern of his commandeered rowboat, overworking a piece of rope. I wish them joy taking him in."

He omitted a report of his own desperate feat of saving Polkadot and himself a similar high dive off the bluff edge. More authoritatively he turned back to Irene.

"Probably his fate will make you feel better over that 'obey' oversight. If you'd like to get the habit, you'd do me a favor by hunting up the village pound and paying the dues put on that rampant shorthorn of mine. Here's a roll that ought to be a gent cow's sufficiency. And you'd favor me further by taking the family friend along."

"You mean——"

"Your Harfy. Maybe you can impress him with the desirability of obeying orders. Got to confess I failed."

"You precious puzzle!" said the girl, with delight. "You aren't—— Oh, you are—you are!"

"Are I—just what?"

"Jealous, you silly. Haven't I told you that Harfy long ago gave up hopes of me, that he is nothing to me—absolutely nothing more than a mere friend who——"

"At that, he's more to you than he's shown himself to me," Pape interrupted with point.

Harford pulled up his mount's head with something of the decisive fling of his own. "I admit that I give orders better than take them," he said. "Come, Jane. Come, Irene. Maybe I can get you out of this mess yet without unpleasant consequences."

"And maybe, Jane, the consequences

aren't going to be so plumb unpleasant," said Pape. "In a certain some one else's little matter of unfinished business that's demanding my time and attention right now, I have pressing need of one assistant. Are you—do you feel—well, willing?"

"But, Why-Not—why not *me*?"

Irene prevented immediate reply from her cousin; spurred her mount close beside the obviously fastidious Polkadot; at last dropped the battered looking bunch of roses to clasp the Westerner's arm. "You know that I—— And I know that you—— Don't you, dar-ling—or *do* you? I'm sure that I'm not ashamed of—of—you know—if you aren't. Of course Jane is calmer than I, but who wants to be calm nowadays? I'm the one that's willing to tag along with you into difficulty and danger and——"

Harford, heated of face and manner, interrupted.

"No one's going to tag with him into any more difficulty or danger. You girls are going to keep your agreement, aren't you? You're coming peacefully along with me, now that I've let you wait long enough to see that this person, rightly called 'The Impossible,' is safe?"

"Let us wait—you *let* us?" Irene flared. "A dozen of you couldn't have forced me to desert him, Millsy Harford—not while I had my health and strength!"

Despite her ardor, Pape managed to free his arm of her hold and asked again with his eyes the question put to Jane. He could see that she was confused, annoyed, justifiably suspicious of the youngster vamp's proprietorship.

"Don't you worry about any unfinished business of Miss Lauderdale's," Harford added with augmented insolence. "I think she will concede that I am more competent and at least as willing as you to attend any and all such. On my advice she has given up her search for a mythical fortune mythically buried in Central Park. Haven't you, Jane—haven't you, dearest?"

Pape, while listening to the man, looked to the woman; gained her gaze,

saw her lips form to an unvoiced "no." Fresh suspicion of Harford possessed him. "Meantime, I suppose your hirelings are excavating this public park according to the directions of that cryptogram you stole from Mrs. Sturgis' wall safe?"

"You confounded blighter, you dare accuse me of theft?"

Pape laughed into the snarled demand. "I dare accuse you of anything. I don't like you and I don't trust you. Miss Lauderdale's unfinished business is safer in my hands than yours. She knows I'm the better man. In case you're not sure, I'm ready to show you."

"No readier than I, you poor fish out of water!" Harford's voice shook into higher, harder notes. "You can't call me a thief and a liar without showing. As I told you this morning, you'll have to answer to me if you raise any more of a row around Miss Lauderdale. When will you give me a chance to make——"

"Now," Pape suggested.

"You don't mean here—before the girls—in a public place where the police are likely to interfere?"

"Why not?"

Pape was in the act of dismounting, in accordance with his own suggestion, when Harford executed a surprise that nearly crowded him to a fall. The attack was abetted by the inherent hostility of a thoroughbred horse for cross breeds of the range. As though trained for just such participation, the blueblood rammed into the piebald, bringing his rider within tempting reach of the enemy ear. A whack more dizzying than dangerous followed the equine impact.

"So that's—the game?" Pape gasped during his recovery. "You've got—the edge on me—with your—polo punch. But swords or pistols—any old fight that's fought—Harfy, my boy."

He threw back into the leather, where he felt as much at home as any man, and jabbed his right foot back into the vacated stirrup. Swinging his calico cayuse, he pressed back the horses astride which the two girls sat—Jane

with pale, set face, like a marble of avengement; Irene, glitter-eyed and high-hued from excitement. They were to look on at a duel of chevaliers in a squared circle hidden by nature. West whirled and bore down on East.

Pape twisted about the saddle horn. With a horse keen to knee pressure as was this cow pony, he had the first advantage of both hands free for swing or jab. Straight at the aristocrats went the rough pair. Polkadot landed a shoulder impact that all but toppled the spindle-legged black. The while, his man-mate's bruising left accomplished contact with the Harford nose. At sight of the "claret" which flowed, Irene from her horse, uttered a cry in which sounded fear for the family friend and admiration of the person impossible. Jane sat her mount, still silent and outwardly composed, except that the color had left even her lips.

In the breakaway, the black kicked out viciously. But Polkadot, with a skill acquired in growing-up days when he had trained with an Arizona outlaw band, flirited his varicolored rump out of harm's way. Already the battle was fourfold, with fist and hoof, two men its instigators, their mounts largely responsible for the footwork.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SOMETHING WORTH KNOWING.

ON the second engagement, not counting that initial surprise attack which had bordered on the foul, Harford handled his thoroughbred into a position of such advantage that he drove a right to Pape's jaw. Rocked from crown to toe, the Westerner saved himself a fall by going into just such a clinch as he would have tried had they been balanced each on his own two feet instead of his horse's four.

There was something superstitious in the look which distorted Harford's good looks, as he found himself held helpless while his opponent rallied—a look which suggested that he had put his all into that uppercut and was worse nerve-shocked than the recipient over its failure to bring decision.

There being no referee to command a break, Pape came out of the clinch when he was ready, with the "spinner" aid of a horse that turned ends on signal, and all within the space of a blanket.

The breakaway, unexpected by the Eastern immaculate, reduced him sardonically to a plane with the Westerner. His stock and part of his striped silk shirt remained in Pape's hands, torn from his neck when the cayuse had capered.

Both of the equine pair seemed possessed of their masters' fury. For a time they fox-trotted about, keeping their riders beyond each other's reach, while they fought an instinctive duel of their own. The black proved a fore-and-after—pawed out graceful blows with slender forefeet, then lofted his heels in a way that jarred his rider more than the wary target. At a familiar knee signal, Polkadot suddenly rose on his hind legs as if for that broncho evolution known as sunfishing.

"Look out—he'll fall back and crush you!" The outcry was forced from Jane.

As at once transpired, it proved unnecessary. The piebald had no intention of falling back upon his man pal. Instead, he hopped forward on hind legs until he had the black cornered, then flung down with all his weight. The thoroughbred, crushed to his knees, escaped by sheer agility the sharp-shod hoofs; wriggled his fringe-bedecked neck and satin shoulders from out the commoner's clutch.

Dumbly infuriated by his failure and urged by imperative signal, Polkadot pressed such advantage as was left him. By sparing the black no time for recovery, he gave Pape his. Head to tail the horses met with terrific impact. For the second or so in which both staggered, a stirrup each locked crushingly.

Followed two fist blows from Pape, so nearly simultaneous that no onlooker could have been sure which did the work. He himself knew that his right had led by enough of a count to jolt his rival's head into fair position for his

gnarled left. Far out from the saddle he leaned to put into that follow blow his last ounce of power. It landed nicely under the Easterner's cleft chin. As the horses sprang apart, Harford toppled and fell.

What would have been a clean knock-out of which no fistic specialist need have been ashamed was spoiled by a mishap. Harford's right foot did not clear the traplike stirrup of his English saddle. The thoroughbred's behavior, too, was unfortunate. In a frenzy of alarm he sprang forward, then dashed for the entrance of the glen, dragging his rider. Probably the fact that Harford was clear out, his body inert, saved him an immediate hoof wound, but there was scarcely a chance of his surviving being hauled over the rocks of the entrance.

His horse, however, did not reach that barrier.

Having Harford dragged to injury or death was no more a part of Pape's program than was murder a component of his hate. Before the black had covered two rods, Polkadot was after him, for once dug by the spurs which he had every right to consider worn for decorative purposes only.

One hundred yards of green, with the sharp teeth of the rock trap but fifty farther on brought the racing beasts neck and neck—brought Pape to an equestrian exploit conceived on the way.

He kicked his right foot free of the wooden stirrup, encircled the saddle horn with his knee; throwing his weight on the left stirrup, he leaned low. To retrieve a grounded hat or handkerchief from the saddle and at gallop pace, he regarded as a simple form of exercise. To seize and loft an unconscious man of Harford's build was difficulty multiplied by his dead weight of some hundred and seventy pounds.

"Impossible!"

Pape's jaw set with the thought challenge—at the word applied to him with such significance by the one he was about to save. Why not achieve the impossible now as hitherto? He put the

demand on his tried muscles, risked two bounds of the black in making sure that his grip upon the collar of Harford's coat was firm, then heaved upon his burden. The initial inches of clearance were hardest—broke his nails, tortured his fingers, almost snapped the sinews in his arm. Not until his right hand was able to join his left did he breathe again. And just in time was his double hold secured.

So quickly did the other horse swerve that the calico could not synchronize. For a moment Harford's body and the taut stirrup were a strained connecting link. Then Polkadot edged nearer and Pape was able to lift the unconscious figure to a position of partial support across his mount's forequarters.

But the stirrup still held, the iron of its shoe having been forced into the leather of Harford's boot and fastened as in a vise. They might be coupled together until the black ran down un-less— The stretch of strap gave Pape an idea. Quick almost as the thought, he drew his gun—aimed three shots—severed the link.

Turning, Pape rode the doubly burdened piebald back in the direction of the two girls, while the black sought exclusiveness in the farthest reaches of the glen. Probably because of the frequent backfire of motors and the blow-out of tires which at times make Central Park suggest a West Virginia mining town on fusillade day, the curiosity of no sparrow cop was excited by the gun reports.

Much more gently than he had gathered up his enemy, Pape now lowered him to the turf and flung out of his saddle to a kneeling position. A cursory examination showed Harford's fine-featured face to be somewhat marred by fist blows. But his body, so far as the emergency first aid could determine, was intact. The last fear of a possible skull fracture was dissipated when the brown eyes quivered open and the flaccid lips began to move.

"He's trying to speak, Why-Not," exclaimed Irene, a moment ahead of Jane in dismounting. "Listen, do."

Pape leaned close enough to grasp

part of Harford's mumbled words: "Didn't steal—anything. Sorry called you—names. Irene loves—"

That was as far as he got at the moment. Irene demanded to know what he said. Pape, who was still in possession of his love of a joke, answered: "It's your name on his lips, Irene. You were his first thought. You're the one he wants, the one he calls for."

"Oh—oh!" she murmured, her dark eyes expanding with the romantic new perception. "Then I haven't been wrong; he has cared for me in secret all along?" She knelt down beside the fallen family friend; hovered over him in egotistic ecstasy. "Poor Harfy—how you must have loved me to hide it so well! And all the time I thought that you— Oh, it is thrilling that you should have pretended to regard another when in reality your grand *passion* was for me! If you'd been killed, I never could have forgiven myself—that is, I couldn't if I had found out afterward. When I think what you must have suffered, I wonder how I ever can repay—"

"You've got a darn good chance right here and now," interrupted Pape, as a finishing touch to his ruse for punishing them and cutting out Jane from the "bunch." "He's coming around fast—isn't in any physical danger if his heart is cheered up. It's better far for him that you two should be alone when he comes clean to. You stay here and nurse him—you owe him at least that much. When he's able to ride make for the bridle path and home. The black is quieting down. You can catch him without trouble. And don't be afraid of pouring out your love upon poor Harfy. It is your duty as a woman and a vamp. It may save his life."

"But you, Why-Not?"

A sudden fear lest she lose the old in the new acquirement strained her face.

"I'll bear up some way. I, too, still have my health and strength." He tried to mask his triumph in a dark, desperate frown. "Come, Jane. You and I are no longer needed here."

He forestalled protest by remounting; gave the older girl a half-humorous, wholly apologetic look; led the way toward the heights.

Five minutes later they dropped rein in a clump of hackberry bushes and started on afoot. On the way he made report of his discovery during the pursuit of the steer. At that, he had not prepared her—indeed, was far from prepared himself—for what they soon saw from cover at the edge of the mesa.

The stage was set as on his dash across it in pursuit of the run-amuck steer. The actors, however—half a dozen in number, inclusive of Swinton Welch, and none in laborers' garb—were now grouped about one of the supply cars. Attention centered upon a man who sat the tail of this cart—one who had not been about during Pape's previous view. His pudgy hands held open before him a sheet of paper from which he was reading aloud.

The pair in the bush stared at this man in amazement. Then their glances met in an exchange of comprehension. So, it was true! The chief issuing instructions was Ex-Judge Samuel Allen, the Lauderdales' long-time friend and family counselor.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FACING BIG ODDS.

WITH the stealth of a Blackfoot brave, Peter Pape approached the powder cart in temporary use as a rostrum. Jane he had left where her safety no longer troubled him. His entire attention reached forward. Having gained the cover of a venerable cottonwood, whose drooping catkins fringed the shafts of the lowering sun, he stopped, every faculty alert.

The slow, accented reading by the apple-cheeked little big man of law was holding the attention of his assortment of thugs to a degree favorable for a surprise assault:

"Eighteen and twelve will show
The spot. Begin below.
Above the crock
A block will rock,
As rocks wrongs overthrow."

To the last word the verse carried to Pape's ears; it was metered to match that previously recited to him by Jane from her memory of the mysterious, stolen cryptogram. There seemed no reason to doubt that Allen was reading the rhymed instructions of the late Lauderdale eccentric.

Swinton Welch was first to offer a thin-voiced complaint against the poem's ambiguity. "That third verse strikes me as the hardest yet, judge. What do you reckon them figures mean? I don't see as there's any way to decide whether they stand for rods or yards or feet. Eighteen from what—twelve to which? Or do you suppose, now, it means that the area of the place is eighteen by twelve?"

With a wave of one chubby hand the lawyer dismissed these demands. "When quite a young man I knew the writer of this rhyme," he said. "It was characteristic of him to put everything as vaguely as possible. I'm relying quite a bit on my own gumption in the selection of this place. But I'm sure that I am right at last. We're on a height, surrounded by the requisite number of poplars, aren't we? The noises we hear from the city, spread about on every hand, might be called by poetic license any kind of a roar. And the whole place is shelved with rock. Since we can't seem to solve those figures, let's blow off the entire top if necessary and trust to the integrity of the 'crock.' You arranged for the acetylene lights, Duffy?"

"They'll be here before dusk."

Pape could not see the speaker from his cover point, but recognized the voice of him of the vegetable ears recently bested in combat.

"Have you thought about the crowd the flare's going to attract, Mr. Allen?" the pugilist wanted to know.

"I've arranged for the police to stand guard over us."

The complacency with which the lawyer made this assertion had a nerving effect upon Pape. His frame straightened with a jerk. His muscles tightened. His thoughts sped up. If the police were enlisted with the enemy

through political pull of the ex-judge, it behooved him to decide at once upon the exact nature of such changes as he, personally, might be able to effect in the afternoon's program. Perhaps too close upon decision, he acted.

"I have permits from the commissioner to cover every emergency," the lawyer continued. "I can promise you that there'll be no interference this time, even——"

"Except from me!"

The correction issued from behind the cottonwood, and it was followed immediately by the appearance of Peter Pape.

Samuel Allen's assurance gurgled in his throat and the apple-red faded from his cheeks and he slid from his seat on the cart tail to face the unfriendly, blue-black eye of a revolver.

"The——the impossible person!" he stammered.

"The *possible* person, don't you mean, judge? It's time you got the general little scheme of me, even though I do look mussed up this crowded afternoon."

Pape's jocularity was a surface effect. The serious coöperation of his every thought and muscle would be needed if he won against such odds. With his gun he waved back two of the crew who, evidently more accustomed to the glance of the unfriendly eye than was the jurist, were edging nearer. Still grinning with feigned pleasantry, he tried to guard against attack from behind by backing toward the second of the carts.

"This morning, Allen, you got me out of limbo through your drag with the law," he continued. "Didn't hope for such an early opportunity to refund that debt. But don't think I'm not ready with the interest."

"The only way to keep you out of new trouble is to leave you in the old," snorted the small man. "If this gun play is for my amusement, I'll say that your methods are as perverted as your sense of humor. Pray desist. Also—pardon my frankness—get out while you can—out of trouble that doesn't concern you in the least."

"Pardon *my* frankness"—Pape, too could feign politeness—"but this trouble does concern me in the greatest. I hate being in your debt. I feel I should take this chance to pay and save you."

"Save me—from what?"

Although the revolver still held his gaze, the lawyer put the question with manifest relief. Argument was his stock in trade.

Pape couldn't restrain a chuckle, so near did he seem to the consummation of his promise to Jane. "Just you hand over Granddad Lauderdale's cryptogram and those cartey-blank permits and I'll save you from being your own lawyer defending a charge of before-and-after burglary. Urge 'em upon me, judge, then call off your crew and vamoose."

Allen sent a glance of appeal among his hirelings, but elicited no response. To them there was, in truth, a stronger appeal in the careless way the Westerner handled his "hardware." They looked to be gunmen themselves, but of the metropolitan sort that shoot singly from behind or in concert before. Certain was it that some one would get punctured did the revolver speak, and each was concerned lest he be the ill-fated human "tire."

Allen seemed left to his own devices. Crumpling the cryptic sheet in his hand, he started slowly forward. Pape lifted his foot for a stride along the cart side. But some time elapsed before the sole of his boot again met mother earth. With the suddenness of most successful attacks on a rear guarded overconfidently, the one leg which, for the moment, supported his weight was jerked from under with a violence that pitched him face forward.

As he fell his revolver barked, but only once. A veritable avalanche of humanity descended upon him, hard in effect as the rocky ground in their attack with gun butts and fists. For a second time he had miscalculated odds; seemed to have met the impossible. In the act, as it were, of seizing the Sturgis loot, he was put out by a blow from a leather blackjack brought down upon his defenseless head by an expert hand.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DOUBT SENT WINGING.

SOME minutes must have passed before Pape's brain again functioned. In the interim he had been virtually hog tied, despite the fact that, literally, the knots were not tied according to the Hoyle of the range.

The first thing he noticed on opening his eyes was that Judge Allen had been stripped of his coat and the left sleeves of his outer and under shirts were cut away to give place to a bandage. Evidently that instinctive pull on the trigger by Pape had sent a bullet into his preferred target, although lack of aim had made it a wing shot.

That the moment was one in which he would best "play Injun" was Pape's first cautionary thought. Not even to ease his painfully cramped limbs did he attempt to move a muscle. After his first roving look, his eyes fixed, with an acquisitive gleam at variance with his helplessness, upon something protruding from the inside pocket of a coat that lay upon the ground near his hurting head.

The something—or one very like it—he had seen before—a folded document engraved in brown ink. The coat also was that torn off the wounded lawyer.

He next discovered that his ears, as well as eyes, could function. The first thing he heard was this, in the voice of the ex-judge: "And I congratulate you, Duffy, on as neat a turn-table as I've ever seen."

Even more than to the unctuousness of this voice did Pape object to the jurist's punctuation by boot upon that section of his own anatomy within easiest reach. His indignation, however, was diverted by the assurance that it was his enemy of the cauliflower ear who had brought about his fall.

"It was easier than throwing a seven with your own bones, your honor," Duffy answered. "Wild-and-Woolly here was too tickled with himself to notice me under the cart tightening a bolt. All I had to do was reach out and grab an ankle."

"Hadn't you better go and let some

doctor look at that arm o' yours, judge?" The concerned voice was Swinton Welch's. "I'll direct operations until——"

"You think I'm going right on taking chances on your weakness, Welch?" Allen's counter demand snapped with disapproval. "I'll see this thing through, no matter how it hurts. Send for a surgeon if you know one who doesn't insist on reporting gunshot patients. Come, let's get this fellow stowed away before the police arrive. Questions never asked are easiest answered."

"Leave us throw him in with the powder," suggested a scar-faced bruiser new in the cast, so far as Pape recalled.

And so they might have disposed of him had not Duffy advanced a better proposition. Near by was a sort of cave where he had "hidden out" on a former emergency, he declared. It was dark and dribbly as a tomb—an ideal safe-deposit for excess baggage.

"To the tomb with the scorpion then!" Beneath his pudginess, the little lawyer seemed hard as the rocks he was so anxious to blast. With a gesture, he ordered one of the crew to help him on with his coat.

Pape relaxed the more as three of them laid hold and carried him across the flat. Duffy acted as guide, and the lawyer, who assuredly was taking no chances, went along to satisfy himself as to the security of the hide-out. Several yards inside the narrow mouth of Duffy's "sort of" cave, they dropped him upon the rock floor; left him without further concern over whether or when he would return to consciousness.

For reasons which had filled him with such elation as nearly to expose his possum part, Pape approved their selection of the particular spot. Now the hope of snatching victory out of defeat came to him with an admission Allen uttered from where he was standing at the entrance.

"I do feel some weakened by this wound," said the lawyer. "Guess I'd better rest here a little while. You fellows go back and start turning rocks."

Try the tilty one first and use powder, when necessary, just as if I owned the park. Remember, I've got the permits."

For five minutes or more Pape waited without any effort to free himself except from the puddle of drippings in which they had chanced to deposit him. Since all seemed permanently quiet, he made sibilant venture.

"Jane—Jane!"

The shadowy figure which at once appeared from out the darker recesses assured him that luck had not entirely deserted him—that the safe-deposit vault selected for him was the same in which the girl had promised to watch and await his summons. On entrance of his pallbearers she had retreated into the depths of the "tomb," quite as he had hoped she would. And now—in just a minute—he'd show them how alive was the dead man they had buried.

She knelt beside him; was bending over him. "Oh, Peter—you! Are you hurt—wounded?" Her whisper was guarded as his own had been.

"Yes wounded, but only in my feelings—over being hog tied."

"It's just as well I didn't know you in the gloom. I'd have thought you dead and died myself. I was nearly dead of nervousness already. Knowing you were armed, I feared when I heard the gun report that you had shot some one and been captured. I couldn't have stayed here doing nothing much longer. Don't know just what I'd have done, but—"

"But that's been decided for you," he supplied, in an ecstasy over the confession back of her words. "You are here to un-hogtie them. The key knot is pressing the small of my back, or I don't know the feel of one. See what you can do."

She leaned over him and busied herself with his bonds. Long and strong as were her fingers, however, they made no impression upon this particular key knot, tied to stay tied with some sailor-taught knack.

"Feel in my coat pocket," he suggested at last. "If they've left me a couple of matches—"

She did. And they had. A stroke

across his boot top lighted one of the lucifers. The odor of burning hemp did not offend their nostrils; rather, was more grateful than the most subtle incense from the freedom promised in its fumes. After the fourth and last match had burned out, the girl was able to fray and sunder the rest of the rope. The "key" turned; Pape made short work of the other knots, shook off his bonds and gained his feet. His first act of freedom was to seize and kiss the two taper-tipped, nail-broken, burnt-finger hands which had liberated him.

"Sweet pardner! Precious pal!"

Pape always remembered his "grave" and the ensuing silence within its dank darkness as the most cheerful place and the liveliest moment of his life.

Only the moment, however, did he allow himself. "I've got to reward you by leaving you again, but not for long. Just wait until I bring the proper tenant of this tomb."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LIFTING A CURTAIN.

WHILE seated upon a bowlder of trap rock that divided the opening, watching the start of the delayed excavation, Samuel Allen felt himself seized without warning from behind. Before he had time to utter more than a gasp he was dragged back into the cave.

Perhaps pain from his injured shoulder made the lawyer speechless. Possibly surprise at the assault of the "scorpion," supposed to be unconscious and soundly trussed, had something to do with his inefficiency. He still seemed incapable of protest when the captive-turned-captor searched his coat pockets and extracted their contents.

Jane, the while, had disobeyed instructions, and followed guardedly; with automatic ready, she now appeared from the darkness into the light of the entrance.

"He deserves punishment and on two counts, I think," said Pape. "Just a minute. I want to make sure."

Stepping nearer the opening, he began to run through the letters and documents taken from the jurist's coat.

"Jane Lauderdale! Can it really be you, my child?" Allen was speaking to her in his oily manner. "I hope that you, too, are not in the power of this impossible——"

"She isn't. I'm in hers."

Pape had overheard; now he wheeled around. A glance had satisfied him that the cryptogram at last was in hand. The brown engravings, the familiar look of which had held his eyes when he lay trussed in the open, quickly had confirmed his first suspicion of them. Folded with the crinkly parchment was other detailed proof.

"You're under arrest, judge," he said.

"How' so? You're no officer and I won't—— You can't——"

"Oh, yes, I can. Some few of the impossibilities that are my pet pastime ought to be accredited to the deputy sheriff of Snowshoe County, Montana. Out with those dimpled wrists!"

With one length of the rope so recently misused on himself, Pape improvised handcuffs; with another he hobbled the ankles of the jurist.

Unnerved by his helplessness, the little great man began to whimper. "You tried to murder me out there. Now you——you——arrest me for what?"

"Ask the man behind the Montana Gusher oil fraud——your dishonorable self. We're going to give you opportunity——a little time alone with the crook."

The accusation left Pape's lips with assurance. The legal tricks played in Western courts against that long-ago fight to protect his good name had convinced him that some legal mind was master of the plot. The jurist's morning skill at court jugglery had brought its flash of suspicion, but not until he had discovered Allen as the Lauderdale enemy had there recurred to him Jane's exclamation, clipped by her father, that some one they knew might be the promoter of the oil fraud. Later had come first sight of telltale stock certificates in the small culprit's pocket, their worth as clinching proof assured by Pape's recent examination at the mouth of the cave.

For the moment Allen seemed stag-

gered by a charge which undoubtedly was a surprise; looked, indeed, as though he would find himself exceedingly poor company.

Pape turned to Jane. "Once more may I borrow your gun, dear? Some one of his plug-uglies seems to have appropriated mine. Come."

"Don't leave me, child," Allen entreated. "Don't go with the wild man. He'll only lead you into more trouble. He can't escape my gang once I start them searching for him, and the price he'll pay for trussing me up like this."

"It would be worth a big price to show you how a truss-up feels," Pape interrupted. "Of course I can't hope you'll stay buried much longer than I, once the gang misses you. But I won't have trouble repinching you, not while I hold these certificates of your guilt. To think, Jane, that my trail's end should run into yours this way! It looks——don't get scared, now——but it does look a whole lot like fate."

She regarded him, serious-eyed, yet faintly smiling of lips. "It looked a whole lot like that to me the day you told dad and me about your search for a——"

The suggestion of a smile vanished as she turned directly toward the wretched-looking little man. "Wasn't 'Montana Gusher' the name of that oil stock you stopped Aunt Helene buying, Judge Allen? Ah, I thought so!"

The girl turned from the obviously guilty lawyer and followed Pape out of the cave. From the shadow of the wall they looked out over the flat.

"We can't continue Western style," he said with manifest regret. "See the mounties? They're here under instructions to report to his honor the judge and do his bidding. There's a limit, as I learned a while back, to what one can tackle in New York single-handed——that is to say, with hope of success. We'll need an injunction to stop that stunt. Let's go and get it."

Almost were they across the open space which they must cover to reach their mounts when a shouted command to halt told that Allen's gang had sighted them. Instead of obeying, Pape

snatched Jane's hand and urged her into a run.

A moment they gained in that lost to the enemy while Swinton Welch explained the necessity of their capture to the police lieutenant. They reached their horses, climbed into the saddles and were on their way before the pursuit started from the far side of the flat.

A second time that afternoon in Central Park there took place a race—this one quite official, with former pursuers turned quarry.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

REALLY surprising was the detailed knowledge of the park which the Western trail-blazer had acquired during the recent adventures. He picked their way through the tumbled terrain of the heights as if from a map. That he knew the up-and-down maze better than the officers now after them was demonstrated when they gained the bridle path by a scramble down a rocky slope with none of the pack in sight.

His immediate objective he confided to Jane in case accident should separate them. A moment of straight riding would take them through the Women's Gate into West Seventy-second Street. There he would slip into the near-by hotel and a telephone booth to enlist legal reinforcements.

But they both had overlooked an important factor in Central Park's equipment—the network of wires spread over its length and breadth for facility of the authorities in imminent cases like or unlike that of the moment. Only when a man and woman riding ahead of them were stopped and questioned by the police guard at the gate did Pape suspect that an alarm had been telephoned ahead of them.

His plan was abruptly altered. Turning the horses, as if to continue an objectless canter, they started back over the path gained with such difficulty, trotting casually enough until beyond official view; then they broke into a gallop.

Cañon after cañon gaped in the apart-

ment-house mountain range on their left, marking streets passed. Their hope grew that, unmolested, they could pass out Pioneers Gate at the northwest corner of the park.

But that hope, too, was outsped. Hoof-hammering behind them caused both to glance over shoulder at a bend. Three of the city's mounted police came pounding after them.

Pape looked about to make sure of their location. The bridle path spilled into a pool of shadows at the bottom of a gorge; granite walls rolled back from the trail side. Recognition of the region which he had been exploring with Polkadot on his first clash with law and order aided him in a quickly formed decision.

"Can't make Pioneers Gate." He signaled Jane to draw rein. "We'll take to—bush—turn the cayuses loose—hide out until they've given us—up."

He swung from his saddle, expecting the girl to follow his example. When, on her delay, he hurried to her assistance, he saw that she was leaning upon the nose of her saddle, her lips pale as her cheeks. Bodily he lifted her to the ground and found her temporary rest against a path-side stump. After turning the horses about, he looped their reins and, with a back-to-stable slap upon Polkadot's splotched rump, started them down-park.

He half carried his partner, exhausted by excitement too long sustained, until they came upon a brush-fringed depression, which at home he would have called an elk bed; there he bade her take to cover; he crawled back to spy out the movements of the pursuers.

At the top of the last rise in the bridle path the police met the riderless horses. They sounded greatly disturbed. Pape was relieved to gather, from such scraps of loud-pitched conversation as carried, that they assumed the fugitives had abandoned their mounts for a short cut to the west wall. He saw two of the trio dismount and begin combing the brush in that direction, while the third remained on guard over the five horses.

All of this was fortunate in that it promised time to reach a definite objective which he had in mind, a place where the girl might rest and both hide until darkness should aid them in escaping from the park. His sense of security weakened, however, on noticing that a police dog was of the party; that the "mounty" left in charge of the horses was sending the animal up the brushy hill on the east—their side of the path. Slithering back into the depression, he awaited for several long-drawn minutes the alarm-bay of the hound, dreading the worst.

It was Jane who first felt the spell of two brown eyes focused upon them through a veil of brush. Nervously she caught his arm; pointed. Soon a long, black-tipped nose rent the veil, sniffing through a spray of vine abloom with bell-shaped flowers of palest blue.

The official dog had trailed them down. But why the delay of his bayed alarm? A moment more and he answered for himself. With suppressed whines and insinuating wriggles, there burst from the clutch of the vine none other than Kicko of the sheepfold, his sense of duty evidently overcome by delight at the reunion.

Pape's joy transcended that of the Belgian dog. Never had he bestowed a more fervid embrace than that which went around the ruffed neck. Jane, too, patted and praised their four-footed friend; the while decorated his collar with a spray of the flowering vine which had veiled his identity.

"Pin one of those blue roses on me?" Pape asked; when she had done so, added: "Out home we call that 'Matrimony Vine.' I wonder if Kicko's bringing it to us is any sort of sign that we—"

"I wonder," Jane interrupted more crisply than he would have thought possible in her wilted state, "whether Kicko will lie low like a good dog instead of a police officer while you explain about those papers you took from the judge?"

He took from his pocket the sheaf of brown engravings. "These, as you may have surmised, are certificates for

stock in the Montana Gusher Oil Company. See"—he opened and handed her one—"they are signed with names of dummy officers, as were the others. But they are blank as to owner and number of shares—right strong evidence that the Honorable Samuel is the man behind the fraud—that his neck is the one I came East to wring."

Jane nodded. "I was waiting to see Aunt Helene and make sure before I told you what I suspected. You see, it was a good while ago when a salesman interested her in the stock. She was about to invest when Judge Allen interfered. Later he told her that he knew it wasn't worth the paper on which it was engraved. Except that my time has been—well, a bit full since yesterday afternoon, I'd have got the facts at once and given them to you for what they were worth."

Next he offered her a memorandum which he had found folded inside the sheaf of stock certificates—a list of names, with figures set down opposite.

"The writing is his beyond doubt—Judge Allen's," she declared after a moment's scrutiny.

"Clinches the proof of his guilt in the oil deal. It is a 'sucker list'—the names of stock biters and the price per bite. It is—"

In his pause Pape gave the girl a look that was at once exultant for himself and regretful for her. "It is Judge Allen's ticket to the Atlanta penitentiary."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

REFUGE OR TRAP?

TO distract the very natural distress which he saw in her face, he forced cheer to lighten the murmur of their exchange. "But let's get to the famous cryptogram, lost and at last regained. Now we can read it as a whole."

Allowing the jealous Kicko to wedge himself between them, Pape spread out the wrinkled sheet upon the hairy back; in a guarded murmur he read:

List to the Nubian roar
And whisper of poplars four.
They tell of bed rock
Where rests a crock
Brimful of Fortune's store.

"Tis on a height
The vault you'll sight
Of buried might,
'Twill lead you right,
Bring delight,
Win the fight.

"Eighteen and twelve will show
The spot. Begin below.
Above the crock
A block will rock,
As rocks wrong's overthrow.

"List, then, the Nubian roar.
List whisper of poplars four.
Climb, then, the height.
Read signs aright.
Count eighteen—twelve
Take heart and delve.
Obey. You'll want no more."

For a while the three of them—counting Kicko—pondered in silence. Two, at least, were considering the script's applicability to the height of Judge Allen's selection. It seemed a possible place, except for slight discrepancies, such as the absence of any particular "roar," an uncertain number of poplars among the pines and the lack of a "vault," except for the rock tomb of Pape's untimely—proved so—burial. In both the hope grew that should they make good their escape with the incriminating evidence against the little lawyer leader, work on the flat would be suspended until after a possible recovery of the documents. Even should Allen force the search, on being freed, they were well armed for rebuttal in court.

One by one—in silence this time—Pape again scanned the cryptic lines. "I'm here to say," he made comment, "that granddad went in for inexpensive verse. I'd say free, except that it rhymes."

"Free? We've paid a larger amount than you possibly can imagine, Peter Pape. And if all we are to gain is the unmasking of Sam Allen—"

"We're going to gain everything—more than you possibly can imagine from the little you love me yet," he reassured her, not to mention himself. Then, again, he took himself in hand. "I, for one, am getting in something of a hurry," he tacitly apologized. "If you'll hold to our side-Kicko here, I'll take another scout."

As before, he wriggled over the rim of their hide-out; was gone ten minutes or so; on his stealthy return he made low-voiced report:

"They've driven off our nags, but left a horse-cop on patrol. A pair of patrolmen are snooping along the west wall and the northwest gate is doubly guarded. The Allen pull sure has pulled fast—and many, this early evening. There is nothing to it but to lie low here until night. Mighty sorry for you, sweet pal. I know you're about all in. But they aren't going to pinch Miss Jane Lauderdale twice in the same twenty-four hours—not in my living company."

"I'm afraid they're going to have a chance." The girl caught his arm. "The dog—didn't he join you?"

"Kicko? No. How did he get—"

"Oh, I'm so sorry! He wrenched himself away from me. I thought—I hoped he only wanted to follow you. Didn't dare call out for fear—"

"Another false friend, eh? Looks like this is our day for uncovering 'em. The pup had a flea-bite of conscience, I reckon?"

Jane disagreed. "Not intentionally—*please*, not Kicko! Don't make me doubt everybody. It's only that he likes a party. The more the merrier is his motto, if he has one."

"And he's gone for the more?" Pape spoke rather grimly. "Well, they mustn't find us here, his police party. The sooner we move on the safer. As a matter of fact, I'm heading for another place—a perfect hide-out. If you feel able, let us be stepping lively. If you don't, I'll enjoy toting you."

They started up the hillside, keeping in the brush wherever such grew, skulking low-backed across the open spaces. Although the girl scrambled after him, evidently determined not to be a drag upon the hand to which she desperately clung with her two, she lost her footing on the rock when near the top and fell face forward.

Her urgent moan that he go on without her was denied strongly by the pair of arms that gathered her up, clasped her like a woman, not a baby, against

a heart^{*} hard hammering from more than the violent exercise and bore her to a rest. She felt herself deposited upon a wooden step; looking up, she recognized the venerable and roofless stone blockhouse literally "perched" upon the top of the precipitous granite hump up which they had come.

Inspirationally Pape had remembered in the light of a refuge of to-day that olden fortress which he had been surveying when detected by the "quail" cop, Pudge O'Shay.

Straightening to the sheet-iron door, he tried the knob, then the comparative strength of his shoulder. But the protection so generously accorded park rovers of earlier wars seemed denied them until Pape, taking sight through one of the oblong loopholes, saw that the door was fastened with a spring lock which could be opened without a key from inside. Straightway he gave his consideration to the fifteen-foot stone wall between.

Never had the Westerner aspired to plaudits as a human fly, yet no Roaring Valley cliff had been sheer enough to forbid his ascent. Pulling off his boots, he essayed the latest in difficulty stock-ing-footed; after several slip-backs, that further tore both fingers and toes, he went over the top. The door thrown wide, he gathered Jane up and stumbled with her over a slablike door-sill that wobbled under their weight.

"Odd," murmured the girl, looking about, "that I should be hiding from the law in this favorite relic of Grandfather Lauderdale. One of his foibles as a Grand Army veteran was to come here at sunrise on victory anniversaries and run up a flag on that staff. Some sentimental park commissioner gave him a key and he never missed an occasion."

"Might have left some furniture scattered about," Pape remarked, with a smile. "Still, you ought to rest easy on the fact that those get-'em specialists will never think to look for us in here."

After making sure that the door had securely latched itself, he doffed his coat

and spread it for her to sit on, with her back to the wall.

The hour was one of the best for relaxation and wouldn't she take advantage of it, he wanted to know? Evening was lowering shadows into the park. Didn't she feel, sifting into the roofless blockhouse, the atmosphere of rest time and peace? Outside the trees were full of birds, as busy about going to bed as though they did not live in the center of the great, wakeful city. Couldn't she imagine with him that the dulled clatter rising from the streets was the rush of some great waterfall or of winds through a forest or of hoofed herds pounding over a distant plain?

Soothing was Pape's illusion that he was back in his limitless wild; rudely was it broken. Slowly, soundlessly, he got to his feet—approached the sheet-iron door—with all senses alert, listened. A sharp knock had sounded from without. No illusion was this. Jane, too, had heard—had straightened against the stone wall, in her wide eyes and tightened lips the tensity of his thoughts.

Peace—safety—rest-time? Had some member of the police force outwitted them? Was the blockhouse to prove, not a refuge, but a trap? Silently they waited.

The concluding chapters will appear in the next issue, dated and out July 15.

Just Possible

EXCITED traveler: "Can I catch the four-o'clock express for Birmingham?"

Railway official (calmly): "That depends upon how fast you can run. It started thirteen minutes ago."

Quite Careless

DID you tell him that smoking isn't allowed?"

"Yes."

"Did you point out the notice?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did he do?"

"Lighted his cigarette with it."

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the
Editor and Readers.

JULY 1, 1922.

The Drama of Baseball

THE unusual in any story is always enjoyed by the reader, but when you come to a baseball tale with a dramatic surprise preceding doubt, suspense, and wonder, you have just the thing that thousands and thousands of fans are going through on the grand stands and the bleachers every day all over the United States.

And they cannot get too much of it, you see. They want their baseball story to have the qualities of a big-league game, if one can judge from the letters we receive, and we think they are very good guides.

What could be more dramatic, for example, than the collapse of the Pirates before the onslaught of the Giants? Sounds like an old-time adventure tale. There was the neck-and-neck race the Yankees ran with the Indians. But what is to come? Suspense—heart-rending, awful suspense!

The Yankees and Giants are all set, the little birds say, to win the pennant again this year in their respective leagues. Will they do it? Anyway, the battle is on, and they may clash in thunderous conflict for the championship of the world.

But what all of us in the stand, on the bleachers, and perched on the hill beyond the fence, long for is to see some bully story stuff projected into the situation—the sort Burt L. Standish would put in at the end of a chapter:

There he comes! Watch his smoke! A dark horse dashing to the front and, in a breath-taking finish, grabbing the flag from some sure-thing favorite that

had the championship on ice, also sewed up! That's the stuff. Bring it along.



In the Next Issue

THE chief feature of the next issue, we are glad to announce, is a big, strong tale of the Northwest Mounted Police, by Roland Ashford Phillips. It is of complete-novel size, though a little longer than some of the complete novels we have been publishing recently. Those who have read the story pronounce it not only well up to the Phillips standard, but, in some respects, surpassing anything hitherto written by that popular author. We have said similar things about other authors—said that this, that, or some other story was one of the best ever turned out by them. Well, we hope to be able to continue saying that about TOP-NOTCH authors. We hope that their work will continue to get better and better, as it has done.

It is some time since we had a novellette from Burt L. Standish, and we regard it as good news that there will be one in the next issue. It is a tennis story, called "Fourteen All." We should like particularly to have you tell us what you think of this story. There was some divergence of opinion about it among the editors.

Two other sport stories will be in the number. One is a baseball tale by C. S. Montanye—a member of the Trenton series—entitled "Thousand Berries a Week." Then there is a tale of the South and the turf by Eric Howard, which he calls "Bluegrass Belle." Another story which we might put in the sport group is "Over Billowing Bunkers," by Henry Leverage. It is, in the main, a sea story, but golf playing has a lot to do with the fortunes of the actors in the drama.

"The Big Town's Secret," that clever serial novel by Ethel and James Dorrance, will come to a close in the next issue. Another serial novel will begin in the same number—"His Long Chance," a tale of the West but not the cowboy West, although it has to do with a sort of ranch; but it is a home-steading experience in which a certain enterprising chap, Arthur Kane, engages, and we think you will be interested in going through it with him.

There will be a tale of the United States Marines on the Island of Haiti, where they are stationed now to preserve order. This is a remarkable story in certain respects—not too serious. It is called "Sergeant Flanagan's Swimming Party."

Among the other attractions in verse and prose are: "Unseen Heroes," by Ted Olsen; "Man of the Moment," a story of Americans in South America; "Sour-Dough Bill Decides," by G. G. Bostwick; "On the Wings of Adventure," by H. M. Hamilton, an aeroplane mystery; "Long Ago Again," by Edmund Leamy; "End at Last," by Eve Eggleston Hoyt.

Away from Care

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have to-night read "Knights of the Range," "In a Washington Trap," and "Adventure's Heart," in TOP-NOTCH, and found entertainment and pleasure in reading these stories. Just the thing to take one away from the cares of the day, and I congratulate you on your ability and success in being able to furnish the public with such pleasing recreation. I have only read three of the stories. I have no doubt the others are equally good. TOP-NOTCH is all right. Very truly yours,

PERCY METZGER.

Fifteenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

Cause of Jealousy

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

I see that people everywhere

Write every day to tell

That they take the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

And like it very well.

Of course, a boost is better

Than a knock, I will admit,

But I must say I do not love

Your magazine a bit.

It's worse than any vampire;

It has weaned my man away;

It might be called his soul mate,

For no longer will he stay

Where I'm working in the kitchen

The supper work to clear.

He'll say, "I've got a TOP-NOTCH;

Guess I'll get out of here."

When I say, "Joe, take the baby,"

He says, "Gosh, ma! this here

Is quite the finest story

That I've read in many a year.

"It takes great shakes to beat 'em

In this TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE;

They've got the peppy writers—

They're class, know what I mean?"

Now never was I jealous

Of another of my kind,

But this crush he's got on TOP-NOTCH

Keeps preying on my mind.

And that's the only reason

I dislike your magazine;

I'll say it is a good one—

Too good, that's what I mean.

Elgin, Illinois.

M. FOXE.

No Reason Whatever

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: A sense of appreciation moves me to write and tell you how much I enjoyed a story in a number of your magazine that I got hold of some time after its publication. I refer to "Service Ace," by Arthur Hornblow, Jr. This story, with its wholesome vigor, its athletic stimulus, and its contrasting character studies, is a refreshing oasis in the morbid morass that engulfs so many of our present short stories.

This is the kind of material we readers are looking for, and sometimes we are impelled, by an unexpected gem like "Service Ace," to say so. Why not let us have some more by this same author and see if he can keep it up?

Yours very truly,

(MISS) AGATHA JOERG.

Brooklyn, New York.

[We are glad to say that the reader's question is answered in this issue in the best way possible—another story by Arthur Hornblow, Jr.—Ed.]

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That search goes on and on. Through a questionnaire test which reveals creative imagination if it exists, more hidden talent will yet be uncovered. The test is offered free to you in this page.

* * *

This is the kind of story that needs little elaboration. The awards speak for themselves. The Chicago Daily News put its great influence and resources behind the motion picture industry, which desperately needs fresh imagination for scenarios. Thirty-one cash prizes amounting to \$30,000 were offered. Thirty-thousand professional and amateur writers competed. Their manuscripts were identified to the judges not by author's name, but by number.

The judges—among whom were David Wark Griffith, the famous producer, Samuel Goldwyn, whose studios will produce the first prize scenario, Norma Talmadge and Charles Chaplin, screen stars, and Rupert Hughes, celebrated author and scenarist—selected "Broken Chains" as the best of the 30,000 scenarios entered.

To a southern girl who lives in a little village of 3,000 population, that selection meant a check for \$10,000, and a career.

To the Palmer Photoplay Corporation, the incident is just one

more gratifying record of a Palmer student's brilliant success.

A public that makes its own scenarios

In its issue of April 1, announcing the prize winners, the Daily News quoted the judges as agreeing that—

"—it proves beyond all doubt that the American public can supply its own art industry, 'the movies,' with plenty of impressive plots drawn from real life."

That is the message which the Palmer Photoplay Corporation emphasizes in its nation-wide search for creative imagination. As the accredited agent of the motion picture industry for getting the stories without which production of motion pictures cannot go on, the Palmer organization seeks to enlist the country's imagination for the fascinating and well-paid profession of scenario writing. Here, in the inspiring story told on this page, is proof that imagination exists in unexpected places; evidence that it can be inspired to produce, and trained in the screen technique, by the Palmer Home Course and Service in photoplay writing.

A free test of your imagination

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