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JULY 15, 1922



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TOP-NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH MAGAZINE

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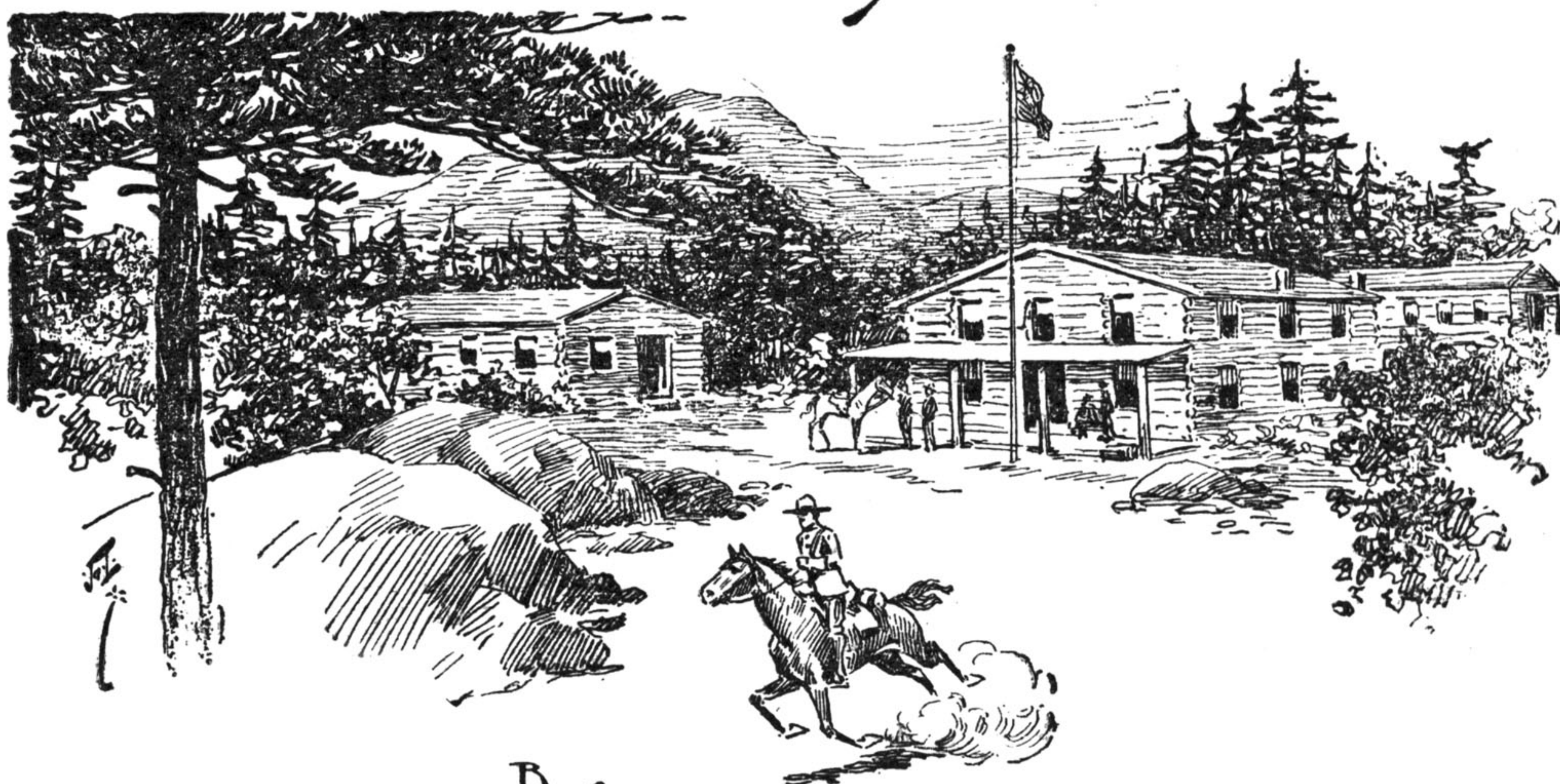
TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. L

Published July 15, 1922

No. 6

When Truth Played False ~



By
Roland Ashford Phillips ~

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

A MADE-TO-ORDER SITUATION.

IN the late-afternoon sunlight that painted the barracks with vivid gold and intense shadow, Broken Bow Post, twenty miles from the Montana line, basked in somnolent calm and serenity. The Canadian Mounted Police headquarters for that particular Alberta district looked as forlorn and deserted as an abandoned mining settlement. The squat log-and-sod-built cabins, clustered within the fenced inclosure over which a flag drooped listlessly, gave no indication of occupancy.

Rolling prairies, seamed with coulee and ravine, splotched with stubble where the wheat had been cut, stretched eastward to the shimmering horizon. West and south the foothills, thatched with spruce and hemlock, marched in disordered array until they met the towering Rockies and cobalt skies.

In the largest of the cabins, however, that served as office, courtroom, and sleeping quarters, Inspector Brice, commanding the post—thin, bald, and glacier-eyed—bent over a desk filling out an uninteresting daily report that in time would find its way to the files at Ottawa. Outside the door, “playin’ bloomin’ watchdog,” as the man him-

self expressed it, Hopple, cook, hostler, and general utility man, alternately dozed and smoked an odoriferous brier.

The clamor of a telephone bell broke the heat-filled silence. The inspector turned in his chair and clamped the receiver to his ear. Hopple, instantly aroused, got to his feet and cocked a speculative eye upon the cabin door.

There was always something alluring in the sound of that bell. It might be the harbinger of excitement. It quickened Hopple's pulse, brought hopeful thoughts into his mind, even though, as a rule, he was not privileged to take part in alarms or excursions. He braced himself expectantly, trying to catch the meaning of the words that passed Brice's lips. The patrols were out. Sergeant Murray was asleep, having come in at noon after a thirty-six-hour jaunt. If the call was urgent, Hopple felt that the inspector would assign him to a mission.

"Hopple!" Brice's voice sounded sharply.

"Yes, sir!" Hopple stepped into the office, eyes shining, shoulders back. His salute was precision itself.

"None of the men back yet?" the inspector inquired.

"No one, sir, except the sergeant." And for fear the inspector had forgotten, Hopple added: "'E's dead-tired."

Brice gazed past the alert and expectant cockney.

Hopple spoke again, his voice eager: "If hit's anything important, sir, I'm ready."

The inspector drummed meditatively upon his desk, his eyes fixed upon the world outside his window. Apparently Hopple's last remark had made no impression. "No use disturbing the sergeant," he said at length. "Constable Garvin ought to be back shortly. Have him report to me when he returns, Hopple."

"Yes, sir." Hopple's countenance became doleful. He sighed audibly and permitted his shoulders to sag. Instead of saluting, wheeling, and marching from the room, he remained beside the desk.

Brice glanced at him narrowly. "What's the trouble?" he inquired.

The cockney came back to himself with startling abruptness, stiffened, and with a salute and a clicking of heels marched toward the door.

"Wait!" the inspector called. "Anything wrong, Hopple?"

"Nothink wrong, sir," responded the other, halting. "I was just thinkin' as 'ow 'ard luck keeps 'angin' on my 'eels, inspector."

"How's that?" Brice's tone was more sympathetic.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," Hopple answered, "but I been 'ere three years, and hit ain't been a very excitin' existence for a red-blooded chap like me. You'll 'ave to admit that, inspector. I've 'ad the trynin', and I know the ropes. I keep up 'opes, thinkin' as 'ow my chance will come; but hit never does."

The inspector broke into a chuckle. "Oh, that's all right, Hopple. Your time will come one of these days, and you'll do yourself proud. I'm sure of that."

"Thank you, sir." Hopple tried to display a bit of enthusiasm over a prospect that he felt was remote indeed. "I'll keep 'opin'. It puts a little 'eart in me. When that phone rang a time ago I says to myself, 'Now, 'ere's my chance. The inspector 'as got no one to send out an 'e'll 'ave to detail me.'"

"Well, it was nothing important," said Brice. "'Pink Whiskers' is stirring up trouble again and I want to talk with him."

"Pink Whiskers!" echoed Hopple. "S'y, 'ow I'd like to go after that rascal and bring 'im back in 'andcuffs! 'E's got to be taught a lesson."

Brice nodded. "He is somewhat of a nuisance. I'll have Garvin go after him presently."

The inspector bent again over his reports, and Hopple marched out of the cabin, scowling at the sunlight and kicking up the thick dust of the parade grounds. He was in the same mood and temper when, half an hour later, Constable Garvin rode through the gate, dismounted, and tossed the reins of his jaded horse to the cockney.

"Here you are, Hoppy!" he cried, using the sobriquet bestowed upon Hopple by the troopers. "Give him a good rubdown, will you? I'm due for a shower and——"

"'Old on!" Hopple broke in, as the trooper started off. "The inspector wants to see you right off. I've a 'unch you're due for some 'ard work before you gets your boots off."

Garvin frowned, cast a lingering glance at the bunk-house door and the comforts that lay within, and changed his course. He had been in the saddle since daylight, felt tired and sore. Riding a monotonous patrol under a blazing sun and through miles of alkali dust was not conducive to temper or bodily comfort.

Walking in the direction of Brice's office, Garvin speculated upon the prospective assignment. He trusted it would be a brief one, or at any rate one to invite a bit of excitement. The dreary and stupid routine of patrol work, of watching out for fires, running down stray cattle, settling petty disputes between ranchers, had become deadly irksome. Apparently nothing of consequence ever happened in this section of the Dominion. He almost regretted having asked to be transferred from Fort Laird. Occasionally something of interest did break in that territory and a trooper was called upon to use his wits as well as bracelets and sidearms. It kept the blood from stagnating.

Neil Garvin was under thirty, tall and husky, proud of the land that fostered him, an able horseman, and a good shot—a fair representative of the service in which he had cast his lot. What he was told to do he did to the best of his knowledge and ability. His record in the files proved it.

Inspector Brice looked up from his desk when the constable entered. "Pink Whiskers has been heard from again," he remarked quietly. "Bring him in. You'll probably find him at his ranch."

Garvin looked at the inspector. "What's the name again?" he asked, wondering if this was a part of the initiation usually indulged in when a new trooper joined a post.

"Pink Whiskers," repeated Brice. "P. W. Oh, I forgot!" he added as if recollecting. "You're not acquainted yet. His name's Peter Wenham, to introduce him properly. P. W. for short. That also stands for Pink Whiskers. You'll hear of him by that name more often."

Garvin continued to look steadily at his officer without registering to any marked degree the sudden mental shock that played havoc with his thoughts. He even managed to smile. "I won't have much trouble identifying a man with pink whiskers," he said.

The inspector gave a low chuckle. "Not unless he has shaved, and that is not at all likely," Brice remarked. "P. W. is proud of his crop. You never saw a finer hanging garden outside of the comic papers."

"What's the charge against him?"

"Assault. P. W. is handy with his fists, and Kendrick got in the way of them this morning. Kendrick isn't much of a fighting man and—well, he wants me to arrest his assailant and says he'll appear against him. I wish you would get him down here before dark."

"Very good, sir!" Garvin saluted, walked out of the office, crossed the parade ground, and found Hopple saddling a fresh mount.

"We got to take care of our 'orses," observed the cockney. "They're 'arder to get than troopers. 'Ere's a good animal. 'E'll take you where you're goin' and back again."

Garvin tested the girths and swung up into the saddle without volunteering a word to the talkative Hopple.

"Goin' after Pink Whiskers, are you?" Hopple eyed the constable closely, as if to account for his silence. "You'll 'ave your 'ands full. 'E's a 'ard customer. Been 'auled before the inspector a 'undred times, seems like to me."

"For what, mostly?" Garvin inquired.

"Everythink from cartin' contraband to 'ammerin' noses. But 'e alw'ys pays 'is fine and laughs. Some d'y we'll be 'avin' a real charge against 'im, and none of us will be sorry. P. W. and

meanness go together, like rheumatism and liniment."

Inspector Brice watched Garvin's departure with meditative eyes; and presently, when the trooper had disappeared and the clatter of hoofs had brought Sergeant Murray to the door of the bunk house, Brice called to him.

The lean-faced, grizzled-haired sergeant, thirty years in the service, with his stripes won before he was forty, came into the cabin. "What's up?" he asked. "Didn't I see Garvin riding off just now?"

With the sergeant and his superior officer there was a noticeable absence of the rigid formalities presumed to be observed between men of their respective ranks. This was never more apparent than at the present moment when Murray, in shirt sleeves and moccasins, dropped into the nearest chair and composedly filled his pipe.

"Sergeant," Brice began abruptly, "what's your opinion of Garvin?"

"I've no complaint to make against him," the other answered. "Hasn't had the opportunity yet to show his metal; but I don't think you'll be disappointed in him when the time comes."

The inspector nodded, as if that had been something of his own estimation.

"Several days ago," he went on, "I was talking with Crombie back of the prescription case in his store when Wenham and Olmstead came in. They didn't see me, but I was in a position to see them. It happened that Constable Garvin rode along the street at that time. Wenham glimpsed him through the window and broke into a violent exclamation. Olmstead wanted to know what was the matter, after volunteering the information that Garvin was a new man at the post.

"I didn't catch all that passed between the men," the inspector continued, "but presently P. W. laughed and remarked that the new trooper had better give him a wide berth or there'd be all kinds of trouble. 'He's got nerve with him, wearing that uniform,' Wenham declared. 'I'll wager he'd start running for parts unknown if he knew I was in the district.'"

Sergeant Murray, listening to what Brice had to say, frowned. "Well now, that's interesting," he remarked. "Acquainted, are they? Thinks Garvin has no business wearing a uniform, eh?"

"I'm telling you what I saw and heard," Brice said. "P. W. seems to think Garvin will be afraid to meet him; that he'll turn tail and run at first sight of him."

The sergeant pondered over what had been said. "Mention anything of this to Garvin?" he inquired.

"Not yet."

"Well, it oughtn't take us a great while to get at the bottom of things," Murray observed.

"No longer than to-night," the inspector declared, revealing his plan. "I've just sent Garvin to arrest Pink Whiskers."

The sergeant grinned. "How'd you arrange it?"

Brice explained the telephone message and the complaint Kendrick had lodged against Wenham. "Garvin happened to be the first man in, so I sent him along to make the arrest. The situation was made to order. We'll know how matters stand now."

"Have you a hunch he won't bring in his man?"

"That remains to be seen."

"What happened when you assigned him to the job?" the sergeant asked, beginning to show added interest.

"Apparently Garvin had never heard of Pink Whiskers, so I explained. It wasn't until I mentioned P. W.'s right name that Garvin betrayed any unusual surprise. Of course, I may be mistaken," the inspector went on; "but I think it startled him."

"Didn't raise any objections?"

"Not a word. Started off on the jump when I said I wanted him back here with his prisoner before dark."

The sergeant looked relieved. "Well, that's something in his favor. I like Garvin. Wouldn't want to be disappointed in him. Don't think you need to feel alarmed, inspector. He'll be back before dark and will bring Pink Whiskers with him. That's my opinion."

"Either that," observed Brice, still

unconvinced, "or he'll come back with a good alibi instead."

CHAPTER II.

PAST IN THE PRESENT.

HEADING westward into the lowering sun that drenched him with gold, Constable Garvin rode out from the barracks and along the well-beaten trail that led toward Sundance City, the nearest settlement, and beyond to the ranch of the man he was detailed to arrest.

Peter Wenham! That name burned in his mind and conjured up memories far from pleasant. It had been years—seven, if he remembered correctly—since he had heard the name spoken or looked upon the face of the man that bore it; years crowded with many strange adventures, of new and startling changes. Winnipeg, Montreal, France, Regina—all had contributed a part in his world.

Then he had joined the service school and spent nearly a year in training before entitled to wear the coveted uniform of the Mounted. After that he had been a rookie at a northern post, facing hardships and privations, accepting the meager dole of pleasures that fate allotted him; the old life all but forgotten—flashes upon the screen of memory; new friends for old; a strange loneliness at times that all the thrills of his work failed to lighten; a bitterness toward the injustices of the past and a longing to square old debts.

Then followed many transfers—Yukon, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Alberta. He welcomed them. Broken Bow Post came next and service under Inspector Brice, with the monotonous round of patrols, humdrum investigations, few arrests.

Garvin had come to admire Sergeant Murray, found the troopers congenial, and enjoyed the antics of the cockney, Hopple, who furnished amusement for the post. But somehow he failed to understand Inspector Brice; there was something cold and distant in the latter's attitude, so different from others of his rank.

Suddenly, bringing him out of a gray world, Garvin had received this assignment. It had come swiftly, unanticipated. He had tried hard not to betray himself at the mention of Wenham's name and the fact that he had been ordered to arrest the man; yet he fancied that Brice had suspected and wondered.

It was singular, he reasoned, that in his fortnight's explorations of the Broken Bow precinct, meeting new faces and hearing all the tales and rumors talked of in the barracks, Peter Wenham never had been seen or mentioned. Once or twice he had heard of Pink Whiskers, but had not been sufficiently interested to question the strange appellation.

What twist of fate had brought Wenham into the district? What unseen hand had set the stage for this forthcoming performance? What could be the situation when the curtain fell?

Those thoughts swept through Garvin's troubled mind as he pressed along the trail; yet not one of them brought with it a hint or suggestion that might swerve him from his appointed task. Whatever lay ahead of him was to be braved; the consequences must take care of themselves.

After the empty, sun-baked street of the settlement had been left behind, Garvin mounted the rising trail that led into the foothills. Below him stretched a fruitful field ripe for harvesting. Huge binders were clanking through the wheat. Great yellow ranks of sheaves ridged the undulating prairie. Each heave of a binder's steel arms flung out behind them a truss of golden grain. Under the scorching afternoon sun the thick dust rolled up in clouds; out of it sounded the rasp and clink of metal, the shouts of men, the crackle of a million flinty stems as they fell before the knives. The trooper watched, fascinated. Truly, he reflected as he pushed on, these vast prairies were the bread basket of the world.

Another hour of steady riding, always with the sun in his face, brought Garvin to the Wenham ranch. After the scene of activity below the bleak and empty fields before him seemed desert-

like. The ranch house and its outbuildings were ramshackle affairs, a reflection upon the industrious rancher of the Dominion.

There were no signs of life about the premises as Garvin dismounted, left his horse standing untied by an empty corral, and walked to the closed door of the main ranch house. There was no response to his knock. He went around and repeated the summons at another door, but with no better result. He decided to remain until Wenham or some of his men showed up, for there was nothing to be gained by scouring the surrounding territory.

Garvin sat on the top step of the sagging veranda and gazed off across the dismal fields to the hills that lifted cool and green beyond. The lowering sun had left purple mists behind; but the daylight would remain for some time in that region. Before dark, Brice had told him. That meant nine o'clock, and it was barely six now.

A footfall caused Garvin to turn swiftly. A girl had come from around the house and stood hesitantly. With a gulp of amazement, half convinced that the visions he had entertained a moment before had become reality, Garvin jumped erect. His heart pounded thickly, and he felt the hot blood surging into his face.

"Hester!" he exclaimed.

The girl stood as one transfixed, eyes wide and lips parted. Garvin stepped forward, almost in fear that the vision before him would vanish as quickly as it had come.

"Don't be alarmed," he said presently. "I'm not a ghost. Neither are you," he added, with a smile, "although I thought so at first."

The sound of his voice, and perhaps his reassuring smile, brought the girl to herself again. She came to within arm's length of him. "Neil Garvin," she faltered, "is it really you?"

"All of me," he returned, and laughed.

Her eyes left his face and traveled down his uniform to his spurred boots; then they lifted swiftly. "I—I can't

believe it," she wavered. "They told me——"

"Yes, I know," he said, anticipating what was upon her lips. "They've said and told lots of things. I haven't died a hero's death yet, and I'm not likely to. Never mind the details," he added quickly, as she seemed about to protest. "There's nothing worth explaining. Here I am, and here you are! That's enough for the present, isn't it?"

"And you—a policeman?" she broke forth.

"A whole lot can happen in seven years," he returned briskly. "I saw you once before in that time. You looked right at me and didn't speak. It was in Winnipeg. Well, that's that. I concluded you preferred not to and let it go. What are you doing here?"

She nodded toward the house. "I'm living here with Peter Wenham and his wife, but she's staying in Calgary just now. Father died six months ago and—and there was no one else. He and Peter were cousins."

"Great Scott! What next? Any more shocks?" Garvin smiled, but continued to survey the girl. Seven years had wrought no great change in Hester Deane, he reflected, unless for the better. How splendid and wholesome she looked in her simple skirt and blouse! How tanned she had become, and how it brought out the blue of her eyes! How radiant her hair in the slanting rays of the sun! He recalled the time——

"What brings you here?" The girl's question put a crimp in Garvin's day-dream.

"Business," he told her. "Where's Wenham?"

"I left him at Sundance. He'll be along any moment now." She paused and regarded him searchingly. "Does he know you are here?"

"He will when he arrives," Garvin replied.

"What do you want with him?"

"I'm going to arrest him—take him back to the post with me."

The girl broke into a low cry. "You—you can't do that!" she said tremulously. "It would mean——"

"What do you suppose it would

mean," he rebuked gently, "if I refused to obey orders?"

"But—this thing! The consequences! Peter is bitter. I've heard him say——" She checked herself quickly. "Oh, why did you come here? With all of the Dominion—all the other police posts—you had to come to this one!"

"I didn't plan it this way," he replied; "but now that the stage is set, and we're all on the scene, I find it rather interesting."

"It's foolhardy," she protested.

"What would you have me do?" he countered.

"Get away before Wenham returns."

Garvin looked steadily into the blue eyes that were fixed imploringly upon him. "Do you believe in me?" he asked suddenly.

"I want to," she answered.

"Then I'm satisfied." Garvin squared his shoulders, drew in a deep breath, and laughed joyously. "If you knew how wonderful it is to think some one has faith!"

The girl gazed at him in amazement; but she did not speak, did not have the opportunity to do so, for at the moment a horseman came through the trees and rode leisurely toward the house. Garvin took in the man with a swift, embracing glance. Except for the fact that Peter Wenham was garbed in a manner befitting his new rôle, and had neglected to trim his great flare of red whiskers, he was unchanged.

The ranch owner dismounted, gave his horse a slap that sent it scampering toward the barn, and walked over to the veranda. The constable waited until the man stood before him without experiencing the slightest ripple of excitement. The appearance of his quarry had calmed him surprisingly; he had no thoughts or speculations beyond the present. If Wenham identified the waiting policeman, or suspected what was in prospect, he gave no sign of it.

"Wenham," Garvin rapped out, "you'll consider yourself under arrest. We'll return to the post at once."

To the surprise of the constable and to the girl as well, who stood silently watching the performance, Wenham

smiled. "That'll be all right, Mr. Policeman," he said in an even, tranquil voice. "I'm ready. Hadn't we better stay here for a bite to eat before setting off for police headquarters?" he added.

CHAPTER III.

A CRISIS AT HAND.

WENHAM'S gracious manner, his placid submission, and the apparent lack of recognition puzzled Garvin. He had braced himself for a violent outburst on the part of his prisoner, a possible argument and quarrel before surrendering. Just what the unexpected demeanor meant the constable could not at the moment fathom; still he prepared himself against trickery.

Wenham, surveying his captor with genial countenance and seemingly oblivious to the fact that his behavior had aroused speculation, again voiced a suggestion: "You'll want my gun, I suppose." He plucked the revolver from the holster at his hip and extended it, butt first, toward Garvin, who accepted it. "What say now?" he went on. "Shall we eat here, or do you prefer the barracks?"

"I—I'll prepare something right away," Miss Deane spoke up quickly.

Garvin hesitated as he caught the appeal, the almost pathetic eagerness with which the invitation was extended. Logic told him not to accept; that an immediate return to the post was his duty. Still, he was tired and ravenously hungry, and a meal of Miss Deane's cooking was not to be lightly disregarded. It would be a simple matter to dine at the ranch and still get back to headquarters before dark.

"Very well," he said at length; "but we'll have to start back in an hour."

The girl darted into the house.

Wenham pushed back his hat and mopped at his damp brow. "Let's go along and wash up," he suggested. "You'll find me a docile prisoner, Mr. Officer," he added, as the two moved toward a covered shed adjoining the kitchen where a pump and tin basin were called into use.

"The fact is," Wenham continued,

after he had rolled back his sleeves and disclosed powerful, hairy arms, "I'm sort of used to this thing. Me and the inspector are always holding confabs. He delivers a lecture, I stand and listen; then I hand over whatever fine he levies and bow myself out."

"So I understand," Garvin replied quietly.

"Say, why didn't Brice tell you what the damages would be in advance? You might have collected them here and spared all the trouble." Wenham laughed at the sally.

The men passed through the kitchen and into the living room, where Miss Deane was busily engaged in setting the table.

"Forgot to ask what I'm charged with this time," Wenham remarked, when he and his captor had found chairs.

"Kendrick's brought the charge."

"Oh, that?" Wenham indulged in a chuckle. "Well, it's worth a fine to mess him up a bit. Never could stomach that shrimp."

Placidly Wenham rolled himself a cigarette and handed the "makings" to Garvin; but the latter refused them, not because he did not indulge, but because he was too busy with his thoughts. His mind had been hard at work on the situation confronting him. Surely, he reasoned, the man had recognized him! Why, then, had not Wenham spoken out—called him by name? What was the object in delaying the inevitable?

The tension was uncomfortable. Several times he was on the point of demanding an explanation of the game that, obviously enough, his prisoner was playing, but on each occasion he held back. Miss Deane kept her eyes averted. She, too, Garvin felt, must have sensed an impending storm.

Meanwhile the prisoner seemed wholly unperturbed. Garvin figured that Wenham was enjoying the situation. Presently the meal was on the table and the chairs were drawn up. The three sat down. Wenham did most of the talking. The girl stole swift, apprehensive glances at both of the men, but voiced no remark.

The meal finished, Garvin pushed back his chair and slowly filled his pipe; then, with a glance through the open door at the gathering twilight, he said: "We'd better be traveling, Wenham. I promised the inspector to be back before dark."

"Suits me," the other responded amiably. He got up, stretched, and went after his hat.

The girl, passing close to Garvin, ostensibly to clear off the dishes, touched his arm; her voice, a low, tremulous whisper, reached his ear: "Watch out! Don't trust him!"

The trooper did not look around, for his eyes were busy with Pink Whiskers, and he did not intend that the man should find another weapon or make a get-away. Whatever ruse Wenham had in mind was to be frustrated. But nothing happened. The prisoner picked up his slouch hat, cocked it upon his head, and apparently turned to await his captor's pleasure.

At that moment two men rode into the ranch yard. One of them dismounted and came up the veranda steps.

Wenham, peering through the doorway, suddenly changed expression. "Pardon me just a second, Mr. Officer," he begged with almost exaggerated politeness. "I want a word with this man."

Wenham stepped out upon the veranda, while Garvin, instantly alert, kept both men under rigid surveillance. The newcomers were strangers to him, but he studied their faces narrowly so that possible future identification would be assured. Just now, he felt, was an opportune time for Wenham to show his hand. Doubtless he had anticipated the arrival of these men and counted on them for assistance.

The prisoner and his visitor conversed in low tones, and Garvin caught nothing of what passed between them. Once, however, the stranger craned his neck and stared belligerently at the trooper, but that was all. A moment later he departed, the other man following him.

Wenham turned with a troubled look in his eyes. "See here, Mr. Officer," he began, "I wonder if we can't make

a truce? I've a business engagement and ought to be off right now. Why can't I report at headquarters first thing in the morning? Just the same to you, isn't it?"

"Sorry," Garvin returned, sensing a crisis, "but we don't do business that way. You're under arrest and you're going back with me—now."

Wenham frowned. "Really, officer," he protested, "my appearance at the barracks to-night is entirely unnecessary. You have my word for it—I'll report to Brice in the morning. This fool charge against me can hang over until to-morrow."

"It isn't going to hang over," Garvin returned.

Wenham squared his sagging shoulders. They seemed to fill the whole doorway. He gazed amusedly at the constable and suddenly broke into a great roar of laughter that echoed throughout the house.

"Say, Garvin!" he cried, his eyes glinting, his tone one of contempt. "What you been thinking about all this time, eh? Surprised? Figured I hadn't recognized you? Thought I'd forgotten, had you?"

"What I've thought hasn't anything to do with this business," the constable replied, relieved that the tension had broken. "We won't waste time talking. Get started! We're due at the post before dark."

"If you've a mite of brains you'll listen to what——" began Wenham.

"Stop it!" Garvin broke in sharply. "I'll listen to what you've got to say when we reach Broken Bow."

Wenham's rancorous laugh again filled the house. "Why, you poor addle-head!" he cried. "I've been playing with you all along. Suppose I intended going to the post with you at all? Not much! I've got more important things to attend to than calling upon Brice. You run along back to your inspector and tell him Pink Whiskers regrets that he couldn't see him to-night, but will try to keep the appointment in the morning."

Garvin controlled himself with a perceptible effort. "You've talked long

enough, Wenham," he said. "I'm going to give you one minute to get into your saddle and go along with me. If you won't go peacefully I'll put the bracelets on you; but you're going, one way or another. Get that!"

"Do you know what'll happen if I see Brice to-night?" the prisoner flung out. "Think hard! It'll be the last arrest of your career. You know what I'm driving at. I'll blast you!"

"Half your minute is gone, Wenham!" the trooper warned.

"Say, do you think I'm afraid of you?" Wenham returned with a sneer. "Why, I saw you riding the streets of Sundance the other day, sitting your horse as big as life and wearing that uniform. You—in brass buttons! Say, it floored me for a minute. Of course, I didn't say anything at the time. I figured what I knew might come in handy in a pinch. What an upheaval there'd be at the post if I——"

Garvin stepped forward, cutting short the other's explosive comments, shot out a muscular arm and sent his prisoner spinning backward. Wenham crashed heavily against the veranda rail, but caught himself in time to prevent a fall. With an imprecation he swung a fist at the trooper, who ducked nimbly. There was a rattle of chain and click of steel as Garvin whipped the bracelets from his pocket; in another instant, warding off the blows, he had pinned the man against the wall of the house with his knee.

Wenham struggled desperately. "You'll never—get those—things on me," he panted hoarsely. "I'll see you—and the whole police force——"

"Neil!" A shrill feminine voice lifted piercingly. An arm encircled Garvin's neck. He turned to free himself with a warning cry that came a breath too late.

Wenham, alive to this unexpected opportunity, swung his huge fist. It caught the trooper just above the ear. Stunned, he reeled, clutching at the prisoner's shirt that ripped in his fingers. A booming laugh sounded. Garvin seemed to be groping blindly in the dark. He heard Miss Deane call; heard

running footsteps; heard, more faintly, the dull thud of pounding hoofs. After that came silence and darkness.

CHAPTER IV.

ALONG TROUBLE TRAIL.

HARDLY, so it seemed to Garvin, had the darkness descended than his eyes snapped open again and he found himself staring blankly at the roof of the veranda. His head spun dizzily as he got upon his feet; then, as his mind cleared and remembrance came, he whirled and surveyed the ranch yard. It was deserted. Even his horse had disappeared.

With a cry of rage and humiliation he stood there, hands clenched, his heart pounding thickly. Miss Deane came toward him out of the shadows, her eyes wide with fright and uncertainty.

"Neil! Are you hurt?" she faltered.

He ignored the query. "Why did you interfere?" he demanded reproachfully.

"I—I had to," she answered him. "I heard all that passed between you and Wenham. I was afraid. I couldn't bear to think of him going to the post and—and——"

"It would have been more desirable than this," he broke in. "Don't you realize what you've done?"

"I didn't stop to think," she admitted.

Garvin shrugged. "Where's my horse? Did Wenham take it with him?"

"Yes. He called back as he rode off—said he would leave it down at the Forks."

The trooper winced. The Forks were three miles off. "Aren't there any horses left here?" he asked.

The girl shook her head.

"Which way did Wenham go?"

"West. But you can't catch him now," she cried, as Garvin turned.

"No; not now," he answered bitterly. "Not on foot. A nice predicament for an officer, isn't it?" He gazed at the girl; felt alternately angry and full of pity. "I'll have a lot to answer for when I report this affair. You should have realized my position."

"I'm sorry. I thought I was doing the best thing."

"Yes, I know. But Wenham was under arrest—my prisoner. You've permitted him to escape. That alone is bad enough; but, in addition, he'll have a long start before I can get my horse and go after him."

Miss Deane no longer fought back the tears; gave way to the strains under which she had labored so long.

Garvin stepped up and patted her arm. "Never mind," he said in as comforting a tone as he could command. "The thing's done, and tears won't remedy it. I understand—appreciate your motive. I ought to feel glad."

"I'll take the blame," she faltered. "I'll go to the inspector and tell him that——"

"Tell him what? That you came to Wenham's assistance and made it possible for him to escape? No; you can't do that, Hester."

"Why not? I'm not ashamed. I—I'll take the consequences."

Garvin shook his head. "Promise me you won't do that. It wouldn't help me."

"Why won't you help yourself," she pleaded. "Why should you face this thing? You've nothing to gain by it. Peter Wenham will never be content until he has blasted you. You can't fight back. If you get away now there'll be no trouble."

"I'm just in the mood to invite trouble," he returned.

"Would you sacrifice yourself just to get the best of him?"

"It isn't the question of sacrificing. I told you before that I'm not a hero and haven't the least desire to become one. Just at present I'm a plain mounted policeman, sworn to my duties. I've never shown a yellow streak yet, and so help me I won't. My instructions were to arrest Pink Whiskers and bring him to headquarters. So far I've had no orders to the contrary. That means I stay on the trail until the job is done. We'll let the consequences take care of themselves."

Garvin picked up his hat and started away. The girl clung to his arm.

"Neil, listen to me," she implored. "You asked an hour ago if I believed in you. I said I wanted to. You told me you were satisfied; that it was wonderful to find some one who had faith. I meant it. I meant more than that. What I've done proves it, even if it was wrong. The line isn't far from here. They won't bother to look for you in the States."

He smiled down at her. "Let's be sensible. If I ran away I'd hate myself, and in time you'd hate me. I know. I tried it once. It'll never be repeated. I'll see you again shortly. Good-by."

Garvin was off at a brisk trot and halfway to the corral before the girl realized what had happened. She called to him; but the trooper merely turned and waved. And a moment later he had disappeared.

Garvin found little difficulty in following the trail and continuing at his brisk dogtrot, although the going was not exactly smooth and he would have preferred to be in a saddle. He hoped to cover the three miles in short order, and if Wenham had left his horse where Miss Deane had said, the trooper would strike off to the west. Pink Whiskers had to be found.

Why Wenham had made away with the animal, Garvin could understand, but he could not fathom at the moment just why the escaped prisoner had been so considerate as to leave the horse at the Forks. Perhaps, after all, it would not be found there. That would mean tramping on to the post. Garvin did not relish that prospect.

With his destination still a mile or more away, Garvin struck the main highway that connected Sundance with Holton Wells, the nearest railroad station. He proposed following it a short distance before striking off on a short cut that would bring him out at the Forks.

As he ran along he heard an approaching car. Presently it swung into view around a bend and came toward him at a rapid clip. It slowed down at sight of the trooper. There was light enough for Garvin to recognize the

man at the wheel as one whom he had seen and talked with several days before. Austin, the stranger had called himself. He was of medium height, bulky, wore a slouch hat and a flannel shirt open at the neck. The man had been looking for work and Garvin had directed him to Sundance.

"Hello, there!" the man cried. "What's the trouble?"

"Horse got away," the trooper explained briefly.

"I'd take you back to the settlement if I wasn't in a hurry," the other called out. "Late now. Got to catch that ten-o'clock express."

The automobile clattered away, and Garvin plodded on in the opposite direction. At any other time he might have stopped to question the man, the ownership of the car, and the bulk of something that, covered by a blanket, was in the rear of the machine. That an admitted stranger, out of work and funds two days before, should be piloting a flivver and in a great hurry to make the train at Holton Wells, was a matter to invite speculation and arouse suspicion. But the trooper had other thoughts that demanded attention and dismissed the more recent episode from his mind.

The twilight still lingered; would continue to do so for another hour or more. The long days enabled the ranchers to do an immense amount of work when the harvesting of their grain demanded it. Garvin, nearing the Forks, was thankful for the prolonged light. Perhaps, by some lucky stroke, he might yet redeem himself.

Somewhat winded by his run, but by no means exhausted, he reached the Forks. Off to one side of the trail, partly obscured by the thick-standing trees, he glimpsed a horse. Gaining its side he uttered a relieved exclamation. It was his own mount. He vaulted into the saddle, shook up the reins, and started to move off when a voice addressed him—a voice that was at once familiar and, at the moment, somewhat disturbing.

Garvin set his lips tightly as he turned to confront Inspector Brice.

CHAPTER V.

THE THINGS UNSAID.

AS with the fading daylight the rose and gold had turned into pearl and misty amethyst, and the evening meal at Broken Bow Post had been served and cleared away, Inspector Brice glanced at his watch, shrugged, and mentioned to Sergeant Murray that he was going into Sundance.

The sergeant followed Brice across the parade grounds to where Hopple was saddling a horse. "When Garvin brings in his prisoner," he began, with a glance at the inspector's grim countenance, "what shall I——"

"If Garvin returns with his prisoner," Brice interrupted, as if to correct the sergeant's remark, "tell him that I shall be back within an hour."

With Brice in the saddle and moving off beyond earshot, Hopple turned toward the sergeant, his voice troubled. "W'ot's 'appened to the inspector?" he queried. "Blimed if 'e don't look as if the 'am he 'ad to-night gave 'im indigestion."

"Perhaps it did," returned Murray, moving off to escape further questioning.

"Well, 'e ordered 'am, 'e did," Hopple flung out, as if to excuse his own part in the affair.

Inspector Brice rode toward Sundance, an erect, trim figure in his new uniform and gold bars, his polished boots and tinkling spurs. He covered the miles at a leisurely pace, his cold gray eyes fixed steadily ahead, his precise mind concerned with a problem that had come to him several hours before.

At the Forks, where the trail divided, he suddenly drew rein. Off to one side of the upper trail stood a horse. It whinnied expectantly when Brice approached. A glance at the saddle and trappings brought a scowl to the inspector's face. That the animal belonged to the post was certain; that it was the big roan Garvin had ridden away a short time ago was also beyond doubt.

Brice pondered soberly upon his surprising discovery. Just why the horse had been left there and why its rider

had chosen to proceed on foot were matters to invite rigid investigation. That things might be adjusted properly and promptly, the inspector backed his own animal off the trail into the deeper shadows and awaited the return of Constable Garvin.

Half an hour later Garvin appeared; and when the trooper had reached his horse and climbed into the saddle, Inspector Brice, not unaware of the rather dramatic situation, pushed forward and announced himself.

Garvin, turning swiftly in his saddle at the sound of his name and the recognition of the man that uttered it, found himself within arm's length of the inspector.

"Where's your prisoner, Garvin?"

"He got away from me, sir," the trooper replied.

"Got away? Where did you find him?"

"At his ranch. He wasn't there when I arrived, so I waited. He appeared and I put him under arrest." Garvin spoke crisply, giving the essentials only. "He made no disturbance. I decided to remain at the ranch for supper, confident that we could return to the barracks before dark."

"Well?" Brice said as Garvin hesitated.

"After the meal, just as we were starting off, two men rode up. One of them engaged the prisoner in conversation; then the men rode away and Wenham asked if I wouldn't release him, promising to report to you in the morning. I refused, of course. He got ugly. We came to blows, and I was about to use the bracelets on him when he struck me down."

"How did that happen?"

"I must have been off my guard," the trooper answered. Never for a second was he going to bring Miss Deane into the affair. Interference with an officer while in the pursuit of his duty was a serious offense. If the knowledge of the girl's actions reached Brice there would be added complications and trouble. "When I came back to my senses," Garvin went on, "the prisoner had escaped."

"You made no effort to follow him?"

"He took my horse. There were no others at the ranch. It would have been folly to trail him on foot, even if I had known the direction he went in."

"Wenham took your horse, you say? How did it get here?"

"He left it here," Garvin replied. "I've walked down from the ranch."

Inspector Brice looked dubious. "If the prisoner knocked you out, as you've just stated, how did you know where to find the horse?"

"A girl at the ranch—Miss Deane—told me that Wenham had called out to her before riding off. She informed me afterward."

"Why was it that your prisoner showed so much consideration?" Brice asked pointedly.

"I don't know, sir," Garvin answered. "I haven't been able to figure that out myself," he admitted.

Throughout his explanations the constable realized how questionable his statements had been. The omission of the part Miss Deane had played in the performance weakened the structure. He knew Brice was not impressed with the defense offered. Yet all that had been told was the truth. It was the essential bit of continuity left unsaid that was damaging.

"A rather singular story, Garvin," the inspector remarked after a moment of silence. "I'm afraid it will call for investigation. There are points that seem to me——"

"It was negligence on my part," Garvin put in. "I should have brought my prisoner directly to the post instead of remaining at the ranch for supper."

"That is a damaging admission for a policeman to make," contended Brice, his tone ominous.

"I know it, sir."

The inspector was silent again. "You say P. W. submitted to arrest without protest?" he asked after a moment.

"Yes, sir; even joked about it. Said that being put under arrest was getting to be a habit with him. He remained sociable and good-natured until those other men rode in. Whatever happened then changed him. He said he had im-

portant business to attend to and could not go with me to the post."

"You had taken his weapons?"

"The moment I arrested him. In fact, he handed them over to me before I requested them."

Something like a smile hovered about the inspector's thin lips. "Very singular, indeed," he observed.

Garvin, watching him, felt the color mount into his face. "I want your permission to follow Wenham," he broke out. "I promise you he won't trick me again. I'll find him if it takes a month, inspector; and I'll bring him back if I have to drag him all the way."

"I hardly think that will be necessary," returned Brice. "The charge against the man is not serious enough to warrant that trouble. Besides, after what you've told me," he added with a sarcasm not lost upon the trooper, "I'm inclined to think Wenham will appear at the post in the morning, as he promised. You can return to the barracks, Garvin."

The inspector shook up his reins and without another word rode off. Garvin looked after him with hot and resentful thoughts. For a moment, spurred by chagrin and overwhelming indignation, he resolved to disobey the orders given him, trail Wenham, and drag him to headquarters; but on sober consideration he realized the folly of that action.

Garvin traveled back to the post with a heavy heart and bitter reflections. To Sergeant Murray and the others he related the story of his unsuccessful quest, listened to the comment it invited without expressing his own opinions, and after a session alone with his pipe turned into the bunk and went to sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OMINOUS PRESENTIMENT.

TO a man the troopers at Broken Bow were in sympathy with Garvin. Long and often bitter experience had taught them that accidents were unavoidable and the unexpected often met with. The mere fact that a man had taken an oath and donned a uniform did not make

him a superhuman. Mistakes and errors of judgment were not rare, even though they were not countenanced by the powers that be.

Inspector Brice, who had gained his commission years before and served no time in the ranks, had an opposite viewpoint from those who served under him. He judged a man by results alone, as did those in headquarters, who had nothing but written reports to guide them; and it blighted his spirit when matters went askew.

Garvin had noticed that night while telling his story, and again the following morning when the assignments were given out, that Sergeant Murray eyed him curiously and seemed unusually quiet while the other men were asking questions and expressing their sentiments. Still there was nothing unfriendly in his behavior, nothing to indicate that the sergeant doubted what had been said.

"Old Pink Whiskers is a bloomin' snike in the grass, so 'e is," Hopple broke forth at breakfast that morning. "'E's been givin' the post a 'ot time of it and laughin' at a uniform whenever the blighter 'oves in sight of one. 'E ain't no more of a rancher than I am."

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Cockran, a tall, bearded trooper who was usually paired off with Garvin on patrols. "Rustle along your coffee and forget the chin music."

Hopple ran on unperturbed: "If I was Brice I'd put a crimp——"

"Say," boomed Cockran, "why don't you ask the powers at Ottawa to put you in command here?"

"I ain't compl'inin' as 'ow the post is run," the cockney answered. "But for one thing I'd t'ke this Pink Whiskers and lock 'im up, and then I'd shave 'im clean. I bet that would 'umiliate the scoundrel. 'Oo knows, maybe, 'e'd be like Samson? 'E couldn't fight when 'is whiskers was trimmed."

"It wasn't his whiskers, Hoppy," put in the sergeant. "Where's all your Bible learning? It was his hair."

"Why not suggest to the inspector that all he needs to subdue this cuss is

a pair of scissors and a razor?" cried Cockran.

The others laughed at the sally—all except Hopple. Forever the butt of all jokes at the post, the clown that kept them amused, Hopple had become calloused to quip or gibe. "I says to the inspector yesterday," he declared, "I'd like to go after P. W. 'E wouldn't pl'y no narsty tricks on me. I'd bring 'im back in 'andcuffs."

"We'd bring you back on a board, Hoppy," retorted Cockran.

"I'll show you jacknipes one of these d'ys," the cockney announced. "I'll m'ke you respect me. I was never brought up to w'it on a 'orde of rummy troopers. Just as the inspector was s'y-ing yesterday, 'e'll use me when the time comes and——"

Hopple broke off suddenly and almost let the platter he was holding crash upon the table. "Blime me!" he exclaimed, staring off toward the barrack gate. "If 'ere don't come Pink Whiskers 'isself."

The troopers at the table, which had been set out on the shady side of the bunk house, turned swiftly as Peter Wenham and a companion rode up, dismounted, and strode coolly across the parade ground toward the inspector's cabin.

"What do you know about this?" grunted Cockran. "Coming in on his own. Suppose he's reformed?"

"'E's a 'andsome bird," remarked Hopple. "Look at 'is whiskers! It's 'ard to tell 'em from a sunrise."

Garvin, who sat silent throughout the morning chatter, entertained a certain presentiment at sight of Wenham. What did this appearance forecast? More trouble? He waited expectantly for whatever surprise was in store for him.

"Good morning!" Wenham cried, surveying the troopers as he came up. "Is the inspector about?"

The clatter of hoofs and the loud voice of the new arrival had brought Brice to the door of his cabin. Glimpsing Wenham, the inspector walked forward, his countenance mirroring grim surprise.

"Hello there!" greeted Wenham in a tone that was at once cordial and familiar. "Bright and early, you see. I'm ornery and careless at times, inspector, but I always try to keep my engagements."

"Engagements?" Brice echoed, gazing steadily at the speaker.

"Why, yes. Didn't you expect me? Didn't that trooper you sent after me last night explain?" Wenham's glance traveled from face to face of the men at the breakfast table, becoming fixed when it reached Garvin. "There's the chap!" he declared. "I couldn't make it down here last night, so I paid my respects to you and told the trooper that I'd be along first thing this morning."

Garvin, amazed at the statement, was on his feet instantly; but before he could speak Wenham had more to say.

"Don't suppose it was strictly according to code," he remarked; "but your trooper was most obliging, and after I promised to report this morning he let me go."

"That's a dirty lie, Wenham!" Garvin cried, striding forward. "You know it is!"

Wenham feigned such utter surprise at the interruption and looked so genuinely astounded at the outburst that the trooper himself was forced to admire the splendid acting of his ex-prisoner.

"Say, what's the idea?" he blustered. "Trying to queer me, are you?" Wenham glowered. "Well, you won't get far. I'm here, inspector. Made my word good. I understand Kendrick's sworn out a warrant against me. All right. I plead guilty to punching him on the nose. What's the damages?"

With an arrogant gesture Wenham rammed a hand into his pocket and brought out a roll of bank notes. "Fifty be about right?" he asked.

Brice, ignoring the proffered currency, spoke sharply. "Wenham," he began, "Constable Garvin charges you with resisting arrest, striking him down when he attempted to handcuff you, and afterward escaping, taking his horse along."

"Nonsense!" protested Wenham. "Not a word of truth in it."

"It is customary to accept a trooper's word in matters of this sort," Brice replied, although he had failed to do so himself.

"Say, this is ridiculous!" Wenham spluttered. "Me resist arrest? Bosh! I knew when I tapped Kendrick I'd have to pay the bill. I expected to be pinched; and when this trooper showed up last evening at my place I treated him hospitably, invited him to stay for supper, and had all the intentions of riding down to the post with him later. But it happened that when we were ready to travel a friend rode up with important news that made it inconvenient for me to come to police headquarters at the time. I explained matters to the officer, said I'd appear before you in the morning, and he was decent enough to release me."

"On the contrary," Garvin came back, smarting under the barefaced lie, "I wouldn't listen to your argument. You know that. Then you became abusive, and in the mix-up that followed got the best of me."

Wenham smiled insolently. "So that's the yarn you've spun to the inspector, is it? Figured you'd overstepped your authority in letting me off and wanted to square yourself, eh? Why, Olmstead here will back me up." He turned to the man who had accompanied him. "How about it? Haven't I told things straight?"

"You sure have!" the other agreed promptly. "Me and Owen were standing by and saw and heard everything that took place. There wasn't any fight."

"This man wasn't on the scene at the time," Garvin declared. "This is merely a cooked-up alibi. If Wenham hadn't run off my horse——"

"Your horse?" Wenham broke into a laugh. "Say, this is getting rich! What'd I want your horse for? Got a better one of my own. Think I'd be foolish enough to steal a policeman's mount? Not much! The last I saw of this trooper he was sitting on the veranda chinning with Miss Deane."

Garvin, on the verge of a retort, hesitated. The mention of the girl's name was a thing he had hoped would be avoided. Wenham, watching the trooper narrowly, seemed to read what was passing in the latter's mind.

"The girl will back me up," he went on. "She was a witness. That makes three of them who'll verify my story, inspector. Ain't that enough? And this fool constable's got nothing but his word."

Brice seemed perplexed at the conflicting statements. He had little faith in Wenham or those who were so willing to testify in his behalf, and as a rule the unsupported word of a constable would have been sufficient to decide the issue; but at the present there were peculiar circumstances to consider and weigh in the balance.

"Now look here, inspector," Wenham resumed, eager to strengthen his case, "doesn't it stand to reason that because I'm here this morning of my own free will that I'm telling the truth? If I'd knocked out this trooper and taken his horse do you think I'd be rash enough to come riding in to the post, knowing the kind of music I'd be facing?"

The argument was well put and seemed to impress Brice, although he did not make it too apparent. "You deny all that Constable Garvin has said regarding the fight and the taking of his horse?"

"I sure do!" Wenham returned promptly.

"You had nothing to do with leaving the animal at the Forks last night?" the inspector persisted.

"The Forks?" Wenham frowned. "Is that what he told? Well, of all things! Say, this trooper sure has a lively imagination. Me take his horse and leave it at the Forks? Never heard the like of such nonsense."

Garvin, disgusted at the string of falsehoods, had no comment to make. It was folly to argue the matter longer.

"Well, I must say," Brice spoke up after deliberation, "that this is an unusual affair. If it wasn't for your past record, Wenham, I'd feel more inclined to take stock in your story. I'll re-

serve decision for the present and hope before long to get at the truth. It seems that Kendrick was called out of town suddenly last night and won't be able to appear against you. I'll postpone the hearing until he returns. I'll make your bail a hundred dollars."

Wenham grinned triumphantly and without hesitation peeled off a number of bank notes from the roll he carried and thrust them into the inspector's hand. "There you are," he declared.

Brice, accepting the money, spoke a warning: "I'm not through with you, Wenham. And until I am I advise you to remain close at hand."

"Trust me for that, inspector," Wenham returned. "I'm a homebody, and wandering doesn't appeal to me. Any time you want me just pass along the word. You won't need to send a trooper to back up your demands."

Wenham wheeled and started toward his horse, not, however, without flashing a malicious grin at Garvin. He had scored and knew it; flaunted his victory openly.

CHAPTER VII.

EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY.

FIVE minutes after Wenham and his companion had left the post, Garvin was called into the presence of Inspector Brice.

"Constable," Brice began, "I don't know what to make of this singular affair."

"I've told you the truth, sir."

"All of it?"

"All that is necessary," Garvin responded.

"Why not let me be the judge of that?"

The trooper hesitated.

Brice's searching eyes narrowed. "That girl at the ranch," the inspector broached shrewdly. "Both you and Wenham say she was present when this affair was staged."

"A part of the time; yes, sir."

"I have found the average woman truthful," observed Brice. "I would be inclined to accept her word for just what happened last night. Suppose you bring her here to-day."

"If that is a command, inspector," Garvin said, his eyes meeting Brice's with unswerving frankness, "I'll obey. If not, I suggest that Miss Deane be excused from testifying."

Brice looked down at the papers on his desk. After a silence he spoke, but without lifting his eyes. "Very well, Garvin," he returned in a tone that gave no clew to his thoughts. "You may go. Ask the sergeant to come here, please."

Surprised at the abruptness of his dismissal and not a little disturbed, Garvin left the office. On his way across the yard he spoke to Murray and watched the sergeant enter Brice's cabin. It came to him that something unpleasant was brewing, the nature of which was not difficult to surmise.

Sergeant Murray found the inspector gazing off into space. Although perhaps unwilling to admit it, Brice often took counsel with the veteran "noncom" and was influenced by his judgment.

"What's the answer to this mix-up, sergeant?" the inspector demanded.

"Can't say, offhand," was Murray's response. "I don't believe anything Pink Whiskers had to say; and you might take that as a point in Garvin's favor."

"Then you believe Garvin?"

"I do. I believe all he's said. The trouble is," the sergeant added, "he hasn't said enough."

Brice nodded. "I agree with you there. Something happened at the ranch last night that hasn't been told. Now what is it?"

Murray evaded a direct answer. "It's absurd to think that Garvin let Wenham go simply because the man promised to show up here to-day. That's beyond all reason."

"Yes; but Pink Whiskers did show up," said Brice.

"He had a reason for it. Make sure of that, inspector. For one thing it backed up the yarn he sprung; and for another, he may have figured it would put him in favorably with you. I've seen things in my time. P. W. is playing a game and trying hard to get Garvin in trouble. It may have something

to do with what you overheard at the store the other day."

"What about Miss Deane?" Brice ventured suddenly.

"She's related some way to Wenham," the sergeant replied.

"Well, if P. W. knew Garvin in the past it's reasonable to suspect that the girl knew him, too, isn't it?"

Murray nodded. "I figured that way when her name was mentioned this morning. It struck me that—well, she's an attractive girl, and Garvin's not so old as either of us and——" The sergeant hesitated and grinned.

"She was a witness to this affair," Brice went on, viewing the matter from a different angle. "Wenham claims she'll corroborate his testimony. I suggested it to Garvin a moment ago; suggested that he bring the girl to me to be questioned. I knew then and there that I had hit a solution. Garvin doesn't want the girl brought into the affair—told me so candidly."

Murray seemed to be pondering over what had been said. "Did he give any reason for it?"

"None; but I can supply it. He's afraid of the girl's testimony."

The sergeant shook his head. "I can't agree with you there, inspector," he objected. "That isn't Garvin's reason. I'll bank on it."

"Isn't it?" Brice contended. "Why not?"

"I've had a theory all along," the sergeant began meditatively; "but I'm keeping it to myself. Maybe it'll work out. I hope so."

The inspector looked curious; but before he could express himself one way or another the telephone bell interrupted. He answered it. A feminine voice came to him clearly. "Is this Broken Bow Post?" Brice said it was. "Has Mr. Wenham been there this morning?" he was asked.

Brice, ever cautious, delayed the information. "Who is this speaking?" he inquired.

"I'm Mr. Wenham's cousin, Miss Deane."

The inspector, agreeably surprised, covered the mouthpiece of the instru-

ment with his hand and turned to the sergeant. "Here's luck! Miss Deane is on the wire."

Murray looked surprised, also, but withheld comment.

Brice resumed his conversation over the telephone. "Wenham has just left here," he replied.

"Oh, thank you! I just wanted to know if he had appeared."

"Just a moment, Miss Deane!" the inspector put in quickly. "What led you to think Wenham was to be here this morning?"

"Why, it was understood last night that——"

"What was understood?" Brice demanded as the girl hesitated.

"That Wenham was to report at the post."

"Between whom was the understanding?"

"Between Mr. Wenham and the police officer who came to arrest him," the girl replied.

"Oh, yes, to be sure!" Brice returned, his tone casual, but his face suddenly set and grim. "I've heard several conflicting versions of what took place at the ranch last night, Miss Deane," the inspector went on. "What can you tell me?"

"Why, Mr. Wenham wasn't able to reach the post last night, and after giving his word to report this morning the trooper released him."

"Then there was no fight?"

"No, sir," the girl responded quickly. "Why—what has been said? Did the trooper——"

"Nothing of consequence," Brice interrupted. "Thank you very much."

The inspector carefully replaced the receiver and turned a grim face toward the waiting sergeant, who apparently had gathered something of what had been disclosed. "The girl verifies Wenham's story," Brice announced.

"I can't believe it!" protested the sergeant.

"Good heavens! It's plain enough now." Brice got to his feet. "Garvin's afraid of Pink Whiskers. Deliberately released him last night. Came back to me with this—this cock-and-bull story.

Didn't figure Wenham would show up here. It's intolerable!"

"Hold on now!" cried Murray. "Don't take too much for granted. Wait until you've——"

"I've waited long enough," Brice cut in. He stepped to the door and called to Hopple: "Ask Garvin to come here at once."

The trooper, summoned from his quarters, presented himself for the second time that morning before the inspector.

"Constable Garvin," Brice began, "what estimate would you put upon the testimony of Miss Deane?"

There was not the slightest hesitancy in Garvin's reply, although the question had taken him by surprise. "I would believe her implicitly," he answered.

A hard smile touched the inspector's lips. "I have just been in communication with the young lady," he remarked.

Garvin waited expectantly, his pulses racing. The telephone! He had overlooked that possibility. Had Miss Deane confessed her part in the unpleasant affair—as she had threatened to do—to protect him? Had she told the truth to spare him certain humiliation and possible disgrace?

"The young lady," Brice resumed in icy tones, "states that there was no fight at the ranch last night, and that you deliberately released your prisoner upon his promise to report here later."

The announcement came to Garvin like an exploding bombshell. Yet there was one solution. It leaped into his mind convincingly. The girl had been cowed and intimidated by Wenham—forced into this shameful deceit.

"What have you to say for yourself, Garvin?" the inspector demanded.

The trooper braced himself. The thought had come to him swiftly, almost gratifyingly, that in uttering this falsehood Miss Deane had, wittingly or otherwise, protected herself. There was little danger now that she would be implicated in Wenham's escape. That, Garvin reasoned, was some consolation. It was a thing he had struggled to conceal; now it had been brought about in a manner wholly unexpected.

"Speak up, Garvin!" Brice commanded. "Surely you have some explanation to make? I'm determined to get at the bottom of this affair."

"I have nothing to say at present, sir," Garvin replied.

Surprise, anger, and mortification glowed in Brice's sallow face; yet when he spoke his voice was remarkably calm and self-possessed. "Very well," he announced. "Until you see fit to speak and account for your behavior, you will consider yourself under arrest."

The inspector, delivered of that verdict, turned his back and strode to the window, leaving Sergeant Murray to perform a most disagreeable task.

CHAPTER VIII.

A QUESTION OF DOUBT.

THE jail at Broken Bow Post—"the strong house," as it was referred to by the troopers—comprised three cells, was built of thick spruce logs chinked with clay, boasted of iron-barred doors and windows, and faced the barrack gates, a solemn warning to those who failed to observe the proprieties of law-abiding citizenship. Its use was confined to the safe-keeping of prisoners and on rare occasions for the punishment of insubordinate troopers, in the latter class of which, that day, Constable Garvin found himself listed.

Sergeant Murray marched his prisoner across the yard and into an empty cell, clanged shut the door, and tested the padlock that secured it. The sergeant looked more distressed at the performance than did Garvin; and now that they were beyond earshot of the inspector he ventured to express himself.

"I didn't look for this," he remarked gloomily. "Brice is on his ear to-day. It's none of my affair, Garvin, but I'm sorry you didn't explain things. It would have gone easier for you."

"The explanations will come later, sergeant," Garvin returned cheerfully. "The inspector isn't to blame for this. There was nothing else left for him to do. The only thing I regret is that Pink Whiskers is still at large and that I'm

not in a position to trail him. I've a premonition there's something in the wind."

"I've felt it myself," the other replied. "P. W. showing up here this morning looks queer to me. He's never done it before, and I'll gamble he'll never do it again."

"If Brice had let me go after that bird last night, as I wanted to do, and as I intended doing, we'd have been spared trouble."

The premonition that Garvin entertained became a reality in less than an hour after the trooper's incarceration. He was sitting on the edge of his bunk, staring thoughtfully through the barred door of his cell, when a townsman, bereft of coat, hat, and breath as well, galloped madly into the barracks, flung himself from his lathered horse, and shouted lustily.

The uproar brought Sergeant Murray, Hopple, and Inspector Brice into view.

At sight of them the visitor made his announcement: "Kendrick's been murdered!"

"Kendrick?" repeated the sergeant. "When? Where?"

"Last night, I reckon," the messenger replied. "A rancher coming down from Holton Wells discovered him lying across the seat of his flivver. Said it was a terrible sight. A shotgun was used on him at close quarters and his face riddled."

Andrew Kendrick was the Sundance banker and a power in the community. His institution was the most pretentious structure in the settlement. Garvin had on two occasions met the banker—both times outside of town. Kendrick was a sleek, prosperous-looking individual with an air of impressive tolerance that money lenders are wont to assume. His dress and manner were more in the style of the city than the provinces, and he traveled throughout the district in a costly big roadster that disputed the right of way with all vehicles of lesser grandeur.

"How long ago was this thing discovered?" Brice demanded.

"About an hour or more," the man answered.

"Why didn't you telephone? It would have saved——"

"I was on the road myself," the man interrupted, "when this rancher came racing along with the news. There wasn't a phone near, so I cut across country and got here as quick as I could."

"Where's this rancher now?" the inspector asked, and then snapped an order to Hopple, who dashed toward the stables.

"He went back to where he'd found Kendrick—said he'd wait there until I brought the police. He'll see that nothing is disturbed."

The inspector turned to Murray. "Better go back with this man," he ordered. "You know what to do, sergeant. I'll try to get in touch with Cockran and have him join you. Use your own judgment and make any arrests you think necessary."

"I guess one arrest will be all that's needed," the sergeant remarked, with a meaning glance at Brice.

"After we learn more of the details we'll act," the inspector returned. "Take your time about it, sergeant, and report back here after you've investigated. This is the first killing we've had in our district for two years, and I want to make short work in rounding up those responsible."

The sergeant dashed into the bunk house for his jacket and side arms; then he ran over to the horse Hopple had brought out and saddled, called to the man who had delivered the message, and set a stiff pace toward the hills.

From the door of his cell Garvin heard the news and observed the preparations; and for the first time since his imprisonment he railed at confinement. Here was excitement breaking, and here he was cooped within four dreary walls! The prospect was decidedly cheerless.

Inspector Brice, returning to his cabin office, passed close at hand, but did not condescend even to glance at the prisoner. Garvin was tempted to call out and request that he be given the

privilege of joining Murray; but sober reflection counseled against it. Brice was not in a lenient mood, what with this fresh crisis confronting him. It was extremely doubtful if he would have released Garvin and given him an assignment had the trooper been the only available man in the barracks.

Garvin sat back in his cell with melancholy resignation. As his thoughts were concerned principally with Pink Whiskers and the trouble he had wrought, they began to register definite impressions upon the trooper's mind.

It was evident that Wenham had not been on friendly terms toward the murdered man. There had been a brawl in which Kendrick had suffered injuries, and the banker had sought revenge by telling his troubles to the police. Moreover, Wenham had stated, in Garvin's presence, that he "couldn't stomach that shrimp." It referred to Kendrick, of course; and Pink Whiskers considered a fine well worth paying for the satisfaction received.

Garvin envied the sergeant's mission, for there was never a doubt in the trooper's mind but that Pink Whiskers had something—or everything—to do with Kendrick's violent death. It was not Wenham's method to act hastily or without taking due respect for the consequences. He was too cunning to bungle things or leave a blazed trail behind him. So unless Murray stumbled upon conclusive evidence, Pink Whiskers would remain beyond the clutches of the law.

These thoughts, passing through Garvin's mind, stirred up rebellion in his heart. He swore at Hopple, who came around presently to air his views of the situation in general, and remained in gloomy mood until, shortly after noon, Sergeant Murray returned to the barracks.

The sergeant, dismounting, went directly to Brice's cabin. Garvin waited impatiently. Fifteen minutes later Murray came out, walked over to the door of Garvin's cell, and unlocked it.

There was a twinkle in the sergeant's eye as he addressed the surprised

trooper. "Step lively! The inspector is waiting."

"What is it now?" Garvin stepped forward briskly enough. "Is Brice to pronounce sentence upon me?"

"He is," replied Murray. "Prepare yourself. You'll get what you deserve this time."

The trooper, expectant, but consoled by the thought that something definite awaited him, hied himself to the judgment seat. Sergeant Murray followed behind.

There was little encouragement in the inspector's demeanor as he bent a cold eye upon his recalcitrant constable. "Garvin," he said, "in view of this Kendrick affair and the shortage of men at the post, I have found it necessary to parole you."

Garvin brightened instantly. "Thank you, sir." If this was the sentence Murray had hinted at and said was deserved, the trooper was uncomplaining.

Brice had not considered it necessary to add that Sergeant Murray had been instrumental in bringing about the truce; that he had urged the inspector to leniency in the matter and enlarged upon the extra work confronting the inadequate local force.

"The sergeant has just returned from a brief survey of the Kendrick affair," said Brice, "and intimates that we are up against a difficult case. So far there is no clew to the identity of the slayer, and while we feel that our suspicions are justifiable, it will require perseverance to fasten the guilt upon the man we believe to be responsible."

"Pink Whiskers?" Garvin asked.

"Undoubtedly," the inspector answered. "However, there are complications and unusual developments that may assist us in solving this matter. We have just learned that Kendrick was an embezzler to the extent of about thirty thousand dollars, that he took the money from the bank vault and was carrying it away with him last night when he was murdered."

Garvin betrayed a sudden interest. "And this money—was it recovered?"

"Not yet. The satchel in which it was presumed to be carried was found

by the sergeant on the floor of the car. It had been slashed open and the contents removed."

A swift and startling recollection flashed into Garvin's active mind. "Let me have some of the particulars," he urged. "Where was Kendrick supposed to be headed for?"

"Holton Wells. That is the nearest railroad station."

"Driving a flivver, was he?"

Brice nodded. "So the sergeant informs me."

"Doesn't Kendrick usually travel in a big roadster?" the trooper asked, recalling having seen the car on frequent occasions.

"Yes," the sergeant replied; "but on this occasion the roadster was laid up for repairs and Kendrick rented a flivver. I learned this from the garage man an hour ago."

"The garage man identified the car as the one he'd rented to the banker?"

"Right away. It wasn't badly damaged. The garage man himself came up and drove the car back to the shop."

"Painted gray, was it? With wire wheels?" persisted Garvin.

"Yes." The sergeant looked puzzled. "How did you know that?"

The trooper ignored the query. "Do you know what time Kendrick left Sundance?"

"The garage man says the banker came into his place just as he was closing up—about seven-thirty—carrying a satchel. Demanded a car at once and said he had to make the night train at Holton Wells. The flivver was the only available machine on hand. Kendrick got in and drove off. Several men in the street saw him. All of them are positive about the time."

Garvin pondered silently, reviewing certain episodes of the night before and arranging them in sequence. "The body was readily identified, was it?" he inquired presently.

"Of course!" The sergeant looked more surprised than ever at that singular question.

"He was killed by a shotgun, wasn't he? Face badly mutilated?"

"Yes. Not much of it left," Murray

confirmed. "Still we know it was Kendrick all right by his clothes, the papers in the pockets, his watch, and seal ring."

"Still it is rather significant, don't you think," the trooper ventured to assert, "that a murderer should use a shotgun and discharge it at close quarters?"

"Well, it isn't a common occurrence," admitted Murray.

"And it might have been done to render identification of the victim rather uncertain?"

"Look here!" the sergeant exclaimed. "What are you driving at?"

Garvin smiled. "I don't believe the murdered man was Kendrick," he replied with a quiet assurance that startled his listeners.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK.

GARVIN'S announcement, coupled with the persistent questioning that had led up to the blunt declaration, had a jarring effect upon both Murray and Inspector Brice. For a moment following the trooper's statement the men regarded him in amazement.

"Are you basing your theory, Garvin," the inspector said at length, "wholly upon the fact that the murderer used a shotgun and that in consequence the victim's face was mutilated?"

"No, sir," Garvin responded. "That is merely one of the points to substantiate my theory. Probably because the Wenham affair of last night was occupying my mind to the exclusion of all else, I overlooked one incident that, until the present, seemed to be of little consequence. As I came down from the ranch last evening and struck the highway, I met a flivver, such as the sergeant has described, traveling at a rapid gait in the direction of Holton Wells."

"Oh, then you saw Kendrick, did you?" Murray broke out.

"No; not Kendrick. He wasn't driving it."

"Who was?"

"A chap I ran across several days before—gave his name as Austin." Gar-

vin went on to relate the particulars of that meeting. "I was surprised to see him driving a car, and I thought afterward I should have held and questioned him. He slowed down when he saw me, apologized for not giving me a lift, and said that he was in a big hurry to catch the ten-o'clock train at Holton Wells. He drove on. That was shortly before I met you, inspector."

Brice did not attempt to conceal his amazement. "Must have been about eight o'clock," he said. "If the car left Sundance at seven-thirty—are you certain it was the flivver Murray has described?" he demanded.

"A gray one with wire wheels," replied Garvin. "Isn't that what you said, sergeant?"

"I did. The only one of that color and equipment in the district, too," Murray declared. "But I've talked with several witnesses who say that Kendrick was driving it," he persisted.

"I won't deny that the banker left the settlement in the car," said the trooper; "but I do say he was not at the wheel when the machine slowed down beside me. It would seem that the drivers were changed somewhere in the four miles between Sundance and my point of observation."

The sergeant whistled softly. "Well, say, this does put a new complexion on the matter, doesn't it? If this chap Austin took Kendrick's place in the car somewhere along the road——" He broke off to ask a question: "Notice how Austin was dressed?"

"Wore a salt-and-pepper suit, flannel shirt, and a big slouch hat. I noticed particularly because the outfit was new."

"Huh!" exclaimed Murray. "The murdered man had on a black suit and a panama hat. I found the hat in the bottom of the car riddled with buckshot. How do you account for that?"

"I don't," Garvin answered. "That's a thing, when solved, that'll go to clearing up the mystery. This Austin, now that I think of it, was about Kendrick's build and had the same color hair. Looked a lot like the banker. Never considered the resemblance before."

"You didn't see the satchel?" asked

Brice, whose sallow countenance was now aglow.

"I don't recall it."

The inspector meditated. "You've given us a new problem to solve, Garvin," he declared, "whether or not your theory is well founded. It may lead to interesting developments."

"It's got me guessing," admitted the sergeant. "First, Kendrick is seen leaving Sundance in the flivver, dressed in a black suit and panama; that much has been definitely established. Then, half an hour later, Garvin spots the same flivver with Austin in it, dressed in a salt-and-pepper suit and a slouch hat. And next, a body is found in the gray flivver, its face riddled by a charge of buckshot. The body is garbed in a black suit, and I find a panama on the floor of the car. Now, what's the answer? Is the body Austin's, decked in Kendrick's clothes and personal effects? Or is it Kendrick's?"

"And if the latter," put in Brice, "how did the banker get out of the car and get into it again?"

"And what became of the thirty thousand dollars?" queried Garvin. "Did any one see the money?"

"Not that I know of," replied the sergeant.

"Then how do we know it was in the satchel?"

"We don't. So far we've just taken it for granted. All we do know for a certainty is that at ten o'clock this morning, when the bank opened, the bookkeeper found the door of the vault open, investigated, and discovered that the money was not there. He claims there was thirty thousand in currency in the safe the afternoon before. Kendrick was the only man, besides the cashier, who had the combination. The cashier's been sick in bed for a week, so that lets him out. I found the satchel slit open and empty in the back of the flivver. The garage man identified it as the one Kendrick was carrying the night before when he got into the car. Also, it has the banker's initials on it."

"We still don't know what it contained, if anything," argued Garvin.

"Well, the money's gone and so is

Kendrick. The satchel was slit open and empty, as I've said before. If it had contained wearing apparel it wouldn't have tempted any one to remove it; that's a certainty."

"Then robbery would seem to be the motive for the crime," Garvin said. "Some one knew what Kendrick was carrying and took measures to——"

"But if it wasn't Kendrick in the car," broke in the sergeant, "where does this chap Austin fit in packing a satchel of currency? Were they acquaintances? Did they plot this mystery between themselves?"

"That's for some smart policeman to discover," remarked Garvin.

"I wonder," Brice put in, "if Pink Whiskers had anything to do with the affair, after all?"

"He had an important engagement to keep last night," responded Garvin; "and he didn't hand any compliments to Kendrick."

"Yes; and he showed up here grinning this morning," supplemented Murray. "Looks queer to me."

The inspector glanced at his watch. "We're wasting time. Sergeant, you and Garvin get busy. Go as far as you like in this affair. Results are all I want. I have no suggestions to offer, except that I think it would be advisable to keep under cover what Garvin has told. See if you can get any trace or information regarding Austin. It may prove valuable one way or another."

Five minutes later Sergeant Murray and Constable Garvin, keenly alert, armed for emergencies, and prepared for the unexpected, rode out from the barracks and headed through the oven-like afternoon heat toward Sundance. The task assigned to them was all in a day's work; and once a trail was found they would follow tirelessly, relentlessly.

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLESOME DISCLOSURES.

MOST of the afternoon was spent in and around Sundance, where the mounted policemen asked questions and garnered information. What they listened to and filed away for future use

was meager indeed; but there was no let-up in their performance, scant as the results appeared.

Andrew Kendrick had been a bachelor, so far as his associates knew, never having mentioned a wife or, for that matter, any other relative or kinsfolk. He had resided at the Maple Leaf House, a small hotel on the outskirts of the settlement.

Mrs. Crumpitt, who ran the establishment, had very little information to give the officers, aside from the fact that her guest had paid his bills promptly, gave very little trouble, and never talked much. A thorough search of the room he had occupied revealed nothing of interest. The landlady had identified the remains as those of her former lodger, but did not seem ready to believe that he had absconded with the bank's funds.

"Mr. Kendrick told me he was going to Calgary on business and would be away for a week," she admitted. "He often did that. And he left all his clothes here. Don't you think if he was running away with that money and didn't expect to come back he would have taken his belongings?"

"He had a satchel, hadn't he?" questioned the sergeant.

"Yes; but it was a small one. He couldn't take much in it."

"No; not much," returned Murray. "Only about thirty thousand. He didn't need to worry about a few clothes."

Mrs. Crumpitt was still unconvinced. "The poor man's dead and gone now. If he's done wrong he's paid for it. What's the good of charging him with this crime?"

Garvin and the sergeant left the house without taking the trouble to argue the matter. The fact that the money was gone and that it was up to the police to find who had taken it did not seem to enter the landlady's calculations.

The employees at the bank were questioned, after each of them had identified the remains of their late employer. Nothing of consequence developed. None of them had the temerity to intimate that Kendrick had removed the currency from the vaults. The book-

keeper admitted that he and Kendrick had counted the money and placed it in the safe late the previous afternoon. The banker remained in the office after the bookkeeper had gone. Yes, he had seen the satchel on Kendrick's desk before leaving. That was all he knew, except that the next morning he had found the door of the safe open and the money missing.

"Did Kendrick say anything about leaving for Calgary?" Garvin asked.

"Not a word. If he had been going away he would have given me the combination of the safe."

"The combination is changed often, is it?"

"I couldn't say to that, sir. I have nothing to do with the safe. The opening of it was always attended to by Mr. Kendrick or our cashier, Mr. Strut, who is ill at home at present."

The bookkeeper went on to say that after he had made the discovery he telephoned Kendrick, only to learn from Mrs. Crumpitt that the banker had left town. Then he had telephoned the news to the cashier and was about to communicate with police headquarters when Sergeant Murray appeared on the scene with the report of the murder.

"Is it possible," asked Garvin, "that Kendrick was taking the money to Calgary to deposit?"

"No, sir; not that amount. It represented every cent of our available cash. We cannot open our doors now until some of our securities are marketed."

While the sergeant went to interview Strut, the cashier, Garvin revisited the undertaking establishment and made a critical inspection of the remains as well as the clothing that had been found on the body. Afterward he appeared at the garage, examined the flivver from bumper to tail light, and listened to all the garage man had to relate.

"I was just closing shop when Kendrick came in," the man volunteered. "Yes, he did seem a little excited, now I come to think back. Had a bag with him and kicked because I couldn't give him a better car. I told him the flivver would get him to Holton Wells in plenty of time to connect with the train. Of-

ferred to drive him over so I could get the car back before morning, but he objected."

"Oh, objected, did he?" said Garvin. "Wanted to go alone."

"Looks that way," the other admitted. "Said he'd leave the flivver in Holton Wells and bring it back when he returned. Said he'd be gone only a couple of days."

Garvin noticed the discrepancy between the garage man's statement and Mrs. Crumpitt's in regard to the time Kendrick intended to remain away; but he made no comment. The fact that the banker had objected to company on the trip was another point just brought out. It served to strengthen the trooper's theory.

When it came to gathering information about Austin, the police found themselves up against a blank wall of ignorance. It was impossible to find any one in the community who recalled, even remotely, the man whom Garvin described. Strangers were not rare in Sundance and, contrary to popular fancy, they were not viewed with suspicion or distrust. So long as a man went about his business and did not attempt to make himself troublesome, he was let alone.

The employees at the bank, including the young woman who had acted as Kendrick's secretary, could not recall Austin as a visitor. None of the business houses had taken on new help within the past week. Garvin was divided between two opinions: Either Austin had failed to find a position in the settlement and had gone out into the country where work was plentiful with the ranchers, busy with harvest, or he had misrepresented himself and his needs and had other reasons for coming to Sundance.

Garvin had found the stranger affable and to all appearances frankly outspoken. There had been nothing to excite suspicion in the man's behavior, or the fact that he was unemployed. Moreover, he had been quick to recognize the trooper the night before and apologized for not having time to give him a lift. He had admitted his haste and

made no effort to conceal his destination. Still, the man's reappearance in new clothes and at the wheel of a car had to be explained.

"If I had only had sense enough to halt Austin and question him," Garvin remarked, when he and the sergeant met later to compare notes, "this little affair would have been nipped before it blossomed."

"Yes," returned Murray, unimpressed; "and if Kendrick had fallen down and broken a leg at six o'clock last night the bank would have been thirty thousand ahead and he would still be drawing breath."

"Which he may be doing for all we know," Garvin observed.

The sergeant pondered soberly. "Well, I don't see it as clearly as you seem to, Garvin," he returned. "It's apparent enough that Kendrick helped himself to the money, tried to make a get-away, and was waylaid on the road. I won't try to explain Austin's performance. He's been sort of a—a phantom, so far."

"Hold on now!" he cried, as the other started to object. "I'm not denying you saw the man. Besides, you described the flivver perfectly. And, of course, you would have recognized Kendrick had he been at the wheel. What I'm getting at is this: you seem to be the only person in the district, so far, who has ever laid eyes on Austin. And that's singular, isn't it?"

"It's unfortunate," contended Garvin.

"So it is," the sergeant agreed. "Seems to me the best thing to do is to find Pink Whiskers and subject him to a bit of strenuous questioning."

"Better get something on him first. You'll have to scare him before you get anything out of him. I believe I know Wenham."

Sergeant Murray looked searchingly at his companion. "Yesterday wasn't your first meeting with him then?"

"Neither my first nor last," Garvin returned. "No use going into details now, sergeant. When the time comes I'll——"

"Suits me," Murray broke in with a

reassuring smile. "The older I've grown the less curious I've become."

"I figured that way before committing myself," was Garvin's frank rejoinder.

The subject was dropped. The men rode on, discussing other matters until the garage was reached. There they dismounted and went inside. Garvin had a desire to look over the two exhibits—the panama hat and the satchel—that had been left in keeping of the garage man and which were later to be taken to the post and held as evidence. These exhibits had not been shown him at the time of his former visit.

The hat was of an expensive make, finely woven, decked out with a bright silk band, and bore the label of an exclusive Calgary dealer. Inside were stamped the initials of its late owner—A. K. However, there was never any question of the ownership of the headgear. It was the only one of its kind in Sundance, and Kendrick had worn it, cocked at a rakish angle, since early July.

The hat was riddled with shot and powder marked, mute evidence of the tragedy that had befallen its wearer. Garvin, examining it with his usual thoroughness, suddenly looked over at the sergeant.

"You've given this the once-over, have you?"

"Sure!" responded Murray.

"Noticed anything unusual in regard to the powder marks?" Garvin indicated the bluish stains that discolored one side of the headgear.

"They weren't painted on; that's one thing sure."

"The powder marks would show which side of the hat was toward the shotgun at the time it was fired, wouldn't it?"

"Why, certainly," responded the sergeant.

"Then what do you make of this?" queried Garvin. "The marks are on the back of the hat."

"Back?" Murray inspected the exhibit closely. "They sure are!" he declared. "I hadn't noticed that before."

"The man wearing it was shot in the face, wasn't he?"

"By Godfrey, that's queer!" The sergeant scowled. "Say, it would look as if the hat had been worn hind side foremost at the time of the shooting."

"Either that," Garvin replied meditatively, "or the victim didn't have on the hat at the time of the shooting and it was doctored to fit the case."

"You mean the hat was shot full of holes afterward?"

"Possibly."

"Huh, that's a new angle! Still, it doesn't enlighten us any."

Although Garvin thought differently he did not endeavor to convince his companion. There would be time enough for that later. He put the hat aside and gave his attention to the satchel. It was a heavy, sole-leather bag with double straps, brass locks and trimmings. One side of it had been slashed open.

The trooper seemed to give it but a cursory examination. "Is this the way you found it?" he asked at length.

"Exactly," declared the sergeant. "Not so much as a scrap of paper in the thing."

The bag was returned to the shelf in the office. Garvin and the sergeant walked out to where their horses stood and climbed into their saddles. Murray eyed his companion narrowly as they rode off; read something amiss in Garvin's continued silence.

"What's on your mind now?" he inquired.

"I was just wondering about a couple of things," replied Garvin. "First, why did the murderer empty the bag and leave it on the scene? Wouldn't it have been more convenient to take the satchel along with him instead of transferring the contents?"

"Probably he didn't want to take chances of the thing being found in his possession," answered Murray.

"And, second," Garvin went on, as if the other had not ventured an opinion at all, "why was the bag slashed open, presumably to get at the prize, when it wasn't locked?"

The sergeant started. "Unlocked,

was it? I hadn't noticed that. What do you make of it?"

"Well, offhand I should say that it was another of the props used to set the stage for this melodrama. The finding of the satchel would indicate, first, that something had been carried off in it by the driver of the flivver—the thirty thousand in currency missing from the Kendrick bank. And, second, the fact that the bag was slashed open and the contents removed would indicate that the assassin had taken the money. Moreover, it would furnish us with a splendid motive for the crime. This affair has been staged by a master hand, sergeant."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PHANTOM QUEST.

ALTHOUGH he had paid close attention to all that Garvin had to say, Sergeant Murray did not immediately respond. He sat meditatively and preoccupied, as if turning over in his mind the opinions ventured by his younger companion.

"Garvin," he said at length, with both envy and admiration in his tone, "you've got a sense that I lack; never had it, I guess. Suppose you might label it deductive detecting. You're something like these storybook chaps who pick up an old shoe and after giving it the once-over announce who'd worn it, tell what he'd had to eat on Friday the thirteenth, and give the color of his second cousin's hair. Now, I can follow a trail if it's fairly plain, and I can put up a stiff fight if that's necessary and usually come back with my man. Maybe that's why I'm wearing stripes. But I don't use my noodle the way I should. It runs only at half speed."

"Nonsense!" protested Garvin. "You're the——"

"I had the first look at those exhibits," the sergeant cut in, "and I didn't see anything in them to invite suspicion or speculation. But you did—right on the jump. That's just the difference between us; a difference that throws the balance in your favor, particularly in a case of the sort we're on now."

"I've done nothing but advance a few wild theories," Garvin returned modestly. "They may not amount to a thing. Sometimes this vivid imagination of mine gets unruly and puts me in bad. It has in the past."

"Well, I prefer a man who'll concoct a theory, however wild, to one whose gray matter doesn't function. Now, I'm not saying that all you've suggested strikes me as logical; but it's worth considering. I'm stubborn enough to believe that it was Kendrick who was murdered, in spite of this Austin episode, and that the money he took from the bank furnished the motive for the crime. Perhaps you think it's because all the evidence points that way, and I haven't brains enough to look beneath the surface. Still, you'll have to admit, Garvin, that the evidence you've sprung, queer as it may be, doesn't dispute it."

"Maybe not," responded Garvin, unperturbed. He saw no reason for extended argument. Until something more definite was disclosed the trooper knew the futility of sidetracking Murray's train of thought.

"We'll get the right steer before long," the sergeant observed. "Maybe we're both a mile away from the truth. Meanwhile we won't waste breath discussing it. Let's get busy."

"You're in command of this expedition," said Garvin. "What's the program?"

"I'm going to take you up the road to the scene of the last unpleasantness," the sergeant replied. "Perhaps you'll turn up a big surprise. I couldn't let you run off alone, of course," he added, with a grin. "You're on parole. You might take it into your head to disappear."

Garvin laughed. "You couldn't drag me out of this district," he declared, "even if I was sentenced to be shot at sunrise. Not with this interesting mystery to solve."

"I imagine the inspector thinks the same," remarked the other.

After an hour of steady riding, the men reached the spot on the main highway where the gray flivver and its lifeless driver had been discovered eight

hours before. The sergeant indicated where the car had been found, on the right-hand side of the narrow road. Then he pointed out a spot directly opposite.

"The chap with the shotgun must have hidden himself yonder and fired point-blank at Kendrick. Killed him instantly, of course. The car, out of control, ran into the underbrush. That saved it from a smash. There was no damage done except to the headlights and the fenders."

Garvin nodded and looked over the ground for himself. The road, thick with dust, was cluttered with marks of reet and hoofs. No one of them could be picked out and studied accurately. The banks on either side of the road at that point were fairly steep and heavily wooded. The assassin doubtless had left his horse some distance away; then recovered and mounted it after the crime. The possibility of trailing him was remote indeed, even if that had been contemplated.

"We're up a blind alley here," contended the sergeant, after Garvin had concluded his investigation and admitted his failure to strike any lead. "Not a solitary clew and nothing to give us any encouragement. Looks to me as if the only thing left is to round up Pink Whiskers and hear what he's got to say."

"It's what he hasn't got to say—to us—that would be the interesting thing to hear," remarked Garvin.

"Correct! Still, we've got to start somewhere, and it might as well be on Pèter Wenham. He might forget himself and let slip——" The sergeant broke off with a low exclamation: "Say, speak of the devil! Here comes our quarry right now. Looks as if P. W. is going to keep his word with the inspector and stick close to home."

"There's an element of safety in that," commented Garvin, as he watched the approach of Pink Whiskers. "Far more than if he remained under cover and had us raking the country for him."

The policemen lounged back in their saddles and fell silent as Wenham rode up beside them. The newcomer was

smiling. There was no malice in the swift glance he flashed at Garvin; merely the suggestion of a past triumph and the hint of more to come that got under the trooper's skin.

"Howdy!" Wenham greeted, with a flip of his hand. "Right on the job, I see. Well, you got a hard nut to crack this time. Dirty piece of business, this killing," the man continued. "Me and Kendrick never got along very well. I always knew him to be a rascal, and I guess the community knows it now. Waited until he got a fat wad and planned to vanish. He got what was coming to him, all right; but I hate to think of him getting potted like a jack rabbit."

"Where'd you learn the particulars of this affair?" demanded Murray.

"Down at the settlement at noon."

"Got your alibi fixed, I suppose," the sergeant said bluntly, "regarding your whereabouts last night."

He of the brick-colored whiskers refused to take insult at the implication hurled at him. "That's not a nice compliment to hand me, sergeant," he remonstrated mildly. "Won't you chaps ever get it out of your heads that where there's mischief I'm bound to be at the bottom of it? Am I the scapegoat for the district?"

"Well, you had important business to transact last night," Murray reminded him; "so blamed important that you couldn't show up at the post. Said so yourself. Where and what was it?"

"To speak frankly," Wenham returned, "I don't think it is any of your business."

"I might make it my business," the sergeant retorted.

"Go ahead! That's the privilege granted by brass buttons and a uniform. I'm through talking to you troopers. By the time it gets to headquarters it's so twisted and garbled that I'm put in wrong."

Wenham shot a glance at Garvin. "What happened last night cured me. Now when I've got anything to say I'll spill it to the inspector himself."

Garvin held his tongue, but the sergeant did not. "Don't suppose you

knew anything about this affair until to-day, noon, eh?"

"Not a whisper."

"I've run across a pile of cheerful liars in my time," Murray declared, "but you top the pack. You had a finger and maybe a whole fist in this Kendrick killing as sure as sunrise."

Wenham shrugged. "Talk's cheap. You'll have to do more than that if you keep wearing that uniform. Why don't you take me along to the barracks if you're so sure of yourself? Why waste time looking elsewhere?"

"I'm not ready for that yet," the sergeant replied grimly, undeterred by the other's bluff. "Take it from me, Pink Whiskers, the next time you set foot inside Broken Bow barracks you'll stay until we escort you to a courtroom. I'd give a month's pay to see that salmon-colored brush of yours hanging in a noose."

Wenham laughed good-naturedly. "You can't get me sore. Is this all you chaps have to do—crack jokes? Why don't you get busy? Got any clues? Nabbed any one yet? Don't you pick on any one but your friends? How about the strangers in the district? Plenty of 'em about. Why don't you look a few of 'em over? The trick was turned by an outsider. I'll wager on that."

The mention of strangers instantly aroused Garvin's interest. Wenham's assertion that an outsider might have played a part in the affair set the trooper's mind at work. It was not that he believed in the man. Doubtless Wenham was quite eager to divert suspicion from himself and thrust it upon others. Nevertheless, Garvin began to speculate upon certain past events, and after Pink Whiskers and the sergeant had discharged the last of their verbal arrows and the rancher had started to leave, the trooper came out with a question:

"Ever run across a stranger calling himself Austin?"

Wenham drew rein and surveyed Garvin with an impersonal glance. "Funny you should mention that," he said. "A couple of days ago a fellow

giving that name tackled me for a job. I turned him away, not having anything to offer. I got to thinking afterward that he didn't look like the usual run of hobos that trail in here during harvest. And not more than an hour ago I saw him again, dressed in a new outfit and looking as prosperous as two-dollar wheat."

"An hour ago?" repeated Garvin. "Where?"

"He was coming into the settlement as I was leaving it. I had a mind to talk to him, but I didn't." Wenham's smile was suggestive. "Quizzing strangers who are out of work one day and dolled up like a tourist the next is a job for brass buttons."

"What's his description?"

"Oh, medium build, brown hair and eyes."

"Recall what he was wearing?" Garvin asked, careful not to betray too much interest.

Wenham meditated. "Yes; he had on a salt-and-pepper suit, flannel shirt, and a big slouch hat."

Neither Garvin nor the sergeant felt tempted to cross-examine Wenham; neither did they seek to impress the man with the importance of his testimony. Pink Whiskers, doubtless inferring by the silence that nothing more was expected of him, shook up his reins and departed.

It was not until Wenham had passed from view that Murray turned in his saddle and regarded his companion with a wry smile. "Well, this is a bit interesting. Here's one person besides yourself, Garvin, who has laid eyes on our phantom friend."

"Very interesting," agreed Garvin, his mind a riot of conjecture. "Whether true or not," he added.

"The fact that Austin's been seen since the murder," the sergeant went on, "hands a wallop to your pet theory, doesn't it?"

"It would seem to," the other returned; "provided you take as true all that Pink Whiskers had to say."

"Of course! There's the rub. I never would believe P. W. under oath. But in this instance he seems to be bor-

dering on the truth. He recalled Austin's name and said the man was looking for work. Moreover, he's corroborated your description of Austin, even to the clothes the chap was wearing. That's something to set us wondering, isn't it?"

Garvin nodded. "It is," he replied. "Wenham must have seen Austin at some time. I won't dispute that; but I'll require something more than his word for it that he saw the man an hour ago."

The sergeant, pondering deeply, reserved comment upon that particular matter. "It's down to a question of bringing to light either Austin or Kendrick," he observed at length. "The finding of one of these men will establish beyond any doubt the identity of the shotgun victim. After that is settled, we'll have a clear field ahead of us."

Garvin did not dispute the assertion. At the same time he kept to himself certain growing suspicions that had found lodging in his mind; suspicions that, received during the course of Wenham's chatter, seemed to reveal surprisingly new complications.

CHAPTER XII.

THE QUESTION ANSWERED?

IN an effort to verify as speedily as possible the statement volunteered by Wenham, Garvin and Sergeant Murray doubled back to Sundance and proceeded with a more diligent investigation. The news of the tragedy had brought many newcomers into town; ranchers and settlers from the surrounding territory who were agog with excitement, morbidly interested in the details of the affair and full of speculation as to the perpetrator of the crime.

The report of Kendrick's defalcation had a decided effect upon the crowd, most of whom were depositors in the local bank and whose savings were matters of vital importance. Just how their deposits were to be affected by the embezzlement, in case the money was not recovered, seemed to be a question of grim speculation. As Kendrick had

been the head and sole stockholder in the institution, and alone responsible for the safety of the funds intrusted to his care, the possibility of making good the loss was remote indeed.

Public sentiment ran high against the murdered banker; and in view of his treachery there were few to mourn his untimely departure. The majority of those frugal and industrious townsfolk who wandered the streets and eyed the closed bank ominously would have been far more interested in the recovery of the missing funds than in the arrest of Kendrick's murderer minus the thirty thousand.

An hour spent in persistent questioning and in combing the town from end to end failed to disclose any trace of Austin. He still seemed to be a will-o'-the-wisp so far as the troopers were concerned. If alive, he was as elusive as the notorious needle in the proverbial haystack. The sergeant appeared disappointed; Garvin just the opposite. The latter was still convinced that the man they sought was decorating a slab in the local undertaking parlor.

It was the sergeant who volunteered an explanation to account for the non-discovery of the quarry. "If there is such a person as Austin and he knows we're looking for him, he'll be scared. He'll naturally think the police are after him in connection with the Kendrick affair and keep himself under cover."

"But why necessarily in connection with the Kendrick affair?" asked Garvin, not particularly impressed with the argument.

"Why not? He must have heard the details. You saw him in the gray flivver last night. That'll demand an explanation. Austin knows it and doesn't want to account for it."

"Then you figure he can't account for it satisfactorily?"

"Well, yes. I don't see how he could, do you?"

"He may have more connection with this tragedy than you first assumed, eh?" Garvin preferred to ask a question rather than answer one.

"If he's not a phantom, yes."

"He seems to be just at present.

Strange, if Wenham's told the truth, there's neither hide nor hair of the man to be found in town."

"A man in the outfit you and Wenham describe, even though he is a stranger, wouldn't be particularly conspicuous," the sergeant contended. "We haven't advertised that he's wanted or that he has any connection with the case we're on. Besides, the townsfolk are too busy talking and speculating and explaining what they'd do if wearing our authority to do much observing."

Supper time found the troopers without a single clew. The sergeant was on the point of telephoning the result of the afternoon's activities to the inspector, when Constable Cockran appeared on the scene with a bit of gratifying news. It seemed he had heard of the tragedy shortly after noon, and upon getting in touch with Broken Bow Post had been ordered to report to Murray.

"I saw a chap answering your description of Austin not an hour ago," declared Cockran, when mention of the unsuccessful quest had been made. "Yes; clothes and all. Passed me on the road near Prairie Springs."

"Horseback?"

"Yes; horse bearing the Rosebud brand. I noticed that particularly, because I've been rounding up some strays from that ranch and the brand's familiar."

"By Godfrey!" exclaimed the sergeant, highly pleased at the unexpected news. "Now we're getting somewhere. Suppose you travel along to the Rosebud Ranch and collar this chap. Make it snappy, Cockran. Austin's appearance on the scene is mighty essential."

"Where'll I take him? To the post?"

"Yes; if you're sure it's Austin. Freeze to him, Cockran, and don't let the weeds sprout under you."

Stopping only long enough to water his horse and roll himself a cigarette, Cockran applied the spurs and vanished down the road in a cloud of dust.

The sergeant looked after him with a chuckle. "A piece of luck," he declared. "Here's the second witness to spy Austin since the shotgun affair. Your the-

ory's getting weaker all the time, Garvin."

Garvin, who had withheld comment during Cockran's announcement, returned cheerfully: "I'll wait until the man's produced before running up the white flag."

Murray laughed. "Good for you! Stick to your guns. I'm going inside to phone the inspector," he added, turning in at the nearest door. "Maybe he's had some news."

Waiting beside his horse while the sergeant telephoned, Garvin was approached by a queer, wizen-faced individual, who addressed him in a nervous whisper. "Got any clews yet?" he inquired, sliding up to the trooper in a manner that suggested caution and extreme discretion.

Garvin, surprised at the query and in doubt as to the stranger's purpose, surveyed him, amused. "Not many," he replied. "Are you interested in this affair?"

"I'm always interested in crime," the man answered. "I've made a serious study of it. If you need any help, call on me. That's my business, you know—detective work. I succeed where others fail."

Garvin smiled. "Well, you seem to be a valuable man. Better have a talk with Inspector Brice. He may give you an assignment."

"I go at things scientifically," the other returned impressively. "I accept no fees. The study of crime in all its various phases is a subject that requires a keen, analytical mind such as I possess."

Before Garvin could respond to that bit of self-flattery, Murray appeared on the scene.

The sergeant glanced at the newcomer and broke into a laugh. "Hello, Zader! On the trail as usual, eh? Well, how do things stand, according to your judgment?"

"I'm making a close study of this affair," the man addressed as Zader replied, glancing around as if in fear of being overheard. "Look out for surprises. There are strange forces at work."

"Is that a fact?" The sergeant tipped a wink at Garvin. "What's your theory now?"

Zader lowered his voice. "I have more work to do before making any statement. You must help me. Where's the satchel the money was carried away in? I must examine it for thumb prints. That's the way to find the guilty man—thumb prints. They're infallible!"

"No doubt of it," rejoined Murray; "but I'm afraid you won't find any clear marks on the bag, Zader. It's been handled by half a dozen men since the robbery. You'd get mixed up."

"Some of them might be clear enough. I could compare them with my collection. We might find a strange one that would lead us to the——"

"By Godfrey!" the sergeant exclaimed, breaking in upon the other's suggestion. "You've thumb-marked about every one in town, haven't you?"

Zader nodded. "Just about. I keep them for reference. You never know when something'll happen to make the prints valuable. I got them all listed and classified."

"Got Kendrick's, have you?"

"Yes. He let me take them a month ago. A nice man, Mr. Kendrick was. I'm determined to find his murderer."

"Good for you!" the sergeant broke out. "Run along home and bring your collection here. We'll wait."

"What for?" Zader asked. "Why do you want Mr. Kendrick's prints?"

"Never mind asking questions. You'll learn all in due time. You're a valuable man, Zader. Hurry now! We've no time to lose."

Impressed by the sergeant's anxiety, Zader vanished swiftly. Once he had gone, Murray turned to Garvin. "Say, this is another piece of luck. Get what I mean, don't you? Kendrick's thumb prints! We'll make the identity of the murdered man a certainty now."

"It can't come too soon to suit me," replied Garvin. "Who is the brilliant sleuth that's assisting us?"

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know him. Why, he's Byrd Zader, a harmless old boy who's possessed with the notion of being a great detective. Took a corre-

spondence course in the thing, I believe. Always snooping around and pulling funny stunts. Pesters us continually and wants the inspector to assign him to the post. He's a bug on thumb prints, and just to humor him most all the localities have permitted him to take theirs. He took mine a year ago and probably will be after yours right away. Has a book filled with them. I guess for once in his misspent career he'll be of some use to us."

Garvin listened quietly to all the sergeant had to relate, but asked no further questions and volunteered no comment. The test in prospect was eagerly awaited, for Garvin was as anxious to establish his theory regarding the victim as Murray was in exploding it. If the prints obtained from Zader matched those taken from the thumbs of the murdered man, the question would be settled for good and all. There could be no disputing of that evidence.

Five minutes later, considerably out of breath, but with flushed countenance and sparkling eyes, Zader reappeared upon the scene, hugging a book under one arm. That his life work was at last appreciated, that he was to be consulted and was to coöperate with the police had wrought a magic change in the man. He was trembling with excitement.

However, when the sergeant explained what was to be done, Zader's enthusiasm waned perceptibly. "What's the sense of taking off another set of prints?" he remonstrated. "Do you think because a man's dead that his thumb prints will be altered?"

"Never mind the chatter," Murray fired back. "You do as I say."

The three men went directly to the establishment presided over by Spofford, who as general furniture dealer of the settlement acted in the capacities of undertaker and coroner. Their wants were made known and as promptly acted upon. To Zader, as the "expert," was allotted the privilege of taking the impressions from the inked thumbs of the deceased.

That finished, the "detective" brought out his magnifying glass and gravely

inspected the results. Next he compared them with the thumb prints contained on a page in his book, under which was written Kendrick's name. Then, turning to his audience, he made his announcement.

"They're indetical," he declared. "The prints I've just taken are duplicates of those recorded in my book. They're all Mr. Kendrick's, of course. Just because a man's dead," he went on in a professional tone, "it doesn't change his thumb prints any. They're the same from cradle to grave, gentlemen—one, unalterable, changeless, as fixed as the stars or the leopard's spots."

Garvin heard the verdict without a change of countenance. First the sergeant, then Garvin himself, studied the prints under the glass and compared the duplicates with the originals. The evidence before the men was indisputable, too apparent to invite the slightest doubt. The delicate tracery of loops and whorls impressed upon the paper decided the question.

"We're obliged to you, Zader," Murray remarked at length, when the troopers had completed their inspection. "You've rendered us a valuable service."

"Is this all you'll want of me?" Zader queried anxiously, viewing his dismissal from the case with evident disapproval.

"All at present, yes."

Zader looked hurt and puzzled. "I don't see what help I've been," he contended. "What was the object in taking off these impressions? Did you think maybe this dead man was—was somebody else besides Mr. Kendrick?"

"Not precisely," the sergeant replied; "but we wanted to be absolutely certain."

"Well, it's certain enough now," Zader declared emphatically. "Thumb prints don't lie. They can't."

Before the troopers left the establishment, Spofford put in a word. "It may not have any bearing on the case," he began, "but you ought to know that at the autopsy held this afternoon the doctor found a thirty-two-caliber bullet in Kendrick's head. It must have

been fired from the rear, because the bullet went in just below the left ear."

"Huh," said the sergeant. "That's news. They must have wanted to make sure of finishing him off quick. Shotgun and revolver! What do you know about that, Garvin?"

Garvin, upon whom the information had produced more effect, was quick to volunteer a suggestion: "I'd say the revolver bullet killed the man; the shotgun was used for another purpose."

"Well, I might have figured that way myself," the sergeant remarked, "if it wasn't for what Zader's just proved. This thumb-print evidence has knocked your pet theory in the head. Convinced of it now, aren't you?"

"I can't very well dispute it," Garvin replied. The disappointment he may have felt was admirably concealed.

"Hardly! There's no question as to the identity of the victim. It is Kendrick all right enough. Perhaps the revolver and the shotgun were discharged at the same time. Anyhow, the shotgun wasn't used simply for the purpose of mutilation, as you've argued."

"Perhaps not," returned Garvin in a tone that was not particularly convincing.

"Facts are facts," declared Murray. "We've got a clear-cut case now with no confusing side issues. Kendrick helped himself to the bank funds, and somebody's pumped him full of lead and taken the thirty thousand. It's up to us to get on the trail and corral the guilty party."

CHAPTER XIII:

THE ONE-MAN JOB.

ALTHOUGH the troopers were provided with "iron forage," as they termed the rations stored against emergencies in their saddlebags, they preferred to dine on better food when the opportunity presented itself. Therefore, when the long twilight descended upon Sundance, announcing the meal-time hour, the men entered a quick-lunch emporium, perched themselves upon high stools, and proceeded to enjoy such eatables as the menu afforded.

When the meal was finished the sergeant again got in touch with Broken Bow Post and reported later developments. Inspector Brice was informed of the Zader episode and the thumbprint performance. Murray admitted that just at the present moment they were up against a stone wall so far as tangible clues were concerned, unless it was thought advisable to take Pink Whiskers into custody. Brice decided to hold off on that matter until some definite charge might be entered against Wenham. He felt that little could be gained in questioning the man or bringing him to headquarters only to be released again.

"We may as well mark time until Cockran brings this man Austin to the post and we learn what he has to say for himself," the inspector said. "Meanwhile, you and Garvin may as well come in."

The sergeant left the telephone to communicate the sum and substance of Brice's remarks to his companion. He found Garvin at the door of the restaurant, looking off up the street.

"Remember Olmstead, do you?" Garvin asked abruptly, after listening to what the sergeant had to impart. "The chap who came into the barracks this morning with Pink Whiskers and joined him in the lying festival?"

"Yes," said the sergeant.

"I saw him pass here a moment ago," Garvin resumed. "Spotted him in the mirror. He stopped and watched me closely, thinking himself unobserved. Then he went away and came back again. I'm curious to know what's on his mind and why."

Murray pondered the matter. "Well," he observed, "the orders from headquarters are to come in. I don't see much good in trailing Olmstead, at that. Think he fits in anywhere, except as a convenient alibi maker for Pink Whiskers?"

"What he does Wenham is back of," declared Garvin. "I've been thinking he sent Olmstead down here to report on us."

"Anything in particular to suggest that?"

"Well, it looked to me this afternoon when we met P. W. on the road—perhaps accidentally—that he was very quick to bring up the subject of strangers and jumped at the chance to discuss Austin. Had all the details connected with the man down pat. Seemed anxious for us to get on his trail. Too anxious, it appeared to me."

"Yes; that's a fact," the sergeant agreed after reflection.

"Must be a reason for it. I might find out something if I loafed around a while. Any objections?"

"Not personally," the sergeant admitted, then hesitated.

Garvin looked up quickly, attracted by something in the other's tone. "You mean the inspector?" he asked.

Murray looked troubled. "You want to get off on this alone, don't you? Don't blame you for it. Gives a man a better opportunity to think and act for himself. I've found it so myself. But hang it, Garvin, the inspector made it plain to me before we started off that I was to stick close! That's what I'm driving at."

"I might have surmised as much," returned Garvin; then, a moment later, spurred by a sudden resolve, he touched the sergeant's arm. "Come inside with me."

The men sat down at a table near the door. The restaurant was deserted save by themselves. "I'm going to spin you a tale, sergeant," Garvin began bluntly. "You can believe as much or little of it as you choose. But this much is a fact—you're the first man to hear it."

Murray regarded the trooper with thoughtful eyes. "Shoot!" he said.

"You know now, and probably Brice does, too, that Pink Whiskers and I are not strangers," Garvin went on. "A number of years ago I worked for him; real estate it was then. Wenham was a land boomer, his concern the biggest in Manitoba. It was legitimate enough on the surface, I suppose, and because I was drawing a fair salary I didn't inquire too deeply into the moral end of it. Well, one day I was sent to Winnipeg, on what Wenham told me was secret business, and told to remain

there for orders. I don't yet know just what happened at the office during my absence, but I was suddenly tipped off by a friend that I had been jobbed; that a considerable sum of money had vanished from the office; that my absence was unaccounted for, and Wenham had accused me of the theft."

"The hoary-headed old game," the sergeant observed. "Go on."

"Well, I made a beautiful goat, all right. I knew Wenham had turned the trick himself; also, I knew I couldn't prove it. He had money and influence and would swear to anything to protect himself—just as he is doing to-day. I might have played the hero-martyr and returned to face my scheming accusers, but I didn't. I knew I didn't have a chance; and even if I did collect any evidence that might stave off punishment, it would require months of delay and imprisonment. And I had other plans—far better ones. I didn't propose to decorate a cell, innocent or not, when there was a place ready for me with the Princess Pat's.

"I enlisted a week before I intended. The military authorities did not take the trouble to split hairs or unwind red tape or probe into the past records of the volunteers. Not in those exciting war days! A man was a man, and the devil take his past!

"I got across to France," Garvin continued. "A whole lot happened in the next two years. I was taken prisoner, for one thing, and for another, when I managed to escape, I found I had been reported killed in action. So I let it go at that. I came back to Canada after a time, pretty much of a wreck; but I didn't venture into my home town. Why stir up old troubles? I hit for the West, got back my health, joined the Mounted, and was shifted from post to post. Two weeks ago I came back here to Broken Bow; and yesterday I ran into Wenham."

The sergeant nodded. "And of course Pink Whiskers hasn't forgotten," he remarked.

"Oh, it isn't that so much," said Garvin. "I'd go to the inspector with the whole tale if I was assured he wouldn't

blow up and pack me off in disgrace; and I wouldn't mind that, either, if he'd postpone the proceedings until I had settled with Wenham. There's the rub. Pink Whiskers needs a taste of his own medicine, and I want to be the doctor. It's coming to me."

"It sure is," the sergeant returned promptly. He fell silent a moment, reviewing all that Garvin had chosen to tell and linking it up with what Brice had disclosed the day before. "By Godfrey, I won't stand in your way! You needn't tell me any more. Of course, you weren't to blame for what happened at the ranch last night. That goes without saying, no matter how the report will read."

"What do you know about that?" queried Garvin, aware of the twinkle in the sergeant's eyes.

"Good heavens, man, I'm not blind! Do you suppose for a minute I've thought Pink Whiskers got the better of you? Not much! I couldn't figure it out exactly until Miss Deane's name was mentioned. Then it came to me like that." The sergeant snapped his fingers.

Garvin smiled. "And not an hour ago you were telling me you lacked a certain deductive sense that I possessed! You're a fraud!"

"Oh, but this was as plain as sunrise," the sergeant protested. "It didn't take any gray matter to arrive at that conclusion. Besides, I'm a romantic old fool. And if I were twenty years younger," he added, getting up from the table, "I'd be courting Miss Deane myself."

"Hold on!" cried Garvin, as the sergeant clapped on his hat and started for the door. "What's the——"

"I'll leave that for you to do—hold on," Murray cut in. "I'm going back to the post. And if the inspector wants to know where you've gone to, I'll tell him you gave me the slip."

"Many thanks," returned Garvin. "If I'm not in by midnight—you needn't sit up or keep a light burning in the window."

The sergeant grinned as he climbed

into his saddle. "I'll bear that in mind. Good luck to you, man!"

Gravin watched him ride off in the twilight and drew a relieved breath. He was extremely fond of Murray and enjoyed his companionship; but always, he had learned from experience, there was bound to be a certain amount of friction existing when two men, of contrary minds, were assigned to the same job.

Garvin had been enjoying his freedom barely longer than five minutes when, turning down a side street and trusting to get another glimpse of his quarry, he ran into Miss Deane. Without giving him opportunity to utter more than a surprised greeting, the girl seized his arm and drew him into an opening between two buildings where the shadows were deeper and observation less likely.

"I've been looking for you, Neil," she began quickly. "I—it's about the Kendrick affair. There was money stolen, wasn't there? From the bank? I—I think Mr. Wenham has it."

Garvin did not hide his sudden interest. "What makes you think so?" he asked sharply.

"This," she answered, thrusting a strip of paper into his hand.

Although the shadows made close inspection difficult, the trooper experienced a thrill at sight of what the girl pressed upon him. The narrow strip of heavy paper with the inscription "\$1000" printed upon it was at once identified.

"You know what it is?" the girl asked.

"Certainly! It's a band used to tie up packages of currency. Evidently this has been torn from a package that contained a thousand dollars. Where did you find it?"

"On the floor of the ranch house this morning. It must have been dropped there last night. I found it while sweeping the room."

Garvin's mind operated at top speed. "Do you know what time Wenham got home last night?"

"It was after twelve," Miss Deane answered. "I was in bed; but I heard

him and others talking. They kept it up until very late."

"What had Wenham to say regarding the Kendrick affair?"

"Very little. When he told me about it this afternoon he laughed. That, together with the paper band I found, made me suspicious."

"I saw Olmstead a while ago," Garvin said. "Does he or Wenham know you are in town?"

"Yes; I had some errands to do. But Mr. Wenham doesn't know about this strip of paper I found."

"He may know a whole lot about it—later on," Garvin returned grimly. "Meanwhile you'd better not be seen talking to me. After what happened last night Pink Whiskers may suspect something."

A quick color dyed the girl's cheeks. "I'm sorry about last night," she said. "I want to help you all I can now—if it isn't too late. That is why I looked for you to-night—brought you this bit of paper."

Garvin, studying the girl closely, seemed puzzled. "Tell me," he began, "has Wenham threatened you in any way regarding last night's affair?"

"No. He figures that what I did was to help him. I haven't told him differently."

"Then what you told Inspector Brice this morning was——"

"I've told the inspector nothing," Miss Deane broke in swiftly.

"You didn't phone him?" Garvin asked, suddenly aware that he had bumped into another mystery.

"Certainly not!" The girl's eyes, widening, were fixed upon Garvin's passive countenance. "What made you ask that? What has happened?"

"I don't know what happened," he admitted, cheered by her denial, yet puzzled at the situation it presented. "Were you aware that Wenham appeared at the barracks this morning and told the inspector that I had released him the night before upon his promise to report to Brice the following day?"

Miss Deane stared wonderingly. "He—he did that?" she faltered. "Made out there had been no fight?"

Garvin nodded. "Even brought Olmstead along to back him up. Stated, furthermore, that you would vindicate him. I think the inspector half believed what was told, because I——"

A swift exclamation passed the girl's lips. "Oh! Then you did not tell the truth about my part in the affair!"

"It wasn't necessary," he answered.

"But it is! It would account for Mr. Wenham's escape and clear you of blame. It must be done—now!"

"Wait!" Garvin spoke sharply and his hand fell upon the girl's arm. "The thing's over with now, and our explanations can wait a more favorable time. Just at present there are more vital matters to consider. You have given me a great lead to-night, and I propose to follow it up. Don't do anything that will make Wenham suspect you. Go back to the ranch. I may see you there to-night. You may be in a position to help me, if you will."

Garvin turned quickly, and before the girl could call out or delay him with a hundred questions that surged to her lips he had disappeared among the shadows between the buildings.

Alert to follow up the clew with which Miss Deane had provided him, Garvin emerged from the shadows on the opposite street and headed swiftly for his horse. Once in the saddle he withdrew the strip of paper from his pocket and scrutinized it under a more favorable light. It was then he saw what had escaped his notice before—a penciled initial upon the edge of the paper. Failure to make out the letters did not seem to trouble him, and presently he was riding along the street toward the Kendrick bank.

The doors were locked, but the trooper's imperative summons and the sight of him through the glass commanded an immediate entrance. The staff was at work upon the books. Garvin went directly to the bookkeeper, who seemed to be in charge, produced the evidence the girl had given him, and awaited results.

"Those are my initials," the bookkeeper declared, after a glance at the penciled inscription. "Every package of

currency is signed on the binder by the person counting it," he added. "That places the responsibility in case of error."

"Good enough!" said Garvin. "Then it is reasonable to suspect that this binder was torn from a bundle of currency counted by you and probably placed in the safe."

"Undoubtedly!" The bookkeeper was perceptibly excited. "Where did you find it? Ought to furnish you with a clew."

Garvin tucked the strip of paper into his pocket, thanked the man for his information, and, without stopping to answer any of the questions that were hurled his way, passed through the door again into the street.

CHAPTER XIV.

THROUGH THE SHADOWS.

FROM the end of the street, sheltered behind a pile of dry-goods boxes, Olmstead watched Garvin's departure, scowled at the direction in which the trooper set out, passed quickly into the store, and took possession of the telephone in the rear of the building. No one bothered him, none was within ear-shot when he lifted the receiver and spoke a number.

"Hello! P. W.?" he breathed guardedly into the mouthpiece when the connection was given him. "Yes; Olmstead. Something stirring in town. Garvin and the sergeant have been busy for an hour or more. Zader was with them a while. What? I don't know. All of them went into Spofford's. Later I saw the troopers in a restaurant. Then the sergeant pulled out. Barracks, I think. Garvin stayed behind and ran across the girl. I saw them talking together for some time. Couldn't get near enough to hear anything. Spotted Garvin again entering bank. No; the girl wasn't with him. She's left for home. Garvin had a talk with bookkeeper, then came out in a hurry and rode off in your direction. Think he's headed for the ranch."

A chuckle came from Wenham. "All right. Suits me. I'll take care of him

if he comes here. Better come up yourself."

"Right away," assented the other.

Up at the ranch house, apparently its sole occupant, Peter Wenham left the telephone and stepped out upon the veranda. After rolling himself a cigarette he stared meditatively across the shadowy yard. Apparently Olmstead's report had given him food for reflection, yet there was no manifestation of alarm or uneasiness in his brooding eyes.

The creaking of an opened door caused him to turn swiftly. "Don't come out here," he commanded, addressing a man in baggy corduroys who had appeared within the house.

"I heard the phone ring," the man said, as if to explain his sudden appearance. "Who was it?"

"Olmstead. He says a trooper is headed this way."

"Garvin?"

"Yes. Hester's been talking with him. Don't know what about. She's seen or heard nothing. That fool trooper's bound to make trouble. We'll have to stop him somehow."

"Must!" insisted the other. "Once he's eliminated we'll have clear sailing—and not until."

"I'll arrange that."

"And Miss Deane, too. Ought to send her away. She's a risk. All women are. Besides, it's inconvenient for me."

"I'll pack her off to-morrow," said Wenham.

The men talked together in low tones for a while. The long twilight faded gradually, the shadows deepened, and the stars began to burn brightly. The man in corduroys came out upon the veranda and remained there until the thud of hoofs proclaimed a visitor.

"It's Hester," said Wenham.

His companion disappeared silently.

Miss Deane walked across the yard. Reaching the veranda, she gave a start as Wenham spoke to her.

"I thought no one was at home," she said, recovering from the surprise. "Why are you sitting in the dark?"

"Enjoying the stars," observed Wen-

ham. He smiled, thinking of what Olmstead had reported. "Hester," he said, as the girl started into the house, "I'm going to send you to Calgary to-morrow to join the wife. You'll like that, won't you?"

"Of course!" In the darkness the girl frowned, trying to account for Wenham's sudden generosity. She had suggested the trip a week before, but Wenham had objected; said that he needed some one to keep house during his wife's absence. Since the finding of that strip of paper and her talk with Garvin, Miss Deane's mind had entertained ominous thoughts. It was apparent now that Wenham wished to be rid of her—temporarily at least. The answer was not far to seek.

"You can catch the noon train at Holton Wells to-morrow," Wenham continued, breaking in upon her thoughts. "The ranch is no place for you just now, Hester. Too rough a crowd." He spoke quietly, almost kindly. "Did we disturb you last night?"

"No," she spoke out of the darkness, thankful for its friendly shelter. "I heard you come in, but I fell asleep again."

"Olmstead was with me." Wenham seemed intent upon explaining. "We left again at daylight. I visited police headquarters. Of course, the charge against me—Kendrick's—has been dropped."

"Of course!" the girl murmured, wondering if he would explain what had taken place at Broken Bow.

"I kept your name out of the affair," Wenham said. "So did Garvin. It put him in bad with the inspector, though. Well, that's his lookout. Still interested in you, isn't he? That accounts for it."

Without answering, Miss Deane went into the house. Presently she brought a lamp into the living room and placed it upon the table. As she started upstairs to her own room, Wenham, leaving the veranda, confronted her almost belligerently.

"See here," he demanded sharply, his attitude suddenly changed. "Don't try to put anything over on me, Hester. I'm not asleep. You and Garvin met

to-night. Had a long talk. What was it about?"

Although surprised at the abrupt question, his hostile tone, and the knowledge Wenham seemed to possess, Miss Deane found herself speaking calmly. "Since I am leaving here in the morning," she replied, "what difference does it make what we were discussing?"

Being talked back to by the girl was a novelty that Wenham had never before experienced. It jarred him. Still, he reflected, choking back the hot words that rushed to his lips, he dared not probe too far into this matter. It would look as if he was alarmed; that there was something to conceal. He must not arouse Miss Deane's suspicions.

"Oh, I'm not terribly curious," he forced himself to say. "Just wanted you to know that I'm no fool. Garvin's playing a losing game when he sits in with me. So long as he attends to his own business and doesn't horn in on mine, there'll be no damage done. You can tell him so. And that goes for you, too," Wenham added.

The girl turned and mounted the stairs, considering a reply unnecessary. Wenham glared after her. When he heard the door of her room shut and the click of the key in the lock, he crossed the floor and took a revolver off the mantel. Then he extinguished the lamp and went out upon the veranda again to resume his interrupted vigil.

After locking her door, Miss Deane sat on the edge of her bed, listening and waiting, nervously expectant. She should have warned Garvin against visiting the ranch to-night; had meant to do so, but he ran away before she had time to speak. That he would come was beyond doubt. Wenham was in a surly mood. There was bound to be trouble, perhaps worse.

Tortured by those reflections, the girl had no inclination to strike a light or begin her packing. She moved to a chair before the open window and looked off across the shadow-dappled valley to the hills beyond. Absolute silence reigned within the house. She wondered where Wenham had gone.

Below on the veranda, as quiet as the

world around him, Wenham sat erect in his chair, his eyes shifting from side to side. An hour passed; part of another one. A big, yellow moon crept up from the prairie side, flooding the land and sketching vivid shadows along the edge of the ranch yard where the spruce and hemlock began. It was among the shadows that the silent image on the veranda kept watch, and it was in that direction, presently, that he heard the muffled thud of a hoof.

Wenham bent forward, eyes probing the darkness. A shadowy form appeared, darted swiftly across a moonlit space between the trees. With a quick, indrawn breath the watcher identified the man. It was Garvin. He caught a clear glimpse of the trooper's face; caught the glimmer of light on the brass buttons. Wenham raised his revolver a second too late, for the man vanished as swiftly as he had appeared.

Wenham got cautiously upon his feet. The trooper appeared and disappeared again, like the flash of a picture upon a screen. Patiently, his nerves on edge, his temper mounting at the thought of that cat-footed, spying policeman, Wenham awaited his opportunity. The thing he proposed to do did not awe him. The primal instinct, the law of self-preservation, seared his mind and burned out all other thoughts.

A moment later the man appeared again, much nearer the house. Abruptly his head showed up clearly in a patch of moonlight. At the close and alluring target Wenham fired twice, the reports echoing thunderously in the still air.

Beyond, the man pitched forward, arms wide flung; then he dropped. Wenham breathed hard; but he was smiling. He hadn't missed that target. The range was too short, and he was too brilliant a marksman for that. At twice the distance the result would have been the same.

The shots had brought the man in corduroys to the door of the living room. He stood peering out at Wenham. "W-what happened?" he stammered.

Pink Whiskers relaxed, looked

around at the speaker, whose face was a blur in the darkness. "Guess I wasted a shot, at that," Wenham replied. "One would have been a-plenty."

"Where was he?" the other asked, stepping forward.

"Over there, beside that low spruce." Wenham pointed. The man had fallen so that part of his body was visible.

The men on the veranda stared at the huddled form. The smell of burning powder still lingered about them. For a long time they reserved speech, their eyes fixed upon the object at the edge of the shadows.

"Better get him out of the way," the man in corduroys suggested nervously. "If there's more than one trooper in the neighborhood——"

"Garvin was alone," said Wenham. "Olmstead saw him headed this way just before phoning me."

CHAPTER XV.

A QUICK FINISH.

UPSTAIRS in the far, dark room, Miss Deane had uttered a frightened cry as the shots rang out. Until that moment she had heard no sound, seen nothing, although her anxious eyes had never once been closed; and her ears had been alert to catch the slightest noise. Her room was at the rear of the house. The shots must have come from the front, otherwise she would have seen the flash.

There were no sounds from below. The house and the moonlit area surrounding it were as silent and peaceful as before. Strange, she reasoned, once the first shock had passed and her thoughts were more coherent, there had been no disturbance, no excitement; no babble of voices. Ominous conjectures filled her mind, and presently, unable to bear the suspense, she left her room and walked to the head of the stairs.

Voices, low pitched, reached her ears. Some one was below. She made her way to the living room. Once there she saw Wenham in the doorway that opened upon the veranda. Although she had heard voices an instant before, Wenham appeared to be alone now.

"What has happened?" she asked.

Wenham turned quickly. "I thought you were asleep," he snapped out.

"I heard the shots and——"

"Go back to your room. This is no concern of yours."

Miss Deane, with one dread thought uppermost in her mind, walked toward the man blocking the doorway. An unsuspected courage was born of that moment. "Tell me what has happened," she demanded.

"It's none of your affair," Wenham retorted angrily. "Get back upstairs or I'll——"

"What are you afraid of?" she broke in. "You shot some one. Who was it?"

A sudden, malicious smile came to Wenham's lips. "Just because you heard a shot you imagine some one was hurt, do you? Well, maybe you're right. Got any idea who it might be? Know of any one who'd likely be prowling around my premises this time of the night? Do you?"

The inference was brutally clear now. The girl winced under it; yet she managed to speak, to control the fears that assailed her. "Where is he? Let me out!"

Wenham continued to block the doorway. "Got an idea, have you?" he jeered. "Well, so have I. You heard two shots, didn't you? Just remember that. Remember in this country that when a man pulls a gun on you, you follow suit. The quickest man is the winner. Get that?"

"Let me out," Miss Deane demanded. She attempted to break through the man's guard.

He flung her back with a sweep of his arm. "I'm wise to you now," Wenham declared. "You knew that trooper was coming here to-night, didn't you? What did he expect to find? Huh! I figured last night when you interfered that it was done to help me. Now I see differently. It wasn't me. It was Garvin you were protecting. You were afraid if he took me to police headquarters I'd squeal on him. That was your purpose."

"Yes; that was my purpose!" the girl cried, unafraid. "I wanted to shield

Garvin. I thought I was doing the right thing. Now I see differently. I see other things differently," she ran on, heedless of the consequences. "Do you know what I found on the floor of this room this morning? A bit of evidence that will convict you. It was torn from a thousand-dollar package of bank notes—one of those you stole from Kendrick last night."

Wenham glared. "Evidence?" he sneered. "Let's see it!"

"It's too late for that," she flung back triumphantly. "I gave it to Garvin this evening. He knew what it was. He has——"

"Garvin?" echoed Wenham. Then he laughed. "Good enough! He'll have no chance to make use of it now."

Miss Deane understood. A new situation confronted her. If Garvin was dead and the bit of evidence still in his possession, she must find a way to recover it. The thing must be done—and quickly. To gain time she resorted to pardonable subterfuge.

"That strip of paper is in the inspector's hands before now," she bluffed courageously. "Garvin wouldn't be reckless enough to carry it with him up here."

The shot must have had some effect, for Wenham did not immediately respond. In the faint light of the room the girl studied the man's countenance, but derived little satisfaction.

"Rubbish!" Wenham broke out at length. "What do I know about Kendrick or the money he was carrying? You're talking nonsense."

"You know I'm not! Why did you shoot Garvin? Why didn't you want him to visit you to-night? Afraid, weren't you?"

"Now look here!" Wenham cried. "Enough of this fool talk. I'm not afraid of what's happened or what's to come. If I was I wouldn't be standing here. When a man fires at me I've a right to fire back. That's what happened a few minutes ago. I didn't know who it was at the time."

The girl continued to watch him; but all the while her mind was concerned with a plan. She must get away. She

must find Garvin. Perhaps he was injured, not dead; perhaps suffering. The thought quickened her desire, spurred her on to desperate measures.

"You get back upstairs," Wenham commanded. "Stay there!"

Miss Deane backed off. She had no intention of obeying the command hurled at her. Once upstairs there would be no escaping. Wenham would probably lock the door; and the window of the room was too high from the ground to risk a jump.

Very slowly and deliberately she moved toward the stairs, conscious that Wenham's eyes were upon her. But the dark room was friendly. She turned suddenly, reached the rear door of the living room, passed through it, continued on through the kitchen, out into the yard, and at last gained the shelter of the trees, where the shadows enveloped her.

Wenham had bellowed a warning at the ruse the girl had played upon him; instantly he started in pursuit. As he passed through the kitchen his boot caught on a table leg. He tripped, sprawled headlong, filling the air with choice and picturesque profanity. By the time he regained his feet and dashed out into the yard, Miss Deane had vanished.

Wenham called loudly and launched threat after threat; but he did not venture far among the shadows. Pursuit now was out of the question. The forest of pine and hemlock and spruce that clothed the mountain slope afforded ample refuge for the girl. He had no idea in which direction she had gone and small hope of finding her had he known.

Grumbling with rage and disappointment, Wenham strode back to the ranch house, to meet the man in corduroys at the door.

"Did she get away?" the latter inquired.

"Looks so, doesn't it?" Wenham retorted savagely. "Huh! We're in a pretty pickle now! Who'd 'a' thought this would have happened?"

"I warned you against the girl," the

other remarked. "If you'd listened to me last night——"

"I figured she'd stand by me. No use whining now." Wenham glared through the open door. "That fool girl will likely hit for the settlement or the nearest phone. In an hour there'll be excitement a-plenty. We've got to clear out—right away."

"Suits me," the other responded. "We can cross the line in an hour if we ride hard. The police can't touch us there; and by the time the United States authorities have been tipped off we'll be under cover. Spokane isn't so far. I've friends there."

"Best we can do," said Wenham. "A rotten mess! The first time I've ever run away. We can part company after we hit Spokane. Better to leave two trails than one. Well, pack up and come on. We'll have to make good use of the next sixty minutes."

The man in corduroys disappeared. Wenham struck a light and began his own hurried preparations. His companion reappeared presently, wearing coat and hat, a package tucked under his arm.

"Where were you all the time the girl was talking?" Wenham asked.

"In a corner of the veranda. I heard everything."

Wenham swore. "Never thought she'd try to get away. Got more spunk than I counted on."

The men went down to the stable, where two horses were saddled and made ready. At intervals the men stopped and listened. No sounds reached their ears.

"See here," Wenham's companion ventured presently. "Why not get rid of—of that trooper? If they don't find the evidence they can't bring any charge against you. Besides, you might find something of interest in his pockets."

Wenham considered the matter. "Might be sensible," he admitted. "I can pack the trooper across my saddle and dump him off in some spot where he isn't likely to be found."

The pair moved off, leading their horses. They reached the edge of the yard and the thickset spruce. There,

but half concealed by the shadows, lay the huddled form. Wenham handed the reins of his mount to his companion and bent down to inspect his victim. Abruptly he reeled back, an imprecation escaping him.

"What's the matter?" inquired the other, stepping back nervously.

"This—this isn't the trooper," Wenham gulped.

"Who is it?"

"It's Olmstead."

The men, confronted by their surprising discovery and for the moment unable to account for the mystery, stood transfixed and dumfounded. And standing there like images, their eyes drawn to the sprawled form at their feet, a clear and familiar voice addressed them.

"I've got you covered! Elevate!"

Dumbly they obeyed the command; still dumfounded they watched Garvin advance out of the shadows, revolver held before him. Before another word was spoken the trooper swiftly relieved the prisoners of their weapons; then he stepped back to survey the men.

"A quick finish to an exciting evening, isn't it?" Garvin remarked. "I counted on finding you at home, Wenham; and somehow I had a faint notion that you'd be present, Kendrick," he added, addressing the man in corduroys. "Glad to find you together. It simplifies matters and accounts for a good deal."

CHAPTER XVI.

A COMEDY OF ERRORS.

THE constable surveyed his prisoners with a smile that, to them, must have been baffling. The finding of Andrew Kendrick alive—public assumption and Zader's thumb prints to the contrary—did not seem to confound him in the least. He had stepped into the scene, brought about a startling dénouement, and viewed the situation that followed with the calmness of one who had staged the whole affair.

The banker and his carrot-whiskered associate, having suffered a double shock in the discovery of Olmstead and the appearance of the supposedly dead

trooper, were momentarily robbed of speech. Their arms still pointed heavenward, their eyes remained unswervingly upon Garvin. Another surprise awaited them when, out of the shadows where the trooper had stepped a few seconds before, Miss Deane appeared.

Beyond a swift glance at Kendrick, the girl did not betray any marked bewilderment at sight of the banker who was presumed to be decorating a slab in the Sundance mortuary parlors.

"I think it would be advisable," Garvin remarked at length, after a pause in which he seemed to enjoy the utter consternation of his prisoners, "to keep you chaps together. As you've worked in double harness before I'm sure you won't object to continuing the performance."

And suiting the action to words, the trooper produced his handcuffs, snapped one of them upon Kendrick's wrist, the other, connected by a short chain, upon Wenham's. The banker accepted his steel bracelet without protest, but Pink Whiskers bristled indignantly as the wristlet snapped into place.

"There's no occasion for this outrage," he broke forth hotly. "You've no charge against either of us. You haven't——"

"Save your breath, P. W.!" Garvin interrupted. "There are so many charges against both of you birds that I don't know where to begin. Perhaps the most recent one against you, Wenham, is the pot-shooting of your friend Olmstead. And so far as charges go, that is sufficient to fit your neck to a noose."

"It was an accident," declared Wenham.

"Oh, undoubtedly! Still, it wouldn't have been an accident if I had been the victim. You should have been more careful."

Wenham glowered. "You're taking a lot for granted," he retorted. "I'm privileged to shoot trespassers. No one has a right to prowl around my premises. Olmstead knew better. He should have called out."

"There were circumstances to prevent that. You see, Olmstead followed me

up from the settlement. I spotted him about the time he saw me. I suppose he knew who I was, but the recognition wasn't mutual. So we started in to play a game of hide-and-seek. Neither of us knew you were watching from the veranda. At least I didn't. With the ranch house dark it was natural to assume the place was untenanted.

"Oh, the accident is readily accounted for," Garvin went on. "I suppose you did spot me—recognized me, too, didn't you? And naturally enough, unaware that Olmstead was in the neighborhood, when he showed himself you let fly. Olmstead made a mistake in wearing a slouch hat resembling mine, and as a penalty he became your target."

Although Garvin's frank explanation must have cleared matters, Wenham did not seem ready to accept it. "What brought you up here?" he demanded. "I've warned you to keep away."

"I came up to make inquiries regarding a certain slip of paper that Miss Deane found in your house this morning. Of course you wouldn't know how it came to be found there. Some one trying to frame up a case against you. That's your usual argument, isn't it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Wenham declared.

"I suppose not. Still it's a trifle late to ring in an alibi now. I suppose you can't account for Kendrick's presence here, either. Didn't know he was around, did you? You thought, of course, he was the victim of the shotgun assassin. Naturally! Every one thought so."

"It wasn't my place to put the police on the right trail," Wenham came back, smarting under the sarcasm. "I knew you were barking up the wrong tree, and decided to let you bark."

"Well," remarked Garvin, "the supposition is that barking dogs don't bite; but the present happens to be an exception to the rule. Now, before you commit yourself too far, Wenham, and to save a lot of useless discussion, let me state that I've been on the job all evening, saw all the performance from the Olmstead scene to the present one.

"I was below the veranda," Garvin

went on, "while you and Kendrick were discussing my sudden demise. I was about to make an entrance when I recognized your elusive friend in corduroys, but held off when Miss Deane appeared. After the young lady had declared herself and made a get-away, I saw where this performance was due for a rather spectacular finish. I managed to find Miss Deane, and we waited to ring down the curtain.

"I decided that you and Kendrick wouldn't wait around long," Garvin continued, "and that you wouldn't pull out empty-handed. So we just marked time until you had produced the prize package. Don't suppose you know what I mean, do you? You will as soon as I inspect the saddlebags."

For all his arrogance and self-possession, it was evident that Wenham had not fully enjoyed the trooper's revelations. The inevitable was to be faced, and it was far from a pleasant prospect.

"To be frank with you, Garvin," Wenham began in a wholly unexpected and disarming manner, "this matter can——"

"Can wait until we reach the post," Garvin broke in quickly. "I'm afraid the shock of any frankness on your part would unnerve me."

"It'll be a bad move on your part if you take me to the post," Wenham flung back threateningly.

"On the contrary," the trooper remarked cheerfully, "it'll be a rare good move. Imagine the excitement at headquarters when you and Kendrick appear on the scene!"

"This is a matter between ourselves," Wenham intimated. "You know what I'm driving at, Garvin. Be sensible. Headquarters doesn't need to know what's **taken** place to-night. Let the bunch **follow** a blind trail."

"Careful!" Garvin admonished. "You're overlooking a witness." He nodded toward Miss Deane, who had remained a silent but interested spectator throughout the discussion.

"Oh, nonsense!" protested Wenham. "Miss Deane is more interested in your welfare than in your professed sworn duty. She proved it last night, didn't

she? Just let us get over the Montana line—an hour's start—and I warrant the inspector will never learn of your past performances from me."

"I believe we settled that question last evening," Garvin replied. "Let's drop it. You'll go to the post with me, Wenham. I wouldn't pass up the chance of taking you there, hitched to Kendrick, for all the green-and-gold fodder contained in that saddlebag. And, by the way," he added, "I haven't had a glimpse of the prize package yet."

Garvin did not betray any great excitement at the sight of the neatly wrapped bundles of currency that rewarded his inspection of the banker's saddlebags. "Nice little windfall!" he observed, returning the money to its cache. "Represents almost a year's salary." He grinned at Kendrick. "Too bad you're not to get away with it after all your careful scheming."

The banker, whose normally ruddy countenance had taken on a pasty hue and whose sagging shoulders and lusterless eyes proclaimed a sorely afflicted spirit, gave voice to a final plea. "Half of it's yours if——"

"Only half?" Garvin remonstrated.

"More than you'll earn in a lifetime," Kendrick wavered hopefully.

"Can't tell about that," the trooper replied in apparent seriousness. "I may turn banker when I leave the service. Stage a get-away when the deposits warrant it; but I'll profit by your mistake," he added. "Your plan was ingenious enough, Kendrick, and it might have succeeded except for one thing. You didn't count on any one seeing Austin in the gray flivver last evening. There's where you flopped, and that's why I questioned the identity of the shotgun victim."

"Think you know who it was—even now?" Wenham spoke up derisively.

"I may have suspicions," returned Garvin.

Wenham laughed and flashed a glance at his fellow prisoner; but before anything more was said the distant jingle of a bell interrupted; brought the prisoners, as well as the trooper, instantly alert.

"That's the phone at the house," Miss Deane remarked.

Garvin made an instant decision. "If you'll stand watch over these birds," he said, extending a revolver to the girl, "I'll answer the summons."

Confident that his instructions would be carried out, Garvin darted away. The telephone was still ringing intermittently as he entered the house and took down the receiver. "Hello!" he cried; and when a familiar voice answered him, added: "Just starting your way, sergeant."

"Been trying to find you for the last hour," Sergeant Murray said. "I'm in Sundance. Was told you'd struck out early this evening and had a hunch you'd be in P. W.'s neighborhood. You're wanted at headquarters. The inspector was a bit ruffled because I'd let you do a lonesome."

"I'm starting off right away," Garvin returned, "and bringing Pink Whiskers along. A bit of excitement up here. Olmstead was shot and killed. Yes; P. W. responsible. That isn't all," he added. "I've found the bundle of currency that Kendrick got away with."

"Found it?" The sergeant gave a jubilant shout. "Fine work! So Pink Whiskers had the stuff, did he? Knew it! And, of course, he did the shotgun work on Kendrick. Say, we've made quick work on this case!"

"Hold on!" Garvin broke in, having reserved news of his other prisoner as a choice surprise. "I found Kendrick in P. W.'s company to-night, and am bringing him along, too."

There was a moment of silence, then a roar over the wire that demonstrated the effect of the astounding news. "What?" cried Murray, in an attempt to speaking coherently. "Did you say Kendrick?"

"Yes; Andrew Kendrick."

"You—you're crazy!" the sergeant exclaimed. "Stop joshing!"

"Kendrick it is," Garvin repeated. "Alive and kicking."

"But—but that thumb-print stunt Zader performed for us!" Murray began incredulously. "How do you account for it?"

"I don't. There are a lot of things I can't account for. But Kendrick is here with bracelets on. I can account for that."

Another pause followed during which, it was evident, the sergeant was collecting his wits. "Well, say!" he exploded at length. "If Kendrick's alive, who in blazes was it we found in the flivver this morning?"

"Why, Austin, of course," Garvin replied confidently. "Haven't I been telling you all along that——"

"You're wrong," Murray broke in, his voice one of bewilderment. "Cockran found and arrested Austin an hour ago. Brought him to the post."

It was Garvin's turn to register surprise. "Austin?" he repeated, as amazed as the sergeant had been a second before.

"That's what I'm telling you! Austin! Your phantom friend. He admits it himself. I'll be hanged if I know where we stand now!" the sergeant confessed, baffled. "Bring your prisoners in, and we'll try to untangle this thing."

Garvin turned from the telephone and left the ranch house with a look of dumfounded amazement upon his grim countenance. Kendrick found! Austin accounted for! What new twist had come to confound the police? Who had been the shotgun victim? Where was this very serious comedy of errors to end?

CHAPTER XVII.

CALLING THE BLUFF.

PEARL and coral of early dawn were staining the eastern skies when Garvin rode up to the Broken Bow Post with his prisoners. Miss Deane had insisted upon accompanying him, to which he offered no objections. Garvin had taken no chances on his journey down from the ranch, and forced his prisoners, still linked together, to ride one horse.

Although dawn announced itself shortly after three o'clock, putting to route the few hours of darkness, none of the barrack's inmates was wasting time in slumber. Sergeant Murray's

hasty return to the post with the news Garvin had imparted furnished too much excitement and speculation to permit of sleep.

As Wenham and Kendrick dismounted, not without difficulty, for the chain coupling their wrists was none too elastic, the inspector ordered them locked up. He turned a deaf ear to Wenham's sudden outburst, and, beckoning to Garvin and the sergeant, he led the way into his cabin.

There Garvin related in detail all that had befallen him since the sergeant's leave-taking the night before, beginning with the appearance of Miss Deane in the settlement and winding up with Murray's telephone connection with the Wenham ranch house.

"Despite the apparent evidence to the contrary," the trooper declared, summing up the highly gratifying results, "I felt that Kendrick was alive and that he meant to get away with the currency and forestall pursuit by leaving behind a body to be identified as his own."

"And very nearly succeeded," said Brice.

"When Miss Deane presented me with the evidence she had found, and afterward I had it verified by the bookkeeper at the bank, who had initialed the 'binder,' I realized I was on a warm trail—a trail that led to Pink Whisker's ranch. I was not greatly surprised at finding Kendrick at the ranch."

"It would seem that Miss Deane is due for compliments," the inspector remarked, when Garvin had finished his report. "You've done a good night's work, Garvin, even at the expense of a new mystery," he went on. "We've got something definite against Wenham, which ought to call for a celebration so far as the force is concerned, and we've recovered the funds stolen from the bank, which ought to put us in high favor with the Sundance depositors."

"And I don't suppose it'll make much difference to the community at large who the shotgun victim happens to be," growled the sergeant. "That'll be up to us to solve. With both Kendrick and Austin alive——"

"If it's agreeable to you, inspector,"

Garvin broke in, "I'd like to have a talk with Austin. His appearance has damaged my theory."

Brice nodded. "Well, your theory was fifty per cent correct, at that," he acknowledged.

Cockran was summoned, given instructions, and returned a moment later with the man he had arrested in tow. As the prisoner stepped into the room, Garvin surveyed him narrowly. The man was bareheaded, but clad in a familiar salt-and-pepper suit and flannel shirt.

Garvin experienced a decided exultation of spirits at sight of Cockran's prisoner, and the latter, eying the trooper, failed to conceal a momentary start, as if something unforeseen had developed at a most critical period.

"Who is this man?" Garvin asked.

"Why, it's Austin," Cockran replied.

Garvin smiled. "He's not the Austin I've referred to."

"Well, he claims to be; and he answers the description you gave of him," Cockran returned.

"Can't help that. He may be Austin by name and his description tally; but he isn't the chap I want to see."

"Say, what are you trying to put over?" the prisoner spoke up resentfully. "Don't you suppose I know my own name? And you know me. I saw you a couple of days ago, and you gave me a lift into the settlement."

"You're mistaken," said Garvin; but at once he began studying the man, as if recalling a previous meeting, not, however, in the circumstances the prisoner had so glibly related.

The surprising situation that had developed and the conjectures it aroused were not lost upon the inspector. "Were you on the Holton Wells road night before last?" he demanded. "Were you driving a flivver? Did you recognize Garvin and talk to him?"

The prisoner shook his head. "Me? No. I wasn't on the road night before last. I was at the Rosebud Ranch, where I'm working. The boss will tell you that much. Besides, I don't know how to drive a flivver. Never tried it."

Brice bent a puzzled glance at Garvin. "What do you make of it?"

"I'm beginning to make considerable of it," the trooper responded with an interest he did not endeavor to conceal.

"Never saw this man before?"

"Yes; once before." Garvin turned to the prisoner. "Do you know Wenham—Pink Whiskers? Or Kendrick?"

"Neither of them. Say, what's all this about?" The prisoner glared indignantly. "What's the charge against me? Just because I happen to be a stranger here——"

"That'll be all—for the present," the inspector broke in sharply. "Lock him up, Cockran."

When the trooper and his protesting prisoner had left the room, the inspector glanced questioningly at Garvin. "We haven't made a great deal of progress with exhibit number one," he remarked.

"Yes; we have," Garvin replied quickly. "We've struck a lead. Perhaps my theory will be a hundred per cent correct, after all. I've seen this man before. It dawned upon me a moment ago. He was one of the men who visited Pink Whiskers night before last at the ranch. Olmstead was the other."

"A friend of Wenham's, then?"

"Undoubtedly; and playing the game with him. This impersonation is part of a conspiracy," Garvin resumed. "Kendrick, Wenham, this alleged Austin, and possibly Olmstead, who's out of the running now, figure in it. Don't you begin to see light now?"

Brice pondered. "Yes, I do," he admitted presently. "But go ahead. Give us your version."

"I'm convinced that Kendrick planned this affair," Garvin went on. "He figured to vanish with the currency and leave another man—Austin—to be identified as himself. That explains the shotgun episode and the mutilation of the victim's face. Austin was murdered and decked out in Kendrick's clothes to make identification more complete and unquestioned. The banker was to disappear."

"But there was a stumblingblock unanticipated by the conspirators. I hap-

pened to see Austin that evening driving the flivver. The plotters found it out, realized I was in a position to queer them, and decided to get rid of me."

"Which they failed to do," put in the sergeant. "By Godfrey! I'm beginning to see a few things myself."

"The conspirators must have figured that I had mentioned my meeting with Austin," Garvin resumed, "and to protect themselves, make certain there would be no question raised about Kendrick's death, they found a man to impersonate Austin. Then, once I was out of the way, the impostor would show himself, deny he had been seen in the flivver, and for the lack of evidence the police would be forced to accept his word. And with no proof to the contrary the assumption that Kendrick had been murdered and robbed would stand unchallenged."

"Huh, you put a crimp in those plans," declared the sergeant. "I'll say, though, this fake Austin's a good actor. He never batted an eye when you called him."

"He had to go through with what he started," said Garvin. "If we could find out who he is, confront him with some one——" The trooper broke off quickly as an idea came to him. "I have it! Let Miss Deane look him over. If he's a friend of Wenham's the girl may know him."

Brice acted promptly upon the suggestion. Miss Deane, who had remained in the barrack yard, was called into the office. Cockran was ordered to produce his prisoner.

The moment the alleged Austin caught sight of Miss Deane he scowled and evaded her steady glance.

"Have you seen this man before, Miss Deane?" the inspector asked.

"Yes, sir," she responded without hesitation. "He has been a visitor at the ranch lately. Mr. Wenham introduced him to me as Sam Owen."

"You never heard him addressed as Austin?"

"No, sir."

"When did you last see him?"

"Night before last, when he and Olm-

stead rode up to the ranch house. Mr. Garvin was present at the time."

The inspector turned to the prisoner. "What have you to say for yourself?"

The man shrugged. "Nothing left for me to say," he returned sullenly. "I knew it was all up when this trooper spotted me; but I tried to stick it out for a time."

"Your name is Owen, and you came here impersonating Austin?"

"I—I didn't want to do it," the prisoner cried, suddenly alarmed. "I didn't want to get mixed up in the—the trouble. But that's all I've done. That's all."

"Who put you up to this?" demanded Brice.

"Kendrick," the man faltered; "but I don't know anything about the other affair," he protested. "I swear it!"

"Did Kendrick give you the suit you're wearing?" Garvin asked, having recognized it as identical with the one Austin had worn.

The prisoner nodded.

Garvin stepped forward. "Take off the coat. We may need it among the other exhibits."

Garvin inspected the garment that the man speedily removed; then, with a smile, he turned to Brice. "Here's a tailor's label stitched to the pocket lining. The same label is on the black suit worn by the shotgun victim. Both belong to Kendrick, of course. We'd suspect that even if his name wasn't written in below the label."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WITH THE DAWN.

AT a nod from Inspector Brice, Cockran went away with his coatless prisoner. Then the inspector turned to Miss Deane, who had been an interested spectator to the recent performance.

"Thank you very much," he said. "Now, if you don't mind waiting outside, we may find it necessary to call upon you again."

The girl withdrew.

Alone with his men, the inspector smiled—a rare demonstration on his

part—and surveyed Garvin. "Well, we're progressing," he remarked. "You've proved another point, Garvin. I'm beginning to think the clearing up of this affair will rest entirely upon your shoulders. We've disposed of Owen, alias Austin. I doubt if he had anything to do with the murder, beyond what we already know. The responsibility seems to rest between Kendrick and Pink Whiskers. Suppose we call in the banker and listen to what he has to say."

The loquacious Hopple, having been summoned to bring in the prisoner, hesitated on his way to execute the order. "Beggin' your pardon, inspector," he began, "but that pestiferous Zader 'as just showed up and——"

"Zader!" cried the sergeant. "Say, we want a talk with that thumb-print hound. Bring him in."

Byrd Zader was ushered speedily into the presence of the inspector. The sergeant, who had elected himself in charge of the present affair, bore down upon the luckless "detective."

"What do you mean by handing us a blind steer in this thumb-print business?" he demanded.

Zader shrank back at the uncere- monious reception. "Blind steer?" he echoed. "What do you mean? I told you the truth."

"The devil you did! Don't you know Kendrick's alive and kicking?"

"Alive?" gasped the other.

"That's what. And you tried to convince us he was decorating the slab in Spofford's establishment. Thumb prints don't lie, eh? The devil they don't! Either they lied or you did."

"Where did you get Austin's thumb prints?" Garvin demanded.

Zader stared blankly. "I—I don't know Austin," he stammered. "You—you're getting me all confused."

Aware of that, Garvin attempted to explain the situation.

Zader listened open-mouthed to all that the trooper had to say. "Why, this is most unaccountable!" he faltered at length. "Kendrick's thumb prints and Austin's couldn't be identical. Absolutely impossible!"

"Well, that experiment you conducted seemed to make them so," the sergeant declared. "Are you sure the prints in your book were those of Kendrick's?"

"Quite sure. I took them myself and Mr. Kendrick signed them."

"And still they matched the murdered man's! There's a screw loose somewhere." The sergeant scowled.

Garvin, whose mind had been at work, turned upon Zader with a question. "Tell me," he asked, "was this thumb-print collection out of your possession between the time the Kendrick prints were registered and last night?"

Zader reflected. "Yes, it was," he acknowledged. "A couple of days ago Mr. Kendrick asked to look over the collection. I left it with him at his office."

Garvin laughed. "There's your answer! Kendrick must have figured that Zader might be called in on this case for the purpose of establishing the identity of the murdered man. He borrowed Zader's book, managed to get Austin to register his thumb prints, but signed his own name to them, and after removing the page that contained his prints, substituted the new one. Simple enough, wasn't it?"

"Why—why, it could be done," admitted Zader.

"You're a brilliant assistant, you are!" scoffed the sergeant. "We'd be following a blind trail for all you've done!"

"It's of little consequence now," the inspector observed. "Garvin's explanation seems to be satisfactory. I'd advise you to hold tight to your valuable thumb-print collection after this, Zader," he admonished.

Zader, properly rebuked and decidedly crestfallen after his tilt with the authorities, silently withdrew, escorted to the barrack gate by Hopple.

"Well, I must say," observed Murray, looking after the departing thumb-print "expert," "that Kendrick figured things down pretty fine if he borrowed Zader's book and substituted Austin's prints for his own."

"An ingenious schemer in some respects and a blunderer in others," re-

marked Garvin. "It's the combination displayed by novices in crime—as I have found them."

"Kendrick's greatest blunder," said the inspector, "was in permitting himself to be caught. That's something he didn't figure on. It will be interesting to hear his explanations."

A moment later, escorted by Hopple, who felt the importance of his duty, Andrew Kendrick was ushered into the office. Pallid and unshaven, garbed in dirty corduroys and heavy boots, the banker presented a sorry spectacle. The inspector surveyed him with profound disgust and amazement.

Once the fashion plate of the district, always immaculate from polished shoes to expensive headgear, his smartly tailored apparel the last word in style, Kendrick's present appearance was shocking. The banker himself must have writhed inwardly at the picture he made.

"Well, Kendrick," the inspector said curtly and with judicial coolness, "there seems to be a great deal for you to explain. I would advise you to consider your predicament and speak the truth. It will profit you in the end."

The prisoner lifted his head and permitted his bloodshot eyes to travel from face to face of the men confronting him. And when he spoke it was with a forced calmness and something of his former arrogance. "Would it be presumption on my part," he began, "if I inquire as to the specific charges, if any, lodged against me?"

"Never mind the technicalities, Kendrick," the inspector returned sharply. "You know the facts. Drop the pretense! You stole certain funds intrusted to your keeping, which Constable Garvin found in your possession. You engineered a scheme to throw the police off the trail. You——"

"Naturally, the money was found in my possession," Kendrick broke in. "As custodian of the funds I was entitled to be in possession of them."

"What was your object in removing the money from the bank safe and carrying it with you to the Wenham ranch?"

"That is beside the point," objected Kendrick. "I took the money, which I had a right to do. Your trooper found it in my possession. Very well! Does that imply I was stealing it? Have you any proof to offer that I was attempting to misappropriate these funds or to leave the country?"

Brice was forced to smile. "Stop bluffing, Kendrick. Your arguments sound very well, but they're useless." The inspector nodded toward a table. "There are a number of exhibits: a leather bag, a suit of clothes, a hat, a watch and chain, and a seal ring. Look them over. All your property, I believe?"

Kendrick nodded hesitantly.

"Night before last," the inspector resumed, "you were seen leaving Sundance in a hired machine, carrying with you a satchel—that satchel," he added, indicating the exhibit. "Correct, is it?"

Again the banker nodded.

"Early the following morning the same car in which you left Sundance was found on the side of the highway. A man, undoubtedly murdered, dressed in your clothes, wearing your watch and ring, lay across the seat. This satchel, also belonging to you, slashed and empty, was found beside the man. That much we know. The assumption was that you had been robbed and murdered, a theory that, thanks to your scheming, could not be disputed until you were found."

"Well?" said Kendrick with an insolence that failed to register. "What about it?"

"It is our purpose to learn how this stranger, whom we now believe to be Austin, came to be found in your machine and dressed in your clothes."

"I can't say," the banker replied.

"You mean you won't say," the inspector rebuked sharply. "Come now! There's but one thing left—confession. It's inevitable. The evidence against you is far too conclusive to permit of doubt, Kendrick. You must be aware of it. That you cannot account for your clothes, your watch, and ring being found upon this murder victim is preposterous."

Kendrick had no reply to make. His courage had begun to desert him.

Garvin looked across at the inspector. "Perhaps I can reconstruct this affair in a way to jar the prisoner's memory," he volunteered.

Brice nodded. "Go ahead. He needs jarring."

Garvin faced the banker. "Kendrick," he began at once, "shortly after you left Sundance with the money in this bag, which your bookkeeper remembers seeing on your desk when he left the bank that afternoon, you picked up Austin along the road, gave him the wheel, and concealed yourself in the back of the car under a blanket. I don't know what you told him to account for the singular behavior; but, as you stated a moment ago, that is beside the point. Austin was driving the gray flivver when it passed me on the road, and I glimpsed something in the rear of the car, covered by a blanket, which I should have inspected."

Garvin paused and stepped nearer the banker. "Somewhere farther along the road," he declared grimly, "you came out of concealment and deliberately shot Austin in the back of the head with a thirty-two-caliber bullet. That bullet was found at the autopsy. Moreover, I found in your possession, not two hours ago, a revolver using cartridges of that caliber."

CHAPTER XIX.

CAUSE AND EFFECT.

AT that sudden accusation Kendrick recoiled, his face ashen. "No, no!" he cried despairingly. "It's a lie!"

Garvin went on heedlessly: "In all probability Wenham and one or more of his associates appeared on the scene shortly afterward—that being his important business engagement previously referred to. A shotgun was brought into use, to render the identification of your victim impossible. Then the victim's clothes were removed and yours substituted, along with other personal articles which would lead the authorities to decide that the body was that of yourself."

"At the time you overlooked the panama hat which was to be left on the scene. It had not received any of the shot because it was not on the victim's head when the shotgun was discharged. So it was set up and shot at. Unfortunately, the target was set up hindside foremost, and the powder marks showed on the back of the hat instead of the front. That discovery led me to this deduction. The next flaw in your plans was the fact that the satchel, although unlocked, had been slashed open. Of course, the bag had been left upon the scene to convey the impression that robbery was back of the crime, and that its contents—the thirty thousand in currency—had been taken by the assassin. Instead of making good that impression, it instantly aroused suspicion. In the first place, why hadn't the bag itself been taken? Surely it would have been more convenient than to transfer the funds to another receptacle. And, second, why was it necessary to cut open the bag when the thing was unlocked? Don't you see where you were in error, Kendrick?"

The banker merely stared. Apparently he had nothing to say, or, if he had, must have realized the folly of argument in face of Garvin's testimony.

"After the stage had been set to your liking," the trooper resumed, "you disappeared, probably in company with Wenham, for Miss Deane heard voices that night at the ranch house, although she failed to recognize yours. However, there was still one unpleasant feature that must have bothered you, Kendrick, and threatened to disrupt your plans—the fact that I saw Austin in the car and would doubtless reveal it. Therefore it was necessary to put me out of the way, as a possible witness, and find some one to impersonate Austin. Wenham failed to remove me, and I managed to be on hand to confront this Sam Owen, who has confessed his part in the affair. Moreover, this coat, which was taken from Owen and which I saw Austin wearing, is yours, Kendrick. It bears the same tailor's label as the exhibit there on the table, along with your name and the date of its making."

Kendrick, listening dumbly to the evidence, and against which he had no word of defense, slumped against the wall. All his brazen arrogance and insolent assurance had long since vanished. Cornered, enmeshed in a net of his own making, the prisoner faced the inevitable.

"Well, Kendrick!" The inspector's cold voice broke the silence that followed Garvin's revelations. "How much longer will you hold out?"

Kendrick struggled to speak, even essayed a ghastly smile. "I—I'm through," he faltered, his voice barely audible in the quiet room.

"Then the story, as Garvin has related it, is correct?"

"Near enough." Kendrick made a helpless gesture. "I had to have money. I planned this thing—used Austin to blind the trail—figured I could evade pursuit. I—I shot him."

"And before that you substituted Austin's thumb prints for your own in Zader's book?"

"Yes." The prisoner stumbled toward the door. "Let me out! Let me out!" He struck weakly at the sergeant who barred his escape.

"Just a minute!" the inspector called. "What was it that occasioned your sudden change of heart regarding Pink Whiskers? He worked hand in glove with you in this affair, yet not twelve hours before you had charged him with assault and insisted that I arrest him."

"I hadn't figured on—on him," Kendrick replied. "He saw what I had done and—and forced me——"

"Oh, that's it! Wenham horned into the game at a critical moment and you had to make him a partner in order to save your own hide. That'll be all for the present," the inspector added. "Take him away, sergeant. I'll get more out of him later—and Pink Whiskers, as well."

The sergeant and his prisoner passed through the doorway into the bright sunlight of the morning. When they had gone, the inspector leaned back in his chair to survey Garvin with a keenly approving glance.

"I'm well pleased with your work on this case," he remarked presently. "I was afraid at first that circumstances——" Brice halted, his eyes fixed steadily upon the trooper.

"Inspector," Garvin spoke up candidly, "I am in a position now to explain several things. It was impossible for me to do so before. I learned last night from Miss Deane that——"

"So did I," Brice interrupted. "Miss Deane telephoned from Sundance shortly after you left her. She explained everything that happened at the Wenham ranch the night before, so it need not be repeated. No doubt Pink Whiskers is accountable for the message that reached me yesterday morning, supposedly from Miss Deane, sent to alibi his story and further discredit your own. I should have made certain as to the identity of the still unknown woman who misrepresented herself over the phone before acting. However, that is past. I understand now the situation that confronted you. Perhaps it was not strictly according to code to conceal what you did; but there are times when such things become necessary and excusable."

Garvin listened with mingled surprise and gratification at the inspector's recital. "That episode calls for another explanation," he began, prepared now to unburden himself and accept judgment at Brice's hands. "It concerns a matter directly responsible for Miss Deane's behavior. Wenham has threatened to reveal it and doubtless will at the first opportunity."

"I'm afraid it will be ancient history by that time," the inspector remarked quietly. "The sergeant has beaten him to it, and you, as well."

"The sergeant?" Garvin echoed, the recipient of another surprise.

"I'm sure you won't hold that against him," said Brice. "He gave me the story as you told it to him, upon his return from the settlement last evening. I've been doing some long-distance phoning since then, seeking particulars from the authorities in the town of your former residence."

Garvin braced himself expectantly.

Here was a situation unanticipated, brought about by the inspector's usual dispatch. He searched Brice's face for some indication of what was to come, but received no clew. The inspector's countenance was as bland and inscrutable as a plaster mask.

"It appears," resumed Brice, "that the case has been buried and forgotten, particularly, so I've been informed, since the accused, one Neil Garvin, late corporal in the Princess Pat Regiment, was killed in France, and Peter Wenham, the principal complaining witness, afterward charged with operating a fraudulent land scheme, disappeared for parts unknown. And while I have reason to believe there has been a slight discrepancy in regard to the death of the accused," the inspector added, breaking into a smile, "I do not think the complainant will deem it advisable to reopen the case."

Whatever trepidation Garvin may have entertained regarding the past unpleasantness, and its bearing upon his future, vanished speedily at the inspector's enlightening report. His smile matched Brice's.

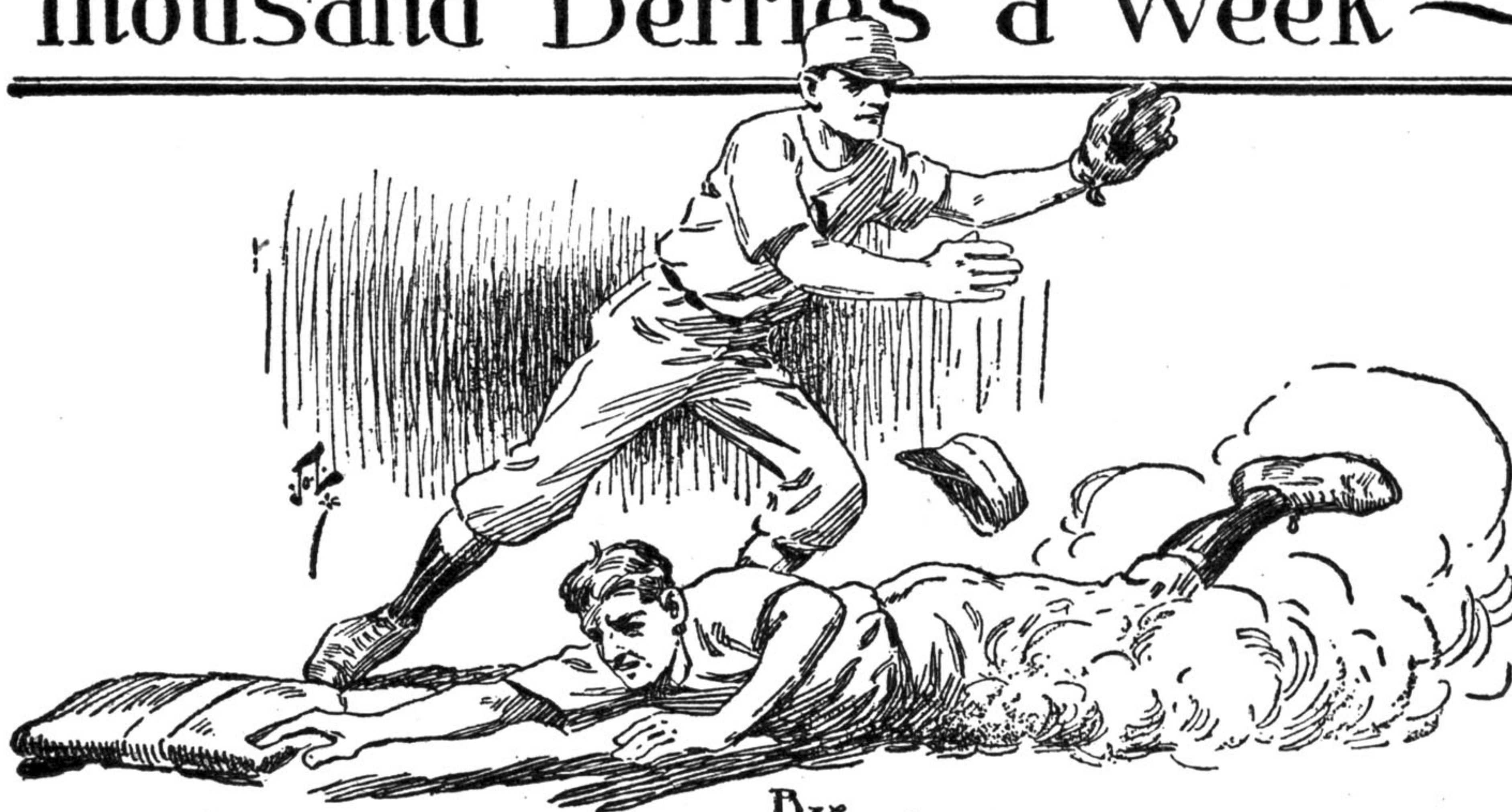
"So long as you are willing to believe my side of the story," he began, "there is——"

"Be assured of that," the inspector interrupted, clapping a friendly hand upon the trooper's shoulder. "I might have reserved judgment, if any one but Pink Whiskers, with his unsavory record, had been on the opposite side. As matters stand, you've nothing to worry over."

Radiant and light-hearted, Garvin stepped from the inspector's cabin to behold Miss Deane near the bunk house in conversation with the sergeant. He hurried toward them, eager to convey the pleasant news.

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.

Thousand Berries a Week—



By C.S. Montanye—

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

A PET AMBITION.

BASEBALL is a great national game. So is love. Baseball is played by both sexes. So is love. What goes to-day for both, to-morrow is "out."

Both are games hard to dope. In either you never know what's going to happen from one minute to the next.

Rosie was the wife's younger sister. She came all the way to Trenton from Centropolis, Ohio. She was about seventeen or so, and what is known to the trade as a "fast worker." Rosie's ambition in life was to dress like a vamp and keep a half a dozen chaps on the string at the same time. She liked ice-cream sodas, nut sundaes, and baseball. She usually got up in the morning in time for lunch. This wasn't so bad considering she had been strolling around with some handsome steam fitter until the moon went out.

Grace, the wife, thought the world and all of Rosie. Grace's pet ambition was to marry Rosie to some wealthy young man. Lots of people have peculiar ambitions.

Personally, I liked Rosie with all her faults. She called me Uncle Ed and

had a habit of dropping in to see me at my sporting-goods store—whenever she needed money. She usually stopped in once a day. But as I say, I liked her.

And I felt sorry for her when the Trenton Tigers, Joe Bain's hard-hitting baseball nine, returned from their mid-August tour of the Jersey wilds and brought along Jerry Duke, alias the "Million Dollar Money Hound."

Jerry was the multiplication kid of the western hemisphere.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNUSUAL SIGHT.

IT was a little past one o'clock on a hot Saturday, and business at my sporting-goods pavilion was booming. Two children came in and bought a ten-cent baseball. Then they asked for a pass for the afternoon's game between the Tigers and the Ridgewood Raiders. They had hardly gone when Joe Bain, the manager of the local team, drove up in his demon flivver, jumped out, and came in.

"Have you seen anything of Rosie, Ed?" Bain asked.

"Now that you mention it," I answered; "I do remember seeing her at dinner last night."

Bain, who liked my young sister-in-law about the same as a pawnbroker likes interest, fanned himself with a near-Panama hat and looked around the store as if he thought I had hidden Rosie away on a shelf. "I want to take her down to the game this afternoon," he explained. "It's going to be a sizzler. The Ridgewood bunch are playing great ball. And I guess you know the pace the Tigers have been going along at for the past month."

"Yes, I've heard about it," I said. "They're copping two games out of every seven."

Bain overlooked my remark. He kept fanning himself with his hat and began to look under the counters as if my wife's sister was concealing herself there. "I want Rosie to see Jerry in action," he continued. "I want to treat her to an unusual sight."

"Then let her see you spend a dollar all at once," I said. "Who may Jerry be?"

Bain looked hard at me. "Did you ever hear anything about the Jamestown flood or the Spanish-American War, Ed? 'Who may Jerry be?' You're supposed to be a baseball fan and yet you ask a question like that. I'm ashamed of you."

"You needn't be. Grace is a fan, but up until last month she thought Babe Ruth was a chorus girl. I do recall a Jerry who used to pal around with Tom in the old days before prohibition. What is he doing now for a living?"

Bain snickered. "Jerry is a pitcher. He's a discovery of mine. I picked him up two weeks ago when we were in Sawtel. Out there they call him the Million Dollar Money Hound. He has an income of a thousand berries a week. Not so bad, eh?"

"Not at all. I suppose he blows the thousand on candy and cigars and so has to play ball for a living," I remarked.

"Jerry Duke," Bain said imperturbably, "plays ball to keep his mind occupied, and because he's one of these baseball fiends who is unhappy unless he's in action. He can't bear idleness, money or no money. He was born

with a twirler's glove on his left hand and all he thinks about is the game. He's a pitching marvel.

"I gave him the toughest kind of a try-out," Bain continued, "and he came through smiling, with the varnish uncracked. I've got him now under a three-year contract. The minute a big-league scout sees him I'm a made man. All I have to do then is to get measured up for a diamond-studded limousine, a winter palace at Palm Beach, and a hundred and seventy-nine suits of clothes. Awful, eh?"

"Frightful. Do I understand that you're going to uncork this pitching member of the industrious rich this afternoon, Joe?"

Bain nodded. "I'm going to send him in against the Raiders and let him work the whole nine stanzas. Duke is one of those iron wonders that thrive on plenty of hard work. If you want to treat your eyes to a good time be at the park at three."

Bain began telling me a lot more about the sensation of Sawtel, but fortunately he was interrupted by the appearance of Rosie and my wife.

Rosie was advertising white silk, rouge, and peroxide. She resembled a Follies girl who had missed the train after the troupe had played Trenton. She carried a black-and-white parasol of the same design as a prisoner's suit. Her lips were so red that they seemed on fire. She had a glow in her eyes that drove men to the river. She was awful easy to look at, and terribly hard to forget.

"Ed," the wife said, "we just dropped in to find out if you're going to close the store at two o'clock."

"If you know of any one who wants to buy anything, I'll keep open all afternoon," I replied.

"Don't be funny," Grace snapped. "We're going out to the game later. We want to know if you're coming along, too. We'd love to have you."

"Sure, to buy the tickets," I said.

This was Bain's cue to step forward. "Come with me," he chirped, "and sit in a box."

"Why, that's sweet of you, Joe," Rosie said. "We accept gladly."

"And don't fail to see the Million Dollar Money Hound," I put in.

The wife sniffed. "No dog is worth a sum like that!" she said. "What is it, a Pekingese?"

By the time I had finished laughing, Joe Bain was almost as red as Rosie's lips. He went into particulars and Grace apologized for her faux pas.

"Jerry is a nice name. Is he cute?" Rosie asked.

Bain shrugged. "He's got good pitching sense and a great arm," he answered. "That's all that is necessary."

After some more chatter all three left. Ten minutes later I began to close up the store. Just as I was locking the front door the two kids who had bought the baseball came up and asked me to refund their ten cents. Owing to the excessive heat they had decided to invest in ice-cream cones.

CHAPTER III.

"LIKE FRENCH PASTRY."

THE hottest place in Trenton was down at the ball park, and I discovered this fact about five minutes after I was in the box with my wife and her sister. A tissue-paper suit felt like a fur coat. Rosie watched the Tigers warm up and I watched the rouge on her cheeks melt. Grace used a fan.

"Aren't you overheated, deary?" she asked Rosie.

My sister-in-law shook her head. "Not particularly so. Why?"

"Your complexion is leaving you," I said.

Rosie gave me a glance that brought the thermometer down about twenty degrees. "Do you think my color is artificial?" she asked frostily.

"No, I don't think it," I answered.

Grace read between the lines and rushed to the defense of her sister. Blows were prevented by the appearance of Joe Bain. He had the richest young man in Sawtel in tow and proceeded at once to introduce us all to him.

"Jerry," Bain said, "these are the

finest people in town. Ed, here, owns that big sporting-goods store you saw when you came up from the station last night."

"Twenty per cent off to professionals," I said, handing Duke a card and a catalogue.

Sawtel's Million Dollar Money Hound didn't look any different from other young men of his age. He appeared to have a couple of eyes, a nose, mouth, arms, legs, and hair on his head. He was tall and rather thin. He seemed to be a little nervous. This nervousness increased whenever he looked at Rosie, which was all the time. Just before he left our box to go to the Tiger dugout he stepped on his own foot and apologized to Bain.

"Well, what do you think of the Duke?" I asked my wife and sister-in-law when we were alone again.

"Not a whole lot," Rosie said indifferently.

"A very ordinary person," Grace murmured.

"Bain tells me that Duke has an income of one thousand dollars a week," I remarked.

"Of course," Rosie said quickly, "you can't expect me to form an opinion of him when I don't know him. He isn't as handsome as Wallace Fairbanks; still he's very attractive. Did you happen to notice how tanned he was?"

"Yes, I did," Grace said. "I guess I was a little hasty in saying what I did. Now that I think it over I can see he is a very charming young man and very good looking. Ed, I want you to speak to Joe Bain and see if you can't induce Mr. Duke to have dinner with us to-night. Understand, I'm not overanxious to have him meet Rosie, but since he is a stranger in town——"

"Say not another word," I interrupted. "I get the point. You feel sorry for him and you love to cook for company and wash extra dishes. You've always been crazy about entertaining people on hot summer nights. I'll speak to Bain a little later. Perhaps the rest of the team would like to come, too."

"Mr. Duke will be enough," the wife answered frigidly.

After a while the game began. Harry Hurley, Trenton's best catcher, handled Duke's delivery. The Sawtel Dollar King was everything Bain had claimed he was with a little more added to it. The Ridgewood Raiders boasted an aggregation of the heaviest hitters in the league. And Duke was working with a strange team on a strange lot. That didn't mean anything to him, however. He pitched perfect ball and nothing in the least perturbed him.

He had a peculiar, snappy way of shooting the pill over the platter. He wound up similar to a crab being pulled out of a net. He had wonderful control, speed, and a lot of stuff on the ball. For four straight innings he held the Raiders to a few stray hits and didn't let a man get beyond first. He handed them an assortment of fast-breaking curves and some smoky, straight ones that had the Ridgewood crowd calling for the cops.

In the sixth inning Duke got just a little wild. The first two Raiders walked. The visiting fans thought they had his nanny and began to ride him. Their kidding seemed to steady Duke. He settled down and blanked the next three up with hardly an effort, leaving the two he had passed anchored on the first and second sacks.

At the end of the eighth he clouted out a clean homer that cleared the bases for a quartet of runs. The game concluded with him on the mound, dealing the same variety of air-tight ball that made the local fans shout themselves hoarse.

"A perfectly marvelous pitcher!" Rosie cried when the game was over. "Wonderful!"

"Go and speak to Joe Bain," the wife ordered.

I did so and the result was that when seven o'clock came and we were sitting down to dinner in the dining room of the bungalow, Jerry Duke was across the table from Rosie.

He might have been a gusher on the diamond, but at a dining-room table he was little better than an oil can. From

the minute that Duke began at the soup, his conversation concerned nothing but the town of Sawtel, New Jersey. He rattled along like a worn-out flivver. He gave us the population of the burg at the last census. He told us what the assets and liabilities were of the Sawtel National Bank, how much it had cost to sewer the town, and how many shingles there were on the roof of the Methodist Church. By the time dessert was served I was trying to decide whether to hurl one plate at him or two.

I figured on a pleasant evening with more information concerning Sawtel. When dinner was over we went out on the porch. The minute we hit it Rosie made me forget and forgive a lot of her past errors.

"Are you fond of walking, Mr. Duke?" she asked.

The pitcher shot a hungry look at our porch swing. "Not when I'm tired," he said. "It's sort of a warm evening. Suppose we all sit down together. I know that you're interested in hearing how Sawtel has grown in the last two years."

"Naturally," the wife murmured in her best company voice.

"We're crazy to hear all about it," I said, longing for a rock.

"Some other night," Rosie cut in. "I haven't had a nice walk in the last three days and how am I going to keep my figure if I don't exercise? Please, Mr. Duke, you're surely not too tired——"

The Million Dollar Money Hound cast another-lingering look at the porch swing, heaved a sigh, and followed Rosie down the porch steps.

A minute later we heard the front gate shut.

"Heaven," I said, "will forgive Rosie's lie about not having had a walk in three days, I'm sure."

Grace folded her hands in her lap. "A thousand dollars a week is an awful lot of money," she said.

"There's a few things that money doesn't cover," I snarled. "Sawtel, New Jersey, is one of them!"

Grace looked across the lawn. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if they liked each other, Ed? There's no good

reason why they shouldn't, either. You probably didn't notice, but Rosie is looking her best to-night. She's a beautiful girl. I suppose if they marry she'll have to live in Sawtel."

"This is the first time I ever felt really sorry for her," I said.

I don't know what time it was when Duke brought my sister-in-law back to the bungalow. At one o'clock Grace left me to wait up. It seemed like a month later when the front gate shut and I heard Rosie humming.

"What do you think of him?" I asked sleepily, after I had locked the windows on the front door, and taken the side-walk in.

"He's like French pastry," she answered.

"How do you mean?" I asked. "Indigestible?"

"No; delicious!" she said with no large amount of enthusiasm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DARK SECRET.

FOR a week nothing much happened. The Tigers played four games. Two were in Trenton, one was at Mill River, and the other at Asbury Park. Duke pitched all four of them. In consequence the Tigers made a clean sweep. With Bain working the Sawtel wonder every day the Tigers had climbed up to second place in the league's standing. They were three games behind the Newark White Sox.

Jerry Duke was the idol of the town. To prove how much Trenton thought of him they let him rave about Sawtel to his heart's content. That seemed to me to be not only the proof of popularity but the greatest test courage could be put to.

About two weeks after the game with the Ridgewood Raiders I got back to the bungalow one evening and found the wife slightly agitated.

"Ed," she cried, "guess what's happened?"

"Rosie's given up rouge," I ventured. "Or Duke has quit talking about Sawtel."

"They're engaged! They're engaged

to be married!" Grace said excitedly. "But keep this tight under you hat. Don't go running around town telling every one you know. As yet it's a secret; only a few people know it. Well, can't you say something?"

"Sure," I replied; "but if I did the board of censors would slap a fine on me."

"A thousand dollars a week! Think of it!" the wife said.

"Money don't cover everything," I said soberly. "Poor Rosie—shipped to Sawtel and linked to a phonograph with only one record in its cabinet."

I didn't say anything to my young sister-in-law that gave her the idea that I knew what had happened. And she kept her engagement to Duke very quiet. It was still a dark secret. Three days later only ninety people in the town knew about it. But they weren't the talking kind.

Rosie bore up nobly under the strain. More than once I saw a wild look in her eyes when anybody mentioned a word that began with s-a-w and ended in t-e-l. As Grace said, one thousand berries a week was so much and a girl would endure a lot to marry a man who received that amount each and every week.

Grace and I were on the porch a few nights after the engagement. We had been there about a half hour when Joe Bain showed up.

"I suppose," he said, "Rosie is out with Jerry?"

"You're a good supposer. Do you care?" I asked curiously.

"Well," Bain said, "he's an awfully good pitcher—the best Trenton ever had."

"A really charming young man," Grace murmured.

"Did he ever tell you about the thriving town of Sawtel?" I asked Bain.

The manager of the Tigers sat up as quickly as if I had shot him. "Tell me about it? That's the only thing he knows! I have got so that if anybody mentions that burg in my presence homicidal tendencies seize me. If he wasn't such a star in the box he'd have a pair of wings on his back and be

playing a flute in an angel orchestra. What chance is there of seeing Rosie after Jerry brings her back here?"

"Hardly any," I told him.

"They keep very late hours," Grace said.

"Early hours," I corrected.

Bain looked at his watch. "Well, I'm only a manager and not a pitcher and so I've got to get a good night's sleep. When you see Rosie give her my regards. You don't suppose there's anything serious between Duke and her, do you?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that," the wife said.

"Where do you get such strange ideas?" I inquired.

Bain looked at the moon that had defied prohibition by getting full. "He's just the kind of a chap to appeal to a young girl. I guess he spends money like water. Don't you think so, Ed?"

"I can't say," I answered. "I never spent any water."

Bain wandered toward the steps. "Well, good night. I suppose you'll be out to-morrow afternoon to watch the Tigers knock the White Sox kicking?"

"We'll be there," Grace promised.

"If," I said, amending her statement, "you pass us into a box free of charge."

Bain said he would and the next afternoon did. As the game promised to be one of the best of the season Trenton had turned out in gala array. The White Sox had brought their own delegation of rooters from Newark. The stands and bleachers had the fans sitting on each other's shoulders. We piped Rosie, wearing a new straw hat, at the right of the grand stand back of the safety net.

"To look at her," Grace cooed, when we caught her attention and waved, "I ask you, would any one admit that she came from Ohio?"

"No one from Centropolis, anyway," I said.

The wife handed me a look that had icicles hanging on it. "You're as humorous as a starving man with ten small children!" she snapped.

CHAPTER V.

LULL IN THE STORM.

THE game began a few minutes later. I guess it was the first time the Newark White Sox had ever been treated so unkindly. Duke won the distinction of being the first pitcher to hold the Sox entirely scoreless. He held them to seven singles and the ninth was the only round where they got as many as two hits. Not a Sox runner reached third during the game.

With the pride of Sawtel working like well-oiled machinery, the Tigers ended the second frame with Harry Hurley, the catcher, tripling into the outfield and scoring on a sacrifice fly. In the third stanza the Tigers added another tally to their credit after two were out. With the Sox at bat in the fourth inning, the Newarks tried hard to get to Duke but failed dismally. He worked with a broad smile and teased them over. In the last half of this session the Tigers were helped along by Newark's errors. Hurley singled, stole second and went to third when the Newark catcher chucked past the sack. The Trenton pitcher walked and the pair worked a double steal successfully, Hurley scoring.

There was a lull in the storm until the seventh inning. Duke remained as steady as the Rock of Gibraltar. In the seventh the Tigers staged a batting fest. The Trenton right fielder fouled out. The Trenton third baseman singled, but died stealing. Hurley rapped out a one-bagger, and while Duke was at bat the Newark pitcher caught the Tiger catcher off first. The White Sox baseman threw wild to second and Hurley reached the bag safely. He scored a minute later on a clean two-bagger of Duke's.

Then the Trenton shortstop hit to the Sox pitcher, who lost his head and threw past first. The shortstop anchored on first and Duke pulled up at third. With the delighted howls of Trenton rising on the summer air the Tigers' second baseman came through with a single that sent the exile from Sawtel home. The busy inning was

brought to a close with a pop fly the Sox short leaped for and smothered.

The last two frames were uneventful. The final count was ten-nothing, with Trenton yammering.

"Thus ends the lesson," I said to the wife. "Let's go home and see what's in the ice box for dinner."

We found Rosie waiting for us outside of the gate. For a wonder Duke wasn't with her.

"Joe Bain is giving the team a celebration dinner up at the Holly House," she explained, "and so Jerry won't be with us to-night."

"That's sad," I murmured. "We won't be able to hear a thing about Sawtel. I call it tough."

"You're horrid, Ed," the wife said.

I noticed, however, that Rosie didn't rush to the defense of her Jerry.

When we reached the bungalow we perceived a figure sitting on the top step of the porch.

"It's that traveling salesman friend of yours from Philadelphia," Grace whispered. "I know because I can see his purple socks from here!"

"His name is Charlie Brennan, isn't it?" my wife's sister said.

"You've got a memory like a bill collector," I told her.

When we opened the front gate Brennan got up and came down to meet us. He sold baseball goods for a wholesale Philadelphia house and always looked in on us when he came to Trenton. He was a short, stout egg, not as young as he had been once, or as old as he would be.

"Sorry I couldn't squeeze in to see the game," Brennan said, after he had passed his hand around. "There wasn't a seat left and every knot hole around the park was occupied. I hear the Tigers cleaned up."

"Your hearing is perfect," I said. "You've got a good pair of ears."

"Will you stop and have some supper with us, Mr. Brennan? We'd love to have you," the wife lied heroically.

I saw Brennan steal a glance at Rosie. "Thanks. I'll be glad to if I'm not putting you out any."

The wife threw a nice meal together.

After I chased the flies out of the dining room we all sat down together. Brennan amused us with stories of his experiences on the road.

"Did you ever happen to take a trip out to Sawtel?" he asked us, after a time.

I looked at Grace. Grace looked at Rosie. Rosie looked at the ceiling as if she had never seen it before. I managed to say that we had never been to the town in question. Believe me, it was some effort getting the words out, and using the hated name.

"I'll tell the world that Sawtel is one hustling little burg," Brennan resumed. "It's a tiny place tucked away in the very corner of the State. But, take it from me, what they don't know about push and enterprise is minus nothing. They have a chamber of commerce that's really wonderful. Its members believe there's nothing in the world like advertising. And that reminds me of Jerry Duke, who is pitching now for the Tigers. I suppose you know Duke?"

"We've heard of him," I admitted.

Brennan chuckled. "I knew Jerry when he was a kid. He's a hustler if there ever was one. And a great ball player. He deserves all his success."

"Mr. Duke," Rosie said, "is a very wealthy young man. Back in Saw—his home town, I should say—he's one of its wealthiest citizens."

Brennan laid down his knife and fork. "Is that what he told you? You mustn't believe everything that Jerry says. He likes to kid a lot. Out in Sawtel they call him the Million Dollar Money Hound because he's always thinking up stunts to make money and multiplying what he does make by a hundred. His latest one is good. The ferocious chamber of commerce which I mentioned gives Duke an income of ten dollars a week for boosting and advertising Sawtel whenever he's away from it. Jerry's a great lad!"

Grace helped herself to a glass of water. She appeared a trifle wilted. Perhaps it was the heat, or the strain of the afternoon's game. Rosie looked across at Brennan.

"Are you sure about that?" she asked in a funny voice.

"You bet I am," he answered. "One of the members of the chamber of commerce told me himself."

My young sister-in-law laid down her napkin and stood up.

"Where are you going, deary?" Grace queried in a limp voice.

Rosie looked back over her shoulder. "To use the telephone. I want to call up the Holly House and break an engagement I made with one of the members of the team. I'll be back in a minute."

When dinner was over I looked at my watch. "If you'll pardon me for a few minutes," I remarked to Brennan, "I'll step down to Sycamore Street and buy the cigars."

"I've got some good ones here," he said.

"I'll buy better ones," I answered. "When we celebrate we want the best!"

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE PORCH.

THE clerk at the cigar store delayed me twenty minutes talking about the Tiger-Sox game. He played a couple of verbal innings for my benefit. When I got back to the bungalow the wife was on the porch.

No one else was around.

"Where's Brennan?" I asked.

Grace looked up. "He left about five minutes ago. I guess he thought you weren't coming back."

I helped myself to the chair beside her. "Where's Rosie?" I inquired. "Upstairs in her room crying her eyes out on account of her busted engagement?"

The wife shook her head. "No," she replied. "She and Mr. Brennan went down to the open-air movies together. I heard her telling him that he had nice eyes. Isn't it too bad that he wears purple socks, Ed?"



LONG-AGO AGAIN

By Edmund Leamy

BESIDE a city florist's shop
To-day I chanced to meet
A little ghost that searched the town
On hesitating feet;
And as a lost and kindred soul,
To one as lost as he
He brought the fragrance of old dream
And far-off Arcady.

He brushed my cheek with pungent kiss
Of clover and of thyme,
Of hollyhocks and daffodils
Amid the city's grime.
And lotus-eyed I walked, forgot
The cares that sought to greet—
The comrade of a vagrant wind,
A little lost and fragrant wind
The ghost of an old garden wind,
That roamed the street.

And mid the gray day and the rain
For me 'twas long-ago again.

Fourteen All!



By Burt L. Standish ~

(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

INFORMALLY INTRODUCED.



EDUCATION? Well, Johnny Gerrity had very little schooling, to tell the truth, but he was not without education; he knew quite a lot of things. First, he was well up on the subject of horses. Almost from the day he could walk—in the Harlem street where he was born—he had played in O'Donohue's stable. There were all kinds of horses there, and Johnny had made friends with them. He learned to know them, and to love them. Horses instinctively nuzzled his pockets for sugar when he came close to them, and they usually found what they wanted.

When he had grown older Johnny drifted down to the race track and learned about a different breed of horses—sleek, speedy thoroughbreds who accepted him as an equal, which was more than some of them did for their owners.

He was too heavy to be a jockey, but his fame as a genius around horses grew in the profession, and he handled more than one valuable string. It was due to the recommendation of an owner that he was placed in charge of the horses on the Marlinghue estate, at

Cedar Cove. That was at the age of twenty-three.

Another thing that Johnny knew exceedingly well was tennis. He learned originally on the Central Park tennis courts. On bright summer afternoons, if you stood at the east end of the tennis courts and looked west, you would see six rows of nets stretching out into the far distance to westward, placed side by side, hundreds of them; and by each net you would see a group of players, battling earnestly.

There was no wire netting around each court to catch the ball and bounce it back to some waiting hand. If your opponent sent over one you could not stop, it usually traveled a couple of city blocks before stopping. You had to run for it at top speed, before some other earnest player claimed it. After a while you either got so expert that very few got by you—or you quit playing in Central Park.

When it is said that Johnny Gerrity was a graduate of the Central Park tennis courts, it is meant that he began in a difficult school. Later he played on regulation courts, and—to cut the account of that part of his career very short—he became an expert player.

The third—and to his mind, the most important—thing that Johnny knew

was that Sylvia Marlinghue, sister of his young employer, was the most beautiful girl in the world—and the most unattainable. Justifiably unattainable, he felt, for who was he to aspire even to think of her? That being the case, he proceeded to think of her in most of his spare moments—and during a good many moments when he should have been thinking of something else.

Old Mr. Marlinghue had always called his superintendent of the horses an equerry. He had lived abroad a great deal, and had taken a fancy to the title. When his son succeeded to the estate at Cedar Cove he continued the custom of his father. Thus it fell out that Gerrity was called the equerry. He looked the word up in the dictionary, learned that it meant master of the horse in a royal establishment, and had a good laugh over it. He had been engaged with his duties as equerry just two days when Sylvia Marlinghue nearly dashed out his brains with a tennis racket. They had not met before, and the somewhat informal introduction marked the beginning of their acquaintance.

CHAPTER II.

SHOWING SOME FORM.

THAT introduction came about in this manner: It was a fleckless, flawless, sunny June day, with just enough breeze stirring the pine tops to make the effort of playing tennis not too arduous. In the background stood the great Marlinghue house, show place of the county, the severity of its fine Colonial lines contrasting pleasantly with the lavish display of nature as exemplified in the trees and shrubs that surrounded the white house. In the foreground was the tennis court, peopled at the moment by two desultory players, Sylvia Marlinghue and her brother Larry, known to fame in Sunday supplements and rotogravure sections as the heirs to a great name and greater fortune.

He called irritably across the net, as she permitted a ball to get by her. "Sylvia, I do wish you'd show some

sign of life. If you don't want to play, say so, but as long as you're——"

"But I want to play, old stupid!" she called back. "I can't help it if you hit them past me. Very few men could have returned that one, much less a poor, weak female——"

He laughed. "There's very little weak about you." He admired her from where he stood. They walked down to the net. "You're right—if you couldn't return that, there are very few men around here who could, Syl. Don't know what we're going to do about the county championship. Looks like Clavering again."

"Unless you beat him, Larry," put in his sister. "Which is possible, because——"

"Because nothing physical is impossible; but that's about all. I may be the best player in these parts, next to Clavering; still, I have absolutely no chance against him, and you know it. I wish somebody would beat him, though. His boastful, swaggering ways get on my nerves."

"You'll have a chance to enjoy his company to-night; he's coming over," she announced.

Larry groaned. "Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed. "To what am I indebted for this great kindness? Oh, that a great tennis player would arise in the land—I mean in the country—and——"

"Well, never mind that, Larry," said his sister, laughing. "Let's finish the set."

They went back to their places. Swish! She sent the ball whirling on its way over the net, just outside the white line.

"One," he said. She nodded and cut another one across. He returned it easily past her, and performed the same service for the next three balls she served, giving him game. In a momentary temper, she whirled and flung her racket as far away as possible, with all the strength of her good right arm.

"There!" she breathed. "Now——" She kept her mouth open, but no words issued therefrom.

That was the moment Johnny Gerrity picked, of all moments in the day, to

come walking from around one of the hedges on his way to the other side of the house, where the horses lived. Incidentally, there were other ways of reaching his destination, but no other way by which he could get a glimpse of the trim form and glinting hair of Sylvia Marlinghue.

"Now, I'll say that's some little jane," he remarked to himself. At the same instant he stepped from behind the hedge. As he did so a heavy tennis racket whistled past his head; it actually clipped his ear in its flight. An inch more and he would have been seriously hurt.

"Fer the love of Mike!" he began. "Now, who in the——"

He was speechless for a moment as he recognized that the projectile had been fired by the fair, if muscular, hand of Sylvia Marlinghue.

"So sorry," she called to him, recovering from her amazement. "It was an accident——"

"Bad shot!" He smiled back at her. "You missed me." He turned to get her racket, and brought it back to her, swinging it tentatively. It felt like old times to him; he had not played tennis for months, and he was passionately fond of the game.

He picked up a ball at his feet in order to return it to Larry Marlinghue, who waited on the other side of the net. Johnny's racket flashed downward, and the ball sailed over the net lazily. Idly Larry made a cut at the ball, to stop it, and then he stared in amazement; he had missed it. When his racket reached the point where the ball flew, the ball was no longer there. He looked up inquiringly at Johnny.

"Some cut, Gerrity!" he said. "Where'd you learn that one?"

Johnny smiled. "Oh, I don't know; I just kind of knew it."

"Can you do it again?" asked Larry.

Johnny nodded. "Sure thing—many times as you want." He picked up another ball and sent it over the net with the same flash of his racket. This time Larry had been watching for it. Alert, his racket flicked down to where the ball would swerve, as before. His

racket hit nothing but thin air. The ball had swerved to the opposite side this time.

"How do you do that?" demanded Larry.

"Why, I don't know. You just sort of do it, if you know what I mean."

"Try some more," said Larry.

They volleyed the ball back and forth. So piqued was Larry at his failure several times to make anything of the shots sent across the net by his equerry that he suggested they play a set. Sylvia added the tinkle of her merry voice to the urgings of her brother.

"Go on, Mr. Gerrity," she said. "You can beat him. He needs a beating, you know."

They played, and from the first it was apparent that Larry was a child in the hands of his opponent. Johnny was smiling and calm, seeming scarcely to hurry, hardly accelerating his pace at any part of the game; yet he covered every inch of his court, and shot them from any position so fast, so deceptively, that Larry could not cope with him at all. And through the game Sylvia sat on the side lines and enjoyed it all immensely. Her brother was good humored, however, and gave it up when he had lost five games without winning one.

CHAPTER III.

SPLENDID HUMILIATION.

LATE that night, after Clavering had left, Sylvia came to Larry in the study, where he was reading. He laid down his book and looked at his sister curiously, noting that she was not her ordinary sunny, happy self.

There was a singularly strong line to her jaw, a cold hardness in her usually carefree eyes, and a pallor to her cheek that he was not accustomed to.

"What on earth's the matter, Syl?" he asked, rising. "You look madder than a nest of hornets."

"I am, Larry," she said simply, but there was a quality in her voice that gave him pause, and he was silent, waiting for her to speak.

Presently she said: "Guy Claver-ing kissed me to-night."

"The hound!" burst from her brother.

She nodded. "I wasn't expecting it. I wasn't looking, and——"

"I'll give him the thrashing of his young life!" cut in her brother.

She shook her head. "That won't do, Larry. In the first place you couldn't do it; he's got thirty pounds on you. In the second place, that isn't what I want. I want him humiliated. I want his pride hurt."

He looked mystified at this, a little at sea. She caught his inquiring glance. "You don't understand, Larry dear. It isn't just his kissing me. What I am so angry about, so mortified about, is his assumption that I'm the kind of a girl one can kiss like that—his conceited, easy familiarity in the matter, as though no girl could think of resisting him, or refusing him a kiss. He's gone now; I sent him home. He said I'll get over being mad, and he thinks so, too. He cannot conceive of any woman being permanently angry at him, really displeased with his actions. He's—oh, he's just a conceited fool; that's all he is; and what I want is to take the conceit out of him. A thrashing won't do it. It's got to be something different, Larry."

They were silent a while, the girl sitting there rigid, with two red spots on her cheeks, sharply defined.

He spoke at length. "Well, what do you want me to do, Syl? Anything you say goes with me," he said tenderly, laying his hand on her arm.

"I know, Larry," she said, squeezing his hand. "I don't know exactly what. It's got to be something to humble him. Something about which he's enormously proud—his tennis title, for instance. If you could take that from him! You couldn't, of course—and that wouldn't quite be what I want, anyway." She was quiet again, casting about in her mind, clutching at the idea that was being born. Then there was a sudden light in her eyes as it came to her. She turned to her brother excitedly.

"I know, Larry!" she exclaimed. "I

have it! Your new man, Gerrity! He can do it!"

Her brother looked mystified. "Gerrity! The man in charge of my horses! Why, he can't belong to the Brook Club—and you must be a member to compete for this title."

"Of course he can belong to the Brook Club, if you say so!" she flung back at him. "Anybody can belong who has your O. K. Don't you see the point? Nobody knows him here yet—he has been here only a day or two, and he has met his assistants only at the stables. You take him into the house, let him get properly fixed up, and announce that he's an old friend who is going to live with us. Take him to the dance at the country club Saturday night, get people to know him, and then put him up for membership at the club. He'll be elected."

"Oh, I say, Syl! That's hardly the thing. I'll do most anything for you, but introduce this man at my club; how can I?"

"Of course," she returned, "you'll do anything for me, and then when I ask you for something, you——"

"I know," he said. "But this!"

"It seems to me if I were a man," she replied, "and my sister wanted me to do something like this for her, I'd do it. Suppose he is introduced and elected to your club—what of it? Whom will he harm there? He looks to be a better man than many of those who were born into membership. And, oh, Larry, don't you see what a splendid humiliation it will make? Guy Claver-ing loses his tennis title to one of our employees!"

She paused here and regarded him. "And after all," she continued after a moment, as she saw he was wavering, "why shouldn't he belong to your old club? In this country a man is supposed to be what he makes himself, not what he's born."

He laughed at this.

"You can laugh," she threw at him hotly, "but where would some men be without money—would they be able to do as well, to be as respected in their professions as Gerrity is in his?"

He was silent a moment, then said: "Well, don't think any more about it, Sylvia. If you still feel the same way about it to-morrow morning, I'm going to take a chance and pull it—that is," he added as an afterthought, "provided Gerrity is willing to go through with it."

"I'll answer for him," replied his sister confidently.

"Do you think he'll be able to carry it off?" asked Larry as an afterthought. "You know, I mean his manner and speech, and all that?"

"I think so," she answered. "I'll take him in hand. Of course, you mustn't tell him that we're going to expose the whole scheme after he beats Guy. That would spoil it."

"O. K.," he said; "only I think it might be harder on Gerrity than it's going to be on Clavering. However, I'll try anything once."

CHAPTER IV.

ONE LITTLE BLUNDER.

WHEN the matter was placed before Gerrity the next morning by Larry and Sylvia, the equerry did not at first think very favorably of the scheme. He was quite willing to be elected to membership in the Brook Club, and to play Clavering for the county tennis title, but he did not see the necessity for concealing his identity—that is, his previous occupation and position as an employee of the Marlinghues; his name, of course, was to remain the same.

There was much argument on this point. "You don't get me," he said to Larry. "I'm as good a handler of blooded stock as there is in this country, if it's myself that says so, and I'm not ashamed of it. If I'm not good enough for you as I am——"

"But you are, Mr. Gerrity," protested Sylvia. "It isn't that. It's only that it might be difficult to get you into the club that way. There are foolishly prejudiced people——"

"Well, if that's the kind of birds there are in that club, I don't want to belong to it," he persisted.

"But you can't play for the title if you don't belong. You see, this title is not exactly an official one. There are only two country clubs in this county, the Brook and the other, the Bowling Green Country Club. There's very little tennis played in the county except at these two clubs—practically every good player belongs to one or the other—and it's generally recognized that the winner of the match between the champions of the two clubs is the county champion—sort of family affair, you know."

"But why are you so anxious to beat Mr. Clavering?" he asked.

"I have my reasons, Mr. Gerrity. You'll do it for me, won't you?" She accompanied this with a smile that made Johnny's heart do a triple somersault. It required very little more talk to make him do as she asked.

It was arranged that he was to live at the house as a sort of permanent guest. The men at the stables were old servitors who would keep mum on the subject when warned. At the house no one knew him except one maid, Delia Moriarty, a red-haired Irish girl, not long in this country, who had attended to making up his room at a nearby cottage. There did not seem to be any danger in that quarter.

Larry looked over Gerrity's wardrobe, and decided that while most of it was passable, there were additions to be made in the way of evening clothes, et cetera, and both of them took a rapid trip to town to supply what was needed. It was decided that, if he was to be treated as an intimate, a member of the family, they should call each other by their Christian names—including Sylvia. Johnny liked this part of the arrangement particularly. So Johnny Gerrity, of Harlem and the East River, became John Seumas Gerrity, intimate of the Marlinghues, and other favorites of fortune.

He took a square look at himself in the mirror of his expensive dresser that night before retiring, in the large chamber that had been assigned to him in the Marlinghue house. He was resplendent in evening clothes. In his mouth was

a fine cigar from the stock of his host, and in his heart a strange mixture of feelings, bewilderment, pleasure, exasperation that he should be masquerading, and a resolve that he would stick and help Miss Marlinghue out of her difficulty, whatever it might be.

"So this is you, Johnny Gerrity," he remarked to his reflection in the mirror. "My woid! Gittin' t' be more than 'arf a swell, what!" He smiled back at his reflection and flicked the ash from his cigar with a motion that he had copied from his favorite screen star. "Oh, ya-as!" he drawled languidly, mimicking some one he had heard. "Conrad is—er—fair, though, to be shuah, he does lack—er—continuity. Now, lahst season at Bar Harbor—er—I mean Bah Hahbah, y'know—— Shut up, y' poor simp, ye're gittin' t' look like one of them yourself," he scolded humorously. He turned to the bed, his thoughts of sleep.

On the bed lay a suit of pale-blue silk pajamas, quite the correct thing, and a dressing gown that some mandarin might have envied. He looked at it and whistled.

"Holy wheat cakes! If the boys of the third ward could only catch a flash of me now—my life wouldn't be worth a Russian ruble. Why——" A knock on the door interrupted his reflections.

"Ah—entah!" he directed, calmly, languidly.

The door opened and red-haired Delia Moriarty stood in the opening. She made a curtsy, coldly, as she regarded him.

"Did you call, sir?" she asked, though she knew he had not called. She wanted to get another look at him in his new splendor. She gazed her fill, coolly, even impertinently, but she gazed at him with approval. Sure, and he was a broth of an Irish boy.

"I did not call, my good woman," he said, turning to his mirror. He was simply paying her out for the impertinence of her manner. She glared at his back angrily for a moment. He did not turn around again, and she closed the door softly behind her.

Outside the door Delia clenched her

fists, and if there were no tears in her eyes it was simply due to her will power and not to her inclinations. "So it's the grand gintlemin ye are, Johnny Gerrity!" she muttered. "Forgettin' yer own people, no less—mixin' wid the great! 'Me good woman,' says he."

CHAPTER V.

ALWAYS AMUSING.

SUCH was the manner of Gerrity's induction into the social life of Green Valley. The rest was not difficult. Both Sylvia and Larry took Johnny in hand immediately, and they made great strides during the next few days, being fortunately untroubled by visitors. Sylvia, by the mere fact of her company and her manners, taught Johnny a great deal. He found his companionship with her very pleasant. By precept and example she taught him to bring out the latent gentility that was his; and he learned rapidly. He was to attend the Saturday night dance at the Brook Club, in the nature of his introduction to the set, and Sylvia gave him a few pointers to bear in mind.

"The point for you to remember, Johnny," she said, her eyes sparkling, "is that, no matter how little you know, the person you're talking to knows still less. Talk about books if you want to—but mention the book before the other person does, and be firm and insistent in your opinions."

"But suppose I haven't read the book?" said Johnny.

She laughed. "How funny you are, Johnny Gerrity! What difference does that make? You don't suppose the others have read it, do you? And remember, whenever you're asked for an opinion about any one or anything, it's always safe to say that it's amusing. Suppose somebody asks you about Bernard Shaw. Why, just remark that the chap amuses you. Or if they want to know what your opinion is of Newport—why, it's an amusing place. You're on safe ground there. Only keep watching your g's at the ends of words. Don't drop any more of them than you can help."

"Right-o, Sylvia," Gerrity replied, "but what I'd like to know is why you are so anxious to have me put it over on Mr. Clavering?"

She colored. "I think I won't tell you—now," she said. "It's a question of—of honor, I think, among other things."

He was silent a moment after this. Then, "What's honor?" he asked—not derisively, but as one who is looking for information.

"Honor?" she repeated. "Don't you know?"

He colored slightly at this. "Yes, I do."

"If you know what it is, why did you ask?"

"Oh, I just wanted to see what smart people think it is. It isn't the same everywhere, it seems. I always thought it was, but I'm finding out different. For instance, this masqueradin' I'm doin'—bang go my g's!—that doesn't strike me as being just—just——"

"I know, Johnny—but don't worry about that; it isn't as bad as you think. Now tell me: What do *you* think about honor?" She asked it provocatively, looking up at him with her laughing eyes.

He stood up, gazing into the distance a moment. "Honor?" he drawled. "Oh, ya-as. I rawther imagine it's very amusing."

It was arranged that Johnny should keep a sort of advisory supervision over the blooded stock for the present. The assistants were capable, and needed only some one in authority to guide them.

All in all, Gerrity was pleased with his transition to a different plane, though a bit confused in mind as to whether, strictly speaking, it was a sporting thing to do. He would have preferred appearing in his workaday capacity as Johnny Gerrity, expert on horses, and tennis amateur; but he recognized the impossibility of this in the false standards that were presumed to obtain in the set at the Brook Club. He would have declined the proposition had it not presented an oppor-

tunity not only to help Sylvia Marlinghue, but to enjoy her companionship. It was something like an impossible dream becoming true.

The servants did not, by word or deed, betray any evidence that they knew he was not just what he purported to be—with the exception of Delia Moriarty. This personable young woman had taken a strong fancy to Gerrity from his first appearance, and it exasperated her—to say the least—that he should be taken out of her sphere by just a flip of the hand, so to speak, of her employers.

But he wasn't thinking of Delia. His thoughts were filled with Sylvia. It seemed to him that she assumed an intimacy with him, a pleasure in his company, that was even beyond the purpose to which they had set themselves. It pleased him. The truth was that Sylvia found him very interesting; he was so different from the rank and file of the Brook Club set. He was a bit rough, to be sure, but never rude or guilty of breaches of good taste; and there was something in the set of his square, capable shoulders, the laughing gleam in his clear-blue eyes, the swing of his walk, that rather intrigued her. It was just a passing interest, but how was Johnny to know that?

He wondered, on and off, what could be Sylvia's reason for her intense resentment against Clavering, whom he had seen at the house the night he had called; but he dismissed it as something he could make nothing out of until Sylvia saw fit to divulge her mind to him. He wasn't quarreling with his good luck.

Gerrity was good to look upon. He gave an air of distinction to his clothes. His light manner blended well with his pleasant personality. If the truth were known, however, he was nervous about the ordeal of the dance on Saturday night. Surely they would be able to see through his masquerade! They could not be so stupid as to believe, he thought. But his thoughts were his own, and if he was nervous nobody but he knew it. Indeed, he had no need for nervousness. He seemed more

in his proper place than a good many who were born into it.

CHAPTER VI.

SOCIETY STUFF TOO EASY.

GERRITY'S début at the dance went off amazingly well. In the first place, his introduction by the Marlinghues worked wonders; it did what ten years' residence might not have been able to accomplish for him; it inducted him unquestioningly right into the heart of the members and their friends. It was enough for them that Larry Marlinghue said he was all right; that Larry said he was the right sort.

Larry himself had more than one qualm about the matter. He felt that he was hardly playing fair toward the members of the club, his friends, and he would have given something to be out of the affair; but he had passed his word to his sister, and he felt that he would have to go through with it at all costs. As to what would happen after the tournament, when Gerrity should be unmasked, he preferred not to think. He liked Gerrity, but felt, however, that some of his friends might not look upon the matter in the same light as he did, and that they would be quite just in their disapproval of his action. Still he shrugged his shoulders and whistled his way through the cemetery of his somber thoughts.

Immediately after the introductions Gerrity found himself whirling off in a swift dance with a blond young thing who whispered to him that he danced beautifully, which he did.

Gerrity took this as his cue to get off some society small talk. "It's been my experience that one either does dance, or he does not," said he brightly. "I mean to say, as it were, that it's something one does by—ah—instinct and breeding, doesn't one?" He appeared quite distinguished as he delivered himself of this gem. Later they elaborated on the theme when, instead of dancing, he sat out one with her—a dangerous thing to do, and something which Sylvia had warned him against.

"Dull party, isn't it?" she remarked

when they had worn the theme threadbare.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I find it quite amusing, don't you know," he said. "One gets so—ah—tired of—the—ah—other thing, that a quiet little affair of this nature is restful to the nerves."

She was silent for a while, regarding his pleasing profile. Later she asked: "Have you been to the opera this season?"

It was late spring. He shook his head. "No, really, you know, I've been so busy that I couldn't get around to it. I've been away from town a great deal, too."

"How do you like Wagner?" she asked.

He looked at her inquiringly. It sounded like a trap to him. "Why, he was a bully shortstop—though he's through now, of course," he said.

She looked mystified. "What's that?" she asked. He saw that he had made some sort of a bull, and he sensed that this Wagner was in some way connected with the opera.

"Just joking." He smiled at her easily, as though it was too deep a joke to expect a girl to understand. "What can one say of Wagner?" he said meaningly, deeply. "Wagner is always—Wagner," he announced, and breathed more easily.

"That's just what I've always thought," she said, and beamed on him; "but I've never been clever enough to put it in just that way. I must remember that."

Gerrity felt more confidence after that. Why, getting on in society was too easy. It was while he was engrossed with that thought he nearly gave himself away.

"Isn't Cedar Cove beautiful at this season of the year?" she was saying.

Before he knew what he was doing he answered: "I'll tell the world it is." He said it with a careless flip of the hand, smacking for all the world of Third Avenue.

She looked up at him and laughed. Later she confided to Sylvia Marlinghue that Mr. Gerrity was priceless. Such

a sense of humor—and such a wonderful mimic! Why, he had imitated an East Side tough so remarkably that, for the moment, she could have believed he was one—were it not for his distinguished bearing and his knowledge of Wagner.

Sylvia breathed a sigh of relief and thanked her lucky stars that he had got by that; next time he might not be so fortunate.

A little later Clavering came in, and when he saw Sylvia sitting alone with Gerrity—it was just after a dance—he hurried over to her and they greeted each other as though there had never been anything between them. Gerrity had a chance to get a square look at him now; he had seen him the night of his visit to the Marlinghues, but had had no occasion to look at him closely at that time. He saw a tall, dark young man, keen of eye, athletic in his bearing—a man well satisfied with himself and with the world in general.

"This is Mr. Gerrity, Guy," said Sylvia. "Mr. Gerrity is staying with us now."

Clavering extended his hand, and the men greeted each other. He glanced carelessly at Gerrity at first, but his look was arrested by a fleeting memory of something—he could scarcely say what, it seemed. He appeared to recall something from a look at the equerry—somebody he had seen before; something he had associated with Sylvia, perhaps.

"Pardon me," he said, smiling. "I thought for a moment I had met you before. I guess not, though."

"I think not," said Johnny, very much on his guard. "Though—one meets so many people, it is sometimes difficult to recollect."

Clavering smiled at him in a perfunctory manner, and turned again to Sylvia. It was easy to see that he was not yet satisfied. And then, this Mr. Gerrity seemed to be on excellent terms with Sylvia; that was something to be attended to.

The next day Gerrity's name was proposed for membership in the Brook Club of Cedar Cove.

CHAPTER VII.

ON DANGER'S EDGE.

THAT week Gerrity, as the guest of Larry Marlinghue, pending his election to membership, played tennis several times on the courts of the Brook Club and made a profound impression. In addition to Larry, there were half a dozen players in the club who rather fancied their game, and each of these in turn played against Gerrity. He beat them, half apologetically, almost.

That was one of the traits they found charming in Gerrity—his entire lack of boastfulness, the absence of blatancy in his manner. He played a fine game of tennis, and most of the members of the Brook Club would have felt puffed up about their ability if they could have done as well. But not Gerrity. He had an ease of manner, an entire lack of affectation, that became him amazingly well. He was a clean-living, fine-looking chap, boyish in his lighter moments; but grave and deliberate at times, mostly because he had to be on his guard in speaking. He won his way into the hearts of the fashionable folk among whom an odd cast of fate had thrown him.

He made a few "breaks," of course, and the people who heard them were always delighted with the cleverness of his "imitations" of East Side characteristics.

Skillfully given the impression that all had been forgiven him by Sylvia, Clavering visited the house again during the week. That young lady treated him much as she had before he had offended her, but a man more on his guard might have been able to make something out of the hard, calculating glint that appeared occasionally in her eyes when she glanced at him.

Clavering, who, it appeared, had serious hopes and aspirations in the direction of Sylvia, did not like the appearance of intimacy that he discovered between her and Gerrity, a young man whom nobody knew anything about and who had lately appeared out of Heaven knew where. It had been given out that Gerrity was interested in horses;

that he was a horseman; and the knowledge of it caused Clavering to prick up his ears. Somehow or other he had been connecting the Marlinghue guest with horses, but he could not remember in what connection he had previously come under his notice. Did he but know it, the incident that he could not remember had occurred when he last visited the Marlinghues. He had gone down to the stable yard to inspect a new hunter that Sylvia had bought, and the equerry had been there supervising the care of the horses. That was when he had seen Gerrity, and that was the reason his mind subconsciously connected Johnny with horses.

However, for some reason or other, Clavering sensed that all was not what it appeared, and he was reserved and watchful where Gerrity was concerned. As for the latter, he seemed to pay little more attention to Guy Clavering than courtesy demanded, though when he was unobserved he inspected him minutely. Although the men had said little to each other, a feeling of strain, almost of antagonism, had sprung up between them—a feeling for which neither could account coherently, though it might have been due to the fact that they were both interested in Sylvia.

"I've been told you're considerable of a tennis player," remarked Clavering to Gerrity on the night he called, just to make conversation.

"Oh, I bang the balls around a bit," returned Gerrity. "I don't hold any county titles—yet."

Clavering stared at him. "Yet? What do you mean?"

The other smiled gently. "Why, nothing, Mr. Clavering—only titles change hands sometimes, don't they?"

The guileless, straight look, with which he accompanied the words, robbed them of any sinister meaning they might have had.

"Is there any chance of your competing?" said Clavering.

"Maybe," put in Sylvia, seeing that the conversation was taking an embarrassing trend. "Larry's put Johnny up for membership in the Brook, you

know. If he can beat the best we have, why——" She left the rest to his imagination.

"Well, I think I'll give a fairly decent account of myself, when the title match comes off," said Clavering with his usual boastfulness. There was an air of self-satisfaction about this statement as he made it that ruffled Gerrity. A man might win a tennis match, but he need not be so confident about it, he felt. There were other tennis players in the world.

Sylvia noted Gerrity's exasperation with approval. That was the way she wanted him to feel. She knew well that, if she wanted to strike a telling blow at Clavering, it had to be a blow at his vanity; and there was nothing that would have the effect of so completely demolishing his vanity as a defeat for the title. He was inordinately proud of his unofficial title of county champion. It pleased him to have people watch him play, and to hear them whisper, "He's county champion, you know." He intended to remain county champion.

Sylvia also had been wounded in her vanity. It had humiliated her to have Clavering think he had but to stretch out his hand and take her. She knew what it was to be humiliated, and she never wavered in her determination that Clavering should be hurt just as she was. She liked Clavering—had liked him, rather—but she expected that, with his self-complacency gone, she could like him a great deal better. As for Gerrity, he was simply an instrument of discipline.

On Saturday came word of Gerrity's election to membership in the Brook Club. That afternoon he took a long walk with Sylvia, who found that her tutorship was proving as interesting to her as it was helpful to her pupil.

Gerrity, meanwhile, had been living in a totally different world from that to which he had been accustomed, and he was finding it exhilarating. He was dropping into place as though he had always been there, and he was beginning to look upon his old life with the same detachment as Larry Marlinghue

himself. The servants did not notice this—except Delia Moriarty. Delia was nursing a secret canker, and she was not the young woman to keep it secret very long.

Gerrity's walk with Sylvia that afternoon was a thing he might have dreamed of in optimistic moments, yet never expected to realize. Never was that young woman so beautiful, never so gracious and understanding. The foliage of the countryside was resplendent; there was just enough haze to take the edge off the sun's heat and to cast a filmy mist over the distant Vernon hills. There were long silences between them that were fuller than talk could ever have been.

Now and again she would speak, in reply, perhaps, to some unspoken thought of his own. She seemed to guess uncannily what was passing in his mind. "Well, what do you think of them?" She smiled at him.

He looked up at her with a bashful grin. "Oh, I guess people are pretty much the same everywhere," he replied. "I mean, take away their money and put them all in the same station of life, and you'll find just as much goodness—and just as much wickedness per person——"

"I'm not so sure about that. I don't think people are pretty much the same. Now you, for instance—you're quite different from anybody else I know."

He blushed. Johnny blushed easily. "In what way?" he asked. "I didn't know I was——"

"Of course you didn't; that's one of the things that make you different. I mean you're not always posing, not always playing for an effect."

"Perhaps I am," he said. "Isn't the country beautiful at this time of year? You know, I never did take a good, square look at the country before. Somehow, I was just always on my way from one city to another—from one race track to another; the country was just nothing but something I had to pass through to get where I wanted to get." He was trying to get the conversation into another trend; he did not care to linger on the subject of him-

self. Still he said: "Well, perhaps it looks so good to me on account of—of the company. You sorta learn to see with the eyes of another sometimes."

She made no reply to this, and thus they went on, skirting the dangerous edge of too great intimacy, yet always fascinated too much to stay very far away from it. Gerrity was indeed discovering a new world. As he said, he found that people were very much the same, and a beautiful girl was a beautiful girl regardless of her station.

They went to the dance that night at the Brook Club, and Gerrity got on famously with everybody—men and women alike.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUDDEN DECISION.

DURING the next week the club tournament was held to decide the Brook Club championship. The winner was to play the champion of the Bowling Green Country Club for the championship of the county—unofficial. Clavering had already won the title for his club—the Bowling Green—as usual. There was nobody in either club good enough to beat him; at least, in the past few years there had not been.

An unusually large crowd turned out for the club tournament, word having gone forth that this new member, Johnny Gerrity, was able to swing a wicked racket, as some of them put it. Gerrity and Larry Marlinghue were on opposite sides of the draw, so it was not until the third day of the tournament that they met, in the finals. Each had gone through his own side of the draw without defeat.

If the crowd was looking for an exciting match, they were not disappointed. Johnny began winning on his cannon-ball service—a love game. He won the match in three straight sets, with the loss of only one game in each set.

"Well," said the referee, congratulating him, "at last the Brook Club has some one who can give Clavering a battle."

"I think I can," replied Johnny.

"Well, if you do, there'll be some high times around here."

"I've played both of you," put in Larry Marlinghue, who had come up during the colloquy. "It seems to me that you're pretty even—the advantage, if any, is only a shade on your side." Johnny nodded. He differed from Larry in his opinion.

There was a dance at the club that evening in honor of the victor, and, flushed with adulation, it was after two a. m. before Johnny, in company with the Marlinghues, came back to their home. He rose late the next morning, in consequence—after nine o'clock. He bathed and dressed leisurely, dreamily thinking of what fine eyes Sylvia Marlinghue had, and how they lighted up when he talked to her. In the hall he met Delia Moriarty.

"It's a fine morning, Mr. Gerrity," she ventured.

"Yes, indeed, Delia," he replied.

"Aye, it is—fer thim as can be enjoyin' av it," she put in maliciously.

He caught the tone and turned to look at her, curious. "What do you mean, Delia?" he asked.

"Nothing." She shrugged. "Only, there's some who must work, an' enjoyin' av the weather isn't fer the likes o' thim. There's others who can do that same. An' there's some"—she looked him directly in the eyes—"who ought to be workin'." Then she went on with her work, and Gerrity went down to breakfast.

He fell to thinking over the girl's words; but dismissed all thought of them after a while.

The next two weeks were sunny, happy, long-to-be-remembered days for Gerrity. A large part of each day was spent in playing tennis with Larry on the Marlinghue courts, and with such other members as cared to play on the Brook Club courts. Then there were long afternoons, when the sun was too hot to play tennis, spent in sitting in the shade with Sylvia, talking on every subject that a young man and a young woman can discuss in their idle time.

Evenings were spent with music,

visitors, or walks in the gardens with Sylvia. Clavering was a frequent caller, both afternoons and evenings, and he could not help noting the preference Sylvia showed for Gerrity—which is perhaps exactly what that wise young woman wanted him to notice.

It was a toss-up between them, however, when both were present. She did not seem to prefer either very much to the other; it was the clear field that Gerrity had when he, Clavering, was not present, that worried him. Clavering had stirred up something strong in her, something resentful, something that was not easily stilled. But to Gerrity she showed herself an angel, a soft-spoken, straight-thinking young woman, filled to the brim with kindness.

Two days before the match Gerrity was in the pink of condition and spirits. He was walking in the garden with Sylvia, and, in their good-natured railery they seemed closer than ever. Suddenly she said to him: "There is no doubt about it, Johnny?"

"You mean about beating Clavering?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes."

He looked at her curiously, as though scarcely understanding. "And after that?" he said.

"Then—we'll see." She smiled at him again, disarming his completely.

"I think I'll beat him all right," Gerrity went on. "But I can't see why you're so awfully anxious to see him beaten. Tell me, now. Just why is it?"

"I once told you not to ask me, Johnny, didn't I? I'll tell you—in time. But not just at present."

That's where the matter rested, but it left Gerrity's heart filling with a strange hope. For the rest of that day he trod upon air.

Clavering had been invited to dinner that evening. Before dinner Gerrity had been looking at the horses in the stables, and directing the help in the care of them. He turned in the direction of the house, as he had just time enough to dress for the evening meal. By way of a short cut he went around

the house instead of crossing in front. Here he found Clavering, who had stepped out from behind some bushes.

"Hello!" was his greeting. Then he stepped into the path in front of Gerrity, frowning. "I want to talk to you," he said coldly.

Gerrity stared at him. "Well, you have the floor, Mr. Clavering," he drawled, pausing, hands in pockets, his eyes looking directly into Clavering's. He noticed the hostility of the other. "Speak your piece."

"It won't do, Gerrity," said Clavering, stepping closer.

"No?" inquired Johnny. "Probably not. Just what are you referring to, though?" But he had guessed.

"All this." Clavering took in the Marlinghue place with a wave of his hand. "All this stuff about being a friend of the Marlinghues and playing in the tennis championships."

"Why won't it do?" asked Gerrity calmly.

"Why?" The other stared at him belligerently. "You know why as well as I do, but I'll tell you: Because you're parading under false colors. Because you're not what you—or the Marlinghues—pretend you are. Because you don't belong in this crowd, that's all. No stable boy does." He paused to let this sink in.

Gerrity strove hard to keep his temper, and for the moment succeeded. "The Marlinghues said I was a horseman, and that's what I am. Don't let nobody tell you different. And as far as——"

"Talk, Gerrity, talk!" snapped Clavering. "You were employed in the Marlinghue stables—I know that. An equerry, I believe they call you. Well, call it anything you like. You're a stable boy all the same. I guess the Brook Club board of governors'll have something to say about it when I tell them."

"You're going to tell them?"

"Am I? I'm going to tell everybody. Where do you get off, anyway, coming in here where you don't belong, pretending you're something that you're

not, mixing with your betters on the assumption that you're their——"

"What do you want?" cut in Gerrity. "Make it snappy."

"I want you to get out—that's what I want!" answered Clavering.

"And if I don't you'll spring your story, is that it?"

The other nodded, towering above Gerrity almost a head. There was a silence for a moment and then Gerrity spoke. "All right," he said. "Spring it. I'm staying right here." He turned to go.

"Here, wait a minute," called Clavering. "I'm not through yet."

"I'm through," flung back Gerrity, walking away. The other followed and kept pace with him.

"There's nothing in this for you, you know," said Clavering. "You're just being used—I don't know why——"

"What's that to you?" demanded Gerrity.

"Well, just this," said Clavering. "It's worth five hundred dollars to me if you withdraw—both from the match and from the scene—if you see nothing more of Miss Marlinghue."

Johnny stared at him. "So that's how you fight your battles!"

"You fool!" exclaimed Clavering. "Do you seriously think Sylvia Marlinghue can really care anything about people like you——"

"Don't bring the lady's name in, Clavering," Johnny warned him quietly; but there was a grimness in his tone that should have spelled danger to Clavering.

"Nonsense!" said Clavering. "Never mind that dramatic stuff. Sylvia Marlinghue is just using you——"

That was as far as he got on that line of thought, because he was suddenly sent into the land of oblivion. It was accomplished by means of a clean-cut swing on Clavering's jaw, followed by another just like it. Both had been delivered with amazing suddenness. Clavering hardly knew what hit him. Johnny stood over him, his clothes scarcely ruffled, and regarded him speculatively. Then he turned and seized a garden hose that was handy, turned

it on, and played it on the figure of the recumbent tennis champion.

When Clavering, drenched and miserable, began to clamber to his feet, Johnny dropped the hose.

"Now, go home and get dry—and spring your sensation, Mr. Clavering."

CHAPTER IX.

A LITTLE CONVERSATION.

GERRITY sauntered away, whistling as he went. So that was the way of it, he reflected. He wondered who had told Clavering; where Clavering had found out. Not that it mattered. As for himself, he had never wanted to conceal his identity. But there was a leak somewhere.

He had just about reached the house when he learned that he had forgotten his pipe in the stables. He could have left it there, of course, if he had been in a hurry, but he decided he had plenty of time, so he turned back to the stables to get it.

He reached the stables and entered the stall of Pomander III, where he had left his pipe. The partitions were about as high as his head, and his entry had been noiseless, so it is no wonder the occupants of the next stall did not know of his presence. That was how he came to overhear their talk. The persons speaking were Sylvia Marlinghue and her brother Larry.

Larry's voice was tinged with exasperation. "Look here, Sylvia," he was saying, "I'm going to get into an awful mess about this Gerrity affair, you know. I——"

"How?" came the voice of Sylvia, cold, hard as granite. It was a voice Johnny had never heard before.

"Oh, you know. Don't make me go over all that again. It was a fool thing to go into, in the first place. When the board of governors learn about it—and you bet they will—I'll be pretty lucky if they don't expel me. Introducing——"

"From the stable to high society! How's that for a movie title?" Sylvia laughed, a little harshly.

"Exactly," put in Larry. "And when the truth comes out—what?"

"Nonsense!" snapped Sylvia. "It'll be called just a rich man's whim. What can they do to you? There's no rule against his being a member that I know of—no written rule, anyway."

"I know," interrupted Larry petulantly. "But it's hardly a sporting thing to do. You know, these people have taken him up on my say-so, and it isn't playing fairly with them."

"Rot!" exclaimed his sister. "Anyhow, you're in it now, and you have to go through with it."

"Well, it doesn't seem the right thing to do," objected her brother. "And while I'm on the subject, I don't think you're acting nicely with him——"

"What do you mean, Larry Marlinghue?"

"Why," he went on, determined to have his say, "I mean the way you go around with him as though you had a special sentimental interest in him, you know."

His sister laughed, peal on peal of metallic, sharp laughter. "How funny you are, Larry! So you think——"

"Why, what would anybody think?" he asked. "I wouldn't be surprised if you married him!"

"Larry!" She came back at him sharply. "How dare you say such a thing?"

"Sorry," he apologized. "But you see how it is."

"Well, if it looks that way, that's just how I want it to look. You didn't think I'd descend so low as to marry *him*, did you—even if it looks like that."

"Well, what are you going to do after the match?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered. "Guy Clavering comes back to heel, chastened and subdued, where he belongs. after I've made the news public that he was beaten by a stable boy!"

"And Gerrity?" put in Larry.

"Gerrity?" she asked, as though she had forgotten him. "Oh, yes; he goes back to the stable, where he belongs."

There was a movement behind them, in the doorway. They whirled to face Johnny, who was standing there, rigid,

grim, his face white. His eyes were hard and dead, as he stared at them. Speechless with surprise, they stared back at him. For several seconds the tableau held.

Then, without a word, Johnny turned and walked out. In half an hour he was on his way to New York, without having spoken to anybody.

CHAPTER X.

SOMETHING SURPRISING.

THE next day Clavering sprang his sensation in Cedar Cove. The first person he met was Rita Rittenhouse, whose family owned a large slice of that part of the county. He told her all about Johnny, what his real profession was, and so forth. Her eyes lighted up with interest. She liked Johnny Gerrity; there was something clean, something straightforward about him that had grasped her.

"So he soils his lily hands with work!" she remarked. "Isn't that jolly? You know, Guy, somehow I thought he was rather worth while. I must be sure to ask him to dinner."

Clavering looked at her, puzzled. "But he's a stable boy, Rita!"

"No, he isn't; he's an expert on horses, as anybody who's talked with him for more than two minutes could tell you. And moreover, what do I care what he does for a living? I like him. He's interesting, he's got something to talk about, and he has an interest in life that most of you people lost long ago."

He gave her up as a bad job, and next tackled Billy Shaw, to whom he told the story of Johnny.

Billy laughed. "I suspected something like that all along," said he. "Say, he's a regular fellow, isn't he, Guy!" He laughed again, as if in remembrance of something Johnny had said. "You know, the minute I clapped my eyes on that chap he interested me. I must get some advice from him about my two-year-olds. Ripping good tennis player, isn't he? I think you're going to lose your old crown, if you ask me, which you don't."

It was an amazing thing to Clavering—and probably it would have been to the Marlinghues, too—but it was the same thing all along the line. The story of Johnny's real business in life made no sensation at all among the young people. They didn't care what he did for a living—despite the reputation for snobbishness that they had! What interested them was the fact that Johnny was "the right sort," and they liked him.

Meanwhile, Sylvia and Larry Marlinghue did not quite know what to do. The next day was the date of the important tennis match—the match Johnny had been booked to win from Clavering. It happened that the athletic committee was stalled somewhere on a three or four-day fishing trip in the woods, and could not be reached. Johnny Gerrity had been appointed to represent the club in the match, and nobody had any authority to make any substitution. And Gerrity had disappeared.

"Well, we seem to have spilled the beans," remarked Larry. "I don't know what to do about that match. I don't believe Gerrity will show up again. Did you hear what they're saying at the club? That it's about time we got some healthy young blood, new blood, into the place. That's Johnny. I hardly understand it myself, but nobody seems to be mad about Johnny except Clavering. There was something about him they liked, I guess."

Sylvia nodded. She knew what that something was; in spite of her pose she liked it herself. She would not have admitted it before, but now that he was gone she missed him. "I know," she said. "I wonder how Guy Clavering found out."

"Why, didn't you know?" asked Larry. "He told me. From one of the upstairs girls—Delia Moriarty."

"Delia Moriarty!" echoed Sylvia, a puzzled look creeping into her eyes. "You mean that good-looking, red-haired Irish girl?" He nodded. "I guess that explains why she left so suddenly this morning. Afraid of getting discharged for telling, I sup-

pose. Well, she might just as well have stayed. It doesn't seem to have been much of a sensation either way. Now about the match?"

"I think the only thing to do will be for me to appear there at the scheduled time, in place of Gerrity. We can fix it up with the athletic committee later, when they get back to the city. Somebody has to play Clavering. We can't let the title go by default."

CHAPTER XI.

ONE TOO MANY.

THE large stands at the Brook Club were freighted to their capacity, towering gayly against a perfect sky. A huge crowd was present; every one who was able to crowd into the arena was there. In the throng was the entire membership of both the Brook Club and the Bowling Green Country Club, reinforced overwhelmingly by their friends and partisans.

A big contingent from the county at large was there, drawn by the lure of a championship match, and by the chance that the title might change hands. The news had gone out that a new champion would arise—a man of the people, not one of the idle rich; these people wanted to see the event take place, and to cheer for Johnny Gerrity. Clavering was not a popular champion.

Most of the crowd did not know that Gerrity had disappeared; they found it out only upon their arrival, and they were not pleased about it, you may be sure. They liked Larry Marlinghue, but they knew he had little chance against Clavering. And the news that Gerrity was an employee in the stables of the Marlinghues only increased the desire of many to see him in action.

Leaning against the grand stand, at one corner, lounged Clavering, impressively towering in his tennis flannels and grace of pose. A cynical smile played over his face as he stood there talking. Some one remarked that it was strange Gerrity should have disappeared just before a match; it looked like running away from it.

"Well, who knows!" returned Clavering, smiling in his reserved, egotistical manner. He gave the impression that it was his view of the matter.

The stands, however, felt differently about it. As the officials began to scurry around before the start of the match, and as Larry sauntered to his place on the courts, they set up a concerted cheering.

"We want Gerrity! Johnny Gerrity! We want Gerrity!"

Clavering looked up at them wordless, but with a trace of contempt for their judgment in his bearing that they did not miss. They would have liked to see Clavering beaten.

At last came the moment for the match. Positions were tossed for and awarded, and the men took their places.

"Are you ready?" asked the referee from his ladderlike chair at the net.

The reply was drowned in a roar of applause that suddenly arose. Tennis racket under his arm, debonair and faultless in flannels, a graceful figure had walked onto the court, bewildered a little by the uproarious greeting, and taking it in his charmingly bashful and diffident manner.

"Johnny Gerrity! Johnny Gerrity!" screamed the crowd at him.

It was he, for a fact, and he had come back to play Clavering. He nodded to the referee, who was a little uncertain as to how to act. In a moment there was an excited group under the referee's stand. Larry and Clavering came up hastily.

Gerrity turned to Larry. "Have you been appointed by the athletic committee to take my place?"

"No," answered Larry. "But we thought you wouldn't appear."

"I'm here," said Johnny. He turned to the referee. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't play?"

The referee shook his head. "None that I know of, Mr. Gerrity."

Here Clavering pushed his way through. "This man is not really representative of the Brook Club," he asserted. "Marlinghue is the man to play me."

"You'll play me, Clavering, or you'll

play nobody to-day, I think. How about it, Mr. Referee?"

The referee nodded. "That's the way I understand it. I had your name down."

Here the crowd, impatient at a discussion of which it could hear nothing, drowned out the conference with shouts of "Gerrity! Johnny Gerrity!"

There was more talk, in which Johnny took little part; at last he took Larry Marlinghue's place on the court, and, grumbling, Clavering went to his own.

"Are you ready?" asked the referee, for the second time that day. The players nodded. "Then play!"

Gerrity held the ball, ready to serve. A tense silence overhung the clear air, unusual to such a large crowd. There was a square set to Gerrity's jaw and the usual smile was absent from his eyes. He was grim; he was going to fight with all he had of brain and brawn.

His racket slashed back, poised for an instant at the top of the stroke; then a white ball flashed past Clavering.

"Fifteen love!" announced the referee. The men changed to the other sides of their courts.

Crash! The ball went on a dead line over the net. No human being could have returned it in time.

"Thirty love!" announced the referee.

In a dazed silence Johnny Gerrity took the first game on four served balls; the older man had been unable to send one of them back across the net.

There was a slightly puzzled look in Clavering's eyes as he poised the ball for his service. He could scarcely understand how a man could get so much power behind his racket as Johnny had exhibited. No man he had ever played had shown this type of speed; it was dazzling. He saw that if he wanted to win from Gerrity he would have to win his own service every time and trust to win on Gerrity's service at some time when he weakened or faltered for an instant.

Clavering's racket whizzed through

the air and hit the ball with the entire strength of his shoulders behind it. Like a rocket it shrieked across the net. From far back in his own court Johnny sent it back even swifter.

"Love fifteen!" announced the referee monotonously. The second game was marvelously fast after that. Both men covered their courts perfectly, but where Clavering was simply playing tennis, Gerrity was playing an almost inspired game.

Like a gray shadow in the night, Gerrity's lithe body ranged over every inch of his side of the net—as he had learned to do in Central Park, where the game had to be suspended if you lost the only ball you had. His racket rose and fell. The ball would clear the net by the veriest fraction of an inch, and shoot unimpeded to the back screen. It would have taken a national champion in good condition to stand up to that kind of game. Gerrity took the second game with the loss of only one point.

The rest of the first set was in about the same mold. Johnny won it in six straight games—a love set in championship tennis! Rattled and bewildered by the other's truly brilliant playing, Clavering did not look the really good player that he was. He seemed a mere novice in the hands of Gerrity. His speed seemed to avail him nothing; he was far in the back court when Johnny served, and even then had difficulty getting to the ball.

In a box sat Sylvia Marlinghue, and on her face was a queer expression. It was the look of a girl who had found herself; the face of one who had cast away sham and got down to elemental facts. Her eyes almost devoured Johnny; they followed his every movement, his every expression.

CHAPTER XII.

AN INVITATION DECLINED.

BEFORE an excited crowd Gerrity took the second set with the loss of only one game. He looked not at the crowd at all. His face was like a stone, so cold and so grim was it. His

business was to play tennis—not to notice crowds. His play was the perfect coördination of body and mind.

Suddenly, as it seemed, a change came over Clavering, as if he were just recovering from what might almost have been a coma. He called on his own will, and on all of his nerve. In his eyes came a hard glint of determination. There was a firm set to his jaw and a tightening around his lips. He took a decided brace. It was time, too; the match was for three out of five sets. As Johnny had won two, he had but to win one more out of three.

The third set was an epic of tennis. Grimly, silently, they contended. Each was fighting the battle of his life with an opponent who must be beaten back, crushed, driven to his base lines. The stands shrieked in their excitement, and on the courts the battle raged back and forth, with the games going first to one and then to the other in clockwork regularity.

Like the ghosts of all the wonderful tennis players of the past the men ranged over their courts, covering every inch. Not a mistake—not a misstep! Their placements were magnificent; their services were exact to the fine quarter of an inch. Up and up the score in games mounted. Now it was six all; now it was nine all; now it was ten to nine in favor of Clavering; then it was ten all. Such a set had never before been seen in match play at the Brook Club. Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen!

Sternly they fought on. The crowd had lapsed into a strained silence. Presently Clavering swayed a trifle—just the merest trifle, on his feet. He was beginning to give way. He was being beaten down at his last frontier. The pace was too stiff for him.

At the fifteenth John Gerrity broke through Clavering's service. He became a whirlwind galvanized into action; he shot the balls back like a sharp-shooter to all angles of the other man's court. The only sounds were the scuffling of the men's fast-flying feet, the thud of the rackets against the lively

balls, and the calling of the referee's voice.

Gerrity won a love game. He needed one more game for the set and match. He started like a panther to sweep Clavering off his feet, and did so in short order. He smashed the ball over the net with uncanny speed. The eye could scarcely follow its terrific flight. It cleared the net by an infinitesimal fraction of an inch. Clavering made a desperate sweep at it with his racket, but it was impossible to return that service. They changed to the left sides of their courts.

Slam! It was another fierce one, just clearing the net, but Clavering was expecting it. His racket swooped up before the ball had even crossed the net, and it fairly sang with the impact as he slammed the ball down hard in the farthest reaches of Gerrity's court. The crowd gasped as he made what seemed an impossible return, and Clavering could only stand and watch it flash past him. The white projectile whizzed over the net right to the feet of Clavering. For an instant he hesitated. He recovered and made a fore-hand lunge at the ball. Straight as a shot from a gun it flew into the net. The score was now forty love. One more point and the game was Gerrity's.

A tense look appeared in Clavering's face. Far back of his line he played, to give him time and room to return the ball, which he knew would be shot across at him.

Gerrity's racket flashed in the air. The ball sailed lazily over the net and dropped on Clavering's side with not more than an inch to spare. Too late Clavering saw his mistake. Desperately he darted to the net, but the ball did not even bounce. It was a perfect cut, and lay dead when it struck the ground.

"Game, set and match!" announced the referee, but no one heard him. The stands poured out their occupants in a gay-colored deluge onto the courts.

Some time later, when the crowd had thinned out around Gerrity and it was possible to speak to him, Sylvia and Larry pushed up.

He received them smilingly, diffi-

dently, as though there had never been any hard feeling between them. She congratulated him with eyes beaming her admiration.

"I'm glad you liked it, Sylvia," he said.

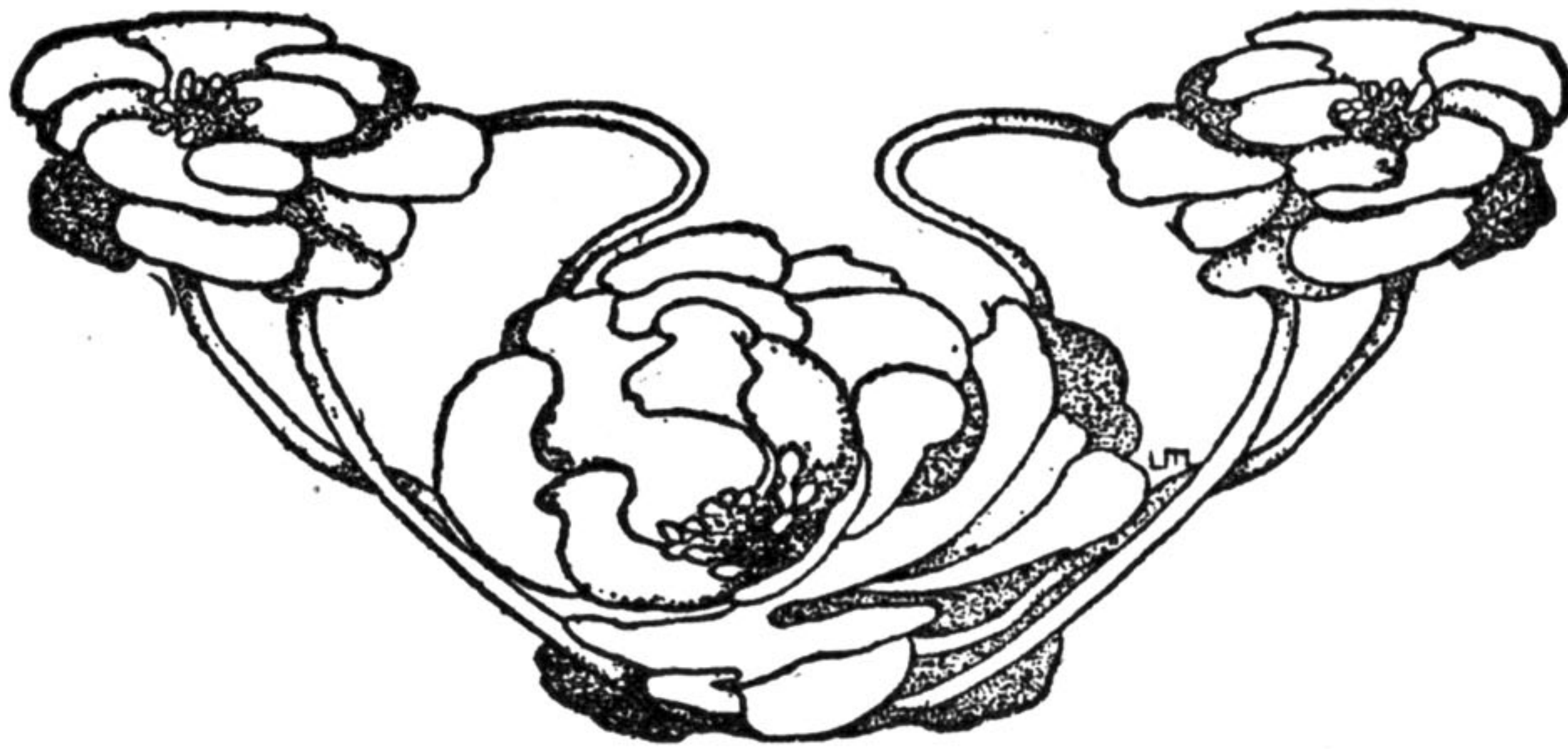
"Oh, it was wonderful!" she exclaimed, and Larry added his comments.

"You'll come up to the house for dinner, won't you?" she added hopefully. "I've such a lot to talk about."

He smiled good-humoredly. "Can't possibly," he said. "I signed up with

a man this morning to take charge of his horses. He's taking them to Kentucky. I must hurry off to make the train. Good-by. Had a bully time at Cedar Cove, and"—he looked squarely into Sylvia's eyes—"I've learned a heap about a lot of things and—people."

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.



UNSUNG HEROES

By Ted Olson

WHEN the Pullman glides to the station gate
 Out of the night and the storm,
 When you speed to the hands and the eyes that wait,
 And the heart that is flaming warm;
 Do you ever pause, as you turn again,
 To the welcome of home and kin,
 To think of the grimy, greasy men
 Who pilot the Flyer in?

Night—and the plain like a sea outspread,
 Snow, or the lash of rain,
 As the rails unwound like a flimsy thread
 In the path of the speeding train;
 But the eyes in the cab were trained and keen,
 And the hand on the throttle true,
 And if danger and death may have lurked between,
 No one but the trainmen knew!

In the languid ease of the parlor car
 You drowsed, at rest, secure,
 While the hand at the throttle guided you far,
 Steady and swift and sure.
 And the desert shrinks to the width of a map,
 And the steel links foam and foam,
 All thanks to the grimy, greasy chap
 Who pilots the Flyer home!



CHAPTER XL.

MESSAGE FROM THE PAST.

THE silence within the block-house as well as without continued and became a torture to the man and woman who waited.

Presently there came an imperative rapping against the door. Pape, standing within arm's reach of the handle, felt something hard and cold slipped into his grasp; he realized that Jane had rearmed him; he appreciated her mute suggestion that it would be better, were they known to be blocked within, to take his chance of overcoming a single enemy than to wait until reinforcements arrived.

A second he considered the automatic, before placing it in his pocket ready—at least for a threat—in case his arms and fists could not decide the issue. To throw open the door and drag inside the disturber would be the best beginning to a fight's finish. He waved the girl toward the far wall; soundlessly he turned the latch and flung back the door with a jerk to admit—

Their pursuer was official, yes, although not so much so as they had feared. With a bound he entered just

below Pape's ready fists—and on four feet instead of two.

"Kicko—you scoundrel!" Pape exclaimed, and with Jane controlled an impulse to laugh.

She patted his head and emitted a low-voiced "Precious dog!"

Pape mounted the wabby doorstep and peered outside. No accompanying officers loomed through the fast-falling shadows. Either the dog had outsped them or had deserted them temporarily for some reason canine and less comprehensible. On relatching the door and facing about, he saw that reason.

The Belgian, his tail waving like a feather fan, trotted toward the girl, swinging from his mouth a shiny object which explained why he had bumped against and scratched at the door, instead of barking for admittance. In Jane's lap he deposited the tin lunch pail, to carry which to his master at noontime was his dearest duty and privilege.

More than curiosity as to its contents—an animal eagerness, in fact, almost as unrestrained as the dog's—returned Pape to his former seat on the floor; hurried his removal of the lid. Three hovered gratefully over the removed contents of that pail. Certainly two were quite ready to believe the errand

of the third as innocent as it looked—to give the quondam deserter the benefit of every doubt, although only the dog's scrap of benefits brought.

"You've vindicated yourself, Tower," remarked Pape. "The lady in this case was right. She looks to me like one of the perfect kind that always is—right, you know. *She* said, old side-kick, that you'd gone to bring a party. And you surely brought one—some party, this. From the depths of the heart of my inner man, I crave your pardon."

The Belgian's grant of grace was as prompt as moist. His anxiety centered upon a less subtle exchange.

"Oh, I was so hopelessly hungry—that's partly what made me collapse!" Jane sighed. "You see, I've formed the habit of eating once in a while. I'd have quarreled over a crust of stale rye bread. But boiled tongue and mustard sandwiches, potato salad, apple pie—Peter, let's begin!"

It did not take the three of them long to demonstrate that there was one luncheon of which Shepherd Tom never would get a crumb. Between bites Pape remembered aloud the herdsman's rather dubious admission of Kicko's propensity at times to present the precious pail to the "wrong" person. In this case, however, even he must have admitted that the wrong was the right.

As the edge of their hunger was dulled they deduced the possibilities. Either the police dog had missed his master at the noon hour or allowed himself to be distracted by some canine caprice. Happening into the excitement of the posse, he had relinquished the pail to join the chase. Afterward, having found preferred friends rather than enemies to be the quarry, he had remembered duty neglected and broken away to retrieve the pail.

The meal ended, Jane took off her hat and settled back against the stone wall with a smile the more æsthetic for its physical content. Kicko, although fuller of goodfellowship than of food, emulated her smile in spirit if not in

deed, stretched out at their feet, yawned and flopped his tail.

After a minute or two of silence she said: "You believe in spirits?"

He nodded. "Assorted kinds—liquid, ghosts—and *you*."

"Then maybe you won't laugh at my fancy"—her voice lowered superstitiously—"that Grandfather Lauderdale's spirit is hovering around inside this blockhouse—now."

He did laugh softly. "Aren't you going to introduce us?"

"Oh, he wouldn't like any such formality. I can just see him taking you in with one glance of those blue, cliff-browed eyes of his. He used to tell me my inmost little-girl secrets before I could confide them to him, he was so second-sighted. The first time he brought me here was at one of his flag-raising dawns. I was very little, but I'll never forget it—the tall, strong old fire-eater that everybody but me thought queer, with his magnificent head of thick, white, curling hair, and the glow in his face from the rising sun and the tears that staggered through the furrows of his cheeks when the flag caught the breeze—spread out its full, rippling assurance of the freedom he had fought for."

"Never mind that introduction. Already you have presented him to me."

"As I grew older," Jane continued, "I came with him often. One time was when they planted a bronze tablet in the outer wall as a tribute to the outpost service this house rendered in the War of Eighteen Twelve."

"They did, eh? A tablet—for the War of——" More than before Pape looked interested. "Maybe it isn't your grandfather's spirit, after all—maybe only the ghost of association."

"No, I'm sure it's he. Wait—perhaps he has a message for us." With a smile on her lips, Jane closed her eyes, spoke dreamily: "He has a message. It's for me. He wants me to give you what I've wanted to give you all along, my entire confidence—to tell you that I've trusted you from first glance, no matter how I've acted—to tell you just what is the improbable-sounding treas-

ure that we've been hunting so desperately, lest our enemies find and destroy it—to tell you how and why the possession of it will clear my father's name and restore us to that 'fortune forevermore' promised in his cryptogram. You'll be incredulous at first, Peter Pape, but all will work out once we have possession of—— Listen closely, now; that crock of the first verse holds the——"

But Pape interrupted: "Don't want you to tell me! I won't hear it!"

"Why-Not Pape"—her eyes flashed open—"you're a—— At least, you might be said to be foolish, the way you stick to a point."

"Did your grandfather's spirit dictate that?" he inquired.

"No. That's thrown in on my own account. It is ridiculous for you to be risking life and limb, reputation, money and comfort, for something whose very nature you don't know."

"But I do know for what I'm risking all those little things."

"For what, then?"

"For you."

CHAPTER XLI.

AWAITING THE ZERO HOUR.

THE pause that ensued may be utilized for the admission that Pape was not as superior to curiosity as his stand would suggest. Indeed, he had speculated, far as his intelligence and knowledge would take him, over the exact nature of the hidden hoard. He had heard of gold and jewels buried by eccentrics of little faith in modern banks and presumed that something of the sort was held in the missing crock. Once before Jane had said that the buried treasure was "bigger than Central Park itself." Just now she had declared the desperation of their hunt due to fear lest their enemies "destroy" it. She had added a new and confusing touch to the mystery, yet he would not permit her to particularize.

"I set out to give you the common or garden variety of service," he said. "That's a kind that doesn't need to understand; that digs ditches and wages

wars and wins women. Don't load me down with knowledge now. Let me go all the way to trail's end—the crock—just trusting that it will lead me to you."

He bent that she should not miss his promising smile—twilight was mixing with starlight by now.

"Faith is better proved without words, dear," he continued. "If you have any in me, this would seem a good time to prove it. Cease worrying. Trust me. Rest. Isn't everything snug and proper? You have almost everything you need—even a chaperon."

"Meaning Kicko or that hoot-owl?"

"Meaning your grandfather's spirit."

"Oh, all right. I'll try."

Pape had other reasons than the girl's weariness for persuading her to try for a snatch of the sleep she might need against possible strain on her nerve and endurance ahead. He wished to weigh—well, several interesting observations.

For long after she had accepted his knee as a pillow, the rock floor as a bed, a live-fur rug for her feet and his coat for her coverlet, he pulled on his pipe; returned the dark scowl of the down-dropping night; gave himself up to thought. The while suggestions which had seemed to soothe Polkadot on that previous trip to the blockhouse recurred to him. More or less monotonously he crooned them over her like a lullaby.

"Don't you hear the dogwood yapping, dear? Can't you fancy those old-fashioned popguns popping? Nothing to break the silence save the shriek of ten thousand auto sirens. No one around but people—millions of 'em! Doesn't it make you think of a little old home in my great new West, where we're to go one day—so like and yet so different? And friend horse is to go along, my heart, all the more appreciative after his clash with the tame. Yes, and you too, police pup—if Shepherd Tom can be persuaded to let you resign from the force, and, indeed, he may be willing after to-day's misdelivered lunch.

"Then list to the Nubian roar—more

like a lion it sounds than the rumble of city streets. List to the whisper of pines, as well as poplars four—there would be four, except that two had been white-circled into stumps. Count eighteen—twelve. Take heart and delve. Above the crock the block will rock. That block did rock—did rock—and rock——”

He leaned low; listened. Jane's gentle, even breathing reported her asleep. He was more pleased than by any of the wonderful things she had done while awake. She did really trust him—did rest in his protectorate, else could she never have been lulled by his murmurings into unconsciousness. Kicko, evidently, had lapsed into dog dreams of chases and fights.

The moon must be rising. Into the blockhouse was shed a weird, indirect light. Then more and more direct it grew until, over the top of one wall, appeared a large, round, inverted bowl of a candle power that dimmed the kilowatt signs along the Gay White Way.

Earlier in the evening, when he had spoken of waiting for darkness, under cover of which to attempt an escape afoot, Pape might have complained at the illumination of the sky. Now he beamed back at the moon, and his complacency waxed with her light, although he realized that bold young Dawn would be up to flirt with the pale night queen long before her departure—that any attempt to escape from the park would not be blanketed that night.

Let Luna reach the steps of her throne, he bade himself in thought, that each corner of the venerable refuge house be lighted. Let Jane have out her sleep—happy he to guard her gracious rest. Let the Nubian roar of power that was not leonine grow faint and die. Let the city and the city's finest go off guard.

Time enough, then, to test application of the eccentric's cryptogram, copper-plated, line by line, to a locality unsuspected by their enemies and chosen by themselves quite through chance. Yet not a doubt shadowed his mind as he awaited the zero hour. The lines fitted, every one.

“List to the Nubian roar”—to the night noises of the surrounding metropolitan monster, uncaged in zoo, never sleeping, ever pacing.

“And whisper of poplars four!” The branches of two stanch old rustlers made silver lace of the moonlight just outside the wall, and doubtless the two that had been sentenced to death had been very much alive at time of that writing.

“’Tis on a height”—one as high as this on which the silver-browed veteran delighted to raise his country's flag?

“Eighteen and twelve will show!” Jane had named these figures as the date on the memorial tablet placed in the wall outside. Not rods, nor yards, not feet did they stand for, but a date.

“Begin below”—and below was a block that rocked “as rock's wrongs overthrow!”

Not until the inverted bowl of the moon was a central ceiling light did Why-Not Pape move to answer the queer questions in his mind. Gently he then lifted the coat-coverlet off the sleeper, wrapped it into a roll, made of it a pillow for her. A low command he gave the police dog to lie still. Then he crossed to the threshold stone; tilted it far enough to one side to assure himself it was a thin slab; muttered in a sort of ecstasy:

“Count eighteen—twelve,
Take heart and delve.”

His maximum strength was required to turn the stone upon its back upon the floor of the blockhouse. Across the earth upon which it so long had laid scurried the crawling-things that thrive in under-rock dampness. But down on his knees dropped Pape. With a slate-like fragment of rock which had broken off in the fall, he began to remove the soft soil. Soon the emergency implement met obstruction. No longer needing advice to “take heart,” he cast aside the slate and began scooping out the earth around this object with bare hands.

A heavy touch upon his arm shocked him into an over-shoulder glance. The Belgian stood bristling just behind him

—had tapped him with a paw insistent for a share in the digging job. Willingly enough Pape accepted his efficient aid down to the top of a small earthen vessel.

More excited than in past hunts for seldom-found gold pockets of his early prospecting days, the Westerner pushed aside the dog; worked his two nail-torn hands down and down the smooth-curved sides. With a slow tug, he lifted what he could no longer doubt was the crock of the crypt. Reverently he carried it across the room and placed it at the feet of Jane Lauderdale.

She was awake. "Am I dreaming?" she wondered aloud.

"Am I?" he returned. "Or do I see a tall, strong old man, with a shock of white hair and a laugh on his lips, raising a flag on yonder pole?"

Pape removed the lid, Jane the contents of that crock of "fortune forevermore."

And thus was fulfilled one of the wild Westerner's wishes—that he should not know until he had found the object of his search. Thus, through deeds and not words, he learned the nature of the venerable Lauderdale's buried hoard.

No stream of gold fell through her fingers to the stone-flagged floor. No packets of bank notes were in her grasp. No king's-ransom jewels blinked in the night-light after their long interment. Yet was the girl's prediction proved so true that he scarcely would believe at first the nature of their find. Stupidly he stared. Only slowly could his mind face its surprise and its enormity.

CHAPTER XLII.

A SIGNAL ANSWERED.

AT ten o'clock next morning a taxicab carrying three fares drew out the Fifth Avenue "pass" and stopped before the Sturgis house. A woman and one of the men alighted. The second remained seated, his waiting rôle evidently prearranged, as the pair did not so much as nod back at him. Ascending the stone flight, they rang the bell,

as strangers might. In due time the door swung open.

"Miss Jane—thank Heaven you're alive and back again!" Jasper's exclamation was fervent beyond all rules of butlership. "Mr. Pape, good morning, sir. Your arrival is timely, too. They have been telephoning in all directions to find you. Such excitement, Miss Jane—sir, as we've been suffering!"

"*They*, Jasper?" The girl faced about in the vestibule to ask.

"Mrs. Sturgis and Judge Allen. He's had a fall and broken his shoulder, we fear. Mr. Harford also was in some sort of accident. An automobile struck him, I believe."

"Accidents all round, eh?" said Pape. "Isn't that odd?"

"Indeed, yes, sir—odd and unfortunate."

Distressed as he looked, Jasper might have joined in the exchanged smile of the younger pair had he remembered how fortunate, if odd, was this voluntary gathering of those persons concerned in the pending crock's-bottom settlement. Indeed, since the lid had been lifted from the earthen pot of fabulous store, circumstances had worked with them.

Their exit from the blockhouse and the park was shared with that of the many young couples driven from Eden at the strokes of midnight. The crock inconspicuous between them within Pape's coat, they had sauntered out Pioneer's Gate unmolested by the law so lately hot at their heels. Straight to the yellow-brick house on East Sixty-third they had whirled themselves and their tidings; they had seen triumph complete in a pair of outward-blinded eyes which could reflect glad sights from within.

Only an hour off after breakfast did Pape ask for the rescue of his equine pal from the granite-spiked corral that flanks the mid-park stables. This was effected by a payment insignificant as compared with the horse's joy.

Of the quartet in the luxurious living room upstairs, Irene Sturgis was the first to acclaim their unannounced entry.

"Jane—and still with *him*—the impossible person!"

The stagy horror in her voice brought Mills Harford to his feet; Mrs. Sturgis sank into the depths of a wing-chair. The newcomers evidently had broken up the council of war under way beside the couch on which lay the wounded little judge.

"Good morning, everybody!"

The cheer in Jane's greeting was not in the faces of those addressed.

"We hardly hoped to find you bunched up and waiting for us like this," Pape added with something of a flourish. "But it saves sending for you."

The matron straightened on the edge of her chair; with a precise expression she inspected first Pape, then her niece. "Where have you passed the night?"

"Most of it, auntie, at a spiritualistic séance in Central Park."

Pape chuckled. "The most inspiring I ever attended."

"Jane! And you the girl I counted on as so reliable! My Irene is steady by contrast. You pretend to go visiting friends and only let us know your whereabouts when you get arrested. One night in a police station house and the next in Central Park! I hope you have married this—this person before bringing him here."

"Marry, mother—that *brute*?" Irene slithered from her seat on the arm of the chair recently vacated by the handsome real estater. Throwing herself upon her cousin's neck with a freshet of real tears, she wailed: "Oh, my poor dar-rling—our poor Janie! No matter what your mistakes, you are more to be pitied than punished. Don't lay your neck on the altar of matrimony for this outlaw. Don't be overcome by this wild-West stuff. I know he has his fascinations. I was once but a bird held in his snakelike spell, until my Harfy saved me from the high seas of his tyranny and the burning blast of his——"

"Oh, Rene, let me go." The more Jane struggled, however, the tighter did the bobbed-haired cousin cling.

"But, you poor child, I know he'll

turn on you one day and beat you up! You saw how he treated my Harfy—a man and his superior in every way; how he rained blow after blow on his precious head. What wouldn't he do to a weak woman in his power? Don't you go and get desperate just because—— Luck in love always seems to run my way. Harfy was so nice when he was coming to. He just gazed at me with all his *soul* when I asked the question I knew he was too used up to ask me. And we're going to have the biggest church wedding of any girl in my set, with all the trimmings, just as soon as mother can manage it—aren't we, dar-rling?"

"It seems—that we are."

In the admission her challenged fiancé looked neither into the black eyes of Irene nor the amused blue ones of her upon whom he had pressed his heart and hand upon every available occasion in their near past. His expression was that of one who acknowledged himself vanquished.

Pape turned to Mrs. Sturgis. "Since, madame, you approve and even urge my suit for your niece's hand, let me say that we aren't married yet. We're going to be right soon, I'm here to tell you, one and all. But that was as unalterable from the first as the laws of gravity. By way of trimmings, we have a score or two to settle first with three of you, which is why we came."

"Ah!" The pudgy jurist had risen painfully on one elbow and now sent the warning word in company with a look of the same sort toward Mrs. Sturgis. "Thank Heaven we are not too late, Helene," he added presently, "to save dear Jane from this schemer. As I hoped, the formalities of our marriage law have not been complied with. This leaves you free to act as the foolish girl's nearest of kin. It will be easy to secure an order from one of my friends at court restraining her further activities by committing her into your care."

"It will take more than an order from such friends at court as you will have after to-day to restrain Jane," Pape remarked pleasantly.

"Clearly she has acted under undue influence from you so far, young man," Allen continued with noticeable dignity. "Were you half as clever as you are conspicuous you'd have got the ceremony over before coming here to threaten the family. As the husband of an orphaned young woman you might have had something to say, but——"

"Orphaned?"

With the interruption Pape crossed to one of the Fifth Avenue windows and there busied himself with a quite unnecessary readjustment of the shade.

The lady of the house was apparently too disturbed to resent this new impertinence. "You know how I dread the courts, Samuel. Let me first try suasion." In emotional appeal she turned to Jane. "For the sake of the dear, dead sister who was your mother, as one who has tried to take a mother's place, I beg you to give up this ill-timed attack of folly and this unbearable man. Perhaps you inherited the tendency, for she also made a sad mistake in choosing her mate."

"She did?" the "orphan" asked quietly.

"In marrying a Lauderdale—practically a pauper except for the family obsession of their claim to vast estates in the borough of the Bronx—she ruined her life. She, too, became obsessed through his power to control her thoughts. Her life, as well as his, became one long nightmare of crown grants, wills, deeds, what nots. She died of it, dear, just as your father afterward went down under disgrace and gloom. Now you, child, stain your lovely hands with this old madness. Excited by the craze for adventure of this—this harum-scarum—you let yourself be led into indiscretions that bid fair to ruin you. Why not give him up now—this morning? I'll stand by you no matter what is said."

"Me, too, dar-rling," chimed in Irene. "I'll soon be a matron, you know, and I'll find you some adequate male, up to date though honest, willing to forget and forgive."

Aunt Helene, her breath regained, pleaded further. "Listen to this before

you leap, my child. Despite what your grandfather left in the way of puzzle charts, Judge Allen and I, acting in your interest, have at last satisfied ourselves that there is nothing—quite nothing of the slightest material value to you buried in Central Park. We didn't intend to tell you so soon, but all last night the judge had a crew of men working at a spot indicated in the cryptogram."

"And how did he get the instructions of the cryptogram?" Jane inquired. "No one saw it before it was stolen but me."

"Jane! That you should speak to me in that suspicious tone! Had I been given opportunity, I should have told you that yesterday the contents of your antique snuffbox were secretly exchanged for the large reward which I had offered in your name, presumably by the thief who stole it from my safe."

"You don't say, ma'am?" exclaimed Pape. "It was, eh?"

The matron ignored him. "The judge, Jane, followed directions and discovered a crock—large and open-topped. But, alas, it contained nothing but a half-witted old man's keepsakes—scraps of his unutterable poetry, ribbon-tied parcels of yellowed love letters, pressed flowers and a wisp of some woman's hair. Were your father alive, I'd feel I should take some of my own fortune and make restitution of his frauds upon the collateral heirs. But since he's dead and gone, I don't exactly feel——"

"Not altogether gone, Helene—but not in need of your restitution!"

At the voice, Mrs. Sturgis smothered a scream, turned, stared. Through the portières that closed off the hall stepped Curtis Lauderdale, led from the taxi by the driver in answer to the signal Pape had given from the window.

CHAPTER XLIII.

RINGING DOWN THE CURTAIN.

AN apparition indeed did he look to the four who had accepted the report of his death. Mrs. Sturgis, with hands grasping behind her, was back-

ing as though from a ghost. The little jurist did not move, but all the apple color had departed from his cheeks. Irene's rouged lips could not pale, but at least her mouth was agape. Harford stiffened, as though preparing for attack.

Jane and Why-Not Pape crossed to the late comer, and stood one at each side.

Accurately the blind eyes fixed on Allen. In direct address the long unheard lips began to speak. "We meet again, Sam, trusted counselor and cherished friend. But with your mask torn off, you look more changed to me than I possibly can to you. Oh, don't waste time with denials! I'd have to be blinder than mustard gas could make me not to see you as you are. For years you traded upon the gullibility of my father. You persuaded him that fortune would build bigger and faster if he withheld proof of title to our Bronx estates and let the Guarantee Investors develop a property that has belonged to the Lauderdale's since the grant of King James. You overcame his needs and his children's needs with false promises of rich reward when he eventually would claim the improved acreage. And after letting him die in half-crazed poverty, with his mysterious instructions unfound and our title proofs buried with them, you advised me to raise money from the collateral heirs and institute a court fight to establish our rights. And it was you, I feel sure, who brought these heirs before the grand jury that indicted me for fraud just after I had sailed for somewhere in France."

A moment Lauderdale paused in the controlled fury of his accusation, brushed a hand across his eyelids, moistened his lips. "But the crookedest lane has its end, Sam Allen. My chief treasure you could not take from me—a glorious girl-child born to retribution. Now to her aid has come this real-man sample from out the West. Working together they have recovered every necessary document, even to my parent's last will and testament. We are ready and able now to right the most grievous

wrong ever perpetrated in the medium of New York real estate—to force your company to turn over a thousand acres in the heart of the Bronx and to make restitution, under your guarantee, to innocent purchasers, even if it breaks you as you would have broken——"

He was stopped by the grasp which Pape had put on his arm.

"Don't dump all the onus on the judge, Mr. Lauderdale," he advised. "We mustn't forget that he's a lawyer, hence full of wriggles. Best leave his punishment to me and that more easily proved charge of The Montana Gusher oil-stock fraud. There is one among those present, to approach the subject guardedly, who is more directly responsible for the Bronx realty steal than his honor."

Even Jane, close as she had been to Pape throughout recent developments, was startled by his statement. What sort of a lone hand was he playing, anyway? Allen's pudgy hands clasped. Aunt Helene eyed one, then another of them, as if bewildered. Only Pape's gaze did not wander. It turned from the blind man's face to fix upon that of Mills Harford.

At the silent accusation, Irene sprang toward him, no longer a kitten, but a mother cat in defense of her own. "Don't you dare accuse Harfy, you cave brute!" she cried. "Just because he makes money out of real estate isn't any reason to jump at the conclusion that he——"

"Right, Rene!" Pape had a sympathetic grin for her vehemence. "I was only considering your Harfy as a possible witness to the truth."

"Be done with innuendo, young man!" Mrs. Sturgis rose to her feet with every inch of her scant height counting. "A gentleman—one of whom we say to the manner born—makes no accusation without proof."

"I don't need to make accusation or present proof to you, madame."

"You're not trying to insinuate——"

Many lights had Pape seen in women's eyes, but never one as startled, angry, and afraid as that flashed him by Aunt Helene. Next moment she at-

tempted a light laugh that ended with a nervous crescendo.

"You, too, must be mad."

"At least that," he admitted cheerfully. "You've known why for several minutes past. You acknowledge the judge here as your adviser, don't you?"

"I certainly do."

"Better ask his advice then without further delay. I've an idea he'll tell you to come across clean—admit that you are the Guarantee Investors Incorporated, who has been trying to grab off the Lauderdale's Bronx ranch and put Jane out of the heiress class. Come, madame! Any woman who can rob her own safe and give the alarm and play-act the grief of a whole wake afterward certainly ought to get a great deal out of a confession scene. Suppose you take your family-friend tool and your son-in-law-to-be into the library for a conference. Just possibly I—the outlaw-that-was—can show Mr. and Miss Lauderdale reasons why they should listen to a plea for mercy."

Before Pape had finished, the little jurist was on his feet in acceptance of the suggestion. The matron drooped into the arms of her child. As one woman they were supported toward the door by Harford.

"It was all my poor husband's idea, not my own," Aunt Helene was heard to say after an interlude of sobs. "And with him, as with me, it was all because we did so want our darling Irene to have the fortune her beauty deserves. We knew how impractical the Lauderdale's were. He didn't believe they ever could make good their claim to the Bronx estate. We both thought it would be better for the dear child to have it than some outsider. When he realized that he couldn't live to see the plan through he charged me to carry it out. Of course I meant to make proper provision for Jane if——"

The door closed behind them. When Jane, her father, and Pape stood alone, low-voiced, happier exchanges passed.

"How did you know, son?" asked Lauderdale.

"Didn't know. Aunt Helene seemed too good to be true; I just stayed on a

busted flush and finished a winner. Why not?"

THE END.

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?

The Wild Heart

NOT very many years ago, on the shores of Puget Sound, lived a small boy and girl whose actual experiences with the creatures of the fields, of the woods, and of the waters have been related by Emma-Lindsay Squier in her first book, entitled "The Wild Heart" (Cosmopolitan Book Corporation.) The way these children made friends with various birds and animals is told simply in a series of stories that should make a wide appeal to juvenile readers, and will prove of deep interest to older folk who love the things of Nature.

On one occasion it is "Skygak," the sea gull, caught in the oil discharged from a large ship, that is befriended, the bird's feathers being so soaked in the heavy oil that it is helpless. Another time it is "Leonard," the deer, saved from the hounds; or "Henry," the heron, with a broken leg. Then there were "Alfred," the seal, "Timothy," the bear, "U-Chu-Ka," the rabbit, and others.

The rabbit's fate was tragic. Taught by the children to come from its burrow to be fed whenever they whistled, when a man with a gun passed by, whistling carelessly, the innocent little creature, expecting its friends, dashed forth to its doom.

Gene Stratton-Porter has written a very entertaining introduction to the book entitled, "Some Youngsters Find Wrong Parents," meaning those children who are born with the wild heart which their elders cannot appreciate.



Tale of the American Marines in Haiti :

Sergeant Flanagan's Swimming Party ~

By
Walter N. Hill ~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

BAFFLED BY THE FACTS.

SLOWLY Sergeant Dennis Flanagan walked up and down beneath the portico of the barracks. The fiery tropical sun rose over the blue tops of the Dominican Mountains. The gray shadows in the streets melted away, the Haitian town of Barcour slowly awoke from its sultry night of slumber to begin the labors of the day.

Flanagan, sergeant of the guard, turned to the marine who stood at the iron gate leaning on his rifle. "Is it sound asleep you are?" he thundered. "Break out those lazy hounds in there! The last note of reveille gone and narry a peep from them. Break 'em out! And if any one of them is asleep without his belt on, put him on report."

The marine sprang to his duty, and Flanagan continued pacing the flaggings of the portico. The guard slowly fell in, sleepy-eyed, hair tousled, yawning and grumbling. Flanagan eyed them narrowly; every one was well belted and armed.

"Fall in!" he ordered. "It's more

like the Knights o' Pythias or the Sons o' Veterans than Uncle Sam's marines you are."

This harangue might have continued indefinitely had it not been cut short by the sudden appearance of First Sergeant Tarr. He approached rapidly, looking decidedly annoyed. "Do you know where Corporal Siniskey is?" he demanded.

Flanagan wheeled quickly and regarded the top sergeant in dumb amazement.

"Divil a bit, if he's not in the second squad, where he belongs. Do you think I have him about me person?"

"Well, he's not in garrison, absent at roll call, and can't be found. Report him absent over leave and when he comes back bring him to me." The first sergeant was crisp and official this morning.

Corporal Siniskey was Flanagan's best friend. Between these two and Private Tenney there existed bonds of a union such as can prevail only between men who have lived and fought side by side in a soldier brotherhood. Siniskey in trouble was Flanagan in trouble, and vice versa.

First Sergeant Tarr departed, bent on his official duties, and Flanagan entered the guardroom office. He sat on a bench. Slowly he pushed his campaign hat over his red hair, rubbed his finger up and down his pugnacious nose, and tugged once or twice at his bristly little mustache. His face, seamed and wrinkled from his years in the service, wore a serious look. He was worried, not so much at Siniskey's absence over leave, but because he actually had not the least idea where the corporal was.

His reflections were interrupted by the appearance of a stockily built, sharp-featured, dark-haired marine, who stuck his head in the doorway and gave a quick look about the room. Seeing that the sergeant was alone he entered hastily. "Flanagan," he said, "Siniskey's gone. Jumped out entirely, and not back at formation this morning. Have you any idea where he is?"

"It's meself that's asking the same question, Tenney," the sergeant replied. "There's something queer about this, something queer, for it's not in Siniskey's habits to be parading about a spig town absent over leave, as though he was a rookie fresh from the boot camp."

"He went out last night after mess and nobody's lamped him since. The top stuck him for a chance at roll call."

Flanagan rose, walked the length of the room and back. "Wait till I'm off duty, then we'll have a look around outside. In the meantime, do ye look over the barracks carefully. Like as not he may have fallen and broken his neck in some dark corner of this blooming rock quarry."

In spite of Tenney's careful search of the barracks and their joint quest later in every café in the town of Barcour, Siniskey could not be found. With great hopes they had started out, and with dull hearts and weary limbs they wound up at the "Hole in the Wall," Flanagan's favorite café, baffled and despairing. At the Hole in the Wall they quenched their thirst with wine, brought by the fair Rosalia. They confided their sorrow to her. She listened with her pretty lips puckered up

in sympathy, and shrugged her beautiful shoulders. She was sorry for the tall American, but that did not bring him back, and his friends sipped their drinks in silence.

CHAPTER II.

DOWN DARK STREETS.

THREE days passed uneventfully. Captain Planter, commanding the marine detachment, ordered Lieutenant Newland to make an official search throughout the town and in the surrounding country. All in vain; Siniskey's disappearance was complete and apparently final.

Tenney grew morose and silent. Usually phlegmatic and practical in times of danger and distress, the loss of his friend seemed to have completely undermined his habitual tranquillity. He spent hours on his cot in the squad room, staring at the ceiling, hardly leaving the barracks except to attend to his duty.

Sergeant Flanagan adopted an entirely different course. His spirit of conviviality seemed to be rejuvenated. He went night after night to every café in Barcour. He joined in the gayest parties, Dominican or American, seeming to have no preference. His was a mercurial nature. His spirits either soared high in exultation or dropped to the lowest depths of utter despair. His loyalty and integrity were unquestioned, but his moods were many and varied. "Drowning his sorrow," some of the marines said. Flanagan let them talk, continuing with renewed zeal to cultivate his rather questionable friends.

Not many days after Siniskey's disappearance Flanagan met Otto Kline. Kline was of that type of American business adventurer who announced his commercial enterprises in loud tones, but who in reality engaged sub rosa in anything short of highway robbery. Kline looked like an Italian, but he laughed a hard, steely laugh when Flanagan called him a wop. Flanagan appeared to have taken a great liking to Kline, and they went about a great deal together.

It was through Kline that the sergeant made the acquaintance of one Rodrigo Salcedo, a Dominican whose activities were of rather a mysterious nature. Salcedo claimed, however, to derive his living from the profits of a certain wheel of chance, of which he was the proprietor. These three were seen frequently in each other's company, and Flanagan's real friends began to shake their heads. One night as the three sat together over their iced beer the question of Siniskey's extraordinary disappearance came up.

"Is it true that the Americans have offered a reward for him?" asked Rodrigo Salcedo in good English.

"A reward! What do you mean?" demanded Flanagan.

"Why, I understand that after so many days the American government will pay fifty dollars for a marine who has disappeared."

"That, added to what his friends might give, would make a sum that might induce him to come back," said Kline with a smile.

"I did not mean what his friends might give," said the Dominican, holding up a match to light a cigarette, and exposing to Flanagan's startled eyes a wrist watch he believed was once the property of Corporal Siniskey.

"I'll tell ye one thing," said Flanagan. "There's nothing Siniskey's friends wouldn't give to get him back safe and sound. But if harm has come to him," he thumped the table to give emphasis to his words, "and I get hold of the spalpeen that did it, I'll break his neck with me two hands."

The Dominican rose to his feet. "You had better first find out where your friend the corporal is," he said, with a leer.

"Would you really pay a reward for Siniskey's safe return?" asked Kline in an offhand manner as he prepared to go.

"Sure," growled Flanagan; "any amount that would not break the Bank of England."

The two men left the table, and Flanagan sat with his head on his hand until they had gone out of the café. Then he rose and went quickly to the

door, arriving there in time to see his friends turn toward the river on a side street.

The wiry old sergeant had little difficulty in stalking his two recent boon companions along the dark streets of the Dominican city. He was not greatly surprised when his quarry led him to the river front itself.

They hailed a boat and proceeded to cross the water to a squalid group of tumble-down shacks known as Cuarto del Ciudad. This was a dilapidated settlement of saloons and dives—a rendezvous for the lower elements of Barcour. It was against orders for the marines to go there, and a court-martial was the certain punishment for offenders. Flanagan chuckled to himself and returned to the barracks in high spirits. There he sought council and advice from Tenney. That worthy marine was interested, but doubtful. He did not believe that Kline and Salcedo would kidnap Siniskey just for the possible reward. Tenney did not even think that Flanagan had recognized the wrist watch.

"How did you know the watch?" he asked.

"Sure, didn't it have the same little, bent buckle and the strap with two holes pulled into one! I tell ye I know it, Tenney, an' I'm going over to this Ciudad del—what-do-you-call-it place—and have a look."

"It's out o' bounds," grumbled Tenney. "An' the lieutenant will never give you permission, for it might anger the poor, down-trodden heathen to have a wild Irishman ransacking their humble dwellings."

"Never mind the permission; we'll go and we'll find that knock-kneed corporal, or my name's not Dennis Flanagan."

Next morning after drill, Gunnery Sergeant Ayland was puttering over his public property when Flanagan burst in upon him.

"Ayland, old bucko," said the red-headed sergeant, "can ye do me the favor of changing this safety on me pistol? I've dropped the beggar on this

rotten spiggoty pavement and she's a bit bent."

"Sure I can, Flanagan," was the reply. "Let me see, where are those automatic pistols? Ah, here they are. It's a safety you want?" Ayland fumbled with the padlock and opened a large, wooden army chest. Inside, Flanagan saw at least a dozen automatic pistols, with a tray full of spare parts. Ayland searched for the desired piece, while Flanagan turned his back and whistled softly to himself.

"Sergeant Ayland!" called a music boy from the doorway. "The lieutenant wants you right away in the galley."

"Hang the lieutenant!" growled Ayland. "Any one would think I was a blooming grasshopper. Here, Flanagan, pick out your safety, and shut up everything when you're through and bring me the keys." Ayland hurried off, mumbling to himself.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRECIOUS HAVERSACK.

WHEN he was alone, Flanagan stepped to the arms chest and quickly removed six automatic pistols, which he put into an empty haversack. Then, after filling his pockets with ammunition, he closed and locked the chest. He bolted the storeroom door and with a sigh of relief walked rapidly to the corner of the building. "I hope Ayland don't want anything in that chest again to-day," he murmured.

At the corner stood Tenney. "Here, me boy," whispered Flanagan, "hide these where I told ye, near the boat, and be sure no one sees you." Tenney took the haversack and leisurely wandered toward the stone steps leading to the quay. Flanagan sought the gunnery sergeant and found him sputtering at the door of the galley.

"That's what I call at least impolite," Ayland said. "The lieutenant sends the music hotfoot for me, and I rushes up here in the tropical sun, and when I gets here the cook says he's gone. An' the music he's skipped out, too!"

"Never mind, old-timer," soothed Flanagan; "the little gentleman's off this morning. Didn't ye hear the singing at the officers' mess last night? No doubt his head's a bit hot. Here's your keys. Cheer up. Join me after recall and I'll set ye up to a long one."

Ayland took the keys, and Flanagan slipped away as soon as was prudent. When he asked First Sergeant Tarr for permission to take a swimming party across the river, the top nearly fainted. Knowing as he did the Irishman's habits and diversions, he immediately suspected something was up.

"Since when have you been swimming, Flanagan?" he inquired.

"It's not the swimming, top," replied Flanagan glibly; "but I've a mind to lie in the cool water for a while, it's so dog-gone hot."

"Well, go ahead; only watch out. No funny business. You'd better not try to go to Cuarto del Ciudad, for I'm liable to be there myself this afternoon on duty."

Flanagan went away a little perplexed. "Now, what did he mean by that?" he asked himself. "What would he be doing there? Nothing, of course; it's only trying to scare me he was."

It was not difficult for Flanagan to gather six volunteers to his standard. His old friends and cronies gladly joined, and although they talked loudly of fine swimming in the cool water, none had the slightest idea that Flanagan had any intention of really going swimming.

To them it was all a ruse to gain the other side of the river. Once there, they trusted to the old-timer's ingenuity to afford them entertainment in one form or another. So it was a jovial party that shoved off in the cutter from the quay and pulled across the river.

The afternoon was oppressive. Not a breath stirred on the waters. The yellow river flowed in sullen silence between the high, verdant banks. On one hand rose the moss-covered walls and ancient towers of old Barcour. On the other stretched the silvery beach, lined with the tangled foliage of many tropical gardens, through which came

glimpses of the picturesque tiled roofs or the disreputable settlement of Cuarto del Ciudad. This was Flanagan's goal, and he searched the shore with keen eyes.

They reached the beach and landed, Flanagan carrying the precious haversack. "Now undress and into the water every man," he ordered.

"Not me," protested Tenney. "Once, when I was young, I fell off a ferry-boat; never again for me!"

"I didn't come all this way to splash in the water, Dennis Flanagan," cried another marine. "Come now, produce the stuff. What's in the haversack?"

"Listen, boys," said Flanagan, gathering them about him with a wave of his hand. "It's not to swim we came here, of course, but we must keep up the illusion. Perhaps the lieutenant or that man Tarr is watching. So undress quietlike, leave your clothes in the bushes, and after you've been in the water you can slip out one by one and grab your clothes. We'll meet on the trail to the town. This is the idea: I've a hunch that the gooks of Dominicans have got Siniskey hidden away, and I want you to help me to look the place over."

He opened the haversack and cautiously showed them the pistols, holding up a warning finger to prevent their exclaiming in surprise. "Whist now! No jabbering. There's a pistol for each one; we may need them later on. Now, are ye with me?" He stopped and looked anxiously around the circle. They nodded their heads emphatically and approvingly, then scattered to undress.

CHAPTER IV.

RATTLE OF RIFLE SHOTS.

TWO minutes later Flanagan stepped out in full view on the beach, clad only in a pair of swimming trunks. These were much too large, and they hung about his meager body like an old rag. He seemed to have shrunk to half his natural size, and he looked as if his old man's head had been set on a child's body. He was painfully aware that his appearance was grotesque, for

he glared fiercely around when he noticed the amused looks cast in his direction. Even the morose Tenney burst into a laugh.

"Stop soldiering, Flanagan," he chortled, "and rent yourself out as a professional scarecrow. The birds would laugh themselves to death just looking at you."

"There's nothing funny about it," growled Flanagan. "Into the water, every one of ye!"

"You've got me undressed, but you'll not get me wet; that's one thing I balk at!" Tenney declared, seating himself defiantly on the boat.

"Will ye stop the chances of rescuing Siniskey by your loathing of water?" asked Flanagan, advancing on his comrade with a threatening gesture. "Into the water, I tell ye! Splash about like a blooming whale and pretend ye're having the time of your life." He himself set the example by plunging in with a howl which sounded more like rage than joy. The rest followed, even the reluctant Tenney.

The last one in was hardly wet when the quiet of the hot, sultry tropical afternoon was broken by the rattle of rifle shots. A perfect fusillade echoed and reëchoed from shore to shore. Shouts and cries arose as women and children ran screaming for cover.

Flanagan and his companions rushed up the beach. The shots came from Cuarto del Ciudad, but they formed no part of Flanagan's plan, and for a moment he stood bewildered. Then he picked up the haversack and roared: "Come on! Grab a gun! There's a scrimmage up there; it's our boys. You can hear the Springfields; let's get to it!" They crowded around him, pushing each other aside in their anxiety to get at the weapons.

CHAPTER V.

FIGHT WITH DEMONS.

HEADED by the wet little red-headed Irishman, they ran up the hill toward the town. Surely there never was a stranger sight than Sergeant Dennis Flanagan leading his

army of six dripping marines into Cuarto del Ciudad. But if their appearance was ridiculous, their intentions were the contrary, and they advanced with splendid élan on the town.

The firing increased as they neared the houses, and appeared to come from the center of the village. Shots began to fly overhead, and the whining and singing of bullets filled the air. The streets were deserted; every door was tightly closed and barricaded. Cautiously they entered the first street and advanced to the crossing. The bullets kicked up the dust and thumped against the adobe walls.

As they rounded the corner a wounded marine appeared staggering toward them and sank to the ground ten feet away. Tenney rushed forward and dragged him to cover. It was First Sergeant Tarr, shot through the shoulder, pale and weak.

Flanagan knelt beside him. "What's the dope, top? What's the row? Who's in there?"

"Captain Planter and one—other. Caught in house—about two hundred gooks around them. Must get help," gasped Tarr. Then with an effort he sat up and stared wildly about him. "You're the swimming party, unarmed," he said in despair.

"Divvil a bit!" cried Flanagan. "It's well armed we are, each with a pistol and twenty rounds. Here, Murphy, help the top down to the boat and shove off for home with him." Flanagan's eyes blazed, his bristly little mustache worked up and down with excitement, and he trembled, but not with fear. He rubbed his hands together excitedly, then he tightened the strings of his swimming trunks. His eyes roamed around the circle of his comrades. The men's cheeks were hollow, their eyes sunk in their heads, but their faces were tense with determination.

"Men," said Flanagan, and his voice sounded hoarse and unnatural, "the captain's in there; I'm going for him. Follow me!" He ran into the street and toward the scene of the fight.

CHAPTER VI.

A DANGEROUS GAME.

WITH a shout the whole party of marines dashed toward the square. As they rushed upon it, a dark crowd of Dominicans gathered in front of the church sent up a yell of defiance and a fusillade of shots greeted them. The marines dropped to the ground and squirmed to cover. A few well-directed shots dispersed the mass of the enemy, and both parties began the dangerous game of sniping each other.

Flanagan crawled up to the edge of a stone fence and looked around the square. Directly opposite them was the stone house, surrounded by a low fence, where Captain Planter and his companion evidently had taken shelter, for the Dominicans could be seen at various points directing their fire at it. From within the inclosure came the continual bark of the Springfields, as the two Americans fought for their lives.

The main group of the enemy was that which Flanagan and his men had come on at the church. These still remained crouching in and about the building. Flanagan thought rapidly; he knew that his little squad was in no condition for a long engagement; they had only twenty rounds each for their pistols, and their one hope lay in a quick dash which might terrorize the enemy.

He jumped from behind his shelter, waving his arms and shouting at the top of his lungs. Tenney sprang to his side, and together they started for the church. The rest followed, a scattered group of howling, bare-skinned fiends, flirting with death. The enemy was thunderstruck; they had fought the Americans before, but never men like these. For these men were white savages, who fought unclothed and charged without fear in the open, straight in the face of a murderous fire. They seemed not to be men, but demons.

"Save yourselves who can!" wailed a bearded chief. "It is the vengeance of Heaven descending upon us! Run, my children, for the mountains! See! The bullets do not strike them!"

The Dominicans broke and ran.

Flanagan leaped ahead faster and faster. A bandit sprang at him from the ground almost at his feet, and Flanagan shot him through. In the excitement of the moment wild laughter choked him. "They've broken, boys!" he screamed. "Drive 'em hard, or we'll never see Market Street again!"

His feet were cut and torn by the rough stones, but he paid no heed. His eyes shone like balls of fire, and his red hair seemed literally to stand on end. About him droned a hailstorm of bullets, but he remained unharmed. He reached the church, Tenney at his heels and the rest close behind. The enemy on every hand were pushing in a panic-stricken horde toward the outskirts of town.

Farther on, Flanagan and his followers came on several mounted men trying to spur their horses into a gallop for safety. One desperate fellow, seeing the white men so close to him, wheeled his black stallion and rode directly at Flanagan, firing as he came. A marine threw up his hands and pitched forward on the ground, face down, a deep-crimson stream spreading about him. Flanagan and Tenney jumped to one side and fired.

The Dominican pitched forward on his horse's neck, and, clinging desperately to his mane, tried to turn the animal. The old sergeant fired again, and the Dominican rolled from his saddle. The frightened horse tore madly through the little group of marines, dragging his rider by one foot caught in the stirrup. Flanagan saw the face as the man was borne by; it was that of Rodrigo Salcedo.

CHAPTER VII.

A FAVOR TO ASK.

THE rout was complete. As long as they had breath left, Flanagan and his men chased the enemy. At last, their ammunition gone, their feet cut by the rough ground, they halted and started to limp back to the plaza. Apprehensive lest the enemy recover from their panic, they cast furtive glances over their shoulders as they hobbled away.

When they came near the church they saw the khaki-clad patrols of the rescuing party streaming through the streets from the river. Scouting far out on every side, they scattered the straggling enemy with many casualties. At the approach of the bedraggled swimming party, Captain Planter came from the inclosure, followed by a tall, lanky figure which Flanagan recognized at a glance. He brushed disrespectfully past the captain and threw his arms about the tall marine.

"Siniskey!" he cried. "Is it whole you are and not shot at all?"

In his excitement he turned the laughing Siniskey around and around, looking him over like a little girl who has just recovered a long-lost doll. Tenney also rushed forward and seized Siniskey by the shoulders, his usual taciturnity giving way to the deepest feeling.

"I'm glad to see you all again!" Siniskey said. "That rascal Vincintello had me tied up here like a trussed fowl. He used to amuse himself every day by sticking needles in me, trying to get me to write a letter asking for ransom."

"Was Vincintello a short, bandy-legged man who looked like an Italian and who spoke English?" asked Flanagan.

"Yes; you'd take him for an American, if you didn't know."

"The same," growled Flanagan. "Mr. Otto Kline, we'll get you some other day."

"And how did the captain find you?" questioned Tenney.

"The captain and Sergeant Tarr were cruising around looking for Vincintello when they stumbled on me in the midst of this hornets' nest. Then they got ambushed themselves, and we had a warm time. The top tried to get out, but I think they got him, poor fellow."

"No; he's safe. We found him and sent him over the river."

Captain Planter interrupted the conversation. "Who was in charge of this—er—er—swimming party?" he demanded.

"I was, sor," announced Flanagan, stepping to the front. He started to stand at attention with his pistol held in his hand like a rifle. In his flapping swimming trunks Flanagan was the most ridiculous little figure in the world.

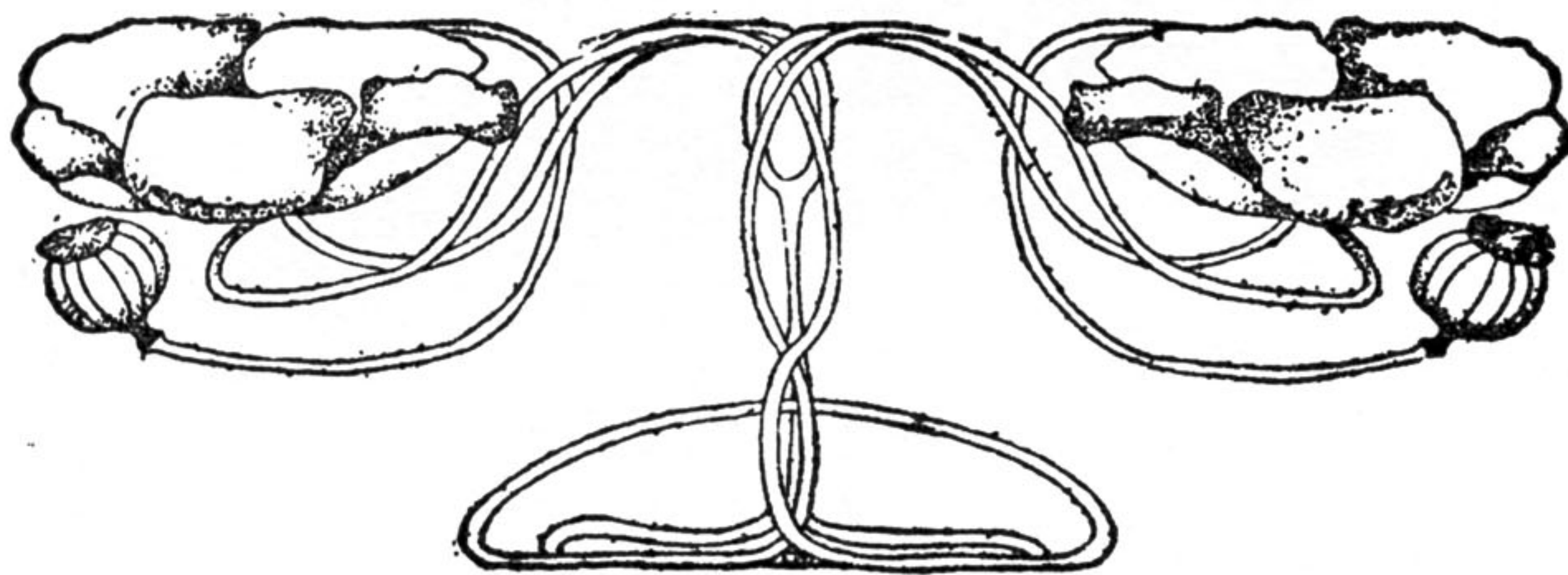
Captain Planter eyed the sergeant keenly. One could hardly tell whether he was going to laugh or cry, for his face twitched, and when he spoke his voice was quite shaky. "Sergeant, that

was one of the bravest deeds I ever saw—that rush across the plaza. I shall not forget it."

"Thank ye, sor," said Flanagan without moving a muscle. "But, begging the captain's pardon, I have a favor to ask."

"What is it?"

"Will the captain please give Sergeant Ayland a receipt for six automatic pistols which I have in me charge?"



SOUR-DOUGH BILL DECIDES

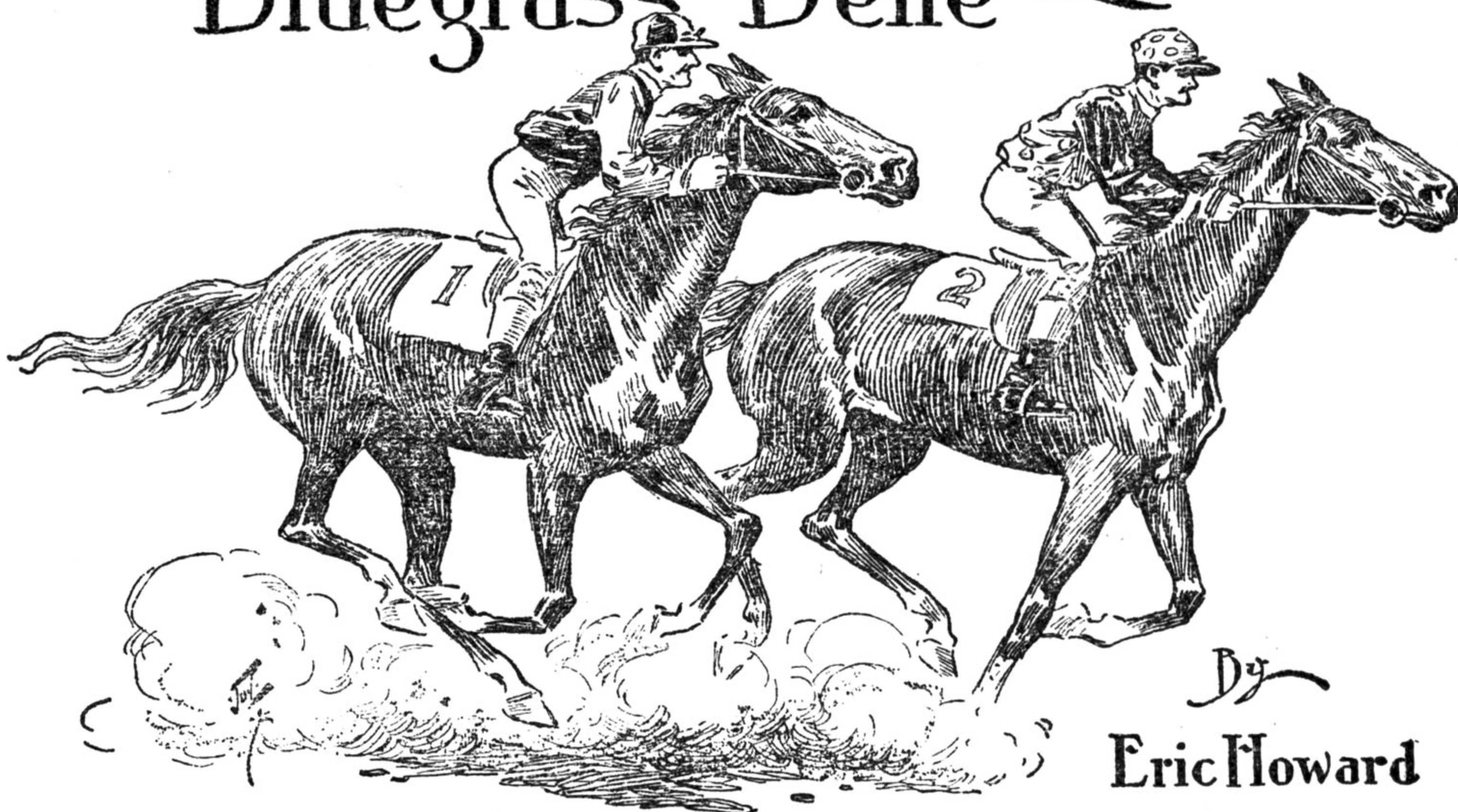
By G. G. Bostwick

YES; I'm back again, old-timers, to the North
 That's tried and tested me;
 Back, when I swore I left for good
 A year or so ago;
 Back to the dear old stamping ground
 I thought had broke and bested me,
 And never till I went away
 Did I its dearness know!

Why, fellows, it's my home—my *home*!
 The very place that made me.
 Ah! how its silence called to me
 Those weary months outside!
 Those noisy nights of city life
 When everything betrayed me,
 And I was sick to leave it all
 And drift back with the tide!

I know—we live on homely fare;
 Our garb is of the plainest,
 And the luxuries and bright lights
 Are denied us on our way;
 But here we're folks and brothers all,
 And in my heart I'm thankful
 That I've come home—and I belong,
 And here is where I stay!

Bluegrass Belle



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

IN FINE TRIM.

FOR the first time in his life Julius Cæsar Brown, the diminutive and ancient darky who jockeyed for Jerry Quinn, owner of the four-year-old mare Effervescence, was torn between loyalty to his master and a fervent desire to help a rival owner win a race. The rival owner was Mary Warburton; the race was the twenty-thousand-dollar Coffrey Handicap.

Effervescence, the surprise of the season since her winning of the Sonora Sweepstakes a month before, was entered and so was Miss Warburton's Bluegrass Belle, the last of that proud Kentucky string which had won honors upon the turf of twelve States and four nations. J. Brown, as the jockey was known on the register, was intuitively sure that one of these two horses would win the handicap and with it the rich purse. What troubled his earnest soul, and crisscrossed his ebony skin with tiny wrinkles, was the fact that they both couldn't win.

Effervescence was almost as much his horse as she was Jerry Quinn's. J.

Brown and Quinn had been together so long, for better and for worse, that their relations were those of partners rather than employee and employer. They had starved together, been bedless together, and they had enjoyed the fruits of victory.

Now that Effervescence's temperament had been diagnosed and the mare cured of her former habit of "blowing up" in every home stretch they were again modestly wealthy. The Sonora Sweepstakes alone had brought a ten-thousand-dollar purse. And Effervescence was in fine trim; in strength, speed and staying power she had every mare in the stables—and most of the horses of the opposite sex as well—left at the post.

Effervescence would never be a race horse in the sense that old turfmen lovingly utter the words. She hadn't the spirit of combat at all; she wouldn't fight it out neck and neck against a rival. She loved to run at top speed for the sheer joy of running, but she was an individualist. So far as she was concerned the other entries simply didn't exist. Nevertheless, she could win races, for the strength and speed of her father and mother were in her

long limbs and full chest, if their eager hearts were not.

The Bluegrass Belle, on the contrary, was every inch a race horse, from the quivering nostrils of her slender, graceful head to the sleek, trim lines of her hind legs. More graceful and less strong than "Effie," as Jerry Quinn affectionately called his horse, Bluegrass Belle was all heart and soul, fire and flame, a superbly coördinated figure of small bones, electric nerves, and an unquenchable thirst for battle. The Bluegrass Belle was of the stuff that bursts its heart before it quits. The closer the race the better she ran; a nose-and-nose finish was her joy and her delight.

What the Bluegrass Belle was upon the turf Mary Warburton was in the world in which she moved. Now, today, she was making a fight against odds that at once alarmed and delighted her. She would not have given up if all the comforts of indolent ease had been laid before her, any more than her mare could have been won from a heart-breaking race by the lure of a green and sunlit pasture. True daughter of her father, Mary was holding on with all that was left of his once-famous stable—holding on against every discouragement, against odds that would have daunted many a man.

Mary herself, in a manner of speaking, was a blue-grass belle. She had the trim slenderness of a thoroughbred, a long, fine column of alabaster throat, a firmly molded chin, a straight nose with the tiniest suggestion of a tilt given it from the proud lift of her head, and deep gray eyes, set wide apart. In features she was like her father, now departed with the other glories of the old-time turf, but her mouth had the soft and wistful tenderness of her gentle mother, and when she smiled the man who could say her nay would be less than human.

Brown didn't know Mary was in Tia Juana until a few days before the Coffrey Handicap. He didn't know that the Bluegrass Belle was to be the rival of Effervescence. If he had known these things he probably wouldn't have

been so eager to tell the world that his mare was the best in the field and would sweep all others before her. Having little to do, he devoted his time to the profitable game of Ethiopian golf, in which he was admitted champion.

CHAPTER II.

HIS MAGIC TRICKS.

ONE day the blaze of sartorial glory that was Julius Cæsar Brown—yellow shoes, white-and-black suit upon which many games of checkers might have been played simultaneously, pink silk shirt, and purple tie and socks—abandoned his avocation of the dice long enough to meet Jerry Quinn at the latter's hotel. In the lobby he came upon Mary Warburton. Brown's smile grew wide, his teeth and eyes shone, and he approached her, hat in hand.

"Missy Wahbu'ton, ma'am," he began, and she turned to him, her own face lighting up and her slim, white hand reaching out to take his black one in a firm, comradely grip.

"Julius Cæsar Brown!" she exclaimed, laughing. "You're looking fine, Julius, just fine! And prosperous, too! I'm so glad Effervescence has come through for you-all."

"Yassum. Julius Cæsar Brown's all right, ma'am. Ain't nevah been laid up no mo' since you done nuhsed me, down theah in N' Orleans. Ain't nevah goin' be sick again, 'less mebbe you'd nuhse me some mo'. I ain't forgot that, missy, an' I ain't goin' to. Yassum! How you-all been?"

Before the girl answered the jockey's shrewd eyes saw a frown cross her white brow and for a moment her smile vanished, to reappear again with a new and pulse-stirring glamour. Mary Warburton was worried.

"I's informed that you-all is goin' to run the Bluegrass Belle in the handicap, missy," said J. Brown.

"Yes. It's just about my last chance, you see. If she doesn't win—but she will!—I'll have to sell out for whatever I can get."

"I sure hopes she wins, ma'am, only Effieversuns is in that race, too."

Mary's smile flashed again. "Then may the best mare win, Julius!" she said.

"Yassum. Only without Effieversuns the Bluegrass Belle would be the best of 'em all, ma'am."

"What about Don Juan, the Baldwin entry; you remember his grandsires, Julius—The Emperor of Castile and El Camino Real?"

"Yassum. The Don's a race hoss, but he ain't got the class of Bluegrass Belle, or the strength of Effieversuns. It's between our mares, missy, an' I's sure wishin' we didn't have to fight each other."

"May the best mare win!" the girl repeated. Then, looking intently into the face of the jockey, knowing his devotion and gratitude to her, she said: "And remember, Julius Cæsar, I mean that! May the best mare win—no quarter asked, and none given. When you ride Effervescence, ride to win!"

"Yassum," said J. Brown humbly. He knew she meant it, but he also knew what victory would mean to her, what it had meant to Jerry Quinn and himself. He would willingly have given up all his magic tricks of the dice to help Mary Warburton win the Coffrey Handicap.

Jerry Quinn joined them. He was an old-young man of thirty-five, diffident and inconspicuous, but with fine blue eyes that twinkled in quiet amusement. The greater part of his life had been lived upon race tracks. His devotion to the sport of kings was the biggest emotion in his life—so far. He was known far and wide as a game loser, a plucky fighter, and a loyal friend.

Mary Warburton's father had tested that friendship time and time again in days gone by; Mary herself knew that Jerry Quinn would never fail her. Toward the girl he felt a half-paternal tenderness, for he had known Mary as a little girl in pigtails when her father's stable was the pride of Kentucky. She would always be, to him, in some measure, that little girl.

"Julius has been announcing that we are to fight it out for first place in the

handicap, Jerry," she said as they shook hands.

"So we are," Jerry agreed. "It will be a fight, too, if I know anything about the Bluegrass Belle. But we can't forget Don Juan. May the best horse win!"

J. Brown grunted. "I's willin' to bet a million bones to nothin' at all that Effie or the Belle will win. It's a toss-up and the odds is even. Yassuh."

CHAPTER III.

AGAINST COMPETITION.

SHORTLY afterward Jerry Quinn, observing his friend closely and knowing something of the difficulty she had experienced in financing the trip from New Orleans to Tia Juana, dispatched J. Brown on an errand and sat down beside the girl, and in another moment, before the compelling sympathy of his eyes, she was telling him her troubles.

"I'm all but through, Jerry," she said. "This is absolutely my last chance. If the Belle wins the purse I can sell her to three New Yorkers for seventy-five thousand dollars. That and the purse will settle up everything and free all my obligations." Legally the obligations were not her own, but her father's. She had taken them upon herself of her own will. She went on, and a frown appeared between her eyes: "If we lose the race, I'll be lucky to get twenty thousand for the Belle, and that much will only half pay off what must be paid. If we lose I can't keep her, and I don't know what I'll do to raise the rest. So, you see, everything depends upon the race. But I shouldn't be telling you this; you're in the same boat, practically, and Effervescence has got to win for you."

"The Sonora Sweepstakes helped a lot," said Quinn. "We were down to the last century before Effie settled down and won, but now we can hold up for some time." He paused and looked thoughtfully away.

"See here, Jerry Quinn!" The girl laid a hand on his arm. "You're wearing the same expression this minute that

Julius Brown had a little while ago. I know what it means; but, remember, you are the owner of Effervescence! You're going to do your best to win. It's a fight between us, fair and square, with even odds, and may the best horse win!"

Quinn mechanically echoed her words, but as he looked into her clear, brave eyes a sudden embarrassment came over him.

"Mary——" he began, and gasped at what he had almost said. She looked at him curiously for a moment, as if sensing the import of his thought, and a slow blush mounted the column of her throat.

"Well?"

"They both can't win," he said stupidly.

"No, Jerry; they both can't." There was a hint of hidden laughter in her words.

"But one of them will," he pursued the point.

"I hope so; but there are other entries, you know."

"Not our kind. The new owners are not horsemen; they're mostly sports looking for a new way to spend their money. They buy high-priced animals, sometimes good ones, and then let 'em go to the devil. Our mares are in the best form of any in the stables—except, maybe, Don Juan. But he's a youngster, and I don't think he's got the strength or experience to win a big event.

"Effervescence sets a terrific pace, you know," Quinn continued, "and she'll take the heart out of the Don in the first half mile. Then, I think, the race is between the mares. Effie isn't a racer; as long as she's in the lead she'll fly. But if she's pressed, or if the Belle should get the lead, she'll quit cold. She won't fight against competition at all. One of them will win, I'm sure, unless the Don surprises us."

Mary knew that he was cautiously approaching something, what, she did not know. "Well?" she asked again.

"If they both belonged to one owner now——" Quinn suggested thoughtfully.

"What do you mean, Jerry?"

"Well, Mary, I like the Belle. I saw her working out this morning. She's my kind of a horse; she's got everything Effie has except strength, maybe, and she's got a heart besides. If she wins these New Yorkers will pay seventy-five thousand for her and then spoil her. She's worth that to me, now, win or lose. If I had the cash I'd buy her to-day. I haven't got it. Maybe I can get it from Barney Shea, but I'm not sure. So I thought you'd listen to a proposition like this: I'll take an option on her until after the race, and pay five thousand for it. Then, if Effie wins, I can pay the rest. If the Belle wins I won't have the money, but you can sell to the New Yorkers—that is, if Barney won't buy her for me."

Mary's face glowed as she heard the words. Here was an offer that would insure her victory in her own race with debt. Win or lose she could pay off her father's indebtedness and retire from the game. The promised freedom was roseate and alluring, but even as her heart embraced it her practical mind critically inspected Jerry's offer and the motive behind it.

"No; you don't, Jerry," she said after a moment's thought. "You can't get me to accept any such 'heads I win, tails you lose' proposition! If I'm to gamble on the Bluegrass Belle, I'll gamble. But no sure things at your expense. Why, you're suggesting that you risk five thousand dollars to insure me against loss. There's no such thing in this game. It's got to be played according to the rules. I won't take your five thousand dollars, but I will give you first chance to buy the Belle, if you really want her."

Quinn protested that he couldn't accept an option unless he paid for it, but she halted him with a smile.

"Surely," she said, "our friendship is old enough to need no money guarantees, Jerry."

His heart leaped at the words, but he had nothing to say. Instead, he left her and went toward Barney Shea, the rich and friendly owner of a large stable. Shea was leaning leisurely upon

a gold-headed cane, an enormous diamond in his tie, and a fat cigar between his genial, smiling lips.

"Barney," Quinn began, "Barney, can you lend me seventy-five thousand right away?"

Barney Shea was not surprised by the request. No mention of money ever moved him. Financial gains or losses were all the same and left him equally unperturbed. He was an ideal gambler; either he didn't care whether he won or lost, or he wore a perfect mask of not caring. He shifted the cigar slightly, reached into his pocket and drew out a small notebook, which he opened to a page of cryptic figures. Then he shook his head. "Sorry, Jerry. Fifty thousand's my limit to-day. Will that do?"

"Not quite. Thanks, Barney. I want to buy the Bluegrass Belle; seventy-five thousand's the price."

"Fair enough if she wins the handicap, but too high if she don't," Shea remarked casually. "You're not afraid Effervescence is goin' to lose, are you?"

"No. The Belle just looks good to me, that's all."

"Yes, she does," said Shea, casting an admiring glance at Mary Warburton in the lobby of the hotel.

"Will you lend me the money if she wins?" Quinn pursued his point. "You see, win or lose, Miss Warburton has to sell, and there's a group of New Yorkers want the Belle at that price if she wins. I hate to see the last of the Warburton string go to that bunch of horse killers. You know, old Colonel Warburton was my friend."

"Uh-huh," Shea grunted. "Yeah, I guess I can make it—if my own entries do their duty in the shorter races. Yeah, if she wins I'll back you, but I'm bettin' on Effervescence. I'm not even runnin' any of my plugs against her."

"I'm bettin' that way, too; but if Effie wins I can buy the Belle myself."

With the understanding that Shea was to advance the money for the Belle if she won, Quinn returned to Mary Warburton.

"I'll take your offer of a first chance to buy the Belle," he told her. "Barney Shea will stake me if she wins and

Effie loses. If Effie wins I'll buy the Belle right after the race at seventy-five thousand."

"I've been thinking it over, Jerry," replied the girl. "I can't do it. If the Belle loses there isn't a horseman in the game who would give more than twenty thousand for her. My price to you, if she loses, is the same as it would be to any one else—only it ought to be less. You were a good friend to dad, Jerry."

No amount of argument would sway her from that decision. At last Quinn had to agree to her terms, and he went away to the stable of Effervescence with a troubled mind and a scowl upon his face. He was sorely tempted to scratch Effervescence, but he realized that such an action would be cowardly and unsportsmanlike. He even thought of various tricks of the turf by which he could force his mare to lose and the Bluegrass Belle to win. But, much as he wanted to help Mary Warburton out of her difficulties, he could not play false with Barney Shea and all the others who would back his own entry.

Yet Quinn knew that if the Bluegrass Belle lost and he bought her at the low price Mary would be saddled with debts for the rest of her life. A great tenderness came over him as he pondered the problem. Unconsciously he stroked the sleek nose of Effervescence as she nuzzled his coat for sugar.

Standing there, considering one means after another of helping the daughter of his old friend, a thought came that made him gasp. It offered a sure way out, it was true, and a great deal more than that, but he did not dare to go on thinking it. Quinn was a modest man, with little of the egoist in his nature, and there were some things to which he could not aspire.

CHAPTER IV.

TWIN STREAKS OF MOTION.

ON the eve of the handicap Jerry was still puzzled over what to do. Both Effie and the Belle were in splendid form, on edge for the morrow's race. Don Juan, it was reported, was expected

by his owners to capture the purse, but the best judges of form did not agree with those optimists. The other horses, unless a dark one unexpectedly made good, were entered simply to exhibit their class. Even their owners were not backing them for first place, although many small bets were being laid upon the horses expected to place and show.

Julius Cæsar Brown was peculiarly unenthusiastic about the race. Ordinarily he would have been loudly boastful, on edge with excitement, and engaged in dice duels for high stakes. Now he wandered into the stable of Effervescence and looked morosely at the mare. He and Quinn were both wishing that she would lose the race, if in that way they could help Mary Warburton win the longer race she was running with debt.

But they both knew that they would have to do their best to win. To do anything else would bring down the protest of their supporters upon their heads, as well as the scorn of Mary herself. All they could do was hope. And a queer hope it was, this desire for defeat that would seem to both of them more glorious than victory.

Sunday, the day of the handicap, dawned bright and clear, with the sun rising in a cloudless blue sky. By train and motor the throngs of across-the-liners poured into Tia Juana. Money flowed from their pockets in an endless stream into the coffers of the restaurateurs, saloon keepers and bookies of that thriving city.

The preponderance of Californians in the crowd made Don Juan, a native son, the favorite. Effervescence was their second choice, and the Bluegrass Belle a long third. The others had only the sporadic backing of system players and sports who were afflicted with the disease of believing in so-called inside tips.

Quinn saw Miss Warburton for a fleeting moment early in the day, as she went to look over her entry. They solemnly exchanged greetings and said: "May the best horse win!"

Later, as he took his place in an owner's box, Mary entered and sat down

beside him. Her eyes were red, as though she had been crying over her mare, but her smile was as brave as ever.

Three races preceded the handicap, with Barney Shea's entries winning two out of three and getting a place in the third.

"Barney can let me have the money—now," said Quinn softly.

"I don't know whether I can part with her." Mary turned to him. "Even to you, Jerry. Bluegrass Belle is all I've got, the last of all father had, the last thing he would want me to sell. Win or lose, it's going to be hard for me to give her up. But I must! I'm glad you will have her, you and Julius Cæsar. I couldn't have sold her to those others, even if no one else wanted her. They don't know horses as we do. And the Belle is brave, Jerry, brave!"

The horses entered in the handicap were led into the paddock. Silk-clad jockeys in many colors entered and stood beside their mounts. There was J. Brown, in Jerry's orange and green, wisely considering the chances of the break for himself and Effervescence, disconcertingly disparaging in his comments upon the other entries. There was the Bluegrass Belle, trembling in every sleek line of her red-brown body, with the strong and skillful lad who was to ride her stroking her nose and whispering soothing words, then looking up at his mistress in the box. There was Don Juan, proud as a young prince, with a Mexican boy holding the reins.

And then—the starter's whistle, impatient pawing, hurried mounting, the sound of a pistol shot, a mad spurt! Effervescence was in the lead, her long limbs stretched out in the joyousness of speed. Don Juan, already a length behind, striving unsuccessfully to take the lead from her, was losing the race in that first furlong by becoming flustered and beginning to breathe too fast.

And then the Bluegrass Belle, off to a bad start, nervous at first, settled into her stride and began passing one after another of the nonentities. Instinctively she knew her opponents and the

tactics to use against them. Now that she was in the race she was no longer nervous; her brain and her heart were full of the lore of racing that she had inherited from proud and victorious forbears.

A length behind Don Juan she settled down to the same pace; the Don, furiously angry because he was not in the lead, remained a length behind Effervescence, who, unpressed, ran for the sheer joy of running, in her ears the sweep of the wind and the low, chuckling hum of J. Brown's endearments. So they ran and so they stayed—Effie, the Don, and the Belle.

Three horses more unlike could not have been found in all the world's stables. Effervescence was a self-centered egotist, chiefly concerned with pleasing herself, but heartless and nerveless, with a wicked eye. The Don was a proud prince, also an egotist, but one who fed on applause and was made passionately mad by another's preëminence.

The Belle, in mind and heart, was like a woman whose strength and endurance are only revealed when she is fighting for those she loves. The Belle, beyond a doubt, knew that Mary Warburton's tears would be dried by her victory; she would pour out her heart and soul to that end.

So they ran for the first three quarters of a mile, with Effie and the Belle running their best and the Don fighting Effie and his own injured pride at every leap. Then, as though she was just warming up for an endless and joyous race, Effervescence increased her strides and forgot to slow down at the turns. The Don made a valiant effort to do likewise, but lost his head and glanced back at the shadow of the Belle that was overtaking him.

In an instant, it seemed to those in the grand stand, Don Juan, the favorite, had dropped into third place and the Bluegrass Belle had outstripped him. The others were bunched far behind, fighting desperately for a worthless fourth place.

Now began a battle royal. Effervescence, unaware of any other horse

on the track, was a speed maniac whose only thought was flight. But slowly the Bluegrass Belle was shortening the distance between them, and as they passed the milepost and entered the quarter stretch she came close enough for J. Brown to know that Mary Warburton still had a chance.

Now the race was between Effie and the Belle. Praying that the Belle would win, Julius Cæsar none the less rode his best for Effie's chances. Down the stretch they plunged, twin streaks of motion, the Belle gaining imperceptibly, Effie running faster than she had ever run before.

The grand stand went wild, but in an owner's box two persons sat silent, their eyes glued to the horses. Quinn's hand reached out and found Mary's. Her eyes filled with tears, but her lips still wore a smile.

The Bluegrass Belle, her heart pounding as if it would break, came on and on until her nose was on a line with Effervescence's jawbone. Now, in sight of the wire, she spurted gamely, and the two mares, so like in speed, so different in all else, crossed together, so close at the finish that only the judges could decide and even their decision might be questioned. It was as near a tie as a horse race can be.

The grand stand became a bedlam. The race was like none they had ever seen before. A test of speed, gameness, a gallant fight—and now, above all, a mystery.

"Who won?" a thousand voices cried. And a thousand answers came—"Effervescence!" "Bluegrass Belle!"—in unanimous disagreement.

All eyes were focused on the judges' stand. But, so close had it been, that even the judges could not agree at first. Five tense minutes passed before they reached their decision.

Mary turned to Quinn, discovered her hand in his, and shyly withdrew it. Then she laughed. "Who won, Jerry?" she asked.

"You did—by a quarter of an inch. I'm glad, Mary. The Belle has broken a record, and Effie has, too, they were so

close together. We've got two world beaters, Mary!"

"Oh, don't say I won until we know! I would swear Effie had the lead at the wire! And I'm glad for you, Jerry! What a race! Oh, Jerry, I can't ever sell the Belle after the fight she made for me!"

With maddening delay a man stepped out on the judges' platform, three cards in his hand. Slowly, unperturbed by the thundering eagerness of the crowd, he swung a rack inward and inserted the three cards, bearing the numbers of the winning horses. In the moment before he swung it out again, so that all eyes could see, madness swept the grand stand. Quinn's hand gripped Mary's tensely. Then he read the numbers and laughed aloud, in sheer happiness. According to the judges, the horses finished the race in the following order: First—Bluegrass Belle; second—Effervescence; third—Don Juan.

A moment later the time of the race was announced. Both Bluegrass Belle and Effervescence had smashed the track records for the mile and a quarter distance. After a race like that seventy-five thousand dollars would be a low price for either mare!

CHAPTER V.

AFTER THE RACE.

THAT evening Barney Shea saw Julius Cæsar setting forth in quest of Ethiopian golf opponents. "Hey, Brownie," he called. "Where the devil's Jerry? I been lookin' all over town for him. Tell him I've got that seventy-five thousand he wanted. And if he ain't gonna buy the Bluegrass Belle I wanta buy her myself!"

Julius Cæsar Brown grinned widely. "I don't reckon he's gonna buy her," he said. "An' I don't guess you is either, Mistuh Shea. I don't guess Missy Wahbu'ton 's gonna sell her a-tall! Yassuh! I reckon nobody's gonna buy the Bluegrass Belle; they're done gonna keep her in the fambly!"

"What are you talkin' about?" Shea asked. "Jerry told me——"

"I reckon you ain't been able to find

Mistuh Jerry 'cause he ain't wantin' to be found. Mistuh Jerry's engagin' in a matrimonial adventure with Missy Wahbu'ton, suh. They's gonna keep the Belle and Effie as the beginnin' of the Wahbu'ton-Quinn string! Yassuh! An' I's the head, trainer, jockey, and so fo'th."

"Married, huh! What do you know about that? Good!" commented Barney. "But how about the money, Brownie? Jerry said he would need it if Effie lost. An' he'll need it more than ever now, if I know anything about gettin' married."

"Yassuh. Seems to me he did say somethin' about borrowing some jack from you-all, if you figgered the two mares was good 'nough security. But then he said he reckoned to-morrow would be time enough, 'cause he was too busy to be bothered by trifles. An' Missy Wahbu'ton seemed to agree with him, suh."

J. Brown's grin grew wider, and Barney Shea exploded into laughter.

"Don't blame him a bit—not a bit!" Shea said with a chuckle. "I'll lend him anything he and Mary wants on them two nags. I wish I had 'em in my stable. Here's luck to the Warburton-Quinn string!"

And so, with seventy-five thousand perfectly good American dollars ready to hand over, Barney Shea had to wait a whole day to accommodate his borrowing friend. But, under the circumstances, and Shea being the sportsman he was, he didn't mind.

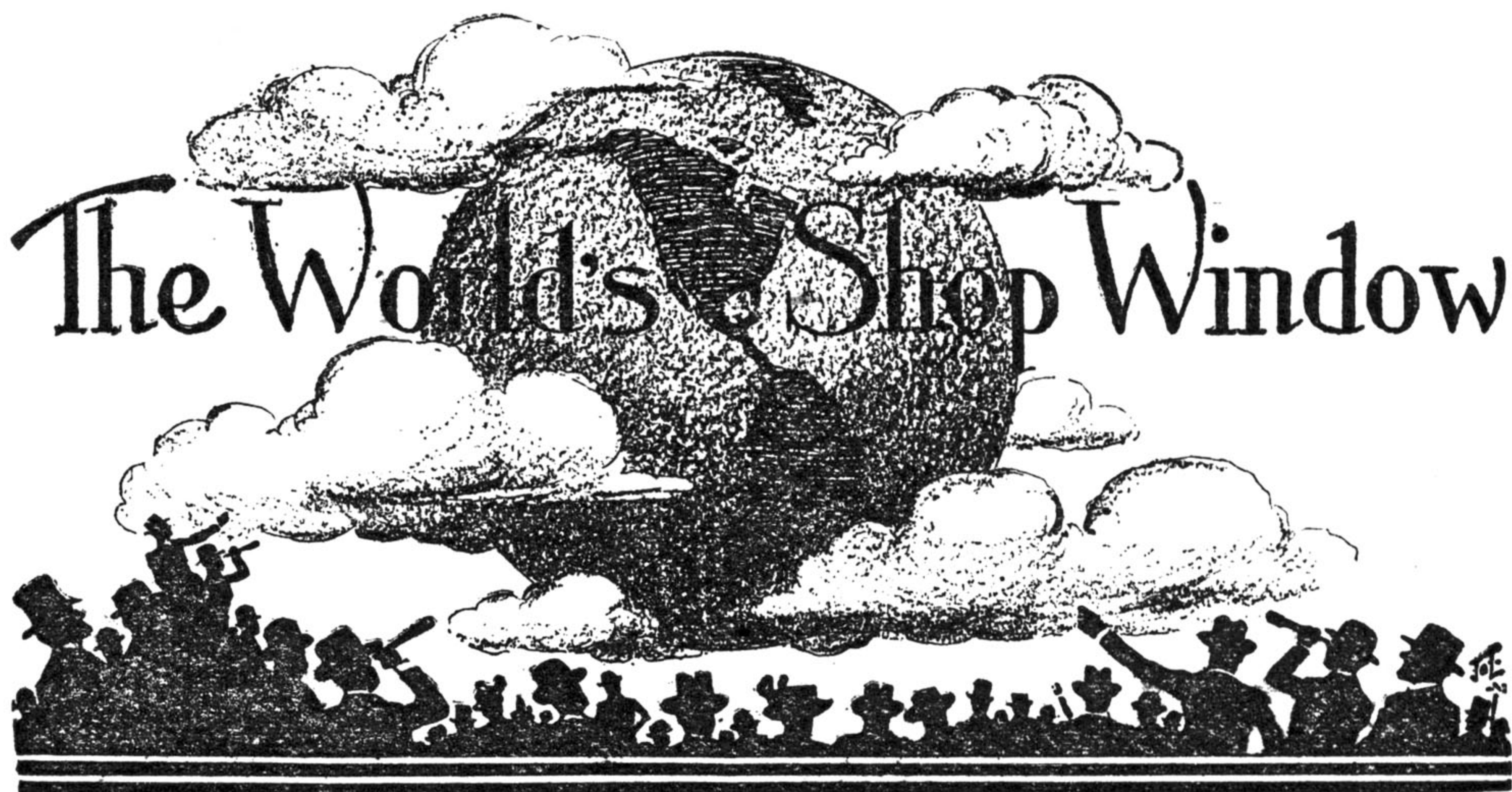
How did this story strike you? A few words about it, if you will be good enough to write them and send them to the editor. We ask you to say, without reserve, just what you think of it. And in the same letter, please give us your opinion of TOP-NOTCH in general.

Increased Interest

DEALER: "That, sir, is a rare old revolver. It was carried by Christopher Columbus."

Customer: "What! Why, revolvers were not invented in Columbus' time."

Dealer: "I know. That's what makes this one so rare."



By Henry Wilton Thomas —

Illustrations by Jo Lemon

Dangerous Thoughts

THERE are people in Japan who have got way beyond merely curbing freedom of speech; they want to put a crimp in freedom of thought. They



managed to get before the Japanese parliament what was called the "dangerous-thought" bill. It would have sent to prison for seven years any one who had thought, was thinking, or might think thoughts pronounced dangerous by a competent magistrate. In other words, it provided this punishment

for persons found guilty of adding to the sum of thought against certain existing laws and their replacement with other laws. It left the dangerous thinker no avenue of escape. It applied to the past and the future as well as the present.

The newspapers of Japan came out almost unanimously against the bill. They wanted to know how the government was going to find out whether a man's thoughts were dangerous or not.

Was the government to establish a department of mind reading? To this the advocates of the measure replied that the task of detecting dangerous thinkers would present little difficulty. The wish was father of the thought and the thought was father of the word. It was only a matter of time when the dangerous thinker would be a dangerous talker; then they would get him.

The newspapers won—quite a rare victory in Japan. Instead of killing dangerous thought, the bill itself was killed. Thus it falls out that in Tokyo and other places people may go about as usual in their rickshas or on foot thinking dangerous or any other kind of thoughts. It is suspected by the backward-looking party that these thoughts often are forward-looking, even radical; that something dreadful will happen to some of the hundred-per-cent Japanese who are gouging on rents, food, shoes, and clothing if something is not done to put down dangerous thoughts. So the Pooh-Bahs of profit plan another



campaign against them. The newspapers declare they will rally again to combat the movement.



A Milanese Martyr

IN the city of Milan, Italy, there is as much radicalism, it is safe to say, to the square inch as in any large center of population in the world. But in the matter of trousers the municipal government clings to tradition. Its officials are determined that all the trousers in the city shall be worn by men and boys; that not a single pair shall be permitted to drape the person of a woman or girl—in public, unless it be on the stage.

Rebelling against the authority of the law is one of the outdoor sports that have attained much popularity in Milan, which is a bright, lively city, nicknamed *Il Piccolo Parigi*—The Little Paris. Many of the rebels are not members of the sex allowed to wear trousers in the streets. Now and then one of the ladies takes a fling at defying authority and attains the distinction of martyrdom.

A recent striking example was supplied by a Signora Rossana Zezzo—a poet and feminist leader, with bobbed hair. She donned a regular man's shirt, collar, and four-in-hand tie, an overcoat with a belt that had ends sticking in the side pockets, strong masculine shoes, a soft white hat with a black band, and—and trousers turned up at the bottom.

The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele is a big, splendid arcade that serves as a center of Milanese life. It was this stage that Signora Zezzo chose for the defiant exhibition of her



trousers. But the rebellion was of very short life. Almost instantly a carabinieri presented himself, saluted the lady, and invited her to go home and take them off. She declined the invitation, and was marched off to a dungeon, where she remained until the majesty of the law had been vindicated.



In Capable Hands

WHILE the world's most distinguished talking men were threatening war at Genoa, one of the world's greatest fighting men was doing his bit in the service of peace far away. In New York there is an institution known as the Joan of Arc School; also, there is the American Scenic and Preservation Society. They got together a while ago and decided to plant a tree in Central Park, to be one of fourteen oaks that will make up the Joan of Arc Grove.

One bright morning a hole was dug, the sapling was set in it, and enough earth was placed around to keep it standing for a while—until a most distinguished shoveler should arrive. A group of girls from the school waited, their French and American flags fluttering in the breeze that blew from the Mall and the rhododendron beds. Venerable members of the preservation society also waited and glanced toward the West Drive expectantly.

At length two automobiles, with police outriders on motor cycles, appeared, and a moment later Marshal Joffre walked briskly on the lawn, his red cap and gold braid resplendent in the sun-



light. With a businesslike air he clutched the beribboned spade handed to him by one of the head preservers and began to throw earth into the hole.

There was nothing in his action to suggest the bored air of the famous man obliged to participate in a public formality. He did not take up a thimbleful of earth and toss it anywhere into the hole. He went at the job with meticulous care; he might have been planting a tree in the garden of his villa in France. One heaping

shovelful after another he deposited at different points about the tree.

He seemed to be enjoying himself greatly when a hand was laid on his good right arm; it was the hand of one of the official preservers. He interrupted the artisan in his joyous task to hand him a second shovel in exchange for the one he was using. A look of wonder came into the face of the mustached soldier, and for an instant it looked as if he might ventilate some strange oaths.

But he refrained; valiantly he refrained from the methods of the Genoa conference. He merely took the extra shovel and went on with his task. It is feared that nobody explained the meaning of the second shovel, and Marshal Joffre carried a memory of the incident back to France as one of the great American mysteries. But the solution is simple enough. The scenic and preservation society had two shovels to preserve instead of one—two shovels wielded by the exceedingly capable hands of the hero of the Marne.



When in Rome

IF one is in Rome these days he will see, in the hour preceding high noon, many Americans in evening clothes crossing the sunny square of the Vatican. With them will be women in black gowns and lace mantles. They are on

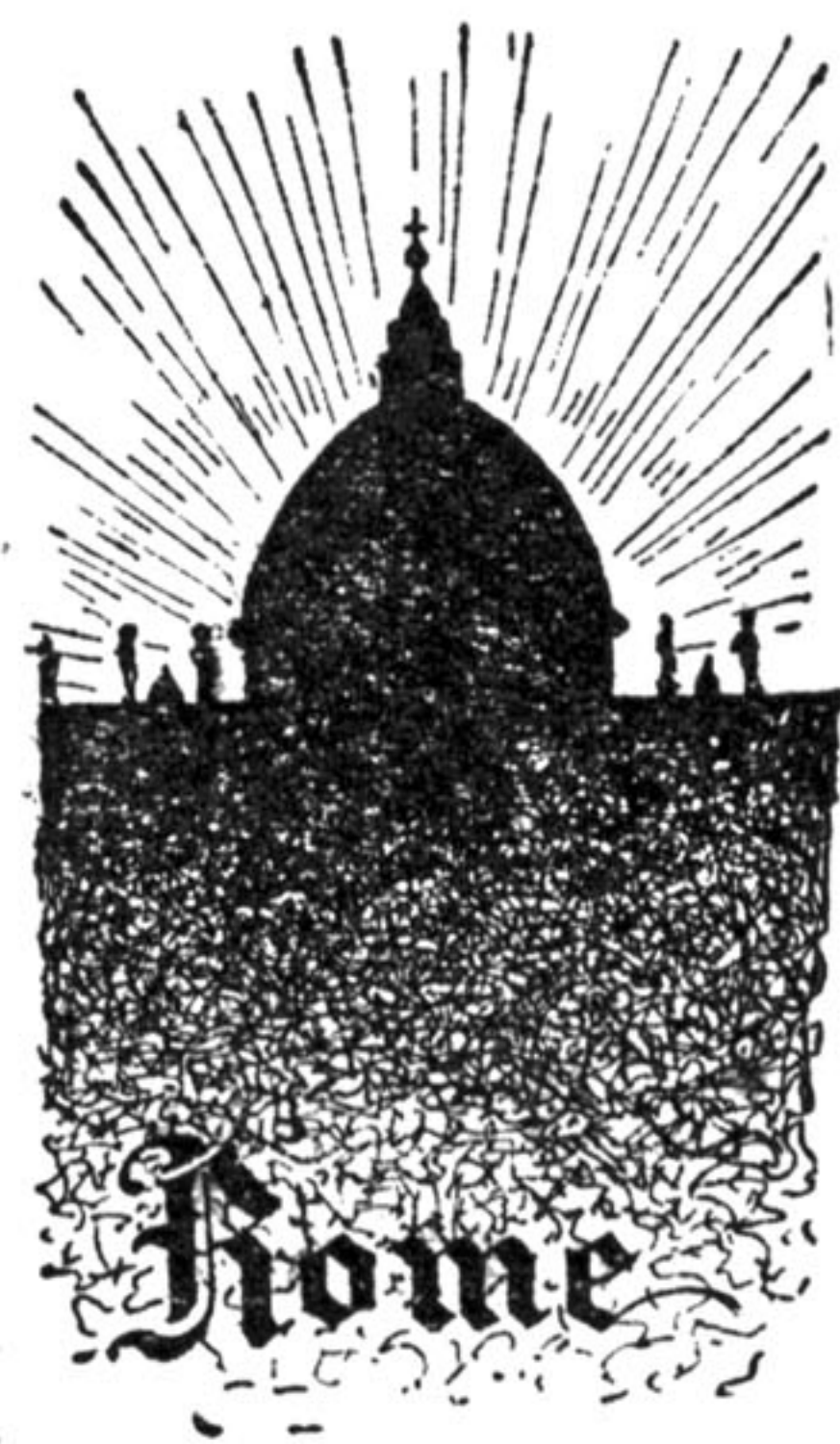
their way to an audience with the pope. The etiquette of the papal court requires that the men who would look upon the face of Pius XI. must do so in swallowtail coat and the other appurtenances of formal evening attire.

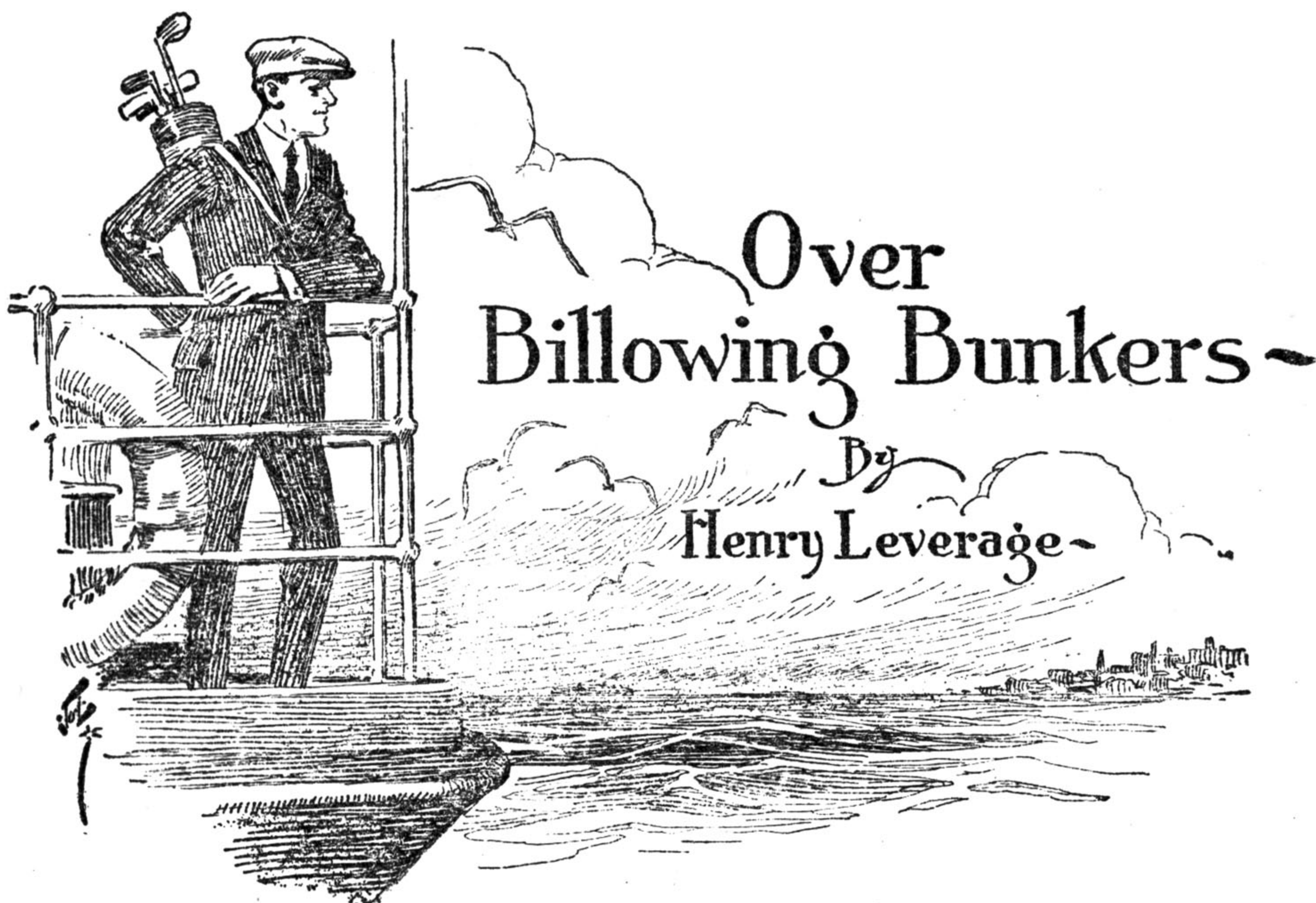
It costs almost as much for your baggage in Europe now as it does for your railroad ticket. Tourists are traveling very light. Many Americans arrive in Rome without a dress suit. But there are plenty of shops across the square from the Vatican where dress suits may be hired, and they are doing a bigger business this year

than ever before. Nearly everybody who goes to Rome wants to see the pope, but the rush is always greater just after a pope has been crowned. The new pontiff has filled the chair of St. Peter only since last February.

Not much difficulty is experienced by visitors in obtaining a card of admission to the audience. The porter at the hotel will get you one, but this is not included in the ten per cent charge for service on your bill. He will expect a liberal present for putting you through to the throne room.

Between eleven o'clock and noon the men in evening togs and the women in formal gowns appear on foot and make their way across the broad esplanade of the Vatican to the door where the Swiss guards receive them. Pilgrims must be careful to keep well to windward of the artificial geyser that sends its stream far aloft from the middle of the square. Many a hired dress suit, as well as a wearer-owned one, has been spoiled by a wind-wafted deluge from this historic fountain.





(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

THAT REMARKABLE SCORE.



RED-HEADED black sheep who went by the name of Mike Monkey—a cast-off scion of a Rotherhithe family, half Scotch, half Irish—an engineer with three Board of Trade certificates—stood in the clearway of the freighter *Melrose* and cast a bitter glance over the golf links of Craymore.

Craymore was a stretch of sand, bumpers, hillocks; hazards where port officers, coffee planters, and blue-water skippers played golf under the rays of an equatorial sun. Native caddie boys flitted over Craymore, English drinks were served at the nineteenth hole, and the clubhouse, bright with striped awnings, sheltered ladies who feared to test their complexions on Craymore's hot surface.

Mike Monkey's irritability and bitterness that afternoon were on account of the ship's captain delaying sailing by playing golf when the *Melrose* should have been on her way to another and cooler island port.

The mate of the *Melrose*—a Yankee

named Landyard—approached the engineer.

"Skipper's late," said Landyard.

The Scotch-Irish engineer went straight up, like a jet of superheated steam. "Late!" he exclaimed. "He's daft wi' that golf game—us sizzlin' here in this iniquitous port wi' cargo perishin', an' deck seams bubblin', an' charter runnin' out! Daft, he is, wi' that owner's game called golf."

"I never played it," the mate remarked.

"I have, considerable! Ye tik th' ball, put it on a wee hill, whack it wi' a club, an' th' one who finds th' ball th' same day he hits it—wins th' game."

Landyard shot a shrewd eye toward a yellow mist below a declining sun. He turned and surveyed the half-moon beach at Craymore, the pearl-thatched houses, the vivid green of the brooding jungle over which towered inland mountains where no white man dared go.

"These islands," he said romantically, "are blessed with an entire absence of time. What does it matter when we sail? Each day is the same—each year glides into another—birth and death are the only two diversions."

"Ye are worse than th' skipper! Wot does it matter? It matters puns, shillings, pence, on my bonus for savin' coal. I ha' steam up!"

Landyard, the mate, yawned and raised a long pair of stretching arms. He lowered them quickly. "There's the skipper!" he exclaimed. "There's the cabin boy he took ashore for a caddie. See Micky stepping into the dinghy. You can use your steam now—and save your bonus."

The captain of the *Melrose* came smartly over the sea and climbed to the quarter-deck. He was followed by the cabin boy, who carried a serviceable golf bag fashioned out of number one flax canvas. Mike Monkey, on tiptoe in the gangway, with a hand on the railing around the engine-room companion, eyed the delayed skipper like a simian regarding a disturbance. Landyard, the Yankee mate, had gone forward where he stood ready to edge steam on a vertical winch.

Micky McMasters, the captain of the *Melrose*, selected a club from the bag, placed a badly banged golf ball on one corner of a hatch, swung the club and drove the ball with a smart tap against the lee rail where it rolled along the scuppers. The cabin boy retrieved it; once more the club swung and the ball rebounded. McMasters, sun helmet poised at the back of his head, selected a lighter iron and began putting the ball around the quarter-deck, popping it into water buckets, lofting it over a deck light, nesting it in the exact center of a coil of rope.

An explosion came from the waist of the freighter when Mike Monkey, unable to hold himself in any longer, shouted for all the ship to hear: "Ye senile fool! Ye driddlin' mucker!"

Slowly McMasters straightened his back, handed the cabin boy the putter, adjusted his sun helmet, hitched his duck trousers, and came sauntering up to the quarter-deck rail.

"Who said that?" The skipper's eyes were on Mike Monkey.

"I did! Ye standin' there an' pretendin' ye don't know who said it. I said it! What with your golf game,

an' delay, an' miserable antics on th' poop deck, I've lost a ton or two o' good Wellington coal what cost three pun, seventeen shillin' in these ports."

Mike Monkey added, riled at the skipper's silence: "Golf will be your ruination!"

"My golf don't cost me much," said Micky.

"How's that?"

"I pay no club dues; I sign for 'chits'; a kind Providence has scattered splendid links all over the known world. Take Craymore—I made the remarkable score of eighty-two, just seven more than——"

"All clear—farrard!" sang out the impatient Yankee mate.

"Playing against a Scotch trader and a foreign diplomat, I made eighty-two," McMasters said proudly. "My game should get better if the weather continues fair, and I have an opportunity to practice on deck."

Mike Monkey gulped, tore off his cap, stamped on it, and ran his fingers through a grimy thicket of red hair. "Ye made eighty-two! Ye better mik eighty-two revolutions on th' propeller shaft an' quit that owners' game! D'ye know we were scheduled to leave this port at noon—here it is seven bells an' me wi' all steam up!"

The skipper of the *Melrose* shot forth an order that reached the waiting mate. "Hoist the mudhook, bring aboard that dinghy, see that we're all clear aft, and you"—Micky drilled the dancing first engineer with his eyes—"you get below where you belong and build the steam. I want to reach Dunden Head by this time to-morrow—where I'm to pass the time of day with the undersecretary of affairs of the Kingdom of Sarawak."

CHAPTER II.

ACROSS THE POLISHED SEA.

A MENACING silence was on the *Melrose* as the freighter cleared the port, steadied her bow and started clamping across the polished sea—a silence broken now and then by the crack of a club against a ball and the shuffling feet of an overworked cabin boy.

Mike Monkey, at sundown, confided to the Yankee mate: "Th' skipper's only lost seven balls overside; he must be a nabob."

"He swings a wicked club," Landyard said. "Th' cook, Carboy Jim, has a welt below the ear where Micky cracked him, and the second mate just asked for arnica to bandage his shin. It's as much as a man's life's worth to go on that quarter-deck."

"I don't mind th' cook or th' mate, but ye should see him tryin' to loft a ball into my funnel. When we reach Sarawak he should be examined for senile decay."

Shrewd reflection flashed in the mate's eyes. "Sarawak," he repeated. "You heard him give the course to Dunden Head, Mike? Do you suppose he's going out of his way to play a game of golf? Th' Kingdom of Sarawak—What have I heard of that place?"

"I thought a sultan ruled there."

"Or a rajah."

"Sure." The engineer smiled. "A rajah! What's Micky got to do wi' th' undersecretary of a rajah?"

"He didn't say anything about Sarawak this morning when he went ashore." The Yankee mate began putting things together. "He expected to keep to the owner's schedule an' pick up that small stuff Gringham and Bell left at Aracada. Now what changed his plans, Mike?"

"A cable from Sarawak."

"That's about it, I guess—an engagement two hundred miles off our course. Wouldn't that make you whistle?"

Mike Monkey thrust his head upward and allowed a cooling breeze to fan his brow. "I've heard," he said, "there's a queen in Sarawak—a bonny English girl. Twa years ago I heard it. Maybe Micky got th' cable from her."

"Maybe so," said the mate.

Morning dawned on that eastern sea, with all the colors of the rainbow running in pluming riot athwart the sky. A hot sun leaped the horizon and hung, like a ball of molten fire, just over the swaying foremast of the *Melrose*. Silver-running swells, as if a sheet of tin was agitated, rocked the deep-laden

freighter. Micky McMasters appeared on the quarter-deck, Mike Monkey popped through the engine-room companion; Landyard, who stood deck watch, gave the skipper the position, drift, compass point, and started below. He was halted by a request.

"Mind passing up my golf bag?" asked McMasters. "I'll get a little exercise before I eat my breakfast."

The first engineer grasped a funnel stay and watched the captain select a club, balance a golf ball on the top of a holystone, and drive against the canvas windbreak on the quarter-deck. A lofting shot cleared the rail.

"Fore!" cried McMasters, as the spinning ball missed the mainmast, skimmed by the funnel, and landed between the eyes of a lascar who was emerging from the forecastle to join his watch on deck. The staggering impact was followed by imprecations in polyglot tongues, an excited swarming out of the crew's quarters, a glittering knife that went the length of the freighter and stuck, quivering, in the woodwork of the wheelhouse.

"Aft!" shouted Mike Monkey gleefully. "Ye didderin' fool—what d'ye think ov Malay golf?"

Micky McMasters had no answer ready; he rebagged his clubs, tucked the bag under his arm, and descended to breakfast. The freighter plowed on toward a knuckle of land that came up out of the sea until it became a fist, dark and forbidding.

"Dunden Head," said Landyard, who had returned to the deck.

The freighter's speed decreased; Mike Monkey frugally banked the fires; an expectant hush was broken only by the sound of creaking stays and lapping waves.

A burst of white on the beach, the flash of oars, the splendid sheer of a whaleboat dancing in the direction of the *Melrose*, brought the skipper on deck where he leaned over a lee rail and studied the coming visitor—a magnificent native who wore only a "geestring" and a turban.

"That's no golf player," said Mike Monkey to Landyard. "That's another

ov those knife-throwers an' I've noo doot we're in for international complications."

"Waal, it's the skipper's funeral."

"Funeral! It's breakin' owners he is, an' breakin' first-class engineers wi' three certificates. I get no bonus on my coal this passage—wot wi' golf an' gammin' native chiefs who come aboard in shameful rig. Where's th' pride of that mon if he's th' undersecretary ov foreign affairs?"

The visitor climbed a bos'n's ladder, salaamed to Micky; they went below out of earshot of Mike Monkey and Landyard the mate.

"There's a deeper game than golf afloat and ashore," said the Yankee. "I wouldn't wonder if that islander came out with a message from the queen of Sarawak. He's a handsome fellow."

"Handsome! I've had that breed in th' stokehole; they're wicked enough to chew slag an' eat clinkers. Like as not this ship is doomed; every one was that mixed wi' queens an' plots an' sinful natives."

A diversion occurred aft when Micky McMasters and the islander came on deck; then they walked side by side up and down the planks, and shook hands in parting. The whaleboat was a bounding speck beneath Dunden Head when Mike Monkey was startled by a salvo of bells coming over the engine-room telegraph. These bells resembled a fish line being violently agitated by a well-hooked sea bass. Mike charged in the direction of the quarter-deck, climbed the weather steps, and confronted the skipper.

"I heard you th' first time!" he shouted. "M' fires are banked. D' ye think steam can be built in a minute?"

"Full speed ahead!" Micky McMasters' jaw was a block and his eyes drilled through and through the irate engineer.

"Ye'll ha' steam when it comes—in good time."

"Darn you! I'll have steam now!"

A muscular arm reached and marline-spikelike fingers prodded the engineer forward. "Th' skipper wants steam," said Landyard. "Take it from me, Mike, there's a good reason."

"He's lost his reason! Shades ov Watt, this is an impossible packet!"

CHAPTER III.

GIFT FROM A QUEEN.

A BELL later saw the *Melrose* steaming over an ocean of sea room, driving from west to east, burning good Wellington coal, and trailing a plume of smoke astern like a five-day liner off Fire Island. Bars were bent; stokehole Kanakas honed secret knives; Mike Monkey danced to the skipper's tune played on nerves attenuated to the breaking point.

"Skipper wants both of us aft," Landyard said through a voice tube. "Better come right away, Mike."

Mike Monkey climbed out of the overheated engine room, shot a wild glance around and about, and mounted to the quarter-deck.

"This way," said Landyard. "Right this way, Mike. Skipper's waitin' an' the Old Man's going to tell us a secret."

The captain of the *Melrose* sat hunched over a small table in the after cabin; before him rested a sextant box; about him were sun-circled portholes, two bunks, a shelf of nautical books, almanacs, a golf bag, and a garishly decorated sheathing painted by some departed marine artist. Spouting whales, tropical palms, a fringe of dancing girls beneath jungle foliage, made the place more like a liner's cabin than a British skipper's domicile.

"I'm here!" Mike Monkey said heatedly. "Ye an' your jingle-bells an' meetin's wi' savages can go hang! We're wastin' coal, mon! D'ye know our present speed consumes twice as much as I've calculated on in order t' make m' bonus?"

A softness flitted into Micky McMasters' eyes; he reached toward the closed sextant box, looked cautiously at the deck light and companion slide, then he went directly, bluntly, to the point. "Just a moment, Mike. Stow your jaw tackle. We're leaving Sarawak as I would like to leave it—full speed on the engines. We're taking something with us to England. My son, Lieu-

tenant Robert McMasters, V. C., of King's Crescent, Richmond, London, West, has received a gift from a queen of Sarawak. It was only last year my boy was stationed at Sarawak, where he was noticed by her majesty, whose consort is a dark and powerful rajah.

"The undersecretary who 'gammed' us at Dunden Head brought the gift," McMasters added with fatherly pride. "It's in this sextant box. It isn't safe—Bob may never get it—that's why I called you from below."

"We're as good as scuttled," Mike Monkey said. "Scuttled, murdered in our sleep, slain like sheep! A dark rajah, ye say, an' a crew of lascars an' Kanakas an' Malays—knife-throwers every one o' them!"

"That's what I thought," said Micky. "The queen's gift to my boy must be hidden beyond the rajah's reach. He doesn't know, or didn't know, that his better half plundered the royal jewel case and sent us its fairest jewel."

"An idol's eye?" Landyard questioned.

"Hardly; there are no idols in Sarawak now."

"A miserable emerald?" asked Mike Monkey.

"No. It's a pink pearl as big as an English walnut." Micky McMasters lifted the lid of the sextant box and exposed a hard, round object that held a sea glamour on its satin surface.

"I've seen one exactly like that in Cheapside," said Mike Monkey. "It was priced twa shillin' an' sixpence."

"Two and six!" The *Melrose's* captain rose from the small table and advanced upon Mike Monkey, who nimbly dodged him. "Two and six! You cinder rat, I'll two and six you! The pearl is worth all of ten thousand pounds, maybe more!"

"Likely it is, skipper," Landyard interfered. "I think the best place for it is right back in the sea where it came from. We touch at Aracada to get that stuff Gringham and Bell left there, and we put in at others of these islands where the rajah's word is law."

McMasters usually listened to his mate; this time his mind was doggedly

set. "The pearl is a gift from a queen—think of that. My boy, my big strapping Bob, is loved by that woman whose hand he never kissed. The pearl goes to him!"

"Ye ha' had a touch o' sun," Mike Monkey remarked; "you with your niblicks an' brassies an' putters an' foursomes an' drivers—instead ov log lines an' compass points an' drift an' declinations. Ye take no mark of us. We're going blindly, twa ton of good steam coal each watch, into the rajah's snare. He has a gunboat in these seas; he has spies everywhere; how can his queen give a gift to a healthy lieutenant, V. C., without incurrin' th' rajah's displeasure? D'ye think our own undersecretary won't take notice o' that?"

The Yankee mate lifted out the pearl from the sextant box and knuckled it like a boy playing marbles. "Looks like a white agate, skipper. Open a port-hole an' I'll pop it out."

"Nothing like that!" declared Micky. "We'll hide it."

"Where?" The mate looked around the cabin.

Micky's eyes followed Landyard's until they both stared at the golf bag. "There!" Micky decided. "We'll put it in a golf ball!"

Mike Monkey's red hair bristled indignantly. "In a golf ball! I said ye were in your dotage from sun. How can you put that agate inside a ball?"

"Bring me a safety-razor blade and some good glue, Mike. Have you got any strong adhesive in the engine-room?"

"I've fish glue."

"Strong?"

"I used it t' mend a cracked gauge glass once."

"That'll do; go get it."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HIDING PLACE.

GRUMBLING, Mike Monkey went on deck, and returned to the cabin with a bottle of rank-smelling glue. Luckily there was no acid in the soiled golf ball that Landyard and Micky McMasters had divided into halves

by the time the engineer closed the cabin companion, after taking a squint toward the wheelsman and the members of the watch, who had gathered forward.

The finished job of hollowing out the golf ball, inserting the pearl, gluing the halves and binding the ball with many turns of cord so that it could set without showing a trace of the cut, occupied the time between two bells.

Then McMasters said to the engineer: "Go forrard and bring me a piece of emery cloth!"

"Wot for?"

"I want to clean off the ball when it dries."

"Ye want a London District Messenger aboard this packet, instead of an engineer wi' three certificates. Get your own emery cloth; try a bit o' shark's skin!" And then Mike Monkey climbed on deck and banged shut the companion slide.

The skipper retaliated that evening by jangling the engine-room telegraph until Mike Monkey coated the quarter-deck with red-hot cinders and had the freighter's funnel glowing like a fat cigar. All the night through the *Melrose* drove on. The dawn brought out one speck on the horizon's rim—a danger in the shape of a gunboat that bore the crescent flag of Sarawak.

"Starboard," said Micky McMasters when he had lowered his sea glasses.

"Starbo'rd, sir," echoed the frightened wheelsman, who had swung the freighter's stern toward the gunboat.

"Steady, now," added the skipper. "Steady her there. Mr. Landyard, drop below and put the fear of death into Mike Monkey. Tell him we're all going to hang together."

Driving under forced steam the freighter, for a time, measured in moments of anxiety by those on board, held the gunboat at a safe distance. Then the overworked stokehole crew rounded on their tormentor, and ejected Mike Monkey through the engine-room companion. He stood leering toward the quarter-deck.

"My flock ha' mutinied," he said to Landyard. "Tell that miserable golf

player aft he better surrender th' pearl."

Landyard listened to the sounds that came from 'tween decks—scraping shovels, clanging doors, wild imprecations from angry natives. The ship's ventilators rang with anathema. "I'll go below," said Landyard. "They'll listen to me."

Micky McMasters came lunging up to the quarter-deck rail. "Stay away from that stokehole!" he shouted to Mike Monkey. "You're bad luck! We're losin' knots of speed by havin' you aboard."

The commander of the gunboat set from his bridge halyards an arrangement of three flags which all on board the *Melrose* believed to be a signal to stand by or take the consequences.

Whatever persuasion Landyard used in the stokehole was effective; the freighter regained its former speed. Land in the form of small islands came up out of a burning sea. Micky McMasters began cutting corners between these islands, trying with all his navigator's skill to elude the persistent gunboat. The *Melrose* grated over a shoal, dodged a coral reef, and squeezed her beam within a strait so narrow that the davits were brushed from the rails.

"Aracada lies over there," said Landyard to Mike Monkey. "Once at that port our course is run. We're heading into a trap."

"I said Micky was daft!"

"He's playing for night to come, Mike. If it don't come soon, we'll have to beach the ship or give up the pearl."

Reaching arms, the tips of the moon-shaped island of Aracada, appeared to starboard and port. Tropical palms thatched a jungle between the rays of the setting sun and the freighter. Dusk pearled and changed to gray softness; lights became visible; a red funnel of flame, followed by a rocket that arched the sky, was proof that the gunboat was still astern of the *Melrose*.

McMasters whispered an order to the wheelsman; the freighter spun and dipped lee rail under; she tried to draw along a shielding shore. The

gunboat's searchlight spotted this maneuver. McMasters tried another swing at the wheel; the *Melrose* went within combing surf, hung steady, came out and inched from danger.

This temporary setback to the gunboat gave McMasters time to call Landyard aft.

"We're all right," the captain said. "We'll send the pearl on its way to England yet."

"How, skipper?"

"You get ready to go over the side and swim for the beach. There's a jungle trail starting from that white kirk that leads to Port Togo on the northern side of the island. It's a long walk, but you can make it in a day or so. At Port Togo you'll find British ships. Give the pearl to the skipper of the first to leave for home. Tell him McMasters is sending it to Robert McMasters, V. C., King's Crescent, Richmond, London, West. Tell him that for me—and the pearl is safe."

CHAPTER V.

HIS CLEVER SUGGESTION.

AN uncharted sand spit, formed by the bar of a small tidal river—a grain of sand almost—proved the *Melrose's* undoing. The freighter, stern on to the beach, bow headed toward the lights of the port, struck, staggered, canted and came to a racking stop that jarred every bolt and nut in the racing engines. The stokehole crew, the engine-room force—one white man and three heathen oilers—emerged from 'tween decks amid a scalding cloud of released steam. The ship righted, held amidship by sucking sand and coral crags.

"The jig's up," Landyard told the skipper.

Micky McMasters shot a glance at the beach, not two hundred yards away; he wheeled and stared into the actinic light that came from the gunboat's direction.

"Ye got us into a pretty pickle," said Mike Monkey.

Spinning around, the captain pointed to the surf between the *Melrose* and the jungle's fringe. "You can swim

it!" he told the mate. "I'll get the ball. Strip to the skin, man. It's our only chance!"

This chance, before Micky climbed on deck with the ball, was lost when the gunboat came gliding nearer the freighter.

"We're a British ship!" McMasters roared through the cabin companionway. "England will hear of this outrage on the Union Jack!"

"Ye stole their pearl," Mike Monkey reminded him. "Better pull th' flag down."

"The beach——" McMasters hesitated. "The jungle—— We must get the pearl ashore before they search us."

Landyard measured the distance between the gunboat and the freighter's stern; it was not more than a mile. "They'll pick me off with rifles, skipper, if I try to swim ashore. It's too far to the beach to throw the ball. Perhaps their search, when they board us, won't be a thorough one."

"They'll scrape our skins!" The skipper wheeled and bumped into Mike Monkey. "What are you doing—grinning an' standing there? Out of my way!"

The engineer walked to a small hatch, lifted a "prayer book" in the shape of a diminutive holystone, and set it on one edge.

"Go below—bring up a golf club," said Mike Monkey; "set th' ball with the pearl in it on th' block of stone, an' make one ov those drives ye told us about, for th' beach. It's about twa ship's lengths. Ye got about one minute an' six seconds to do it in."

"Set th' ball adrift," proposed Landyard.

"Mike's idea is a better one." Micky McMasters lurched for the open cabin companionway, disappeared, and reappeared carrying his favorite driver, a heavy club, cord-wrapped on the handle. His hands shook when he steadied the ball on the prayer book and drew back for a drive. Landyard and Mike Monkey, watching, saw the little skipper's knees knock together in agitation.

"Loft 'er mon!" the engineer said. "It's your last chance—here comes that gunboat!"

A fierce white light illuminated the deck of the *Melrose*; creaking blocks indicated that the gunboat was lowering a boarding party.

"Fore!" Mike Monkey said. "Don't hit th' water or th' pearl will sink!"

Micky McMasters, who had faced death more than a score of times in his career, dropped the club and covered his face with his hands. "It is my boy's pearl," he said huskily. "Suppose I should lose it!"

Landyard, the mate, sensed the psychology of the captain's anxiety. "Let Mike Monkey make the drive," he suggested.

The engineer picked up McMasters' driver, and approached the ball. "I'm not given to wasting my time," he said, "but I can play a bit ov th' game myself—like my ancestors of th' heather."

The heavy driver described an upward swing, Mike Monkey's right knee bent; the club swished and met with an obstruction.

"See it go?" the engineer asked.

Landyard, the mate, had splendid eyes. "There she soars, up, up! Now she drops; she's hit the sand; there it rolls along the beach and between those two palms with another palm crossing like the letter 'H.'"

CHAPTER VI.

A COMPLETE SURPRISE.

THE longboat from the pursuing ship grated against the *Melrose's* side; a magnificent native came climbing over the rail, and salaamed to the astonished trio on the quarter-deck. "The under-secretary!" exclaimed Micky McMasters. "What brought you after us?"

"The Queen of Sarawak sent me," explained the native. "She wants you to give your son, Robert, this box, without you opening it. Too bad you did not stop when we first signaled you. That is all, captain." The native removed his turban, handed McMasters a tiny, inlaid box, salaamed once more and left the ship.

McMasters went aft and leaned over the taffrail. "Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed. "If I haven't been all kinds of a confounded fool! I might have known that they wanted to do my boy honor."

The gunboat was a speck in the distance when the captain turned and shouted to Landyard and Mike Monkey. "We'll go ashore and get that golf ball. Lower the dinghy."

Searching vainly all that day and a part of the next McMasters, Mike Monkey, and Landyard were forced to admit themselves beaten. The golf ball had been lost in the thick snake grass at the fringe of the jungle.

"I told ye so at the beginning," said Mike Monkey sadly. "Golf is a game that you win if you can find the ball after you hit it. That ball's gone!"

Returning to the *Melrose*, McMasters set about to get the freighter off the sand reef. He had part of the cargo shifted; the engines backed and were raced forward; the ship slid into deeper water.

"Ye better cut no more corners," said Mike Monkey.

Two bells out from shore the skipper awakened the ship by bounding up the cabin ladder and charging forward. "I just had to peek into that small box," he told Mike and the mate. "There is a note in it what says: 'I am sending you another pearl that matches the first. They are matched—they should go as one gift. Love from a queen in Sarawak!'"

McMasters thrust out his hand and showed his companions a round, pink pearl.

"We lose one, but we go home with another. Won't Bob be proud of us?"

The Place To Be

COUNSEL: "Now, tell me, where did he kiss you?"

Plaintiff: "On the lips, sir."

Counsel: "No, no; you don't understand. I mean, where were you?"

Plaintiff (blushing): "In his arms, sir."



Man of the Moment

By Walter E. Grogan



IT began at the time Byrwin Trent was in the full tide of his popularity. A revolution, quiet, decisive, had upset a tyrannic dictatorship with a minimum of gunpowder, and had placed in the presidency an honest man, Stephen Riaz. He was sound, capable, trusted, but of no brilliant parts; a man, it seemed, of solid, prosaic, unheroic virtues; a good administrator—he had held a portfolio in a previous ministry—but never regarded as an aspirant to the troubled honors of a president of a minor republic.

His secretary was Byrwin Trent—the adventurous American about whom clung a host of vague, disturbing rumors. One more unjust tax by Glefano, the president, a sudden vitriolic opposition by Riaz, unexpected in that quarter and surprisingly well done, a stirring of public indignation, and the thing was accomplished. Opinion pointed to Trent as the instigator—the brain and the courage that had supported Riaz. Opinion was right.

You have, then, Byrwin Trent, an outstanding personality of Ranico, the capital, that city of broad streets and handsome houses set on a hill. People pointed him out—he was a fine figure on

horseback—told legends of him, called him the inspirer of Riaz.

Diana Newton saw him first from her balcony. He rode a little behind Riaz—a contrast to that short sack of a man.

“Who is that?” she asked. “The man following Riaz? He sits his horse like a conqueror.”

“He is,” was the answer.

They explained how he pulled the strings for the puppet Riaz—a soulless plodder, they declared, until Trent lent him ambition.

“Why does he not ride first?” cried Diana, her face aflame.

To her it seemed unworthy that the man was not crowned with the laurels he had won. To let this thick dolt of a lawyer wear the triumph! Why?

She had contempt for the ungainly lawyer, now ruler. Appearances weigh greatly with a girl. And she was all girl, full of enthusiasm; and, as a girl, having enthusiasm only for the presentable. Trent was one to take the eye—especially at a distance. The lines round the fine, challenging eyes were not then discernible; or the weakness of his too-finely chiseled mouth.

“One hears——”

They would have told her current

gossip with the zest of those who have derogatory information to impart.

"One hears!" She caught them up, her voice full of scorn. "What does one not hear? An angel would be smirched if he came to redeem the country. He has done a great thing. It is the man who does, not he who talks."

She thought a moment. Riaz knew her, had known her father to his own advantage, and was not ungrateful. There was to be a ball to-night.

"I shall ask Riaz to present me," she said. "He dances?"

"If you had not been away these last two months, you would know how divinely he dances." This intelligence was femininely emphatic. "One treasures a dance from him as a gift from Heaven."

She accepted all good qualities for him with enthusiasm. But another man had come into her life—Paul Wood, who was clean-built, brown-haired, capable. He had not the brilliance of Trent. He was quiet, self-contained, apt to be brusque, a granite man; but sterling. He had the respect of men who were white. That is eloquent. He was the only son of a New Yorker who found the silver in Hartaguador, the little republic on the frontier of Mexico. The Elsená Mines became his when his father died. It was then that he felt free to speak to Diana Newton. Before he had been merely manager of a struggling export firm, insecure, even in that position.

Probably he spoke too late. A year previously he had done her a service, and she had been grateful. It was a prosaic matter—some capital of hers in the hands of an unscrupulous financier redeemed by his cold astuteness. In the warmth of her feeling she had been malleable; but at that time he and his father had been estranged, and his succession to the silver mines was by no means sure.

"If I could only show how deeply I feel!" Her glorious eyes had been luminous. She had the grace and the dark beauty of her Spanish mother.

"I am glad to have had the oppor-

tunity of being of service," he had replied, with lowered eyes.

She had the sense of a rebuff.

II.

AT the ball, half shielded by a curtain, Diana saw Paul Wood and Trent side by side. Trent was all animation—a handsome face that spoke as well as his tongue, an eye that flashed and gloomed, a smile that came and went like sunshine on a flickering day. Wood, stolid, serious, seeming heavy by contrast, was at a discount. Trent stood for high romance, Wood for prosaic security.

Riaz heard her request to be introduced, and an inscrutable look came into his eyes. "My secretary?" he mused. "You wish him introduced?"

"He is the man of the hour."

Her tone was indifferent. Riaz watched her eyes, though. There was more of interest there.

"Yes; of the hour." He paused.

"And after the hour?"

"You fear trouble?" she asked, puzzled.

"For me—no. I am in the saddle. I sit solid. I remain. But Trent!" He took her hand, held it as might an elderly relation kinder than most. "His record——"

"Scandal from you, señor?" She had scorn and rebuke for him.

"Not scandal, Diana. I have to learn the men I trust."

"But you trust him?" she flashed back.

"As far as he trusts himself. A man of moments. A meteor. He has achieved a great thing in this well-nigh bloodless revolution. But I am the security for the country. A plain man for everyday wear. Life is not a necklace of supreme moments. He came to Ranico penniless."

"And worked a miracle. Superlative man!"

"Because I understood." A cryptic smile twitched his lips. His voice dropped to a more serious note: "I will not introduce him."

"The man who made you!" Her indignation was cutting.

"Is he? One chooses one's tools. Your father was a friend whose memory I keep here." He laid a fat hand on his left breast. "For his sake I refuse."

"There are others who will."

She rose, dwarfing him in the blaze of indignant beauty. As she spoke she beckoned imperiously to Paul Wood over the head of Riaz.

"You will remember that I refused," Riaz said and moved aside.

It was an irony of fate that selected Wood as the introducer of Trent. He hesitated a moment, but the flash of her eyes was compelling. The introduction made, he seemed suddenly shut out. He had no trick of self-assertion. And that day, back from his possessive visit to the Elsenia Mines, he had determined to speak to her. He had a quick apprehension that Trent would be a rival.

Trent played the hero, feasting his eyes upon Diana's rare beauty. In Ranico women complained that he had no heart but a thousand courtesies. In truth, no one had made an impression, although rumor had it that he had not always been so unsusceptible. Now in a moment he was at her feet. She noted the sudden fire in his eyes and thrilled to it. Trent played the hero consummately. There was no braggadocio. He made little of his work in rousing the country.

"They are capable of sudden devotions," he said. "One strikes a flint, and they are tinder."

"True steel," she commented.

"At least, it was for their own salvation."

He brushed aside her murmured comment, but his eyes told her that it was not unnoticed.

"And you are content to be the shadow behind the throne?" she asked.

"Riaz has more solid virtues than I," he replied in a soberer note. "He is a maker of laws."

"And you a breaker of tyrannies." She gave him a smile.

"Not all—nor wishful to be. There are some one would covet."

His electric-blue eyes were more elo-

quent than his lips. They were magnetic. They called to her.

"Some?" she echoed, compelled to a daring she feared.

She had a pulse dancing. Of such were the heroes of romance.

"One," he answered softly.

III.

TO Paul Wood, later, Diana listened with an odd wonder at what tonight would have been had he spoken earlier. She had some stir of her former feeling for him, that quiet sense that a woman might be secure with him. He had no phrases for the decking of his love—a halting tongue stumbling over words—but there was no disguising the honesty of his emotion.

He was pale, he looked a little awkward, her eye took notice, so recently filled with the ease and grace of Trent, but there was something of regret in her voice when she dismissed him. One could be so sure of his unalterable love. He was a rock, granite, unchangeable. He had waited to be sure of his position. That had its appeal for her, although she wondered he knew so little of women. A man should be masterful. In old days slaves had loved queens and dared to tell them so.

"If I had spoken before?"

The question was out before the quick following desire to stifle it.

She looked away. Who can tell a woman's thoughts, half thoughts, breaths upon the mirror of her brain? Riaz, despite her contempt for his apparent jealousy of Trent, had left something of warning. Paul Wood stood for security. There would be no tremors with him and no glamour. That was the pity of it. Young life called for color.

"I do not know," she replied.

That answered him. He knew that his silence had lost him his supreme desire. A bitter knowledge!

Trent's wooing was tempestuous. The girl was caught up in the whirl of it, unprotesting. In a fortnight they were betrothed. Something of his buoyant mood fell from him at her surrender. He stared out at the night.

"Heaven make me worthy of you!" he said in a deeper tone, awed, and, conveying to her ear a hint of doubt.

"Worthy!" Riaz and his warning made her stress her belief in an effort to stifle the memory.

"Who am I?" she returned. "And you, Byrwin, the savior of this people! It is you who must make *me* worthy, teach me to reach the high things, to feel with you the glow of purpose that makes of life the glorious thing you make it. Oh, my dear—my dear—I am a woman and weak!"

"Weak?" He held her hand, but his eyes were for the sky. "I wonder if you know? You have heard stories about me?"

"I am deaf to them," she answered, but apprehension stirred a little.

"Some are true. But my love for you will redeem me. I count on that." His tone grew more hopeful. "I have lived in the lower world; you are something from heaven. There is a strain of weakness in me. But enough of that. What I can do, you have seen. It shall be, it *must* be with your help, the level on which in future I live. No more falls."

He squared his shoulders, looking at her with a smile.

Her face whitened. He had borne himself so heroically before, a conqueror, a breathless, imperious lover. Here he was suddenly on a beseeching note, asking strength of her.

"You who made Riaz president ask help of me!" She laughed to reassure herself. "What new phase is this, Byrwin mine? The conqueror kneeling in the dust!"

"Riaz is a better man than I. He lasts." He was moody again.

Thereafter, for a month, he was an ideal lover, an ideal man. There were no more gloomy half glances at hidden weakness. He was at once delightfully masterful and delightfully slavish. He had a whimsical side that made for laughter. He was generous also. He had praise for Paul Wood.

"A man of men," he declared. "Where were your eyes, dear? He worships you. One might trust a life

to him and have no fear. But you are mine. Be sure I hold you."

"No need to hold. I am at your side."

She gave her eyes to him. These were moods in which he riveted her heart to him.

Then came whispers of gambling. She overheard something at a presidential reception.

Two days later he came to her, contrite. "It is in my blood. But this is the last time."

He reiterated that. With her help, her inspiration! He felt smirched at having fallen, but never again. He entreated forgiveness. He, the conqueror, her hero! She began to readjust her conception of him. There was a coolness and a reconciliation. He had persuasive powers.

"I do not like a gambler," she said. "It must be the last time, Byrwin."

"On my soul, on my honor, on my love of you!"

He drew a picture of conquering weakness for her sake.

The next day Trent handled an incipient mutiny of the police with skill and bravery. The press eulogized him. He had ridden up to leveled carbines. He had not hesitated to shoot the ring-leader in front of the men. The mutiny was squashed. A man of complexities! Lath and steel! She recalled his "Riaz lasts." Was he a man of moments? Then came an ugly rumor of State money and a gambling debt. She taxed him with it.

"It does not exist," he assured her. He had a fine indignation that sounded to her keener ears a little forced. Riaz said the same—mentioning the rumor. "The State funds remain as they were to a dollar," he told her, in case she had heard the flying story.

Her proud answer was, "I have faith; it is higher than slime can climb." But her heart had qualms in quieter moments. She had seen Byrwin with Paul Wood. And a gossip said: "Is Paul Wood going into politics? I thought him honest. But he has given Riaz's secretary a handsome *pourboire*." She flashed her anger. Trent was above

bribery, and she taxed her informant's proof.

He had none, apologized, was abject. He had not known of her association with Byrwin—deaf, he had not caught her name.

At home, brooding, her fears increased. She put the matter to Trent baldly. "You can explain. I know that. But it hurts that tales should gain currency."

She entreated him for reassurance. A bad sign when faith requires bolstering.

"Wood lent me money. A prince of men. The time you know—I have not played since. Not for big stakes."

"Paul Wood lent you money."

The knowledge hurt her. Had Byrwin traded on Paul's love for her? She brushed aside the thought as unjust. But already she could imagine flaws in the paragon.

IV.

THEN came the time when an urgent message summoned Diana to an old servant, a faithful friend who had nursed her father. The village lay some way out of Ranico, and these were times when a woman could not ride far alone. The message came when Paul Wood was in her house—he had some business of investment for her. She sent him posthaste for Trent.

It was then an early hour of the morning. He had difficulty. Trent occupied a suite in the official house of the president. He was not there. His man, a Filipino, grinned. His master had not been home all night. Wood found grin and information eloquent. He ran his quarry down in a gambling hell. Trent was in a hopeless drunken stupor. A pitiable spectacle! Certainly he could not sit a horse. Paul returned to Diana with some vague story of a state engagement which Trent could not break. She had raised eyebrows for that. Her message had been imperative. She rang up Riaz. There was no engagement.

"What is the truth?" she demanded.

Her wrath was for Wood. She looked regal, her eyes blazing. Wood

stammered, looking, as an honest man often does, transparently guilty. He had surmised that Trent was engaged as he had not found him at his suite, he said. His man had declared him absent.

She was about to speak again, there was lightning in her eye, thunder on her brow, when a second message came with news of the servant's death. She was melted, dissolved in tears, a real sorrow.

Something of the real truth leaked out. Trent shamed, repentant, confessed to a part.

"I am not worthy." He stood against the sunlight on her window, handsome, even noble. "Diana, I give you back your promise although it stabs my heart. I have fallen again. If we were married—I want your nearness to help. To see you when I will, to hear you, to know that you are my partner. I am weak, but you would make me strong. But I give you back your promise."

She would have none of his renunciation. "I have promised. My father never broke a promise. I am his daughter." She had an uplift of her head for that. She thought. "He may have the more need for me. He owns to weakness. But he is confident that he can beat it down with my help."

After Trent had gone she sat a long time with drooped head, musing. Possibly it was then that a half regret was born. She, as all women, had the mother instinct. Byrwin was a brilliant, weak, wayward child. She was enamored of her power to help him. But if she had not been so precipitate! She was the prey of some sad thoughts.

Twice she heard—in Ranico gossip resounded—of Paul Wood's aiding Byrwin. Wood said nothing of it to her, but her heart warmed to him. Then Riaz went visiting state neighbors, carrying with him his secretary.

During the time a crisis in Diana's financial investments led to a close association with Paul Wood. She saw more clearly his sterling qualities, recognized that here was a man who might give a woman happiness. A man who was loyal, unalterable. She thought of

him as a rock. In his devotion to her he had not swerved. Such a man would not require to be strengthened by a woman. An unquieting rumor concerning Trent was again in the wind. Weak, so weak out of her sight! She sighed. For the first time she wondered whether her love would be sufficient. She visualized stern battles. Yet her hand was to the plow, and she would not waver.

The Elsená Mines required the urgent attention of Wood, who rode off a couple of days before the triumphant return of Riaz, and with him Trent. Riaz had his testimony for Trent—to him alone was due the praise.

Diana heard of this, had a sense of pride and a sigh for the weakness that went hand in hand with so much brilliance. It would be her task to strengthen him. Her task! When in the young days of romance a woman recognizes a task the future is clouded, fraught with certain forebodings. Diana's eyes were shadowed, looking out over the broad, glittering, sunlit world.

It was in the quick dusk of the semi-tropics that Trent came to her. Half eager, he was half ashamed.

A schoolboy, she thought, uncertain of his reception. Was she already his taskmistress? He would ruffle it with others—no uncertainty with them.

"My heart has been here each moment," he declared.

His manner was perfect, warm, yet with that touch of respect she knew he had for none else.

"And your brain with you," she returned with a smile, a compliment to his tactful handling of difficult matters when a-journeying.

"I am nothing without you," he protested. "Brain, yes. The cold organ. But I want the nearness of you—to live." The ardor of his eyes died at the slowness of response in hers. "You have heard," he said, crestfallen, "that I fell again?"

"One tries not to believe," she answered sadly.

"If you were always with me," he protested, "you would be a pillar." At

that he stared at the veiled landscape and the growing beauty of the night sky. Was it true? He began to see himself as hopeless. Yet he clung to his love for her. That was new, a passion he had never felt before. Strong, surely strong enough to hold him! Was it?

Later he spoke of trouble with bandits. They had overwhelmed some police.

"They swoop down from the mountains and are gone before we can make disposals. We have harried them lately, and they are in a waspish mood. Pinched, no doubt! They are after silver—the universal bait. I would have sent troops, but——" He shrugged his shoulders. "There are so many officials to consult. Time is essential. That is the worst of it. They are already on the Perena road."

They were in the veranda. She looked up quickly.

"Paul is on his way to his mines," she said. There was a breathlessness about her words that caught Trent's ear.

"That is bad," he answered.

He asked her quickly as to the length of time he had been gone. Was he riding alone?—practical questions.

"I will send a messenger."

"Can he be trusted?" There was doubt in her voice. "They have their spies here."

"I will go." In a flash he had made his resolve.

"If you would!" Her anxiety quivered in her voice. "Is there danger to you?"

"No." He brushed that aside. "I shall overtake him before he can meet the rebels."

"If they met him?"

"Ah! Paul is no friend of theirs. They have sworn to even matters with him. But I can overtake him. Have no fear."

"I have none if you undertake it," she replied.

He laughed. How much of that was trust in him, how much relief for Paul?

Suddenly he had his arms around her, straining her form to his breast, his lips

for her eyes, her hair, her lips. Her response was slight. She drew back when he released her. Never before had he been passionate. She showed her trouble in tear-clouded eyes.

"Forgive me!" he cried, exaltation rather than supplication in his voice. "I carry a sense of you into the night. You are not awake, Diana—not yet. Perhaps——" The mood fell from him suddenly. He sighed. "I am not worthy of you, Diana, but Heaven knows I love you—love you! If that be my last word to you, believe it true."

Then he was gone.

V.

TRENT'S horse was white with sweat when he reined in at a rambling bungalow. Some way back he had come across a horse with a broken fore-leg and a bullet hole behind its ear. That sight had spurred him. He guessed at Wood's misfortune.

Trent called. Paul Wood appeared on the veranda. Trent dismounted, tethered his horse to an upright.

"Alone, Trent?" Wood asked. His face was strained, set.

"Alone. You, too?"

"Yes. My horse set his leg in a hole. I put the brute out of his misery. I came on here. The owner was just riding off, mad—frightened. Caporo's men"—he named the gang of bandits—"are in the scrub three miles off."

"He left you?"

"Yes. You had better follow suit."

Byrwin Trent had a glance of admiration for Wood. The man was wonderful. He knew the treatment Caporo's crew would give him, but he spoke without a tremor.

There were two men and one horse, and that tired. And in Ranico a woman waited. Trent breathed heavily. She had sent him to save Paul. She and Paul had always been friends. And Paul was the better man. He thought quickly. Even now the glamour was fading out of Diana's romance. He had sensed that. She would be true to him and try to save him from himself. Yet in the first flush of the love he bore her

he had been weak. The bad strain held good. What did they say, "A man of moments." He looked back toward Ranico and smiled.

"Take my horse, Paul," He called him Paul for the first time. "Get back as quickly as you can."

"And leave you!" Wood laughed shortly. "That is impossible. I love Diana, and she loves you. You go back, Trent. I have had hard thoughts of you, but you are brave, by the living gods you are brave!"

Then Trent lied—lied magnificently. "You fool!" he cried. "I am here to meet Caporo. It was to be secret, but you have blundered on it. I trust to you to keep it secret. The government is not anxious for it to be known that we treat with bandits. Ride off, Wood. Your presence will spoil all. Three of Caporo's band were shot at the Elsenia Mines when you organized the defense. One was Caporo's son. Caporo has sworn to torture you. If you be caught here with me, then I——" He shrugged his shoulders. "They will not want a witness."

"Is this true?" Wood demanded. Yet the lying carried conviction.

"Should I give my life for yours?" Trent smiled.

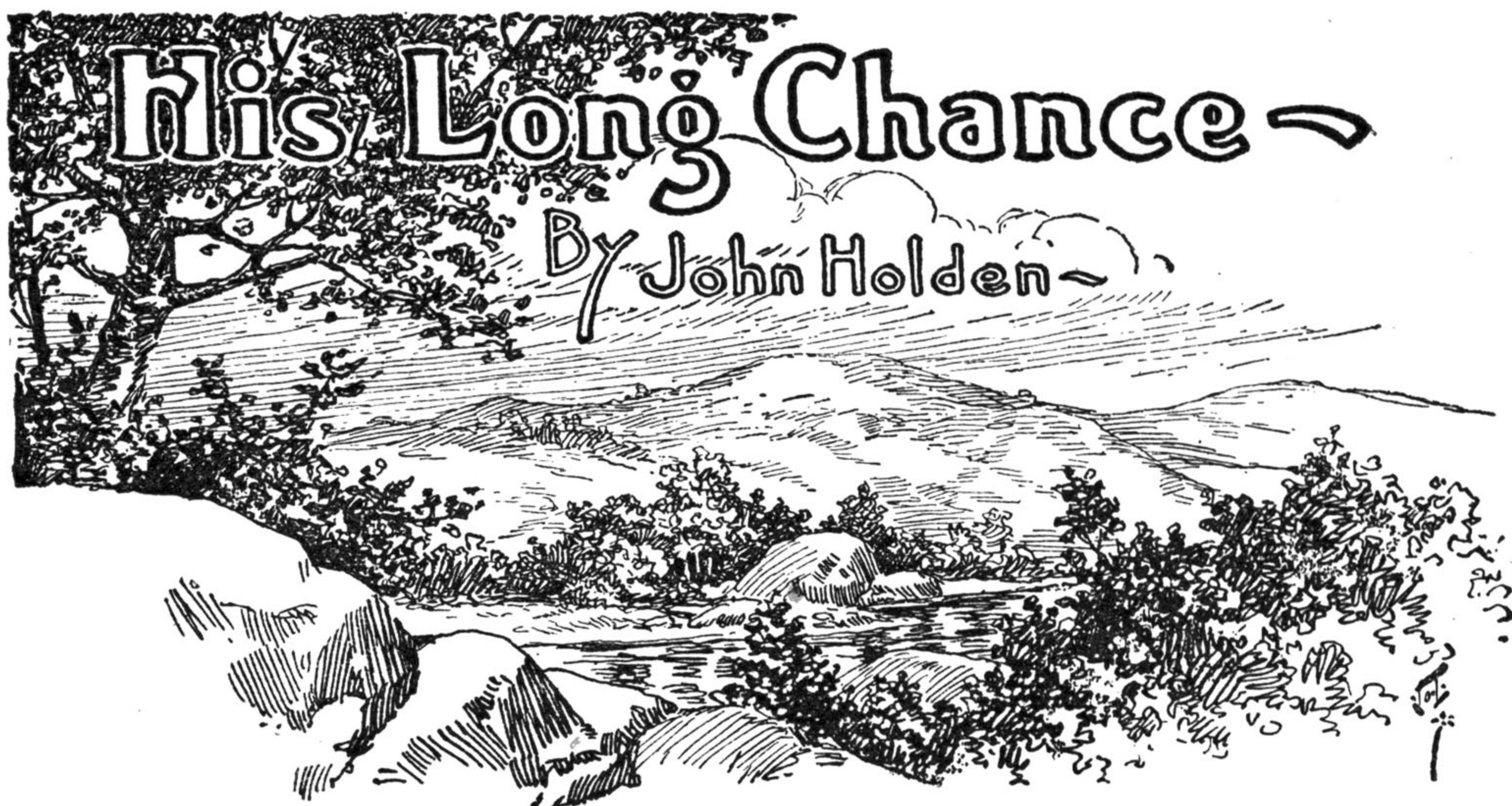
"You are to marry Diana. No." Then after a pause Wood added: "A dirty business parleying with cut-throats."

"You do not understand the higher politics," Trent smiled.

He gave Wood a note to Diana. In it he explained that his rival believed that he, Trent, was in no danger. "But I know and am glad. I should have brought you misery, my weakness is full grown, a gnawing, implacable devil. I send you security. Paul is the better man. Adios!"

For a long while after Wood had vanished down the road, Byrwin Trent stood looking toward Ranico.

"Adios, Diana!" he said. "I could not live and be worthy of you; but I can face disaster, even death, so that you shall not be ashamed to think sometimes of me."



CHAPTER I.

A LUCKY STEP.

HE need not have ridden into Two-Dot on a freight train; Arthur Kane was not a hobo. It happened that he was merely an Eastern young man knocking around the Western States in search of employment more congenial and promising than book-keeping. He possessed a five-dollar bill, and a fraction of that amount would have paid his fare from Maverick, where he had worked three days in a grain elevator.

Elevating grain did not seem to be Kane's forte, nor was Maverick the sort of town he wanted to tie to for life, so he had decided to move on. But not on cushions. When one had left the so-called prosaic East to seek adventure in the so-called romantic West, riding on cushions seemed tame, commonplace.

Thus far Kane had encountered no adventure worth putting in his home newspaper. But as his train rolled into the division yards at Two-Dot it seemed that his longing for a thrill might at last be gratified. He had alighted from his side-door Pullman and was engaged in whisking himself with a large and capable hand when he sighted what was undoubtedly a minion of the law.

So far as he knew, Kane had no reason to fear a constable. Neverthe-

less some instinct told him that it might be just as well to avoid the law. Its representative did not resemble a big-town cop. He wore no uniform. But he did wear a large shield and an expression of authority, and these were sufficient to send Kane around the end of the freight car and in the general direction of uptown.

It was very early in the morning. A night mist still hung like gauze over the town, and only on the horizon did a few faint wisps of golden flame herald the approach of a new day. But there was light enough for Kane to see, as he looked apprehensively over his shoulder, that the limb of the law had sighted him. The limb stood tickling his chin and watching Kane, as though in doubt as to the newcomer's status; then, slowly, as though he had nothing better to do, he came sauntering along after the adventure seeker.

Kane did not like the sensation of being sauntered after. He had sought adventure, true; but now that adventure, in the form of a heavyweight policeman, seemed to be seeking him, he felt uncomfortable.

In vain he told himself that he had done nothing wrong. His rôle of quarry, as he gradually quickened his stride uptown, became increasingly disagreeable. He still maintained his pose of casual pedestrianism, but the casual part of it was growing difficult. He

wanted to run. But only criminals ran from authority, and he was no criminal. At least he hoped he was not.

Come to think of it, he could not be sure. He had heard of some queer laws having been passed by certain Wyoming towns. He wanted to turn a corner and hide, but that would not do either. It would be a sort of confession of guilt. Kane reflected, as he walked faster and faster, that he had never seen a lockup from the inside and it would be just as well to keep his record clear.

He had about decided to stand still and make some remark about the beauty of the morning to the approaching cop, when an odd sight met his eyes. Half a block farther on, a number of men were standing in line. He looked at the line and from it to his leisurely pursuer, and an idea came to him.

Kane did not know why the men were standing there and he did not care. It might be a bread line, or a group of recruits for missionary service in Timbaktu. Whatever kind of a line it was, he felt an increasingly keen desire to join it, for it would afford a refuge for a man who seemed to be for the moment under suspicion. Therefore, he dropped in at the end of the row of men and stood there. Presently the man behind the shield of authority approached and stood directly in front of him.

"Didn't I see you hop off that there freight train that just pulled in?" The constable's voice was gentle. One could tell at a glance that he was one of those kind-hearted persons who are grieved by the necessity of inflicting pain upon others.

Kane looked up in a docile manner. "Yes, sir—but it was only because I had to. I would never have arrived in Two-Dot in time if I had walked. And if I hadn't got here when I did, chances are I would not have been able to get in on a good thing like this."

The constable was visibly impressed. He tickled his chin again. "Well, I don't know as I blame you. It's a chance of a lifetime all right. I almost wish I had resigned my job so I could

take advantage of it m'self. So we'll say no more about you stealing a ride from the railroad. But don't do it again; not around Two-Dot. Good luck to you, an' I hope you get a good one." The constable strolled off.

Kane took a deep breath. "Well, that's that," he muttered with relief. "The next question is, what am I in for? He hoped I'd get a good one. Good what? Well, it's up to me to wait and see."

CHAPTER II.

HOLDING THE LINE.

KANE looked at the men ahead of him and at two newcomers who had joined the line behind him. They were not bread-liners; that much was certain. A few were dressed in town style, with white collars and ties; but most of them were attired, like Kane, in the easier clothes of ranch workers. All of them wore serious expressions. Kane noted that the newcomers and the man ahead of him were regarding him with mixed wonder and suspicion. He waited until the kindly constable had proceeded beyond hailing distance, then he turned to the men behind.

"Do you mind telling me what all these people are doing here?" he asked.

His neighbors did not answer immediately. They looked Kane over from head to foot, and then they exchanged significant glances. The man ahead, who wore a pressed suit, a white collar and a dignified expression, sniffed audibly.

"What's the big secret?" pursued Kane.

His rear neighbor found his voice. "You actually mean to say, stranger, that you don't know why you took a place in this line?"

"If I knew I wouldn't ask," answered Kane, smiling.

"He doesn't know!" His neighbor exclaimed this in the manner of one who addresses the world at large.

The man in front sniffed again. "Since it appears that you got into this line by accident, you should not be allowed to stay," he said. "It was never intended that hobos should be allowed

to benefit. What the community wants is men of character and industry."

Kane gave this man a searching look. "Who says I'm not a man of character and industry?" he inquired. "You assume that I'm a hobo? One swallow does not make a summer; one ride on the rods does not make a man a hobo."

The white-collared one seemed impressed by Kane's language—that of an educated man. "Just the same," he said, "it's a shame that a person who dropped into line merely to avoid the law should be given what amounts to a small fortune."

Kane stared at him. "What's that? Small fortune? Say that again, please."

But the man would not say it again. He turned disdainfully away and shrugged his shoulders.

Kane turned to the chap behind him. "What did he mean by giving me a fortune?" he asked.

The other man grinned in a friendly manner. "It's like this, buddy. You're in front of the United States land office. The government has cut out some agricultural land from the Big Horn Forest Reserve, and at nine o'clock it will be open to homestead entry. I suppose you know all about government homesteads?"

Kane shook his head. "The only kind of homestead I know anything about is the kind that old people get ejected from when they can't meet a mortgage, and it's only on the perpendicular stage—I mean the movies—that I've seen even that kind. You see, I'm from an Eastern city—the kind of bird that you Westerners call a tenderfoot, I guess."

The men behind Kane laughed; the one in front regarded him with increased disapproval.

Kane's informant continued: "A Western homestead grant is considerably different from that. It's a quarter-section of government land that any American citizen can file on. The man who files must live on his homestead a certain length of time and make certain improvements, and then he gets a free title to it. That's why all these people are standing in line. They want to file

on this government land that's just been thrown open for entry. It's good land, only ten miles from town. The first man in line gets first choice, and so on down the line."

Kane's face showed his amazement. "You mean I can get a lot of land for nothing? Just for living on it?"

"Sure—a hundred and sixty acres."

"Good land that one can grow wheat and cabbages and things on?"

"You bet you can grow things on it."

"It seems too good to be true!"

"It isn't, though."

"A farm—worth real money—for nothing!" Kane took off his hat and fanned himself. "And I was beginning to think the good fairies were all on strike. They *are* in the East."

"There's plenty of opportunity out this way."

"It certainly looks like it."

Kane's delight seemed to annoy the man in front. "I wouldn't shout about your good luck just yet," he said. "How do you know you can make good on a homestead? Think of what you've got to do—build a house to live in, buy horses and ranch implements, fence your place. Where are you going to get the money to do all that?"

Kane began to wonder where it would come from, when the man behind spoke up.

"Aw, bunk!" he exclaimed. "He don't have to build a house at first; just a shack. He don't have to buy horses; he can hire his work done. He don't have to get his place fenced right away. And on top of all that, he don't need to take up his residence on his homestead for six months, and during that time he can earn money."

"I never saw a hobo yet that could stick to a homestead long enough to gain title to it," returned the pessimist.

Kane was about to make a heated reply, but controlled himself. "As I told you before, I'm not a hobo," he said to the man quite calmly. Then he turned his back on the croaker. He wanted nothing to do with such spirits. He wanted to bask in the golden sunlight that now flooded the sidewalk and reflect upon his glorious good fortune in

thus finding the opportunity that he sought.

Land of his own! He realized now that a ranch was the one thing that he wanted most. He did not doubt his ability to win title to a homestead any more than he doubted the warmth of the sunshine. Two-Dot looked like a nice, clean town, too. It was the kind of community he had been looking for. Here he would take root and become a solid citizen.

But not, it appeared, if the croaker could help it. The fellow broke into Kane's pleasant reverie with another annoying question. "Since you seem determined to try your luck on a homestead, may I ask you who you are and where you came from?" he questioned, with a grimace of distaste as he again surveyed Kane.

His supercilious air was distinctly annoying, but Kane kept his temper and sense of humor. "Who am I?" he said. "Let me see. Why, I'm Pierpont Morgan's favorite nephew. Don't tell anybody. They might not let me have a homestead."

His sarcasm was not without effect. "You *look* like it," retorted the other. "Chances are you haven't got even the ten-dollar filing fee that you'll need when you step into the land office."

This was something of a blow for Kane. His face showed it. His tormentor was not slow to note the havoc he had wrought. He laughed sneeringly.

"Too bad, tenderfoot," he said. "Cheer up, though. You may get another chance at a good homestead in ten or fifteen years."

Kane made no reply. If only he could borrow five dollars. He had a pawnable suit case at the express station, but he had no time to get it and take it to a pawnshop, even if he could hire some passer-by to hold his place in line for him. The land office was due to open in a few minutes. He turned to the men back of him.

"I've got five dollars," he said, "but not ten. Could either of you men lend me five?"

The sun was warm, but not warm

enough to dissipate the chilliness that suddenly sprang up.

"Ten dollars is all I've got with me," said the first man.

"I'd like to oblige you," said the second, "but I'm married and I'm starting with almost nothing, and the old lady would scalp me if I loaned money to a stranger. Stick around, though. Something may turn up."

"Why don't you ask *me*?" suggested the man in front.

"I don't want the land badly enough for that," Kane answered. "Thank you, all the same."

The other's face flushed with anger. Kane retained his place in the line, hoping against hope that something would happen to enable him to take advantage of this opportunity to acquire government land that might never occur again.

The sun rose higher. Kane's hopes sank lower. Prosperous looking men appeared on the street on their way to business, but none of them looked kind-hearted enough to lend money to a stranger. Kane racked his brain for a plan to get possession of five dollars immediately, but in vain. It looked as though his golden opportunity must be allowed to slip through his fingers.

He was almost ready to quit the line in disgust when something occurred that made him decide to hang on a few minutes longer. A girl came up the street on horseback—the sort of girl Kane told himself that he had been wanting to meet all his life. He looked at her and her thoroughbred mount, and decided that at least there was no necessity for him to quit in plain sight of her. He would wait until she had passed.

In a moment he was very pleasantly surprised to see the girl stop her horse directly opposite him.

CHAPTER III.

TWO BIG SURPRISES.

KANE fancied that the girl was about to speak to him, but he was mistaken. She looked at him, true enough, but she looked at every one else in the line, too. The effect upon all the wait-

ing men, young and old, was practically the same. All stood more erect and looked more cheerful.

Kane did not wonder at that. It was plain that she was not only an exceedingly attractive girl but a person of some consequence. In her modishly tailored riding togs, she presented a decidedly pleasing picture. Of medium stature, lithe and athletic, her delicate features and wonderfully expressive eyes outmatched those of any girl he had ever known. Kane was absolutely certain of that.

"Good morning, Mr. Gayde," the girl said, and the croaker in front of Kane was transformed into sunshine on the instant.

"Why, Miss Barnard," he said, "I never dreamed that you'd be along to wish me luck."

Kane felt foolish. That she should speak to that fellow, of all persons!

"Oh, I wish luck to every man in the line." She smiled upon all of them.

Kane liked this. Perhaps this Gayde person—evidently that was the fellow's name—did not stand so tremendously well with her after all. He looked down at his baggy trousers and decided that free and easy attire has its disadvantages. He fingered his unbarbered chin and wished that he had shaved that morning instead of the previous afternoon. Also he regretted his lack of five dollars more keenly than before. With a good homestead in his possession, he might be able some day to get acquainted with this extremely interesting young woman. He sighed a little as she looked past him at Gayde. This seemed to be his day for missing things.

Gayde was making good use of his opportunity. "You know, Miss Barnard—" Evidently he did not wish the whole line to know what Miss Barnard knew. He leaned over to whisper to her, on her horse, so that, while his one foot remained in line, the rest of him was out of line. He said something to her and she laughed.

That laugh evidently played havoc with Gayde's common sense, as well it might; so that, probably without realizing what he was doing, he leaned

closer to her and removed from its position his one foot that still remained in line. Now he was definitely and unmistakably out of line.

Her laugh affected Kane too. His gloom vanished. Being something of a practical joker, there flashed into his mind a plan by which he could return the compliment to the fellow who had called him a hobo and gibed at his misfortune.

"See where he is?" Kane spoke to the man back of him and pointed to Gayde.

"Sure; he's out of line. Why don't you move up?"

Kane stepped forward and filled the gap in the line. Gayde was too absorbed in his conversation to notice it.

"Good for you, pilgrim!"

"He had it comin' for talkin' to you so mean."

"Don't give him his place back."

"I intend to give it back to him," Kane said. "I'm only having a little fun. He didn't really mean to leave the line."

There were more than two men in the line behind Kane now and none of them seemed to think that Gayde's place should be restored to him—possibly because, if he dropped out, they would be placed one position nearer the land-office desk.

"If he starts anything you can lick him," some one whispered to Kane.

Others echoed the same sentiment, and all looked admiringly at Kane's robust frame and broad shoulders. The Easterner was no weakling, though he had spent years in an office. In fact, it was the physical restraint imposed by such work, after he had spent two years in the army, that had driven him to seek an outdoor living in the West.

The expected clash came in a moment. Gayde ended his chat with the girl and stepped back toward what had been his place in line. He bumped into Kane's stalwart shoulder.

"What do you mean?" He glared at the man he had called a hobo. "Step back and give me my place!"

From her saddle, the girl looked down

at the two men. Kane grinned. "Why should I give you your place?" he inquired coolly. "You stepped out of it, so your place is at the rear. Besides you wouldn't accept a favor from a hobo—a dandy like you?"

Gayde's face reddened. "You step back," he said under his breath, evidently so that the girl would not hear him, "or I'll make you!"

"Bully for you!" exclaimed Kane. "A little exercise while we're waiting would be just the thing."

Gayde looked from Kane to the girl. He was fully as big as Kane and obviously endowed with physical strength.

"I'll see you later on, Miss Barnard," he said, "and let you know which quarter-section I get." Plainly his intention was to make her ride away.

Instead, she alighted from her horse and faced the two men. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Kane experienced a little thrill as he found himself gazing straight into her lustrous eyes. "Just a trifling difference of opinion," he informed her. "Mr. Gayde thinks he should have his place back after he stepped out of it to talk to you, while I maintain that he has lost it and should at least ask me, in a respectful tone, to let him have it back."

"I wasn't out of line!" Gayde flared. His angry demeanor was in striking contrast to Kane's calmness.

"Just a moment, please." Miss Barnard turned to the men behind Kane. "Did Mr. Gayde step out of his place?" she asked.

"Yes. Not very far, but he was out of it right enough."

"I leaned over a bit to talk to you," Gayde said to her, "but I kept one foot in place all the time."

Kane pointed to Gayde's natty oxfords. "Neither of his feet is in place now," he said.

Miss Barnard studied the situation. "I think I know what happened." She turned to Kane with a smile. "If Mr. Gayde stepped out of line, you know that it wasn't intentional," she said.

"Oh, I can quite understand why he did it," said Kane meaningly.

She frowned at the implied compliment.

"In the circumstances, Mr.——"

The man from the East jumped at the opportunity to introduce himself. "Kane, Miss Barnard," he said, and lifted his hat.

The girl looked a bit crestfallen. Evidently she had not intended to give this trampish-looking stranger an opportunity to introduce himself.

"Do you think that your attitude is a generous one, Mr. Kane?" She addressed him as an equal. His speech and manner, so different from his hobo attire, had evidently impressed her.

Before Kane could reply Gayde broke in. "Please go away, Miss Barnard," he said. "I don't want you begging favors for me from a tramp. I am perfectly capable of getting my place back; but you know that I will not hit him while you are here."

Kane realized that he had drifted into a position where he might have to engage in physical combat. "May I suggest also, Miss Barnard, that in the circumstances it might be better for you to leave?" he said.

"I prefer to stay!" the girl replied. Kane could tell from the fire in her tone that she had a will and a temper of her own.

"You appear to have a grudge against Mr. Gayde," she said to Kane. "Why is that? All you men ought to be friends. You'll be neighbors on your homesteads."

Kane smiled a bit wistfully as he recollected his lack of five dollars. "I'm afraid, Miss Barnard, that I am not going to be anybody's neighbor," he said.

"Why not? Aren't you going to file on a homestead?"

"I was until I discovered that the filing fee is just five dollars more than I possess. It is on that account, in fact, that I'm playing this little joke on Mr. Gayde—moving up into his place when he stepped out of it, I mean. You see, he laughed at me when he found I was short of funds and called me a tramp—which isn't quite my proper designation,

Miss Barnard, even if I am not very fashionably attired at the moment."

The girl appraised Kane again. "I'm sorry," she said.

Gayde interrupted. "Won't you please go away, Miss Barnard, so I can settle my account with this fellow?"

She silenced him with a look. "I am sorry, not only for your misfortune, but because it seems that I must leave you two on bad terms," she went on. "You said something about your action being a joke, Mr. Kane. Isn't it possible then that you can conclude the joke by letting Mr. Gayde have his place?"

Kane lifted his hat again. "If it will please *you*, Miss Barnard," he said, "Mr. Gayde may have his place." He pushed back, bowing as he did so.

Gayde stood glaring at him a moment, then stepped into his former place without a word.

"There! That's the way to act." She smiled at both men. "I'm going now—if you'll both promise me that you won't quarrel as soon as my back is turned."

"If any quarreling is done, it won't be my fault," Kane assured her.

"All right," Gayde agreed shortly.

"Remember now—and good luck to both of you." She mounted her superb horse and with another smile at the disputants she was off.

Gayde seemed to have a short memory for promises. He glared at Kane. "So you *did* step back, despite that scrappy talk of yours, eh?" he sneered.

Kane felt himself growing angry. "I stepped back in order to please a lady," he said. "I am now trying to avoid further dispute for the same reason."

"Good excuse!"

Kane looked at his neighbors and read the expression in their faces. There was no doubt about it; he was losing caste in their eyes. He remembered the wording of his promise to Miss Barnard—that further quarreling would not be his fault. Did that imply that he must back down before a man who obviously wished to continue quarreling? He thought not.

"Mr. Gayde," he said, "if you are trying to make these people believe that

you compelled me to restore your place to you, I am ready and willing to demonstrate, by physical means if necessary, that you are quite unable to make me do anything."

Gayde glared at him. His fingers were clenching and unclenching.

"You miserable tramp——" he began. "You——" Gayde stopped at that word. A boy who had arrived in breathless haste interrupted him.

"Mr. Kane, Mr. Kane," called the boy. "Message for Mr. Kane."

"That's me." The man from the East wondered if some mistake had not been made. He could think of no one who would wish to send him a message.

"Here y' are." The boy thrust an envelope into his hand. "No answer," he said and scampered away as though anxious to get out of Kane's reach.

Kane scrutinized the handwriting on the envelope. It was a lady's. The envelope was an ordinary one such as could be obtained at the nearest stationery store. He tore it open. A ten-dollar bill was inside and along with it a card.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Hey, kid!" he called, but the boy was out of sight. "Now what can I do? I've got to keep it." Kane put the bill in his pocket and studied the card again. It was a dainty one, tastefully engraved with the name "Miss Ruth Barnard," and in pencil were scribbled the words: "Please accept this as a loan."

Great Scott! If it didn't beat the Dutch! She had made it possible for him to obtain the homestead that he so much desired. Because of her he could seize the golden opportunity to acquire land and make something of himself. Never in his life had Kane felt so grateful and happy. His encounter with Gayde was driven clear out of his mind.

But the latter was on hand to remind him of it. "Who sent you that?" he snapped.

In silence Kane showed him the card.

"Well, I'm——" Gayde stood looking at Kane a moment. He seemed to be thinking. Varying expressions chased one another across his shrewd

features. At length he spoke. "Kane," he said, "I'm sorry I called you a tramp and I want to apologize. I don't blame you for moving up into my place here either. You were right and I was wrong. Will you forgive me for making a fuss about that too?"

Kane was nonplused. "Why—er—sure," he said. "That's all right. I do look like a tramp, and I was only fooling about your place—at first. Of course I'll forgive you. Why not? We are going to be neighbors, you know, so we might as well be friends."

The land office had opened and those first in line were already filing on the land they desired.

"Got your land all picked, Kane?" queried Gayde.

That was a new thought to the Easterner. "Why, no," he said. "I just take what they give me, don't I?"

"Not exactly. You've got to tell the clerk what quarter-section you want. At least, that's the usual way, and the best one; because if you simply took what he gave you how do you know it would be any good? Some of them are not worth even the filing fee of ten dollars."

"By George! I'm up against it then, am I not?" said Kane. "I don't know what's good and what isn't. I don't know a thing about this tract except what the men here in line have told me. What should I do?"

"Get some one to advise you, I should say."

"But who?"

"Well—er—maybe I could help you."

"I'd be very glad if you would."

"All right. I will." Gayde pulled a little map from his pocket. "Here's the one I think you had better file on," he said in a low tone as though he feared he would be overheard. "South-east quarter of section six."

Kane repeated the description so there might be no mistake. "Gayde, you're all right," he said. "Thanks ever so much."

Kane's turn to file came in due course. He filed as directed, and left the land office with a document that gave him immediate possession of one

hundred and sixty acres of government domain, with the promise of a full and complete title free of charge, after he had resided on it a specified length of time and made certain improvements. He looked around to express his thanks again to Gayde; but that enemy who had so suddenly become a friend was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER IV.

HOMESTEAD POINTERS.

ARTHUR KANE tarried in Two-Dot only long enough to get breakfast and spend his remaining change for some sandwiches for lunch. He knew that he must begin his homesteading career by earning enough money to get started on, but he could not bear to delay the inspection of his land a moment longer than was necessary.

He was able to size up the town pretty well, however. Its activity and progress surprised him. Back East a town of five thousand people was usually a slow place, with shops that carried little more than the necessities of life.

But Two-Dot was a city in miniature, with all the enterprise and improvements of a city. Main Street was well paved and artistically lighted. Shop windows displayed costly jewelry and beautiful gowns. Luxurious motor cars purred up and down the streets. The county courthouse and the post office were beautiful buildings. Two-Dot pleased Kane immensely. It seemed to him just the sort of place he would like to settle down in.

He had learned while standing in line at the land office that he could reach the homestead tract by following the Big Horn Road out toward the mountains; and he had secured from the land agent a map of the township by means of which he should be able to find his quarter-section without difficulty. One corner of his one hundred and sixty acres lay only a short distance from the Big Horn Road, and along its eastern boundary flowed a stream.

As he walked briskly along the road to his homestead Kane thought that

never before had he felt so happy. It was a beautiful day. Warm sunshine bathed the countryside in its golden glow, but there was none of the sticky humidity that he had been accustomed to in the East. The clear air was wonderfully exhilarating; the perfume of grass and wild flowers was delightful. Ahead of him the majestic Big Horn Mountains reared their mighty peaks into a blue haze that looked as soft and clinging as a lady's veil.

Kane gazed at the ranches that he passed with new interest. Hitherto all farmhouses had looked alike to him; but now that he was a landowner himself he could see the difference between the prosperous and the unprosperous ones. A particularly well-kept place that he passed seemed, to his newly awakened senses, like a bit of paradise—the stately stone mansion standing in the midst of grounds that were as beautifully parked as an English country estate, the barns and outhouses painted in soft tones that harmonized with the landscape, the rich green of the meadows, the golden sheen of the grain fields, the fat cattle grazing contentedly.

And to think that, only a few miles beyond, one hundred and sixty acres of such land belonged to him! Of course, he could hardly expect to build a mansion like that right away or even soon; he had sense enough to know that herds and tilled fields are only achieved by patient effort. But with the solid land as a foundation, he asked himself, why should he not hope to possess such a ranch in, say, five years?

Kane thought of other things, too, as he paced along the road with long, swinging strides. He took from his pocket the dainty bit of pasteboard that had been sent to him by the girl who had loaned him the money to file on his homestead. Miss Ruth Barnard! So that was her name. He had always liked the name Ruth. He smiled happily as he reflected that, in returning her money, he would have an opportunity to get better acquainted with her. It seemed to him that Gayde could not be on such intimate terms with her,

since he had not progressed beyond the stage where he addressed her as "Miss."

His encounter with Gayde was something, too, that Kane turned over in his mind. The fellow was all right—must be, or he would not have taken the trouble to tell him on which quarter-section to file. Come to think of it, Kane could not blame Gayde for wishing to exclude no-account hobos from the benefits of the homestead law. A good citizen would naturally want the land to be settled by hard-working men who would add to the wealth of the community. Kane had no illusion about his personal appearance at the time; he certainly looked like a tramp. It was up to him to show Gayde and the community that he was as good a man as any of them.

After a while Kane passed the last of the well-cultivated ranches and came upon a broad expanse of fallow land, lightly wooded here and there, that undulated over rising foothills until it merged into the rough, timbered and rocky base of the mountain. This was the homestead area. So far as he could judge, it was what it was reported to be—fully as good as the cultivated land he had passed through, though not so level. He could readily understand how it came to be included in the forest reserve which embraced the mountain by Washington officials who had never seen it, and how, after it had been examined more carefully, it had been excluded and restored to its original status as public land.

Homesteaders going out to their tracts in wagons passed Kane as he walked along. He knew they were homesteaders because of their exultant attitude, the hurry with which they were proceeding to their new homes, and the loads of new lumber that they carried. One of the less heavily laden ones invited Kane to ride, but he was enjoying himself too keenly afoot.

After a while, when he thought he had nearly reached his land, Kane stopped to chat with a man who had dumped a load of lumber on the ground and was obviously choosing a site for the construction of his first dwelling.

"You're one of the homesteaders, I see," Kane remarked.

"You bet. Are you?" The man was as happy as a child on Christmas morning.

"Sure thing."

"Good! We'll be neighbors. Jake Harvey is my name. Been hunting a good homestead for the last five years, and here I have it where I didn't expect it nohow."

Kane introduced himself.

"The day of the homestead is just about passed," Jake went on. "There ain't much public land left any more, and what there is is a long way from any towns. But once in a great while good land close to town that's been locked up in a forest reserve or a reclamation project or something gets reclassified as public land and that's where the home hunter gets his grand chance. Take this tract, for instance. Every acre of it would 'a' been homesteaded ten or fifteen years ago if it had been open for entry then."

"Is it hard to prove up on a homestead?" Kane asked.

"Heck, no! It's a cinch when your homestead is this close to town."

"Can a fellow like me, that's dead broke, make a go of it?"

Jake looked at Kane's capable shoulders. The two were sauntering around. Jake was picking a site for his shack, and Kane was taking advantage of a good opportunity to acquire information.

"Sure you can," said Jake. "You don't have to do a tap of work on it either if you don't want to. Just get a job in town, fulfill your residence requirements by sleeping on it at night for six months a year for three years, hire your improvements done, and there you are."

"Is that considered a fair and honorable way to get land from the government?" Kane asked.

"You bet it is. How else could thousands of people get started? And your improvements don't have to cost you a cent either. Let the man you hire keep the crop he takes off your place, or rent your place for pasturage. Why, I've

seen fellows in line this morning that haven't no more intention of working their places themselves than a cat has of swimmin'. There was one fellow with a white collar and lily hands that works in a bank. Think he'll quit his bank job to go roughin' it on a homestead? Not much! You know the fellow I mean; he was standin' in front of you in line this morning and you was havin' an argument with him."

"Oh—Gayde! So he's a bank clerk, eh?" Kane hesitated. "Do you—er—happen to know who the young lady was that settled our argument?"

"Sure. She's the daughter of old man Barnard, who's president of the bank that Gayde works in. Some pip-pin! Been East to school an' everything."

Kane allowed this information to sink in. "I suppose the young lady has lots of admirers," he remarked casually.

"About every man in town, I guess. But she don't seem to pay much attention to them."

CHAPTER V.

THE BITTER TRUTH.

KANE had acquired food for thought, but it was about homesteading that he wished to learn now. He asked Jake what kind of a dwelling he meant to put up, where he would place it and why, how he would secure fresh water, and so on.

"A shack'll do me for a starter. Just rough boards nailed to a framework and covered with tar paper to keep out the rain. Water is the main question. I'll build my shack wherever I can get water the easiest. I'm looking around for a spring now, but I guess I ain't lucky enough for all that. I'll have to dig me a well."

"I hope I'm as lucky as you, even if you don't find a spring," said Kane.

"Your place ought to be better than this because you was standin' ahead of me in line and had a better choice. You picked yours out beforehand, I suppose?"

"No; I didn't have any chance to do that. I filed on a friend's advice."

Jake looked dubious. "That's all right—if he's a good friend. Too bad you couldn't 'a' picked it for yourself though."

Kane brought out his township plat. "Do you mind telling me which quarter is yours?" he queried. "I must be getting pretty close to mine. I'll be able to locate it from yours if you'll tell me."

"Sure; mine is the northeast quarter of section seven." He looked at Kane's plat. "Yours is the southeast quarter of section six, so your place is right next to mine on the north. I'm on my southeast corner right now. All you've got to do is walk half a mile—roughly eight hundred and eighty paces—north and you'll be on your southeast corner. Then walk west half a mile, north half a mile, east half a mile, and back to where you started from, and you'll have gone all around it."

Kane put his plat in his pocket. "Thanks," he said. "If I can ever do anything for you just let me know."

"You mentioned that you were broke," said Jake. "If you want to make a few dollars come back and help me build my shack."

Kane said that he might, thanked Jake again, and resumed his journey.

According to his neatly printed plat, Kane was now traveling upon a public highway, but it did not seem like a highway of any kind, public or otherwise, to him. A highway for rabbits maybe, but not for humans. He scraped through bushes and went ankle-deep into mudholes. But he did not mind. He reflected that what was marked on the plat as a public road was merely a road allowance, and, anyway, he need not come this way in future. The Big Horn Road, a real highway, ran close to his quarter section.

Despite the rough going, Kane counted his paces. The government surveyors had doubtless driven boundary posts into the corners of his quarter section, but he could find them more easily if he knew where to look. Counting and pulling his feet out of mud occupied him so much that he did not pay much attention to the land about

him. After he had counted the requisite number of paces, he searched for and found his southeast corner. Then he took a long look at the first tract of land that had ever come into his possession.

First he noted the stream that flowed just inside his eastern boundary. There was his water supply. No need to dig a well while fresh and undefiled water from the eternal snows above rippled past his door. It was a pretty stream, too, richly lined with trees, and it made merry music as it tumbled along its rocky course. There were deep, wide pools in it, too, that doubtless sheltered numerous trout.

Then Kane noted his southern boundary. It was good land, but it would have to be cleared for plowing. In its present state it resembled a picnic grove more than anything else. It was just as well to have a little wood on one's place, however. It would come in handy for firewood and fence posts.

Kane next took note of the view. He had climbed by such easy gradations that he was a bit surprised to find himself so high up. But the sheer beauty of the outlook momentarily drove from his mind any thought that he might be too high.

Below him, like a richly tinted carpet, lay the most beautiful countryside he had ever seen. The rich sunlight lay upon it like a golden haze. Green meadows and yellow fields of ripening grain lay side by side in checkerboard style; smoke curled up from ranch houses that looked like children's toys; the cattle looked like kindergarten animals.

From behind him sounded the rustle of green leaves, the merry tinkle of the stream, the liquid music of many birds. From the standpoint of beauty alone, his homestead was an ideal place.

But it was not beauty alone that Kane was looking for. He had to consider the plot from the standpoint of utility. He was no judge of land values; yet, as he paced westward along his southern boundary, he could not help feeling that his place was not quite so good as Jake's. Even with the trees cleared off,

there did not seem to be very much tillable land. On the north side a ridge of jagged rocks seemed pretty close at hand.

As he proceeded to his western boundary the rocky ridge approached closer and closer until, when he reached it, there was scarcely any strip of good land at all.

Kane turned and paced eastward again, along the base of the rocky ridge. And then, as he came back to his stream, the truth dawned upon him. Out of his hundred and sixty acres, only about thirty or forty could be farmed, and even these required expensive clearing. The rest of his quarter-section was a sloping area of jagged rocks. His homestead was practically worthless. He had trusted Gayde to pick a good one for him, and this was the result.

CHAPTER VI.

GRINNING AND BEARING IT.

AFTER a while Kane pulled himself together and returned to Jake Harvey's ranch. A lot of his buoyancy of spirit had fled. Still, he was not the sort of chap to despair in the face of adversity. He felt that such a spirit would not get him anywhere. He fell to wondering how he might make the best of a bad job. A surge of self-pity filled him as he heard the birds twittering merrily.

Jake was still doing hard tasks with the zest of a child at play. "What's the good work, ol'-timer?" he queried.

Kane sat down on an empty box. "Jake," he said, "would you like to gaze upon the champion fool in Wyoming?"

"Meanin' who, son?" The old settler's voice was rough, but there was a degree of kindness in it that Kane was quick to appreciate. Men such as Jake Harvey do not bestow such titles as "ol'-timer" and "son" on a pilgrim without meaning something. "You ain't a-goin' to tell me that your ranch ain't no good, are you?" he went on as Kane failed to answer.

"It looks so, Jake, unless I go in for

raising goats. Will they eat rocks? I know they eat most everything else."

"Well, I do declare!" Jake sat down beside the younger man. "I thought it looked a leetle mite rough' from here, but I didn't want to say nothin' 'cause you looked so happy and hopefullike. So it's a bloomer, is it? What are you aimin' to do with it?"

"Don't know exactly," Kane answered. "Would you recommend me to go ahead and prove up on it?" He described the place.

"Can't say as I would," said Jake. "In fact, I'm sure I wouldn't. You'd be wastin' time an' money."

"Still, that scenery!" exclaimed Kane. "If they could only eat that, the goats would surely live high, wide and handsome."

"Yes, but they can't and you can't. The only thing I can see for you to do is to go to the land office, relinquish the place, and ask to have your homestead rights restored."

"Is it easy to do that?"

"Anything but. It'll mean six months of government red tape at the least."

"I don't suppose there'll be anything left to file on then?"

"So far as this tract is concerned, there's nothing left now. Every last scrap of land that's any good was taken this morning. By the way," Jake went on, "you said you filed on the advice of a friend, didn't you?"

Kane laughed. "I asked you if you wanted to see the champion fool. Take a good look; I'm it. He fooled me all right. Some friend!"

"Who was it? Anybody I know?"

"The fellow who stood in front of me in the line this morning. Gayde, his name is. You said he worked in a bank."

Jake whistled. "Aha!" he said. "The fellow you were having the dispute with in front of Miss Barnard this morning? I saw you, but was too far away to hear what was going on."

"I guess that's why he gave me a wrong steer. He said he wanted to make up and I was fool enough to believe him." In a few words Kane gave

Jake a résumé of what had occurred in front of the land office.

"Yep; that was his game all right," Jake agreed. "He wanted you to get a worthless homestead so you wouldn't hang around Two-Dot and maybe cut him out with Miss Barnard—as if a girl like her would take a man like him seriously, anyhow. It was that ten dollars she sent you that put the bug in his ear. But say—look here ol'-timer, you don't seem to be so glum about it as you might. And I don't blame you. What if you did lose a homestead? You won a friend, didn't you—about the niftiest piece of young lady in these parts, too." Jake slapped Kane on the back.

"Oh, lots of girls would do a thing like that for a fellow in distress," Kane said. "Probably she felt that she had started it anyhow, since if she had not come along Gayde would not have stepped out of line."

"Well, if you're not going to get back at Gayde by marryin' the girl, then how are you going to get back at him?" Jake wanted to know.

"I haven't thought about getting back at him," Kane said. "What's bothering me is how to make something out of that lemon of a homestead I've drawn."

"In the old days you could have shot him, but I'd hardly recommend that now," the old-timer advised. "It's got so that a fellow can get hung for that just as quick out here in Wyoming as any place back East."

"Well," returned Kane with a smile, "I guess I'll just have to charge it up to experience, and let it go at that."

"What do you figure on workin' at when you get back to town?" Jake asked.

"Oh, anything,"

Jake rose to his feet. "Why not go to work right here?" he proposed. "You can help me get my shack up if you want to."

"You bet I do," said Kane.

"Good! I've got a location picked out. Found a spring—yes, sir! What d'you know about that for luck?"

Kane thought of his own rippling

stream and what a luxury it would be on a real homestead. Jake cooked what he called "a little snack o' lunch" and then the two began building the house.

First Jake leveled off a piece of ground, laid stringers on it, and on these nailed the rough boards that would answer for flooring. Next they sawed and nailed together, while they lay on the ground, the side walls. They raised these into place and braced them temporarily by means of the framework for the front and back. It was only a one-room affair with a roof that sloped from front to rear that Jake planned for his first abode, and the framework for it was pretty well in place when they quit for the welcome supper that Jake cooked over an open fire.

They chatted during the evening and Jake remarked that no squarer man than Jim Barnard ever lived. This was the bank president and father of Ruth Barnard. Jake was sure also that the daughter was one girl in a million.

"Just the kind I'd go after if I was an educated young feller of your age, even if I didn't own a nickel and looked like a tramp," he insisted; but Kane threatened to throw a pail of water over him and he discontinued his eulogy of the Barnards.

In the morning they resumed building operations.

"I'm certainly learning a lot about homesteading. I've got to make use of the knowledge," Kane remarked.

The framework nailed securely in place, they put on the overlapping boards that are known as shiplap. They set Jake's two window sashes, one on each side, in place, and boarded up around them. They made a door and swung it into place. Over the board covering they spread heavy tar paper and secured it in place by means of laths and shingle nails. By nightfall Jake had completed the building of a rain-proof shack that would answer all requirements for the summer and, with another covering of boards over the tar paper, would also answer for winter.

Kane slept in Jake's shack that night and in the morning collected his wages.

"If you should accidentally have a run-in with that bird Gayde and want to get bailed out of jail, just let me know," Jake told him.

"All right," said Kane, with a grin, "I'll let you know if anything of that kind happens."

"When it comes to trouble, you've got to look out for the women, too," Jake warned him. "It beats all," he persisted, "what a pretty girl can do to a man when she's interested enough in him to loan him money."

This almost brought a sharp reply from Kane, but he curbed his tongue, and the two parted on the best of terms. He did not like these frequent references of the simple-hearted Jake to Miss Barnard.

Nevertheless, as Kane plodded back to town it was upon her that his own thoughts were fixed.

"There's no need for me to call on her," he told himself. "I can mail her the ten dollars I owe her just as well. She won't want to see me."

But he wanted to see *her*. He had to admit it to himself.

CHAPTER VII.

WHERE THERE'S A WILL.

THE first thing Arthur Kane did when he reached Two-Dot was to enter the Bon-Ton Clothing Store. After laying aside the ten dollars that he owed, he still had some money left. He managed to fit himself out with a collar and shirt.

He next entered a barber shop for a shave and hair cut and after that he had his clothes pressed and his shoes shined. His garments were still whole and did not look half bad in their rejuvenated state. Then he purchased a cake of soap and betook himself to a swimming hole that he had sighted on his way in. He washed his underwear and waited for it to dry in the hot sun. With his hair cut, his face shaved, and wearing a white collar and a tie he was not an unhandsome figure.

Kane decided to wait until evening to call on Miss Barnard. Having a few hours to spare, he spent them in roaming through the residential section. He noted the well-kept lawns, the trees and shrubbery, the flowers, the tennis courts and other evidences of culture.

He asked a schoolboy where Mr. Barnard, the banker, lived, and he had pointed out to him the largest and most imposing mansion on Residence Hill. Kane looked at it from a respectful distance and then at his attire. He did not feel so well dressed now as he had by the river bank.

Kane spent a small sum for supper and, in the cool of the evening, betook himself toward Residence Hill and the Barnard home. He had not sighted Gayde and hoped now that he would not do so that evening.

As he approached the Barnard place he noted that, on the trellised veranda, there were three or four people. He turned onto a brick walk that led through a large and beautifully laid out lawn to the veranda steps. He braced up and went forward with a firm step.

He wondered if Ruth Barnard was on the veranda. He could not see through the trellis. He wondered if she would recognize him if she were there. He forgot Gayde as completely as though that person had never lived.

Ruth Barnard was on the veranda. Kane's heart gave several heavy thumps as he saw her. He thought she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. She stepped forward with the smile that he remembered so well.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Kane," she said. "You have called at just the right time."

She turned to the other people on the veranda whom Kane could not see very well, and introduced him to her mother and father—the former kindly featured and gray-haired, the latter a keen-eyed man who looked more like a retired cattle baron than a banker. Then she turned to the fourth member of the party. "I understand that you and

Mr. Gayde are already old friends," she said.

Kane flushed. "I've had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Gayde," he said. "He did me the favor of picking a homestead for me."

"The pleasure was mine," said Gayde with a sly smile that Kane was not slow to comprehend.

Kane handed Ruth an envelope which inclosed a ten-dollar bill. "I don't know how to thank you," he said.

She laid it down without opening the envelope. "One way would be to tell us all about your homestead," she suggested. "I'm sure you got a good one. Mr. Gayde did, and you had the next best choice."

"Go ahead," encouraged Mr. Barnard. "We bankers are greatly interested in new settlers. In fact, I may say, with all due modesty, that if it hadn't been for the Two-Dot business men that tract would still be locked up in the forest reserve."

"For pity's sake, Jim, forget business for a while." This from Mrs. Barnard. "Don't tell us if it's a *good* place or not, Mr. Kane. We'll take it for granted that it is. Tell us if it's a pretty place."

Kane was thinking fast. Should he tell them the truth about his homestead? Since he had stated that Gayde had picked his place for him, a statement that it was valueless would be an accusation that Gayde had deceived him. That might lead to recriminations and a disagreeable scene. Would that insure a pleasant evening for Miss Barnard?

He felt it to be his duty to repay Ruth's kindness by making himself as agreeable and entertaining as possible. Certainly it was no fault of hers that Gayde had deceived him. She had done her best for him. She had appraised him as a gentleman despite his ungentlemanly appearance when she first saw him. It seemed that the least he could do would be to confirm her appraisal by leaving unsaid a statement that might precipitate trouble.

"Mrs. Barnard," he said, "I'm glad

you asked me if my homestead is pretty, because it is about its scenic beauty that I wish particularly to talk."

"Thank goodness!" The lady was all enthusiasm. "At last we have a man in Two-Dot who can think of something besides what land will produce."

"Yes; go ahead," Ruth urged. "I agree with mother."

Mr. Barnard shrugged his shoulders. His wife and daughter were going to talk about beauty. Time for him to take a back seat and remain silent. Gayde, too, looked none too comfortable. He belonged, like Mr. Barnard, to the materialistic school.

"First; there is the view," Kane began. "Honestly, I never saw a more entrancing one in all my life. From my southern boundary, I can look over all the land between there and town, and I tell you it's a sight worth seeing—the town in the distance, the green fields spread out like a vast checkerboard, with green and golden squares, the road winding along like a ribbon."

"Isn't that fine!" enthused Mrs. Barnard. "I never heard a rancher talk like that before."

"No rancher ever could talk like that about his place," said Ruth.

"Then there's the stream," Kane continued. "Fine trees along the banks; the water ripples over the stones and makes the sweetest music you ever heard; deep pools here and there that are probably filled with trout——"

"Without a doubt," interjected Mr. Barnard. "All the mountain pools are filled with trout."

Every one except Gayde was interested in Kane's homestead now. Gayde sat back and glowered.

"Then there's the grove," Kane went on. "A regular grove, mind you—trees here and there, and level green grass underneath—just the sort of place we used to have Sunday-school picnics in when I was a kid back East."

"Isn't that fine!"

"So close to town, too."

The women hung upon Kane's words. Gayde might as well have been in Hongkong for all the interest they took in him.

"Then there's rocks at the back of the homestead." It was not so easy to enthuse about those, but with an effort Kane managed it. "A bit of waste land, I suppose most ranchers would call the rocky area, but from the scenic standpoint it's not wasted. Here and there you can climb up on a big boulder and get a still better view, and then there are sunny little nooks and corners, and tiny caves and such, and funny little rabbit paths."

Kane's fancy was working smoothly. Appreciation was stirring him to his best efforts.

"Really, you know, it's almost a shame to use such a tract for a commonplace ranch," he said. "A summer resort is what it really is. Why, it doesn't take any imagination at all to picture the whole town running out there to spend week-ends once a proper hotel is built to take care of them. When you think of the cool air and the view and the fishing——"

Ruth, whose eyes had been glowing while Kane went on with his rose-colored recital, could restrain herself no longer.

"Oh, let's go out!" she cried abruptly. "I mean it! We can all go out to visit Mr. Kane at his splendid homestead. Let's see—not this coming Sunday because we have another engagement, but the Sunday after that. Let's do it. We'll be welcome, won't we, Mr. Kane?"

Kane felt as uncomfortable as he did when he had sighted Gayde. Now he was in a fix! "Why—er—certainly come out," he stammered, wondering just how he was going to manage it.

Gayde now spoke up. "You don't seem very enthusiastic, Kane," he remarked. "What's the matter? You haven't been romancing about your homestead, have you?"

Kane saw that a bit of Ruth's enthusiasm had evaporated. She was looking at him curiously. That would never do.

"I was just—er—wondering if I could get my shack up by then," he said. "But I'm sure I can. Anyway, come

out. By all means, come out. I'll be delighted to have you."

Ruth's interest revived. "Indeed we will—a week from next Sunday. I'm just dying to see your beautiful place."

"It would be so nice if you could refrain from making a common old ranch out of your homestead," said Mrs. Barnard. "The town needs just such a place as yours for picnics."

"He can't make a living out of picnics." Gayde's voice was like a slosh of cold water.

"I hardly think that Two-Dot is big enough to support a summer resort," observed Mr. Barnard. "Besides, it would cost a great deal to build a hotel."

"Materialists!" Mrs. Barnard's tones were scornful. "You *are* going to make a summer resort of it, even if you don't make a fortune at it, aren't you, Mr. Kane?"

"Why—er—it might be done," Kane said musingly.

"Well, it's going to be a summer resort for one day anyhow—the Sunday after next." This was from Ruth.

Kane was looking around for his hat. He felt that this was the moment for an effective exit. "Yes, it'll be a summer resort the Sunday after next," he agreed. "I hope you'll all be able to come." He rose to his feet and said good-by.

To his joyous surprise, Ruth walked to the sidewalk with him. "I'm very glad you called," she said.

She gave him her hand and the feel of it affected him so that he was scarcely responsible for his words. "You're sure you'll come out?" he said.

"Absolutely."

"Then good-by till then."

"Good-by."

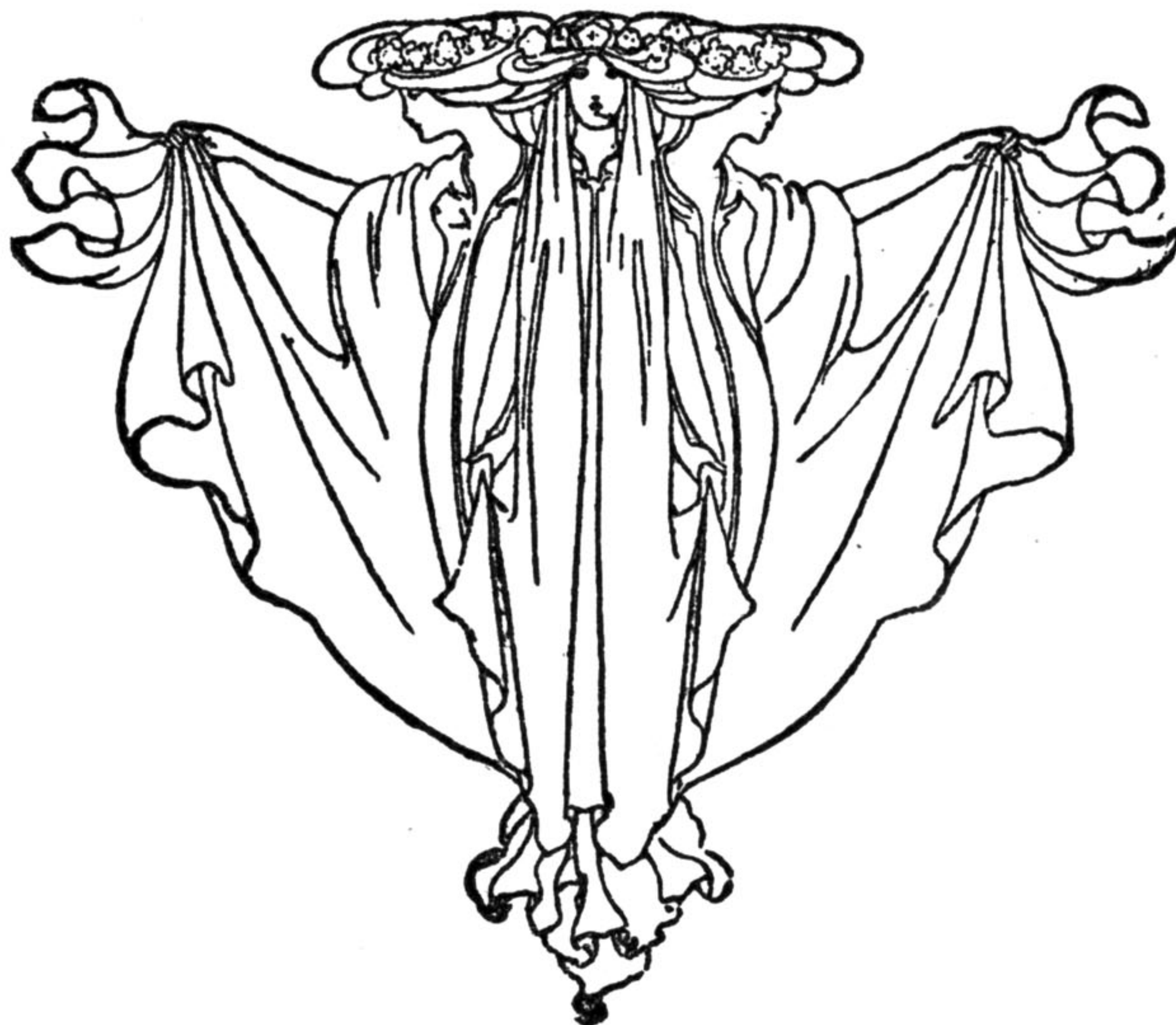
It was not until half an hour later that Kane regained complete possession of his senses. He counted his cash and found that he possessed exactly thirty-two cents.

"Just the same, I promised her I would be on that homestead a week from next Sunday and there I shall be," he told himself. "And that isn't all.

I've got to have a shack built. If I don't she'll think I'm the worthless hobo that Gayde claimed I was when she first saw me. A summer resort! And not for goats, but for people. Bully idea! A week from next Sunday!

Why, I've loads of time. But that's all I have got. Never mind. The thing will be done. Who says so? I do."

The next section of this novel will appear in the issue of **TOP-NOTCH** dated and out August 1st.



THE END AT LAST

By Eve Eggleston Hoyt

THE sunshine never seemed so fair before;
How softly stirs the breeze among the leaves!
Birds sing, and flowers bloom, and no one grieves,
Or knows the fate I fear beyond that door.

Be brave, my heart, and tremble not to meet
The foe that all must face; ye martyred saints,
Lend me your courage ere my spirit faints;
Give grace to bear, and guide my faltering feet.

A last farewell, thou comrade of my youth,
Now I find fortitude to meet my doom:
I calmly enter into that dread room—
The end has come—'tis out, that wisdom tooth!

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the
Editor and Readers.

JULY 15, 1922.

Light and Shade

IN the dog days those men and women who get out the magazines have nothing to do but their work, which is to keep cool and incidentally turn out in printed form the sort of entertainment that will prove refreshing to readers. You might say their life is quite simple. But they would be happier if they could deliver to their readers real breezes—put them right into tales; but as it is, they have to be content with delivering only the figurative goods—a grateful air or two caught on the wing and made into breezy stories.

Probably a few hundred thousand people wish their life was as simple as that of the magazine folk, whose work is all cut out for them, who have nothing to do in the dog days but present these breezy stories; probably they wish they had nothing to do but read them. Well, people placed like that are relatively few in a country such as ours, where the habit of working is pretty general.

There are people who regard it as a bad habit; a great many of these follow the profession of hobo, but not all. Some who have not contracted the habit of work are provided with food, clothes, and shelter by others. They are among the people whose life is just as simple as that of the magazine workers. They haven't anything else to do but read the stories.



The Next Issue

THE sea delivers salt breezes to the shore, and the author delivers fresh breezes to the reader, be he a creature of the work habit or not. Readers tell us

that the story which entertains and refreshes in the summer is an ever-welcome boon—that it helps them to enjoy the dog days with all their lights and shades. We have been looking over the list of things for the next number of TOP-NOTCH, and we find what might be described as a feast of boons.

First, we have an outdoor tale of generous length that has a lot to do with Western gold mining, and takes you through a series of adventures which won't heat you up at all, for all you have to do is sit tight and read about them. The story is called "Out of the Blue," and its author is William Wallace Cook. It will run to about forty-five pages, and will be the complete novel.

The novelette, a light and airy episode of romance and money-making, is titled "His Last 'Almost,'" and we guess there is no doubt about it being a breezy story. A newcomer in these pages is the author—Mack Esplen.

Among the sport features will be a baseball story by Burt L. Standish, called "Down to a Shut-Out." It is a good long yarn, and one of the best we have had from this master of the baseball story.

There will be a fishing story, and we place this among the sport features. If you have any doubt about the propriety of this designation, ask any fisherman if fishing is a sport. Frederick White is the writer who supplies this bit of refreshment trimmed with breezes off the water, and he calls it "Speckled Silver."

"The Flapper and the Gollywog" is something you will find among the sport attractions of the next issue, although you might not think so. It is the title of a boxing story by T. C. Wignall, an author who has won his spurs in this branch of story-telling.

John Draper Evans contributes a clever tale of theatrical life, titled "Di-

rect from Broadway." From Thomas Thursday we shall have one of those laughable side-show stories for which he has become famous—"Success? It's Too Easy."

Some of the titbits in verse are: "One Consolation," by G. G. Bostwick; "In the Summer Woods," by Jo Lemon; "Poor Little Fellows," by Edmund Leamy; "Under the Test," by Floyd Meredith.

It is some time since we had a tale of the wild folk by Harold de Polo, and we are glad to announce one for the next issue—"For the Monarch's Crown." It is a story that will take you into the big woods among the moose.



A Pretty Good Scout

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Please add this letter to those you have, praising "Oh, You Baseball Romeo." Let's give the laugh to the knockers. That was the best serial of its kind you ever ran, and personally I'd like a good comedy serial every month. It is too bad the way your readers have roasted poor old C. S. Montanye. He must be a pretty good scout to stand it without a comeback. I think he's a marvel, and all his stuff rates much higher than the average run of magazine fiction. I'd rather read a good *funny* story any day than a serious one. It's harder to laugh than to cry, isn't it?

Let's have more of Boston and Cook. And Standish, of course. Let's have a good adventure tale by that wizard.

All the best to T.-N., the top of magazine fiction. Very truly yours,

ANTHONY SHERMANICH.

West Hoboken, N. J.



Story and the Standard

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: May I be permitted a criticism, or rather a personal opinion, on a complete novel which I read in T.-N.? It is "Billion or Bust," and does not seem to me to be up to your T.-N. standard, although it is better, at that, than most stories.

The rest of the stories, as usual, can't be beaten, and "The Haunted Diamond," in particular, is excellent.

Sincerely a TOP-NOTCH fan,
FITCH ROE.

Iowa City, Iowa.

No Sugar Coating

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I'd like to write a few words about the "Rim o' the Range," by the Dorrances. I think it one of the worst stories they have ever written, and one of the worst complete novels T.-N. has ever published. The story dragged along so slowly with action scattered here and there.

The novelette by Lyon Mearson was good, in my opinion, and so were most of the short stories, notably those by Harold de Polo, Holloway Horn, and Crosby Garstin.

"The Haunted Diamond" got better as it went along, and I found it very interesting, and the more stories that T.-N. has by Burt L. Standish the better I like it. The new serial, "Cross Tides," by Frank H. Shaw, began well.

I have been reading TOP-NOTCH for the last four years, and I think it is a dandy magazine.

Hoping that T.-N. will get better and never worse, I remain, yours truly, P. M.

Webb Avenue, Bronx, N. Y. City.



Good Pictures

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I see the large film companies are filming your stories now, as I have just been to the movies and seen a film entitled "Colorado Pluck," with William Russell as star. I am almost sure that it was the same as a story you published a while ago entitled "Colorado Jim," and it certainly was a corking good picture. I have often thought that some of your stories would make good pictures.

I have just finished reading "On the Sunshine Trail," by W. W. Cook, and think it would make a splendid film. I think it the best story I have read in your magazine for a long time. I have been reading your magazine for five years, and consider it the best I have ever read. Could you not give us a story about water polo? I don't think I have ever read one in your magazine, and I would like to read one, as I play it myself. Wishing you continued success, sincerely yours,

J. EVANS.

330 Lagauchetière West, Montreal.

[The film rights for "Colorado Jim" were sold. Water polo is a subject that few writers choose for their stories. TOP-NOTCH has had water-polo stories, but exceedingly few.—ED.]

For the Story's Sake

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Have been going to write for some time, and tell you what a fine magazine you have. I like all the writers, especially of the Western and baseball stories.

I stopped in the middle of "Rim o' the Range" to write this, and to correct Ethel and James Dorrance, the authors.

Douglas, Arizona, is on the El Paso and Southwestern, instead of El Paso and Southern. Also, Aqua Prieta is south of Douglas and not east, and there is no town of Mesquite or any other town between them. Nothing but the international boundary between the United States and Mexico.

Aside from such little mistakes as this, the magazine can't be beaten. Yours very truly,

EARL L. FRANCE.

Seventh Street, Richmond, Cal.

[Authors have to use their magic wand occasionally to touch the ground and make a town spring up. It is their privilege; they do it for their story's sake.—ED.]



A Toothsome Song

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: If the get-together spirit, as expressed in your splendid T.N.T. department could have selected anything, as a department symbol, in any way more appropriate than T.N.T., I'd like to hear of it. One having read her first copy of T.-N. naturally repeats. By repeating, one has T.N., T.N., T.N., and the consequence is T.N.T. in perfect sequence.

If ever T.N.T. has proven the weakness of ordinary dynamite, then our own dear T.N.T. symbol has proven the weakness of ordinary dynamic expression. Where, in the vast field of reading material, can one find a section in any magazine that twice a month stirs the heart like the time-honored "French pheasants singing the Mayonaise?"

Ever since TOP-NOTCH first came to my attention, I have been in favor of the "passing of time," even at the risk of growing old prematurely, that I might have my next copy. Once I start reading it, I could readily list it as "an added insurance risk," for the house could burn down, and until I had finished, I'd let it burn.

So you can easily see where this young

reader stands when the vote is taken on who's who, and what's what in entertaining, educational reading matter. Sincerely yours,

(MRS.) ELIZABETH ROCHE.

Fayette Street, Pittsburgh, Pa.



The Lure of the Sea

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Referring to "Pecos Star," a story in your magazine of April 1st, it was good and full of life, and I believe the author was writing of things he understood. Probably he has many such stories stored away in his brain. Let them out, mister—through TOP-NOTCH.

I value TOP-NOTCH greatly as a companion when I'm out at sea. I have just finished a nine-months voyage circling the globe, visiting twenty-two different ports.

This story brings me back to my old love. My first love was the ranch, mountain, and trail. Then my fickle love turned to a hog locomotive and two streaks of rust. You can't tell about love. My third and last love is the sea. The sea is like a wife to a man. No matter what you do, or where you go, you still belong to her and she to you. I guess we're married till I die. The lure of the sea! Surely there is a lure, that tears your very heartstrings. I have seen men fighting it and hating the very smell of salt water; but the lure always wins and has the last word, like a woman.

So, brother, why not submit and get the best she has to give you?

Then, again, there is something about the sea that brings out what's in a man, drives out of him a lot of nonsense that is given to staying in the systems of some that live ashore. A seaman is up against the hard fact of old Neptune and his merciless onslaught, and the truth becomes his faithful companion.

Also, God is so evident on the sea, more so than on land; but there is so much mystery. You can feel His presence and realize His wonderful power. Your magazine, TOP-NOTCH: The stories are all good. I read them all. If you will study human nature a little, you can get good from stories when they are well told! Stories are but the thoughts of humans. It's only the selfish ones that find fault with a story. They think if it doesn't interest them, nobody else should read it. Good-night.

ERNEST MERRITT.

Station B, Tacoma, Wash.

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