

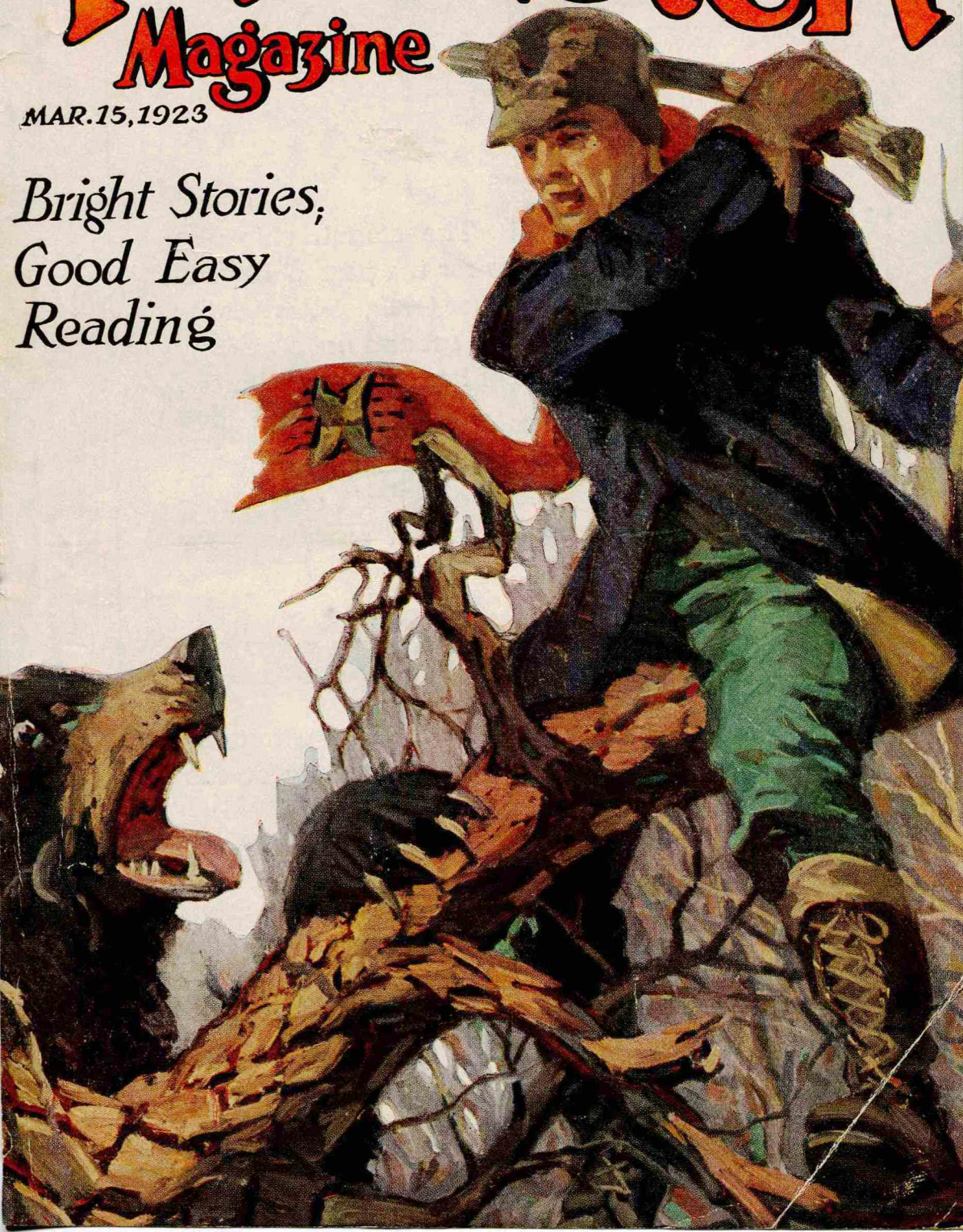
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# Top-Notch

## Magazine

MAR. 15, 1923

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# TOP-NOTCH

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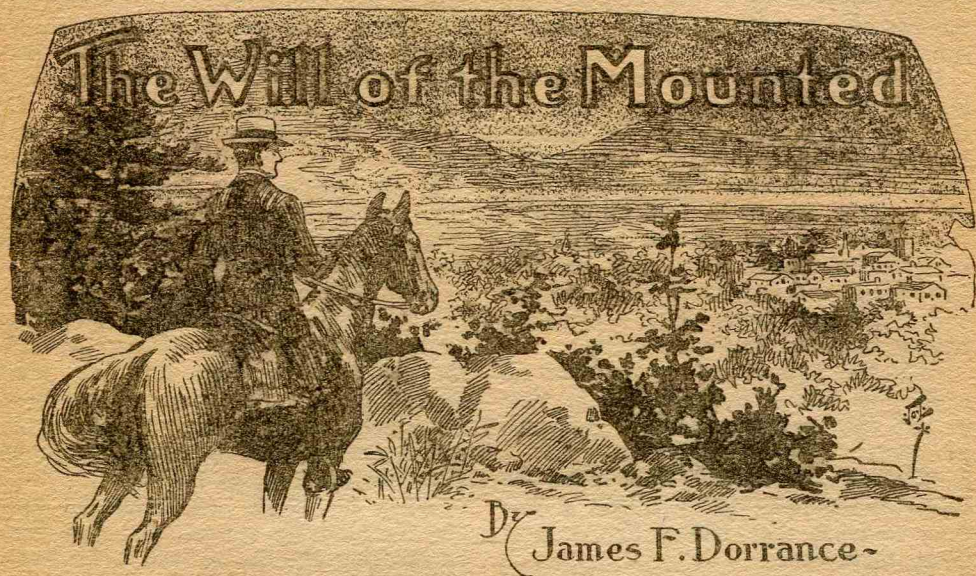


# TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. LIII

Published March 15, 1923

No. 4



(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

## CHAPTER I.

### THE DRAMA BEGINS.

**T**HE policing of a mushroom gold camp, such as the one they were approaching, was so big a problem that the authorities had overlooked no advantage. The fact that Inspector Bernard Conklin of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, never had seen duty in British Columbia presented the attractive possibility of his making a preliminary survey in plain clothes, severely plain in truth—as plain as stained khaki, scuffed leather, and battered felt could materialize. It was entirely by chance that he had overtaken on the trail to Gold the lovely creature riding beside him.

"Of course," he said, "it wouldn't be a worth-while gold rush if there wasn't

plenty of crowd and excitement. Do you think I'm in time?"

"Oh, there's still a chance for you to locate a pay claim—if luck's riding with you," she said cheerfully. "Scarcely a day passes without somebody reporting a new 'discovery.' But you're just three days too late for our first real excitement. One of the B. C. X. stages was held up and robbed last Monday."

Almost did Inspector Conklin give himself away at this unexpected crime report. In more ways than his fair informant could possibly imagine he felt too late.

At a recent conference in Hazelton, a railroad town on the Grand Trunk Pacific, Captain Baxter, superintendent of the police division in which the new diggings lay, had decided that the inspector should remain incognito until he had



opportunity to study the field of his first important command. In the rôle of one of the gold-crazed "rushers," the news of the camp would flow unrestrained in his presence. He would be able to get an advance line on those who were prone to lawlessness, as well as identify the element that might be counted on the side of law and order. Moreover, he could form an unbiased opinion as to the prospective permanency of the camp and the number of constables needed to police it satisfactorily.

He had shipped a "war bag" containing his uniform and personal effects by the stage line of this same British Columbia Express which the girl had just mentioned. The charges were prepaid, and the baggage was to be held until called for. Then he had set out on his favorite police horse, Kaw, over the Old Sun Trail, a time-blazed path into the Yukon country, from which a cross-cut had let him into Argonaut Valley.

"Did the robbers get—make their escape?" he asked, remembering in time to cut the professional tone from his question.

"Clean as a whistle. They killed the driver at the reins, so there isn't a clew even to what they looked like or how many there were."

"But the passengers?" he ventured to ask.

The girl shrugged shapely shoulders. The face that looked up from beneath the concealing brim was framed in ash-blond wavelets. The figure that had looked so boyish from a distance, while he was overtaking her, was now rounded into exquisite feminine lines. Her corduroy riding trousers were frankly worn, without hint of skirt, but her gray flannel shirt was V'd at the neck to show a marble throat such as no boy could have endured. And in the belt that pouched a man-weight automatic was the final touch—a small bouquet of waxen snow-flowers.

In answer to his question she told him that there were no passengers in the coach. "It was the in-bound baggage wagon they held up, you see—doubtless by mistake."

As he pondered the unusual circumstance of road agents mistaking a bag-

gage wagon for a passenger-carrying coach, they were startled by gun fire. Conklin's expert ears placed it a short distance ahead and to the right of them—a bit nearer town. He recognized the snarl of a rifle and, a second later, the bark of a revolver. Unquestionably the reports had come from different weapons.

A half-stifled scream drew his eyes from their forward-looking search to the girl at his side. The effect on her was surprising. She could not have shown greater alarm had one of the bullets perforated her hat. Every trace of color had fled her cheeks.

"Oh, that it's just some hunter and not——"

If she finished her prayerful expression, Conklin did not hear it, for she had dug heels into her horse and the animal was skimming the trail.

Kaw took after the cayuse full tilt; his rider, the while, listened for other shots, but heard none. Ahead, he saw the girl round a sharp turn into what seemed to be a through road and head toward the town. If she was seeking the source of the shots they had heard, he knew she need not go far.

When his black negotiated the turn and the road was spread out before him, he saw that she had arrived. Her horse stood nosing another and she was kneeling in the trail beside an indistinct figure. In a moment he had dismounted and stood beside her.

"Too late!" she cried, looking up at him with a terrified expression. "If only I hadn't slowed to chat with you—— I feared they would get him and was riding to warn him. I thought there was plenty of time to get to town before he started."

She did not blame him for the delay; seemed only to accuse herself. For the inspector there was enough of surprise in the figure of the slain man to occupy his mind and eyes.

"Who—who is he?" he asked after staring a moment.

"He's our new mounted police officer, Inspector Bernard Conklin," she said, her voice hushed. "Don't you know the uniform when you see it?"

Conklin did recognize that particular uniform far better than she possibly



could have imagined, but he refrained from admitting it.

## CHAPTER II.

### A DOUBLE-BARRELED CASE.

REACHING down, the inspector gently raised the girl to her feet; but he did not set her right on the mistake in identity. The case looked double-barreled to him, in that he had an inside line on the hold-up for the express company's stage and a lead toward at least one element of the heterogeneous camp which was opposed to the coming of the Dominion's law-bringers. He meant to fire both barrels to the utmost effect and the fact that they existed must remain for a time his secret.

"Looks like murder," he said, his eyes leaving the stolen uniform and focusing on the wound, the clean hole of a steel bullet in the right temple.

"It is murder—from ambush," the girl declared, her voice sharp with conviction.

But Conklin was not so sure. Without disturbing a convulsive death grip, he examined the revolver held in an out-flung hand. It had been discharged once.

"'Twasn't a complete ambush anyway," he reasoned. "He had some hint of what was coming. Couldn't have drawn his gun after that bullet struck him. The way my ears read the reports, he fired just after the rifle spoke—probably a spasmodic pull on the trigger and no aim or hit."

"He was so brave—absolutely fearless," she murmured.

Conklin might have gone further in reconstructing the crime, but he checked observation on that subject, lest she suspect his training.

"You knew him well, Miss—Miss——" he asked, partially to divert her mind from his professional deductions.

"I'm Ruth Duperow," she told him. "My father is a missionary here. Yes," she went on, "I knew the inspector quite well and admired—both my father and I admired his courage and uprightness."

"You said his name was——"

The girl's frankness did not desert her. "His real name was Bernard Conklin, but

we knew him first as Bart Caswell. You see, he has been here for a month, studying the camp without any one suspecting that he was not the mining expert he pretended to be. Not until the stage robbery did he disclose his real identity and put on his uniform."

Conklin turned to hide a smile; the plan which the girl outlined as Bart Caswell's sounded so exactly like his own. When he turned back to her his left hand was meditatively stroking a clean-shaved chin on which the blue of his beard showed faintly through the flesh.

"Is there a coroner in Gold?" he asked.

"When a man was killed in a shaft cave-in on Sweet Marie Creek last week, the deputy sheriff acted before dad read the service," was the girl's information, delivered with a frown. The reason for the contraction of brow appeared when she added. "That deputy is a chump named Sam Hardley, and he didn't like Bart—I mean Mr. Conklin."

The real Conklin made mental note of this fragment without seeming to be impressed or more than casually interested.

"At that, Hardley will have to be notified, I suppose," Miss Duperow went on. "It's the law, isn't it?"

The inspector nodded. "Something of the sort. But first, I'm going to have a little look into the brush to see—what I can see. Mind waiting a few minutes?"

"Don't risk it!" cried the girl, taking a step toward him and laying an impulsive hand upon his sleeve. "Whoever murdered Bart may be lurking in the brush and wouldn't hesitate to take a shot at you. You don't know how desperate the——" She broke off in sudden caution and finished inconsequently: "One killing is enough for to-day."

"A killing too many," he assured her, but swung into his saddle. "I'll take no unnecessary chances, and I'll not be gone long."

With the girl's disapproving glance following him, he rode into the brush at the left of the trail. From this direction, he figured, had come the rifle bullet. He had small hope of any encounter. With the cowardly attack so neatly turned, he could conceive of no



reason why the perpetrator should hide around the scene of the crime. There was a chance, however, that he might pick up the trail of departure and learn its trend before the camp's amateur sleuths got busy and blotted out all "sign."

On superficial survey it seemed to Conklin that the bogus officer had been riding out from town on some mission not entirely unsuspected by those against whom he meant to act. Near the trail forks some one had lain in wait and "plugged" him.

One shot had sufficed. Bart's effort to answer undoubtedly had been futile. Then the slayer had slunk away in the brush. It seemed unlikely that he would go into town; entirely reasonable that he would return whence he had come. Conklin imagined that this would prove to be the place for which the pretended "mountie" was bound, were that ever determined. That the escape had been through the brush seemed likely, since nobody had passed them on the trail after the shots.

Twenty yards into the brush, he set Kaw on a course parallel with the trail that followed the River Cheena. The undergrowth was not too thick for riding if one looked out for fallen trees and devil-club thickets. The ground, soft from recent spring rains, took tracks like putty. An Indian in moccasins might have passed without leaving a trail, but any booted white must have shed footprints like Crusoe's man Friday.

Soon Conklin picked up horse tracks, so fresh as to be still sucking moisture from the muskeg. These angled toward the trail over which he had recently followed the Duperow girl. He followed them back to a clump of poplars; there he found evidence that a horse recently had been tied, evidently having been ridden there from the main trail.

Footprints coming and going testified to a round trip in that direction. He examined these with care. In measuring them with his lead pencil, lacking a tape, he noted the impress of a peculiar plate on the side of the right sole. Either the wearer was slightly lame or possessed a gait that made it advisable to reinforce the outer edge of his boot.

The foot trail ended in a patch of salmonberry bushes, already in thick leaf and furnishing an ideal curtain. Groping about where the earth was beaten down, he soon recovered a copper cartridge case. His eyes sized this as having been thrown from a 30-30 Winchester, the same sort of rifle that his saddle carried, one likely to be common in that region. Undoubtedly the dented cylinder had encased the steel-nosed bullet that had ended the career of the crook who had the nerve to impersonate a mountie.

When Conklin stood erect, he found that he was head and shoulders above the bramble screen, in plain view and easy range of the tragedy scene. Doubtless in the very spot which he occupied the murderer had stood erect to fling a taunt or shout a false warning at the approaching horseman; then had shot before the other could act.

The circumstances of the crime reproduced to his satisfaction, Conklin squandered a moment in studying his partner of the trail, his scrutiny unsuspected by the fair object thereof.

Miss Duperow stood uncovered, her hat hanging from the horn of her saddle. The sun played upon the unmeshed waves of her silver-gold hair, bringing out unnumbered glints. She was taller than he had thought, almost as tall as himself. Her face was buried in hands that rested on the saddle seat, her poise slumped and heavy with grief.

"Poor youngling," mused Conklin in deep sympathy. "She's taking it hard. These gentlemen crooks surely do raise Ned with the ladies. Knowing that her father was a missionary, this Bart would not be at loss what trumps to lead. Reckon his blossoming out in my scarlet just topped the bill. Must have cut quite a figure in life, this Bart Caswell—or whatever his real name was. Handsome dog, too. No resemblance to me, except that he was dark complexioned and had the same initials." He turned away with the hope that some one else would have the job of telling her that the murdered man was himself a criminal.

Regaining his horse, Conklin mounted, minded to follow the hoof-print trail for



a way. Following the pony tracks was child's play; Kaw attended to it, leaving the inspector free to peer ahead. Meantime his mind was busy revolving the surprising facts with which chance had equipped him.

He saw no need for mental doubt over the stage robbery. The uniform in which Bart was clad unquestionably was the dressier of the two in the war bag which he, Conklin, had expressed to Gold. The "X" Division had a new tailor and Conklin's inspector uniform was the first of that rank to come from his bench. A mistake had been made in stitching on the insignia and trace of the change remained on the sleeve. Even had there been other members of the Force in the mining district, he would have sworn to that uniform. He had not a doubt that the handsome deceiver of the missionary girl either had held up the express driver single-handed or had participated in the crime.

He could not agree with Ruth Duperow that the road agent or agents had mistaken the express vehicle for one of the passenger coaches in use on this difficult line. That did not stand the test of reason, any more than did a supposition that the robbery had been for the sake of securing the uniform of a mounted police officer. No one could possibly have known that such a rig was in transit. At best, the authority which any spurious wearer might command, must be of brief duration, for the owner could be counted on to follow his clothes. The risk was not worth the fleeting advantage.

Conklin did not have to argue himself into a conviction that he must seek elsewhere for the purpose of the holdup. Some other shipment—just what, he meant to find out—that was coveted and worth taking chances for must have been expected. He believed that, in examining his loot, the robber had come upon the uniform and decided to use it in some other bold stroke without the law.

The inspector could not withhold admiration for the daring which the man who called himself Caswell had shown in his last hours of life. To put on the trusted and feared uniform, to declare himself the representative of Dominion

authority and to undertake the solution of his own crime was a coup as clever and novel as it was impudent. Had the culprit stopped there, he might have made a clean get-away with whatever else of loot the stage carried. Conklin concluded the prize that had made him resort to murder must be of great value.

Conklin did not overlook the possibility that Bart might have been slain by a pal dissatisfied with the division of other express loot. But, in view of hints dropped by Ruth Duperow, he was inclined to believe that this morning's slaying had no connection with the B. C. X. crime. The girl, after all, was his best source of information.

Just as he was about to turn back to question her further, the horse tracks he was following broke from the bush into the trail from the switchback and were lost. At once he swung Kaw around for the return canter. Shortly he overtook his own pack cayuse, faithfully plodding in pursuit, and took the animal in tow that it might not suffer from uncertainty at the crossroads.

At the turn he saw that a group of men had gathered about the lifeless figure of Bart. A freight wagon drawn by three yoke of oxen had been stopped near by and reins dropped on four or five saddle horses. But he looked in vain for his companion of chance. Ruth Duperow and her mount were gone.

### CHAPTER III.

#### UNDER SUSPICION.

NONE of the usual greetings of the Northern trail were offered Inspector Conklin as he rode up to the group. Instead, he found himself the target for a battery of frowning eyes. The men presented a stolid front of frigid scrutiny. The probability flashed upon him that, as the first stranger to reach the scene, he was under suspicion in connection with the crime.

Conklin stopped his horse and was about to dismount when there was movement in the group. A short, stout man, from whose ample belt dangled a small cannon of a revolver, waddled forth to a stand before him.

"What's happened?" asked Conklin,



quickly deciding to say nothing of his previous visit.

"That's what we're goin' to find out," said the fat man in that shrill small voice with which humans of undue girth sometimes are afflicted. "Who're you?"

This question was as natural as Conklin's own, but the manner in which it was asked put him on edge. And since Bart had appropriated his name along with his uniform, he could not answer truthfully without laying himself liable for a fuller explanation than he proposed to make at that moment.

"As for that, who're you?" he snapped back.

"I'm Deputy Sheriff Samuel Hardley." The speech was pompous; so was his turning back of coat lapel to exhibit a nickle-plated badge of office. "I represent the law of British Columbia in Gold."

Conklin had suspected the interrogator's identity and was ready with his: "Glad to meet you, sheriff."

"And I've got authority to make you answer my questions," piped the deputy. "Where you from and what's your business?"

"From the Caribou country by way of the Old Sun Trail," Conklin answered truthfully enough. "There's my outfit over there." He jerked his thumb over shoulder toward the pack horse which stood with the prospector's outfit in broadside view. "That tells you what my business is."

"Be ready to prove it. What you know about this murder?"

The inspector wished he knew just how the Duperow girl stood in the matter. Probably, for reasons of her own, she had gone on before any of the town party arrived—possibly because she had heard them coming. Or if any of them had seen her, it seemed evident that she had not mentioned his participation in the discovery, or that he was beating the bush on the case. Yet, after all her seeming frankness and her keen personal interest in the victim, why had she "slid out?" Since he could not answer that mental query, he decided on reticence in answering the deputy's spoken one.

"I don't know anything about it," he

replied with no appreciable delay, although without accenting the "know," as he should have done in strict truth.

"Kinda queer you should come ambling along with Inspector Conklin of the Royal Mounted lying in the road not yet cold," grumbled Hardley. "Yes, sir-ee; it looks right queer to me. I think I'd better take you in on suspicion."

Conklin bore down upon him with a most direct glance, the blue of his eyes turning black with intensity—black as the ears of Kaw between which he was forced to look for exact focus. "And I think you'd better do nothing of the sort—on suspicion. I'm a Canadian citizen; I have and know my rights."

The inspector, of course, was running a sheer bluff. The provincial officer might have placed him under arrest; but to suffer detention was not in Conklin's program, for relief from it probably would require the disclosing of his identity at a time when he felt he could work to more advantage under cover. In the brief moment of their roadside controversy he had "sized" his man and believed him one who would yield to a stronger will without other than ocular demonstration.

But he did not have opportunity to prove his estimate of Hardley. Aid or interference—whichever way one looked at it—came from an unexpected quarter.

"The stranger's right, Sam," spoke a handsome, blond-bearded chap, whose look of intelligence recommended him to Conklin as above average. "You haven't any call to arrest him just because he happened along a public trail at an unlucky moment. Far as that goes, you might better arrest yourself."

"What you driving at, Phil Brewster?" demanded Hardley, breaking away from the inspector's gaze and turning on his fellow townsman. "Are you hinting that I had any hand in sending 'west' one of his majesty's officers?"

"You was jealous of him," put in an old man with a twisted face, the driver of the oxen, if one could judge from the goad upon which he leaned.

"And sore as a pup when you found he'd been here a month without your



suspicioning," contributed another townsman.

Evidently Hardley was not surrounded by any picked posse and was none too much respected as the peace officer of the community. Relieved to be out of the calcium, at least temporarily, Conklin swung from his horse and crossed the road to look at the body of Bart, the natural move had he really been strange to the tragedy.

The deputy chose to ignore the jibes of his neighbors. But he renewed his demand upon Brewster for an interpretation of his insinuations, reminding him that he was not a "bohunk freighter" to be talked to like an ox.

"Oh, I don't think for a minute that you kicked off Inspector Conklin," the handsome chap began to explain. To the real Conklin, listening, came a creepy feeling at the use of his name in such a connection. "I was just using you as an example to show your hasty methods with this stranger," Brewster went on. "You were sitting your saddle on this very spot, all alone and staring down at the remains, when I rode in from the creeks. But I didn't suspect you of firing the shot or even of *knowing* anything about it!"

Hardley looked somewhat mollified. "But Sam was jealous," persisted the stolid ox-driver.

"Stop your noise, Cato!" shrilled the deputy. "There was a perfectly good reason for my being first on the scene. I saw the inspector ride past my shack all uninformed up and looking as if he meant business."

"More'n you'd know how to look," goaded Cato, playfully prodding the deputy with one of his inordinately long arms.

"Want me to bash you up?" Hardley demanded, irritated; then went on with his explanation. "For reasons best known to himself and beyond my ken, now never to be disclosed to mortal understanding, Conklin hadn't been taking me into his confidence either before or after uncovering himself. It wasn't good policemenmanship on his part, I'll say, but I'm big enough of a man——"

Cato's cackling laughter interrupted. "Big enough, I'll say—but of a *man*?"

"Anyway I figured that I knew the breed of wolves up the creeks better than he did and that he might need help. You know Sam Hardley's gun is always ready. So I saddled up Loafer there and took after him, prepared to lend a hand for law and order, as was my sworn duty."

There was further exchange between the Goldites—theories regarding the new crime, gratuitous advice for the fat deputy, speculation regarding its effect on the outside reputation of the camp. Glad that interest had shifted from himself, Conklin listened subconsciously.

Suddenly his attention was claimed by a decoration which had not been on the uniform when first he had scrutinized it. Into the breast opening of the serge coat was tucked a spray of snow flowers.

"Her last tribute," his thought whispered, "and an ill-considered one if she has any real reason for not wanting her little world to know that she first discovered the crime."

It was unlikely that the impostor had been that morning where he could pluck flowers which Conklin knew to grow only in the deeper gulches where the packed snow of winter resisted the spring thaw to the last. The wearing of a nosegay of any sort was so out of keeping with the character that Bart had assumed as to attract attention. The inspector wondered that the men arguing behind had not already noticed and questioned its presence.

Kneeling ostensibly to tie a boot lace, he rectified the girl's mistake by lifting the flowers from the uniform and tucking them in the inside pocket of his coat. The others, although approaching, evidently had not noticed his deft appropriation. Ruth Duperow's connection with the tragedy was her secret unless she later chose to take the camp into her confidence.

"It's a cinch that these two killings are linked," Hardley was shrilling to all ears within range. "When I get the man that killed the inspector, I'll have the man that shot the B. C. X. driver; and, vice versa, if I get the man that killed the stage driver, I'll have the one that shot the inspector."

"Which one do you calculate to get



first, Sam?" asked Brewster, straight-faced as an undertaker.

The pudgy deputy stared at him in momentary suspicion, then took the bait. "Cato the Ox might be excused a fool question like that, Phil, but I'd have thought you'd be wise to vice versa. Don't you see, man, that these murderers are one and the same?"

"Then I advise you to throw down on that one and the same quick as the Almighty will let you," advised Brewster. "The mounties will be riled to the core over the killing of one of their own; they'll swarm in here like flies as soon as the news gets out."

The mining camp's deputy sheriff was obviously disturbed by this logical counsel. Although the morning was not warm, he whipped out a saffron-colored handkerchief and mopped his brow. Evidently that ministrations did not satisfy, for he took off his hat and polished his pate, which was disclosed to be as bald as an eagle's.

"Spite your astonishing ignorance in some things, Phil, you sometimes show a glimmer of sense," said he at last. "I was headed right in the first place. I've got to make some arrests and have the victims ready for the mounties when they come swarming."

His eyes, while delivering himself of this pronouncement, had fixed on the inspector.

"Victims—you said it," offered Conklin in calculating defence. "Some arrests—I suppose you'll make a bunch of them. Well, start in with me and bring in lots of company. You might as well make the mounted police plumb disgusted with you while you're about it." For a moment he watched Hardley squirm under this obvious scorn, then added: "Isn't a coroner's inquest the first of orderly procedure in a case of this sort? If you get a verdict from a jury, you'll have something to stand on when—when the mounties come."

Hardley embraced the offering found in Conklin's sudden change from scorn to a practical suggestion. "I'll have an inquest, with all due respect to the law, just as soon as we can get the late inspector to town," he shrilled. "See that you stick around, stranger. There's no

telling at who the coroner's jury will point the finger of guilt."

Conklin nodded agreement. From official experience, he knew that there was no telling.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE GIRL A PUZZLE.

**I**N the slipshod procedure of Deputy Sheriff Sam Hardley the professional policeman had an illustration of why the force of which he was a member was needed to supplement some county peace officers of the Dominion. Although the fat sheriff undoubtedly believed that a commissioned officer of the mounted police had been murdered in cold blood while in pursuit of duty, his handling of the case proved most perfunctory. There was no close study of the immediate surroundings; not even a beating of the bush to determine the point from which the fatal shot had been fired.

The fact that the victim's revolver had been discharged once was noted, not by Hardley, but by the citizen addressed as Phil Brewster who, it developed, operated a freight packing business between Gold and the creeks. Doubtless the tragedy of the express driver had been handled with similar carelessness and this unlucky Bart Caswell given every opportunity to launch his daring impersonation.

About all that Hardley did was to go through the pockets of the uniform, while one of the crowd made a list of contents as they were produced and placed in a large handkerchief. There was a wallet, meagerly supplied with small bills, a pocket knife, a ring of keys and a brier pipe—not any of which were familiar to Conklin. But there was in addition a certified copy of his own commission as inspector of the R. C. M. P., which had been in the war bag, and a sheaf of official blanks. These proceeds of the search were knotted within the handkerchief and deposited in Hardley's pocket, presumably to be handed over to the Mounted.

Soon the waiting freight wagon was impressed into service as a rude catafalque. With the horsemen in procession formation behind, the cortege headed for



the near-by camp. Its pace at least was funereal, thanks to oxen deliberation.

Once into the main street the semblance of permanency was seen. The establishments of two rival trading companies were built of logs and surprisingly supported show windows. The one hotel—in distinction from several bunk houses—had two stories, with a false front atop the second. Conklin noted also a restaurant, a chop house, a pool hall, several “soft” drink emporiums—all of rough-board construction.

A shack of slabs, roofed in cedar shakes, crouched alongside the hotel and supported the sign, “Sheriff’s Office—Gold Branch.” Evidently it was from the front door of this that Deputy Hardley had seen the impostor set out on his fatal ride. Near it stood the temporary post office, which divided a store room with the records of the mining recorder.

The First Bank of Gold occupied a tent with a wooden floor. For the reassurance of customers and for the information of all, this tent wore a banner on which was painted: “Our palatial permanent home is under construction across the street.” Glancing in that direction, the stranger saw a structure of corrugated iron, awaiting a roof.

Gold, at this season of the year, was a night town, so the streets had been practically deserted as the small procession entered. Even though most of the population was at work up on the creeks, there was something of an outpouring into King Street as the news of the tragedy spread.

Some fifty men and a scattering of women gathered to mill about the freight wagon soon after the oxen were halted before Hardley’s shack. From the vantage of his saddle seat Conklin studied their faces as they received the news, but caught no trace of any emotion that interested him. All seemed genuinely shocked; none too deeply moved. He heard many express regret at such a drastic blow against the law; if any rejoiced, he did so secretly.

Sheriff Hardley consulted with important citizens, identified for Conklin by the one nearest his stirrup as the bank manager, the camp doctor and the prin-

cipal real-estater. Presently the deputy shrilled an announcement that in his capacity of coroner he would swear a jury and hold an inquest at one o’clock in the uncompleted bank building.

The freight wagon, its somber burden covered with tarpaulin, was drawn to a position at the rear of the unfinished structure, which was open where workmen had been laying a cement floor for a vault. The townsmen, curiosity satisfied, began to disperse about their mundane affairs.

In turning Kaw to be about his own, Conklin came face to face with Ruth Duperow, who evidently had just reached town and at speed, for her mount was puffing. The color of excitement was high in the girl’s cheeks. But no hint that she ever had seen him before came from the young woman who, within the hour, had been so solicitous of his welfare as to try to keep him from entering the bush in search of the murderer. Her eyes did not avoid his; they simply did not know him.

Having administered this puzzling cut direct, she focused on the gallant figure of Brewster who rode alongside her, his handsome face alight with undoubted admiration.

“What has happened?” Conklin heard her ask.

“Your dashing inspector has been murdered.” Brewster’s reply was fittingly low.

The girl’s eyes flashed angrily. “How awful! I must say you don’t seem greatly distressed, Mr. Brewster, and I’ll thank you not to connect me with the poor, brave man by saying *my* inspector.”

“You’ve been seeing so much of this Bart person, Ruth, you haven’t had any time for your old friends. Of course, I’m sorry for the way he’s been put out of the running, but——”

“That ‘but’ does you small credit. Who do you suppose——”

“Hardley hasn’t decided yet.” Conklin caught the flicker of contempt in the freighter’s eyes. “Better come and have dinner with me at the hotel; this isn’t our tragedy.”

Her displeasure seemed increased, and she gathered in the reins. “I wouldn’t think of it,” she said with decision. “I



must carry the dreadful news to father." Whirling her horse, she dashed away up the road over which she had so lately come.

"Some actress—but why?" murmured Conklin.

## CHAPTER V.

### FOLLOWING A HUNCH.

THERE were several why's that Conklin found it necessary to consider. Why had she cut him at their next meeting? Why had she feigned entire ignorance of what had happened? Conklin could only hope that the same answer would serve for all—that she had acted so in the hope of being more free to work out a solution of the mystery as to who had killed Bart.

It was evident from Brewster's complaining attitude that the impostor had paid Miss Duperow enough attention to arouse the handsome freighter's jealousy. And Brewster had misplayed his hand by permitting his feeling to crop out at such a moment, when he should have shown the murderer's detection and punishment to be his chief interest. He now stood staring up the street after her, looking utterly discomfited.

Dismounting, Conklin led Kaw across the street and joined Brewster, who snapped out of his gloom on being addressed. The information which the inspector sought was pleasantly given.

The stranger undoubtedly could get a room, such as it was, at the Bonanza Hotel. Brewster himself lived there. The "eats" weren't much, but he could take pot-luck at the restaurant. If his room wasn't airy enough, he could get ample ventilation by poking his fingers through the nearest partition. He'd find the stables "around back." There was no telegraph office—yet, and no radio. Yes, the camp was a little slow catching up with the times. The next mail would go out in the morning.

"Guess I'd better tell that suspicious deputy where I'll be stopping," Conklin remarked when duly posted.

Brewster laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Don't mind Sam Hardley, stranger. By now his mind is loping along some other angle of suspicion. Better come to the inquest, though. With

Hardley in the coroner's seat, it'll be better than a vaudeville."

The inspector did attend the inquest in the unroofed bank building, where the workmen had laid off for the "event." That he did not find it as amusing as Brewster had promised was not entirely due to the queer feeling that came with every mention of his name as that of the central figure. He writhed at the official flounders of Hardley who made an exhibition of a jury which, under sensible direction, probably would have proved competent.

Conklin had heard strange coroner's verdicts before, but that which this fat deputy sponsored was a prize-winning oddity. Hardley read it aloud:

"We, the jury in this murder case duly impaneled, do find and hereby report that Inspector Bernard Conklin, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, in pursuit of duty in the proximity of Gold, B. C., did come to an untimely death, to the regret of this afflicted, law-abiding community.

"We, the jury, etc., do find and hereby report further, that the aforesaid lamented Conklin was murdered by a rifle bullet fired by the man who held up the B. C. X. stage and killed Ben Tabor, driver thereof and subject of the last preceding inquest of this court, both being foul and fatal murders.

"We, the jury, etc., do find and hereby report still further, that Deputy Sheriff Samuel Hardley, Esq., reached the scene of the tragedy with commendable promptitude. We direct him to draw such posse as he finds necessary from amongst the citizens of Gold and run to earth the perpetrator of these dastardly crimes; and, furthermore, we express our confidence that he will leave no stone unturned to justify his reputation as a fearless officer with the encomiums of a successful capture dead or alive."

Hardley's shrill voice was softened by the huskiness of proudful emotion as he finished the reading. From his seat on an empty packing box in the front row of spectators, Phil Brewster uttered a fervent "A-men!" then, catching the eye of Conklin who stood beside the wall, he winked sardonically.

"Needless to say, fellow citizens of Gold," Hardley shrilled on, after having cleared his voice, "your sheriff appreciates the confidence of which this jury of his peers has so fitly delivered itself. He will leave no stone unturned to bring to a rope's end the foul fiend guilty of sending to perdition these two men, one



a brave officer of the law and the other a worthy driver of B. C. X. mules. He would respectfully suggest that before you leave this temporary temple of justice, so kindly loaned for the occasion by the public-spirited manager of the First Bank of Gold, each and every one of you look for the last time on one who gave his life that this should be a more decent and law-loving mining camp."

For this last suggestion, Conklin could forgive Hardley's astonishing lack of modesty, even his consigning to "perdition" the two casualties. Although the fat deputy could not have imagined it, he had done the inspector a pronounced favor. Conklin lost no time in gaining a position from which he could watch the reaction on every face that looked upon Bart. His attention was caught by a little woman of pleasing countenance, in a drab dress and the befowered hat of an outsider, whom he had noticed casually during the hearing. Now that the line had thinned to nothing and even the deputy had left his guard-of-honor post, the little woman came forward haltingly and bent over the rude catalque. Conklin could not see her face at the moment, for it was shadowed by the hat brim, but he heard a stifled sob. For an instant she tottered and seemed so likely to fall that he took a quick step toward her. His aid, however, proved unnecessary. With a shudder, she recovered herself and hurried away, dabbing at her eyes with a bit of cambric.

As the only individual who had shown the least personal emotion, Conklin's interest followed her. So did his steps. Outside, he felt fortunate when he fell in with an acquaintance of the morning, Cato, the driver of oxen.

"Who is the little woman in gray?" he asked casually.

"She's a widdy, but not looking for a second." Cato's face was more twisted than usual by its sarcastic grin.

"And I'm not seeking a first," Conklin set him straight. "I asked because she seemed more affected than the other women by Hardley's tribute line."

The old goader of oxen seemed reassured. "She's just a big-hearted jane, owner and cook of the Home Restaurant down the street yonder. The inspector

boarded with her before he bloomed out in the royal uniform. I boarded there, too, until she turned me down. I'm just wonderin'—was it him in the offing that made her so cold to my advances? Course he wouldn't look at her, not serious; him being an inspector in secret. But women nurse wild hopes—specially widdies. Maybe I'd have a chance now that he's been plugged into the discard."

Conklin glanced at him in amazement that, with his caricature of a face, he could speak of women nursing wild hopes.

Evidently Cato read his thoughts. "You needn't look so doubtful, stranger." He flared with resentment. "Ox driving brings mighty smart wages up here, and I got a claim on Hoodoo Creek that may make me one of them mill'onaires when I get round to working of it next winter. Women can read behind the mask—specially widdies."

Anxious to be off on the trail of his hunch, the inspector was not sorry when they came to the Brewster warehouse and Cato left him to inquire about his next load of freight to the creeks. Conklin felt suddenly hungry—for home cooking.

## CHAPTER VI.

### RICHER THAN GOLD.

THERE was no one in sight within the Home Restaurant when Conklin entered. While talking with Cato, however, he had seen the woman in gray unlock the door and disappear within, and now, after he had shut the door noisily behind him, he heard some one moving beyond the partition in the rear. He had time to make choice between a seat at one of the two small tables and a stool at the oilcloth-covered counter beside the range. Presently, she came into the front room and found him seated at the counter.

That she had been crying was evident; also that she had made an effort to remove the traces. Inwardly Conklin regretted that he had not left her longer alone with her grief.

"I'll leave it to you, ma'am," he said when she came to take his order. "Whatever is easiest for you in the way of a square meal."



She murmured an apology for the scantiness of Gold's markets, but thought she'd be able to feed him without falling back on the can opener. Bread had been baked that morning, she told him, as she set out a stack of soft slices. But she could not speak as encouragingly about the butter's age.

Conklin liked her voice, understanding its sad inflection, and he could feel full sympathy for her wan smile. Fortunately the range was directly before his seat; he could study her without seeming rude as she placed a steak to broil and sliced potatoes for a raw fry.

In the course of his intent study of her, his hope grew that something valuable could be drawn from her. With his second sip of the coffee, he broke bluntly into the matter in hand. "Well, they got poor Bart at last, I see!" he remarked.

He could see that he had startled her, as he had intended to do. She looked at him sharply, as if to make sure that he was the stranger she had taken him to be. For a moment he feared she was going to break into tears. But with an effort she controlled herself, evidently being no stranger to sorrow.

"You knew Bart—the inspector?" she asked, choking back a sob.

"In a way of speaking—yes," said Conklin. "I know that he was not an inspector of the Royal Mounted."

With uncertain steps, she felt her way along the lunch counter.

"Not—not an inspector?" she faltered. "Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"Just what I say, madam. What's more, I *know* that Bart's sudden taking makes you a sure-enough widow, instead of a pretended one. You have my deepest sympathy, Mrs. Caswell."

To himself, Conklin justified his seeming harshness of utterance on grounds of professional necessity; that there might be real mercy for the woman also involved, in case he succeeded in breaking through her reserve, was another consideration. Everything depended upon her reaction to this "shot" assertion. He had followed her on a hunch bred of her emotions at the impostor's bier. Old man Cato had given him a plausible reason for her showing of grief. While studying her when she stood over the

range, however, the idea had come to him that she had been Bart Caswell's wife. He was prepared to be shown that the woman herself was not a criminal, even by inclination. In fact, he was predisposed to believe that she would prove essentially honest.

"You're wrong, stranger—wrong on both counts!" The woman replied to the inspector. She had steadied herself, was forcing her voice to hold an even tone. Conklin could not yet be sure that his hunch was right.

"Mr. Conklin was a sure-enough inspector," she went on. "The coward that murdered him will learn that to his sorrow when Barney's mates come from headquarters to avenge his death. As for my being his widow—" She essayed a little laugh that was almost too much a strain upon her histrionic powers. "I'm not saying what might have come to pass had not death stepped in; but as it stands, he was just a brave friend and a good-paying boarder."

A moment the inspector merely stared at her; then he leaned along the counter toward her. "You'd like to see your brave friend's slayer punished, wouldn't you?"

A flash of fury lighted her worn face, her teeth clicked ominously and her small, work-roughened hands were clinched.

"I'd give the world if it were mine and count it well spent!" she cried. "If ever I find out who—" She checked herself, evidently fearing that she was going too far in behalf of a "brave friend and a good-paying boarder."

"Then tell me all you can about Bart, his recent movements and what he had planned for the future," urged Conklin quietly. "I am here to get the man who killed him, Mrs. Caswell."

Probably it was his repetition of that "*Mrs. Caswell*," more than his declaration of purpose that suddenly unnerved her. It was such convincing indication that her denials had not been believed. She sank into a chair that stood with its back to the front window in a space beyond the range and buried her face in her hands. She looked so hopeless that Conklin's heart was wrung with pity for her. His hunch had been right, but there



was no need now to press it unfeelingly. She should have all the time she needed for sobbing readjustment.

"How come you to think you know so much about him—about us?" she asked presently, without looking up.

"I *know*, ma'am. I am the real Bernard Conklin—the inspector whose uniform he wore."

His mask was off. He had been more frank than at first he had intended to be, but, in all the circumstances, he considered the temporary secret of his identity entirely safe with her.

Bart's widow started up in her chair. "Here so soon!" she exclaimed.

"Not soon enough, though, I'm sorry to say. If the Force had planted a detachment here with the first Chinook, probably your husband would not have been tempted to hold up the B. C. X."

Mrs. Caswell groaned in her anguish. "You know—about—about that, too?" she asked brokenly.

"Naturally. How else would he get hold of my uniform? Tell me, madam, what did he expect to gather in when he held up that baggage stage? It's a cinch that he couldn't have known that my clothes were in transit."

But the little woman was not persuaded to answer at once. Conklin had to show her his official shield, which he had taken from its place of concealment in his trail pack when he had stabled his horses before the inquest. He went to some pains also to assure her that, while technically she was an accessory after the crime, no charge would be placed against her if she helped in unraveling the latest murder. He pointed out that, because of the stolen uniform in which Bart had been killed, she could not hope to prevent the fatal stage robbery from being laid to him.

"But I can save his memory the disgrace of a brutal murder!" the widow cried, as though suddenly persuaded that the inspector was genuine. She fluttered out of her chair into more confidential range at the counter. "Bart did shoot Ben Tabor, but he had to fire in self-defense. It was his life or Tabor's; he made a brave man's choice." She paused a moment to catch at a sob that seemed determined to escape, then proceeded to

eulogize as best she might. "Bart Caswell was the gentlest of men. I never knew of his harming a soul before. Except for that wrong idea that the world owed him a living and his peculiar way of collecting it, there is nothing that could be said against him."

"I'm ready to be shown, Mrs. Caswell," the inspector encouraged her.

He listened then to the old, old story of the "double cross" in a new setting and with unusual variations. The First Bank of Gold, according to the widow, used considerable currency in its purchase of dust from the creek miners. To guard against robbery the shipments were made in supposed secrecy by the weekly baggage stage, but the driver knew the valuable load he occasionally carried. Caswell and Tabor had been friends in Vancouver before either came into the north country and soon after their meeting in Gold the ill-fated robbery had been planned.

Bart had "stuck" the stage at the agreed point, only to be told by his friend, the driver, that the expected \$30,000 shipment for that week had been withheld. Not then suspicious, Bart had accepted this statement as fact, expressed his hope that they'd have better luck next trip and was disappearing into the brush when Tabor fired at him. The bullet struck a silver plate which had been placed in Bart's back to repair a wound suffered in a Seattle gun fight some years before. The blow of it had staggered him, but without serious injury. Turning as Tabor was in the act of firing again, he had brought down the traitor with a single shot.

A hurried search of the express book showed that the currency shipment had been made. Driving the stage off the trail, Bart had examined the load thoroughly, but failed to find any bank package. He concluded that Tabor had concealed it somewhere along the trail, meaning to get the whole of the loot for himself after putting the blame on the friend he expected to kill.

Watchful for flaws in the widow's account, Conklin seized upon a seeming one. "But if Bart had been killed in the brush, no loot would have been found on him," he pointed out. "Tabor



still would have been held responsible for the currency."

"They had planned in advance," said the widow with a sorry little smile, "that Tabor would report his stage robbed by three masked men. He need only have sworn that the other two got away with the bank package."

Conklin made mental note of at least one way of checking up Mrs. Caswell's account; then asked her about the uniform.

"Your bag was the only thing on the wagon that Bart thought might be of use to him," she admitted with an air of frankness that was convincing. "He brought it here—to a room he was supposed to be renting from me—in the half story above the restaurant. When I found him there trying on the suit, he told me about his hard luck."

Conklin felt that the crux of the interview was approaching, but meant to get at it gradually, retaining the full advantage of the confidence he had established.

"The idea of impersonating an officer of the Mounted—was that merely to assure him a get-away from the Tabor killing?" he asked.

"Partly to delay an investigation of that by pretending to have undertaken it himself; more to help him in another undertaking he had in view up the creeks."

Considering a moment, Conklin ventured: "Having failed in landing the bank currency, he was going after gold in the raw, perhaps?"

"He told me that there was something richer than gold——"

The noisy opening of the street door interrupted. They glanced up to see Cato entering. Looking like a horrid gnome, with his long arms dangling almost to the ground from his misshapen shoulders, the ox driver advanced to a stool one removed from Conklin's. Upon this he pulled himself, after giving his neighbor the merest of nods. From his breath, he evidently had fortified himself for this untimely visit with bootleg courage. He leered at the widow, as if he considered himself assured of welcome now that his attractive rival had been eliminated.

"'Tis a starving man you see before you, Mary, Queen of the Scots," he declared. "But a starving man with a jingle in his pockets. With all the goings-on in camp, I'm rejoiced that the Home is open for the serving of meals what is meals."

Recalling the hope which Cato had expressed on the street a short while before, Conklin had none of his own that there would be early opportunity to finish his interview. When he heard the order that the ox man gave, he was sure there would be none. He attacked the steak that had been neglected, hoping that the old man would be too engrossed with his "chances" to notice that the meat was cold.

"I haven't forgotten that second cup of coffee, sir," the widow had presence of mind to offer. "If you'll be wishing for supper this evening, please come in by eight, as I'll be closing early."

Conklin took this as both his dismissal and an appointment for the widow to finish. Until eight o'clock, then, he would have to wait to know what Bart Caswell had in mind that was richer than gold and was to be had on the Creeks of Argonaut with the aid of a Royal Canadian police uniform.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A CRYPTIC MESSENGER.

FROM the Home Restaurant, the inspector went to the stable where already he had made his horses comfortable. He secured a clothes poke from the stack of his outfit. The Bonanza Hotel proved advantageously informal, in that he was asked for "two dollars the night in advance," instead of being confronted with a register for his name and address. A key, secured by a tin disk too large for any normal pocket, was tossed to him by a grouchy boniface, who informed him that he'd find No. 12 at the head of the stairs.

Opening a canvas door held by leather hinges, Conklin entered a tiny room lighted by a single window. It was furnished to the minimum with a blanketed cot, chair, and table, of the roughest construction.

As he sat on the edge of the cot, he



recalled some of the events of the day. "Richer than gold!" The last words of Bart's widow kept recurring to his thoughts. What could this presumptuous crook of the wilds have had in mind? The inspector could think, of course, of commodities that were more precious than the yellow metal, but of none that were indigenous to that upper corner of British Columbia.

So he puzzled over the remark until he reached the conclusion that Bart must have used a figure of speech. He would await the widow's interpretation.

The inspector was not surprised to find that he did not think of Mrs. Caswell as a participant in Bart's outlawry. Without protestations of innocence or any oral plea that she had tried in vain to reform the daring rascal, she had acquitted herself of culpability. The weary lines in a face that must have been beautiful not so long ago, the haunted look in her dark eyes, even her superb first effort at denial had won the mountie's sympathy.

A knock upon the wooden frame of the canvas door interrupted his study of the situation. Arising, he unhooked the latch, whereupon the improvised door swung inward of its own weight and the accord of its makeshift hinges.

Disclosed in the frame, filling it perpendicularly, but sadly lacking in horizontal proportions, stood a gaunt, miner-clad figure, distinguished by a pair of deep-set eyes which burned like living coals and a shock of white hair which waved its freedom from the slouch hat which he had removed.

"You will pardon me, stranger; no intrusion meant." The voice was soft and a smile of utmost benignity came into play. "In the midst of life we are in death."

"The missionary—Ruth Duperow's father!" was the thought of Conklin; but he gave no sign of the recognition. "Safe enough statement in this camp to-day," he said to the visitor.

"I'm the sky pilot of these diggings," the other announced in a "pulpit" voice that rumbled through the hall.

"Won't you come in, sir?"

The missionary declined with a shake of his shaggy head. "I must hasten on

my weekly rounds, distributing lessons from the Word. Won't you accept one of these and promise me to read it?" He held out a small tract, taken from a handful which he carried.

The inspector glanced at the title: "What Shall It Profit a Man——" He smiled tolerantly, thinking what a queer character his companion of chance had for a parent.

"It is not meet that we should be seen in conference." Duperow's voice had been lowered to a whisper; then as suddenly it boomed that all beneath the roof might hear. "I trust you will read that tract, brother—read and profit thereby." And with that, he stalked down the hall, as if in search of other needy souls.

Conklin watched him. On getting no answer from the next door, the gaunt frame was stooped to slip a tract under it. At another a woman answered his knock, and a "sister" was informed that in the midst of life she was in death.

Back in his room the inspector pondered the single whispered sentence with which the sky pilot had varied what evidently was his wonted words when distributing tracts. What could it mean unless there was a message—temporal rather than spiritual—for him hidden somewhere within the pamphlet?

But when he shook its leaves no enclosure dropped out. He examined the margins without raising a sign. The inside of the back cover was unprinted, but nothing had been written thereon. He remembered that the missionary had picked the tract seemingly at random from a pack of several dozen, and he was discouraged.

Still the whisper persisted. "It is not meet that we should be seen in conference"—he recalled every significant word of it. Surely such words had not been spoken at random. Drawing the chair to the window, he sat down and began a more intensive study of the printed sheet. Soon an ink dot beneath a lower-case letter rewarded him; then others. Presently he had picked out a sequence of dotted letters spelling p-a-r-d-o-n.

The process reminded him of reading a sun-heliograph or taking a blinker message at night. Undoubtedly the com-



munication was of importance that the girl had gone to such trouble to assure its secrecy. The father, too, must have shared the secret or he could not have been trusted to pick out the message-dotted tract. From his clothes poke, the inspector took a writing pad and with his pencil set the indicated type impressions into words, with this final result:

P-a-r-d-o-n m-y v-a-m-o-s-e a-n-d c-u-t  
B-o-t-h f-o-r g-o-o-d o-u-r c-a-u-s-e  
B-a-r-t s-a-i-d y-o-u c-o-m-i-n-g t-o h-e-l-p  
N-o-w m-u-s-t c-a-r-r-y o-n a-l-o-n-e B-e  
c-a-r-e-f-u-l K-e-e-p s-i-l-e-n-t C-o-m-e o-u-r  
c-a-b-i-n l-a-t-e t-o-n-i-g-h-t R-i-v-e-r a-t  
G-l-a-c-i-e-r R-U-T-H D-U-P-E-R-O-W

The message amazed him on more than one count. She had left him cold at the point of discovery and later on refused to recognize him on the street in Gold for the good of "our cause." What cause? Unless that was her way of indicating law and order, he knew of no *cause* they had in common. Again, he was to "carry on alone." What did she expect him to carry on?

But most puzzling of all was that "Bart said *you* were coming." Who did she think *he* was, anyway? That she had made a faulty surmise of some sort was evidenced by the fact that she still held the crook at his assumed inspectorship value.

As for the rest of the message, nothing would please him better than to accept the strangely sent invitation to call.

Taking out the waxen flowers of the girl's one lapse from caution, he pressed them within the tract, then replaced them in his pocket.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THIN PARTITIONS.

AT the shack of a surveyor, whose sign he had noticed on riding into Gold that morning, Inspector Conklin purchased a blue-print map of the district. Returning to his room at the Bonanza, he gave some time to intensive study of it in the hope of finding his way toward the creeks after nightfall without asking questions and in a general mapping of his surroundings.

His morning course to the point where he had overtaken the boyish-looking

rider was easily traced, and thence into town. Working back, he found the trail over which Ruth Duperow had come and followed that to the mouth of Glacier Creek. Evidently the girl for some reason had taken a roundabout course that morning, for he noted that a more direct trail to town followed the Cheena. His acquaintance with the Indian tongue was sufficient to spare him the map-maker's mistake of adding the word river to a name that already included it in the "na" suffix.

From such detail as was drawn into the map he judged that Glacier was not much of a creek. It appeared to start in a nest of glaciers, if one could believe the topographer's scrollwork, and to flow through a cañon, as from the neck of a bottle. Between the Cheena and the cañon entrance was drawn a square with the legend "Indian Mission." That no mining claims were marked off on this creek, although those surrounding it were well staked, seemed remarkable, but the stranger did not try to guess the answer.

For no other reason than that the name had lodged in his mind, Conklin sought out Hoodoo Creek on the map and found the claim accredited to Cato—Thirteen Above. If the long-armed oxman cited it in advancing his hopes with the widow, Conklin hoped that the number would exert its supposably baleful influence.

From the blue print he turned to writing a report to his chief in Vancouver, to whom word of the murder of "Inspector Conklin" doubtless would be sent without delay. He took a grim sort of enjoyment in an opening after Mark Twain:

"I have the honor to state my safe arrival in Gold, B. C. Any reports of my violent death that may reach you are *slightly* exaggerated."

In the terse English that has made mounted police reports models of modesty, he told how he had "run into" two murder mysteries. One of these, with its accompanying stage robbery, he believed he had solved, except for stray angles that did not affect the capital crime. He was at work on the second murder case, with fair progress.



Over his final paragraph, which was headed "Suggestions," according to the form followed by the Force in official communications, he pondered deeply. Whatever he wrote there, he had reason to believe, would be incorporated into an order soon after passing under Captain Baxter's eyes. On his first independent command, he was anxious not to make mistakes. Finally he wrote:

Am not prepared to pass judgment, at this writing, as to the permanency of Gold. From what I have seen, however, the district sadly needs Dominion policing. Would suggest that you send at your earliest convenience one (1) sergeant and two (2) constables, mounted, and with suitable camp equipment. As I may be working under cover on this second, unsolved murder, please instruct the sergeant to make camp on his own responsibility and act accordingly until he hears from me. Tell him to disregard reports of my demise as unfounded and—

A strident "Come in!" evidently in answer to a knock he had not heard, sounded from the adjoining room and caused him to raise his pen from the paper with the sentence incomplete.

"Hello, Brewster—glad I found you in."

The shrilled greeting was in an unmistakable voice. Its wording informed Conklin that the agreeable freighter of this morning acquaintance was his immediate hotel neighbor.

"What can I do for you, Hardley, you honorable strong arm of the law?"

The voice of this question undoubtedly was Brewster's—the same that had remarked the thinness of the tar-paper partitions. They were veritable sounding boards. Conklin could hear every word.

"Wanted to ask your advice, Phil, about a point in this Inspector Conklin murder."

The real inspector winced involuntarily. It was a very bad joke. He doubted that he ever would become accustomed to hearing Inspector Conklin spoken of as murdered—done for.

"Shoot!" he heard the unseen Brewster invite.

"It's this way, Phil. Conklin must have been quite a big bug on the Force. As you said this a. m., his snuffing's going to make a noisy roar-back. I got to report it to somebody in the Mounted, but who and whereat?"

Conklin fidgeted uneasily in the silence that followed, evidently due to Brewster's considering his answer. He detested eavesdropping; never had resorted to it on any of his cases. By way of letting the two in the adjoining room know of his near presence, he scraped his chair noisily over the bare floor. This warning, however, failed to check Brewster, or even to lower his voice.

"I remember reading that Vancouver was the nearest staff office of this new Canadian Mounted, but I've just been thinking— If they send a lot of mounties into Gold and run down these stage-robbing murderers, you're not going to get any credit. I'm strong for home industry, even in justice. Why don't you delay reporting the inspector's murder until you land your man?"

"Say, you're a real friend, Phil, even if you do try to ride me sometimes. I need the credit for turning a trick like that. It might make me sheriff next election. But—but would I dare?"

Conklin started for the hall, but on the way heard Brewster's reply:

"Write your report, Sam, but don't post it until after to-morrow's mail has gone. That'll give you a week. Then address the letter to Ottawa, which will give you a few days more. In that time you ought to have the murderers rounded up. You can forget that I told you about there being any Vancouver headquarters."

Surprise at such advice from a seemingly public-spirited citizen delayed Conklin's knock until he had heard it through. Of course, all this might be merely a sign of real, though mistaken, friendship for Hardley. On the other hand, was it possible that Brewster had personal reasons for wishing to delay the coming of the Mounted?

With this question to the fore in his mind, Conklin knocked on the adjoining door and was invited to come in. His entry seemed not to disturb either of the two.

"Just wanted to tell you that the next room is occupied, and that the partition between is more or less of a megaphone," he said in a light tone. "If you've any secrets—"

Brewster's laugh was natural enough



to be reassuring. "If we were talking secrets, stranger, we'd take to the brush. I've lived in the Bonanza since the day it was opened, and I don't even think secrets behind these make-believe walls."

The inspector dismissed his unintentional eavesdropping with a shrug and turned to the sheriff. "Out on the trail this morning you seemed to think that you might want me later. You'll know now where to find me—Room No. 12."

"Forget this a. m., old topper. I was maybe a little mite excited out there at the scene of the crime. There ain't such a lot of difference between hard-riding deputy sheriffs and mounted inspectors. It might 'a' been me lying there deader than dead. Your happening along looked sort of queer. I'm seeing straighter now. You're welcome to Gold and I hope you get what you came for."

"You'll find me strong for law and order," said Conklin.

This seemed to invite Hardley to real confidences. Beckoning Conklin from the doorway, he edged his chair closer to the cot on which Brewster reclined in his stockinged feet.

"Don't mind telling you two in confidence," he whispered, "that I'm in a fair way to nab the pair that robbed the stage and killed Tabor and Conklin. Maybe I ain't seemed to be doing much, but I've got clews to burn already."

"You have?" cried Brewster, hunching himself into a sitting position on the cot.

Hardley nodded assuredly. "There were two of them in the bush laying for the inspector this morning. One had a Winchester 30-30 and used it to kill Conklin. One rode a horse that was shod in front, but plain behind." He paused, evidently from his expression, to collect the encomiums he considered his due.

"Important if true, Sam," Brewster observed.

"Quick work," admitted Conklin, honestly surprised; his hand was in the trousers pocket that held the cartridge case picked up that morning. "How in the world did you learn all that?"

Hardley seemed to relish supplying the details, even though he had to whisper them. Apparently he had forgotten that

one of his confidants was an utter stranger both to him and to the camp, one whose name even he did not know. It was country-official vanity advanced to the *n*th degree.

"Dr. Pratt dug out the bullet, which fixed the brand of gun with which the deed was done. Then I've got a half-breed boy on my staff who's keen as a Gordon setter in the bush. He found the horse track of the two from the scene of the crime. Now I'm looking for a man with a 30-30 repeater and a horse that's shy on shoes."

Surprised that Hardley should have shown so much initiative, and apprehensive that he was getting too near "home" for comfort, Conklin framed a diverting question.

"What do you know about the chap who was killed?"

"You mean this last one—Inspector Conklin?" asked the deputy in turn, but merely as a preface, not to wait for answer. "Kirby of the First Bank has heard of him. Says he was nicknamed 'Blue Barney' up in the Northwest territories, and is guilty of some of the hardest patrols ever made. He must have been a regular fighting machine. Autopsy proved that."

Blue Barney! That was a nickname they had given Conklin. His chance to check up on the widow had arrived sooner than he had expected. He showed casual, but sufficient interest in the disclosures mentioned.

"The inspector had been under fire before and more than once," declared Hardley. "The doctor found a silver plate bracing his spine high up between his shoulders. And, would you believe it, there was a dent in that plate which looked as if he'd been hit in the identical repair spot by some later bullet."

"Checked to a T," thought Conklin of the widow's story.

He became more than ever anxious to be clear of the talkative deputy. With all his false surmises, the natural-born bungler had corralled some accurate information and might make a deal of trouble for him. At first chance he got back into his own room.

With a few swift strokes, he completed and signed his report. His superinten-



dent must be prepared for that inspector-murder story, whether Hardley finally acted on Brewster's advice or not.

Hurrying from the hotel into King Street, Conklin found the post office and mailed his letter. Then, although the hour was only seven, he advanced casually upon the Home Restaurant. He was eager to be on his way to the creeks before Hardley stumbled, as possibly he might, upon the fact that Conklin's rifle, stored with his outfit, was a 30-30 and that Kaw was "shod in front, but plain behind."

## CHAPTER IX.

### INTO THE NIGHT.

YOU were saying, Mrs. Caswell——" Conklin's wait at one of the Home's small tables had been long drawn. The slender widow was worked "ragged" to cook and serve for the tide of customers that, by perverse chance, had set in particularly strong that evening.

Fortunately all were strangers to the inspector, and he congratulated himself that he had attracted only passing notice, as he sat seemingly absorbed in an old magazine, with his coffee never quite finished before him. He had gained nothing by coming early, for it was nearly nine o'clock when, at last, they found themselves alone.

"Let me see," considered the widow, for appearance's sake supporting her tired self by leaning over a stool, instead of sitting down at the table opposite him. "Where was I this afternoon when that old pest broke in?"

"I trust you punctured Cato's hopes?" The inspector could not resist the momentary digression.

"The presuming ox had been drinking," she said. "He gave me—well, let's call it an argument; but I had the last word. He'll not come bothering around here again."

After a smile and a nod of approval, Conklin snapped back to their unfinished business. "You were telling me what Bart had in view up the creeks. Something richer than gold, wasn't that the way he put it?"

"His very words," the widow went on, in the glow of loving reminiscence. "Naturally I was curious, for I thought

that gold was all there was worth while up here. I asked him what he meant." And with that her lips were still and a dreamy look came into her eyes.

The inspector did not believe that she had paused with aggravating intent, or even from any sense of the dramatic. Doubtless her thoughts were with the departed rascal. But that was no place at all for her to stop; he just couldn't wait longer to know what in Gold was richer than gold.

"Yes—yes!" he prodded, glancing at his watch to suggest a time reason for his hurry.

"Why, Bart just took me into his arms in a gentle, big-bear way he had—at times—and said—— I'll never forget; it made me so very happy."

Again she was living over what evidently had been the big moment of her recent life; but that did not ease in the least Conklin's present impatience.

"Well, what did he say?"

"Bart said—'All you'll care to know, Marge old dear, is that for once I'm going to put something over in the name of the law and within it. I'm going to rectify a wrong. In the name of the Royal Mounted, I'm going to loot some looters.' That's what Bart said, and you can understand, Mr. Inspector, how happy it made me."

For another brief moment Margaret Caswell succeeded in forgetting her recent bereavement.

"That talk was the morning after the unfortunate stage—business," she went on, with just a little break in her voice at mention of crime. "Bart went forth in his borrowed uniform to establish himself at the hotel as befits a commissioned officer. He dropped in here for supper, and we had a fine talk. He told me that nobody seemed to doubt his authority, and that the whole camp was breathing easier at sight of the famous scarlet and gold. In truth, you know, what he wore just stood for scarlet and gold, for it was your blue serge uniform."

Exactly like a woman to insist on being accurate about the clothes he wore, thought Conklin, and he pictured the swath the handsome crook must have cut in the new camp all excited with its first big crime.



"Bart knew that he would have to work fast," the woman was saying. "From letters or orders he found in the bag, he was aware that you'd soon be coming in plain clothes. In spite of the fact that he would be acting in the name of the law and that all his so-called lifting would be from Montreal crooks, he'd be forced to make a get-away over into Alaska and from there to the States by some through steamer. It was agreed that I'd stay on here, running this eating place, until I heard from him. You see, it was safe enough, for we had been very careful, and no one suspected that there was any relationship. After that evening I never saw Bart again to speak to."

That she might not yield to this call upon her emotions, Conklin put out a couple of rapid-fire questions. "You think then, that one of these so-called Montreal crooks got him? Any line on them?"

"No line," she answered regretfully, adding after a moment's thought: "None at all, unless—— There's a young woman he met up the creeks, a missionary's daughter, I believe. I saw her speak to him one day on King Street and, of course, he had to explain. He met her when he was just plain Barton Caswell and out prospecting. From her father he learned of the wrong that was being done by the Montreal outfit, but until that uniform fell into his hands, he did not see any way of getting the best of them. Perhaps these missionary folks can help you."

Evidently Bart had played his cards with the skill of an expert, thought Conklin. From the widow's unimpassioned admission she held no grudge against Ruth Duperow. There had been no hint of slur in the tones that mentioned the younger, prettier woman, suggesting that she must have had implicit faith in the crook's love for her.

Declaring his intention of looking up the mission folks, the inspector returned to the subject of the loot. Had she asked no further about what it consisted of?

"I surely did, but his answer was always the same. 'Richer than gold, Marge girl; richer than gold.' He said

that he'd be the first mounted policeman in the history of the Force to make a clean-up, even if he was one only for a week. This stroke was to mean luxury for me, a home in an orange grove in California, diamond rings set in platinum, fine dresses—everything! I think this morning, when he rode out so bravely, that he hoped never to come back to Gold. The loot is up there in the creeks, you know, and Alaska lies still farther on. Any hour the real inspector—who turns out to be you—might ride in, as, in truth, you did."

Satisfied that the bandit's widow had withheld nothing worth while, Conklin was anxious to be off about the invitation which Ruth Duperow had "dotted" him. He felt, however, that he owed Bart's widow something for the information which, once she started to impart it, had been given so frankly. He was minded to pay at once, even if the coin thereof was only good advice.

"For the present you'd best sit tight here and say nothing, Mrs. Caswell," he began. "I suppose it was come easy, easy go with Bart; that he leaves you practically nothing. From what I've seen of your trade this evening, you have a paying proposition in the restaurant. I don't see any reason why you can't go on with it."

"But when people know——"

"Maybe they need never know that Bart was anything but a boarder," Conklin interposed hopefully. "You seem to have guarded your secret well, when even infatuated old Cato didn't suspect your man of being more than a suitor."

The little woman had been too distressed to give thought to her own future; naturally she seemed uncertain about it. Then, suddenly, the flame of that love that was beyond Conklin's comprehension, but within range of his appreciation, flamed to decision.

"But they will have to know if I save Bart's reputation!" she cried. "I'll not have the world think he killed that double-crossing stage driver in anything but the defense of his own life."

Here was complication that disturbed the plans which the inspector, impelled by his rugged conviction that every person was entitled to a square deal, had



been making for her. He had no time to argue with her, so went on to impress upon her what was vital to his own operations.

He could work to a better advantage toward the capture of Bart's slayer if the double unmasking was delayed. Her promise to say nothing until he gave her leave was his for the asking. The town folk probably would arrange an appropriate funeral for the dead "inspector;" she would need to attend as a sorrowing acquaintance, but she must keep a tight rein on her emotions if she wished to aid in the capture. In this, ordeal though it would be, she promised to do her best.

As he arose to leave, he offered her his big hand. She reached out her small one timidly.

"I never thought I'd be shaking hands with a mountie," she confessed in a murmuring voice. "I'm afraid I've hated you wearers of the scarlet, you were so all-sure about getting the men you went after and I never knew when Bart would fall into your clutches. But now——"

"That's all right, little woman. You've helped a lot, and I only hope I get this one." He started toward the door, but remembered one thing more. "That war bag of mine—I suppose Bart took that to the hotel when he moved. I'll be needing that other uniform when this mystery's cleared."

"The bag is still upstairs," she said quickly. "Bart took only some documents and papers besides what he wore. He didn't know but what his identity might be questioned on his sudden change from a mining expert to a mountie."

"And the room—is it unrented?"

She nodded.

"Then, if you'll accept me as a tenant, until further notice we'll let the bag stay where it is. The rent?"

"I couldn't think of taking rent from you when you're working out my revenge," she said.

Conklin frowned. "I'm seeing that justice is done, madam," he said referring to her use of the word revenge. "I am teaching Gold the value of human life. And I'll pay for the room—the usual rate."

To escape further discussion he hurried into the suddenly fallen night. Pondering the marvelous complexities of the women met in a day on the last frontier, he nearly plumped into the mud hole that lay out front. Close to the shack was a beaten path; this he followed. At the corner he was edging into the vacant lot which adjoined when, without a swish of warning, something blacker than night fell over him.

Instinctively he struck out at this blackness, his knuckles denting a yielding substance that had a fibrous touch. Before he could throw off its enveloping folds, he felt a pair of strong arms go around his waist. They closed in, as with a gathering string, the covering, evidently a horse blanket, from the smell.

As a sudden surge of fury against such artful manhandling lent him strength to thrash about, a heavy blow fell upon the back of his head. He felt his knees weaken under the shock of it, but clawed and strained to break the clutch about his waist. A second hammering blow descended. His ability to struggle failed him. His knees gave way. The Gold garroters, whoever they were and whatever their object, had got him. Blue Conklin was out!

## CHAPTER X.

### MORNING'S MAZE.

THE awakening of Inspector Conklin was painful; never before had he known that a head could ache with the throbs that were racking his. Presently his mind took hold of a fragmentary idea—horse-blanket. Upon this, after a struggle, he was able to spread a mental picture of his sorry going-out at the hands of some mining-camp thugs, doubtless intent on robbing him.

His next wonder was what had awakened him and by way of answering that he opened his eyes for a look around, the greatest surprise of which was broad daylight. The sun, then, must have served as his alarm clock—called him out of that night that was darker than any he ever had known before. Now its rays were streaming into a cabin room in which he lay, fully clad, upon a straw-stuffed bunk.



He did not bother to get up just then; he merely lay back upon the inadequate pillow of his slouch hat and "listened" to his head ache. The idea that he had been robbed persisted. To his surprise, he found that the currency belt about his waist had not been disturbed. Surely mining-camp crooks would have known where to look for his valuables!

Then he slid his right hand over his chest to feel the flat holster that hung beneath his left arm. Greater surprise! The army automatic, that he had learned to use in France and for which he had retired his Colt .45, lay ready in its usual concealment. The conclusions, painful in their process, were at once comforting and disturbing. He had not been trimmed or even frisked. Robbery could not have been the motive behind the attack outside the widow's restaurant. Then—what?

Slowly he raised himself to a sitting position upon the bare bunk and permitted his eyes to rove until they settled upon another shock to his tortured comprehension. This was found in the narrow window through which the sun was streaming. Iron bars crossed the opening. He must be a prisoner in jail.

"Deputy Sheriff Samuel Hardley, the strong arm of the law!"

He swung his feet from the bunk and took a somewhat wabbly stand upon the floor. Further survey convinced him beyond doubt that he was in the blundering deputy's one-cell bastille. This proved to be built of logs, with a door that looked as thick as that of an ice box and studded with nails. The two windows were near the log ceiling, narrow, oblong and barred. There were three bunks, against as many walls, and a Yukon stove in the cell's center—no other furnishings, but enough for a frontier jail.

So, that was the lay of the cards, he mused darkly—the explanation of the surprise attack. After their talk in Brewster's room at the Bonanza, the fat deputy must have located Kaw—shod in front, but plain behind—and the 30-30 rifle left at the stable. Hardley had realized then that his ill-considered revelation of clues would have put his man on guard. Learning that Conklin, supposed

murderer and robber of stages, was in the restaurant, he had made ambush and effected his capture along safety-first lines.

There the deputy's caution seemed to have stopped, thought the inspector, enjoying again the reinforcing feel of his automatic. Neglecting to search his prisoner was quite in keeping with other official blunders which the fat man had made. Conklin would have to give Hardley credit, however, for effecting a silent, bloodless capture—with a blanket, as he remembered it.

Full assurance on this point awaited his glance. Almost at his feet lay the thing—a worn horse-blanket. Possibly the deputy had covered him with it before locking him in and, in the restlessness of thug-impelled slumber, Conklin had kicked it off.

A bottle that stood upon the sheet-iron stove invited inspection. Even before he picked it up, the stars on its label prepared him for the brandy smell which a sniff at its neck brought forth. If Hardley had been fortifying his courage with that high-powered stuff, there was no need to wonder that he had overlooked his prisoner's gun. A drink of the liquor might have strengthened Conklin; but he realized that he would need all his wit in the heated session which he meant should begin with the deputy's arrival at the jail. Lifting the stove-top, he permitted the pint which remained in the bottle to gurggle into the ashes of some long-ago fire.

Seated on the edge of one of the bunks, he took stock of the situation. He had missed his late-night appointment at the Duperow cabin on Glacier Creek. The missionary folk would think, probably, that they had left too much to his intuition in their excess of caution. That, however, meant only delay and, while hours were precious, he would make up for lost time once free of Hardley's faulty detecting.

It began to look as though he was not a huge success as a plain-clothes man. He had taken off his mask for Bart's widow. Ruth Duperow evidently believed him to be a constable come to aid the murdered "inspector." Now it seemed likely that he would be forced



to make a confidant of the talkative Hardley in order to be able to carry on at all. If Bart had not made the uniform a conspicuous target for one bad outfit of that particular region, he'd be tempted to climb at once into the gold and scarlet which the bandit had left unworn. Never had he liked under-cover patrols, but in this particular case he felt that "civies" were essential.

An hour had passed since his awakening and he was beginning to wonder when the overfleshed deputy fed the prisoners at his perforce boarding house. If the surmise suggested by the half-empty bottle of "Four Star" was well taken, Hardley might sleep late that morning and awaken with a "head" that would make his visit to the guardhouse a second thought.

Conklin considered firing his pistol a few times through the bars of a window in the hope of attracting attention to his plight; he even went so far as to unlimber the weapon. But he recalled that he had not the slightest idea where the calaboose was situated, for it had not come to his notice in the course of his one crowded day in Gold. That it did not stand immediately back of the sheriff's office, he was certain, and it might be on the camp's outskirts for all he knew to the contrary. It seemed the part of wisdom to conserve his ammunition; at least to give the deputy another half hour of grace.

In his impatience to be out and going, the inspector began pacing the floor. Already his physical fitness was asserting itself, returning him rapidly to normal. There were two lumps on the back of his head, where the put-out blows had landed, but there was no sign of a scalp wound, thanks to the protection which the thick blanket had afforded. Except for the confining bars and that ice-box door, he was entirely able to be out carrying the law where it sadly was needed.

On his fourth or fifth round of the small room, he paused before the door, seized with a commanding impulse to expend his surplus energy in beating upon it. He had seen prisoners behave in that same futile fashion in his own guardhouses and for the sake of quiet

had put irons on them when they persisted. But there was no one in this inhospitable place to iron him and he yielded to the extent of beating a tattoo upon the stout planking.

To his amazement the door gave slightly under this, which was no way at all for any self-respecting jail door to behave. This "giving" suggested the application of more force. Crouching, he put his shoulder to it and the heavy portal swung open. He had been "jugged" in an uncorked "jug," and there was nothing, now, to keep him from going when and where he listed.

He delayed just long enough to examine the fastenings that had not fastened. A heavy padlock hung securely locked in its deep-set staple, but the hasp had been left outside, folded back against the door. For the first time that morning Blue Conklin smiled; more than that—he grinned. For once he was indebted to too much brandy!

Outside under the blue sky, he took several deep breaths of vitalizing air. He had seen his own prisoners do that on being freed from confinement, but never understood the impulse as he did now. A moment was necessary to get his bearings; the jail stood on a knoll a hundred yards back from King Street.

To "make tracks" out of camp was his first inclination. But at once he rejected any attempt at escape. That would only start Hardley in pursuit, probably with that posse which the coroner's jury had authorized so superfluously. Rather, he must quiet the deputy's suspicions, even to disclosing his official identity if necessary. Picking his path, he strode down the incline to the street.

As he neared the Bonanza, he saw Hardley come off the porch and start waddling in his direction. But at first sight of him, the deputy merely added another to the morning's list of surprises. This one took the form of a cheerfully waved greeting, as from friend to friend. By no stretch of the imagination could it have been expected from a sheriff sighting a prisoner who had just broken out of jail. Conklin advanced, puzzled and on guard.



"You're out early this morning, stranger," shrilled Hardley when the paces that separated them were few. "Just been up to your room looking for you, but heard no 'Come in.'"

The inspector studied the man a moment, then replied: "Sorry I was out, What can I do for you, now that you've found me?"

"I noticed yesterday that you've got a come-hither eye," went on the sheriff in a lower voice. "I've got a hunch them murdering stage robbers are camped in a cañon south of town a ways. Thought you might like a little frolic as one of my official posse. No danger to speak of, for I'll be leading you and we'll all be armed to the teeth. Better come if you've got the time to spare."

That Hardley did not know Conklin had spent the night in jail seemed indubitable. The inspector could not explain it, for it seemed too much to blame upon the brandy. The deputy had been absolutely sober in Brewster's room. But explanations could wait. Here was a chance for him to be about his police business without disclosing that he had any.

At once he expressed regret. He honestly had not the time to spare. Hardley could understand how anxious he was to get to the creeks and locate something for himself. The deputy should have no trouble recruiting enough men, citizens who knew the country better than Conklin did and who already had staked their claims. He was for the law every time—Conklin was, but he'd appreciate being excused from service this once.

"Sure, I understand, friend," agreed the deputy. "Be on your way and the best of good luck to you. My down-river hunch may be all wrong, so keep your eyes peeled for a horse that's shod in front, but plain behind. The rider of him is the killer of Inspector Conklin, or I'm a liar and as a sheriff not worth the powder to blow me to blazes!"

Half an hour later a horse that was shod in front, but plain behind traveled north out of Gold. His rider was Inspector Conklin himself, not the "inspector's" killer.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CLOSED CREEK.

BY noon Conklin had his A-tent pitched on the bank of the Cheena, between the trail and the stream, a few rods below the point where Glacier Creek made its indigo-colored contribution. Above the scrubby timber spiraled the smoke of the hidden mission, to which the officer proposed to pay a neighborly visit when he had finished eating the meal of bacon and beans which he was preparing.

Yesterday the Duperows had made plain that they wished his conference with them to be secret and under cover of night. His unexplained capture had made that impossible. Whether or not their caution was well founded, he was unwilling to await the falling of another night. He would need to make camp somewhere and felt it might better be near enough to excuse an open call. Hence he had pitched his tent here.

But Conklin had done more that morning than ride out from Gold, five muddy miles, and make camp. His years of detachment service had made him something of a jack-of-all-trades, and his cayuse-packed outfit was comprehensive. Kaw, grazing on the lush grass of the meadow, now was as neatly shod as he could have been at the hands of a blacksmith. No longer was the animal a fit subject for Deputy Hardley's suspicions.

The inspector had scoured his tin dishes in river-bank sand and was returning to the tent when he saw a horseman observing him from the main trail. The man stared a moment longer, then rode toward him. Soon the inspector recognized him and wondered at such curiosity from a man of affairs.

"You're my first visitor, Brewster!" he called as the cordial freighter drew near. "Welcome to camp. If you'd been fifteen minutes earlier, I'd have fed you. Now, if you're hungry, there's the grub box."

"So it's really you?" The visitor's response was oddly halting, as if he was finding it difficult to believe his eyes.

"To my best knowledge and belief, I'm no one else."



Brewster laughed and swung into a chatting position by hooking one leg over the horn of his saddle. "And here was I hot-footing into town to get you out of jail."

"Kind of you, but apparently unnecessary." Conklin offered a laugh of his own. "Where did you get the idea I was in limbo?"

"Thought our nickle-plated deputy sheriff had gone back to his first suspicions and was troubling you, when he should be beating the bush down river."

The inspector did not need to feign his look of mystification. That the news of an arrest that Hardley himself did not remember had traveled to the creeks to be overheard by Brewster served only to deepen the puzzle.

"Did Hardley mention jail to you?" he asked. "He didn't to me, and I saw him just before I left town."

"It wasn't Hardley—haven't seen him since he left my room last evening. But Cato said Hardley had pinched you and locked you up. He declared he had helped in the capture and was pleased with himself."

At mention of Cato, the inspector was suddenly in the clear, although not so much as an eyelash flicker betrayed the fact. He recalled now the inordinately long arms of the man. Doubtless these had puckered the horse-blanket about his midriff and beaten him into insensibility. The lovelorn old codger, fired with jealousy, must have been stalking the widow's place, mistaken him for a rival and acted under the dictates of his brandy-befuddled brain. That he had forgotten to confide the fact of imprisonment to Hardley was evident; but then, he had neglected to lock the jail. How the ox driver had gained possession of the key was a detail unexplained, but Conklin never would be sufficiently curious to inquire into it. To have been taken single-handed by Cato was not particularly flattering, even though the gnome was possessed of superhuman strength.

"Wasn't Cato hitting the hooch yesterday?" was all he asked of the driver's employer.

"He was that," admitted Brewster, "and he had a hang-over this morning.

But how he ever imagined— Oh, well, there's no harm done, long as it was only a drunken dream. I was afraid Hardley would lose another day getting after the Conklin murderers and I didn't want to see you suffer for his foolishness. You've picked a queer place to camp, strikes me. Didn't you know that Glacier Creek was closed?"

Conklin had not heard this, and was curious to know how any creek could be "closed." Brewster told him. The genial old missionary, Duperow, had laid the foundation for the unusual situation in the early days of the rush. With more foresight than many laymen, he had seen what was coming. To hold the Indians of his congregation, or whatever he called it, and to keep them from contact with the white "rushers" as far as possible, he had induced them to stake and register every foot of bar and bench from the cañon entrance back to the glacier. To make a close corporation of it, he and his daughter Ruth had staked the two full claims between the cañon gate and the Cheena. Glacier Creek had not proved a bonanza, but Duperow did not seem to care; the laziest Siwash could pan out a living, and the old man was keeping his little flock together.

Then along came Bonnemort and Kluger, a shrewd pair from somewhere back in eastern Canada. They saw a chance of operating the Glacier Creek claims on a large scale. The Bonnemort of the combination admitted to being a half-breed, and he knew how to handle the Siwashes. Before Duperow knew what was up, the two had leased every Indian claim beyond the cañon gate. Moreover—and Brewster was forced to smile appreciatively as he told it—they had hired the Indians to work their own claims. When all was "set," they posted a "No Trespass" sign and stationed an armed guard at the narrow entrance. When this sentry turned back the sky-pilot, intent on visiting his flock, all the district learned of the coup.

Brewster said he had been "right friendly" with the Duperows at that time. Because of their fears that the Siwashes were being robbed he had brought Sam Hardley to investigate. The B. & K. outfit had produced their leases



and the Indians had denied that they were being worked against their will. As no established trail ran up the creek, which was a veritable cul-de-sac because of its glacier source, Hardley had decided that the lessees were within their rights and there wasn't a thing to be done about it. The creek was still closed and as there was only one entrance—through the narrow mouth of the cañon, where one man could hold up a regiment—it was likely to remain so until the within-the-law promoters took down the bars.

"I lost out with the Duperows because I wouldn't storm the gate," Brewster concluded regretfully. "About that time appeared this Inspector Conklin, then under cover as a mining expert. He fell hard for the girl, which is not against him, for there isn't a finer girl in all B. C. than Miss Ruth. I don't know what he thought of the monopoly or what he meant to do when he got into uniform. As you know, the stage robbers killed him before he was officially saddled up."

"What do you make of it yourself?"

Brewster shrugged his broad shoulders. "I may be prejudiced. You see, while I lost my best girl, I landed the B. & K. packing contract. I'll say they pay their bills. Hope you won't think I was trying to horn into your game by criticizing your camp selection. But I thought you might not know how things stood on Glacier."

Conklin thanked him, then glanced toward the river. "Maybe I like the looks of the Cheena," he added.

"Scouting for dredger people, eh?" Brewster made shrewd surmise. "I hear they're cleaning up strong in the Klondike. The Cheena ought to pay rich for any one with money enough to put in a hydraulic. Remember that Philip Brewster is in the freighting business in case you begin operations. Good luck to you and good-by for the present."

The inspector watched Brewster ride across the flat to the main trail; noted that he turned back toward the creeks. Evidently the freighter had been riding into Gold, as he said, to effect Conklin's release. An obliging individual, Brewster, even if he had given his fat sheriff friend foolish advice about holding back the Mounted.

So Glacier was a closed creek. A guarded "gate" had been swung across its cañon mouth. Upon what? Upon Bart Caswell's something "richer than gold," he strongly suspected. Perhaps upon the "inspector's" slayer, as well. Conklin was part Irish; he enjoyed passing the impassable—or trying to.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A FIGURE OF SPEECH.

CARRYING an empty tin pail from his meager mess outfit, to lend the borrowing color of a neighborly call, Conklin trudged openly to the mission. This proved to be a sizable log structure, without beliry or cross, that evidently served both as dwelling for the missionary and a place of Indian worship. It had been up several years, from the dead look of its logs. The outlook was upon Glacier Creek, rather than the Cheena. A forest of scrubby cedar and fir skirted the sides and back of it, while not far away was that misplaced spur of rock which formed one flank of the closed cañon.

His coming was announced in chorus by several malamutes chained to individual dog-houses in the front yard. The venerable "sky pilot" himself was at the door of the dwelling to admit him.

"You are welcome, brother—more than welcome," was the greeting. "Your arrival relieves Ruth of the necessity of riding to Gold to assure us that nothing had happened to you."

"Circumstances beyond my control made last night's appointment——"

Conklin's excuses were interrupted by the sudden entry of the girl from what seemed to be a kitchen. At first glance he thought that she was wearing skirts to-day, but a second showed the semblance really to be a blue gingham apron. Below the hem of it showed her riding boots. Her pleasure at seeing him lighted her whole face.

"I was worried about you, friend stranger, in a strange and sometimes hostile land," she said, offering him her hand in a fashion that promised a man-to-man sort of shake.

But something must have happened to the promise. The hand was snapped



back before his fingers really had closed upon it.

"You were certain, then, that I had read your cryptogram?" he asked. "Weren't you leaving a good bit to chance?"

"With a member of the Mounted?" She seemed surprised that he considered his acumen worth mentioning. "You wouldn't be worthy the force had you missed it, for you couldn't help but recognize my father in such an outstanding missionary rôle and you knew that I—well, after all I had told you about the inspector."

"You are positive that I am a mounted?" he asked, as if testing her.

The silver-gold head nodded emphatically. "Bart told me that a constable was coming. I call him Bart—well, I knew him longer by that name."

Thus early in the interview from which he hoped so much was Conklin put to decision on a problem that had troubled him every time he had thought of it that morning. Should he unmask Bart Caswell at the very start and frankly state his own rank, or drift along as the constable she supposed him to be?

He recalled her as of yesterday morning, standing in the trail bent with grief, when she thought no one was looking on. The truth would be a terrible shock to her; she would never be able quite to forgive the man who told her. It wasn't as if the impersonator could continue weaving his web. Bart was dead; his blandishments silenced forever. In a flash Conklin decided, in the service of justice and law, to remain for a time a constable in her eyes.

From his pocket he took the tract and from between its leaves the pressed snow flowers. "These had served their purpose, so I lifted them when no one was looking," he said, handing them to her.

Her eyes thanked him. "It was a slip—but from the heart. In the brush I wondered that no one remarked them. Phil Brewster might have suspected their source."

"Mr. Brewster is a gentleman, Ruth, with all his shortcomings," said her father. "He would have kept his own counsel. I never have doubted his high regard for you."

In evident embarrassment she returned to the subject nearer her heart. "When Bart told me you were expected, I begged him to wait until you were here to back him up. But he was so brave, so impetuously brave, and he felt that the uniform, which means all the power of the Dominion, was backing enough. Just think, if you had been an hour earlier reaching the district, he still might be alive!"

At the signals of distress which the girl was flying in spite of herself, the father again broke in. The constable, having just ridden out from town, must be hungry. They had dined, but Ruth was a wonder at pot-luck meals.

Conklin reassured them both, telling of the precaution he had taken to cover his visit by establishing camp near by. He pointed to the tin bucket. "Any one seeing me come here with this, surely must take me for a borrowing neighbor, don't you think? Already I've been spotted as a scout for a gold dredging outfit with designs on the Cheena."

"Then, brother, if you'll pardon me, I'll hand you over to Ruth," said Duperow. "I am engaged in a vital work—nothing less than the translation of the Epistles into Chinook. I try to leave all temporal affairs to my daughter, for my time is short—my time is short. You will find her most competent and more fully informed in the details of this outrageous intrigue than I am myself. In this grievous time of turmoil which has fallen upon us, I thank the good Lord every hour for such a daughter."

"Father, dear!" she gently hushed him.

While the girl was engaged in settling him at a table near a window and arranging his books and papers, Conklin glanced about the comfortable living room. Every stick of furniture, he perceived, was frontier made. The few wall decorations were Indian handiwork, beyond doubt—rude carvings in wood, garishly painted; reed basketry of beautiful design, a bow and arrows, canoe paddles. The floor coverings were skins which never had been in the hands of a professional taxidermist. There was an air of home about the place not to be found in the quarters of the longest established



police detachments. In this instance, undoubtedly, it was the touch of Ruth.

He crossed to the fireplace, on which cedar logs were in a crackling blaze. Its rock was native galena in which the brownish stains of iron predominated, but so besprinkled was it with mineral facets as to look alive where the firelight played upon it. On the mantel there was no touch of "outside," not even a photograph. Its decorations were a totem pole and several pieces of carved ivory. Either the girl was satisfied with existence in the wild, or did not wish to be reminded of civilization. When she rejoined him after having "settled" the parent at his self-assigned task, he was idly fingering several specimens of heavy grayish mineral which lay at the end of the mantel.

"Frog-gold, my father calls that stuff," she said. "It's the plague of our Glacier Creek placers, cluttering up the sluices and utterly worthless except in rare instances, such as——"

She ran her eyes over the specimens and picked out one that was shaped curiously like a human hand. In the gray palm was a small nugget of gold, worth possibly a dollar.

"Take this one as a souvenir of your first visit to the mission," she said, and held it out to him.

He had been on the point of asking her for one of the curios, because of a possible connection with the case that had occurred to him, so accepted the gift gladly. Then he asked her to tell him how she had spotted him so surely the day before.

She motioned him into one of the two sway-backed chairs which stood before the fire, and sank into the caribou-skin seat of the other.

"As I was expecting some one like you, it was merely a case of putting two and two together," she informed him, with a pleased smile. "The certain touch with which you translated the crime was my first clew. Then came your sortie into the bush, something no ordinary stampeder would have risked for a murder that did not personally concern him. I noticed, too, that you rode a cavalry seat and that you were freshly shaven. Gold rushers don't waste time with

razors, but constables are likely to, from force of habit. At that, you played your part well—not a flicker of recognition for Bart, although you must have been deep cut. Those points I noted would have spelled nothing if he had not prepared me, even to telling the coincidence of your having the same family name, although not even distantly related."

A fore-planning individual, this precious Bart of hers, thought the inspector, glad to be relieved of the necessity of inventing a name for his immediate use. Of course, the impostor had realized that the owner of the uniform must soon follow the war bag, and had prepared the girl for the arrival of another "mountie." That same name but no relation touch was masterly.

"But if you were so sure of me, why did you give me the slip, when I particularly had asked you to wait?" he asked.

She proved frank enough about that. "I heard Hardley shrilling to some companion from around the bend in the trail. He is such a bungler and he knew that Bart—the inspector had been—well, often came to the mission. I did not want him to see me, so I took to the bush. Then Phil Brewster rode up. He had imaginary reasons for disliking Bart, and his presence was all the more reason for my staying hid."

"Then I blundered along," Conklin reminded her.

"I wasn't far away. I saw—heard. If Sam Hardley really had arrested you, I'd have come from cover and made him release you."

Conklin believed she would have done this, regardless of unpleasantness to herself.

He put a question based upon the widow's revelations that had not revealed. "Did Bart ever mention to you that something richer than gold would be his reward in this matter he had in hand?"

A wave of color mantled the girl's white neck and eddied into her cheeks. "Reward for capturing the B. C. X. murderer?" she asked.

She was fencing with him for the first time in their acquaintance, the inspector



felt. "We both know that Bart wasn't riding toward the creeks yesterday morning in search of any stage robber," he said to her.

"Had Bart spoken of a reward richer than gold?" she asked, with a sudden return of her former directness of manner.

"I was so informed in Gold." Conklin risked a query from her as to his informant.

But she did not ask. Instead, she glanced shyly at him, then looked into the fire. "Bart must have been thinking of me when he said that," she murmured. "He was riding toward Glacier Creek yesterday to right the wrongs of our poor Indians."

As Conklin stared at her, a picture of lovely embarrassment over her admission, he realized that any man might have used the figure of speech advisedly. But Bart Caswell righting Siwash wrongs, even for such a reward, did not chime in with his past performance. Personally Conklin did not want to admit—officially he could not believe that Ruth Duperow was the "richer than gold" something in the daring rogue's mind.

### - CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE WAY OF THE FORCE.

THE account of the closing of Glacier Creek which Inspector Conklin heard from the daughter of the mission was very like that given him by Phil Brewster up to a certain point. He let the whole story pass as news to him, however, and found advantage in the earlier report, which made the girl's additions stand out, emphasized by their novelty.

One of these was decidedly startling—that which told of an inspection which Bart Caswell had made of the creek in the Duperows' behalf just before, as Ruth put it, "the murder of Ben Tabor forced him to declare himself an officer." Of this Brewster had said nothing, but it was possible that he had not heard of the venture.

"Bart never told us just how he got past the cañon gate," said the girl in confiding this important event in the recent history of the trouble creek. "I have an idea that liquor was used, the

end justifying the means, you know. Perhaps he was silent on the point because he knew how unyielding my father is on the subject of alcohol."

She paused to direct a filial smile toward the parent's unseeing back, then went on: "Anyway, Bart made friends with a hired gunman that Bonnemort and Kluger had on guard and slipped into the gulch where the claims are located. He showed great skill in keeping under cover and was not discovered until the next afternoon, by which time he had seen more than enough.

"His report," the girl went on, showing a sense of continuity rare in women, "was worse than we had feared. The conscienceless scoundrels had made slaves of all our people, plying them with liquor and working them heartbreaking hours under the whip. Bart thought that the slavers knew their days of oppression were numbered and were trying to strip the claims of their treasure in the shortest possible time. Undoubtedly the guard at the gate was as much to keep the slaves in as the whites out. Isn't that an intolerable state of affairs? Do you wonder that we are beside ourselves with anxiety, realizing our impotence until Canada wakes up to what is going on?"

There was no doubting her honest rage, or that it was unselfish, since neither her own claim nor her father's was being plundered.

"Did I understand you to say that Bart was discovered up the gulch?" Conklin asked, anxious to keep the girl to the facts.

"Bonnemort himself caught Bart slipping through the brush near one of their long sluice-boxes," Ruth informed him. "This half-breed, who favors his Indian mother in face and his Norman father in build, is a physical match for two like our poor inspector. He would have beaten Bart to death had not his partner happened along. Kluger, who evidently is the brains of the combination, didn't want a white man murdered on the works, as he put it. They brought Bart to the gate and literally kicked him into the open, after warning him that he'd have no second chance. If ever they caught him trying to spy on them again, they threatened to shoot



him down like a ghou! and they would—they did."

Conklin was interested in knowing exactly what steps had been taken since the Duperows' worst fears for the Indians had been confirmed by Bart's daring sortie. It seemed that the Duperows had found themselves at loss what steps to take. Already the father had appealed to the townsmen of Gold and to the miners of the creeks, but had failed to stir them into making an end of the outrage. No one appeared to care what happened to Siwashes. Sam Hardley had declared himself satisfied that B. & K. were within the law and had refused to summon the sheriff, his superior.

"How about your friend Brewster?" the inspector asked.

The girl's face clouded at the mention of his name, as it had on meeting the man on King Street the previous day.

"I am greatly disappointed in Mr. Brewster," she said. "He had every chance to prove his manliness before these pillagers were fully intrenched. He—he failed me utterly. I did not appeal to him again, for I fear he has sold out to the enemy for a mess of freighting pottage."

"And Bart?" Conklin prodded.

"Remember that we did not know then that he was an official. He asked us to have patience until he could work out a scheme to get the better of them. Of course he had in mind invoking the power of the Mounted, as he did after the stage was robbed."

Conklin recalled the widow's version, undoubtedly the true one so far as concerned Bart's mental processes in regard to the Glacier Creek plunderers. "Until that uniform fell into his hands, he did not see any way of getting the best of them," Mrs. Caswell had told him.

Bart's plan from that point was easily deduced. Once in uniform, it had been necessary for him to "stall" in regard to the Tabor murder—to checkmate Hardley and any citizens' investigation by pretending to make his own. He seemed to have found time, too, for a reassuring visit with the Duperows and perhaps to advance whatever personal game he was playing with the girl.

Yesterday morning he had set out for

the guarded cañon on Glacier Creek, counting on the magic of the Mounted which, for once, had failed to cast its wonted spell. Possibly this failure was because the plunderers had recognized the counterfeit. But the inspector was not ready to credit that explanation. He preferred to think that it pointed to the desperation of the gold strippers, who did not hesitate to add the murder of a commissioned officer to their other crimes.

Conklin was forced to admit to himself the neatness of Bart's scheme as he now surmised it. Had the uniform "worked," the fake inspector would have taken the B. & K. clean-up, ostensibly to hold it until the courts adjudicated the Indian claims. Once the treasure was in his possession, he would have made off with it over the conveniently near Alaskan boundary and escaped with it on some southbound steamer that touched at no British Columbia port. Just possibly, with that gift of tongue with women of which Conklin already had seen evidence, Bart would have persuaded Ruth to accompany him.

Ruth's eyes had not left him during this rapid mental summing-up, but now she showed impatience for his opinion.

"Don't you agree, Constable Conklin, that everything points to Bonnemort and Kluger—their threats against Bart as an ordinary citizen, their fear of him as an officer of the Force?"

"But are you sure that they knew of Bart's transformation?"

The girl nodded positively. "Bart met Kluger face to face on King Street when he was in uniform."

"And didn't arrest him?"

Ruth offered quick defense for the implied criticism in the inspector's question. "Don't you see that an arrest might have spoiled everything by giving Bonnemort a chance to escape with the treasure they've cleaned up?"

Knowing the real reason the impostor had made no arrest, Conklin passed the point without further comment. Admitting the seeming motive which the creek operators had for the murder, he set forth the vital need of direct evidence before he could make a charge of murder that would hold.



"I'll give the Glacier diggings a look-over," he said, with a decision that was not as sudden as it sounded, and got to his feet.

Conklin's expression showed as little concern as though he proposed going to the door for a glance at the weather prospects. He was not underrating the risks that would come with an attempt to work from the inside out; but he was ignoring them so far as any surface indication was concerned. From the scout he was determined to make, he had every hope of getting the needed direct evidence; at least he would determine what it was "richer than gold" that had led Bart Caswell to tempt fate once too often.

"You'll never get past the gate!" cried Ruth in despair. "Kluger himself has taken charge of the guard there. He was there yesterday morning and yelled to me: 'Tell your friend a uniform makes a fine target!' That renewed threat it was that sent me toward town with my too-late warning. Again this morning, since you had been delayed, I went over to the creek. He was there, but kept silent—even when I called him a murderer. I tell you, constable, the cañon is closed!"

Conklin smiled his appreciation of the care she was showing in his behalf. How loyal she was even to this wrong one who had lied his way into her favor. So she had dared call Kluger a murderer to his face! The wonder was that she hadn't drawn a bullet for herself instead of silence.

"I'm figuring on coming out through the cañon, Miss Duperow—sort of unlatching the gate from the inside. There must be another way in." Conklin's tone was confident, although the other way of which he spoke was yet to be found.

"There is another way in!"

This welcome declaration boomed upon their ears from the old missionary at his desk under the window. Evidently he had not been as absorbed in his biblical translation as they had thought him. Now he pushed back his chair and crossed to the fireplace.

"I discovered this other way when exploring the spur last spring, just before this curse of gold descended upon us,"

he explained. "Had I known what Bart was up to, I'd have shown him this secret way. I did not actually enter the gulch by it, not trusting muscles that are getting ragged with age, but you can, brother, if your head is level, your fingers and toes strong."

"Score one for the sky-pilot of the Argonaut!" cried his daughter, throwing her arms around him and patting his back. "Since they've smitten us on every cheek we possess, it's high time that we smote them back."

In the planning for the hazardous attempt which immediately followed, Ruth Duperow's insistence on going alone proved a complication. Before the inspector realized her trend, he had admitted knowing only a smattering of Chinook. The girl, it seemed, spoke the tongue of the British Columbia Indians fluently.

"These Siwashes are by no means as dumb as they look," she said. "They will know who left the diggings on this murder ride yesterday morning. They'll tell me and then you'll know the man you're after."

Conklin at once rejected her offer as rash beyond reason. Her father, however, seemed passive, perhaps silenced by his admiration of her courage.

"Why, I'll be safe enough," Ruth declared, "with such a constable as you to protect me."

But her trustfulness did not appeal in the extremity. Conklin insisted that such a bit of scouting was no work for a woman. She might cross-examine her Siwashes after he had cleared the creek of whites, but not before. In the end, however, there was a compromise to the extent that Ruth should come as far as the edge of the gulch—to see that her father got home safely.

The inspector departed from the mission openly, carrying his tin pail. He even hoped that the house was, as the girl feared, being watched through a glass from the cañon mouth. At his camp he made hurried preparations, pocketing a supply of "hard" rations and extra cartridges for his automatic. Down in the meadow, he unpicketed both his horses. They could be trusted not to stray far from the tent and, in case his



return was delayed, they must not suffer for grass and water. Although Duperow had said nothing about need of a rope for his "other way in," Conklin quickly spliced the two picket strings and coiled the length over his shoulder. Gaining cover of the timber, he made his way as rapidly as possible to a rendezvous behind the mission, where the Duperows awaited him.

The spur proved a hard climb; the missionary needed help over several of the rougher places, but at length he brought them to a point where the sheer wall of the boxed-in gulch was many feet lower than normal.

Even there, a dizzy drop intervened between the top and a narrow ledge that promised a path to timber line for one who was certain of foot. The old man pointed out certain crevices and projections by which a daring climber might work his way down to the ledge; but Conklin was glad he had brought a rope with which to simplify the start.

The risk that any one would catch sight of him as he lowered himself seemed slim, for the creek at this point was some distance away and a thick growth of fir lay between. At any rate, this was a chance that must be taken; he must negotiate that ledge in daylight.

"You'll come out at the Indian burying ground," said Duperow. "I'm sure it lies in front of this dip in the wall. Conceal yourself there for the night. The Siwashes will be anywhere else after darkness falls."

Having knotted his rope at fifteen-inch intervals, Conklin made one end fast to the selected anchorage, a sturdy young cedar that grew near the edge of the cliff and cast over the other end. As nearly as he could judge by peering over, the hemp reached almost, if not quite to the ledge.

"How soon should we look for your return?" Ruth asked, when all was ready.

"When I come out through the cañon gate," Conklin answered, with a laugh which he hoped was reassuring.

Throwing off the reserve which had held her since his refusal of her company, she stepped closer to him and held out both her hands.

"Bring me back Bart's slayer!" was her parting.

As he went down hand over hand, with his feet braced against the face rock, he wondered what she would have said had he lifted the mantle which concealed Bart's duplicity.

## CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN MORNING CAME.

THE rope proved long enough, but there was no overhang. And the ledge was a way down the face of the cliff, but so fragmentary that many times the hold of his fingers forced into crevices alone made it passable. At the very start, an apparently solid piece broke off under his weight and almost cast him into the depths. After that lesson, so nearly his last, he sidled along the wall, so that his toes might set as near the face of it as possible.

Fifty feet from the bottom of the gulch the ledge ended. He was forced to stake all on a hazardous leap into the top of the nearest fir tree. While the upper branches gave under his hundred and eighty pounds and countless needles pricked him, his fall was broken, and eventually stayed by the stouter limbs below.

In the gathering dusk, he gained the burying ground of which Duperow had spoken. Familiar as he was with native customs of the Northland, he felt thankful, when this settlement of the dead loomed up in the gloom, that he had been prepared for the spectral effect. Built on stilts above each grave were huts of bizarre woodwork. In each, he knew, were housed the particular personal treasures of some departed brave, but nothing of intrinsic worth.

Conklin was not superstitious and, much as he might have preferred other habitation for the night, he did not hesitate to borrow a lodging here. Selecting the most commodious of the "hatches," he climbed under its roof. Although this particular eight-by-ten boot box boasted both a spire and a dome it was open on one side, presumably for the purpose of exhibiting a black bottle, an alarm clock from which the works had been removed, and other heirlooms of



some Siwash gone to happier fishing grounds. It offered a measure of protection, however, against the chill that came with darkness. As he had no blanket and dared not light a fire, this "spook roost," as he thought of it, was more than welcome.

A short distance up-creek from his refuge and on the opposite bank lay an Indian camp of four or five families, to judge by the number of supper fires. He watched the natives through their meal, the while munching a tasteless emergency ration that was guaranteed to be rich in calories.

The Indian camp proved unusually quiet. He had heard Eskimo hunting parties make far more of a powwow around their night fires. There was no ribald song or laughter, no fighting, which was to be expected if the despoilers were supplying the natives with liquor, as Bart had reported.

The yelping of many hungry dogs warned him of the folly of trying to scout the camp under cover of darkness. He decided to spend the night where he was and start his investigations when work began in the morning. Gradually, with the fires, the noises of the Indian camp died out, as if their sleeping mats were superattractive after a hard day on the placers.

Politics made strange bedfellows, Conklin had heard. Well, he stood ready to testify that police duty in the Argonaut Valley brought one to strange beds. His first night in a jail bunk; his second in a Siwash mausoleum! And on both occasions nothing softer than his hat for pillow!

But the murmur of the rushing creek and the sougning of the firs invited sleep; he yielded to the duet lullaby. A crash as of thunder awoke him one time in the night, but he found the sky clear on looking out. Not until a second report came could he locate the source—the glacier in which the creek had its source. Evidently the green monster was discarding its surplus ice. There came variation of the alarm when new crevasses were formed with a terrific, splitting noise.

The worst start of the night, however, came with a sense of falling and landing

with a thump that shook every bone in his body. That he had fallen and landed, not dreamed the sensations, became plain when he found himself on the ground looking up at the hut. He had rolled out of "bed."

Conklin was up with the *klootchmen*, and they arose at the break of day. Before the Indian camp was thoroughly awake, he had slipped out of the burying ground and gained the cover of the timber fringe close to the south wall of the gulch. From what he could see now of the formation he concluded that Glacier Creek was not as inaccessible as reputed. There were other possible entrances, at least one of which appeared less hazardous than that by which he had come. In the past the natural entrance through the cañon always had been open, and no one had ever found it necessary to work out another.

Refreshing himself at a spring upon which he stumbled, he turned first to an investigation of the cañon a quarter mile below. So nearly did the wings of the rocky spur meet that there was less than a hundred feet between walls at the narrowest part. Through this gap, Glacier Creek poured without hindrance. Along the opposite wall ran a wagon-width trail.

At a point about halfway through the cañon stood two tents, the canvas of which still was white. Doubtless this was the camp of the guards and perhaps of the promoters of the steal. Just now he was satisfied with placing this camp; close investigation could wait until he learned what "richer than gold" was being gleaned up the gulch.

Slowly he worked his way upstream, still keeping back from the bank and well screened by the brush. Breakfast was over at the camp near which he had spent the night. Twenty Indians, men and women, were at work, picking and shoveling in the near-by bench, and wheeling loaded barrows to a long wooden sluice-box, into which a small stream of creek water had been diverted. The onlooker was puzzled that they worked with such seeming good-will. In fact, he never had seen natives so industrious. Nowhere was any whip-armed master to be seen.



A blast from upstream did not concern him greatly, as he thought the glacier was cutting daylight capers. But when other blasts crashed out at regular intervals, he felt certain that dynamite was being exploded. This would explain how the Siwashes were able to work so freely in the frozen gravel and gave color to Bart's report that the claims were being "stripped."

Exercising the utmost caution, he worked his way eastward until he stood opposite an exaggerated "ant hill" of activity, undoubtedly the scene of major operations. There were three sluices here, near a bench that was shattered from a recent explosion. No crew of hired white miners could have shown greater industry or fewer lost motions. As below, he saw no sign of any white oppressor.

Then, from a tent near the Indian encampment, there emerged a young giant who answered Ruth's description of Bonnemort, the breed who nearly had done for Bart. Six feet two or three and "built from the soles up," he stood looking over the busy scene. Swarthy he was to a degree, but too handsome and carefully dressed for a native.

Conklin surmised that this was his first appearance that morning. Confirmation came with the appearance of a young squaw bearing a tray of breakfast which she spread upon a table in front of the tent. Indeed, this breed must "have a way" with the Siwashes, thought the inspector, to command from them such competent service. From his reserved seat in the brush, Conklin envied him the cup of steaming coffee and, later, the cigar which the autocrat of the wild lighted. This last was particularly tantalizing to one whose pipe performance must remain cold.

Presently on horseback came a little man, all white, puttee-clad, and, on reasonable supposition, one Kluger by name. Dismounted, this new arrival, reputed to be the "brains of the outfit," did not come to the breed's shoulder, but from the rapidity of his movements, Conklin judged that his small frame concealed a dynamo of energy. The two conferred a moment, then started toward the nearest sluice-box.

Peering out of the brush, Conklin felt as if he were watching some well-lighted moving picture. He heard Bonnemort call a couple of Siwashes to join them, but no word of the conversation of the two partners reached him.

For an hour he watched them as they directed the morning clean-up of the treasure gathered on the riffles—cross cleats on the bottom of the sluice troughs—from the pay-dirt washed the previous day. One departure from regular placer practice stood out. The gleaners carried two sacks, one twice the size of the other. At every riffle contributions were made to each.

If this was a division of the yield between the managing sharpers and the working owners, it seemed unnecessarily clumsy. Why did it need to be done on the dump in such piecemeal fashion? Both parties to the proceeding, however, seemed satisfied. There was no haggling, not even discussion over the division if such it really was. In the end the two whites, between them, carried the larger and heavier poke to Bonnemort's tent, while the two Indians, who had made the cleaning, bore off the smaller sack to one of their wickiups.

After spending several minutes within the tent, behind closed flaps, the partners came out and together started downstream, Bonnemort walking with long strides beside the mounted Kluger. To Conklin the supposition seemed reasonable that they were bound for a clean-up at the lower diggings, and that, for a time, the upper creek would be free of whites. He decided upon a bold stroke, the success of which would depend upon how far the Siwashes had been taken into confidence.

Going down creek in the brush until he was out of sight of the camp, he gained the trail and started back. He walked as openly as though he belonged to the outfit; stopped at several points to look critically at the work being done, then strode on with a nod or grunt of approval. None challenged his advance; not even a look questioned him. He entered the tent as though he had every right so to do, as, indeed, he had, although right of a different sort than any who observed him could have imagined.



As the canvas flaps fell behind him, he made a rapid survey of the interior—two folding cots with bedding, camp stools, a table built of empty dynamite boxes, with the label of the "Kingdom Come" brand much in evidence, and an improvised clothes-horse hung with an assortment of masculine garments. His particular interest centered in what looked like a carpenter's tool chest, but which, for want of any likelier container, he took to be the camp's treasure box. Without much hope, he stooped and tried the lid. It was locked.

In the act of kneeling to examine this, the tent was suffused with sunlight by the opening of a flap. He straightened and turned as a young squaw entered, her head bound in a bright-colored bandanna. Possibly she was the fastidious Bonnemort's chambermaid, he thought, come to make the bed.

"*Kla-how-yah!*" She grunted the usual Chinook greeting, but evinced no surprise at finding him in the tent.

"Don't mind me," returned the inspector, with well-assumed assurance and the hope that she at least understood English, as a mission was near, even though she did not speak it.

But she spoke it, and to his utter consternation. "Right good make-up if it fools a friendly mountie," she said with a lilting laugh that was controlled not to carry beyond the canvas. "How do you like me as a brunette—and a *klootch?*"

"Ruth?" he whispered.

"None other, Mr. Conklin."

## CHAPTER XV.

### TENT-TOLD TALES.

CONKLIN stood and stared at the changed young woman, marveling at the completeness of her transformation. A right good make-up, she had called it; he could truthfully make the statement stronger. When her eyes were hidden and her voice silent, all trace of the missionary girl was gone. She looked as Siwash as though she had been born on the trail of a squaw mother and had passed her babyhood strapped to a board.

The fine lines of her slim young figure were swathed in rags after the clumsy

fashion of the North Coast native women. Waist-line was conspicuous by its absence, her makeshift skirt seeming to drop from her shoulders. For a one-piece garment it certainly was of pieces, patched and pinned and tied together. He doubted if she could step out of it without taking it apart.

To her complexion she had done something that gave a rich copper tinge. The hands were stained to match. Her lips had been thickened with paint lines and over her patrician nose ran a series of blue lines, a counterfeit of the tattooing with which the Argonaut Valley women disfigure themselves. A finger tied up with a soiled rag added a last touch of verisimilitude. Only after a brief but intensive study of her could he decide what it was that contributed most to the transformation.

"I see you don't like me as a brunette," she observed.

"Your hair! You've not sacrificed that for this wild——"

She quieted him by lifting the edge of her bandanna turban and exposing a strand. Its silver-gold sheen was untarnished, and Conklin breathed easier.

"I could cover my hair," she explained softly. "And my face will wash white—eventually. I'll be a blonde again if you insist. But I do object to your adjective 'wild,' as applied to my perfectly sane enterprise."

"Didn't I make plain yesterday that your coming in here was beyond all reason?" he demanded.

"Not so far beyond as myself," she murmured rebelliously. "I'm here, am I not? And you'll find me more reasonable for having had my own way."

She had intended to follow him from the first, she admitted. For that reason she had watched his descent from the top of the cliff, marking the difficulties he had overcome. After helping her father back to the mission, she had given her evening to make-up and costume, and had left home before day-break.

"Do you mean to say that you tiptoed that ledge and took the jump into the fir?" he asked.

She shook her head, flashing him a smile. "I profited by watching you. I



came all the way down by rope, bringing an extra coil, ready knotted, from the mission and tying it to the end of your picket string."

"But you won't be able to fool the squaws," he observed, again looking troubled.

"Haven't tried. They think I slipped in to see how they were faring and togged out as one of them that the whites might not suspect my visit. They seem pleased—perhaps flattered, and will keep my secret."

Conklin did not relish the situation created by her persistence. The girl's presence was a grave complication—handicapped him just when his investigation was advancing with unexpected smoothness. But now that she was in, his duty was to get her out safely.

"And how are your Indian wards faring?" he asked, by way of gaining time to figure out the safest, most expeditious exit for her.

"They puzzle me, for they have no complaint," she answered. "Either conditions have radically changed or poor Bart was sadly misled in his observations. Actually the Indians seem to look upon Bonnemort and Kluger as benefactors. '*Hiyu skookum* Boston men,' they call the rascals."

"B. & K. are taking the bulk of the clean-up," Conklin told her. "I watched the divvy when they stripped the sluices out front this morning."

"But that doesn't seem possible," Ruth protested. "I hear from two of my trusted *klootchmen* that the Indians are given *all* of the gold."

Conklin seemed not to have heard. He was crossing to the front of the wall-tent where, beneath the table, he had sighted a sack exactly like the treasure-weighted one he had seen the partners carry from the creek. But if this was the same, it had been emptied.

"*All the gold*, I said," repeated the girl, impatient at his seeming lack of attention to her astonishing report. "What do you make of that, Mr. Mountie?"

"I'll say that is right kind and unbelievably generous of B. & K."

The inspector had upended the sack and was shaking it. A single jagged

lump, evidently held in the fabric when the sack had been dumped, thudded to the ground. Both leaned over to examine it. The girl straightened first.

"More of that old frog-gold," she said with another low, aggravating laugh.

Conklin picked up the specimen. It was of the same grayish metallic substance as the hand-shaped nugget which Ruth had given him at the mission. This one, however, held no yellow offering.

"Richer than gold!" In thought, Conklin murmured Bart's exclamation of promise to Mrs. Caswell.

He believed that at last he knew the answer to that part of the Glacier Creek riddle. But he said nothing to the girl of his hopes, as he pocketed the specimen.

"You said the Siwashes would tell you which of the two men rode away from the gulch the morning of the murder," he reminded her. "Did they?"

"That's another peculiar thing," she replied, lines of perplexity wrinkling her stained brow. "My *klootchmen* friends insist that both Bonnemort and Kluger were here as usual all that morning. They made *hiyu* clean-up—gathered much gold—that Thursday morning and are positive they are not mistaken about the kind white men. The Indians haven't heard that Bart was murdered; they still are chuckling over the way he was run out of the gulch."

"That would seem to leave us cold, wouldn't it?"

But even as he asked the question, Conklin saw something else within the tent to convince him that the search for Bart's slayer was exceedingly "warm." In the presence of this second inanimate witness, he was more anxious than ever to get the girl safely out of the gulch—before the fireworks.

"I'm nearly through in here," he went on. "Have you planned how you will get yourself out?"

"I can go back the way I came, I suppose," she answered, with a pout that was not as effective as when she had looked her ash-blond self. "But I thought you were going to open the cañon gate—from the inside out?"

"Even so, I can't have you within range when I—when I pick the lock."



"You mean that there may be shooting?" she demanded with suppressed excitement.

He did not like the gleam of hope that seemed to shine in her eyes. "You've done your part, Miss Duperow—more than any other woman would have dared to do. I wonder if I can trust you to wait for me in that graveyard down the creek."

"To sit and idly wait when I might have a hand in the excitement!" she moaned. "Being a woman is an awful handicap, Constable Conklin."

"That will be the helping part in this crime clean-up," he assured her, "to sit and wait, and if I do not come for you, to make your own way back to the mission and wait some more until other mounties arrive to settle the score. You've done enough; leave the rest to me."

Ruth protested that she had accomplished nothing but the ruin of their theories. Couldn't she do something constructive?

"We are done with theories, and it's time I demonstrated some facts," said the inspector in a convincing tone. "I feel certain I can promise you the arrest of Bart's slayer if you'll go at once to the hide-out I suggested."

"But the *klootchmen* said——"

"Squaw talk—forget it." He was growing impatient. "Likely they don't know one day from another. Any moment the breed, Bonnemort, may return. Don't risk his seeing you. Please go while there is time!" He turned to the tent front and held back one of its flaps.

"Ruth unwelcome—a new sensation!" she murmured disappointedly, then shuffled out of the tent with the flat-footed walk of an Argonaut squaw.

Conklin watched her a moment with admiration. How brave, resourceful, she was! Then he dropped the flap and, turning, focused his gaze upon an overturned boot that lay beneath the improvised clothes-horse.

This was a right boot, according to the sole of it, which was turned up. Staring at him from the outer edge of that sole was a peculiar plate, presumably attached to counteract the wear of some

foot slightly lame or peculiarly gaited. As plainly as if it had been articulate this told him: "The man who wears me killed Bart Caswell!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### CLUTCH OF THE BREED.

MAKING her way down Glacier Creek, giving no attention to the working Siwashes and receiving none from them, Ruth Duperow wondered what discoveries this enigma of the Mounted had held back from her. She did not resent particularly his lack of confidence, feeling that she had not earned it. That he seemed to disbelieve what the *klootchmen* had told her about the continued presence of the white and near-white spoilers at once troubled and gratified her. She hated to think that the Indian women would mislead her; but she did want Bart's slayer captured and punished. Hope of that seemed built on the Thursday morning absence either of Kluger or his half-breed partner.

At the start of this requested exit the girl did not hurry, but ambled along squaw fashion. Once across the creek and out of sight of the upper diggings she meant to take to the brush and the Glacier natives should see her no more until Conklin came for her. That he would come for her—that he would be able to come she did not doubt. From the moment she had seen him stride into the tent of Bonnemort as if he owned it, she had felt certain of his ultimate success.

As she approached the foot log that made the bridge to the graveyard side of the creek, she began to speculate upon Conklin, the man. How old was he? Well, he looked thirty, but acted older in experience. No wonder he liked her better as the blonde she was, since he was so decidedly brunette himself. Was he married? Probably not, since he was only a constable. Why hadn't he advanced to higher rank, since he seemed to be a born executive? That was beyond her speculation, but at least she could hope that success in this mystery of murder would bring him the advancement he must have deserved. Too bad she hadn't asked Bart more about him.



She reached the creek and was about to climb to the foot log when she heard some one start across it from the other side. Raising the eyes which she had held downcast throughout the walk from the tent, she saw, with a tremor of alarm, that Bonnemort had beaten her to it. She sidled away from the log's end and seemed intent on watching the stream. Of course this up-risen breed would be above noticing a squaw drudge, but she preferred to take no unnecessary chances.

With eyes steadily averted, she waited. The heavy steps drew nearer as the big man set his feet upon the flattened surface of the improvised bridge. Then suddenly they ceased. He had halted at the end of the log.

"Look up here, you *klootch*!"

The tone was that of a request, but it brought the girl a sudden chill of terror. She dared not look up, yet scarcely dared she refuse.

Evidently patience with a squaw was not held a virtue by the Eastern breed. "Sulky, eh?" he grumbled, and sprang down from the log to a stand directly before her. Reaching out, he took her chin between his thumb and forefinger and tilted it until her stained face looked up into his.

"A new one, ain't you?" he asked. "Thought I hadn't seen you before, princess."

A look came into his dark eyes that frightened her the more. Not daring to utter protest for fear her Chinook might betray her, she cuffed at the hand which tilted her chin and broke his hold. Bonnemort's chuckle sounded more ominous to her than an imprecation.

"A Siwash *klootch* with spirit—and a beauty to boot!" he exclaimed. "There is something new under the sun. Your light's been hidden long enough, young wildcat. Take a stroll up to my tent and we'll talk things over."

His huge hand closed upon her shoulder with a firm clutch, but without undue violence. When he started back to camp, she stepped perforce at his side. Although tall for a woman, the giant breed was head and shoulders above her, and she recognized a captor who could be circumvented only with guile.

He tried her out with several imperti-

nent questions. Was she married? What would she take for a kiss? Did she like white men, the big-bear kind?

He seemed to disown the Indian blood that was reputed to flow in his veins. Evidently he spoke little Chinook, for he complained at her refusal to understand English.

As they strolled slowly along, Ruth wasted no thought on self-censure. Conklin had been right—her exploit was absolutely wild. Escape she must, but if humanly possible by her own wit, without involving the mountie or even disturbing him in his investigation. A plan flashed into her mind and she hastened to perfect it.

With just the reluctance she thought her rôle required, she accompanied him to the placers. The Siwash men who looked up from their mining grinned at her or turned stolidly away. It was nothing to them that this *skookum* Boston chief saw fit to pay attention to one of their women. No hope of help was there from that quarter.

When she reached that section of the placer where the two squaws to whom she had disclosed herself earlier in the morning were attending a sluice, she began to struggle, hoping the pair would come to her rescue and effect her release without disclosing her identity. But with her first jerk, Bonnemort's fingers tightened like a vise, as though he had been expecting some such move. She continued to struggle.

Fear that Conklin had gone into ambush within the tent and would come to her aid, to the upsetting of all his plans, kept her from crying out for help. One of the squaws did throw down her shovel and start toward her, but the other called her back. They whispered a moment, then turned their backs and bent to their toil.

Even the realization that her Indian friends, hardened by the sorcery of too much gold, had failed her, did not lift her voice. At the head of the creek, she glimpsed the glacier embedded in the mountainside like a gigantic prism, its innumerable facets reflecting the sunlight in all the colors of the rainbow. On either side lay a fringe of brush and timber. All these invited her, offering



sanctuary from a fate that promised to be worse than death. But first, before she could flee to the hope of escape they held out, she must break the degrading clutch of Bonnemort, the breed.

As she twisted and squirmed, her nails marked his face with furrowing scratches; but the smart of these seemed only to inflame him the more. As penalty, he demanded a kiss then and there, where all her tribe might see. In the struggle to enforce his low-voiced decree, the bandanna that bound Ruth's head was loosened and fell to the ground. Her marvelous silver-gold hair was revealed.

"A blonde Siwash, eh!" exclaimed the breed. Both hands seized her and held her off, as helpless in his clutch as though she had been a child. For a moment his eyes enjoyed the oddly masked beauty of her. But soon, with comprehension, there entered a new light—that of recognition.

"So!" he muttered, baring his teeth as an angry beast shows its fangs. "The missionary skirt would butt in on a man's game."

Transferring his hold to her streaming hair, Bonnemort flung the girl from her feet and started to drag her toward the tent.

At last, all other hope gone, Ruth Duperow screamed for help—the help of her mountie. The green, old glacier broadcasted her distress, reverberating her shrieks until the gulch rang with them.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AS A MAN MUST.

WITHIN Bonnemort's tent Blue Conklin knelt before a chest, the lock of which he had just succeeded in breaking. He was staring with dilated eyes upon the real treasure of the Glacier Creek placers—truly richer than gold.

As he reached out his hands to run them into the heaping gray wealth a scream sounded. It might have been the cry of some buzzard soaring in the blue above the Siwash camp.

But the next second the shriek took definite form as a human cry for help. Then came the shrill of his name—a long-drawn Conklin!

In a flash he knew. Ruth had been discovered and had fallen within the clutch of the despoilers. Without closing the lid of the treasure chest, he sprang to his feet and lunged out of the tent. A hundred yards down the slope he saw the girl and the breed in desperate struggle. Toward the scene of unequal combat hurried a score of Argonaut natives.

Conklin charged down the incline. "Coming, Ruth!" he shouted.

The breed heard and flung his intended victim away from him on to the rocks. One glance at the onrushing figure enlightened him. "Wolves run in pairs!" he exclaimed. "And die together!"

Ruth saw him draw a revolver. Had he fired from the hip, her opportunity never would have come. But the breed, confident in the distance that still separated him from the unknown on rescue bent, paused to take a fine aim. The girl's fingers had closed about a rock. With all her might she hurled it at his head.

Her aim was poor, but its faultiness proved fortunate. The missile struck Bonnemort's wrist as his finger pressed the trigger. The bullet went wild. The gun was knocked from his grasp and was thrown, by some muscular freak, within Ruth's reach.

For a second Bonnemort stood, clutching his bruised wrist; then, with a snarled imprecation, he sprang to recover his weapon. But Conklin, at the end of his rush, crowded him off; the girl seized the gun and scrambled to her feet.

She could not understand why the constable did not draw his gun and declare himself. Bonnemort, too, looked puzzled, but evidently took heart from his foe's restraint, for he advanced threateningly. Ruth, thinking Conklin might be unarmed and fearing that he would be no match for the giant, tried to press Bonnemort's gun upon him. But Conklin waved her back.

"Hold off the Siwashes!" he commanded. "This brute has a beating coming to him."

Bonnemort advanced with a chortle of joy, delighted that luck had favored him



with the respite of physical combat. So many things could happen in a battle of fists.

"Remember what he did to Bart," cried Ruth, fearful for Conklin, who looked undersized in comparison. "Take his gun!"

For answer Conklin gestured to the narrowing ring of natives, reminding her of the part to which she was assigned. Then he side-stepped the breed's initial rush, and the man-to-man battle was on.

Had it been altogether a matter of measurements and weight, Conklin would not have had a chance. Bonnemort had more than an edge on every important item. If once he could get his powerful arms around Conklin, the breaking would be as on the rack of old-time torture. Except for occasional swings, which would have knocked out Conklin had they found their mark, Bonnemort's efforts were directed to this end.

Conklin had his last detail as a staff-sergeant to thank for his successful evasion. This had necessitated his spending part of the winter in the subarctic near Coppermine River, at the most northerly outpost of the force. The natives were giant Eskimos, trained by necessity to battle with polar bears. When boxing matches were put on at the detachment, in lieu of other diversion, Conklin had acted as instructor. His greatest difficulty had been to break his pupils of "hugging" and to teach them that a punch was more effective than a clinch any day. As a result he was not only trained to the minute, but highly practiced in slipping out of clinches.

From the first Bonnemort fought as had the Eskimos, trying again and again for a crushing embrace. With each vain effort, Conklin exacted punishment with jabs and cuts to the face. Never was he caught by the other's powerful arms.

For the half-breed the contest soon was sanguinary. His eyes and lips suffered and his nose was dented. On the other hand, Conklin was practically unmarked, except for a lump on his forehead and a spot on his cheek where Bonnemort's knuckles had scraped the skin with a glancing blow.

*Kloutchmen* and "braves" had come from all parts of the diggings and stood

in an irregular circle, staring with open-eyed wonder at the battle. Ruth was having a hard task to keep them back, although she still held the gun ready. No partisan spirit developed. If anything, their grunts at clinches evaded and blows sent home favored the smaller, more compact fighter. Conklin was unknown to them, but the fact that the mission girl sponsored him with gun point was enough for them.

Bonnemort's wind was first to fail him and for an untimed round or two Conklin played for it at every opportunity. It became clear that the half-breed's great bulk was more "beef" than muscle. He was becoming a spectacle. His rushes lost their force; his swings became hopelessly wild; his guard, never effective, broke down entirely.

"Punishment enough for manhandling you?" Conklin asked Ruth, as the whirling of battle brought him facing her.

"Yes—yes, he's paid!" she cried.

Conklin waded in then, regardless of an embrace he no longer feared, and beat Bonnemort to his knees. No coup de grâce was necessary, as the overgrown breed was blubbing for mercy. The Siwash gallery grumbled that one was not delivered, until they saw the victor produce a pair of handcuffs and snap them upon the defeated one's wrists. Bonnemort seemed too dazed to notice the sudden official trend of the situation.

"I arrest you in the king's name," said Conklin.

At this, the eye of the breed that was not already closed narrowed with suspicion. "Who—who are you?" he asked through puffed lips.

"Inspector Conklin of the Royal Mounted."

"Inspector?" The questioning cry was from the girl.

"The real Inspector Conklin," he said, then quickly looked away, as if to study the Indian spectators. He would give her a moment to grasp the truth about Bart and hide any confusion over her misplaced confidence and wasted grief.

He had not looked at her when he spoke again. "Will you please tell these Siwashes, Miss Duperow, to get back to their work. Tell them who I am and that I've taken charge in the king's



name. That always goes strong with Indians. Make them understand that none of them is to leave the diggings."

Ruth seemed to shake herself together from this blow which he had delivered with all possible mercy. "I don't exactly understand, friend, but I thank you." She stepped into the circle of wondering natives and repeated his orders in Chinook.

"But he wears no scarlet tunic," objected one of the Siwashes in English.

"He needs no uniform," the girl replied. "*He is the law.*" This also she repeated in their jargon of gutturals.

On order, Bonnemort led the way to the tent. Conklin followed close behind, with an arm supporting Ruth, who seemed a bit unsteady.

There was a groan from the half-breed when he saw that the lid of the treasure chest was thrown back.

"Since when did the force take to breaking the locks of honest men?" he snarled. "For what am I arrested?"

Instead of answering, Conklin slammed down the lid and motioned Bonnemort to seat himself upon the chest. Then he crossed the tent and picked up the tell-tale boot. Returning with it, he made a comparison.

"Thought so," he murmured.

There was no need of measuring and he tossed the boot under the table. The breed had the biggest feet he had ever seen on a human being. By no possibility could one of them have been forced into the boot which he had just flung down.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### BOOT AND BOOTY.

**K**NOWING nothing of the footprints which Conklin had found in the brush near the scene of Bart's killing, Ruth Duperow had looked on at the comparison of boots in mystified silence. Bonnemort seemed to have a better grasp of the reason behind the test.

"I'm no murderer," he muttered, glowering at his captor.

Conklin smilingly agreed. "You stepped on me once in our punishment mill—I was afraid you weren't. But I know where to find your friend Kluger."

Realizing his "break," Bonnemort retreated into the safety of silence. Conklin turned to Ruth—seemed on the point of enlightening her.

"Listen!" she whispered.

They heard hoof beats hammering into camp. Some one on horseback was coming at speed. The inspector crossed to the tent front and peered out through the flaps.

"Guess we won't have to go for Kluger after all," he said, still peering out.

The half-breed muttered an oath, his petulance directed against old lady Luck, who usually gets credit for the best and blame for the worst that happens to illogical humans.

"Bonnie—Bonnemort, where are you?" The deep-throated call came from outside.

"Where d'you suppose?" Conklin called back in a voice that he hoped would pass for the half-breed's.

He turned to Ruth, directing her to crouch behind the treasure chest and keep her gun on Bonnemort.

"No more fighting with fists—please!" she begged.

"There's no woman in this man's case," he whispered, and motioned for silence.

Phil Brewster walked into the tent a moment later, and Conklin realized that it was the first time he had seen him on foot. The affable freighter walked with a limp.

"What you sitting there for, you big boob?" Brewster put his question to Bonnemort before glancing about the place.

"Thinking it over, perhaps." From a point back of Brewster, where he had stood unnoticed, Conklin broke in before the half breed could speak for himself.

Brewster whirled, and with the move his gun appeared from handy concealment. But Conklin had expected some such desperate act and was ready. His left hand caught the freighter's right at the wrist and swung it upward. Brewster's bullet let a look of blue sky through the canvas roof, while the muzzle of the inspector's gun prodded the ribs of his suspect. The freighter saw fit to obey a command to drop his weapon.

"Sorry I haven't more bracelets with



me," Conklin said. "Miss Duperow, if you'll look under that clothes rack, where I found that boot just now, you'll find a length of rope."

Out of the corner of his eye, while his hands still were up, Brewster had his first glimpse of the mission girl, as she arose from behind the chest. "You!" he exclaimed in amazement. But the sight of her—and she was a "sight" in her rags, her Siwash complexion and natural hair—scarcely helped to clear his mind regarding the trap into which he had walked. "What's this all about, you highbinder?" he demanded of Conklin.

"You remind me—I neglected to introduce myself when we met yesterday and the day before. Bonnie there might tell you that I call myself Conklin, inspector of the Mounted Police."

"But he's dead!" blurted out Brewster. "Not that he knows of," Conklin assured him quietly; "but *you* have a very good reason for thinking so. Now, if you'll oblige by putting your hands behind your back——"

When Brewster had obeyed, perforce, the inspector directed Ruth to tie the wrists. After he had inspected her knots and recovered the dropped gun, he suggested that Brewster sit down on one of the cots until they were ready to start back to Gold. The freighter did so and swung his right leg over his left knee. From his seat on the other cot, Conklin saw on the exposed sole one of the peculiar leather-saving, metal plates in which he was so interested—the one that had made its impression in the soil so near the scene of the murder. Reaching under the table, he retrieved the spare boot he had thrown there and saw that they matched in every particular.

"Just to make everything according to Hoyle, Brewster," the inspector said, "I now place you under arrest for the murder of Bart Caswell, alias Inspector Conklin."

Brewster seemed stunned at the charge. His eyes, as if by instinct, avoided Conklin's steady gaze. He looked appealingly at Ruth Duperow, then at the scowling half-breed, starting slightly at his first notice of the nickled wristlets the man wore.

"Who's the boob now?" snarled Bon-

nemort. "Leaving tracks with your bum foot for any bull to read!"

"Shut up, you fool!" A look of fright crossed Brewster's handsome face. For a second he seemed about to spring upon the breed. Then, as quickly as it had come, the spasm passed. He turned his eyes on Conklin. "If you ever press this ridiculous charge," he said, "I'll prove it false to the jury. I've done some freighting for the B. & K. outfit, nothing more. Rode in here to-day to collect a bill. Down at the cañon Kluger passed me on to Bonnemort. I ran into you—and trouble."

After a moment's pause for thought Brewster continued: "Say, if you really are Inspector Conklin, who was the uniformed bird that came to Gold as Bart Caswell?"

The inspector glanced at Ruth before replying. His sympathy for the girl amounted to sorrow. While she would have to know the worst about Bart some time, there was no necessity of her hearing it now, on top of all she had been through. The questions of the prisoner might be ignored.

Evidently Ruth read the thought to spare her. From where she stood at the back of the tent she flashed him a signal. She wanted to know the worst—and now.

Knowing that a painful operation is more humane if quick, the inspector performed this one with the thrust of a single sentence. "Bart Caswell's widow is ready to tell the court why he killed Ben Tabor in robbing the B. C. X. stage of my uniform and papers."

"Well, I'll be——" Brewster began.

"Told you Caswell was a crook," whined Bonnemort. "No yellow legs would have let himself be caught the way I got him that day up here on the creek."

Conklin waited for Ruth to speak. When she came toward him her face wore the bravest smile he had ever seen on woman.

"What next, pardner?" she asked.

"The first step," he told her, "is to rig up some sort of an M. P. seal for that treasure chest I broke open."

Without ceremony, the inspector lifted the breed to his feet and ushered him to



the left-hand cot. From that seat the disfigured partner might glare more conveniently at Brewster.

"But that chest holds only frog gold," Ruth reminded Conklin. "The Siwashes have all the real gold, and it belongs to them."

"You don't really think that a close and crooked corporation like that of Brewster, Kluger and Bonnemort would supply food, dynamite and expert management for a bunch of Indians and take their pay in pretty specimens, do you, Miss Ruth?"

She studied the proposition from the new angle which his question presented. "It doesn't seem reasonable, but——"

"It isn't reasonable," he interposed, raising the lid of the chest that she might feast her eyes upon its heaping gray store. "This frog gold, as your father calls it, happens to be native platinum—worth six times its weight in gold."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### BRIGHT WITH PROMISE.

WITH his astonishing declaration of the real, richer-than-gold wealth of the Glacier Creek placers, Inspector Conklin turned to Brewster for confirmation. "What is the current quotation on platinum?" he asked.

But the freighter no longer was available. "I'm no bureau of information," he growled.

"Try me," offered Bonnemort, who seemed to have quite a score against Brewster. "At the present time that platinum is worth a hundred and fifteen simoleons an ounce—was up to a hundred and seventy during the war."

"And the purest gold brings a trifle over twenty dollars," Conklin reminded her. "You see I was nearly exact."

With a quick glance, as if the presence of such a store of wealth frightened her, the girl lowered the lid. "Then the mission Indians are——" she hesitated.

"Rich—for them," he supplied.

"Did you know that the Duperow claims between the cañon and the Cheena are heavier with frog gold than these up creek. Dad and I will be——" Again she hesitated, as if unable to believe the surprising good fortune.

Conklin would not have cared to explain the worried look that came unbidden into his eyes, had he been taxed with it. Complications foreseen were responsible. "Then you and your father will be near-millionaires," was all he said.

He improvised a flimsy fastening to replace the lock he had broken, and pinned over the chest crack a sheet of paper on which he had written "Officially Sealed, B. Conklin, Inspector R. C. M. P." Then he made a young Siwash, picked by Ruth, vain for life by swearing him in as special constable and placing him on guard at the tent door. His instructions were to permit no one to pass until Conklin returned, and he was entrusted with Brewster's gun to support his authority.

Inspection showed that the Siwashes had gone back to work under "king's orders." Conklin had no thought of telling them how rich they were making themselves, until their status was fixed by the proper court. Meantime they'd be best off, continuing their labor, for "all the gold" allotted them by the spoilers. With Brewster tied to his saddle and Bonnemort, still handcuffed, on foot, the prisoners were started down creek under the guns of the inspector and his volunteer aid. Under the officer's arm was a worn boot for a lame right foot, his prize "Exhibit A."

On the down creek tramp Conklin told Ruth what he knew of the wonder story of platinum. The missionary was not the first to call this occasional associate of gold a nuisance and to throw it away, not knowing what else to do with it. In less than a generation the gray metal had emerged from the lesser metals, crept past silver and then raced beyond gold into the limelight of popularity. Whatever the ultimate fate of the ore, it was certain to remain a treasure-metal until long after Glacier Creek had been mined out.

For his own satisfaction, as well as hers, he outlined the plot against the Indians as he now saw it. Phil Brewster, he believed, had recognized platinum in the frog gold which the Siwashes were discarding. Brewster had sent for Bonnemort and Kluger to direct the harvest, while he rode guard outside under cover



of his established freighting business. They had corralled the Indians on their claims in the easiest possible way—by giving them all the gold that was sluiced while they took the six-times richer platinum. Their discovery that Bart had recognize! the precious metal had signed his death warrant.

After some persuasion and the reminder that she was a persistent young person, he sketched the steps by which he had walked through the mystery. His conviction that Bart had robbed the stage, based on recognition of the uniform, had given him a "head start" and had proved a lever with the widow Caswell. She had started him on a "richer than gold" search. Ruth herself, with her tip about the frog-gold, had spurred him for he suspected it to be platinum. The squaw tale that the Siwashes were getting all the gold had helped, and the shaking of a platinum nugget from the ore sack had completed his enlightenment.

They passed the graveyard diggings without disturbing the Siwashes at their labors. At the tent camp in the cañon Conklin surprised Kluger, sacking platinum for the get-away which Brewster had warned him was imminent. The little man was so preoccupied with his delightful task, and in such fancied security, that the inspector had a gun to his back before he looked up from the booty. Two additional saddle horses were annexed here, which Ruth and Conklin mounted.

At the "gate" they surprised one of the two hired guards in controversy with Duperow. The old missionary had become anxious about his daughter and was trying to talk his way into the gulch. On seeing his employers under arrest, the guard resigned on the spot and couldn't hand over his rifle quick enough. While Duperow rode for Conklin's horses at the near-by camp on the Cheena, the others waited or were made to wait at the mission, where a wondering Siwash girl brought out a "snack" from the pantry.

The ride into Gold, with the missionary in the van, and his daughter with Conklin in the rear, to guard against desertion en route, was marked with but

one incident. Near the scene of the Thursday ambush, Duperow recognized the other guard riding back to camp from the town. Single-handed he had made the last necessary capture, adding another prospective witness for the king's case.

Not until Conklin had gone through the formality of borrowing the town jail from Deputy Sheriff Hardley, and the prisoners were safely immured, with the ice-box door really locked, did Ruth Duperow seem to remember her costume. A signal sent from her seat in the saddle brought Conklin out of the curious crowd about the log calaboose.

"I'm sorry not to see you in the glory of your uniform, inspector," she said with a return of that frankness of manner which had charmed him at their first meeting; "but I simply can't wait for the—the unveiling."

Her threatened departure surprised him, left him suddenly confused. He felt himself getting red in the face and the conviction possessed him that he wasn't going to say the right thing. Confound his inexperience—his neglected education—along this all important line!

"Why, little woman—Miss Duperow—Ruth," he stammered, "I wasn't exactly counting on your doing that. I'd thought of dinner and then giving you an official escort home. I've got to go back to Glacier to-night, you know. What's your hurry?"

She made him a grimace, all the more effective because of her now distorted make-up. "I couldn't think of dinner," she assured him. "I've got to get back to my tribe—my scrubbing brush. I've just realized that I must look a—a scandal in this rig. Even in Gold, B. C., I have a social standing to maintain.

"Your standing as a heroine in Gold couldn't be disturbed by a blast of dynamite after what you've done to-day," he declared, which he thought rather neat, considering the reality of his inexperience. "Of course my plans stand vetoed."

Once more they shook hands, and the thrill he got nearly brought forth what was on his tongue's end—"I just want you to know that you're my heroine and for always." But, as he watched her ride



over the rolling outskirts of the town, that she might escape possible recognition on King Street no doubt, he was glad that he hadn't spoken. Perhaps after she had time to forget that men were not to be trusted, perhaps another day when chance brushed their stirrups, he would speak the words that had trembled on his lips. Anyway, he had met the one woman at last, and all the platinum on Glacier Creek couldn't buy from him the memory of those recent crowded hours.

The crowd remembered that he was a

member of the Force, even if he had momentarily forgotten that fact. They clamored about him for details of the crime clean-up, few of which they would hear from him. There was Deputy Hardley to be put straight about the B. C. X. hold-up; and Mrs. Caswell to thank for her "richer than gold" help, and special constables to be selected and sworn for service at the borrowed jail and on the creek. Indeed there was much for Inspector Conklin to do in his new domain, which promised now to make, rather than break, him.



## THE BIG TRY-OUT

By James Edward Hungerford

WHERE the big-league boys are training  
 For the speedy games in spring,  
 Mighty batting blows are raining—  
 An' the whizzing spheroids sing!  
 Pitching arms are getting limber;  
 Catching palms are getting tough;  
 An' they're testing out new timber—  
 An' the slogan's, Treat 'em rough!

Big-boy wonders from the bushers,  
 Are exhibiting their speed;  
 Some are fancy baseball pushers,  
 Of the "born" ball-playing breed;  
 Some are only flivs an' flashers,  
 Who fan out, when put to test;  
 Some are mighty batting slashers,  
 Who can lay a ball to rest!

Scores would shine, but few e'er twinkle,  
 'Mongst the bush-league diamond stars,  
 An' their aspirations crinkle,  
 When they vault the big-league bars;  
 All their stick tricks, they unlimber  
 To the chief, who sees their cracks,  
 Then he hews the backwoods' timber—  
 An' he doesn't spare the ax!

Some are whizzing, wonder pitchers,  
 Destined some day to be great;  
 Others twirling, twisting twitchers—  
 But they fail to pass the plate!  
 Some have trained for many winters,  
 An' are wise to all the tricks;  
 Some are speedy home-run sprinters—  
 Who run home—back to the sticks!





# Diamond Dust-

By  
Albert Chenicek-

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

## CHAPTER I.

### THE WITLESS WONDERS.



NE of these bright mornings," said "Lolly" Popp, tossing aside the newspapers he had been absorbing with his coffee, "I'm going to commit what is known as assault and grand battery on a couple of smart newspaper reporters."

"What's the big sorrow?" I asked. "Been eating raw or burned meat?"

"Some of those typewriter pounders," went on Lolly, "think that the right way to report a ball game is to give the grand slam to every player on the losing team. If the losing team happens to be the home outfit, the slam is bigger and better. Just take a look at the write-up of yesterday's game and you'll make the connection. Those so-called experts will go to any extreme to get a giggle from vox pop."

It didn't take me long to figure out what had slid under Lolly's fair skin. One piece in the *Star* read:

It is very fortunate that there are only eight teams in the league. If there were more, the Snails might by some freak of fate be slightly above last place, and be very unhappy about it. Close observation tends to make one believe that the Snails can be at home only while roosting in the cellar position.

That was bad enough, but it was as nothing compared to what the *Clarion* printed. Here it is.

Several years ago the White Sox were known as "The Hitless Wonders." It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the Snails are "The Witless Wonders."

"Nice and gentle, aren't they?" asked Lolly, when I'd read those two items. "They wouldn't hurt our feelings for the world."

"Well, we can't very well deny that we are in last place," said I. "And from the looks of things we're due to stay there for the rest of the season."

Lolly got up to his feet in disgust. "You're just as bad as the rest of 'em, Sid. Come on, let's take a hike. Maybe you'll lose some of your pessimism on the way."

As we left the hotel dining room, Lolly jerked his head toward the table where Tom Matlock, our manager, was sitting. "Mat doesn't look very cheerful this morning, does he?" he asked.

"Managers of ball clubs usually aren't bubbling over with mirth," I remarked. "Do you expect him to go out and celebrate every time we lose a game?"

"No," said Lolly; "but what I object to is the 'atmosphere of defeat' as the guy in the book says. You and Mat and the newspaper reporters talk and act like the Snails were through and ready for the undertaker. Now I say that we may be down, but we aren't out."

"That sounds kind of familiar," said I. "Wonder where I heard that before."

"Never mind; you've just heard it



from me. All the Snails need is a little jogging up, and we're going to get it, unless I've been getting the wrong dope."

"Just what does that mean, Lolly? Out with it."

Lolly swung off into a path leading to the park and did not answer until we had deposited ourselves on a green bench. "I suppose you've heard the talk about a new player coming to the Snails in a few days?" he asked.

"Sol!" said I. "You think that a new horsehide harrier will be enough to lift the Snails out of last place? Lolly, we don't need one new player—we need eight."

"Thanks," said Lolly. "That's the first compliment I've been handed since I joined the team."

"Nobody said anything about you," I told him. "But let that pass."

"There's something rather unusual about this latest deal," Lolly continued. "Old Fletcher used to be satisfied with owning the team and raking in the profits, and let Mat have a free hand in picking and choosing players—also in firing them. He's changed his tactics in the case of 'Thunder' Meek, however."

"Thunder Meek!" I repeated. "Who might he be?"

"The name kind of double crosses itself, doesn't it?" Lolly chuckled. "That's his name, though. He's the new player I've been telling you about. According to what I've heard, Fletcher told Mat that Meek was to have the freedom of the diamond, or something like that. Meek is to play any position he may want to, and stay out of a game if he feels that way, or do anything at all. Can you beat it?"

I couldn't. "Wonder what's the idea?"

"Don't know; but I can make a guess. I should say that Meek is an all-round star, hired by Fletcher to come to the Snails and inject some life into the team."

"He can't be so good, though," I objected. "If he's such a star, why hasn't he been signed up long ago in the big leagues?"

"You forget that a lot of men who could play good ball are making a living in other lines of work," Lolly replied. "Anyway, I'm curious to see this Meek."

"Let him come on," said I. "I'd pay admission to see a man with a name like that!"

## CHAPTER II.

### HIS ODD ANTICS.

TWO days later, while we were at batting practice just before a game with the Wildcats, Meek showed up. Lolly first broke the news to me. "Sid, the life-saver has arrove," he proclaimed, as I stepped away from the plate after slamming out three hot ones and a bunt. "He's gone to dress."

"What does he look like?" I asked. "Does he fit his name?"

Lolly shook his head. "I don't know, Sid. Haven't seen him yet. I just got the news from Mat."

I kept my eyes on the door of the clubhouse. I wasn't the only curious one, either; the rest of the team felt the same way. Mat wasn't giving out any information, so all we could do was wait.

Pretty soon, just when we were wondering if Meek had decided to spend the rest of the day indoors, he came into sight.

Practically every player on the field turned to stare at him as he approached—and it was no wonder. The nickname "Thunder" had led every one to expect a huge, hulking, swaggering, and dominating man. Meek, as he ambled up, proved to be so slender as to be practically shadowless, and promised to be as swaggering and dominating as a foot of boiled spaghetti. Timidity oozed out of him pitifully. He wore great, shell-rimmed glasses that covered a pair of frightened black eyes.

And that was the man who, Lolly had said, would inject life into the Snails!

Meek made his wabbling way to Matlock, looking around at every step as though he feared a ball would climb up his neck and bite him.

Lolly and I, speechless, moved up so that we might hear what was said.

"I think I'll play third base to-day," said Meek, in a high, thin voice that suited him exactly. It harmonized with him better than the far-too-short-and-wide uniform that he wore.

Mat looked at him a minute before



speaking. I could see the light of despair in his eyes.

"All right," the manager said at length. "What you say goes." Then, as the ump declared that it was time to start the game, he spoke to the rest of the team that had gathered round. "Get out there and win this ball game! Sid, Meek will take your place at third. Up and at 'em now!"

The team scattered, and I made myself comfortable in the dugout.

At third base Thunder Meek walked around in circles before he decided upon a spot to stand. He pounded in his glove several times with his right hand, hitched up his drooping trousers once or twice, scratched in the dirt with his spiked shoes like a hungry chicken, and then appeared to be ready.

Before the first ball was pitched the fans in the stands had judged him a likely subject for their wit, and a verbal barrage was flung at him.

"Hy, you on third! Whozur tailor?"

"Look at them shanks!"

"Don't wriggle around like that—you'll disconnect yourself!"

"Hey, Mat! What's this on third?"

Then the game was on. Don Walton was in the box for us, and was his usual wild self. He walked the first batter on four pitched balls. Fortunately, the next man knocked into a double play.

Then the fun started. The third man up slammed a sizzling grounder to Meek, who stepped out of its path and tried to grab it with his gloved hand outstretched. He didn't get the mitt over far enough, however, and as a result the ball banged against his finger tips. The horsehide frisked away to left field.

Meek put in the next few minutes hopping around first on one foot and then the other, varying the pantomime occasionally by blowing vigorously upon the injured digits. He did not appear to have the slightest interest in the ball or the game.

The runner got to second before Lolly, who was out in left field, got the ball back to the infield.

On the next ball pitched the man on second began dusting it for third. Simmons, back of the plate, whipped the pill toward Meek. Alas, that worthy,

instead of noting this action, was busy watching the runner approach. For a minute it seemed that he meant to tackle the man, football fashion, but at the last minute he jumped aside. At that instant the ball arrived. Meek turned around just in time to receive it in the pit of his stomach.

He sank to the ground, gasping for breath. The runner, unable to run straight because of his laughter, zig-zagged down the home stretch and crossed the pan.

Five minutes later Meek began breathing normally again. He was white-faced but game.

Don Walton struck out the next man, finishing the first half of the inning.

In the dugout, I turned to Mat. "Say, Mat," I began, "where on earth did Meek learn——"

"Shut up!" growled Mat. "Don't start any of your funny stuff now. I haven't got a thing to do with Meek."

Poor Mat! I said nothing, but when the team arrived, he was helpless.

"Say," cried Walton, "I'm through right here unless you get that comedian off third! What's the idea, Mat? Are we playing a baseball game or running a vaudeville show?"

"Mat, you're getting to be some picker in your old age," said Lolly. "If that bird Meek ever played a game of ball before he came here to-day I'm a pair of twins!"

"'Thunder' Meek," wailed somebody. "Kin yuh imagine——"

"That'll be about enough!" exploded Mat. His face was red. "Never mind the comedy. I've got orders to play Meek and that's all there is to it. Don't forget that I can't help myself."

"Say, what got into Fletcher, anyway?" asked Lolly.

Mat shook his head. "Dunno," he said.

Luckily, Meek wasn't around while this talk was going on. He was sprawled in the grass a short distance away from third base, evidently not yet recovered from his collision with the ball.

In our half of the first we started out to sew up the game. The first man singled, stole second, and managed to get to third when Lolly flied to right.



Then came a single, bringing in our first run.

After that there were hits galore. The Wildcats helped us along by bobbling the pill once in a while. When Meek went up to bat there were two out, and we had garnered four runs. A man rested on second.

From the way Meek stood at the plate, we became more certain than ever that he had never played a game of ball in his life. He'd picked out the heaviest bat we had and the way he handled it was a farce; it almost threw him off his balance every time he moved it.

The first ball pitched to him drove him into a panic. He stepped back, seeming fearful that it was going to connect with some part of his angular anatomy, and then, when the ball swerved over the pan, he made a ludicrous attempt to hit it. The ball was on the way back to the grinning pitcher before Meek had completed his swing.

Meek refrained from swinging at the next two pitches, though we thought he'd bite at anything. The umpire declared the tosses to be balls. The next pitch was a strike, and then came another ball. Meek dropped the bat and started for first.

"Hey!" yelled the umpire. "Where do you think you're going?"

Meek turned around, surprise on his face. "Why, to first base, of course," he replied.

The ump motioned him back. "You'll have to wait until another ball is called. Four balls and not three make a walk in this league."

Evidently Meek didn't know whether to believe him or not, for he looked questioningly toward the dugout. About half of us were curled up with mirth. Mat himself had a twinkle in his eyes.

"Go back and bat," he called.

Meek went, but he was plainly unsettled. No doubt he'd felt much relieved at finishing his first trip to the plate without being hit by the shooting ball.

He swung at the next pitch and missed it by at least a foot. The heavy club he used whirled him around and sent him sprawling in the dust.

"Batter out!"

Meek got to his feet and once more stood up at the plate. When he saw the pitcher leaving the diamond, grinning, he turned inquiringly to the ump, who stood staring at him. "What's the trouble?" asked Meek. "That's only the third strike."

"Only the third strike! Say, how many do you want?"

For an instant Meek stood undecided. Then a weak grin came to his thin face. "Oh!" he said. "I—I guess I just got a walk and a strike-out mixed."

Can you beat it!

### CHAPTER III.

"SOME LITTLE WONDER!"

THAT first inning was a good example of what followed in the next eight stanzas. In the second inning Meek decided that he'd had enough of third base and told Mat that he wanted to go in and pitch for a spell. Since Mat was under orders and couldn't very well help himself, he told Meek to go ahead.

Contrary to everybody's expectations, Meek didn't let the Wildcats pile up a thousand runs or so. He didn't stay in the box long enough. The first batter to face him connected with the initial offering. The ball went straight at Meek, slammed him on the shins, and bounded out to left field. Meek at once sat down and began rubbing the injured portions of his anatomy.

This done, he decided that the pitcher's box was too near to the big guns to be safe and went out to left field.

Out there he missed three beautiful fly balls. He tried hard enough to get them, but some unfortunate accident always foiled his valiant efforts. Once he tripped up over his own feet, another time he let the ball go straight through his hands, carrying his glove with it, and the third time he was so busy chasing a fan's runaway straw hat that he didn't see the ball until it bounced against the fence.

All this bothered him a lot, as I could see when I turned around from my place at third. No—I don't mean that his misplays worried him. The thing he



didn't like was that when a ball came to him he had to stop eating the peanuts he had bought from a candy butcher.

But why go into all the horrible details of that game? Enough to say that when the last man was out the score stood at twelve to six against us.

The newspapers of the following morning gave us a lot of space, describing in detail Meek's new method of playing baseball. One result was that in the afternoon the stands were packed with curious fans.

The game was the same story over again. We lost. Meek played his own version of the national pastime. His chief feat was to run to third instead of first in the fifth inning when he accidentally managed to tap the ball.

That evening Lolly let loose a hunch when he and I were taking a stroll around town.

"Meek isn't the dumb-bell he lets on to be," Lolly declared. "There's a reason for his cutting up as he does."

"Of course," said I. "Most likely he's one of those newfangled psychoanalysts out getting some data on the psychology of crowds in relation to the unusual, or why ball players steal home."

"I've noticed," went on Lolly, without batting an eye, "that Meek isn't such a scream when he's off the ball field. You know that yourself. He acts just like everybody else does, and dresses as well, and looks perfectly normal. It's mighty queer that he should pull all those boners out on the field. And why on earth doesn't he kick for a suit that fits him in at least one or two places?"

"You're looking at this in the wrong way, Lolly," I told him. "Just because a man appears to be normal doesn't mean that he's a good ball player."

"No; but——" Lolly stopped suddenly. Then he said, in a low voice: "Here he comes now—and look at the girl with him!"

She was a queen; I knew that after the first glance. Pretty? Say, beside her Helen of Troy would have looked like a telephone operator minus powder and paint.

Even with such a beauty, Meek didn't look very happy. Seemed to me as if they'd had a quarrel and hadn't yet come

to a dark spot where the matter could be properly adjusted according to the rules and regulations governing such cases.

A minute later Meek introduced us and we discovered that the young lady's name was Cherry White. There's no need of describing a girl with a name like that.

We chatted a while about the weather and other matters equally important, and then traveled on. If I'd left it to Lolly, however, we'd have been standing there yet. He was some taken with Meek's companion.

"Sid," he said in a loud whisper, taking off his hat and stroking down his hair, and then adjusting his tie, "isn't she some little wonder! Did you notice her eyes—shiny, and sparkling, and laughing and——"

"It wouldn't have hurt much if you'd paid a little more attention to Meek's eyes," I told him. "That gentleman was eying you as if he would have enjoyed chewing you up. For a fact, Lolly, your actions were disgraceful."

"Hump!" said Lolly. "Remember that old saying about all being fair in love and war? I say let the best man win."

I grabbed him by the arm. "Say, look here! How long have you known this girl, anyway?"

"What has that got to do with—with anything?"

I couldn't answer that question.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE TIMID VILLAIN.

IT didn't take me long to find out that Lolly was a fast worker. He didn't waste any time about getting better acquainted with Miss White—not he! Three evenings after we'd been introduced to the girl I met him on the street, heading for the biggest movie show in town with the young lady cooing on his arm.

The following day, on the ball field just before the game, I tried to get a little information from him.

"Say, Lolly," I asked, "doesn't Meek kind of object to your taking his girl out nights?"



Lolly grinned. "Sure!"

He answered so calmly and cheerfully that I was thrown off my mental balance. "Well, then why—why——" I began weakly.

"Listen, Sid," he said, coming closer. "I'm going to let you in on a little secret."

"Yes?"

"Uh-huh." He leaned over and whispered into my ear. "We're engaged!"

"Eh?" I stepped back and stared at him. "You're what?"

"Engaged," he repeated. "E-n-g-a-g-e-d. You know—we're going to be married."

I shook his hand flabbily. "Congratulations," said I. "But—give me a chance to figure this out."

It was true, as I discovered later. Somehow or other the whole team got wind of the affair and Lolly had to put up with a lot of good-natured joking over the subject. He didn't mind, though; he seemed positively to enjoy it.

As for Meek—Thunder Meek—during these days he played his regular spectacular game on the field and for the rest shunned everybody. Never a word did I hear him speak to Lolly, and at the same time I couldn't see that he was particularly unhappy.

The Snails kept losing ball games steadily, but since we were in last place already that didn't mean a thing. For a time, when the papers carried a lot about Meek and his own system of baseball, the fans turned out pretty well, but after a while the novelty wore off and the paid admissions were nil-minus.

Naturally enough, after Meek alone and unassisted succeeded in presenting our opponents with several games, the team got into a "what's the use" frame of mind, and that didn't help matters. Mat did his best to liven us up, but it was easy to see that he didn't feel much different from the rest of us.

It was one afternoon about a week after Lolly had told me of his engagement to Cherry White, and after the first of a series of three games at the Wildcats' home grounds, that Lolly, all excited, spilled some more information.

We were on our way to the hotel at the time. Lolly had put up a ragged

exhibition of baseball during the game, and had received a beautiful bawling out from Mat afterward, and I thought at first that that was why he was upset. He set me right in a hurry.

"Sid," said he, "I'm going to go up to Meek's room to-night and give him the neatest talking to you ever heard. In spite of his crazy baseball I always had a notion he was a square shooter, but I've grown wiser. He's going just a little too far this——"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," I interrupted. "What's he done? Start at the preface before you begin explaining the appendix."

Lolly thrust a hand into his coat pocket and fished out a letter. It was a beautiful pink, and perfumed. Right away I guessed it was from Cherry White.

"Read that," said he; "then you'll understand."

I let my eyes skid down the lines of purple ink. The letter read:

DEAR LOLLY: I feel I must write you just a line to let you know that I fear something dreadful is about to happen. I received a letter from papa this morning, and he says I must marry Mr. Meek. I am afraid that he is commanding me to do that because Mr. Meek has some kind of a hold on him, and, oh, I am so afraid! I don't know what to do. I am sure that I will never, never marry him, and yet—papa has been so good to me. We must find a way out, somehow. Please do not make a mistake in regard to Mr. Meek. Though he may seem docile and timid, he is a villain at heart. Love,

CHERRY.

I whistled when I had finished reading it. "Who'd ever think it! The guy who said the path of true love doesn't run smooth sure had the right dope, didn't he?"

Lolly put the letter back into his pocket. "When I get through with Meek," he said, "there won't be any obstacle."

That sounded nice, but what did it mean? "Just what do you aim to do?" I asked him.

"Do! Why, I'm going to tell him to pull away his meddling hands and if he don't, I'm going to smash his face in!"

"You make me laugh. Do you think a man who'd go to the trouble to get a



hold on a girl's father in order to win her would take your talk to heart? And do you imagine that if you hit him he'd be the kind to run away and hide? Forget it. If you so much as touch him he'll sue you for every cent you've got—and most likely get it. The cave-man days are gone forever, sad to say. Use your head."

Lolly didn't say anything to that, but when we had walked two blocks farther he shook his head slowly. "I guess you're right, Sid," he said. "This is a case of brain against brain."

"Yeh. And if you feel the game's going against you, why, call on me!"

"Thanks," he said, without a smile. "I'll see."

During the next two days he kept pretty much to himself, and walked around as though he was dreaming. I guess he was trying to figure out some way to get the best of Meek. Not a word on that subject did he say to me, however.

Then, the day we reached the old home town again, and just before he set out to find Cherry White, he came up to me with his face spread in a wide grin.

"I've struck the scheme at last, Sid!" he exclaimed. "It means finis for Meek."

"That's nice," said I. "Let me hear the scenario."

He shook his head. "Not yet. But I'm going to need your help. Do I get it?"

"You bet. Just wave the red flag or hang two lamps in your window when you want me."

## CHAPTER V.

### A TIME OF PERIL.

**T**HE Snails played a four-game series with the Bruins and, while we were losing the quartet, only one incident occurred that had anything to do with Lolly and his trouble with Meek. It was in the third game, or, rather, just before the third game started.

Cherry White regularly appeared in a seat in the pavilion nearest left field—where Lolly disported himself during each nine-inning spasm—and it was this fact that brought about complications.

"Sid, I'm going over to talk to Cherry now," said Lolly, a few minutes before the game was scheduled to begin, "and I want you to keep an eye on me and Meek. If he begins following me, you get after him."

"What do you want me to do? Drag him away by the neck and strangle him?"

"Nothing as rough as all that. You just time yourself so that you arrive about a half minute after he does. Give him a chance to say a few words. Then grab him by the arm and haul him off. He'll protest, but don't let that bother you. If he insists on staying, take him by the neck and the seat of his trousers and give him the bum's rush. Understand?"

"Sure. Start your act."

Lolly set out. The minute he started out for the girl in the stand I could see that Meek, near the dugout, perked up. Then our star comedian strolled after Lolly, and I fell into line about forty feet behind him.

Lolly had barely time to reach over the front of the stand and shake the girl's hand before Meek arrived. I came up in time to hear a few of Thunder's words.

"Cherry, I know you've let this fellow turn your head, but don't forget that I'm the man you're going to marry. That icy stare isn't going to do much good, either, so you better——"

"Mat wants to see you right away, Meek," said I, pulling him away by an arm. "Hurry up or he'll get peeved."

"Hang Mat!" cried Meek. "Let me loose!"

"Nay, nay. Come along."

He tried to jerk free, but I held him tight. He exited, shaking a fist at Lolly, who just grinned and turned to the girl again.

We were halfway to the bench when the ump called "Play ball!" So I told Meek that I guessed Mat didn't want to see him after all, and went out to third base. Meek went to second, the position he had picked. I saw Lolly leave Cherry White and go out to left field.

After the game—which we lost by the score of ten to one—I asked Lolly a



question. "What was the idea of the play before the game?"

He winked an eye. "I'm not saying, just yet."

That was all I could get out of him.

The second day following, before our first game with the Parrots, Lolly, his face very serious, took me aside and broke more bad news.

"Sid, I'm afraid something's going to happen this afternoon," he said. "I feel it in my bones."

"No doubt," I told him. "We're going to lose another game. But cheer up—this is the last series of the season."

"I don't mean that. Meek has been altogether too happy lately. He must have something up his sleeve. I'm worried."

"I don't see why. The girl is in the stand, where you can see her all the time, and Meek wouldn't try to pull anything while you're watching. You're letting your nerves get away from you."

Lolly wasn't convinced. "Keep your eyes open, will you?" he asked. "We've got to play safe."

I promised, and a few minutes later the game started. It was the same old story. For a while we got by pretty well, but then Meek, at second, pulled a lot of boners and we were five runs behind. As each inning passed the Parrots worked up a bigger lead, so that when we went in to bat in the last half of the ninth we were on the short end of a nine to three score.

The first man struck out, the second popped up to right field, and then Lolly stepped up to the plate.

During the game, I'd looked over to where Cherry White sat, once in a while, and I did the same thing now. Everything seemed all right.

Lolly fouled the first two pitches. As he made ready to bat again, he glanced over to the stands. Then I saw him straighten up suddenly, toss aside his bat, and set out at a mad run across the field.

Paralyzed into inaction for the moment, I looked to see what had started him off. As I did so, some one left the bench and started running after Lolly. The few fans in the stands let out a roar.

Then I saw. Where the girl had been sitting, alone, were now two men. There seemed to be some kind of a tussle. All at once the solution sped through my brain. Meek had hired the men to kidnap the girl!

I sprang to my feet, and at that instant realized that the man who had left the bench a few seconds before was Meek. Now I saw him close behind Lolly, who was rapidly approaching the stand. I joined the chase.

Lolly was about ten feet from where the girl was struggling with the two men when Meek caught up with him. There was a flying tackle, and then the two were rolling on the ground, clawing and kicking.

Lungs ready to burst, I dashed on. Before I came up to them, however, Lolly had jerked himself free and had vaulted over the front of the stand and was attacking the two would-be kidnapers. I passed Meek, who lunged to catch me. A moment later I was beside Lolly.

That was some scrap while it lasted. Meek joined in, and a few minutes later both ball teams arrived and were milling around, tripping over seats, sprawling in all directions. Even some fans entered the spirit of the occasion. I don't think more than four people knew what it was about.

While I was trying to repay several good cracks some one had handed me, the police arrived and the fireworks were over. Lolly and I hung around till every one was gone—the umps had declared the game over, and the police had made no arrests—and then went to the dressing room to clean up. The girl and her assailants had gone, also Meek.

"Well, that's what I call a good day's work," said Lolly, grinning.

When I asked him just what he meant, he said: "Wait till we get back to the hotel."

## CHAPTER VI.

### ENTER THE PLOT.

THE whole affair was a puzzle to me.

For one thing, while Lolly had rushed wildly to the rescue of Cherry White, he hadn't appeared very anxious to see what had become of her after the



fracas, nor had he shown any particular animosity toward Meek in the clubhouse. There were several other points that, on thinking them over, struck me as a trifle queer, but Lolly, true to his word, would not explain a thing until we had reached the hotel and were up in his room.

"Now," he said, "I'll let you——"

Just then the telephone rang and he stopped to answer it. He talked for about a minute and then, receiver in hand, he turned to me and asked: "Sid, would you consider taking a job paying two hundred a week? The baseball season's over, and this'd be a good thing for you. I'm in on it. Say the word."

"What's the job?" I asked, dazed. "Never mind, though. I'll take it!"

Lolly turned to the phone once more. Pretty soon he hung up and sat down again. "It worked out just the way I figured it would," he said. "You owe that job to me, but I'm not asking any commission. 'Well,' he went on, while I stared at him, 'I'll give you the details. You remember the day we met Meek and Miss White on the street?'"

I nodded.

"I suppose you likewise remember that a few days later I told you we were engaged? Well, we weren't."

"Eh?" said I. "You weren't? Why not? I mean, why did you say——"

"We couldn't be," went on Lolly, "for the simple reason that Cherry White was already Mrs. Meek. Rather, she was, and is, Mrs. Collins. Collins is Meek's real name."

"I see," said I. "It's all very plain."

"Meek, or Collins, is an actor for the Modern Photoplay Company," continued Lolly. "That firm is a new one in the picture field, and is specializing in movies built around various sports. You get the idea?"

"They wanted to make a play with a baseball background. To get the real dope, they figured that it would be best to take a lot of scenes in an actual league park, and with real teams playing. They knew the Snails didn't have a chance for the pennant, so they went to Fletcher and made arrangements with him to have Collins come to join the team, with the understanding that he was to be permitted to play in any manner he chose.

They figured, with Collins on the field, there'd be a chance for some comedy.

"Well, after Fletcher had agreed to let them have free rein for a certain amount of money, they put the rest of the scheme through," Lolly went on. "The meeting with Meek and the girl was arranged, though we didn't know it. Also, she vamped me purposely. The idea was to get me interested, so as to prepare for the action that occurred to-day. They wanted to make it lifelike, and to do that I had to be kept in the dark as to the real plot—so they thought.

"However, the girl didn't like to string me along like that, and it wasn't much to Meek's liking, so the second time I saw her she let me in on the whole thing, and I agreed to go through with it. She said if I got in some good action I'd have a contract offered to me, no doubt. To get you in on it, I asked you to get into the scene the other day by having you drag Meek, or Collins, away. You see?"

I couldn't say whether I did or not. "But how——" I began.

"The head of the film company just called up a minute ago and told me the whole plot. He didn't, and doesn't, know that Mrs. Collins had tipped me off long ago. There you are. We've both got good paying jobs that will last until the rest of the scenes for the picture, which is to be called 'Diamond Dust,' are taken, anyway."

"But that letter you got from Miss White," I said. "Why did she send it if she had told you everything?"

"That's easy," replied Lolly with a smile. "She didn't write it or send it. The director did that."

It all soaked in gradually. "What I don't see," I told him after a while, "is how the pictures were taken. I didn't see any movie cameras around anywhere."

"You just didn't look hard enough," Lolly returned. "They were in the park, all right, but located in inconspicuous places. They didn't have to be placed very close to the action photographed because they were equipped with the new tele-photo lens—one of the lenses that act as a telescope and bring scenes close up. You've seen pictures in the news-



papers that were taken in that manner. Anything else you want to know?"

"Yes," said I. "Since you knew the whole scheme almost from the beginning, why didn't you let me in on it?"

Lolly grinned. "There were times when I thought I would, but I figured it would be better if I didn't. You see, I wanted to find out if I was a good

enough actor to put the plot across—and I succeeded!"

"I'll say you did," I told him.

"By the way," I added, "it's a small matter, I know, but when does this two-hundred-buck salary start?"

I grinned all over my sunny countenance when he answered: "Your salary's going on now."



## ON THE SEA ROAD

By Ted Olson

DOWN the glimmering sea road in days of old they came—  
Days of mirth and magic, wind and blood and flame!  
Down the glimmering sea road in crested Viking ships,  
Challenge in their bold blue eyes, laughter on their lips!

Gentlemen adventurers! Scoundrels long unhung!  
Why should rogues so black of grain have their fame still sung?  
Why should polished modern ways seem so stale and slow  
When your lawless venturing snares our fancy so?

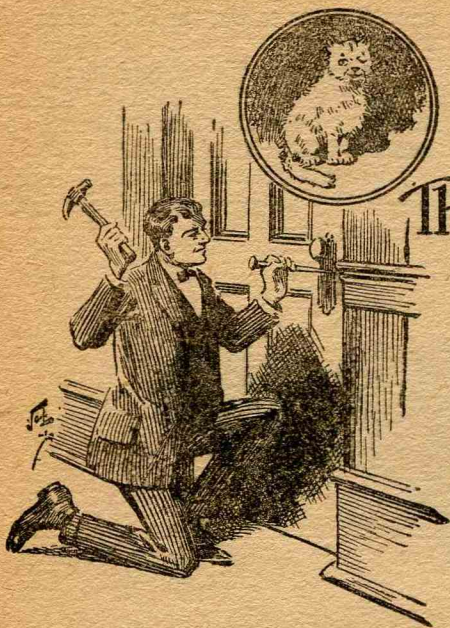
Still the glimmering sea road strides across the world.  
Ah, but it is dull with smoke from greasy stacks unfurled!  
Chart and log and compass guide you safe and far,  
Where the steersman set his course by a windy star.

Down the glimmering sea road of wind and flame and foam  
Sometimes still a dusky tramp blunders tipsy home.  
What though haughty liner folk gaze at her askance?  
Somewhere in her dingy hull broods the old romance.

Somewhere still a white strand flames beneath the moon;  
Singing trade winds strum the palms that fringe a blue lagoon;  
Love and youth and treasure still stir the hearts of men;  
And laughing rogues with bold eyes put out to sea again.

Let's forget the new world, cultured, suave—and dull.  
Take the splendid, salty trail of albatross and gull!  
Slatting sails and blown spume, chanties madly flung  
Down the glimmering sea road to a world still young!





# That Sealed-Room Tragedy~

By  
Vincent Starrett~

(A NOVELETTE)

## CHAPTER I.

### BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR.

**H**AVING killed his victim with characteristic eagerness, and without a twinge of conscience, Laurence Mottashed lighted a cigar and sat back in his big chair. This, of course, was not the end. First the police would come, then the coroner, and when all had been thoroughly baffled the celebrated detective would appear. This man would nose around and go deeply into things. Wherefore, an important problem now presented itself and Mottashed thoughtfully considered it:

Murder, suicide, or death by accident?

There was the dead man, and there was the choice of solutions offered the investigating authorities. They might take their pick; but in the end?

Mottashed faced the problem squarely with knotted brows. Twice the ashes from his cigar fell into a fold of his waistcoat before he stood up. Then, with thoughtful eyes, he picked up his hat and gloves, selected a stout walking stick, and went out into the night. A turn in the park would clear his head and no doubt point a way out of the difficulty.

Latham, his secretary and amanuensis,

watched him go, and Mottashed, reading the young man's thought, said: "Nothing you can do to help, Vance! Why don't you go to the theater, or to see your girl?"

To this Latham replied: "Thanks; I guess I will."

For two hours Mottashed tramped the gravel paths of the little park near his home, puzzling his head about the hole in which he found himself. Then he returned to his study and locked himself in.

Latham had gone when his employer returned, and to the housemaid who met him in the hall Mottashed gave his orders: "I am not to be disturbed to-night."

"Very well, sir," said the maid, and went about her business.

In the seclusion of his study, with the shaded electric lamp burning softly, Mottashed again faced the problem he had created.

The crime did not bother him in the least, for it was only a crime on paper. John Cleland was dead—slain by Laurence Mottashed—but John Cleland never had existed. He was a puppet from the Mottashed closet. As a writer of popular detective stories, Laurence Mottashed had killed many Clelands



under many other names; had robbed Clelands, abducted Clelands, and otherwise harassed that long-suffering race throughout a successful career.

His present story bothered him immensely, however, for in it he had for the first time attacked a fascinating problem, perhaps the oldest and most fascinating in literature—the mystery of death in a sealed room.

Here was Cleland dead in his chair—in a sealed room; that is, a room with all windows and doors securely locked on the inside. Yet the death was an unnatural one. Hence the three possible solutions. It was a neat puzzle, and to be successful its inventor must discover a logical and at the same time unhackneyed explanation of the mystery. So, being a logical and methodical man, Mottashed made a series of notes on his scratch pad, setting forth the difficulties presented by each of the suggested solutions, as follows:

"Murder: If Cleland was murdered, how did his murderer escape from the room leaving it locked at all points from the inside? Comment: Certainly the dead man did not obligingly rise and lock the door after his slayer.

"Suicide: If Cleland committed suicide, where is the weapon with which he took his life? Comment: Thorough search of the room fails to disclose a weapon; it fails to disclose also any mark on the body.

"Accident: If the death was accidental, why is not that fact plainly evident? Comment: There is no mark on the body, but trustworthy medical testimony based on the position of the body and the expression of the features insists that the death was not natural. Query: Is medical testimony always trustworthy?"

Mottashed laid aside his pencil and leaned back in his comfortable throne chair of leather; then he smiled. "Very pretty indeed!" he murmured. "But I'm blessed if I know how Maxwell is going to turn the trick!" Maxwell was Mottashed's famous detective, a creation dear to many thousands of readers, and even dearer to his creator.

For the time being, Maxwell's puzzled creator gave up his problem and pushed a button. Then, remembering

that the door was locked, he stepped over to it and turned the key. A second maid shortly thereafter entered the study and Mottashed gave an order. A tall glass in which ice musically tinkled was the miraculous result of this command.

"Mrs. Kennedy has retired?" asked the author.

"She had a headache, sir, and asked me to answer your bell if it rang. She has gone to bed."

"I see. Well, thank you. I shall need no more attention to-night. Mr. Latham will be back by midnight, I suppose."

Mottashed saw his servant open the door, saw her through its aperture, and again locked himself in the study. As he strode back to his chair a small gray kitten brushed against his ankle, and he stooped to stroke its soft fur.

"Puss!" he said. "Pretty puss! So you slipped in, did you? Well, little one, out you go again! I must be alone to-night, puss. No time for play!"

Once more he unlocked his door. He set down the kitten in the corridor with a final caress; then again he locked his door and returned to his chair. For a moment the little animal outside scratched at the barrier, seeking admittance, while Mottashed listened, smiling. In another moment he had turned to his tall glass and his problem.

He roused himself after a period of thought. "Of course," he mused, "the simplest explanation may be the least obvious and the best. Cleland might have been fatally wounded before he entered his study—outside the house perhaps. Unaware of his desperate condition, and unwilling to alarm his family, he goes alone to his study and locks himself in. In the study he dies. That, at least, is plausible and, I think, sound."

He pondered this for a few minutes and made another memorandum on the pad. Then a slight noise fell upon his ears. Puzzled, for his nerves were alive and he knew himself to be alone in the room, he slowly stiffened and listened again for the interrupting sound. He turned slightly in his chair and leaned forward. A look of bewilderment crossed his features, quickly followed by an expression of pain and terror. He tried to cry out.



The slight sound he had heard was repeated, but Mottashed made no further move, and after a time silence again settled upon the room.

At six o'clock the next morning Mrs. Kennedy, the housekeeper, arose and went downstairs, followed shortly by her staff. At seven o'clock she told the first housemaid that breakfast would be served at seven-thirty, and the first housemaid went upstairs and tapped on two doors, that of Latham, the secretary, and that of Laurence Mottashed, her employer. At each door she said: "Breakfast, sir, in half an hour."

Latham entered the breakfast room twenty minutes later, but immediately went upstairs again. Halfway up he met the first housemaid coming down.

"Did Mr. Mottashed answer you?" asked the secretary. "He usually beats me downstairs, but this morning I'm ahead of him."

Without waiting for a reply, he smiled and went on up. He tapped on Mottashed's bedroom door, and as there was no response he turned the handle and entered the chamber; he was a privileged young man. Mottashed's bed was empty, and the bedclothes were undisturbed.

Latham hastily withdrew. "I say," he called to the maid, who had reached the foot of the stairs: "Mr. Mottashed isn't in his room. Do you suppose he fell asleep in the study and spent the night there?"

He plunged down the stairs and went at once to the room in question. It was locked. Latham looked at the housemaid.

"Hanged if he didn't!" he said, and began a brisk tattoo on the panels. "Funny!" he commented, after a moment, when there was no response. He drummed harder.

The second housemaid, passing through the hall and seeing the secretary and the first housemaid standing outside the door of the study, came and joined them. The housekeeper, scenting something unusual, hurried in from the kitchen followed by the cook.

"What's the matter?" asked the housekeeper suspiciously.

"Don't know," briefly answered

Latham. In an instant he added: "Mr. Mottashed didn't sleep in his bed last night; I'm afraid he's still in his study."

Mrs. Kennedy became white. "Ill?" she asked faintly.

"I hope not," returned Latham. He pounded vigorously on the door panels. "Hello," he called. "Hello, there, Mr. Mottashed! Wake up!" As if to tempt his employer from slumber he added: "Breakfast!"

The commotion elicited no response from the interior of the study.

Latham stooped to the keyhole, but the key was in the lock and obstructed his view. He lay flat upon the floor and tried to look beneath the door; and a thin streak of electric light crept out to meet his peering eye.

"Wait here!" he said sharply, and hurried out of the house and around to the side.

With a little leap he grasped the central window ledge and drew himself up. The blind was down, but there was an interval of perhaps half an inch between its lower extremity and the window frame. For an instant Latham hung there, staring, then he dropped back to earth and ran rapidly around to the front. He plunged into the house, and the group at the study door fell back before his approach.

"He's inside," said the secretary briefly, "and I'm very much afraid——"

Without completing his sentence he flung himself upon the door, turning the handle at the same time. "Get me a hammer and chisel," he said, and when these had been brought he attacked the metal frame in which the doorknob sat. He was no expert, and some time elapsed before he had the lock out and was able to push open the door.

Then he entered and went directly to the side of his employer. He placed a hand on Mottashed's shoulder, then fell back shuddering before the look on the author's face.

"Shall I telephone for a doctor?" timidly asked Mrs. Kennedy, from the doorway.

"Yes," replied Latham with a gulp; "but there's nothing he can do. Mr. Mottashed is dead!"



# CHAPTER II.

## THAT GLOVE OF MYSTERY.

WELL," said my friend Jimmie Lavender, "it has come at last, Gilly!" I paused in the act of stripping off my gloves to regard him with surprise. His eyes were dancing, his smile was half whimsical, half triumphant.

"What has come at last?" I inquired. "You haven't fallen in love?"

He turned and swept an arm in a circular motion around his room, book-lined on three sides.

"There," he said, "you will find all the detective literature I have been able to lay hands upon. It is my hobby, as you know, to collect it. There are hundreds of clever fictional detectives on those shelves, and the 'problem of the sealed room' has fascinated them all. I have often wondered if so melodramatic a mystery ever existed in life. It seems possible now. I have actually had presented to me for solution that most negatively dramatic of all situations."

"You are certainly pleased about something," I remarked, and finished removing my gloves. "What is the 'problem of the sealed room?'"

"Oh, ignorance!" he murmured, and relighted his pipe. I patiently waited.

"It is a room, Gilruth, locked at all points from the inside, in which a man—or a woman, if you like—is found dead from unknown causes."

"Oh!" I said. "You are talking about the Mottashed case. I read about it in the afternoon papers. So you're to have a hand in that?"

"Yes. Vance Latham, Mottashed's secretary, is a classmate of mine. I am acting at his suggestion. He is dissatisfied with the police conduct of the case. I have been talking with him over the telephone."

"But Mottashed died of heart failure, or apoplexy, didn't he?"

"The papers, I believe, say something to that effect; but that is only their guess based on insufficient information. Latham thinks that Mottashed was murdered."

"How could he be murdered?" I objected. "He was alone in the room, and all the doors and windows were locked."

"Exactly," answered my friend. "You see the fascination of the 'sealed room' problem!"

"What do the police think?" I asked.

"Probably that the death was natural, and I admit I don't blame them for it. I don't like to theorize before I know what there is to be known, but if the main facts are as stated by the newspapers it is certainly the only reasonable conclusion. The absence of a weapon would negative the idea of suicide; the locked door and window would preclude the notion of murder. Accident? Possibly, but there should be something to indicate the nature of the accident; and I understand there is nothing."

"Why is Latham so certain that it is murder?"

"Oh, he's vague enough," replied Lavender, "but he's been close to Mottashed and knew the man's life and thought; not the sort of fellow to commit suicide, and sound as a dollar physically. Therefore—to Latham—the only explanation is murder."

"Not enough!" I grunted.

"No," agreed Lavender; "it isn't enough. Maybe Latham will have more to tell us when we see him. Do you care to come along?"

I cared very much to go along, and I said so promptly.

Starting at once, we took a street car to a suburban railroad station and boarded a train for the Mottashed estate, which was a show place of a fashionable suburb. At the Hazelhurst station an automobile, sent by Latham, awaited us, and we were driven rapidly through the attractive streets of the town to the scene of Mottashed's final adventure.

The two-story structure was of expensive stone, and stood well back in its own grounds, which were surrounded by a high iron fence. We turned into a tree-lined avenue and after a short run alighted before the steps of the handsome pile, the car continuing around the house to a garage in the near distance. Latham was on the veranda to greet us—a handsome, intelligent fellow of about twenty-four or twenty-five, and Lavender introduced me to his old classmate.

"Good of you to come, Jimmie," said



Latham. "Now we'll get something accomplished."

"What's the matter with the police?" asked Lavender with a slight smile.

"They're all right as far as they go," answered the secretary, "but they're small-town, you know, and they've made up their minds that this is a case of natural death and won't be shaken in their conviction. And I freely admit," he added, "that everything points that way. I wasted no time in sending for you as soon as I saw the course matters were taking. It happened only this morning; that is, we found him this morning, you understand. I suppose it happened some time last night."

He led us into the house as he spoke, and called a pale-faced maid to take charge of our hats and coats. A policeman stood aside to allow us to pass.

"Everybody's in an awful state," continued Latham, as he noted Lavender's glance at the servant. "Mrs. Kennedy—the housekeeper—is prostrated, and these girls are ready to follow her to bed. I've had to drive them a bit to keep them up. Oh, it's a devil of a mess!" he concluded passionately. "I feel as if I'd lost my father, and I *have* lost my closest friend. Mr. Mottashed was more than an employer."

"I know," said Lavender. "It's too bad. I suppose the police are in the room yet?"

"They're all over the house. You can't move without stepping on a policeman, or a detective, or a coroner's assistant."

"The coroner's been here?"

Latham led us into a wide sitting room and gave us chairs. "Yes," he answered. "He's a doctor here in town, and he was on the spot early. He's out impaneling a jury now, and the inquest will be held to-morrow afternoon, here, at the house."

The secretary dropped into a chair and looked at us out of haggard eyes. "What do you want to know?" he asked.

"Better begin at the beginning and tell me the whole story," suggested Lavender. "I'll ask any questions that occur to me."

"All right," said Latham. "I've been over it twice already, so I'm not likely to miss anything."

He talked rapidly for a few minutes, sketching in the framework of the tragedy. Lavender absorbed the whole tale in silence.

When the secretary had finished, Lavender asked: "You went out, as he suggested?"

"Yes; followed both his suggestions. Took a girl to the theater."

"So that your own movements are accounted for until about one o'clock in the morning!"

"That's right. Girl with me all the time."

"She knows nothing of this?"

"Knows all about it now. I hustled over and told her this morning."

"When you came in at about one o'clock, you noticed a thin streak of light under the study door, and when you called through you heard Mr. Mottashed answer you? Now, are you quite certain the voice was that of your employer?"

"I'm not certain at all," replied Latham. "I assumed that it was he, of course. But I couldn't even hear what was said. It was only a sort of grunt. Just as if he heard me and was saying 'All right!' To me it meant just that—that there was nothing he wanted except to be left alone, and that I could go to bed. If he had wanted anything he'd have sung out."

"It was his custom to sit up quite late?"

"Oh, yes! One o'clock wasn't late for him. He often sat up until three when he was figuring out some puzzle."

"There was no one else up?"

"No one that I saw or heard."

"And no sounds of any sort during the night?"

"Not a sound—so far as I am concerned. I asked Mrs. Kennedy and the maids, and they said they had heard nothing either."

"And there are no marks on Mr. Mottashed's body?"

"So the doctor says, and I agree with him."

"H'm!" mused Lavender. "I don't wonder the police refused to listen to you, Latham. What makes you so certain it is not a case of natural death?"

"Well, there was his face!" Latham lowered his voice almost to a whisper.



"It was—twisted, you know; as if he'd been badly frightened. The doctor laughed at me; said the face registered pain. Spasm of the heart that took him off, and so on. Maybe—I don't know! But I don't believe it; instinct, I suppose. Here's the way I figure it, Jimmie.

"Mr. Mottashed simply wouldn't have committed suicide; no reason to. And if he did, how did he do it? Where's the weapon? Where's the wound? His health was O. K. Remember, I knew him well. No heart weakness; no stomach trouble; no serious ailments whatever; a good insurance risk. He was happy, fond of life and living, and with every expectation of plenty of both for years to come. No money troubles, no affairs of the heart—a widower, you know—not a worry in the world except his stories, and they were pleasant worries. All right! He dies suddenly in the night—locked in his study! Why?"

Lavender smiled at this presentation of the case; then he became grave. "Forgive me, Latham," he apologized, "if I say that your argument while well stated is not convincing. I'm not saying that you are not right, but your idea will take some proving. The autopsy will divulge the whole story, probably, whatever it may be."

"There may not be an autopsy," replied Latham. "Oh, I know it's the thing, but here are the police and the doctors agreed that heart failure is the cause, and willing to sign their names to it. I'm alone in my belief, and haven't a thing to base it on except instinct; they won't listen."

"There *must* be an autopsy," Lavender said. "It would be highly irregular to forego it. I'll stick by you to the last on that, Latham. Who benefits by Mr. Mottashed's will?" he asked, as if the question had just occurred to him.

"I do," answered Latham miserably; "more than any one else, at any rate. The housekeeper and the maids—all here for years—get something, but there are no children and no close relatives, and I get the bulk of the estate."

"A nice thing for you," returned Lavender. "Well, the police can't suspect you of murder, eh? You, the one

person who greatly benefits by the death of Mr. Mottashed, are the one person unsatisfied that the death was natural."

Latham impatiently shrugged his shoulders.

We followed him in a few minutes to the door of the study, but the local police were still occupying that room in force, and we did not enter. Lavender's reputation had long preceded him, however, and the men looked up with interest when he appeared. He only smiled and nodded.

"Looks all right here, Mr. Lavender," said one of the investigators.

"Finger prints?" suggested my friend.

"His own—lots of 'em," said the other. "Nothing else."

"The maid's will be on the glass, too." Lavender smiled. "By the way, I should like to talk with both of the maids and with Mrs. Kennedy also. I may as well do it now."

Throughout the remainder of the afternoon he interviewed the two maids and made a pilgrimage to the room of the housekeeper, questioning each closely about her movements of the night before and particularly as to sounds heard in the early-morning hours. The maid who had given Mottashed his glass of liquor told of her brief conversation with her employer which, innocent as it was, took on some significance because it was the last speech known to have been uttered by the author.

This maid had gone upstairs at once, following her dismissal for the night, and had heard no further sound or speech from the study. Mrs. Kennedy told of retiring early with a headache, which, curiously, had not kept her awake.

Then, toward evening, a bombshell was exploded in the house. Lavender's presence undoubtedly had spurred the local police to action. Eager to show their best to the celebrated private detective, they had researched the study while my friend was engaged with the housekeeper and her staff. Eager to distinguish themselves, the village detectives were willing even to accept Latham's theory of violent death—tentatively—although none believed in it, the coroner least of all.

We were proceeding toward the study for Lavender's first glimpse of the room



at close range, when the local police chief came up hurriedly.

"Gentlemen," he said rhetorically, "we have made an important discovery. It would appear that Mr. Latham may have been right, after all. While it is true that there is no mark upon the body to indicate foul play, it now seems certain that somebody was in the study last night with Mr. Mottashed. Mr. Latham, do you recognize that glove?" From behind his back he suddenly produced a gray-silk glove and held it up for the secretary to see.

Latham fell away from it as if he had been thrust backward. "Good God!" he cried. "Where did you get that?"

"We found it behind a bookcase in the study," returned the officer severely, "where probably it had been dropped as a favorable hiding place. A woman's glove, gentlemen! Now, who in Hazelhurst, do you suppose, has the mate to that glove?"

Lavender looked quickly at Latham, whose face was white. "Do you recognize it, Latham?" he asked. "If so, we'd better hear about it. I assure you it is thoroughly unimportant," he kindly added.

"Oh, you do, do you?" sneered the police chief. "Perhaps Mr. Latham has another idea."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Lavender impatiently. "The glove may have been behind that bookcase for weeks; see, it is covered with dust. And why should any one drop it there—particularly a murderer—where it was sure to be found?"

"So that's your idea!" jeered the local officer. "Mr. Latham seems upset about it, though."

It was true. Latham had experienced a shock.

"Whose is it, Latham?" asked my friend again. "Does it belong to the young woman you were with last night?"

Latham squared his shoulders and looked at them both. "It belongs to me," he answered quietly. "I missed it—some time ago. As Mr. Lavender says, it has probably been there for weeks."

The breast of the police chief swelled. "Mr. Latham," he said with great dignity, "it is a woman's glove and was not

there yesterday morning, as the maid will testify."

"Are you charging Mr. Latham with murdering his employer?" asked Lavender swiftly.

"I am not accusing anybody—yet," significantly replied the other; "but Mr. Latham will not be allowed to leave this house until the presence of this glove has been satisfactorily explained."

## CHAPTER III.

### A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

WHEN the important personage had taken himself off, Lavender looked at Latham and Latham looked back at Lavender.

"Why didn't you tell him the truth, Vance?" asked my friend. "I suppose it can't hurt her?"

Latham suddenly seized Lavender's arms and propelled him toward the sitting room, where he himself fell into a chair.

"I don't know!" he said. "That is—oh, of course it can't hurt her! What's the matter with me? She had nothing to do with this. But I don't want her dragged into the case at all. She knew nothing about it until I told her, this morning. Look here, Jimmie! The truth is, that glove was in my pocket last night!"

Lavender was genuinely surprised. He considered the statement for a moment, with Latham's imploring eyes searching his classmate's face.

"You mean—you lost it?" I put in.

"I suppose so. Dropped it pulling out my own gloves, I suppose. But how did it get into the study?"

"You raise an interesting point," said Lavender, at length. "If you dropped it, then somebody found it, and that somebody placed it where it was found again in the study. Now, who is there that would do that?"

Latham was distressed. "I can't think of any one here who would do it," he admitted. "Why should any one?"

"That's what I should like to know," answered Lavender dryly. "How long have you had the glove?"

"A few days. She gave it to me last week."



"Keepsake?"

"Well—yes! Something of the sort."

"And you are sure you had it in your pocket last night?"

"I supposed it was there; that is, I didn't suppose anything about it." Latham's tongue faltered. "I had put it there and hadn't removed it. See? I don't remember thinking anything about it particularly."

"What pocket was it in?"

"Inside pocket of my black cheviot coat. It's upstairs; I wore it last night."

Lavender's face was a study. "Well," he said with a queer smile, "it is awkward, but unimportant, as I said. It will serve one purpose, however. This police fellow—what's his name—Jackson?—will be busy as a beaver now. He thinks it's important; and you can be sure there will be an autopsy and that quickly."

Latham looked at his classmate. "You don't think I'm keeping anything from you, do you, Jimmie? I'm sure you don't believe I murdered Mr. Mott-ashed."

Lavender laughed silently. "I think you are not a very accomplished liar, Vance," he said.

Latham flushed and looked angry. For a moment I thought there would be a row between the two friends.

"That fool Jackson will annoy Miss Rutland," he said at length.

"So that's her name, eh? Well, let him. He's probably at it now. She can only tell him the truth—that she gave it to you. And you've already said it was yours."

"Don't rub it in, Lavender," said Latham. "I did it for her."

"It won't help her, however. On the contrary, it will subject her to a great deal of annoyance. Jackson knows as well as I that you lied to shield Miss Rutland. There's only one way now to overtake the error: let's get at the truth. Did Miss Rutland wear that glove last night?"

"Yes!"

Lavender whistled. He rose to his feet and strolled about the room, ending by filling and lighting his pipe. "Of course she did *not* give it to you, despite your heroic announcement. But how did

it get into the house? How did it get into the study? Behind the bookcase? What Jackson thinks, of course, is perfectly plain."

The secretary bounded to his feet. "I tell you, Lavender," he shouted in a rage, "Lillian Rutland was not in that room last night! Don't you think I know? Do you think for one minute that after I'd taken her home last night, she slipped out and came over here to see— Why, it's preposterous! Unthinkable!" He tossed his arms in the air and subsided into his chair.

"Very well," said Lavender calmly. "I have no objection to your version of it. You are probably quite right. But how does that help Miss Rutland?"

Latham got to his feet again. "I'm going over to punch Jackson's head for him," he announced. "That'll help her, and it'll help me, too."

"You're going to stay here for the time being," replied Lavender. "You wouldn't be permitted to leave the house anyway. You remember what Jackson said! You are not under arrest, but you *are* detained. A little distinction, you see.

"Look here, Jimmie! Will *you* see her? I'll give you a note, and——"

"Good idea!" approved Lavender. "Do it quickly, and I'll go over while Jackson's there."

I went after my hat, determined to know all that was to be known; but as it happened our journey was made unnecessary. As we were getting ready to leave the house Jackson reappeared, and with him there entered the house a surprisingly beautiful girl. At sight of her Latham cried out.

Jackson looked very mysterious as he beckoned Lavender and me to one side. Latham and Miss Rutland were engaged in talking to each other in a corner of the hall. The police chief watched them suspiciously for a moment, then with a shrug of his shoulders turned to Lavender.

"Let's go in here," he said, and led the way into the sitting room. Closing the door carefully after him, he continued: "It's clearing, Mr. Lavender, and that glove may be more important



than you think. You'll pardon me if I took offense at your tone a while ago! That's over. I've been talking to Miss Rutland, and of course it's her glove. I knew that before. Everybody around here knows Lillian Rutland, and most of 'em know what she wears. She admits it's her glove, all right, and what do you think she says?"

"That she dropped her gloves in Mr. Latham's side pocket last night," promptly replied my friend.

The police chief looked at Lavender in amazement. "How did you know that?" he asked.

"I didn't *know* it until you put the question; but I thought it rather likely."

"Well, it's clever, I won't deny. But you see what it means?"

"What?"

"Just this: that the glove we found in the study was in Mr. Latham's pocket last night—with the other one, I suppose, which is probably still in his pocket. Mr. Latham came in about one o'clock; it's true, for the girl's story checks it. He called to Mr. Mottashed and got a reply. The rest of the folks were in bed. Miss Rutland's people can testify that she didn't leave the house after she returned. Her sister slept with her all night. There you are! I won't deny that I suspected the girl at first. That's over! But when Mr. Latham came in, early this morning, he had those two gloves in his pocket. This morning, later, he's got only one—at least I suppose he's got it. The other we found in the study hidden behind a bookcase. Who put it there?"

"Possibly somebody wishing to throw suspicion on Mr. Latham," answered Lavender.

"Rot!" said Jackson cheerfully. "You don't believe that, do you?"

"Perhaps not," admitted Lavender.

"Who would know he had the gloves in his pocket?" persisted the police officer shrewdly.

"Well, he may have dropped one in the hall, where it was found by somebody else."

"By who?" Jackson was ungrammatical, but determined.

"I don't know! Maybe Mr. Mott-

ashed! You don't know that he didn't come out and go back."

"You don't believe that, either, but there's a possibility of truth there. Did you know that Mr. Mottashed left a series of notes for a story he was writing?"

"Yes," replied Lavender. "Latham told me."

"Then you know what they were! The story he was writing was the very story we are living!" declared Jackson dramatically. "And look here: He may have solved it himself!"

"You mean his suggestion that a man apparently murdered in a sealed room might have been fatally wounded outside of the room, and then have locked himself in to die?"

"Something like that. Maybe he didn't know he was going to die. Suppose he left the room just as Mr. Latham came in—at one o'clock. Suppose there was some trouble between them. Suppose Mr. Mottashed picked up the glove which Mr. Latham had dropped, and said something that Mr. Latham didn't like. Suppose——"

"Too much supposition," Lavender yawned aggravatingly. "And even if you were right as to their meeting, how was the death brought about?"

Jackson's eager face became downcast. "That's a puzzler, I admit," he replied. "If we can get to the bottom of that, we've solved the mystery."

"What are you going to do with Miss Rutland?"

"Well, I want her to talk with Mr. Latham. I want them to talk this all over. Then, if they know anything they haven't told, maybe we'll get the benefit of their conference. If he's guilty, she may get him to confess, eh?"

"You are satisfied she is not an accomplice then?"

"Well—yes! But she may know something. Why did Mr. Latham hurry over to her home this morning to tell her about this?"

"That's why, I suppose," answered Lavender. "To tell her about it."

"Or to tell her to shut up about something!" suggested the other. "Maybe about the gloves!"



"Well," said Lavender, "if that's what he was after, he wasn't very successful, was he? She talked pretty readily, and her story is very reasonable. No, Mr. Jackson; we're still groping in the dark. I won't deny the force of your remarks, and you've done some smart thinking. Of course, you've proved nothing yet, but the glove might be twisted into a damaging piece of evidence. You are too eager, however, to agree with a theory that pleases you. At first you were willing to call the death natural; now you incline to suspect Latham because of this glove. But the big mystery in this case, Mr. Jackson, is the manner of the death of Laurence Mottashed—not who killed him. You realize this, I think, and you will agree that there should be an autopsy at once. If murder has been done, the autopsy will prove it; if murder has not been done, you have no case and we are wasting our time."

"What do you suggest?" asked Jackson. "I mean immediately."

"An autopsy to-morrow, and meanwhile that these young people be let alone; there's no earthly use in pestering them at present. Right now I want to see the body, and in a little while I want to go over the study very carefully. I've postponed my investigation in the room on purpose, for I want to make my examination at night, as nearly as possible under the conditions that obtained in the room last night."

"What do you expect to find? Do you mind telling me?"

"Not at all!" Lavender smiled. "I expect to find that Mr. Mottashed met death in some very curious manner; that he was not murdered at all, but was the victim of some extraordinary accident whose simplicity has baffled us. Certainly I do not believe that any person in this house had even a contributing hand in his death."

There was a timid knock on the door, and the second housemaid put her head inside. She was trembling with suppressed excitement.

"Mr. Lavender, sir," she breathed. "Mr. Latham—in the kitchen—the cook has disappeared!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### SOMETHING OF A SHOCK.

IN the wide kitchen of the agitated Mottashed household we learned that the startling announcement of the second housemaid had been slightly hysterical. Despite the form given by the young woman to her announcement, nothing had happened to Latham; he merely wanted to see Lavender in the kitchen. There we found him, a puzzled young man, standing at the window endeavoring to decipher a hurried pencil scrawl.

The cook—one Agatha—definitely had vanished, leaving behind her the fragment of paper which Latham now clutched, and which after a moment he handed to Lavender. My friend read it aloud for the benefit of the local chief.

"After years of servis this is what it coms too. Others are rewarded, I am forgotten. I am sory about Mr. Mottashed."

"AGATHA WEEKS."

Latham was watching my friend's face. "What do you make of it?" he asked quickly, when Lavender had finished. "She says she is 'sorry about Mr. Mottashed.' Do you suppose—There was that glass of liquor, you know——"

"Nothing in the glass," interrupted Jackson. "Doctor Hayes had it tested. But what about this Weeks woman? There was nothing against her. What makes her run off like this?"

"Guilty conscience, maybe," replied Latham with a nod.

"No," argued Lavender; "merely indignation, I should say. But she must be brought back. The appearance of flight is bad and will do her no good. She's probably no farther off than the station, Jackson, calmly waiting for a car into town."

"If she is," said Jackson briskly, "I'll have her back in no time."

"Don't frighten the poor old soul," suggested Lavender. "She hasn't done anything, I'm sure. She must have overheard your remarks to us, Latham, right after we reached here. You mentioned Mr. Mottashed's will, and I distinctly recall your saying that Mrs. Kennedy and the maids were left something; but you made no mention of Mrs. Weeks."



"What makes you think that?"

"The first three sentences of her note can refer to nothing else. She feels badly hurt, I have no doubt, and has left with what few possessions she cares about, determined not to spend another night under the ungrateful roof." As Lavender spoke he smiled, and Jackson hurried off on his errand.

Latham smiled also. "But that is ridiculous," he said, "for she was left a little legacy, too. I didn't mention it, I suppose, because I wasn't quoting the full text of the will; I was merely replying to your question."

"The information will take ten years off her back," said Lavender. "I think Jackson will find her, for I don't believe she's trying to hide. Funny she was not seen leaving the house."

It seemed to me that I had been out of things for a long time, and I offered a suggestion.

"You were going to look at the body, Lavender," I ventured.

He gave me a glance of amusement. "So I was, Gilly! And since you are so set on it, we'll go now."

Latham explained that the dead man had been removed from the study and by order of the coroner was now upstairs in the room he had occupied in life. As we started up the stairs the coroner came in.

The secretary made the necessary introductions, and the doctor accompanied us to Mottashed's room.

"Anything happen while I was away?" he asked, as we went up.

"Yes," answered Latham bitterly. "We've had a brilliant display of energy. Jackson has found a glove in the study and now agrees with me that Mr. Mottashed was murdered. He goes further and suspects me of the murder—or Miss Rutland; I'm not sure which. At any rate we are accomplices."

"Jackson is a fool!" remarked the coroner. "Mr. Mottashed was not murdered. He died of heart failure. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Lavender?"

"Well, it's what kills most men," answered Lavender noncommittally. "For one reason or another their hearts cease to beat. It always induces a condition called death."

The coroner permitted himself the luxury of a short laugh. A moment later we stood at the bedside.

There were some seconds of silence after the coroner had turned back the sheet; then Lavender bent over the figure of the dead man.

"You see?" inquired the doctor. "Not a trace of a wound! And, of course, no thought of poison or anything like that. The poor fellow's heart just stopped; that's all. One twinge, and then——"

"Would a twinge cause that expression?" asked Lavender, indicating the set look of pain and terror in the dead face.

"Oh, yes! It may have been a severe one, you know. He would wince and double over, and rigor mortis would retain the expression of torture."

"A severe fright might stop his heart and explain the whole mystery," I contributed.

Both men looked at me and nodded.

"It was my first thought," said Lavender. "But what frightened him, Gilly?"

He continued to examine the body.

"What's this?" he asked at length. "I thought you said there was no sign of a wound!"

The coroner swiftly leaned over and examined the spot indicated by my friend—a tiny white line on the left side, low down and concealed by the arm.

"It is nothing," said the doctor, rising greatly relieved. "I noticed it; but it is an old scar. He has had a trifling operation there at some time, hardly more than an opening of the skin; possibly a small blemish was removed. It is at least a year old—and probably older."

"It is curiously situated," commented Lavender. "The cut seems to have been very short and clean, and to have been made exactly between two of the lower ribs."

"It is an old scar," persisted the doctor. "You don't think it was made last night?"

"Certainly not!" replied my friend.

"Then why waste time on it?"

Lavender turned to the secretary. "You said that Mr. Mottashed had no serious ailments, Latham. I noted your use of the adjective. What minor ailments did he have?"



"Never heard of any," interrupted the coroner, with a stare.

"Nothing to speak about," answered Latham. "I had in mind an occasional touch of rheumatism. It didn't occur often, and was not severe; a touch in the back, I think, at long intervals."

"Look here," said Lavender suddenly, "if the police are through with the study at last, I'd like to go down and see the place myself."

"All right. It's probably empty now except for a guard."

The patrolman on duty inside the study door made no objection to our passing into the room, and for the first time Lavender stood on the scene of the crime—if a crime had been committed.

"Do you mind closing the door?" he asked. "Come in, officer," he added, addressing the policeman, "you are very welcome, but I don't want to be annoyed by curious servants. No, no, puss!" he said with a laugh; "you go out, too!"

He picked up the little animal that had tried to push past his legs—Mottashed's gray kitten—and stroked its pretty head until the small beast purred ecstatically; then he set it down outside the door. In another moment our party was locked in the study; we heard the snap of a small bolt with something of a shock, I think. The lock proper had not been fixed since Latham's operations with hammer and chisel.

## CHAPTER V.

### INNOCENT OF MALICE.

THE conditions now," said Lavender gravely, in what I called his lecturing tone, "are practically identical with those of last night, except that it is now earlier in the evening than it was when Mr. Mottashed locked himself in. I take it that the windows are still locked and that nothing here has been moved unnecessarily."

He walked across to the windows and examined the locks; then he endeavored to open them. They resisted his efforts. Afterward, he moved slowly up and down the room sounding the walls and studying every feature of the place. The "tap-tap-tap" of his sensitive fingers on the walls and on the door panels gave me an

indefinable thrill, and Latham was similarly affected. Only the Irish policeman was stolid.

Then for a time Lavender stood beside Mottashed's desk and carefully turned over the articles that covered its top. At length he looked at Latham, inquiry in his glance.

"Mr. Mottashed sat in that chair, of course," said the secretary, pointing to the one at the desk.

Lavender nodded. "Very good," he said. "Do you mind sitting there also, Latham? Thank you! Now, can you show me exactly the position in which Mr. Mottashed sat when you entered the room?"

"Well," Latham replied slowly, "it was a natural position, and yet it was a bit curious, too, perhaps. About like this!"

He turned slightly to the left in the big leather chair, so that his eyes were half turned from us as we stood facing him.

"His head," continued the secretary, "was turned to the left a trifle farther—about like this—and his chin was sunken down on his breast. His look was—well, twisted, you understand? He half hung, as it were, over the left arm of the chair, perhaps looking down at the floor. It may have been an attitude of thought."

The policeman entered the field with an idea. "He may have been turning to look at the window," he said. "Perhaps he heard a noise outside."

"A very intelligent suggestion," remarked Lavender. "And either he did not complete his turn, or he did complete it and was turning back when he was struck dead."

"No one entered through the window," said Latham positively. "It was locked, as it is now."

"Pardon me," said the policeman, "but we have only your word for that, Mr. Latham—your word and that of the woman. I'm not making an accusation; I'm just stating a fact."

"He's quite right," said Lavender promptly. "However, I think we may take Mr. Latham's word about the windows. Unless you believe Mr. Latham himself murdered his employer. Do you?" He put the question frankly, with



friendly interest that seemed to suggest that he and this policeman were working the case together.

"No, sir; I do not," candidly responded the other; "but there was a glove found in here this evening, sir. I found it. And 'twas a woman's glove!"

"So you found that, did you?" Lavender smiled. "From the ado your chief made about it, I thought it was a discovery of his own."

Latham was gnawing his lip the way villains do on the stage.

"And 'twas not here yesterday morning, sir," continued the policeman. "The maid will swear to that."

"It might have been dropped here this morning to cause suspicion to fall on some one," suggested Lavender.

"Yes; it might," agreed the policeman. "I hadn't thought of that. But who would do it? And why? I understand that Mr. Latham here claimed the glove, but of course we all know better than that, sir. No ill will, Mr. Latham!"

"What the devil are you driving at?" furiously demanded the secretary. "I suppose your confounded chief is bothering Miss Rutland again, right now."

"I'm afraid he is, sir," answered the man respectfully. "It can't be helped."

"Wait a minute, Latham," protested Lavender. "This is the most intelligent man I've found around here to-day. May I ask your name?"

"Garnier, sir," replied the policeman. He added with a smile: "Half Irish and half French!"

"A good mixture, eh Gilly? Look here, Garnier, have you ever heard of me before?"

"Many a time!"

"Will you believe me then when I tell you something? I know what I'm talking about. Latham had nothing to do with this affair. Neither had Miss Rutland. Personally, I do not believe a murder was committed. To-morrow the autopsy will clear the atmosphere like a blast of winter air; to-day we are excited and too close to the tragedy. There's no sense in trying to solve this puzzle in twenty-four hours. But I'll tell you this: whatever happened, these young people had nothing to do with it. They are as innocent as——"

He cast his eyes about him as if seeking inspiration for his figure of speech.

"As innocent," he finished, "as that kitten!" And he pointed to the little gray animal which had rubbed his ankle at that moment.

Then suddenly he stepped back and looked with wonder and dismay at the tiny furred beast. "Gilly!" he said sharply. "How did that kitten get in here?"

It brought us all up with a start, for with our own eyes we had seen him put the kitten outside the door, then lock the door. We stared at the small gray bundle of nerves as if, in a moment, it had become a monster, or had spoken to us in human accents.

Lavender's voice was hard when he spoke, and I sensed his alert interest in the striking problem of the kitten.

"There is an entrance to this room that we know nothing about," he said, at length. "Was there some one here, after all, last night?"

He stood looking down at the young cat playing at his feet, and we stood and looked at Lavender. He made up his mind.

"Gilly," he said, "get a saucer of cream in the kitchen. Mrs. Kennedy, who is listening outside the door, will give it to you. I'll keep the kitten here. When you have the cream, take your position outside the door and call this small gray mystery. I want to know how he gets into this room after he has been locked out, and perhaps I can find out by observing how he gets out of this room after he has been locked in."

I slipped out and hurried to the kitchen after Mrs. Kennedy, and soon returned with the saucer of cream; this I set down outside the study door.

"Kitty, kitty!" I called. "Here, puss! Kitty, kitty, kitty!"

Lavender, inside, had set the kitten down and now was watching its movements. At first it paid no attention to my calls other than an idle lifting of the head; but, as I continued to plead, my seductive tones aroused its curiosity. It started toward the door. Lavender told me later that the moment was one of the most breathless in his career.

The kitten advanced almost to the



locked door, and the watchers expected to see it retreat upon discovering the barrier and make for some new and unsuspected opening. Instead the little beast turned off almost at the threshold and disappeared—behind the bookcase.

Thus it was that I, on my side of the door, first knew the secret. The tiny black nose and gray head emerged almost at my feet from a small barred opening onto what was obviously a ventilator, low down against the baseboard of the corridor wall. So small and unimportant it was that no one in the hall had paid it any attention, while inside the study its opening was concealed.

"Lavender," I called through the door. "The ventilator!"

"Of course!" responded his hearty voice from the other side, and in a moment he had unlocked the door and I had rejoined the party.

The chief of police came hurrying toward us at the moment, attracted by the excitement, and he was quickly followed by the servants and the coroner. Jackson was in good spirits.

"I got this Weeks woman at the station, just as you said," he told Lavender, grinning. "Waiting for a train to Chicago, as quiet as you please. And what a row she wanted to make when she understood that she couldn't go!"

"Where is she?" asked Lavender abruptly.

"She's back in the kitchen, singing 'Tipperary,'" replied Jackson. "I threatened to lock her up at first for not telling what she knew about her master's death, but I guess you were right about that. She doesn't know a thing. She's sore because of Mottashed's will, or was until Miss Rutland told her it was a mistake. Now she's happy as a squirrel."

"Well, Mr. Jackson," said Lavender, "in your absence we've made a start toward a solution. Your glove clew has just been shot to pieces by this gray kitten."

He smiled and pointed to the little Maltese which was now licking up the cream in the saucer and purring loudly. Jackson did not understand.

"Never mind," said Lavender. "Here, give me a shoulder, Gilly!"

With Garnier's shoulder beside mine we managed to roll out the heavy bookcase, and exposed low down behind it the corresponding half of the metal grille that framed the opening to the ventilator.

"You see," explained Lavender, "the kitten squeezed through these narrow bars from the hall. Mr. Latham obviously lost the glove last night, as he came into the house; and the kitten seized it for a plaything. Some time or other during the night the glove was dragged through this small aperture and left in the study behind the bookcase. The light in the study would attract the kitten, which probably played around in there a great deal during the morning hours. Mr. Mottashed was dead, but of course the kitten knew nothing of that."

He explained to Jackson the experiment we had just performed, and described the actions of the kitten. Jackson was highly impressed.

"All right, Mr. Lavender," he said, "and I'm glad enough it wasn't Mr. Latham nor yet Miss Rutland. But—this only explains the glove! If there was a murder committed in there last night, no man ever got through that little hole in the wall to commit it. He couldn't get his head through even if there were no bars."

"You are quite right," answered Lavender. "And the bars have not been removed for any purpose. So that no man was in the study, last night, Jackson—no man but Laurence Mottashed!"

The police chief seemed to regard this as a tribute to himself. "Now we are getting on," he said with a smile. "We are back where we all started—all but Mr. Latham. Perhaps we are all agreed at last that Mr. Mottashed died of heart failure, as I said from the beginning."

"As I said," corrected the coroner.

"Well, as we both said," compromised Jackson.

"At least," said Lavender, "we are on good terms again, all of us. Perhaps you would care to hear my explanation of what happened in here last night. Only an autopsy will determine the truth or falsity of my theory, but if you are interested——"

"Was he murdered?" demanded La-



tham. "That's all I want to know, Jimmie!"

"Well," responded Lavender slowly, "in a sense, I suppose he was; a sort of long-distance sense! But we can't do anything to the murderer, for he is quite innocent of malice."

And stooping down he picked up the Maltese kitten and laid it against his shoulder.

## CHAPTER VI.

### IRONIC DESTINY.

LAVENDER made a statement of the case as he saw it, about as follows: "It goes back to the little scar, Doctor Hayes. It puzzled me by its curious position, and for a time that was all. Then I recalled Latham's remark about Mr. Mottashed's health, and upon inquiry learned that his only ailment was an occasional touch of rheumatism—twinges of rheumatism in the back! The connection was remote, but it was there. Then came the incident of this kitten and the locked room, and suddenly my imagination supplied what the evidence could not. It was the kitten that was there with him last night. It is odd that some one did not hear him talking to it."

The second housemaid gasped suddenly, and Lavender turned toward her with a smile.

"So somebody did hear him?"

"I didn't think a thing about it," replied the maid, with deep embarrassment, "not thinking that a few words to a kitten could be important; I clean forgot about it, sir. It was just after I left the room, after bringing him his glass, that I heard him talking to the kitten—quite plain it was, too. He was putting the kitten out, sir, and kind of scolding it friendly like for coming in."

"Of course," said Lavender. "He put it out and the thing went back later, calmly walking through the grille there and across the little bar laid over the shaft. Naturally, having put it out and locked the door, Mr. Mottashed was surprised to see it in the room—as surprised as we were a few minutes ago. As it happens, by a curious circumstance, we know practically the moment that the kitten entered the room."

"Mr. Latham came in about one

o'clock and saw a light burning in the study—just a thin streak shining out from under the door. He called to his employer, thinking he might be wanted. And Mr. Latham heard Mr. Mottashed reply, which is very important—at any rate, he thought he did. Just a faint sound—like a grunt. Mr. Latham interpreted it to mean, 'All right, Latham, I hear you! Don't bother about me! Go on up to bed!' But the fact is that at that moment Mr. Mottashed died."

Jackson got slowly to his feet. "Mr. Lavender," he demanded, "can you prove that?"

"Doctor Hayes can," replied Lavender instantly. "There must be an autopsy, of course. Now understand me, gentlemen! I don't claim to be infallible, and I would be a fool not to admit that I may be wrong; but I'll wager I'm not! It all checks too closely; the scar, the rheumatism, and the kitten! Mrs. Kennedy, how long ago was it that Mr. Mottashed had a small operation performed on his side?"

The woman looked bewildered.

"A needle?" suggested Lavender.

"Well, I declare!" said Mrs. Kennedy, enlightened. "How could you guess that? I'd forgotten it completely. So you've heard about that, have you, Mr. Lavender! Why, it was a mere trifle and has nothing to do with the case; but it's true that a couple of years ago, in leaning over the plush arm of a big chair in which he was sitting, Mr. Mottashed ran a needle into his side, low down near the waist. I suppose it had been in the arm of the chair, you know. Well, he pulled it out, and there was no point on it; so of course he didn't know whether there had been any point or whether the point had stayed in his side. To be sure, he had a little probe made, but nothing was found, and he decided there had been no point on the needle. I didn't know there was any scar, sir, and surely it can't be very large."

Lavender turned to the others. "You see?" he asked. "Everything fits now. Once get started correctly and the pieces fit together like the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. This, then, is what happened: The kitten came back after Mr. Mot-



tashed put it out—entering through the ventilator a moment before Mr. Latham came in by the front door. Mr. Mottashed was surprised to see it in the room, for of course the ventilator didn't occur to him any more than it did to us. He may have spoken to the kitten; probably he did. Then he leaned down over the left arm of his chair to stroke it, for by that time it was at his side, near the foot of the chair.

"And at that psychological moment the wandering bit of steel in his body reached his heart. The bending over was all that was needed. One sharp spasm of pain—and there was the dead man in the chair, in a locked room, without a wound upon his body.

"Mr. Latham had just come in, and as he called he heard Mr. Mottashed's first and probably last groan. Gentlemen, unless I am ludicrously wrong, the autopsy will disclose about an eighth of an inch of needle in the heart of the deceased."

Which was exactly what the autopsy did disclose, except that the atom of steel was somewhat smaller; so Lavender's brilliant hazard was vindicated and justified. But it was a hazard based on more than mere imagination as I tried to point out to my friend. He only smiled.

"I was correct," he said, "therefore what I did was brilliant. If I had been wrong, I would have been called a fool;

my deduction would have been just the reverse of brilliant. So much depends on success or failure, you see!"

"Poor old Mottashed!" he resumed after a moment. "Did you read his notes, Gilly? At any rate, you heard what Jackson said about them. He was working on a 'sealed room' story! Imagine it! The coincidence is shocking—almost immoral. Ironical destiny!"

As we prepared to depart, once more the kitten of fate put in an appearance, hovering near Lavender's feet.

Latham looked at it with tight lips. "It's not its fault," he said, indicating the kitten, "but I shall never be able to look at it again without a shudder of remembrance. Perhaps it would be well to put it out of the way, eh?"

"Don't be silly," answered Lavender. "If you don't want the little beast around I'll take it. I'm not superstitious, and I should like a souvenir of the 'sealed room,' anyway."

"Please do!" begged Miss Rutland, who stood near.

So we took the kitten away in a basket and found it a home with Lavender's landlady, who named it "Cross" because it was a Maltese—not because of its disposition. It is only fair to the kitten to say that no bad luck as yet has visited the house which shelters it. And as Latham's and Miss Rutland's good luck began with the departure of the kitten, everybody is happy.



## SPRING NOT FAR BEHIND

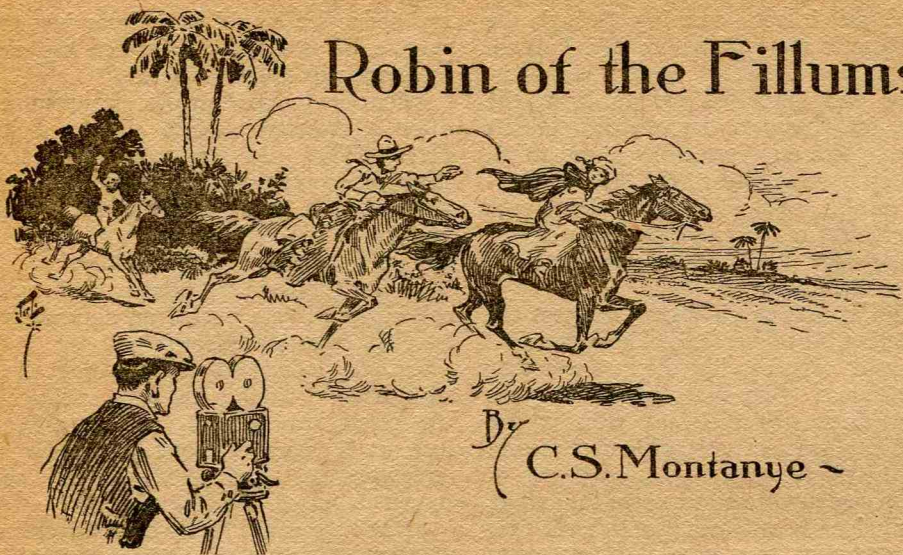
By Thomas J. Murray

THE wind is lyric in the sagging wire,  
That sways and stretches past my darkened pane  
Down from the hills, careening, creeping higher,  
And flinging far the wild autumnal rain,

I seem to gather from the dread intoning,  
Fierce notes of victory won on lonely seas,  
Where now some hapless bark with timbers groaning,  
Rides on, a derelict off hostile leas.

It moans a menace through the midnight, wearing,  
But I drift off to dreams where all is still;  
Far in a pleasant province am I faring,  
With crocus starring all an April hill.





# Robin of the Fillums-

By C.S. Montanye ~

ED, the motion-picture producer, and Gracie, his wife, were not particularly enthusiastic over the arrival of Carrie, Gracie's sister, and Joe, Carrie's husband. That the troublesome youngster Robin, accompanied his parents did not make the visit any more attractive to the host and hostess.

To get Robin out of the way for some of the time, Ed took him to the studio, where his antics attracted such attention that they were filmed, and the pictures proved a huge success.

Jerry Duke, head of the Sunbeam Company, tried to get Robin away to work for him, and as he offered Joe more money than Ed was paying, it looked as if he would get the boy.

Ed, however, had a bright idea, and taking Robin down to his office he called in Nick White, the director, and unfolded the scheme. Then they started a rehearsal of the little stunt Ed had planned.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LAST WORD.

THE following morning, when me and the wife was sitting down to breakfast, we notes the absence of two parties, namely Joe and Carrie.

"They are in their room," Gracie says, "whispering together like a pair of gunmen. I heard them when I came down the hall."

I sets down, unfolds a copy of the morning newspaper, and looks out of the window at the Palisades, which is still there.

"They must have got home from see-

ing Jerry Duke terribly late," I says. "I didn't get into the hay myself until twelve o'clock, and Carrie and Joe and Robin wasn't home then."

Grace begins to attack her grapefruit, and after she gives me a sample of it in the eye—she lets up and lays down her spoon.

"Keeping Robin out as late as if he drove an owl taxi didn't make him sleep any better," friend wife says. "He must have had pains in his stomach, because he cried all night."

I grins, listening for Joe's footsteps. "The bird what said these walls is soundproof," I murmurs, "is a liar by the clock, and if he wants any proof of this soundproof stuff, let him come up and sleep here a night when Robin has the jimjams."

At this moment in walks Carrie and Joe, side by each, and looking as pleasant as a rainy March afternoon.

"Good morning," they says together, flopping into their chairs at the table.

I snickers out loud. "Good morning," I says to Joe. "If Robin is working for the Sunbeam Company you had better be on your way with him to the studio. I hear Jerry Duke likes lateness about the same as a chorus girl likes water!"

No sooner I says Jerry's name, Carrie's eyes begin to flash.

"Don't say nothing to me about that Jerry Duke!" she yells. "Before I would



let that roughneck have charge of my son, I would sooner drown him in the ocean!"

Gracie slips me a look, and I gives her a wink in return.

"Yeah," snarls Joe; "the big tramp would have got beat up by me hadn't he been so old. I could hardly keep my hands off him!"

I made belief I was as surprised as if the doctor had said "Twins," and looks at them both with a stare. "Why? What was the matter?" I asks. "I thought you and Jerry would get along as well as crackers and cheese—him being the crackers and you the cheese!"

Joe is so sore he forgets his breakfast, and begins to march up and down the room, talking as he does so.

"Ed," he says, "because you are my brother-in-law, and because I always did like you, I'm going to tell you exactly the kind of a dirty deal we got off this bird Duke. We gets down to his house on time, and while we was talking to him, Robin accidentally breaks one of these here vase things in the parlor. This gets Duke sore—as though it was our child's fault—and he says he will deduct the cost of the vase out of Robin's first week's salary. Then he gives me a contract to read over, and while Carrie and me is doing it, Robin is playing around with a beanshooter what some one given him, and accidentally he hits Duke on the back of the head with a stone."

Carrie draws a breath. "Yes," she says; "and will you believe it, Ed, when I tell you the big brute wanted to beat him up—a little child like that? Joe quiets him down by telling him it is tricks like that you pay him real money for."

"Yeah," Joe chimes in; "what do you know about that, Ed? Then because Robin accidentally breaks a window before I can grab the beanshooter away from him, and because he gets hold of some matches which had no business to be left laying around, this Duke gets up in the air and starts calling our child names such as brat and so forth. Well, just to show how much I thought of him and his punk company, I grabs up the contract, tears it in a hundred

pieces or more, and throws them all in his face!"

Gracie and me busts out laughing, and Joe, getting back both his second wind and his appetite, sets down and falls to.

"That is certainly tough," I says, "and I don't blame neither of you for doing what you done."

In comes Roger and tells me the car is waiting downstairs.

"Ed," says Joe, halfway through his first omelet, "if anybody ever tries to make me place Robin with any company outside of yourn, I will give them a good bust in the eye! And Ed," he continues, "while we're on the subject, I would be much obliged if you would have your lawyer draw up a contract for Robin and me and you."

Roger throws me into my fur coat and hands me a derby hat.

"I will do that very thing!" I says, making for the door.

Just as I reached it, Carrie, being a woman, has to have the last word.

"And Ed," she chirps, in a voice as soft as cream, "do tell the people at the studio to be careful not to give Robin candy. He was sick all night from candy some one gave him yesterday."

I must hand myself a bouquet for the way I kept a straight face, as I thought of how I kept feeding Robin those candies all through the rehearsal of the little stunt that made Duke so sore. But Robin was willing so long as he got plenty of candy and had a promise of more. But I'm sorry it made the poor kid so sick.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WASTING HIS TIME.

THERE is no getting away from it," says Nick White, "the Sunbeams has sure got one grand drawing card in this here little Goldilocks kid. Un'erstan', Ed, I ain't saying she can touch Robin in any way, but all the same the fans eats her stuff up and hollers for more. And why—simply because she is a gal! Now Robin is right at the top of his form, but still it is a novelty to get a flash of a little gal cutting up and doing stunts. Any one would expect that in a boy, but when a gal pulls it, it goes over twice as big!"



I lights a fresh cigar and nods. "You're right," I answers; "last night I and Gracie went over to the Cosmopolitan Palace for nothing at all except to get a slant at this Goldilocks kid, and what you has said is true and more. She's there heavy, but anybody who has only got one half of an eye can see Jerry Duke, being disappointed in not being able to steal Robin, has went and dug up this here little skirt to enable him to gather in some of the golden freckles what we're getting. And, by the way, couldn't I throw a lawsuit into him for imitating Robin's stuff? I'm going to ask my lawyer the next time I get downtown."

Nick blows some smoke rings and frowns. "If I was you," he says, after a while, "I would try and get some dope on who this Goldilocks kid really is; how much she gets by the week—if she does get it; how long her contract is for—if she has got one; and who the parents are."

I have to laugh at this. "What do you think I am—a detective? Or have all I got to do is just to pick up the phone and ask Duke them questions? And there is a swell chance I'd get an answer, hey?"

Nick moves his shoulders, spills some ashes on the floor, and walks over to the door. "Suit yourself, Ed," he says, "but if I was in your shoes I'd get busy at once, if not sooner."

"If you was in my shoes," I answers, "you'd be swearing with the pain, on account of them being too tight on the toes! Much obliged for the advice. But I won't get worried—yet! This Goldilocks can't grab all the coin in sight, and wait until the public gets a flash of Robin's 'Day of Rest' howl. They'll have something to think about."

"It's a great picture," he admits, "but still don't forget we ain't wise to what Duke is making, too."

With this he blows out, and no sooner is he gone than the door is jerked open, and in walks Joe.

"Ed," he bawls, comin' directly to my desk, "it has began to rain so Carrie sent me down with Robin's rubbers."

"In the future," I tells him, "don't come marching in here until Miss Holli-

day gets a hold of your name, and finds out if I'm busy or not. You might not know it, but there are rules to this office, just like there is to any company what makes real dough!"

He helps himself to a chair and yawns. "Yeh? Well, I don't see no signs saying to knock before entering in, and for all the sign of your secretary outside, she might be in Japan. Anyway, why should I go and spend a couple of beans getting cards printed up just to hand you? You know me as it is."

I laughs. "To my sorrow, yes!"

He yawns again and licks his lips. "Well," he goes on, "when I gets cards for you, you'll know it!"

"Listen," I says coldly, "if you have come here to hand me an argument, see Miss Holliday. She takes care of that end of the business. Now you can just leave Robin's rubbers here and beat it."

He starts looking all around my desk for any cigars that have been left in the open, but don't find none.

"Ed," he says after a minute, "I left the package with Robin's rubbers in the subway, and consequently I haven't got them. But if you will stake the child to a pair, you can take the fifty cents outta his salary at the end of the week. That will then leave four hundred and ninety-nine dollars and fifty cents even."

I puts my hand on a glass paper weight. "If you don't lay off that stuff," I snarls, "there will be something coming to you, and not at the end of the week, but right *now*!"

He gets up out of his chair and picks up his hat. "If I had a temper like yours," he says, "I would do my best to change it."

I see he's going, so I lets go of the paper weight. "Yes; you would!" I sneers. "You don't ever change nothing, not even your collar! Why, the one you have on now looks as though it came direct from Pittsburgh."

He beats it to the door and grabs a hold of the knob. "That's all on account of *you*," he whines. "Behind my back you went and told your laundry not to accept my stuff no more. What can I do?"

As he was standing there, I suddenly



get an idea in my nut that maybe I can use him for something else than a person to bicker with.

"Come back here, Joe," I says, trying to make my voice pleasant.

Being a grafter, and devoting all his time to seeing how much he can get away with off of me, has left him no time to know what's going on in the world outside. Thus I know he is unaware of Goldie Goldilocks threatening the popularity of Robin. I tells him all about it, and instead of being worried, he shows his brain work by laughing like it was the funniest joke he ever heard.

"Ed," he yells, "you're wasting your time running a movie-picture studio. There're more managers on Broadway than there is fish in the sea, only looking for comedians like you to make rich and famous!"

He opens the door, just as I gets up to my feet.

"Get away from out of here before I hit you with the desk! You're so thick that what I have just told you must be like a fairy tale to a child!"

The door closes, and I hear him still laughing. Even when I looks out of my office window, and get a slant at him walking through the rain, his shoulders is still shaking.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SOME GRAND NEWS.

A COUPLE of mornings later, whilst waiting for the garage to send my limousine around to the flat, Gracie comes into breakfast, where I'm sitting at the table letting the servant girl remove the ruins of what was once bacon and eggs.

"Ed, dear," she says, after slipping me the usual good-morning kiss, "I have some grand news for you about Mrs. Finnegan."

She slides into a chair, while I gives her the north and south.

"And who is Mrs. Finnegan?" I asks. "I know she ain't no Eyetalian, but I don't think I ever heard you speak of her before."

Gracie shoves a couple of slices of bread into a toast machine and turns on the juice.

"I only got acquainted with her the day before yesterday. The butcher gave me her meat by mistake, and mine to her. Being a lady, she brought it up to the door. She says she was always crazy to know us, on account of her sister being anxious to go into the movies, and she——"

I grabs up the telephone to find out if my car has left yet, or what, and cuts her short with a laugh.

"That leaves her out!" I snaps. "Please, Gracie, don't get friendly with nobody what has a gang of relatives all ready to make Douglas Fairbanks and Marguerite Clarke has-beens! We're now enjoying enough trouble with our own relations, without taking on no more."

The bird in the garage tells me the car will be right around, and I hangs up the receiver and comes back to the table.

"What I was going to say," friend wife goes on, shooting a lot of this dignity into her voice, "was that Mrs. Finnegan is a good friend of the aunt of Goldie Goldilocks! Now will you sit down and give me a chance to speak?"

I follows out her orders and she goes on:

"Mrs. Finnegan says this Goldie child's right name is Helen Ryan, and that they live in a little one-horse Jersey town called Nutvale. The child's father is a man that never worked and a liquor hound. It seems the mother was a Robin fan, and seeing Robin on the screen so much, gave her the idea why shouldn't her own child, even though a girl, grab a little change for herself, too? So, Mrs. Finnegan says, the mother took her to Jerry Duke and he gave her a job. Mrs. Finnegan says that if you want, the next time she sees the aunt, she will find out for you how long Goldilocks is signed up for, and how much she is dragging down per week. Now, how about it, Ed?"

Roger comes in with my hat, coat, and stick. Whilst I let him button me into the coat I looks across at Gracie.

"Yeah," I says; "tell her to do that very thing, and if her sister, or her mother, or whoever it is wants a job before the camera, will come down to the studio, I will let them take part in a mob



scene in Robin's picture, which Nick is at the present time shooting."

I divides a kiss with her and goes out trailed by Roger, who is sore on me for wearing a green-and-red tie instead of the blue one he put out for me. Whilst waiting for the car, I kids him along, telling him it will never happen again, and then he beats it all the way back to the flat to brush off a speck of dust on my sleeve. This done, he ducks for good, and at the same moment my limousine draws up before the door.

"Boss," the chauffeur hollers, "I'm late on account of having an argument with a cop, and then having to take a poor old sick woman home."

"Listen," I says, "you've too much imagination for a chauffeur. The next time there is a vacancy on the scenario writers' staff, I'll consider you for the job. Now get me down to the studio and don't lose no time doing it."

I gets into the car and right away gets a sniff of a funny perfume, and sees a blond-haired hairpin laying on the floor mat. Then I knows who the poor old sick woman is.

Robin is already on the job, and when I gets into the studio where Nick is shooting the last interior scenes, I sees my little nephew setting in a bucket of water with clothes on next to nothing, chewing on a cake of soap, whilst Norma Delightful is looking around the set for something or another.

"Don't look at the camera, Robin!" Nick is bawling, as Steve Clancy is turning the crank, and getting all the stuff on the fillum. "Keep watching Norma, and keep chewing on the soap like as if it was candy! Shiver a little like you was cold! That's the boy, Robin! That's the——"

Just at this moment Child Edward gets a flash at me, and forgetting all about the movies for the time being, he jumps out of the pail of water and begins running at me.

"Runcle Ed!" he hollers, "I don't wanna go 'round all naked no more! I'se cold! Runcle Ed, kin I have my clothes now?"

Nick begins swearing and tearing out his hair, while Norma almost weeps.

"Oh, Robin," she says, "what a bad,

bad boy to spoil that pretty scene in which I registered so perfectly!"

Forgetting he is minus a suit and other things, my child star throws hisself down on the floor and begins making a noise what can't be told from a dozen engines all going at once.

Miss Murphy comes to the rescue with a little trick bath robe, while Nick looks unhappy, and says out loud if Robin was his child, he would beat him good with a cat with nine tails.

"Make him leave me alone!" Robin wails. "I didn't do nothing, Runcle Ed, —honest I didn't do a thing!"

He gets up onto his feet, water running freely from his eyes and off his legs, and comes around to me.

"Listen," I tells him, "if you don't want Runcle Ed to give you a good fanning, stop making belief you're Niagara Falls, and git back into that bucket of water, and do what Nick tells you to pretty quick!"

He cries harder than ever at hearing this, and rushes away from me to Norma, who, on account of fearing to get her new gown wet, climbs up on a chair.

"Robin," she screams, "if you put any wet on this dress I will never give you any more kisses!"

Having more sense in his little finger than Joe has in his whole head, Robin stops weeping as quick as if some one had said the word "candy," and begins laughing.

The scene is retook again, after which my little nephew is led away to his dressing room, and Ted Gavin grabs hold of me by the elbows.

"Boss," he says in my ear, "give me a word in private alone with you."

"Come on up to my office, Stupid, and have as many as you want, provided they ain't over a dozen," I answers, breaking away.

He follows me upstairs, and when he gets into the office, throws hisself into a chair and whistles songs, while I take off my collar and tie.

"Well," I snarls, after he has almost blowed his teeth out, "quit the concert and tell me what is bothering you, outside of the income tax."

"Boss," he says seriously, "last night going home from work I runs into Jerry



Duke, and Jerry takes me in and treats me to a little brew, telling me there is a nice job at his studio for me to write the stories and shot-to-shot stuff for this here little Goldie Goldilocks, at one thousand bucks more per year than you give me!"

After he gets through I takes a drag on my cigar and looks at the ceiling like I never seen it before.

"And?" I says, after a while.

He gets up and tries to break the indoor walking record around the room.

"The extra dough, of course, suits me all right," he chirps, "but I hates to leave here on account of getting to be so fond of Miss Holliday. My contract expires next month, but if you will match the Sunbeam's offer, I am yours for another one year or five years."

I gives the matter thought. "Listen," I says, "whilst you are a pretty good scenario writer, Ted, I can't see my way clear just now to boost up your wages. However," I goes on to lie, "I shall be sorry to see you go, and Miss Holliday will be that same, also, as no less'n three days ago she was telling me what a good kid she thought you was, and how much she would miss you did you ever leave here."

Gavin gets as red as a Sunday handkerchief on Ellis Island, and busts into a high laugh. "Did she say that?" he cries. "If so, when I goes over to the Sunbeams the first thing I shall ask Jerry Duke is if he needs a new secretary!"

I swallows nothing a couple of times, seeing my plan for keeping him go to ruin, and sighs. "Don't do nothing rash, Ted. You've been with me for some time, and I hates to see the old bunch go. I will think over this here raise, and let you know about the same later on."

He creeps to the door. "Anyway," he pauses to say in a low voice, "a bird what expects to take a tumble out of this matrimony thing needs all the kale he can get and more, too."

He goes, and in about ten minutes Miss Holliday blows in with some letters the postman had just gave her.

"Well," I says to kid her along, "Teddy Gavin was in just now, telling

me you and him is about to commit marriage."

She stops still and looks as surprised as if I had asked her out to dinner.

"What!" she screams. "Me marry that shrimp! If he was the last man on this earth I would walk by him without noticing him! The little sawed-off runt what he is; I should like to hear him make a crack like that around me!"

I opens the first letter, sees it is a bill, and drops it in the trash basket without reading it.

"You and him ought to get hitched," I says. "You has his number, and you don't like him. That saves you doing it later on!"

## CHAPTER X.

WHERE GAY DEVILS CONGREGATE.

THE same night after dinner is over, and Joe and Carrie sticks Robin in the hay before going out for a walk, which don't cost my brother-in-law a nickel, I and Gracie slips into the living room and after I promises to be careful with my cigar ashes, I'm allowed to sit down in a chair which my money bought.

"Ed," friend wife begins, "me and Mrs. Finnegan had another conversation today in regards to Goldie Goldilocks. She found out from the aunt that Jerry Duke has given the child's mother no contract, and pays her merely one hundred dollars per week. She understands there is some sort of verbal agreement that the little girl must work six months, so he can see what kind of business her fillums do before signing her up for any length of time. This is strictly confidential, and Mrs. Finnegan says that if you ever let on that she told you, the aunt would never speak to her no more!"

Gracie grabs a breath and goes on: "Not only this," she says, "but the aunt told Mrs. Finnegan that Duke is ready to spend money on the little girl, and make her such a drawing card that Robin won't be anywhere in it with her! She told Mrs. Finnegan this Jerry Duke snake is also going to try to get Nick White and Ted Gavin and Steve Clancy away from you by offering each and every one a thousand dollars more a year than you are paying them."

"Is that so?" I yells. "Well, I guess



when it comes to raising the ante I'm just as good as Jerry Duke, or any one else! What is more, I will sell every Liberty Bond I've got, and every share of stock I own, before I let *him* put anything over on *me*."

Friend wife puts her finger across her lips. "Don't holler so, Ed!" she says. "I'm not deaf, and you will wake Robin up and you know what that means!"

"I have a good mind to go around and give Jerry Duke a slam on the chin," I tells her.

Gracie begins to smile all over her face. "Instead of doing that," she says, "why don't you go one better? I can find out the address of the Ryans from Mrs. Finnegan, and you could take the child away from him, and sign her up with your own company for about one hundred and twenty-five per week. She and Robin would make a great pair in the films acting opposite to each other. Isn't that a great idea, Ed?"

I lets out a shout and grabs her up in my arms. "Gracie," I yells, "if you was a man no doubt your name would be J. P. Morgan! You're sure there with ideas! This one is a peach! Watch me get after it!"

A couple of days later, me and Nick White could have been observed setting in the smoker of a train what was rushing madly, at a speed of about three miles an hour, toward Nutvale, New Jersey.

"Since this here Goldie Goldilocks and her mother has begun to enjoy the salary what Jerry Duke has been paying them," I explains to Nick, "they have thrown Nutvale flat on its back and have gone to that dear New York to live. However, if the dope I've got is right, the father of the child, by name George Ryan, is still adding one point to the total population of the burg we're bound for. I hope we can find him without no trouble."

My director nods his head and looks out of the window, at scenery which consists of nothing more nor less than flat marshes.

"I hope so, too!" He sighs. "Believe me, Ed, these rural excursions is enough to give a bird the blues."

I bites off the end of a fresh cigar and

looks at our fellow traveling companions, which, for the most part, is a bunch of foreigners.

"Anyhow," I says, trying to be cheerful, "even if we don't find this here Ryan, all we is out is one dollar twenty, same being the price of the railroad tickets."

In about thirty minutes more, or two hours altogether, the conductor bawls: "Nutvale!" and I and Nick piles out onto a station what looks like it was built the day after Columbus came over. There's no one in sight, and for company we has a milk can and a mail sack. Around us we sees a few shacks, and a store what is a cross between a restaurant and a blacksmith shop. Also, there is some muddy roads on top of which some mournful-looking chickens is picking amongst the dirt.

"Good night!" moans Nick. "If they calls this a town, the Emperor of Japan is my brother. Ed, keep this dump in mind, so if we ever needs a location what means misery and solitude, we can come here and shoot it."

I looks all around, but nothing stirs. "I wonder," I says, "if we couldn't get a hack what will keep us from getting our knees dirty on that there mud!"

My director laughs sarcastically. "A hack!" he sneers. "From the looks of this burg a horse would starve to death, or go out of his mind from being lonesome!"

We goes across the station, and opens the door of a room what is about two inches wide, and three inches long. In this place there are three things—a stove, a telegraph instrument, and beside it a bird what looked as old as Noah. He had whiskers growing all over his face, and as we goes in we gets a flash at a book he is looking at and sees it is the most recent edition of the *Photo News*.

When the old bird sees us, he drops the magazine like he was suddenly shot, begins to take his whiskers out of his various vest pockets, and totters to his feet.

"Listen," I says to him, at the same time slipping him a cigar to show him we're friends, and not anybody what lives in the village, "we're seeking one George Ryan. Where can he be found at, and is



there a cab or something what can take us to him?"

The old bird looks at us both as if we had asked him for his right eye, and begins to laugh. "Gentlemen," he says, in a voice what can't be told from the high notes on a violin, "Bill Temple did run a hack here, but that was many years ago."

Nick nods his head. "I knew it," he chuckles. "I'll bet his horse ran away on him, hey; so it wouldn't have to live here?"

"Well," I goes on, "leaving that aside, and seeing we will have to buck the mud, just shoot a little information as to where we can interview this Ryan and we will be much obliged."

The old bird points a shaking finger opposite to the direction we are looking. "Just follow that road," he says in a squeaky voice, "and after a while you will come to a saloon known as the 'Halfway Inn.' Yqu will find George there."

Nick scratches his head. "The Halfway Inn," he mutters to himself. "I'll bet it is all the way out."

Seeing there was nothing to it but to hoof it, we thanks the old bird and leaves him looking at the gift cigar. The last thing I sees through the window of the station, as we turns up the road, is Noah hiding the cigar away in one of these here trick safes.

"Ed," says Nick, after we trudge on for about a half an hour, "do you suppose that bird was kidding us?"

I was just about ready to admit the fact, when we come in sight of a building what looks like it is all crippled up with rheumatism.

There's a sign hanging by one leg over a porch, which is minus pretty near all its floor, and some windows with holes almost as big as the Hippodrome.

While we stands and gives the place the double-o, we hears the clink of glasses and some voices.

"Ah, hah!" cries Nick. "So this is where the gay devils of Nutvale congregate!"

I grins. "Let us now go in and interview one of them."

We trips across the porch, throws open a door, brushing aside some friendly cob-

webs, and steps into a room in which there is a soft bar, a hard bartender, and one man toying with some lemon and seltzer.

When both sees us they looks surprised, and begins to tremble as if we were a couple of dicks on their trail.

"Is your name George Ryan?" I asks of the bird before the bar.

He sets down his glass and backs away. "Yes," he whines; "but I'm innocent and can prove it!"

"Lay off that stuff!" Nick snarls. "No matter what you have did, we forgive you on account of the dump you live in!"

"Listen," I says, dividing a couple more cigars between the bartender and the bird we've come to see. "We understand you're the father of Helen Ryan, known on the movie-picture screen as little Goldie Goldilocks."

He admits the fact, and we all retires to a table in one corner of the room.

## CHAPTER XI.

### AFTER THINKING IT OVER.

HERE I tells Ryan what we came for, and drags the contract which my lawyer gave me, out of my pocket.

"Now," I explains, "if you will sign this here contract, giving the Enterprise Comedy Fillum Co., of which I am the president, the services of your daughter for one year from date, for the sum of two hundred dollars per each week, I will give you now as a bonus a brand-new ten-dollar bill!"

"Make it twelve!" he hollers.

"Sure," butts in the bartender; "it's worth twelve if it's worth a nickel."

Nick begins to cough, and has to go to the window and look through some of the holes in the glass, before he can recover hisself.

"All right," I says; "I'm on."

I gave him the printed contract, and a loan of my fountain pen, and he signs it, the bartender and Nick being the witnesses. Then I slips him twelve dollars, and tucks the contract away in my pocket, while Nick sighs like he was glad the job is over.

"Bob," says Ryan to the bartender, "how much do I owe you?"



The root-beer dispenser yanks a book out of his back pocket like a flash of lightning. "Twelve dollars even!" he hollers.

We gets back to town as the shades of night is falling, and I stops at the studio to lock the contract up in the safe, and also to give Jerry Duke a ring on the telephone, and let him know his discovery is now my own property.

"And," I winds up, after giving him all the dope I has, "being that Helen Ryan, alias Goldie Goldilocks, is now working for me, just give her the address of my studio, and tell her to report for work Monday morning at nine sharp."

He lets out some language which must have shocked central, but I cut it short by hanging up on him. Then I goes home and tells friend wife the good news, also Joe and Carrie, and gives Roger the job of his life by removing more mud from my person than there is money in the mint.

Bright and early the next morning I gets down to the studio with Robin, turns him over to Nick, who is just recovering from his trip, and gets a hold of Gavin, going with him into my office.

"Now," I says to him, when I'm back to my desk once more, "keep this under your hat. Between I and you, I'm going to give you that thousand a year more you want, and to celebrate it, I am now going to allow you to write an original five-reel comedy fillum featuring both Robin and Goldie Goldilocks!"

This almost knocks Gavin out of his chair, but he recovers hisself gamely, and looks at me like I had just told him Miss Holliday was going to marry him.

"Boss," he hollers, "can it be little Goldie is now ours?"

"Yes," I snaps; "but you don't have to tell everybody down in the street about it! Now show me that you're a real scenario writer and not a false alarm, by turning out something both original and clever!"

"I'll do just that!" he chirps. "I will have a synopsis ready for you that will be a scream."

He beats it away, as Miss Holliday comes in with the information two persons are outside wishing to talk with me. Their names, she discloses, is Jeremiah

Duke of the Sunbeam Co., and Mrs. George Ryan.

"Send 'em in," I directs, "but search 'em first for concealed weapons."

In no time at all in comes the pair of them, Jerry Duke as soft as oil, and Mrs. Ryan, who proves to be a woman measuring six feet nothing, with an arm on her like a shipbuilder, and a face what is registering "suppressed emotions," as Nick sometimes says.

"Well, Ed," Jerry begins, as I bows to them both, and shows them where chairs may be had, "that was a pretty cute trick of yours beating it out there to Jersey, and getting Helen's old man to sign a contract. Personally, I never did give you credit for having so much brains in your head! However, the contract won't hold, as a contract made with a party under the influence of liquor is no good."

"Yes," butts in Mrs. Ryan; "and George must have been ginned, because that is the only way I ever knew him to be. He puts it in root beer!"

"Yeah?" I asks. "Well, such was far from being the case. He was as cold sober as the female president of a Woman's Prohibition League! Go ahead," I continues, speaking directly at Jerry; "try and bust this here contract, and you're welcome to all the fun trying to do it! My own lawyer says it is so ironclad that even this here T and NT wouldn't have no effect on it at all!"

Jerry and the lady exchanges glances, and then Duke pulls a sigh what sounds like it comes from his shoes.

"I haven't got no time," he says, "to monkey round in no law courts. I will do the right thing, and pay you one thousand real dollars to transfer the contract you have made for Helen over to me."

"As far as I'm concerned," Mrs. Ryan horns in, "I don't care if my little tot works for you. The bigger the dough, the better it pleases me."

"How about it?" Jerry asks, standing up and fumbling with his hat. "Are you going to make this thousand dollars, what is just as easy as rolling on a log, or are you going to try to hog the whole comedy fillum business?"

I thinks it over as quickly as I can, and then gets up, too. "Listen," I says



to them both, "I will think this here offer over, and whilst I am doing it, I should like Mrs. Ryan to bring Goldie Goldilocks down to the studio this afternoon and introduce me to her."

The whole three of us moves to the door.

"Go ahead and think it over," snaps Jerry, "but don't take no more than forty-eight hours to do it in, as I will lose my patience and bring suit to break that contract."

Mrs. Ryan shakes hands with me, and slips me a wink. "I will bring Helen in to you this afternoon," she says to me aside, while Jerry, seeing what a bear for looks Miss Holliday is, pulls out a trick mirror and begins to fix his necktie in it.

Then they beats it, and I ducks down to the studio to tell Nick what has happened. I finds him chewing the rag with Norma, whilst Robin, dolled up in an artful Algernon costume, is rehearsing a scene for "The Day of Rest." He is amusing himself with a bottle of ink and a toothbrush, with which he is painting a white cat black.

I prys Nick away from Norma, and tells him about Jerry Duke's offer.

"Don't do nothing of the kind!" he advises. "This Duke bird is up to more tricks than a chink magician. I wouldn't trust him from here to there with a counterfeit dollar bill!"

"The kid is coming down this afternoon with her mother," I says, "so if you got any exterior work save it for to-morrow, so you can meet her."

He promises to do this, and I gets a flash at Miss Murphy emptying out the pockets of one of Robin's suits. I recognizes, even from where I'm standing, an amber cigar holder I have been missing for two weeks or more, and goes over.

"I don't know where Robin picks up all this trash!" Miss Murphy says to me.

"Don't you?" I answers coldly. "That is funny; you're with him all day, and you're paid to look out for what he puts in both his stomach and his pockets!"

She gets red at this, and I grabs up my lost cigar holder from amongst a litter consisting of a chewed clothespin, some stones, a fishhook stuck in a cork, the stub of an old cigar, and a piece of

something that was no doubt once candy, but was completely disguised by being covered with dirt.

"Camera!" bawls Nick, and not wishing to distract my little nephew's attention, I blows back upstairs.

Well, about half past two or three o'clock, Mrs. Ryan comes down to the studio again, this time leading by the hand little Goldie Goldilocks herself. The child is about the same age as Robin, has hair the color of a grapefruit, blue eyes, and a complexion that any chorus girl would have given all of her salary for.

"Helen, dear," the mother chirps, "this is the nice gentleman what you're going to work for! Shake hands with him!"

Goldie gives me her hand and I shakes it. "I ith glad to meet you," she lisps, showing me all her teeth as she does so.

I puts a chair for Mrs. Ryan by the window, and taking Helen, leads her down to the studio. There was a rumor about her coming which has gotten around, and all of the gang is as anxious to meet her as they would be if it had been Mary Pickford herself. She is led around from one to the other and introduced. Then Miss Murphy and Norma drags Robin away from an old "prop" sofa, behind which he is hiding, and he busts out weeping.

"Robin!" I says, grabbing a hold of his shoulders. "Ain't you ashamed to be seen crying before this nice little girl who you're now going to meet, and who is going to act with you in the movie pictures? Come on now, Robin, like a good kid, and say 'Hello' to little Goldilocks!"

Little Helen picks up the ends of her skirts, like they does in dancing schools, and crossing her legs makes a low bow in front of him. "I ith glad to meet you, littul boy," she says politely. "Don't cry any more."

When child Edward gets a flash at Goldilocks' face, and hears the strange words she says, he stops crying and begins to scream at the top of his lungs. "Take her away!" he yells. "Runcle Ed, take her away! I don't wanna look at her—I hate her—I hate her!"

He keeps this up, throwing hisself on the ground and kicking with his heels,



while Helen, looking at him as though he was a curiosity, pulls out a stick of peppermint candy from her pocket and begins to calmly suck on it.

Whilst she is so doing, Miss Murphy with the aid of I, Nick, and Norma, manages to get Robin to a standing position, and holds him there on account of his legs resembling rubber bands. Then he gets a flash of Goldie's candy out of the corner of his eye, stops yelling, and looks at her in astonishment. As he does so, the little girl removes the candy from her mouth and sticks out her tongue at him.

"Oo can'th hath none of my candieth," she says, taunting him by waving the peppermint stick before his eyes.

As she does this, Robin springs from out our grasps with a shout, grabs the candy out of her hand, and the two of them go to the mat, screaming like a couple of maniacs; Goldilocks having both hands full of Robin's hair, and him kicking at everything in sight.

I leaves the whole studio to separate them, and breaks a world's record getting upstairs to my office.

"I hope," says Mrs. Ryan, as I tears in and picks up the telephone, "Helen will like Robin."

I pays no attention to her at all, but shoots a number over the wire to central and, after getting it, hears Jerry Duke at the other end of it.

"Jerry," I says, trying to make my voice calm, "this is the Enterprise Comedy Fillum Co.—Ed speaking."

"Yes," he answers me; "and how about that there proposition?"

"I have been thinking it over," I says, "and no doubt you're right thinking it is a dirty trick stealing your star off you. Send a certified check for a thousand bucks right away, and I will give you the contract and your star—if there is anything left of her!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### GETTING THE BEST OF IT.

**H**ONEST, boss," says Ted Gavin, "if ideas was money, I'd be a beggar in the streets! I have set up each and every night this week, trying to dope out a brand-new scenario for Robin that'll

suit you, and please Nick, and for all the good it done me I might just as well have gone to bed and slept!"

"Bein' awake or asleep with you," I says, "is the one and the same thing! Now, look here, Ted," I goes on to remark, "bring me stuff and not excuses, and the both of us will get along like a couple of lovers in summer! You've been stalling on this new scenario long enough. It's about time you come through with something outside of hard-luck stories, and lost sleep!"

He feels his chin like he was making sure it was still with him, and nods his head. "I know it!" he moans. "I know it! But what can I do when my brains quits cold on me?"

I grins at this. "Never mind what your brain is doing. And don't say you *can't* do it. There's no word like that in the army, or in movie studios. A clever boy like you, Ted," I says, slipping a little of the old oil into my voice, "shouldn't have no trouble at all in framing a good story with a lot of clever comedy in it. You done it time and time again in the past, and you can do it now if you want. Beat it home, slip into the hay, and tear off some sleep. Then, maybe, when you waken up, there will be something in your head besides nothing."

Ted gets up onto his feet. "I got to do something," he mumbles; "that's a cinch!"

I smiles. "Sure; so get rested up so you can do it!"

He totters away whilst I sends down to the studio for Robin. The office boy I sends rushes back in less than thirty minutes, and says the child has already gone to the flat with Miss Murphy. I'm just about to do the same thing, there being less business in the office than there is in bathing houses in December, when the door opens and in comes Mike Hanley.

"Ed," he chirps, approaching, "I'm going to make you a free present. I'm going to give you four tickets what is good for the opening of the new Café Jazbo to-night. My cousin is a good pal of the manager down there, and he got 'em for nothing. Take them and be welcome."



He sticks a fin in his pocket, and drags forth two pairs of pink pasteboards. These he shoves across the desk, and I picks them up before he can change his mind.

"Much obliged, Mike," I says; "if there's anything what I and the wife loves, it is new restaurants where the waiters ain't on to us. We'll use these tickets nicely."

The same evening when I gets to the flat, I finds Gracie in the library, reading a magazine and wearing a dress for which she is hiding the bill on me.

"Where is Carrie and Joe at?" I inquires, feasting my eyes upon her as the saying runs. "How comes it they ain't in sight?"

The wife sits up, allows me to split a kiss with her, and smiles. "They took Robin out for a walk," she replies. "They've been gone a long while now. I'm not sure whether they'll be home for dinner."

"I'm sure!" I answers. "When the gong rings they'll be risking life and limb to get to the dining room. When the both of them passes up a free meal, it'll be the day Rockefeller gets flung into bankruptcy!"

Gracie laughs harder at this, just as the latest French maid she had imported from the Bronx announces the dinner is ready and waiting.

As she tells us of the fact, the front door is hurled open, and in piles Joe, Carrie, Robin, and Miss Murphy. My little nephew is as usual—meaning moist, and there is a red spot on one cheek what looks suspicious.

The minute he lays an eye on me, he begins telling me his troubles.

"Runcle Ed," he sobs, "papa give me a licking and wouldn't give me candy! I seen a little gal on a bench what was eating some candy, and when I tried to take it off her, papa hit me!"

"I was never so surprised," horns in Carrie, "I thought my darling child had been learned better than to act like a roughneck!"

"What d'ye expect?" I laughs. "Look at his father!"

Joe, who is letting Roger drag him out of his coat, turns his head to me. "Yeah?" he snarls. "Well, if I'm a

roughneck I got it from wearin' them punk collars of yours!"

I'm about to come back at him when the wife steps in.

"For goodness' sakes," she says, "if you boys must fight, go downstairs! But don't crab a dinner that is waiting to be eaten!"

Miss Murphy removes Robin, still weeping, whilst the four of us tumbles into the dining room, where the soup is getting cold.

The minute Joe sits down he is happy again!

The meal gets over with practically no fighting at all—Joe merely getting sore at a remark I makes, and trying to hurl a butter dish at me.

"Well," says Gracie, when the servant girl rushes away with our coffee cups, "what is on the program for to-night?"

This reminds me of the free tickets Mike gave me. "Oh," I chirps, giving the wife a nudge, "we're all goin' down to attend the opening of a brand-new café."

Joe looks at Carrie. She looks at the Palisades.

"New café?" he sneers. "Where d'ye get that stuff? Do I look like a boob what is going to blow six or seven dollars and get nothing out of it but a headache?"

I pulls out the tickets and passes them around.

"Oh!" says Carrie, after giving the passes a examination. "These here are complimentary tickets—there's no cost attached to them!"

Hearing this Joe grabs them away from her and gives them the double-o. "That's different!" he hollers. "I'll get dressed now!"

Both him and Carrie ducks away and Gracie laughs.

"Isn't it funny," she remarks, "what a bit of graft will do?"

About half past nine, the brother-in-law and Carrie trail in, and announce they are ready to depart. Joe wears a dress suit what cost at least fifteen berries, and keeps peering into the mirrors to observe the effect. I informs him that he would be a riot in burlesque, and he is deciding whether I've insulted or flattered him, when the door opens and



in walks Miss Murphy, to say she can't do a thing with Robin, who is screaming his head off, and is every place in the room except in his bed.

Carrie leaves to see what can be did, going off with the nurse. Then there is a call for Joe who don't want to go in for fear of getting the two dollars' worth of shirt front he wears, dirty.

"The only thing the matter with that kid," snaps the wife, "is that he needs a good whipping. He has the pair of them buffaloes and all he has got to do is to shout for whatever he wants."

As she finished speaking, the tumult in the other room, what is letting the neighbors get exercise by beating on the steam pipes, comes to a end. A couple of seconds pass and then into the room marches Joe and Carrie, leading Robin, who is fully dressed in his clothes, between them.

"There is nothing to it," says Carrie, red in the face. "Our son is on his bad behavior and we can't go and leave him."

"Therefore," chimes in Joe, "we will have to bring him with us!"

Robin, who is smiling all over his face, knowing he has the best of it, busts into giggles. "I wanna go! I wanna go!" he yells. "I wanna go somewhere."

"If I wasn't your uncle," I hisses, "I'd tell you where to go! As it is, lay off that song and dance or you will get a spanking on the seat of your pants that you will remember when you get to be seventy years of age!"

Ten minutes later sees us climbing into the car, my little nephew as happy as if he had been given the freedom of Huyler's. After Joe makes a pass at Carrie for wiping her feet on him, and wanting to know does she think he is a millionaire what can afford to have his pants pressed every day, I passes the word to the chauffeur and we starts.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### HIS MONEY'S WORTH.

WE finds the Café Jazbo is situated near to Broadway, and is covered with both electric lights and class. There is a few automobiles standing in front of it, about six hundred even, and after we

is allowed three inches of standing room, we gets out.

"Oh, boy!" yelps Joe, his eyes shining. "This is the kind of a place I'm crazy mad about! Believe me, the kind of a family I come from was brought up in joints like this! Some time, Ed," he says, turning to me, "I want to tell you my family tree!"

"What do I want to hear about a bunch of cheap grafters for?" I answers.

We goes up some imitation marble steps and into a room what has got a mirror in it for every chorus gal living. Here some bandits, known to the trade as coat-check boys, helps theirselves to our hats and coats, sneering when they looks at the label in Joe's and sees it only cost two bills. The burglars hide the lids, and a big bird, with a diamond in his shirt the same size as a onion, comes over and demands our tickets. I produce the same and we're then allowed to go inside and surround a table.

"Oh, look it!" Robin shouts, the second we gets into our chairs. "Runcle Ed, there is a lady smoking over there!"

Carrie gives him a shake, and whilst he goes dumb he can't stop staring, and imitating the dame he looks at, making belief he is smoking, too, and blowing imagination smoke rings until it kidnaps the woman's animal, and, chucking away her cigarette, she tells her partner what she thinks of people what brings childrens into cafés.

Then Carrie makes a remark or two on her hook, expressing her opinion of cigarette fiends, and stating maybe Joe has a pipe he ain't using.

My brother-in-law gets seated comfortable and looks around. "It's lucky we're getting in for nothing," he says. "I'll bet the prices in this place is something terrible!"

I steps on Gracie's foot. "When you are out on a tear," I says to Joe, "and spend thirty cents or more at one time, I'll bet every insane asylum in Great City is sweeping out their best rooms."

He is too busy peering about, and trying to notice if all present is wise to his dress suit to answer, but Carrie presents me with a glare and sniffs.

Well, after Robin gets his hands slapped for fooling with the electric lamp



on the table, a waiter gets absent-minded and comes over to us, wanting to know if we have been served, and if not what do we want.

"Gimme the whole bill of fare!" Joe yells. "What I ate at the flat has give me a good appetite!"

"I think," says Carrie, "I'll get Robin a little lamb."

My nephew shows tears. "I don't want no little lamb!" he weeps. "I wanna little dog what I can call Tillie!"

The wife explains Carrie is ordering him something to eat and not to play with, and the waiter turns to me for my order. I and Gracie picks some economical stuff, and everything is O. K. until we gets to the vegetable end of it. Here we are stuck, friend wife voting for spinach and me being in favor of cabbage.

"Try the peas, sir," the waiter butts in, trying to keep us from coming to blows.

"Not a chance!" I barks. "The knives here are new, and therefore sharp. When I commit suicide I'll use gas—and let Joe pay the bill!"

Well, after another hour the waiter gets through, and breezes to tell our wants to the cook. As he goes out some midnight crap specialists in one corner of the room, same being nothing more or less than a jazz band, busts into bedlam and Robin leaps out of his chair like he had sat on a spark. He gets all excited at the music, and it is about as much use to calm him down as it is to keep a show girl from thinking of limousines.

The worse the music gets the better he likes it, and he acts like a jumping jack gone mad, shouting at the top of his lungs. The people around us enjoys a good laugh, and then some one passes the word that Robin is the famous movie-picture star, and after that there is more advertising done for him than had I used a magazine.

Next some people gets up to dance on the floor, laying they cheeks together and indulging in what is known as the shimmy. Little Edward leaves off yelling to watch them and no sooner he gets an eyeful, he begins shaking his shoulders and shivering like the temperature was down around zero. This stunt cops

a lot of attention, and them eating forgets to watch what is going on on the floor to keep Robin covered with their glances.

Finally the jazz players has a heart, gets wore out, and brings the piece to an end. As they does this I suddenly feels a hand on my shoulder and looking around sees no less than Ted Gavin standing alongside of me.

"Some little jazz cootie!" Ted yells, looking over at Robin and throwing Carrie, Joe, and Gracie a nod each. "Honnest, boss, it's a shame to keep the kid tied up when he knows more about dancing than Mr. Shimmy hisself!"

I looks my scenario writer over, noticing he is arrayed in a dress suit what looks like he grew in it, and that he wears a shirt what has more tucks than there is tightwads in Scotland.

"How comes it you're here?" I wants to know. "The last I seen of you, you was due for a date with a mattress and a chance to give them brains you boast of a chance to get rested."

Ted makes a move like he is brushing nothing away from him. "Mike Hanley give me a couple of free tickets to this place," he explains, "and not wanting them to go to waste I used them. I can sleep any time, but the tickets was only for to-night. Besides I can always think better where there is music playing. It makes me relax."

I laughs coldly. "If there's not a scenario ready for me in a day or two, I'll relax your salary until you won't reconize it."

Gavin grins like a wolf. "Don't worry none about that," he says; "sooner or later it'll be shaped up and ready."

"Make it sooner," I says, "or it will be too late!"

He tosses us all a smile and nod to divide, and joins a blond lady at a table in one corner of the room.

The waiter what took charge of us waits until we just reaches the point of starvation before coming to our rescue with a tray covered with dishes and a napkin. Joe licks his lips at the sight, and Carrie finally gets Robin tamed long enough for him to get a peek at a heap of ice cream, what the Rocky Mountains has nothing at all on. Once child Ed-



ward sees the same he loses all interest in what is going on around him.

Outside the soup being as cold as the ocean in January, and the steak being as tough as a ash can, and the coffee being full of grounds, there is little or no fault to be found with the meal. Now and then whilst we eats, the jazz band comes to life and throws a fit.

About eleven o'clock there is nothing left in sight but empty dishes and for once Carrie is so full she don't want to talk. Joe, happy as a humming bird with a beak full of honey, sighs and asks me for a cigar. When I passes one what I have been carrying around, waiting for the chance to get rid of it, who slides into the table but the waiter, laying a slip of paper with more figures on it than is in the Follies at Joe's elbow.

"What's this?" my brother-in-law says.

The waiter coughs. "The bill, sir."

Joe drinks a glass of water and picks up the paper like it was hot. He looks it over and gets pale as cream. I nudges Gracie, who is doing her best to keep a straight front face, and Carrie yawns, not having no interest in anything.

"You might be a good waiter," Joe snarls suddenly, "but you're a poor comedian! Here is what I think of you and your bill!"

He takes the bill, tears it into six or seven hundred small pieces, and hurls the lot of them into the waiter's face. I and Gracie sits up, ready to carry Joe home, but there is no battle, and we're disappointed to see the waiter turn his back and walk away, like getting insulted was hardly anything.

"How is this for a dirty deal?" Joe barks. "We get free tickets and then they tries to collect, playing both ends against the middle! Take it from me, the district attorney is going to know about this place!"

I was about to answer when the bird with the onion-size diamond shows up, followed by the waiter.

"What are you trying to do?" he asks Joe. "Beat the bill? Or what?"

My brother-in-law pushes Carrie, who is sleeping all over him away, and calls for the light artillery. "Beat the bill!" he screams. "The only thing what will get beat around here is you!"

The owner of the diamond grins and winks at friend wife and me. "Yeah?" he says. "Let me introduce myself—I'm Steve Kid Ryan, the Battling Bruiser! Some time when you get a chance drop around, and I'll show you newspaper clippings of my knock-out record. Meanwhile settle up and let's all settle down."

The minute Joe hears who he has threatened, he drinks a couple more glasses of water.

"Listen," he says, "didn't we give you our tickets when we come in?"

Robin, who is afraid of the newcomer, climbs under the table. Carrie is the only one what don't get disturbed.

"Are you trying to kid me?" the other goes on. "Them pink pasteboards was only good for admission into this here place. They didn't mean," he roars in a voice what attracts only the attention of nine-eighths of all present, "you could eat thirty dollars' worth of food, remove any of the oil paintings what are hanging around here, or kill any of the waiters! Them tickets saved you two bucks for reserving the table! Henry," he says to the waiter who is lurking behind him, "present this bird with a brand-new bill and if he ruins it beat it for me!"

Having got this off of his chest he blows. Joe sinks down in his chair until only the top of his head and ears show. The waiter does some bookkeeping, and lets Joe have the twin of the bill what got tore up.

Seeing there is nothing to it, my brother-in-law sighs like a steamboat requiring room. "Ed," he whines, "this is outrageous! We will have to go fifty-fifty on it, I suppose, and make the best of a raw deal, hey?"

Oh, lady!

"Get away!" I laughs. "I didn't tell you to order stuff with prices what would make Tiffany blush for shame! Gimme that bill, and I will mark off what I and Gracie made disappear."

"Certainly," says the wife; "that is only fair."

Joe being temporarily paralyzed, the waiter does what I asks, and also gives me a loan of his pencil. Addition proves I'm minus exactly seven dollars. The other twenty-three belongs to Joe. When



I informs him of this he unbuttons his collar, and drinks another glass of water.

"Twenty-three dollars!" he moans. "The savings of a lifetime! Ed," he begs, "gimme a lend of that much until tomorrow."

Friend wife kicks me in the ankles under the table.

"I'm sorry," I lies, "but ten dollars is all I have."

I shows him a bill for proof, and seeing he is defeated again, he wakes up Carrie, but puts her to sleep again when she hears what the damages is. Then Joe dives a hand down into his pocket and comes up with a tidy roll of greenbacks. The waiter is paid by the both of us, and I hands the man a buck for luck.

He thanks me and turns to Joe. "Don't I get no tip off you?" he asks Joe.

My brother-in-law looks as wise as a raven. "Sure," he says, grinning. "Here is one—always carry an umbrella when it looks like rain!"

By this time the clocks is flirting with the hour of twelve. We decides to call it a night and be on our way. Robin is dragged from under the table, where he has gone to sleep, and we beats it into the room where the blackhands has got our hats and coats. Here, I gets mine without no trouble and is slipping into it when I sees Joe handing the coat boy a five-dollar bill. Thinking the shock he had in the dining room has unbalanced him, as the saying is, I waits until we gets into the street and then begins.

"What't the big idea?" I asks coldly. "You turn the waiter down on a dollar and hand five to the hat-check boy."

Joe smiles. "Yeah; but look at the swell silk-lined coat he gimme!"

No sooner does Carrie get a flash of it than she wants to go back and see if she can't draw something in seal or sable!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### WAITING IN EXCITEMENT.

THE next day is Sunday, and there's nothing to do but lay around the flat, read the newspapers, argue, and wonder if there's anything stirring in Gavin's mind in the way of a scenario.

For some reason I don't feel as cheerful as usual, and once in a while feels something funny going on inside of me.

Even when I gets down into the studio, and into my office the following morning, prepared to work and bicker with Gavin, I'm still under the weather. Five minutes after I had slipped into my desk chair, Nick White comes in.

"Ed," he says, "how about the scenario for Robin's latest? I'm achin' to shoot something, and I don't need to be president of this business to know the exchanges all over the U. S. wants a release worse than a loan shark wants money! How about it?"

I removes collar and tie, hides them in the bottom drawer of the desk, and rings for Miss Holliday.

"Find Ted Gavin," I says, when she appears, "and tell him to come up here as fast as the law allows—if not quicker."

She promises to do this and departs, splitting a wink with Nick which she thinks I don't see.

In five minutes she is back again.

"Mr. Gavin," she says in a weary voice, "hasn't come in yet."

I gives my solid-gold Ingersoll the north and south and lets Nick take a peek at it.

"Keep Gavin paged," I says to Miss Holliday, "and no sooner he arrives send him in."

Lunch time comes, but my scenario writer don't. Feeling bad, I don't eat, but dines off of a cigar, giving my attention to a heap of mail, the most of it from exhibitors and exchanges, pleading I should give them anything of Robin's, if only a half of a reel.

It is two o'clock to the second when there's a knock on the door and in comes Ted, looking like something the Bolshevik has been toying with. He looks like he ain't slept since I last seen him, and if I had a nickel for every wrinkle in his suit, I could retire wealthy. Also, he needs a shave worse than Europe needs law and order, and there's enough rings under his eyes to stock a jewelry store.

"Good morning," I says; "no doubt you pushed the clock ahead so far you were unable to catch up with it. But



sit down, Ted, and tell me all about that new scenario."

He flops into a chair and rubs his eyes. "Boss," he says, "if I don't show up with a scenario what is a riot, a bear, a scream, and a knock-out, by to-morrow a. m. I give you leave to can me without notice!"

I looks him over, wondering what kind of a stall this is.

"The cannin' will be done without *your* leave," I puts in. "But," I snaps, "this ain't telling me the plot of my little nephew's new picture. Have you got the script ready, are you working on it—what?"

He pulls out his watch, looks at it, and leaps out of his chair like he had sat on a wasp. "I got the thing in my typewriter now. I only come here to let you know I ain't laying down on the job. Boss," he raves, "once you get a flash at the business and comedy in this here story, you is going to present me with a slap on the back and no doubt raise my salary!"

I laughs. "Maybe the slap will be alongside of the jaw," I says, "and possibly the raise will be when I picks you up to hurl you down the stairs!"

He only laughs at this and ducks. Once he is gone I tries to put my mind on my work, but it is as useless as trying to play tennis with a golf stick. The something what has been disturbing me in the inside regions is a cross between the stomach aches Robin enjoys and cramps. As it gets bad I send Miss Holliday out for a powder, but the only good this does is to make it worse. The result is that after a couple more hours I unties myself, totters down to the car, and gets rushed home to the flat where I creeps into bed, whilst Gracie, making sure it is sickness, and not cellar alcohol that is troubling me, telephones to a medico.

The doctor rushes over—arriving two hours later. He turns out to be a tall, thin bird with a face, if it was his fortune, that must leave him poverty stricken. He has a trick beard, and a way of rubbing his hands every other second that is enough to make a patient feel worse than he does. He goes over me like a secondhand clothes dealer go-

ing over a suit of clothes, taps me from head to feet, listens to my chest with a telephone, and then says I'm suffering from nothing more or less than a slight case of ptomaine poisoning what comes from something I ate—if I didn't eat it I wouldn't have it. Then he advises me to stay in bed for a while, tells me to take up golf, writes a full hand of prescriptions, calls for a five-buck fee and departs, leaving me alone with my pains and friend wife.

Being ill, as Gracie calls it, drives all thoughts of the Enterprise Comedy Fillum Co., Gavin, Robin, and the like from my mind. All I can think of is what time should I take the next pill, and is my fillum company going into bankruptcy on account of my absence. In about a week, however, I'm feeling natural again—which means ready to argue with Joe and Carrie if necessary. The medico, who has got to know me like a old friend, goes across me with a tape measure, looks as wise as a boiled owl, and says I can go to the office again, but not to get overheated or excited.

"Send for the car!" I bawls, no sooner the M. D. is gone. "I'm going to the studio direct and find out the worst all at once!"

Arriving there, I finds the building's all in place, and is given a great hand by the bunch. My hand is shook until it aches, and I'm gave a welcome what makes up for being sick two weeks.

Then Nick White draws me to one side and crawls up on my ear. "Ed," he says, "I has got a treat in store for you that is going to make you forget the meaning of the word sick. Ted Gavin has turned out a scenario what is better'n a Liberty Bond of any issue. There is more comedy in it than there is in the weather reports in the morning newspapers, it flows like the Niagara Falls, and gives Robin a chance for entirely new stuff. They is six reels to it and already three is complete."

I draws a breath. "Nick, that is what is known as a unfair advantage. Here I was sick and ill and without giving me the chance to look over the script, you go ahead and shoot it. Now suppose I don't like it. What then?"

He laughs. "Oh, you'll like it O. K.,



Ed. Why, this would put the worst grouch on the bum. I know what you like, and I also know good stuff from the bad. C'me on in and look it over. If it don't make a hit with you, you don't owe me no salary for as long as you have been away!"

He leads me into the projecting room, goes around to the operator and whispers something to him. The lights go out, a movie-picture machine begins to hiss like a snake, and then, keyed up to the pitch, as the saying is, I await, with my nerves all excitement, the showing of Ted Gavin's wonderful scenario.

The succeeding chapters of this serial will appear in the next issue of **TOP-NOTCH**, dated and out April 1st.

### Had Him Both Ways

**H**OW dare you come on parade," shouted the Irish sergeant to a recruit, "before a respectable man loike mesilf, smothered from head to foot in graise and poipeclay? Tell me now—answer me when I spake to yez."

The recruit was about to excuse himself for his condition, when the sergeant stopped him.

"Dare yez to answer me when I puts a question to yez?" he cried. "Hould yer lyin' tongue, and open yer face at yer peril! Tell me now, what have yez been doin' wid yer uniform? Not a word, or I'll clap yez in the guardroom. When I axes yez anything and yez spakes, I'll have yez tried for insolence to yer superior officer, but if yez don't answer when I questions yez, I'll have yez punished for disobedience of orders. So, yez see. I have yez both ways!"

### Too Much Precaution

**A**N Irishman was nailing a box which he intended sending by express. It was essential that the box should not be inverted during the passage, and a friend ventured to suggest to Pat to write conspicuously on the case: "This side up, with care."

A few days later Pat reported to his friend that all the contents of the box had been broken.

"Heavens! Did you label it, 'This side up?'"

"Yes; I did. And for fear they should not see it on the top I put it on the bottom as well!"

### A Poor Substitute

**A** YOUNG Scotchman had married an English lady, and some time afterward he paid a visit to a bachelor uncle.

"Weel, Sandy, I hear ye hae gotten a wife," said the old man.

"Yes, uncle."

"What can she dae?"

"Do? What do you mean?"

"Weel," the uncle went on, "can she sew an' knit? Does she mend your claes?"

"No," the young man admitted.

"Humph!" commented the uncle.

"Weel, does she cook? Can she mak parritch?"

"Oh, no, uncle!" the young man explained. "The servants do all those things. But you should hear her sing. She has the most beautiful voice you ever heard."

"Sing!" repeated the old man scornfully. "Man, could ye no hae gotten a canary?"

### Still, It Gets Smoked

**I**T was the monthly gathering of the League for Promoting Virtue by Law, and all the members had turned up.

As soon as the proceedings started, one member rose to his feet and began:

"Mr. Chairman, I regret to have to say it, but as I came here this evening I saw Brother Gray coming along the street, and he was smoking a pipe!"

Amid groans of horror, the chairman duly admonished the erring one. "Desist!" he finished. "Pray give up the uncleanly habit."

"Yes; even a pig would not smoke tobacco!" added the accuser.

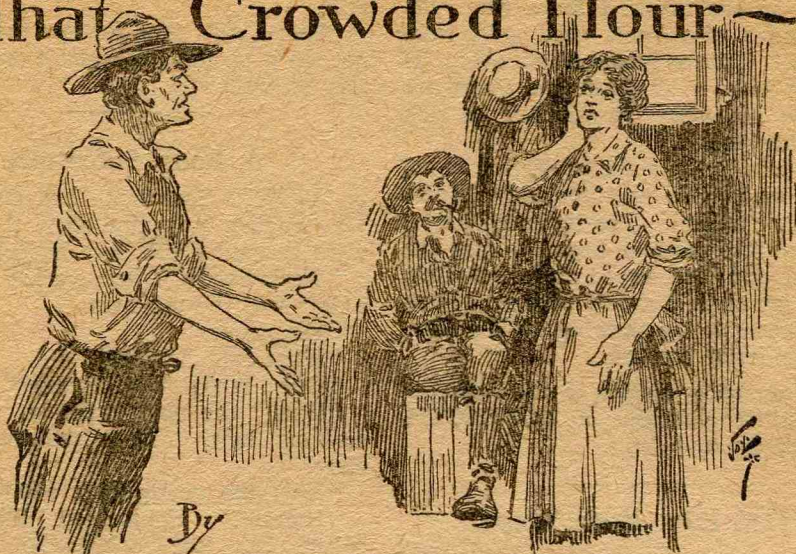
Brother Gray swung round on him. "Then I presume, Brother Goodson, you don't smoke?"

"Me smoke? Certainly not!"

"Well, then, Brother Goodson, who do you think is more like the pig—you or I?" demanded Brother Gray.



# That Crowded Flour~



By  
William Merriam Rouse~

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

## CHAPTER I.

### THE FEAR OF DEATH.



WHEN Trent went into Tunk Burgess' house he felt as though something were going to happen. He put the feeling away from him as nonsense and said, "How do you do?" to Burgess, and nodded to Burgess' wife, with no more thought just then of the sudden shrinking of body and spirit that had come over him as he stepped into the dirty kitchen.

It was as usual in there. Unwashed dishes piled in the sink, the floor not swept, and the windows grimy. Trent laid the shotgun that he carried across the only clear and clean corner of the oilcloth-covered table, and sat down beside it. The rat face of Burgess took on an almost human expression as he looked at the weapon, which Trent kept as sleek and shining as a well-groomed horse.

"Nice gun you got there," said Burgess.

"Yes." Stanley Trent placed it a little more firmly upon the table, for it was loaded and he had left the safety catch

open. "I thought I might scare up a partridge coming over the mountain."

Burgess grunted, pulled his eyes away from the shotgun, and half turned in his chair. "Lily!" he said. "You go down cellar and draw a pitcher of cider."

The woman went without a word. Trent noticed that she had the mark of a recent beating; a bruise, purple and red, showed where Burgess had crashed against her cheek bone. She had been crying, but her black eyes were flashing fire in spite of their redness. There was a cut on one of Burgess' knuckles. Trent saw these things more or less instinctively, as an out-of-door man sees things. It was none of his business; but he always felt as though he wanted to wash his face and hands after he had been in Burgess' place.

He could feel the silent hatred of the woman as she took a pitcher and left the room. It was too bad, he thought. She was a white-skinned, black-haired woman who would have been handsome if she had taken care of herself, and smiled. Trent was deeply sorry for her, entirely apart from his feeling toward Burgess.



He and Burgess hated each other quietly, and always had; probably because they were so different. Now, however, there was a real cause for bad blood between them. The year before, at butchering time, Burgess had bought a pig from Trent with the promise to work it out chopping during the winter. Credit is long in the mountains. Trent had let the debt run through the winter and the following summer. It was now November, and a year had passed.

They drank a glass of cider together before Trent said anything. He did not regret having come, but he wanted to be fair, even to a man for whom he had neither respect nor liking. He wanted to avoid trouble.

He didn't fear Burgess, but Trent knew that any trouble would worry Dorothy, his wife. She had asked him that day not to go to Tunk Burgess' house, with some pretty plain words about the danger of his own hot temper, and she had begged him almost with tears not to carry his shotgun. Already Trent was sorry, and but for the streak of obstinacy that went with his temper he would not have gone on with the matter. Dorothy was fine, like a piece of sound and fine-grained wood, and Trent was capable of appreciating her. For her sake he determined to keep hold of himself.

"I thought maybe you could do some chopping for me this fall," he said at length. "I'm going to cut ten or fifteen cords of wood."

Burgess' eyes fell before Trent's, and Trent knew then, with anger rising inside of him, that Burgess would do his best to wriggle out of the obligation just as he had done before.

"I got my own chopping to do, Stan," replied Burgess. "I'm all out of wood, and you ain't. Tell you what we might do, Stan. You come over and chop with me a week, and then I'll go over and chop with you two weeks. Trade works the first week and the extr'y week ought to come close to paying for that pig."

From a reliable man this would have been no more than a request for a favor, but from Tunk Burgess it was laughable. He had nothing to chop unless he had bought some wood on the stump,

which was not likely. Obviously he expected a refusal, which would place him in the position of having offered to pay. If he drew an acceptance he could manage somehow to get a little wood for himself and then plead a lame back, or other misfortune, when the time came to work for Trent. This was what was known in the Crowquill Mountain neighborhood as a Tunk Burgess trick.

Stanley Trent was furious, but he still kept control of himself. He decided, as he had felt that he would decide, to call the pig a loss. He could not, however, bring himself to let the matter go with a laugh and a shrug. A smaller man would have wanted to take it out of Burgess' skin; a bigger man would have wasted no more time.

Trent leaned forward upon the table and tried to force Burgess to meet his gaze. "You bragged in the store at the Corners that you got your last winter's pork from me for nothing," he said, quietly enough.

Burgess was scared, and Trent knew and enjoyed it. It was never Burgess' courage that people feared; it was the between-midnight-and-morning treachery that had so far earned him immunity from punishment through thirty-odd years of evil-doing.

"Aw, Stan!" he growled. "If I said anything that sounded that way it was a joke! Somebody's been trying to make a monkey of you!"

This was the spark. Trent leaped to his feet, trembling with rage. "Make a monkey of me!" he shouted. "You're the one that's trying to make a monkey of me! But you can't do it! Don't you suppose I know you're a liar and a thief, and always have been? I know you won't pay for that pork, and I don't give a damn for the price of it! All I want is to tell you what kind of a skunk you are! Not sand enough to rob a man out and out! Not even sand enough to fight! You can't find a renegade dog between here and Canada that's got any respect for you!"

Trent stopped only because words failed. He was conscious that the woman gave a low cry and ran out of the house, slamming the door behind her. Burgess had crouched forward in his chair. The



shotgun was on the opposite side of the table, out of reach, but a greasy butcher knife lay close to hand. His lips had become bloodless, drawn back over his teeth. More than ever he made Trent think of a rat.

The difference was that Burgess was not cornered, not in any danger, for Stanley Trent's quick wrath had already begun to simmer down. He knew he could thrash the man and that it would give him small satisfaction to do it. He barked a short laugh, reached for his gun, and took one step with the intention of leaving.

Then it was that the coward turned safety into disaster. His hand gripped the butcher knife, and he sprang up with the point sweeping toward Trent. The fear of death was stamped upon his face.

## CHAPTER II.

### A BARRIER BETWEEN.

FOR the next few seconds Stanley Trent acted automatically. He sprang back and jammed the muzzle of his gun at Burgess' chest to hold him off. He had taken the shotgun up, as he naturally would, with the right hand at the trigger guard. A roar filled the room—rattled the dishes on the shelves. Tunk Burgess was blown a pace backward. He dropped to the floor and lay face down.

A little interval passed before Stanley Trent realized that he had killed a man. Not even the evidence left by a charge of shot at close range brought it clear to him until he had stood for a time with the gun still poised to ward off attack and his eyes fastened upon what had been Tunk Burgess. At last he put down the gun and rolled the man over.

Then he was sorry; merely that, for Burgess undoubtedly would have killed him in that insanity of fear, and Trent knew that he had no intention of shooting. He had been caught completely by surprise.

He moved toward the door with the idea of trying to call the woman and then going to the Corners to notify some one—he wasn't just sure to whom to go first. Halfway across the room he stopped, stricken by a thought that left him as weak as water.

It looked like murder. He had gone to Tunk Burgess' house armed, and started a row. The woman had heard that. He remembered that it had looked as though he were going to attack Burgess. A killing that had been done in self-defense, and actually without any intent to injure, had the appearance of murder committed for the price of a pig.

Trent rubbed his hand over his forehead. The hand was cold and the forehead wet. He walked around a small circle, once, unsteadily. Swift desire to get to Dorothy came to him. He couldn't think. He wanted to get to her as a hurt child goes to waiting arms for comfort. He went out blindly and began to run.

It was two miles to his house, at the foot of Crowquill and over on the other side. Halfway there he became breathless and his stride broke; but he plunged on, running, walking, staggering. Nothing mattered but getting to Dorothy. If he got to her he could think, perhaps.

He was like that when he burst into his own kitchen. Dorothy was putting bread into the oven. She snapped upright and stared at him, with terror growing in her face. The picture of her as she was then became indelibly imprinted upon his mind; the blue of her dress emphasizing the deep blue of her eyes; clean slenderness and soft, smooth brown hair; all that haven of peace and rest in womanhood that the heart of man desires.

He ran toward her with his hands outstretched. "Oh, Dot!" he cried. "I've killed Burgess!"

She stepped back. He stopped, still holding out his arms. He followed her eyes, and saw the crimson stains upon his hands. He hadn't noticed them before. Her glance swept up to his face and he realized dimly that he must look queer. More than ever he needed her.

"Stanley! You—you—killed him?"

The gesture of the arm that she made with those words was like a knife slashing into his heart. It seemed to him that she pushed him away into an abyss of unclean things. A barrier rose between them. He felt as if she were no longer his wife.

Trent cried out, but the cry broke and



died half uttered. His world was melting away from him. He swayed, pulled himself up, and in doing so turned around. For the first time he saw Tom Gregg, his closest friend, in a chair by the stove. They had been as brothers to each other.

"Tom!" said Trent in a whisper.

Gregg remained motionless and speechless. His hands were upon his knees, as if he had started to get up and thought better of it, and he was staring at Trent as he might have stared at some animal strange to the mountains.

### CHAPTER III.

#### IN A DAZE OF UNREALITY.

**T**HROUGH the little interval during which Trent implored Gregg silently much happened, also silently. Stanley Trent's mind in this moment took on a supernatural keenness. From the face of Tom Gregg he learned that he had to expect from him what he might have expected from any decent stranger, nothing more. Gregg had failed him. Between them the bond had been broken. Trent knew that he had looked for a rush of friendship, a pledge of loyalty. It was like miscalculating the strength of a rope.

There was more than this. The glance of Tom Gregg flashed away from Trent's face and went to Dorothy. In his eyes Trent read a hope that flickered up and then dimmed as a light is dimmed by the drawing of a curtain. Once Gregg had tried to court Dorothy, before her marriage, but he had lost so easily that Trent had never thought much of it, or that Gregg really cared.

"Murder!" said Tom Gregg hoarsely. "You bragged to Dot what you'd do!"

Trent's own horror of murder was just as great. They had always had the same ideas about things, which were those of their environment. A fight was an honorable matter, of course; the use of a gun or a knife against another man was cowardly; and murder was close to the depth of human depravity.

"No!" With the shouted word of denial Stanley Trent found his power of speech, and words flooded from him. "I didn't murder Burgess! Dot! Tom! Listen to me! The gun did it! He started for me with a knife! I stuck

out the gun to hold him off! It blew a hole through him! I didn't do it! I didn't mean to do anything!"

"Tunk Burgess never had the sand to knife anybody!" said Gregg sternly.

Helplessly Trent turned and met the dark-blue eyes of his wife, who had stood silent and helpless since that first outcry. In her eyes he read incredulity, agony. He knew she had no thought but for him in that moment, but he believed that she thought him a murderer. Suddenly she put out her hands and plunged forward; falling as a child falls, limply. He leaped and caught her in his arms. She was a dead weight; she had fainted.

He carried her into the bedroom, to stand impotently beside the bed staring down at her in a daze of unreality. With fumbling hands he put a wet towel upon her forehead. Then he went back into the kitchen, closing the door behind him. She would be all right in a few minutes: he wanted to convince Tom Gregg that he wasn't a murderer; but Tom Gregg had gone.

Trent ran to the door and shouted, but the mountains gave back no answer. He could hardly believe this, any more than he could believe the rest of it. He dropped to a chair and buried his face in his hands.

After a time he got up and drank half a dipper of water. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. The ticking of the old wooden clock that had belonged to his mother sounded raucous, profane. Trent ached with pity for himself. He pulled at his hands, walking up and down the floor. He saw the stains upon them, turning dark now. In a kind of panic he ran to the sink and scrubbed with half a dozen waters before he felt that they were clean.

So many thoughts stabbed him at once that he reeled with the pain of them. The thought of Dorothy was the worst. In the hour of all his life when he most needed her she was not with him; she was in there alone on the bed. He did not doubt that she had repudiated him. The horror in the few words she had spoken, the gesture she had made, her following silence, all convinced him that she would neither believe his story nor stand with him in his trouble.



He felt that he no longer had a wife. It was like having the sun blotted out. How was it possible that Dorothy had failed him? She who had kissed him that morning with lips that clung to his and hands that caressed his cheeks as they drew away—she probably would not let him go near her now if he went into the bedroom where she was. He did not dare to go.

He tried, and could not bring himself to open the closed door between them. He wanted to find out whether she were all right, recovered, and could not. Another terror added to his sum total of suffering. Suppose she died in there alone? And yet he could not force himself to go to her; he could not bear the thought of the look he might find in her eyes. Wasn't there any such thing as justice in heaven or earth?

Suddenly a cold blast of physical fear swept across his soul, dulling the other great pain. The sheriff would be after him! Jail, bars, and—he knew what they did to murderers! He did not dare to say it even to himself. And because the freedom of the mountains was in the blood and bone of him, his suffering was a thousand times more keen.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### HIS ONLY CONCERN.

AS a caged animal moves around its prison, endlessly, hoping against all the evidence of wood and steel that there is a way out, so the mind of Stanley Trent traveled around and around his situation, seeking a possibility of dropping back into the morning of that day, into the calm happiness that had existed then. There was no way of doing that, but there were alternatives from which to choose before the end of the day arrived.

When the sheriff came up the shoulder of Crowquill he could shoot him. Then would come a posse. Trent could take his stand out on the bare granite end of the shoulder and make them kill him. He could die like a fighting man, under his own blue sky; his blue sky whipped by the wind-driven clouds that were symbols of freedom to him. Other men would have to die with him, but he

would have the end he wanted and avoid the end he feared.

A flare of rage drove through him; and out of the depths of his mind came the suggestion that he carry Dorothy and Gregg along with him. His jaws moved, and his breath came out in a silent and horrible semblance of a laugh. Why not make everything crash down at once, as Samson had done when he put his arms around the pillars? He glanced up at the rack where his rifle hung.

For a time he dwelt upon these thoughts with clenched teeth and hands. Then a revulsion took him. In a few minutes he hated himself for having had the thoughts.

He could take to the woods. More than one good man was back in the Adirondacks, or in Canada, with no prospect of ever coming out. The vision of a new life formed. Work in the camps, if he wanted it, another woman, whisky *blanc*, tobacco, the perfect freedom of the woods. There was money in the house, and he had his rifle. So far there was nothing to prevent him from stepping out and into an existence that would give every physical pleasure of life.

He remained, however, seated in his chair. He was no longer afraid. He had the will and the power to move, but he did not get up. There was something lacking in any solution that had so far presented itself to him. There was something about life and freedom by flight that repelled him; although he was far from leaning toward a folly of self-immolation. Nor did conscience show its gray face. He had gone far enough so that conscience became a puny thing. He was walking out beyond the confines of life into that clear space where a man stands alone with himself, unchained from all the limitations he has known. Trent was concerned now with what he really desired for himself and with that alone.

He rose and swung up and down the room in company with curious thoughts. When a hog was butchered they did not stop at killing him. They put him into a great iron kettle of boiling water and then scraped him clean of bristles, until his hide was pink and white. He had been scraped clean.



Trent walked to a window and looked up at the wooded crests against his own sky. His glance swept lovingly down to the shoulder of Crowquill, and then along the brown earth road that ran a stone's throw from the house. He must make up his mind to something.

He stood, as tense and rigid as a dog straining at a leash. Bob Frazier, the sheriff, had just hitched his team to a sapling and was looking up toward Trent's place. He started slowly along the path.

Gregg? Had he sent the sheriff? Suddenly Trent found that he didn't care about that. The end of the respite was upon him and must be met; that was all he cared about. He had to make a decision in something like a minute.

Trent lifted his head and drew in a deep breath; he had a consciousness of great strength. He realized now that the worst thing that could ever happen to him had happened when Dorothy had believed him a murderer. He had weath-ered it.

He still stood upon his own feet—rather he stood upon his own feet now although he had staggered and dropped to his knees at first. That was the thing that mattered. All the other fates were indifferent. If he stood upon his feet any of them might come without being able to harm the real Stanley Trent. It was not a great deal to him what other people thought or did. Any decision that he might make was secondary to standing foursquare and undaunted.

As to this matter of the killing of Tunk Burgess he would tell the exact truth. That would satisfy him; and other people could be satisfied or not, as they might choose. Did the mountains ever lie, or hide themselves? The strong winds tore at them, the frosts bit into them, but they stood in an eternal peace and joy that was concerned only with being what it was.

## CHAPTER V.

### UPON HIS OWN FEET.

**T**HE boots of the sheriff were upon the doorstep. Trent opened the door before he could knock and then stood aside for him to enter.

"Come in, Bob," he said, grave, but

7B TN

steady enough. "I was just going down to the Corners to see if I couldn't get word to you."

"I thought likely you would, Stan." Frazier sat down in the nearest chair and began to fill his pipe.

Trent flung up his head. "I'm ready to go along, Bob," he said. "I'd kind of like to talk to Dorothy a minute first, though. She fainted a spell ago, and I want to make sure she's all right."

"Hey?" Sheriff Bob Frazier stopped a lighted match on the way to his pipe, burned his fingers, and swore earnestly. "You ain't arrested, Stan!" he said. "Think you was? All I come up for was to tell you to be at the inquest to-morrow at the Corners!"

Trent stood open-mouthed, in speechless amazement. Frazier stared at him, began to comprehend, and chuckled with huge friendliness.

"I guess you had a right to be worried, at that!" he exclaimed. "That Lily woman come tearing down to the Corners and said she peeked in a window and see Tunk trying to knife you. That was why I started in the first place. Met Tom Gregg, and he went back with me and the woman and looked things over. Found Tunk deader'n a door nail, of course. Gregg didn't say nothing except you was to home and would probably be glad to get things cleared up quick."

"Come to think of it," Frazier went on, "you didn't know you had a witness, did you? Guess it might have looked bad if Lily hadn't hated Tunk strong enough to tell the truth. Far as the law's concerned he brought it on himself, and far as I'm concerned as Bob Frazier I'm durned glad of it, Stan!"

Frazier got up quickly and held out his hand. Trent wondered if there were anything in his face to reveal the hell through which he had come just now. He took the sheriff's hand mechanically, but he gripped it hard.

"I'll be there, Bob," he said. "Glad you come!"

"So long, Stan! Good luck!"

The clock struck four as Frazier went out. One hour of hell! Trent followed him and stood upon the doorstep as he



swung down the path. Crowquill was touched by the slanting light of late afternoon. The mountain seemed more than ever strong and beautiful and unshakable; upright, alone, heeding nothing.

In a moment Trent would go back into the house and to Dorothy. When he told her the truth, her white, satin-smooth arms would clasp his neck in a frenzy of joy. Things would be as they had been, almost; almost, but not quite. For in the long hour between the time when she had heard of what he had done and this moment Stan Trent had died.

The old Stan Trent, a plaything of destiny, had died, but Stanley Trent lived. The new man stood there upon his doorstep and encompassed the world. He was as free as the electricity that plunged through the air, and as strong. He knew now that there was nothing in the heavens above, nor in the earth beneath, nor in the waters under the earth of which he was afraid. Stanley Trent could get what he wanted out of life—by taking it. He had the power. There were no more weaknesses in him because nothing outside of himself had any power to make or break him. He loved his wife with a deep and everlasting love, as he had always done, but now he stood upon his own feet.

He turned and went into the house. The door of the bedroom opened and Dorothy came slowly toward him, pale, tear-stained, her lips parted, and her eyes wide and dark. She ran to him and her arms, satin-soft, drew tight around his neck.

"Stan!" she cried. "Oh, my husband! I don't care what you've done! I love you! We'll pull through—somehow—together, won't we?"

He remembered that she didn't know. Her love had been with him, then, through all that time when he had fancied himself alone. He drew her closer, until she gasped under the strength of his embrace.

"It's all right, Dot!" he whispered joyously, looking down into her eyes. "Sheriff Bob's been here—it's self-defense! There was a witness! Do you understand? I didn't mean to kill him, and the way it is I wasn't even arrested!

It never happened, Dot!" he added, as he bent his head and kissed her.

### His Ready Wit

**A**N Irish waiter named Kenny was noted for his ready wit. A party of gentlemen who were staying at the hotel heard of Kenny's wit, and one of them made a bet that he would say something that Kenny couldn't answer at once.

A bottle of champagne was ordered. The one who had made the bet took hold of the bottle and began to open it. The cork came out with a bang and hit Kenny in the mouth.

"Ah," said the man holding the bottle, "that is not the way to Cork!"

Kenny took the cork out of his mouth and replied: "No; but it's the way to Kil-Kenny."

### His Turn Now

**T**WO golf fiends—an Englishman and a Scot—were playing a round together.

After the first hole, the Englishman asked: "How many did you take?"

"Eight," replied the Scot.

"Oh, I only took seven, so it's my hole!" exclaimed the Englishman triumphantly.

After the second hole, the Englishman put the same question again. But the Scot smiled knowingly.

"Na, na, ma man," said he; "it's ma turn tae ask first!"

### Twisted Meaning

**T**ESS: "Why didn't you speak to her? She met you with a smile of reconciliation on her face."

Jess: "Yes; her face was what you might call 'reconciled,' wasn't it?"

Tess: "Reconciled?"

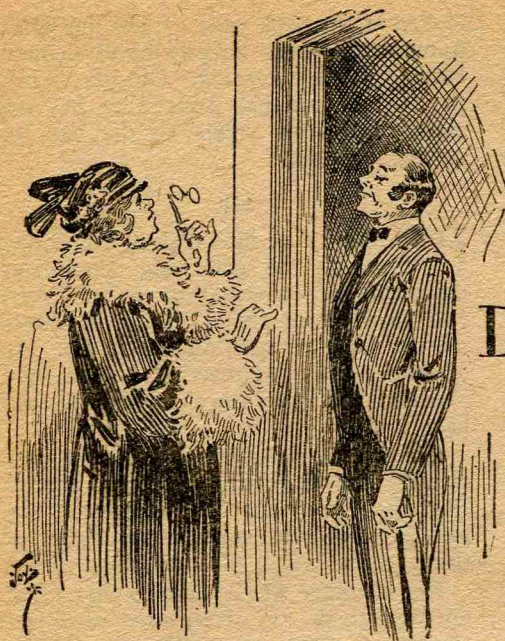
Jess: "Yes. Made up, you know."

### Living in Hope

**H**IGGS: "Why do you allow your daughter to bang the piano so hard?"

Biggs: "I'm hoping she'll either sprain her wrist or bust the instrument."





# Don't Mention It-

By

George L. Euston

**B**REAKFAST was ready for me on the gate-legged table near the window when I climbed out of the hay that morning. Horace brought me in a poached egg and a sheaf of mail. I was reaching for an envelope that didn't bear the resemblance of being the hiding place of a bill when I heard the distant tinkle of the doorbell. A minute later the world's champion valet appeared.

"A Mr. Judson is calling, sir," he announced with a discreet cough.

I laid the letter down and lifted my left eyebrow. "Judson! The name is not familiar. What does he look like, Horace?"

My valet smiled bleakly. "He is rather a smallish person, Mr. Marley. Somewhat, if I may say so, on the order of a pugilist."

"Send the gentleman in," I directed. "Then linger around if it happens to be a case of mistaken identity."

A minute or two later my caller entered. As Horace had said, Judson was a small, bulky individual with a jaw on him and eyes as blue as the law reformers foster.

"My name's Ebenezer Judson," he began shortly. "I'm the proprietor of the

Sea View Kennels. I'm interviewing the tenants of this house with the hope that I can interest them in a dog. No home is complete without one. I breed, raise, and sell German police dogs."

"I already own a police whistle," I murmured.

Judson fingered his chin to see if it was still with him. "If you'd like to look at one of the dogs," he went on persuasively, "I could arrange it without any trouble to you. I've got a flivver of my own. I can bring one here for you to look at if you want."

I told him I wasn't interested in the least.

"But if you hear of any one who would be, will you let me know?"

I assured him I would and rang for Horace. When the room was empty I opened the letter I had laid down. Somehow, I felt I should have recognized the handwriting. Before I had read a dozen lines my appetite had left me.

## II.

**I**S something the matter, sir?" Horace inquired, when he returned to remove the breakfast dishes. "You haven't finished your egg, and you appear a trifle pale, sir."



With difficulty I straightened up. "My Aunt Alice writes me that she is coming in from the wilds of New Jersey to give a series of lectures here in town."

Horace coughed. "I see, sir."

"No; you don't," I differed. "That's the trouble, Horace. A series of lectures means that Aunt Alice will make this apartment her headquarters for an entire week. And unless you know my Aunt Alice personally you have not the slightest conception of what that means. I might say that what a mouse is to the speaker sex, what a fishhook is to a herring, and what a bill collector is to a bankrupt, does not add up or equal one half of what my Aunt Alice is to me!"

Horace looked interested.

"To begin with," I explained limply, "she is the vice president of the Anti-Tobacco League of Redwood, New Jersey. I'd as soon smoke a cigarette in her vicinity as I would place my person in close proximity to the rear feet of an agitated mule. Aunt Alice lectures on what she calls 'The Perfect Existence' and practices what she preaches. Also she makes every one else do the same thing, and to argue with her is as sensible as expecting to get all the collars back that you send to the laundry. The last time she visited me I was pounding the pad at nine o'clock in the evening and out of the feathers at five-thirty in the morning!"

Horace smiled. "Rather a formidable person, sir."

"My Aunt Alice," I resumed, "always brings along a couple of the textbooks she writes. They have to do with the perfect existence, and there's no shirking when she gives you a book and tells you to read it. The first time she wished one on me I read four words on the first page and tried to stall her along. I soon got over that idea. I'd much rather try to charm a couple of angry rattlers than not be prepared for her cross-examination. Another one of her happy habits is rehearsing her lectures aloud. Usually, I'm handed a disposess after she leaves. Her voice and a foghorn are the one and same thing."

Horace blinked. "When, may I ask, is she coming here, sir?"

I picked up the letter gingerly and

looked at the back page. "The day after to-morrow. She's already hired Bedlam Hall for Friday evening. Oh, yes; I forgot to tell you that Aunt Alice has the same regard for valets as she has for mangy leopards!"

### III.

**P**RECISELY at nine o'clock on Friday morning the bell rang, there was the sound of conversation in the foyer, and Aunt Alice sailed in like a three-masted schooner with all canvas set. My mother's only unmarried sister had changed but little since I had last seen her.

She had put on more avoirdupois, nose glasses, and wore an acidulated expression that gave one the impression she had just finished consuming twenty or thirty cents' worth of sour lemon drops.

Her entrance was so sudden that I had not time to get rid of my after-breakfast cigarette. Aunt Alice removed it from between my fingers, tossed it accurately out of the window, and shook hands aggressively. Fortunately, it was her belief that osculation was unsanitary.

"You are looking well, Edgar," she boomed.

"I don't feel it," I answered.

She looked me over with an needlelike eye. "Undoubtedly lack of exercise. I have devised a new system of Swedish calisthenics. Is your roof safe? I shall have to take you up there as soon as it gets light to-morrow morning and give you two hours of setting-up exercises."

"I shall look forward to it," I answered hollowly.

"I see," she went on, "you have engaged another odious valet."

"Horace," I returned defensively, "is not odious. He's the most capable man I ever had. You should see the way he knots a dinner tie."

Aunt Alice sniffed. "I don't want to intrude in your personal affairs, Edgar, but I am very much afraid you will have to give him notice. To me valets are an abomination. I have a long lecture to rehearse this afternoon and his presence would disturb me. Besides, it is really for your own good. A person who cannot tie his own cravat takes his place



with the representatives of the lowest form of animal life!"

Before I could reply to this compliment Horace staggered in under nineteen pounds of my aunt's luggage. She plucked a pigskin traveling bag out of the litter, opened it and thrust a fat volume into my hand.

"My latest *opus*, Edgar. Take it, study it, don't skip a word of it. At dinner hour to-night and for the rest of the week we will discuss each chapter. I shall expect you to be fully informed of the contents. You may retire to your chamber now and look over the first twenty-seven pages. I have a little writing to do."

I took the book into the bedroom, parked it in a closet with my rubbers, and waited until the coast was clear. Then I collected hat and coat and slipped down the hall.

I discovered that Horace was lurking around the foyer. "Ssh!" I whispered. "Not a word, Horace!"

He opened the door for me, smiling gently. "I shall serve dinner at six, sir," he murmured in a smooth, untroubled voice.

#### IV.

IT was ten minutes to six when I returned to St. Swithin Court, opened the front door of my apartment, and crept in. In the semidarkness of the foyer I stopped and listened for the baying of Aunt Alice.

The silence, however, was sweet and tranquil. Nothing disturbed it save the quiet footsteps of Horace in the dining room. Drawing a breath, I crossed my fingers and went down the corridor.

"Where," I inquired stealthily, "is my aunt?"

Horace, busy setting the table, arranged a knife and fork before he raised his head. "Your aunt," he replied quietly, "asked me to tell you that she has decided to stay at one of the downtown hotels, sir. She left several hours ago with her baggage."

There was a chair three feet away from me. I slid into it, sat down weakly and stared dumbly. "Gone!" I croaked. "Which—who—why?"

Horace placed a plate between the

knife and fork and filled a glass. "I rather imagine," he said with a cough, "that your aunt is not fond of animals. You see, sir, that Mr. Judson who was here the other day called about two o'clock with a particularly large and vicious specimen of hound. Your aunt was not at all taken with the beast, particularly when it growled and snapped at her. When she learned that you had purchased it, she packed and left in extreme haste; quite a sudden exit, sir."

I went over to the table and emptied the glass Horace had filled. "But I didn't tell Judson I wanted to buy any of his dogs!" I said.

A faint smile flitted across the expressionless face of Horace. "I am aware of that, sir. It happened, however, that the valet of the gentleman on the top floor told me his master was looking for a good watchdog. So I took the liberty of telephoning Mr. Judson and buying the dog for you. After your aunt left I took the animal upstairs and sold it. I might add, sir, that you made twenty-five dollars more than you paid for it."

"Er—you may hand me my cigarette case, Horace," I said. "You get the twenty-five as a bonus."

"Don't mention it."

"But you get it!" I cried.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Horace blushing deeply.

#### The Two Sides

NIXON: "Shanks is very narrow-minded in an argument!"

Dixon: "Not at all! He's always ready to admit that there are two sides to every question: his side and the wrong side!"

#### The Rabbit's "Anecdote"

WHAT is an anecdote, Johnny?" asked the teacher.

"A short, funny tale," answered the little fellow.

"Quite right," said the teacher; "and now, Johnny, you may write on the blackboard a sentence containing the word."

Johnny hesitated a minute, and then wrote: "A rabbit has four legs and one anecdote."



# Against Killing Odds —



By  
Burr Chapman Cook ~

(A NOVELETTE)

## CHAPTER I.

### BEFORE THE BIG GAME.



A CLOUD of gloom seemed to creep in with the chill wind, through windows and doors of the drafty Field House—a deeper reflection of the same cloud that had lowered over the campus and student body of State University for several weeks. The orange-and-blue team—sponsors of a proud tradition of football supremacy in the Middle West—had taken a bad slump. Something was wrong, but nobody seemed to know what the trouble was. They had been scored on all season and had barely won from the light Normal College eleven the week before.

"You fellows ought to be ashamed of yourselves," said Coach Milner, as he gazed down the room first at one player and then the next. Milner was an alumnus of the university, a product of the system of graduate training that had turned out winning elevens in the past. He was a tall, smooth-shaven man, somewhere in the thirties—prominent

jaw, small blue eyes, and a nose that had been broken below the bridge.

"Here it is, Saturday," he went on; "one week before the big game and the scrubs run through you like water through a sieve. What ails you fellows anyway?"

The snatches of laughter from beyond the partition separating the varsity quarters from those of the scrubs had died away. The second-team men were listening to the coach's words. The scrubs could afford to be a trifle hilarious. Their responsibilities consisted in giving the varsity a good work-out, and in this they had been highly successful. The scrubs, as Tim Tolliver expressed it, had an excellent "espre de corpse," in spite of the fact that they had been merely the battering dummies for the varsity team all season.

Milner continued: "It isn't because you don't know football. Every man of you has played on the varsity before—you're the pick of the university—and you come out and play like a lot of wooden Indians. It isn't fair to me. I've got a reputation at stake. You're my



team. I've drilled you and coaxed you, and sworn at you—and I want you to show something. There's just one thing about it: if you don't take a brace pretty soon Dinsmore is going to lick you—the same as they did last year. A bunch of the alumni are coming up to see you trim the brown and white and get square on the championship honors. If you don't do it, your name is mud, that's all! One more scrimmage next Wednesday—the last before the game—and I want you to show what you've got. It's your last chance."

He turned and made his way into the adjoining room, followed by the disgruntled glances of the players. His words had a double significance for many of the men—for Ellis, captain of the team, who would be graduated in the spring, and Wolcott at left tackle, MacCaulay at half back, and two or three others. It was not only a last opportunity to square things with Dinsmore, but a last chance to write their own names in the football annals of the university.

In the adjacent room the coach stopped for a word with the scrub players. "You fellows did well to-day," he said, with a grudging praise. "Stick to it. Last practice Wednesday. Played good football, Meredith," he added, as he passed a rangy, blond-haired chap by the door. "If we lose Saturday it won't be the fault of you scrubs." He turned and left the room.

Although words of praise were rare with Coach Milner they did not stir any great elation in Jim Meredith's breast. He smiled to himself as he continued his dressing. To big, earnest Holcomb, half back on the scrubs, or little Tim Tolliver, the second-team quarter back, such words of encouragement would have meant a great deal.

Meredith was an odd sort. It was his first season at the university—having transferred from a small college in the South the middle of the previous semester—and, although he was a good player, it was only under considerable persuasion that he had come out for the team at all. Whatever were the reasons for his indifference he kept them to himself. A likable, though rather taciturn indi-

vidual, he had won the regard of his small circle of acquaintances by his good-natured seriousness and a ready tolerance of other people's whims.

He continued his dressing, and a few minutes later stepped out of the Field House and drank in a deep breath of the crisp autumn air. As he struck off down the leaf-carpeted lane that led to the dormitories he glimpsed the lanky figure of Sol Holcomb plodding along ahead of him. His hands in his pockets, the big scrub half back was deep in thought.

"Howdy, Jim," responded the latter to Meredith's greeting. "See you got a rise out of Milner. Good work."

Meredith smiled, partly at the implied compliment, and partly at the glum countenance of his teammate. Day after day he had seen the latter playing superbly aggressive football, and he had often wondered why he was not given a chance on the varsity. His first team opponent, MacCaulay, was a much lighter man and not nearly as effective on the defense.

"What do you think is the trouble with the team, Sol?" Meredith ventured at length.

Holcomb turned with a hint of asperity in his manner. "If you want my candid opinion, Jim," he replied, "I think they've got men on the team who shouldn't be there. If Milner thinks you're playing good football, why doesn't he give you a chance in Wolcott's place? I know Wolcott is a letter man, played on the varsity all season, and all that; but personally I think he's a weak sister. And there are one or two others," he added under his breath.

Meredith digested his chum's remarks in silence as they continued their way. He had played opposite Wolcott most of the afternoon and had found no difficulty in opening holes through the latter's tackle. Wolcott was a stout youth, inclined to be fat, with ungainly hands which he sometimes used in doubtful conformity to the rules. Later on Ellis had changed places with Wolcott and then it had not been so easy.

Garbor Ellis, captain of the team, was medium-sized, but squarely built, with a remarkable muscular development. A



quick thinker and relentless in following up his advantages, he was a difficult man to play against. That same relentlessness had somewhat amused Meredith. It seemed to him that Ellis took his sport with an almost vindictive seriousness.

Both Wolcott and Ellis came from Meredith's home town, and his slight acquaintance with the latter had been brought about through their mutual interest in a young woman. Meredith had always maintained, to himself, that his interest in Mary Parker was only platonic; he liked her quick, decisive logic and keen wit. Since his entrance into the university he had lost touch with her.

His companion's voice roused Meredith from his meditation. "Leave you here," said Holcomb, as they came to a turn in the way. "See you at practice next Wednesday. It's the last chance we'll have to make a showing; but I'll bet you—even if we beat the varsity again—none of us will get a chance against Dinsmore."

"I'm afraid you're in a gloomy mood, Sol," said Meredith, laughing.

"Perhaps I am," returned the other; "but I'm out for the team. All I ask is a chance to make good, and it's plain they don't want me to have it. There's going to be a show-down for a couple of those birds pretty toot sweet. Wait and see! So long."

## CHAPTER II.

### CALL FOR ACHIEVEMENT.

MEREDITH was revolving his friend's words as he turned into the road leading past the chapel and fraternity houses, down to the campus. In the attitude of Ellis and the others he himself had sometimes felt a vague animosity. As he headed for his dormitory he cast a look back at the rows of fraternity houses, with their tomblike fronts. Wolcott and Ellis, in company with Coach Milner, were just entering one of the low, colonnaded porches.

Turning into the ivy-trellised building on the edge of the lawn, Meredith slowly climbed the four flights of stairs to his room. He felt tired; there was an unaccountable ache in his joints, not entirely attributable to the heavy exercise.

If it was a slight cold a good night's rest would rout it. Taking a book from the table he sank into a chair by the window. The evening breeze felt good on his flushed cheeks. From the campus came the sound of singing; somewhere a guitar was strumming idly; from farther off, subdued by distance, came the silvery quaver of a bell.

A knock sounded at the door; the latch was lifted, and a boy in the uniform of a messenger stuck his head in the opening. "Telegram for you, Mr. Meredith."

The student took the envelope, signed his name and handed the boy a coin. It was probably from the encyclopedia publishers. He had been obliged to cancel an order the previous week, and there had been some misunderstanding about it. Carelessly he unfolded the paper and read:

Come home over Sunday if possible. Want to see you. Very important. J. M.

He read the missive several times, puzzled. The governor, as he was accustomed to call his father, would not have telegraphed unless there had been some urgent reason; of that he felt assured. Rising from the chair, he put on his hat and left the room.

Two people were entering the dormitory as he descended the stairs—one a dark-haired young man in a blue serge suit, that set off his thin figure; the other a girl. Meredith blinked his eyes. The jaunty toque, the stylish simplicity of the gray traveling skirt, and the easy stride were unmistakable; it was Mary Parker. The young man with her was her brother. The girl's eyes met Meredith's and an exclamation of pleasure sprang to her lips.

"Well, Jim Meredith—of all people!" She crossed the hall and held out one firm, tanned hand. "Do come in for a minute," she added after the greetings were over and they had stepped down the hall to her brother's room. "I came on a little ahead of time for the game Saturday."

She tossed the straw toque on her brother's divan and sank into a Morris chair, a questioning smile on half-parted lips. She seemed to fit into her cozy disorder of the room, with her tumbled brown locks, the loose sport jacket, and



the trim skirt draped across one knee. The same wholesome vitality radiated from her, but it seemed to Meredith that she had changed; there was a challenging spirit of uneasiness in her manner.

Parker was lighting the student's lamp on the center table. "Sit down, Jim," he said. "Glad we ran across you. There's something I want to speak to you about."

Meredith took a chair by the window, opposite the girl. "Sorry I can stay only a few minutes," he said. "I'm going home over Sunday, and I've got to make reservations at the station before supper."

"Home?" queried the girl; her brother had excused himself and stepped into the adjoining room.

"Just got a telegram from my father this evening," continued Meredith, "asking me to run down. I don't know what for. He wants to see me about something or other. I'll be back Monday night, I guess. But tell me about yourself, Mary. It seems ages since I've seen you."

"There's nothing much to tell, Jim," answered the other. "Since we moved up on the Hill I've been doing nothing but assist at tea fights and coming-out parties—now and then a college prom thrown in for good measure. A futile existence! What about yourself? Lyle tells me you've been out for the team."

Meredith smiled. "I suppose you'd call it that," he responded. "I get my exercise going out there in the afternoons. It's better than fooling around the gym. Never thought particularly about making the team. I finished my course in higher mathematics this quarter; that's taken most of my time. But I'm getting along pretty well. Have only one more year." He smiled a trifle self-consciously, and fingered his watch chain. "It's been pretty hard work. My encyclopedias haven't been selling any too well. That's meant some extra jobs. Still, I guess it's worth it."

A dim tenderness crept into the girl's eyes, but presently lost itself in a mischievous sparkle. "The same old Jim, I see," she said. "Lyle says you ought to be on the team, and from all reports they need somebody. I can't imagine

any one but you going out for football just for the exercise."

"But I have the enjoyment of playing, and that's what the game is for, isn't it?" There was an amused twinkle in the clear, gray eyes.

"Still, I should think there would be an incentive in winning your letter," protested the girl. "It shows you've made good; it stands for a certain form of achievement. Besides, representing the university and helping it to attain athletic honors is surely commendable."

"Commendable, perhaps," agreed Meredith with a smile, "but only incidental. I'll let the other fellows take it seriously if they want to. Even if I am good enough to make the varsity, for example, there's no need of advertising the fact by sewing a two-foot letter S on my jersey. Sport is all right in its place, but it won't help me to get my engineering degree." He laughed softly.

"I wish I had time to convert you," the girl returned with a smile, as she glanced at the watch on her wrist. "I'm to meet Garbor Ellis at the hotel for supper, and I'd better be going." A slight irritation stole into her voice. "Really, Jim, you ought to convert yourself to an ardent interest in athletics. You're missing contacts and associations that might some day be of great benefit to you. I'm serious."

She rose, crossed to the divan, and put on her hat. Her mood changed. "I hope I'll see you again and we can have an old-fashioned chat. Good-by, Lyle," she said as she stepped to the door.

Meredith followed her and took the proffered hand.

She gave his hand a firm squeeze as she turned and crossed the threshold. "You're just a little old-fashioned, Jim," she called back. "But I still have hopes for you. Remember one thing: A girl likes achievement in a man—even the outward and visible signs of it. Good-by."

### CHAPTER III.

#### DROPPING A BOMB.

THE girl's parting words lingered in Meredith's mind as he turned back into the room to confront her brother. Lyle Parker was a year or two his



senior, more or less studious in his habits, but a keen observer of the life about him. It was his last year in college and as editor of the university paper *Topics* he enjoyed an enviable reputation among the student body. He accepted Meredith's apology for not being able to remain more than a moment with a quick nod of his head.

"Won't keep you a second, old man," he said as he balanced on the edge of his desk and lighted a cigarette. He spoke with a terse economy of words. "Everybody's wondering what's wrong with the team, Jim. I think I know what the trouble is."

He exhaled a puff of smoke and shot a sharp glance at his visitor. "I was out at practice this afternoon," he went on, "and I saw you second-team men outplay the varsity. I saw Ellis shift over and relieve Wolcott, when you began making it too hot for him. I wondered if the thing didn't strike you as odd?"

"They shift around that way occasionally," replied Meredith. "The left side of the line has always been a little weak."

"That's just the point," continued Parker quickly. "MacCaulay on the secondary defense has never played high-class football, and if Dinsmore wins, it's going to be by specially prepared plays through that side of the line. Wolcott and MacCaulay have played on the team all season, and they've made their letters; but they shouldn't be there. Holcomb ought to be in MacCaulay's place, you ought to be in Wolcott's tackle, and Tim Tolliver is a long sight better quarter back than Winch."

Meredith could not suppress a smile at his friend's vehemence. "I appoint you a committee of one, Lyle, to reorganize the team," he said.

"It wouldn't do any good," returned the other. "Do you know why? Because that team is a close corporation. They don't want any change. Did it ever occur to you that every man there is a fraternity or clubman—even Coach Milner. Ellis and Wolcott are members of the same society. MacCaulay and Winch and Randall, and all the rest of them are clubmen. They've formed a

mutual benefit association, whose purpose is to see that they get their letters and honors and social reputations at the expense of the rest of the college. That's why Ellis went to Wolcott's rescue; that's why they'll fight to a man to keep anybody off the team who doesn't belong to their particular cliques."

He snapped the half-finished cigarette into the grate and his thin lips pressed in a straight line. "That, in my opinion, is the trouble with the team," he went on. "Not that I blame the fraternities—my own or any other. But I do blame the men who are pushing themselves at their expense. It has come to the point where it means more to these fellows to say that their crowd has three letter men on the team, than to say that their college won the championship."

He took several paces up and down the room and stopped before his visitor in an attitude of sudden determination. "A bunch of the alumni coaches are coming up here Wednesday for the last scrimmage," he continued; "McCoy and Larned, and some of the other old-timers. I'm going to tell them what I think about it. It's a difficult situation, but I'm hoping there may be one or two with courage enough to face the issue."

"And after that?" inquired Meredith, smiling. He consulted his watch. His friend's relish for dropping bombs into the placid course of college events was proverbial.

"After that," replied Parker, "I'm going for them with the heavy artillery—and I want you to help." He placed a hand on his chum's arm. "Go out in earnest and show up Wolcott; show up the whole gang. I've watched you play, Jim, and you've got the makings of one of the best tackles in the game to-day. If you'd only try! If the scrubs win Wednesday I'm going to make it the subject of an editorial in *Topics* Thursday morning—expose the whole business. The system is wrong, Jim. It's abuse of privilege—against the best interests of the university, and it's got to be broken up. No clique can run this college and get away with it!"

He suddenly relaxed his tense manner and smiled, while he fished a second cigarette from the pocket of his coat.



"That's what I wanted to say—had to get it off my chest. Hope I haven't bored you."

Meredith paused on the threshold. "You may be right, Lyle," he conceded good-naturedly. "I'll do my part to help the scrubs win. But there may be a difference of opinion as to my merits—not that I don't appreciate the compliment."

"No compliment intended, I assure you," replied the other. "It's the principle of the thing that's important. I think there is an obligation to face the issue—even though you don't think it has any bearing on the real purpose of your college life. I'm inclined to think it has."

"I wonder," mused Meredith. "You're running true to form, old war horse. I'll see you later. So long."

Meredith buttoned his coat about him as he stepped down the hall and out into the chilly night. It was after seven—too late for supper at the commons—but he could get a bite at the station. A slight mist had risen, and the air was heavy with the prophecy of rain.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A SERIOUS MATTER.

MEREDITH rested his chin in his hand and gazed out of the train window at the panorama of landscape. He had left the university Sunday morning at seven; it was nearly ten o'clock and he would soon be tossed into the hurry and bustle of his native town. Always before, his homecomings had been brightened by the thought that Mary Parker was there to greet him. In the last year or so he had missed that prospect. The Parkers had moved to another part of the city, and he had not had as much opportunity of seeing her as formerly.

Pittsfield was a large manufacturing town, the capital of the State. Both Ellis and Wolcott were sons of prominent citizens; they lived on the Hill—a semi-suburban district that had been developed by the wealthier business men—and Meredith had never had occasion to make their acquaintance until he had gone to the university.

It occurred to him that these fellows would have assured places provided for them when they were graduated; they possessed the contacts of which Mary Parker had spoken. His father's business connections were not large enough to provide him with any very influential friends. John Meredith was a contractor—a careful, painstaking workman of the old school, who had never, through an inherent dislike or incapacity for pulling strings, availed himself of the full opportunities the growing city provided. Of late years, however, he had been comfortably occupied.

The train was nearing the city; Meredith rose and prepared to leave. A good night's rest had not, as he had expected, routed the ache in his limbs, and a certain tightness in his throat and a dull throb in his head advertised the fact that he was saddled with a disagreeable cold.

Presently they were in the station, and, slinging his coat over his arm, he descended to the platform and made his way to the street. A short trolley ride, and he was again before the brownstone house—looking so smugly like its neighbors—where his father lived with a widowed sister. The latter greeted him with a motherly welcome and he was soon installed in his own room.

Everything was much as he had left it—the red carpet on the stairs, the parlor with its shrouded, stiff-packed furniture, the severe appointments of his father's study. Mr. Meredith had just returned from a stroll before dinner, and he greeted his son with an awkward affection. He was a medium-sized man, somewhere in the late fifties, with strong, heavily veined hands and a broad, weather-beaten face. His hair was tinged with gray and the deep-set eyes were hedged about with innumerable tiny lines.

They sat down to dinner, and the conversation touched upon trivial affairs, but Meredith could see that the "governor" was worried. The gray head bowed over his plate with a weary resignation, foreign to his usual demeanor. It was not until they were alone in the quiet study that the older man unburdened his mind.

"Jim," he began, "I'm sorry I had to send for you, but I'm up against a seri-



ous business proposition, and if things break against me it's going to mean that your old man is down to bedrock."

He hesitated an instant as though undecided how to approach his subject, passed one hand across his eyes, then continued:

"Things were going well, up to about four months ago, and then I began losing some city contracts I ought, by rights, to have had. I didn't understand what was going on until last month when I sent in bids on the swamp reclamation. My figures were the lowest the city got, but the work was turned over to Dave Wolcott. Same thing happened with two or three other jobs."

He paused and leaned forward in his chair, his gray eyes abstractly following the figures in the rug at his feet.

"Things came to a show-down last week," he went on more slowly. "About a year ago I got the contract for the dam below the river at Fallsburg, and we started work on it last summer. I got the pilings sunk when along comes a State inspector and condemns my work. They claimed my abutments weren't strong enough to hold the force of the water. I've got affidavits from experts to prove my work is O. K., but they just won't listen.

"Well, it was serious business for me because, lately, I've had to depend more and more on the river work for my revenue. To make a long story short, I put the thing in the hands of a lawyer, and the case comes up for a final hearing next Friday."

He leaned back and there was a worried frown between the deep-set eyes.

"There's a clique up at the State house, Jim," he said, "who are trying to run me out of business. Harrigan and Ogden and myself are the only outside contractors who've had any work since this bunch got in. Charlie Ellis is the head of the outfit; he's been the big boss here ever since he cleaned up on the traction monopoly over a year ago. They've built up a close corporation. A couple of months ago the *Courier* started a campaign against Ellis, and they run the paper out of business. It's consolidated now with the *Ledger*—and everybody knows where the *Ledger* stands.

It's controlled by Joe MacCaulay, and he's hand and glove with Ellis.

"That's the story, Jim. Looks as if they had your old dad beaten. It all depends on the decision of the courts, and I'm afraid they got a strangle hold on the courts, too." His voice broke and filled with emotion. "They've formed a small ring of monopolists—Ellis, Wolcott, MacCaulay and Company—whose aim is to kill fair competition and run the business of this city and State to suit themselves. They ought to be run out of town, but instead they're looked on as representative citizens, build fine mansions on the Hill, and let the taxpayers do the worrying."

He ran one hand disconsolately through his heavy locks.

"It doesn't seem fair. For thirty years I've been in the contracting business, and I've done my work the best I knew how. The trouble is, I never took politics seriously; it's a game I left to the wise fellows, and I never thought it would interfere with my business. But politics has got into the State, Jim, and its driving decent trade to the wall."

He crossed to the window, his deep-veined hands clasped behind him, and stood for a moment gazing out at the dingy apartments that crowded on all sides, as though they resented the feeble intrusion of sunlight that found its way into the yard.

Meredith rose and placed one hand tenderly on the governor's shoulders. His eyes held a smoldering fire and the usually amiable expression of his face had changed. Beneath the surface of his father's talk he had read the bitter disappointment, the crumbling of long-cherished ambitions.

"I'm sorry, governor," he said with deep sincerity. "I know how you feel about it."

The older man slowly turned. "It's hard right now, Jim. I always wanted to do more for you, Jim," he added, a slight catch in his voice; "but unless things turn out my way Friday I'm afraid even the little I've been doing's got to stop. That's the reason I wanted to see you, and prepare you for what may happen."

"Don't you worry," said Meredith,



trying to inject a note of encouragement in his voice. "I'll cut out college and come home and help. We'll pitch in together and show them where they get off."

"I set my heart on your having a university training, Jim," replied the other with a pleading look in his tired eyes. "And I want you to stick it out—if you possibly can. If the case is decided in my favor we can get along all right. I want you to go back to college. Promise me you'll do that."

"All right, governor—I'll see."

For some minutes both men sat in silence. The pale filter of sunlight had departed, leaving the little room wrapped in a premature dusk. From the street sounded the jangle of trolley cars, or now and then horses' hoofs, clattering on the cobblestones. A brooding quiet followed these fragmentary reminders of the busy world that moved outside. Meredith clasped his strong hands on his knees, his eyes staring vacantly before him. Vaguely he felt his hopes closing in on him. It meant the end of his dreams, his graduation—all his high ambitions.

The muffled clatter from the kitchen—where his aunt busied herself with the dishes—wafted in to him, ludicrously magnified in the tragedy of the moment, as though the business of washing dishes was some necessity that persisted in spite of all else. And slowly, deliberately, out of the *mêlée* of conflicting thoughts came Lyle Parker's words of the previous afternoon: "The system is wrong, Jim. No clique can run this college and get away with it."

The muscles of his throat contracted and his hands clenched. Here was a replica of the same clique rule, the same attempt to stifle fair competition. It was as though a white light of understanding had suddenly flared before the young man's eyes.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SCRUBS MUST WIN.

ON Tuesday morning Meredith returned to college. His cold had settled into a racking cough, with sharp pains through his shoulders, and now and then a feverish flush suffused his

face. His personal discomforts, however, were obliterated in the overshadowing seriousness of the moment. His mind was made up; he would leave college at the end of the week and go home and help his father. It was going to be a hard sacrifice, but his duty plainly lay with the man who had been making sacrifices for him ever since he was born.

There was only one lecture in the afternoon and he spent most of the day packing. That night he passed in a restless, tossing slumber broken by fantastic dreams. He awoke Wednesday morning hot and feverish, a little giddy and unstable on his feet. He felt that it would be wise to see the doctor, but there were a multitude of small details to be looked after—a letter to the encyclopedia publishers, straightening out his bank balance, the preparation of his afternoon lectures, and the morning had passed before he knew it.

He ate very little for lunch and returned to his room to find Lyle Parker waiting to see him. The latter scanned his face anxiously.

"What's the matter, Jim—aren't you feeling well?"

"Just a bad cold, I guess," Meredith replied, as he sank weakly into a chair. "I'll be all right later on."

"Hope so," said the other, "because we want to turn the trick this afternoon. Judge Larned and four or five other alumni coaches are in town. I'm going up to see Larned now—just thought I'd drop in for a second. Take care of yourself. The scrubs have got to win, and it's up to you, Jim, to see that they do." He picked up his hat and crossed to the door. "I'll see you on the field. So long."

Meredith threw himself on the bed. He had been only half conscious of his friend's words—something about the scrubs winning. There was a fierce ache in his head and he had difficulty in collecting his thoughts. The scrubs must win! Some nebulous idea connected with that fact strove to rise above the feverish tangle of his thoughts, but he couldn't grasp it. It worried him. There was something he had wanted to tell Parker, but the whole business had slipped his mind.



At four o'clock that afternoon there was a curious crowd of spectators out for the final practice. Only straight football was to be used and the coaches had decided to open the gates to as many of the student body as wished to witness the scrimmage. It might act as an incentive to the men. The day was cold and raw, with slinking clouds sending fitful showers of rain. In the lower bleachers were clustered a small crowd of students in their rubber slickers, while a sprinkling of townspeople stood in isolated groups on the higher tiers of seats.

Meredith, wrapped in his heavy jersey, idly passed the ball among the circle of scrub players, who were waiting for the scrimmage to commence. He barely realized how he had got there; some mechanical force of habit had driven him, shivering, into his damp football togs. McCoy and Larned and some of the other alumni coaches were standing about, talking in undertones, eying the players with a professional concern. There was a peculiar silence among the men. The feeling of doubt as to the outcome of the game with Dinsmore had congealed into a definite apprehension. This scrimmage assumed the proportions of a last test. If anything could be done to strengthen the shrinking hopes of the university team, now was the final opportunity.

Presently Coach Milner's whistle shrilled on the air and the players began taking their positions. It was to be a regular game of four short, ten-minute quarters. Meredith tossed off his sweater and trotted onto the field, beating his arms to keep the blood in circulation against the chill wind. The damp air irritated him into fits of coughing, and his face felt hot.

Captain Ellis was adjusting the ball for the kick-off. Behind him Meredith noticed the tall figure of Holcomb, his lips pressed in a thin line—waiting. Something in the big half back's attitude recalled their conversation of the previous Saturday. It was Holcomb's last chance, and he was going to make the most of it. Tolliver, the scrub's wiry little quarter back, was dancing on his toes, but there was a grave expression on his usually grinning countenance. The

chirping banter of small talk, with which he fortified his second team's famous "espre de corpse," was missing.

The whistle blew. There was a rush of pounding feet—a dull thud—and the game was on!

For a few minutes, with the feel of the spongy turf beneath his feet, the short breathless movements, the straining of muscles as his body met the shock of opposing players, Meredith forgot his troubles. He was not up to his usual form, however; the heavy exercise brought a bright flush to his cheeks, and his head began aching with a dull, annoying ache.

The play got under way, and it was soon apparent that the first team had taken a brace. In spite of all the scrubs could do, the former secured the ball on downs and began forcing their way toward the latter's goal, working with a machinelike regularity. With their new orange-and-blue jerseys and shining headgear, they formed a flattering contrast to the nondescript attire of the second team. The psychological effect of their appearance seemed to be reflected in their actions. Again Meredith sensed that peculiar spirit of animosity, of vindictiveness in the attitude of the men facing him. It aroused in him a feeling of personal resentment.

Perhaps the other scrub players sensed the same thing, for they began playing with a sullen abandon, hurling themselves viciously against the varsity's attack. For a time things were more evenly balanced. Tolliver recovered a fumble and got away for a short run, and by the time the first quarter was called, the ball was again in the center of the field.

The teams gathered together on opposite sides of the field and Meredith threw his sweater about him and listened subconsciously to the tirade of the coaches. His face was hot and moist and a faint chill ran up and down his spine. The smug smile on the face of Wolcott, who played opposite him, kept flitting before his eyes. The latter seemed to appreciate Meredith's condition, and he had taken particular pains to pile up on plays, even after the dawn had been called, if in so doing he could add a



blow or thrust of his knee at his scrub rival.

As the teams assembled on the field Meredith caught a glimpse of Lyle Parker in conversation with "Big Bill" Larned. He knew Larned by sight; everybody in the university knew him, if not by sight, at least by reputation. He had captained one of the big elevens that had made football history in the later nineties. He was a large-boned man, partially bald, with penetrating blue eyes that seemed always to be weighing the object of their contemplation. The moment they ceased their scrutiny one knew that the brain behind them had formed an irrevocable decision.

Perhaps it had been this same talent for careful appraisal that had elevated him, in his practice of the law, to the position of a judge of the supreme court of the State. No matter how pressing his professional duties, however, Big Bill Larned always found time to return to his alma mater during the football season to help with the final training of the team.

As Meredith took his place in line Lyle's words of the previous Saturday recurred to his mind. "The system is wrong, Jim. It's an abuse of privilege—against the best interests of this university. No clique can run this college and get away with it."

Resolutely he braced himself and followed through the motions of the game.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A MAGIC WORD.

LIKE a small contact plug the word "clique" electrified a train of submerged thoughts in his half-numbed brain. There was a rush of feet, an impact of heavy bodies, a wrench at his shoulder, and he was smothered beneath an avalanche of red and blue jerseys. As he slowly extricated himself from the tangle of arms and legs, his eyes lighted for a brief moment on Ellis and Wolcott, consulting in hurried undertones. MacCaulay, the varsity half back, was just rising from his plunge through the line.

For a second Meredith forgot where he was; there was a dizzy whirling be-

fore his eyes, and he dropped his arms at his side, staring at the men opposite him as though, for the first time, he took cognizance of their presence.

"Ellis, Wolcott, MacCaulay and Company!"

Some one was calling his name, and he stumbled back into position, only half aware of what he was doing. There came a bark of signals. He braced his hands in the mud. Wolcott's long, ungainly fingers slapped against his shoulders, twisting him off his balance. There was a blow against his chest, a clawing and trampling on his legs and arms, and before he realized what was happening a cross-tackle play had smashed through him for a five-yard gain.

He was a little bewildered as he rose into place again.

"Ellis, Wolcott, MacCaulay and Company!" The words kept ding-donging through his head. For a space he seemed to be sitting again in the governor's study, the pale filter of sunlight tracing patterns on the ceiling, while his father's voice sounded dully in his ears.

"There's a clique up at the State house, Jim, who are trying to run me out of business. They've formed a small circle of monopolists whose aim is to kill fair competition and run the business of this city and State to suit themselves."

Meredith never knew what happened to him in the next few minutes. The play had come again at his side of the line, but with a surge of blind anger he hurled himself into it. There was no gain. Suddenly the whole thing became incandescent; the nebulous thoughts that had been lurking in back of his fever-racked brain sprang into his consciousness. That was it! The same system that was turning against the interests of his home town, his State, and his father, was trying to dominate his university, his team, and himself. He forgot his illness, the throbbing pain in his head, everything but the fact that he was fighting a close corporation, a clique, led by the sons of the very men who were driving his father to the wall!

Once again the play came at him. He clenched his teeth and flung himself against Wolcott, the latter's long fingers clutching at him, but unable to impede



his drive. As the players were regaining their feet, he felt some one's knee jerked clumsily against his chin; it was too forceful a blow to be entirely accidental.

The teams were again in the middle of the field. So far matters had stood about even, with the varsity keeping the ball in the scrubs' territory most of the time. But now a change seemed to come over the scrubs. Meredith had forgotten his former amiable tolerance. His face was taut and white and he began to call sharp commands to his teammates. Three successive plays were hurled into Wolcott's tackle, Holcomb carrying the ball each time for substantial gains. A thrill of excitement ran through the group of silent spectators in the stands. The second team had taken a new lease of life.

The coaches on the side lines saw what was happening. The scrubs, who had been fighting an aimless defensive battle, now had a leader, and they were taking the initiative, responding to the call of leadership.

Slowly but surely the varsity was forced back. There were no smiles now on the faces of the players, no easy indulgence of small infractions of the rules. Every point, every inch of ground, was hotly disputed. During the intermission between the second and third quarters the coaches had very little to say. Some of them may have grasped the essence of drama in the situation, as though each side represented not so much competing skill and strength, as two conflicting points of view.

Perhaps Big Bill Larned could have analyzed the situation more definitely. He had stood beside Milner and followed each play with a close interest. As the scrubs began slowly to force their way down the field his steady blue eyes lighted with a humorous smile. When the whistle called the players to position for the third quarter he crossed to the scrub team and placed his hand on Meredith's shoulder.

"Good work, old man!" he said. "Break it up!"

Meredith smiled wanly as he went back to his position. His face was burning and his arms ached, but this was no time to be thinking of personal discom-

forts. Too much was at stake! He caught another glimpse of Lyle Parker, paper pad and pencil in hand, crouching behind the goal posts. He had promised Lyle that he would help the scrubs win. Lyle wanted to prove his theory; Meredith had felt the bitter truth of that theory with all its injustice.

The scrubs had the ball on the varsity's twenty-five-yard line. Tolliver was snapping off the signals. Again the play crashed into Wolcott's tackle for a small gain. His rangy opponent was glowering at Meredith with an angry scowl, and the long fingers began to close whenever they braced against the latter's shoulders. Twice Meredith shook himself loose from the other's clutch before he shot him a brief word of warning.

"You shut your mouth!" retorted Wolcott sourly.

Meredith squared his jaws and an unpleasant gleam sprang into his blood-shot eyes. Tolliver's signals were piping on the air.

"Change signal!" called out Meredith, half rising from his place in the line. "Send Holcomb through this tackle."

A surprised look passed over the faces of the varsity players, and Winch, the quarter back, shifted beside MacCauley on the secondary defense. Milner crouching on the side lines muttered something under his breath. The groups in the stands were strangely quiet.

The ball snapped into play. Wolcott's long arms were thrust out before him. With one sweep of his shoulder Meredith knocked them up, and lunging into the other's chest, literally lifted him in the air and flung him savagely back against the crouching MacCaulay. Holcomb charged after him for a five-yard gain. Wolcott was a moment recovering his feet; he slunk into line and gritted his teeth, returning Meredith's impassive stare with one of smoldering hate.

A second time the play was directed at Wolcott, and a second time Holcomb gained the necessary distance. They were on the varsity's fifteen-yard line, with first down and goal to go. Presently Captain Ellis motioned to Wolcott to take his place, and he himself crouched opposite Meredith, his muscular arms braced for the attack. Whatever was



going on in the varsity captain's mind was undiscernible in the expressionless cast of his face. Only the compressed lips and snapping black eyes indicated the stress of emotion under which he was laboring.

The same look was on the faces of the other varsity players. The scrubs—this bunch of second-raters—were outplaying them. There was more implied in the fact than the challenge to their individual positions. They were conscious parts of a system; they had accepted their preferment with the understanding that they could show cause why they should have been preferred above the others. And now—before representatives of the student body and the watchful eyes of the coaches—these others were showing themselves superior. Thoughts of the Dinsmore game faded into the background. There was no reserve now; they were playing with everything that was in them. It was self-preservation.

Three times the scrubs drove at the varsity line, and each time failed to gain. Once Ellis tricked Meredith out of position and slipped through to spill the play. The former was still comparatively fresh, and on offense and defense he kept pounding at his opponent with a cruel, relentless fury.

The duel between them, concealed from the spectators, and only partially revealed to the men on the side lines, was bitter and without quarter. Every ruse that the varsity captain had used against him in past practices Meredith turned on his rival. But the latter checkmated each new move by the strength and agility of his play. It was a veritable Titans' struggle, and when the whistle blew ending the quarter both men threw themselves exhausted on the ground.

## CHAPTER VII.

### IN DESPERATE STRAITS.

MEREDITH opened his eyes. His name was being called and some one was shaking him by the shoulder. "Come on, Jim—last quarter."

It was Lyle Parker's voice in his ears. He sat up and threw off the blanket he had wrapped about him. The players were again assembling on the field.

"You're all right, aren't you, Jim?" inquired Parker, after gazing at him a moment. "This is our last chance, old man. We've got to beat them. Everything depends on it!"

If Lyle only knew how much depended on it! Beat them? The scrubs would beat them if it took the last ounce of Meredith's physical and moral courage. "No clique can run this college and get away with it."

He stumbled onto the field and took his place in the line. "Beat them! Beat them!" The words formed a monotonous refrain in his head. Fragmentary, elusive pictures flashed before his eyes: First, the dusk-filled study in his governor's house, then Lyle Parker, resting on the edge of his desk, a cigarette glowing between his fingers, and his dark eyes blazing with conviction as he talked. Then, a vision of blue eyes and a small head of tousled brown locks, framed in a doorway, smiling at him with a faintly ironical smile.

"You're just a little old-fashioned, Jim, but I still have hopes for you. Remember one thing, Jim, a girl likes achievement in a man."

Meredith sank his fingers in the mud and looked up to see the grim, stony face of Ellis watching him warily. Again the play began. Time after time the weary varsity backs threw themselves against the stubborn scrub line, only to gain a trifling advance. The ball passed to the second team and the latter reopened their attack toward the varsity goal. Twice Meredith succeeded in opening holes through Ellis by sheer brute force, but each effort was a severe demand on his strength.

As though they realized that he was the mainstay of the second team's stiff opposition the varsity players began to concentrate the fury of their resentment—grown personal by now—on Meredith. When he lay at the bottom of the play they piled up on him. Once his faded blue jersey was half ripped off him, his face scarred and splotted with mud.

But Meredith got up, shook his head and stumbled back into place. At length the scrubs had forced the varsity to the five-yard line. One more plunge ought



to do the trick. A thrust at the right tackle had failed. It was the next to the last down. Tolliver was barking out the signals; weary as he was, the plucky little quarter back was snapping off his numbers with a precision and verve that sent a thrill of confidence into the scrub players. For an instant Meredith's senses recovered their full command, the pain above his eyes slackened slightly, and he turned his head with a frowning command:

"Change signals, Tolliver! Give Holcomb the ball!"

Lyle Parker, on bended knees behind the goal posts, heard the words, and a thin smile flirted over his lips and disappeared. Ellis, crouching opposite Meredith, dug his feet in the turf and waited; he was tired, the constant battering attack was beginning to tell, even on his rugged stamina. Tolliver shook his head dubiously, glanced once at the coaches clustered on the side lines, and then bent down behind center.

"Change signal! eleven—fourteen—twenty-one—seven!"

Meredith drew a deep breath and tensed his quivering muscles. It was through his tackle. The ball snapped back. He swung to the left. There was a rush of feet behind him. Ellis had not budged. And then, with a mighty lunge of his broad shoulders, Meredith threw his weight against his opponent.

For a brief second Ellis partly rose and strained to meet the attack, but his own powerful defense was not equal to the savage determination of the man opposite him. MacCaulay, excited and forgetting to wait for the runner, threw his body into the breach against Meredith's towering hulk, followed by Wolcott and Winch. From the side lines it looked as though the big scrub tackle was to be smothered beneath the angry wave of red and blue jerseys. But suddenly the wave rose to a peak, pinioned on Meredith's shoulders, toppled backward, and was hurled to the ground.

The scrubs had gained three precious yards. The lines were forming again. With an awkward deliberation Meredith found his place. His lips were mumbling; dark shadows kept flitting before his eyes. There was one last chance to

make it! Tolliver was barking off the signals. Suddenly Meredith rose and sprang behind Tolliver, a wild, delirious gleam in his eyes.

"Give me that ball, Tim," he called hoarsely. "Give me the ball. I'm going through the center of that line, and *they can't stop me!*"

Tolliver jerked his head around with a bewildered look. But before he could speak the tall figure of Holcomb had brushed by him, almost lifted the center out of his place, and himself crouched over the ball.

"Go to it, Tim," called back the latter, as he shoved the center man toward Meredith's vacant tackle. "Give Jim the ball. We'll show these birds where they get off!" He turned back and faced the astonished varsity players. The latter's secondary defense had closed in behind center. An impulsive burst of applause sounded from the bleachers. Tolliver bent down and called the signals. The ball snapped back. The quarter back spun on his heel holding it out for Meredith. A brief instant of delay. The lines met. Holcomb's broad shoulders burrowed into the pile of players in front of him. And then, with a last gathering of his strength, a sharp intake of breath, Meredith clasped the pigskin to him and drove straight for the center.

There was a resounding thud as he hit the line—his legs plowing through with the furious impact of his assault. A cry of pain rang out from the tangled mass of men. The formation wavered, shook, split in the middle and Meredith shot through. Only MacCaulay and Winch remained between him and the goal. Instead of avoiding them Meredith lowered his head and lunged directly at the two men. With a brutal kick of his knee he caught the quarter back in the pit of the stomach and the man collapsed with a moan. MacCaulay sprang at him and with an angry snarl Meredith plunged full into the varsity player. The latter's fingers slipped to his ankles; Meredith started to fall, but with a final effort tore himself free, half spun around, hesitated an instant as though waiting for another attack, and then toppled across the goal. The whistle blew. The scrubs had won.



# CHAPTER VIII.

## A BEARER OF GOOD NEWS.

WHEN Meredith again opened his eyes he was lying on the cot in his own room. The lamp on the center table cast a glare into his face, and he turned his head feebly to observe two men standing beside him, talking in undertones. In the distance sounded the tolling of a bell, and from somewhere below came the idle twanging of a guitar. It was all vaguely familiar.

A momentary return of the feverish weakness stole over him, and a succession of distorted pictures flashed before his eyes; a stony face close to his own, that grimaced at him—and then the governor's figure standing with bowed head while a man in flowing robes rose and denounced him—a pair of tantalizing blue eyes, laughing mockingly—and finally, himself, dressed in his best clothes, a suit case in his hand, boarding a train.

Why was he lying there? There had been a racking pain in his head but it had miraculously disappeared. Then he remembered! His glance returned to the two men and met the eyes of Lyle Parker regarding him with concern.

"Hello, Jim! Feel all right now?"

Meredith nodded. The other man turned toward him; he was elderly, with gray hair and spectacles.

"All right, Mr. Meredith," remarked the latter. "A good night's rest will fix you up. Just a bad touch of malarial fever, but you've worked through most of it. If you had gone to bed two days ago and taken care of yourself, you wouldn't be where you are. I'll drop around in the morning." He crossed the room, picked up a small black bag, and stepped out of the door.

Meredith looked up at Parker with a puzzled frown. "What's it all about, Lyle?" he inquired weakly.

"You passed out after that last rush, Jim," responded the other. "We got you back here as soon as we could. It's all right old man. You played a wonderful game; the whole college is talking about it. And we've proved our theory. We've broken up the system."

Meredith closed his eyes, trying to digest the import of the words.

"I saw Judge Larned after the scrimmage," continued Parker. "He didn't say much, but they're going to have a conference of the coaches to-morrow morning."

Meredith dropped back on the pillows. They had broken up the system. Lyle had been right. It was strange how his studies had suddenly receded into the background, how everything that seemed of importance before was revolving about the game that he had considered merely a means of taking exercise.

He smiled to himself as his eyes lighted on the calendar above his desk. Then the smile faded from his face and a mist gathered in his tired eyes. The next day was Thursday. On Friday his father's case came up for trial.

The next afternoon a knock sounded on Meredith's door. He had been up and about all morning—a little weak, but none the worse for wear. Standing on the threshold, a duster over one arm, and a faint smile in his penetrating blue eyes, was Big Bill Larned. The latter stepped in and gave the young man before him a grasp of the hand.

"Hello, Meredith!" he said, ignoring the chair the other offered him. "My name's Larned. Only going to stay a minute—car's waiting for me. How do you feel—all right?"

"A little shaky," said Meredith; "but I'll be all right in a day or so."

"Fine! I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed watching you play yesterday," continued the other. "Your friend Parker has told me of the situation here—although I rather suspected something of the kind—and I believe we owe you a real debt of gratitude. It may be some recompense to you to know that we have decided to put you in the game Saturday in Wolcott's place. There is going to be a little shake-up on the team—Holcomb and Tolliver in place of Mac-Caulay and Winch." He smiled. "We've got to beat Dinsmore this year, and if you play the way you did yesterday I think we can do it."

His eyes were observing the youth before him with a thoughtful glance.

"By the way," he added, "Parker tells me you come from Pittsfield."

Meredith nodded.



"Graduate this year?"

"Next year," answered the other.

"Look me up some time, will you?" said the older man as he turned toward the door. "We need a few young fellows down there who aren't afraid to stand up and fight for a principle. You're not a fraternity man, are you, Meredith?"

The latter shook his head.

"If you should have the opportunity of joining one," went on the other, "and I shouldn't be surprised if you did, don't let this experience deter you. Remember that institutions—excellent in themselves—are often exploited by unscrupulous individuals. And put everything into football that you would put into any other pursuit. It's a good game; it teaches a fellow to play hard—but on the level. Good-by. See you Saturday." He disappeared down the stairs.

There was a peculiar elation in Meredith's breast as he turned back into the room. He wished he could see Mary Parker and tell her the news—that he was going to play against Dinsmore, that he was going to fight for all he was worth, not only to win his letter, but to represent his university and help it to attain athletic honors.

## CHAPTER IX.

### RESULT OF A CLASSIC.

THE following day passed with the usual routine, but all through it Meredith was anxious and ill at ease. That afternoon his governor's case came up for the final hearing. He felt that he ought to be there. In his mind's eye he could see the courtroom, filled with official dignitaries, his father standing up before them, pleading for the square deal that would probably be denied him. He ought to get news Saturday morning, or early in the afternoon at the latest.

When he returned from lunch Saturday noon there was still no word. At two o'clock he left for the field. For three days the town had been filling with excited visitors—old alumni, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, professional men—all the human kaleidoscope that makes such an occasion something more than a spectacle of athletic prowess.

Flags and bunting flapped in the breeze, small urchins noisily peddled their programs, and down by the field the long lines of decorated automobiles slowly inched their way toward the arena.

Meredith got into his clothes, the new orange-and-blue jersey feeling snug and comfortable after the dirty sweater he had worn on the scrubs, and with Holcomb and Tolliver, made his way to the field. What followed was always to remain dreamily intangible—the bedlam of cheers, the packed mass of brown and white of the Dinsmore rooters, and the colorful orange and blue of his own contingent.

Crowds were still pouring into the grounds, autos honking and sputtering their way into the parking space behind the south goal, as Meredith tossed off his blanket and prepared to go onto the field. A mud-spattered car was just turning into the grounds. As it came opposite the players' bench Big Bill Larned jumped out and crossed to the group of State coaches.

Next he was on the field, waiting for the kick-off, and finally crouching opposite a brown-and-white player, feeling the exhilarating contact of heavy bodies, the rush of feet, the straining of nerve and muscle.

Dinsmore, aggressive and confident, with a proud record of ten victories and no defeats, forced the play the greater part of the first two quarters. But State University fought hard and valiantly. There was an odd spirit among the men. Except for the patter of talk from Tolliver, or an occasional word of command from Ellis, they remained silent. Their stern, set faces however, evinced the fact that it was not the silence of hopelessness or defeat, but a grim determination to vindicate themselves before the student body. Every foot that was lost made them rise to greater heights of battle. And State University vindicated herself magnificently. The game, which proved a classic in the football history of the Middle West, gave Meredith his great opportunity. It gave him his chance to fight for his university, to win for her, to make his letter. And he did all three.

An hour after the game Meredith left



the Field House and climbed the path that led to the campus. The air was odorous with the scent of bonfires; groups of singing undergraduates rolled by, arm in arm. Workmen were stringing lamps along the walk leading to the rotunda. Now and then some one would recognize him and call his name across the lawn with words of congratulation.

He hurried along, abstractly conscious of it all, but burdened with a vague fear. Entering the dormitory, he took the stairs to his room, three steps at a time. For a moment he paused to accustom his eyes to the fading light. On one corner of his desk lay a thin, yellow envelope. He approached it gingerly and then, tossing his cap in a corner, picked up the missive and tore it open.

Case decided in my favor. Judge Larned renders decision. Malicious restraint of trade and fair competition. We win. Write later.  
GOVERNOR.

A lump rose in Meredith's throat, and for a minute his eyes grew misty. It seemed as though some confused cycle of events, into which he had been projected almost against his will, was rounding out with a strange dramatic coherence.

His glance lighted on the open trunk across the room, and even as he looked a slow realization of what had happened dawned on him. It meant that everything he had steeled himself to give up could still be his. The to-morrows and to-morrows that went on into another full year were still tangible possibilities—with all their high hopes and dreams of achievement. Achievement! Even the outward and visible signs of achievement.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs. There was a sharp knock at the door, and he opened to disclose Lyle and Mary Parker standing on the threshold. Meredith rose hastily to his feet and returned the congratulations with an embarrassed smile.

"Thank you," he said. "I did the best I knew how, because—because I wanted to see the old university win."

He caught the girl's eyes regarding him with a deep, inscrutable look.

"Come downstairs, Jim," said Parker.

"We're going to have a celebration. There's a bunch there now waiting for you—Holcomb and Tolliver, and a crowd of others." Catching Meredith's gaze fastened on his sister with a strange intensity, Parker tactfully retreated to the door. There was a rare smile on his lips. "Come when you get ready," he called back. "I'll tell them you're on your way." His footsteps sounded down the hall and Meredith crossed to the girl. Their hands met.

"You were right, Mary," he said, "about a lot of things."

She gave his hand a gentle squeeze.

"So were you, Jim. Lyle told me everything. I'm proud of you."

There followed a brief pause in which each looked deep into the other's eyes.

The girl broke the silence. "Let's go down with the others. I've got lots of things I want to talk over with you."

Meredith smiled contentedly as he felt the other's arm slipped into his own, and allowed himself to be piloted to the door. "Some time—if you say so—we'll have another old-fashioned chat, Mary," he told her.

"To-night—after the movies," she replied, and pressed close to him as they stepped into the hall.

### Absolutely Correct!

WHY is a black hen cleverer than a white hen?" asked the small boy slyly, at the breakfast table.

"I don't know, sonny," said his father; "that's a puzzle, I think."

"Oh, no," replied the boy triumphantly; "it's because a black hen can lay a white egg, but a white hen cannot lay a black egg."

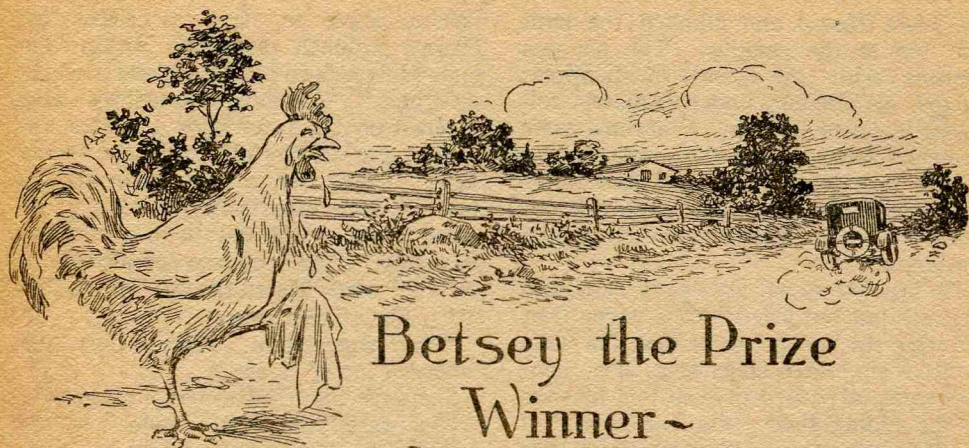
### Always the Same

YES," said the prospective buyer; "I always judge an automobile by its engine."

"But don't you pay any attention to its finish?" asked the seller, who had been extolling the upholstery and trimmings.

"Never! My cars always have the same finish—a brick wall or a ditch."





## Betsey the Prize Winner ~

By Thomas Thursday ~

**T**HE ten white-topped tents of the Younger Brothers World's Greatest Carnival glittered in the sunlight of Anchorville, Nebraska. The manager, Tim Mackensie, had walked around the midway, noted that the set-ups were punk, then chewed his cigar in disgust. The city council had inspected the outfit, demanded the removal of the hootchy-kootchy show on the ground of too-short skirts, after which they accepted fifty dollars from Tim, then retired to their checker playing. And so—— But let's get down to business.

Come around and have a look at the side show—always a chief attraction with a carnival outfit, provided, of course, that it has been assembled by a showman and not a sock manufacturer. The banner, depicting ten great attractions—they're always great, you know—flapped in the breeze, engaging the attention of early natives.

In the center, we observe the bizarre canvas of no less a personage than Madame Gillette, the Bearded Lady—Nature's Famous Curiosity, et cetera. We are obliged to mention madame because she plays a small but important part in this yarn. It isn't necessary to announce the other nine attractions; however, if you care to hang around the front when the first ballyhoo is given by the "opener" you will learn that the greatest assemblage of freaks and curiosities from

all parts of the world may be seen for the small sum of a dime—ten cents.

Lying on the bally stand, with his back quite solid to the flooring, we observe "Doc" Barnumbey, manager of the side show. At present, Doc is between thirty-two and assorted trouble; for Madame Gillette, the Bearded Lady, has failed to put in an appearance. That was Doc's pet ailment just then. All the rest of the freaks had appeared for the season's opening, but madame arrived not.

With a snort of irritation, he walked peevishly around the kid-show tent, wondering how it would feel to get his fingers into the flowing whiskerettes of the afore-said madame. He felt quite sure that he could do, in one jerk, exactly what a barber could do with a good razor. And he reveled in the thought.

Coming down the midway, as fast as his prodigious—that's a pipping poster word—body would carry him, wobbled "Deacon" Douglas, press agent extraordinary for the Younger Brothers World's Greatest. The Deacon, let us emphasize, was fat, enormous, bulky, gigantic, and whatever else Mr. Webster may have concealed within his big book. Doc spotted the Deacon the same time that the Deacon spotted Doc.

"Howdy, Doc!" greeted the Deacon. "What d'ye think of this burg, huh?"

"The burg don't worry me none at all," replied Doc. "I got much better trouble than that in stock!"



"Tell papa," soothed the Deacon. "You know me, Doc; I'm the greatest little trouble-killer in the market. 'Member the time I went into see the editor of *The Hayfever Eagle*, at Cidertown, Wisconsin, and——"

"Cut it!" snapped Doc. "I'm worryin' my bean off about that there barber's-enemy, Madame Gillette. She ain't showed up, down, or anything. Le's see you figger *that* out!"

The Deacon knitted his brows, as they remark in sewing circles, and made a commendable effort to think.

"At's a cinch to dope out," he said at last. "She musta got on the C. P. I. train, and the nearest that would land her to Anchorville would be Cedar Falls, which same is twenty miles from here. You'll find the lady waiting there in the station for you to guess where she is. That's the way them females are."

"Well?" said Doc.

"What d'ye mean—well?" returned the Deacon. "If you had a kronen's worth of brains in your skull, or wherever you keep 'em, why, you should ought to figure that we might breeze up to Cedar Falls and grab off the lady."

"Good idea," admitted Doc. "Go ahead!"

"Go ahead?" What d'ye mean, go ahead? I ain't lost her; but I'll go up there with you and help you to find her. How's that?"

"In what—a balloon?"

"No, simp; in my twelve-cylinder Buns-Joyce Speedster."

"Does that old bus of yours still run?" asked Doc.

"What d'ye mean, does it still run?" demanded the hurt Deacon. "I guess I ain't never invited you to ride with me before, have I?"

"I heard that it blew up in ten sections last spring," returned Doc. "Did you glue it together again?"

"Come on; le's go! I'll breeze you up to Cedar Falls so quick you'll think you're riding on a comet!"

## II.

FORTHWITH the Deacon pushed the suspicious Doc toward a car that was new in the long, long ago. The car had twelve-cylinders, when you counted 'em,

but had only six when you used 'em. And the brakes—well, we'll come to them later!

"Hop in, Doc!" invited the Deacon. "Plenty room for two."

"Might be room for two," complained Doc. "But you're the two. Guess I better sit up on the hood, hey?"

"Come on; plenty room, plenty room! What d'ye want—a whole Pullman?"

Doc squeezed in beside the Deacon, jammed his hat down over his brow, and made a bet with himself that the thing wouldn't move.

Deacon started, and the car shot off with the quiet pur of a boiler factory running in high.

"She runs nice and smooth, what?" shouted the Deacon proudly.

"Yeah," said Doc. "Er—what is it?"

"What is it!" snorted the Deacon. "What did you think it was—a go-cart? You don't know a great bus when you see one. Jus' wait till we hit the State road. I'll show you some traveling, I will!"

"Got rubber tires?" asked Doc innocently.

"Sure, I—— Say, what d'ye think this is, a trolley?"

"Well, they ain't no rubber heels on this baby," kidded Doc.

"Aw, keep quiet, and hold fast. Here's where we dash into the State road. *Now* I'll show you something!"

The Deacon turned into the State road, and worked the speed up till the telegraph poles resembled a wicket fence. Doc was amazed and, for the moment, almost forgot that they were in search of Madame Gillette.

"There goes my lid!" yelled Doc.

"Forget it!" flung back the Deacon with a grin. "This boiler don't stop for cheap hats. If you want it bad, jump out and get it!"

"What do you think I am—a eagle?" raved the peeved Doc.

For reply, the Deacon let the bus out another notch.

"I hear a horn blowing!" yelled Doc as they started to descend a long hill. "Better ease up, or we'll bust up the State!"

"Let er bust! I know more about driving than Ralph de Palma ever heard



about. I—— Say I can't turn off this here gas feeder! Must be getting rusty, or something."

"Slam on the brakes, you stone head!" howled the alarmed Doc.

Deacon called on the brakes, but they were evidently out—down and out.

"The brakes—the brakes!" hissed Doc, poking the Deacon in the prime ribs.

"Quit yelling, you fathead!" fired back the Deacon. "I'm trying to work 'em, ain't I? I tell you they's something wrong!"

The car sped down the hill like an arrow from the bow of the late Sitting Bull. A flurry of dust, akin to that of a tornado, trailed behind them. Then Doc summoned prayer to his aid. As to the Deacon, he summoned the choicest language known to the show world, and tugged at the emergency brake furiously.

Then, just as they reached the foot of the hill, both brakes worked with a jam and a bust. Oh, a terrible bust! The car jerked to a halt as if it had hit the Great Wall of China or Fort Mahoney. Doc was deposited in a haystack beside the road. The Deacon landed in a soft berth, the same being a pile of tarred gravel on the opposite side of Doc.

### III.

DOC was the first to revive. He reassembled his joints in their proper physiological places, pushed his Adam's apple within an inch of its correct location, then peered around to see what sort of mountain had hit 'em.

First, he caught sight of the Deacon, sitting on the gravel pile, picking off the tarred pebbles from his hair, eyebrows, and general clothing. His face was well smeared with dirt, grime, and assorted fungi. Next, Doc espied four dead chickens directly behind the car. Further observation was interrupted by a stern, rural voice, to wit:

"Poor Betsey Ross—poor Betsey!" it lamented. "Durn you critters, you have went and ruint my prize winner. Ain't they no laws in this land for varmints like you?"

Doc and the Deacon immediately focused their attention on the speaker. They noted a tall, gangling sort of bird

with enough whiskers on his chin to out-rival even Madame Gillette.

"Greetings!" said the Deacon from his seat on the gravel pile. "What the Sam Hill happened to them chickens, hey?"

"You went and run into 'em!" wailed the farmer. "And one o' them hens was Betsey Ross, and she won the prize last year at the, now, State Fair. Best settin' hen in Milkfed County, and you critters had to go and ruin her? She could lay three eggs in one day, and——"

He stopped right there, extracted a red cloth and applied it to his eyes. Doc and the Deacon observed drops of water trickling down the ends of the old boy's mattress of prime whiskers. Therefore, Doc looked at the Deacon and the Deacon looked at Doc. Then both looked at Betsey Ross and bowed their heads. For be it known that show folk, public opinion notwithstanding, are very human, emotional, and sentimental. Doc and the Deacon felt truly sorry for poor pop and his Betsey Ross.

"We're darn sorry, colonel," said the Deacon. "But that boiler of mine went loco and the brakes worked all of a sudden, see? And that's why she didn't stop before running into your stock. But we didn't see your chicks, anyway. Going too blame fast, I guess."

Doc rose, picked up the four chickens from the road, and piled them at the farmer's feet.

"Mister," said Doc, "I guess we owe you something for damages. How much?"

"Waal," said the old chap, "three o' them was just ornery common fowl, but Betsey—waal, I reckon no amount of money would have bought *her*? She was a pet and a prize winner, an' everything."

"Yeah," said Doc. "I understand, colonel. So let's have the low-down on the bill and we'll beat it along."

"I'll charge ye only two dollars apiece for the common birds, but you'll have to pay twenty dollars for Betsey. She was wurth fifty, easy—for her eggs alone!"

Doc looked at the Deacon and the Deacon looked at Doc.

"How much jack have you got in your poke, Deacon?" asked Doc.



"Thirty cents!" replied the Deacon after a thorough search.

"That means that I gotta be the goat!" moaned Doc. Then he extracted forty-two dollars—his entire bank roll—and peeled off twenty-six berries; six for the "common fowl" and the balance for Betsey Ross.

"Here she be!" said Doc, offering the farmer the money. "And we're plumb sorry it happened."

The old fellow took the sum, placed it carefully in his pocket and, without saying a word, picked up the chickens and walked slowly to his house.

"Well, where do we go from here?" demanded Doc.

"Back to the show!" snapped Deacon. "If the bus runs that far."

"How 'bout Madame Gillette?"

"She's outa luck!" replied the Deacon, getting into the car. "When you get back to the works, why, you can plaster some alfalfa on one of the females, and let 'er go at that! Hop in—le's go!"

On the return to the show grounds, Doc found a telegram awaiting him. This is what he read:

DOC BARNUMBEY, care of Show Grounds, Anchorage, Neb.

Husband upset oil stove—beard caught fire—have only mustache left—wire what I should do.

MADAME GILLETTE.

Doc read the message twice, got plumb mad three times, then hotfooted it to the telegraph office and fired back this reply:

MADAME GILLETTE, Gem City, Wis., care of O'Brien's Delicatessen.

Mustache no good without whiskers—buy razor and finish job—then try movies—you're fired.

DOC BARNUMBEY.

#### IV.

SEVEN weeks later, the Younger Brothers World's Greatest Carnival closed for the season—with the aid of three sheriffs and a bevy of creditors. Such unfortunate things sometimes happen in the show world.

Doc and the Deacon packed up their bags and silently stole away to the land of New York. In the afternoon they called at the offices of *The Showmen's Gazette*. On entering, they noted a goodly number of troupers surrounding the desk of one Ali Baba McGill. Mr. McGill, an ex-trouper, conducted a

column for the *Gazette*, entitled "Troupers' Trails."

"Show folks?" they heard Ali Baba say. "Why, bless 'em, they're the greatest bunch on earth! They can get by no matter what game they flop into. For the example, take the case of old 'Pop' Mantell. Pop's trouped for years with all the tricks since the days of Pete Barnum, doing everything from running the kid show to sheet writing. Well, Pop retired some years ago and started a small chicken farm out in Nebraska. Business ain't so good with Pop, see, so he decides to put his showmanship to practical use. Well, what do you suppose that old skinflint does, eh?"

"What?" demanded three of the bunch.

"Pop's farm is right on the road, and every now and then some wild motorists come racing down the hill at a mile a minute. So Pop figgers that they should buy some chickens, dead or alive. So when he hears a car coming along, why, all that he does is to sprinkle a little corn in the middle of the road, open up the chicken coop, and chase the hens to the corn. See the idea? Then when the car bumps into 'em, why, Pop pulls a yarn about them running over his prize egg manufacturer, which he always calls Betsey Ross, and——"

Doc looked at Deacon and the Deacon looked at Doc.

"Doc," said the Deacon, "I'm getting hungry. Let's eat!"

"Let's!" snorted Doc. "We heard that story some place before."

They entered one of those white-front restaurants where a gentleman, dressed as a physician, flops flapjacks in the air for a ballyhoo.

"What will you have?" asked the waitress of Deacon.

"Er—I'll take a order of roast chicken," replied the Deacon with a large grin.

"And you?" asked the waitress of Doc.

"Aw, gimme a order of beans!" snapped Doc. "Chicken's too expensive."

#### No Case Recorded

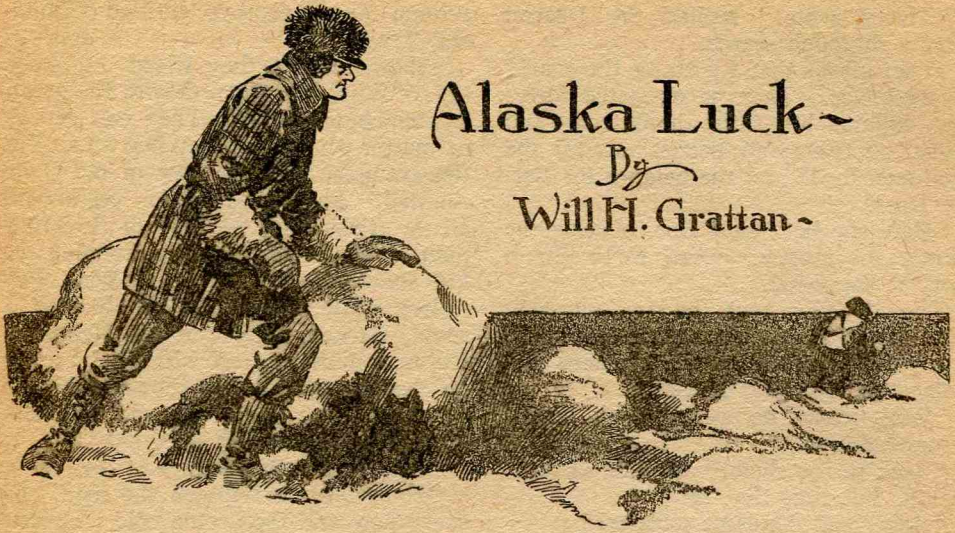
ROWE: "Money talks, I tell you."

Joe: "Yes; but it never gives itself away."



# Alaska Luck~

By  
Will H. Grattan~



IN the case of Jim Bolton, fickle fortune had established a record. Bolton admitted it, freely and generously, as he stooped over a tiny oil stove in a snow hut north of sixty-six degrees. Outside, the air seemed to snap with its burden of frigidity. Pressure ice, rearing like a cayuse under the spur, gave out a metallic tenor resembling the sounds in a great machine shop. Above these sounds came, at intervals, the howling of the huskies that had drawn Bolton's sled down the Alaskan coast.

These were old noises to Bolton; but as he lifted a strip of hard, scorched bacon to his mouth, there came still another sound. Something, man or beast, was approaching the hut. Yes; was at the door.

Bolton had been alone in the camp for two days. At least, he had supposed he was alone. He had sought shelter there to make repairs after weathering a blizzard that almost wiped him and his dog team off the map of the northland. The camp had seemed deserted.

The musher snatched up his rifle and turned swiftly. A mittened hand was pushing back the tarpaulin curtain over the entrance.

Bolton lifted the gun, covering the intruder, who slowly came into full view.

"Stop! Who are you?" Bolton demanded.

There was no immediate response. The

man gradually pulled himself erect, swaying uncertainly on heavily incased feet. Bleary eyes looked out of a haggard, bewhiskered face.

"Well, then, who the devil are you?" retorted this newcomer.

Bolton's ready weapon seemed to alarm him but little. Its owner brandished it more suggestively.

"Where'd you come from?" snapped out Bolton. "Are you alone?"

Then he remembered about that shifting of fortune. A few weeks before, he might have had reason to fear. But now—what had he to lose? Bolton lowered his gun.

The stranger was mumbling something. His gaze had settled fixedly on Bolton's pan of bacon.

"Hungry?" asked Bolton.

With a half nod, the stranger lurched forward. His still-mittened hands went into the pan, and he began to eat with savage voraciousness.

Bolton seated himself on an empty box and watched, but made no comment.

The fellow never paused in his orgy until every bit of the bacon had disappeared. Then he staggered back to a heap of tarpaulin and slumped down. He heaved a great sigh. A crinkling of his brow followed, as if for the first time he was wondering how his host had taken his unceremonious feasting.

"Feel better?" inquired Bolton.

"Yeah; I been asleep in that other



shack, under a heap of canvas. Drugged, I guess. Don't know how long. Lord, I was famished. I——"

His mouth sagged open. He stared, in startled amazement, at the face of the other man.

Bolton, too, looked sharply at the countenance of his unlooked-for companion. "Sieckel! Al Sieckel!" he exclaimed.

"Bolton! You!" came almost simultaneously from the other. Then he spread out his hands, in a gesture purposely careless. "We meet again," Sieckel added.

Bolton's fists were opening and closing rapidly. He glanced at his rifle, close by his side. "I ought to kill you," he muttered.

"Sure! I cleaned you out once," agreed Sieckel. "After you grubstaked me, too. You ought to kill me, maybe. But what's the use? That was years ago. I've gone through hell, Bolton. And now——"

"Now you're strapped, broke, up against it hard, I suppose," said Bolton, in matter-of-fact tone. "Never heard much more about that bunch of claims you staked. Anyhow, you don't look prosperous."

Eagerly, Sieckel nodded. "Yep; I'm all in, Bolton. I ain't worth killin'."

"We're in the same boat now, Sieckel," answered Bolton in hollow tones. "I'm broke, too."

"I heard you was rich," returned Sieckel, surprised.

"Sure! I been rich a dozen times," was the reply. "Rich, then on the verge of starvin'. That's the way it goes with me. This time, though, I'm wiped out for fair. Fire took what little there was left after I bought up some fool oil leases in the States."

"Tough luck, ain't it?" breathed Sieckel. "When'd you get here? How long've I been asleep? My friends went off and left me to die, I guess. That's the kind of friends I got."

"That's the kind you've deserved, far as I know," remarked Bolton dryly. "I got here yesterday, 'bout noon. You must been sleeping two days, anyhow, or almost. Why should they leave you? Did you have anything worth stealin'?"

Sieckel nodded. "Gun and boots. They'd a slit my throat for a bottle of hootch."

"Might myself," said Bolton. "But I guess you haven't any."

Sieckel's grin was sickly. "Goin' to Nome, or other way?" he asked.

"Nome," said Bolton. "You must've slept through one son of a gun of a storm. Blew me in here off the ice, smashed runners and broke traces. Which way you goin'?"

"Ain't particular," was the answer.

"If you fall to and help me fix up things, so we can get started in the morning, you can come along," suggested Bolton.

"Sure! I'll help," Sieckel quickly replied.

Bolton did not see the look of cunning that crept into the man's eyes.

## II.

ALMOST any other companion Bolton would have relished; but the bitterness in his heart toward Sieckel was too strong. He dreaded the coming hours with him. Why, if it hadn't been for Sieckel, Bolton remembered, he could have gone back to the States years before he did. And he probably wouldn't have lost everything while the girl who was to marry him was on the way to join him. That was what had happened this time.

Bolton raved at fate. He must get out to Seattle in time to stop her, break the news gently, send her back to wait until he made his pile once more. But Bolton felt he was losing his stamina, his persistency, his "pep." And the girl—she had just about reached the end of her patience, he felt.

"Well, there blows happiness!" he told himself acidly.

Sieckel was working hard with that runner. Bolton hadn't believed the man was capable of such effort. Bolton decided to match the other's energy. They'd get out the next day, he felt. One of the big Malemites was wailing his impatience at the leash.

"All right, old-timer," gritted Bolton. "You'll get your chance."

The sled was ready by dusk. The traces, too, were spliced. Bolton got out



another mess of bacon and hard biscuit. He fixed some canned soup over the flare of the oil stove. He handed Sieckel a hatchet to break one of the old boxes, to start a more warming fire.

Bolton was busily stirring the soup when it seemed to him that the little flame bent queerly, as if under some malignant influence. He glanced around just in time to grapple with Sieckel, who stood over him with upraised hatchet.

At first, surprise made Bolton weak. Sieckel wrenched free his hand holding the hatchet. Bolton jumped, both hands outstretched, at the handle of the gleaming weapon. He caught it. The two men crashed to the ground, locked in ferocious embrace.

A terrible, cold anger replaced the surprise in Bolton's thoughts. With fierce strength and wrestler's science, he slowly forced Sieckel over, broke his hold on the weapon. Then, with a lightning-quick leap, Bolton himself got the hatchet and stood with it, threatening his adversary.

Sieckel, squirming up, gave one look and dashed out of the door. He raced along the snow and ice-incrusted beach.

Bolton followed, determined to fix his old enemy at last. Why the other had attacked him he did not know, but he supposed the purpose must have been robbery, though Bolton had little enough to tempt a man. Still, there was the dog team. At any rate, Bolton decided, he would be bothered no longer.

Sieckel ran like one possessed. But his weakness soon told. Bolton gained. Sieckel staggered out upon the rough "winter roof" of the sea. He dashed at a ridge of the pressure ice, as if to put the barrier between himself and his pursuer.

Then Sieckel slipped and fell, dropped from view. Bolton darted toward him, still seized with a murderous resolve. He stopped just in time to save himself from going into a pit, at the bottom of which lay Sieckel. The fellow was groaning and gripping at an ankle. He glanced up at Bolton with the terror of the condemned implanted in his face.

"I'll go back and get the rifle," Bolton informed him, shot the words through his teeth

### III.

ON the way to the hut, Bolton's blood lust shriveled and faded. Hatred for Sieckel failed to interest him. He disliked the thought of taking the man back to civilization with him, but he didn't want the fellow's blood on his hands, now that it was no longer necessary to save his own life.

"He'll be an extra burden on the dogs, but I'll take him along," Bolton decided. "I've got enough troubles without adding the memory of helping a human—even a half human—to die."

He got his rifle out of the hut; but he took up a rope as well.

Sieckel was squirming, apparently in great misery, at the bottom of the ice pit when Bolton returned. But he pleaded for his life. "Don't kill me!" he begged. "Are you going to kill me?"

Bolton shook his head. "You're as mean as a polecat, but I can't kill you," he said. "Catch this rope."

In his relief, Sieckel's shaking became even more severe, but at last he controlled his nerves sufficiently to grasp the line Bolton threw to him. He was dragged none too gently out of the pit, sobbing and murmuring at the pain in his ankle.

While one hand held the rifle, Bolton helped Sieckel back to the hut with the other.

Sieckel leaned over quickly, from a seat on a tarpaulin pile, and ripped the thongs upon his boot with a knife Bolton handed him. The ankle was badly swollen, the skin dangerously blue.

"Looks like a bad sprain," commented Bolton. "Guess you're safe enough. It won't do you no good to try and get at me again, will it? Besides, the dogs would tear you to bits. You didn't know that. Or did you expect your friends back, perhaps?"

"No," Sieckel replied; "they're gone, the hounds."

"Why did you want to kill me?" demanded Bolton.

The other did not answer immediately. At last, he replied: "Figured you might kill me if I didn't."

"That's a lie," said Bolton, though without great vehemence.

He reached forward and helped Sieckel



off with his greasy outer coat of fur. Some papers fell from an inner pocket. Sieckel, touching his ankle and moaning, did not notice. Bolton glanced carelessly at one of the documents, a legal-looking affair. Then he began energetically to pick through the others, opening them.

Sieckel, suspicious of the other's silence, looked up: "Leave them be," he said. "What are you doing?"

"I'm learning," replied Bolton, "learning something that is mighty interesting, Al Sieckel. So those claims did pan out, eh? You traitorous pup!"

Sieckel swallowed painfully. "Just recent," he said at last.

"And that's why you wanted to kill me, eh? So I wouldn't claim my legal share. Did you trace me here? But how could you have known? Was it just accident, as you said?"

Sieckel nodded. "That part of it was right," he declared. "That gang kidnaped me up here, to get me out of the way, so they could put in on one of the claims. They thought there was a chance, a loophole in the law, to get the claim for themselves if I disappeared."

Bolton was silent for as much as a minute. "How much, Sieckel?" he demanded at last.

"Plenty," answered Sieckel, with a curl of his lip. "Confound this ankle! You're rich again, Bolton. You'd find it out when you got to Cape Wales, or, anyway, Nome."

Bolton had a swift vision of a face in the crowd on the dock at Seattle. His protean goddess of fortune had done another "quick change."

### Showing the Boss

THE office boy came into the office, hat on head, and slamming the door behind him, said abruptly: "Can I 'ave the 'alf day off to go to a baseball game, sir?"

"That's not the way to come in," returned the boss. "Now, you take my seat, and I'll show you the way you should enter."

The boss went outside, and on coming in again closed the door quietly, and in a meek voice said: "Please, sir, may I

have the afternoon off in order to go to see a baseball game?"

"Yes," replied the boy, "and here's a dollar to spend."

### Meaner Still!

TWO small boys were discussing the various excellences of their respective parents, and the conversation had reached the highly critical and even personal stage.

"Well," remarked Tommy Stubbs, "you can say what you like, but I reckon your father's about the meanest man that ever lived. Fancy him letting you walk about in them old boots, and him a boot-maker, too!"

"Bosh!" replied Bobby Roberts. "My father ain't so mean as your father, anyway. Why, fancy him being a dentist and your baby only got one tooth!"

### Turning Away Wrath

THE office boy had made his hundredth mistake. His employer sent for him.

"Have you anything to say for yourself?" asked the man of business sternly. "If I made mistakes like you I'd never be where I am."

"Yes, sir," replied the lad promptly; "but if we were all like you, you wouldn't be where you are, either."

The boy is still on the job.

### The Only Way

TOMMY had been very troublesome at school. He did everything that he ought not to do, and was thoroughly naughty.

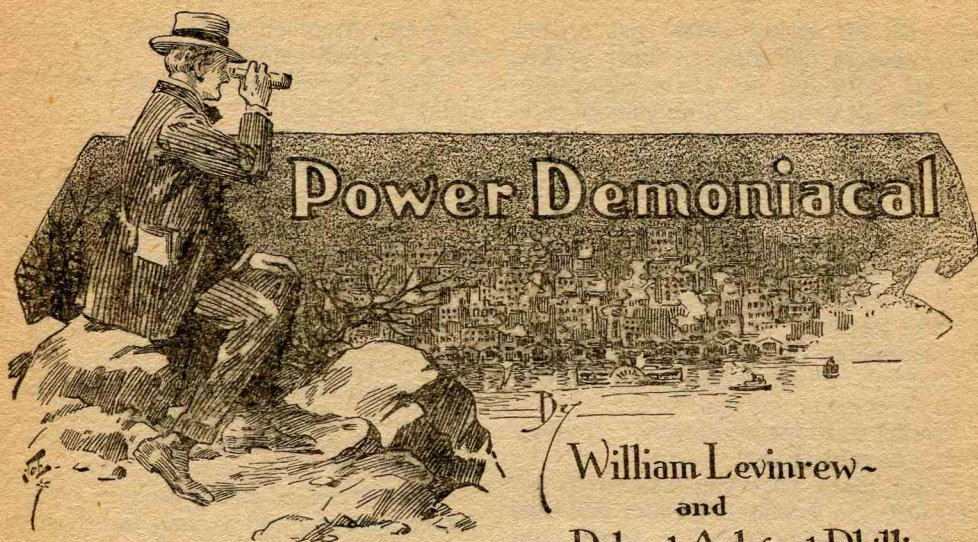
The teacher of his class had instituted a new form of punishment. She kept a roll of those children who made themselves conspicuous by their bad behavior, and each month a list of the "awful examples" was posted up.

This afternoon, when she thought she'd stood about enough, she suddenly stopped the classwork, and exclaimed sternly:

"Now, listen to me, Tommy! If you don't stop misbehaving I shall have to take your name!"

"Well, teacher," replied the small boy, "you'll have to marry me first!"





William Levinrew-  
and  
Roland Ashford Phillips-

ALL beneficial forms of electrical activity would cease, according to John Kester, called the power demon, unless one billion dollars was turned over to him unconditionally. As proof of his power, he announced that the street-car, subway, and elevated lines would stop at noon of a certain day. This happened, and no understandable cause could be found for it.

Wall Street financiers, whose fortunes were threatened, met to decide what steps to take. Since they did not decide to turn over the billion dollars to Kester by noon of the following day, all transportation which depended upon electrical energy stopped, as the power demon had announced would happen. The streets were filled with automobiles; only steam-driven cars kept on running.

Jimmy Lawrence of the *Planet* was given the assignment to discover who was back of an attempt to kidnap Kester.

John Harbin and Simon Prentice, two of the financiers, were of the opinion that "Wolf" Marshall, another millionaire, was in league with Kester. At Harbin's home, the financier interrupted Kester's conversation with Martha Harbin, and told the power demon that the money would be given him provided Kester and Marshall were not allies. Kester declined to give this assurance at once, but promised an answer on the following day.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE RIVER DRAMA.

WHILE Kester, the power demon, was having his interview with Mr. Harbin and the other bankers, Bowen, the detective whom Mr. Harbin had engaged to see that no harm came to the

man upon whose safety the fate of so many millions of people depended, waited outside the Fifth Avenue mansion. Bowen had known a distinct sense of relief when, from his station a hundred feet from the Harbin home, he had seen the wonder man's car roll up to the curb, and in addition to the driver and the car's owner in the front seat, he had seen three khaki-clad forms in the tonneau.

After Kester had entered the house, Bowen stepped out of his own car and approached the other vehicle. When within ten feet of it he found himself facing the business end of a large caliber revolver, held by a very steady hand.

"Stand where you are!" a voice called, and the captain with whom he had become acquainted earlier in the day confronted him. Recognizing Bowen, the officer dropped the arm that held the revolver, and the two stood chatting for a while. Bowen noticed that Captain Corwin did not put the revolver back into the holster, and that when he resumed his seat the officer still held the weapon in his hand.

The detective went back to his own car. The rain had stopped and the air was milder; but Bowen burrowed deep into his overcoat. Worn out with his long, thirty-six-hour vigil, he decided to take a nap until Kester came out of the



house. Instructing the driver of his car and the three other men to keep their eyes open for anything unusual Bowen closed his eyes.

The motion of his car awoke him. His hand flew to his gun; then he laughed sheepishly and relaxed. Ahead of him was the car with Kester, the huge black, driving, and the three alert heads surmounting the khaki-clad figures in the rear seat. The top of the forward car was down, to permit its occupants a clear view of their surroundings. Bowen nodded approvingly at this precaution. He glanced about and saw that except for the many stalled vehicles around them, they had the streets practically to themselves, so far as vehicular traffic was concerned. He felt more at ease. In forty minutes, if they did not have to wait too long for a boat, Kester would be in his own house, surrounded by a hundred men who would, if need be, give up their lives to protect him.

Before they reached the ferry one of his men told him that when Kester left the house, he took two sheets of paper out of his pocket, put each in an envelope, gave one to the black man and restored the other to his own pocket. Bowen listened to this absently, attaching little importance to it.

A boat docked as the two machines swung under the arch of Riverside Drive Viaduct, and discharged its passengers and vehicles—one horse-drawn wagon laden with produce and one steam-driven car. Bowen found that his machine and Kester's were the only two waiting in line to board the boat.

Although it was considerably after ten o'clock—almost the lightest traffic hour of the twenty-four—Bowen noticed that an unusual number of passengers had come aboard. The majority of them crowded on the forward deck, close to the collapsible gates.

As the detective mentioned this to one of his companions, the man addressed, scanning the crowd, clutched Bowen's arm. "See that young chap standing by our headlight? He's the one I trailed last night to Norton's office."

"Sure of it, are you?" demanded Bowen, his mind instantly alert.

"Positive."

The detective looked over the other men standing near by. They were husky, hard-looking customers. A gang? Undoubtedly, he figured. Commanding his own men to be on the alert, Bowen climbed out of the car and walked up to Kester's machine.

"We've spotted one of the thugs who attacked Kester last night," he said in a lowered voice to Captain Corwin.

"On this boat?" the officer queried.

"Yes. I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of the passengers aboard were of the same caliber, probably engaged by the man who staged the affair last night. There's trouble brewing, captain."

"We're ready for anything, Bowen," the officer returned crisply, with a nod toward his two khaki-clad companions.

"But with fifty men against us," the detective said, "we may find ourselves in——"

"What do you suggest? Retreating?" There seemed to be a note of scorn and sarcasm in the captain's tone.

"Why not back off our cars and await the next boat?" Bowen proposed, ignoring the remark. "Let us see how many of the passengers follow?"

"You are exaggerating the danger, Bowen. Our business is to remain with Kester, not to command him. We are not afraid of the odds against us. You are privileged to withdraw."

Bowen flushed. "Perhaps Mr. Kester will decide the matter."

Kester, who had been listening to the conversation between the detective and the officer, glanced at the huge black beside him. "I am not afraid," he said quietly. "I prefer to remain on the boat."

"Very well." Bowen inclined his head, turned and walked back to his own car. To his driver, he said: "Be ready to go the minute the gates are open. Take off your brake. The block will hold you until we're across the river."

The detective stepped back and gazed apprehensively at the opposite shore. A bell sounded and the gates clattered shut. The boat was off.

Bowen noticed, after they had cleared the slip, that Captain Corwin, in spite of his professed indifference, had drawn



his large automatic and was holding it on his lap. Bowen thought he detected an additional alertness in the manner with which the soldiers cuddled their rifles.

A large man approached along the vehicle runway from the rear, carrying over his shoulder a long iron bar nearly as thick as his wrist with a strap attached to each end. This man stopped between Bowen and Kester's car, where he dropped one end of the bar and stood leaning on it, gazing vacantly around the boat. Bowen found himself wondering for what purpose the bar could be used with those dangling straps at each end.

The detective was annoyed at the cramped quarters of the boat where such men could get close to Kester's car without giving the captain an adequate excuse to order them away. His own car was occupying the right side of the space reserved for vehicles, and the huge black sitting in the driver's seat of Kester's car was on the side farthest from where Bowen stood. He saw, partly hidden by the car and the figures within it, a small man standing within reach of the huge Zulu. The detective started around the front end of Kester's car to get a better look at the man, when he was conscious that the boat was stopping.

One of Uncle Sam's ex-destroyers—low, rakish, recently sold and converted for private yachting purposes—was steaming slowly down the river, diagonally across the path of the ferry boat. When the pilot of the ferry boat saw that a collision was imminent, he blew his whistle. As the yacht still kept on its way, the pilot sounded the reverse signal.

The yacht, seemingly unable to stop, drifted slowly down the tide. When it came directly opposite the slower craft, it swung its bow toward the ferry boat. To avert the collision that seemed certain, the ferry pilot pointed the bow of his vessel up the river. A number of persons close to the port rail surged back when they saw the boats were going to collide.

With both boats in that position, the port-quarter of the ferry boat facing the port rail of the yacht, they touched lightly, scraped sides for several yards and came to a stop. The port rail of the

ferry boat, now deserted, was directly above the low rail of the other vessel, where a number of men were gathered.

As Bowen stepped forward, vaguely suspicious, there was a piercing whistle close to his ear and a bellowing yell from the direction of the pilot house. In the same instant a hard forearm went around the detective's throat in a strangle hold and a knee bored sharply into the small of his back. His arms were seized by two pairs of hands, while another pair relieved him of his weapons. Then he was hurled violently aside against one of the posts, where he lay half-stunned.

With the sounding of the whistle the forward deck of the ferry boat became the scene of wildest activity. The man with the thick-iron bar had lifted it to his shoulder, and was peering toward the yacht, edging closer to Kesler's car apparently in a desire to see more clearly what was going on. With the sounding of the whistle, he lurched toward the machine, and his iron bar dropped across the chests of the three khaki-clad men. Two men behind the car seized the dangling straps, and in an instant the bar was fastened across the arms and chests of the captain and his two companions, imprisoning them, for the time being, as effectively as though they were in strait-jackets.

Two other acts were performed with lightninglike rapidity. The small man standing beside the negro whipped out a blackjack and brought it down upon the Zulu's skull. Simultaneously, with the dropping of the bar and the collapse of the negro, another man appeared out of the semidarkness and tossed a blanket over Kester's head. Both men dragged their victim from the car, carried him across the deck and passed him over the low rail of the yacht, where a number of eager hands received the burden.

Still another scene had been staged at the same moment and with different actors. As the ferryboat and the yacht collided, the block was knocked from under the front wheels of Bowen's car, the gate raised, and the chain across the runway lowered. Unseen hands in the rear of the car pushed mightily. Before the startled driver could apply his brakes, before the occupants of the tonneau could



do more than bolt from their seats and throw themselves clear of the rolling car, the machine plunged into the water.

In his dazed condition it seemed to Bowen that he had no sooner toppled to the deck of the boat, where his assailants had flung him, than he was upon his feet again; but in that interval, brief as it appeared to him, the whole performance had been staged, as swiftly and almost as silently, as the flashing of a picture upon a screen.

The yacht had started away, bearing with it Kester and undoubtedly the principal actors responsible for his capture. Bowen stumbled dizzily toward the remaining car. The bar that had imprisoned the soldiers had been wrenched away and the men were pumping bullets in the direction of the vanishing yacht.

Captain Corwin was swearing savagely. Bowen's men, still dazed at what had taken place, were rounding up the few remaining passengers. Kester's huge guard, now partly recovered from the terrific blow dealt him, was staggering across the deck, as if intent upon diving into the river and swimming after his master.

After a word with Captain Corwin, who explained how Bowen's steam car had been disposed of by the conspirators, the detective led the way up to the pilot house. Entering, they found one of the men on the floor, senseless, the other bound. Speedily releasing the uninjured man, and learning meanwhile how he and his companion had been taken by surprise and rendered helpless, the pilot was ordered to take the wheel and set a course for the Jersey shore.

Descending to the lower deck, Bowen ordered his men to release the passengers they had rounded up. "The bunch we want went off on the yacht," he said, surveying the dozen frightened captives.

"It was the quickest piece of action I ever witnessed," Captain Corwin admitted, after order had been restored and the boat was under way again.

Bowen nodded and felt tenderly of his wrenched neck and arms. "Fast workers, all right," he agreed. Never by word or action did he reproach the captain for failure to take advice or heed his warn-

Just before the boat nosed into her slip, one of Bowen's men stepped up beside the detective and thrust a letter into his hand. "Found this on the deck, chief—just about the spot where Kester was put over the rail. He must have dropped it there."

Bowen glanced at the inscription on the envelope. "It's addressed to Kester's mother," he said, puzzled.

"I didn't want the captain to know," the man said, glancing over his shoulder to where Corwin and his men stood near the machine. "That's why I waited until now. I'm not putting any clews in his path."

Bowen smiled and pocketed the letter. "Thanks, Johnson. I'll have a look at this later."

Once off the boat, the detective hastened to the nearest phone booth, where he attempted to get in touch with Harbin. Learning from the butler that the banker had not yet returned, Bowen left word that he would call again at midnight.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WINKING LIGHTS.

HARBIN was one of the first to reach his office on the morning following Kester's kidnaping. Bowen had broken the news to the banker shortly after midnight, but did not care to go into details over the wire.

"We have plenty of work cut out for us between now and daylight," the detective had announced in response to Harbin's questions. "Hope to pick up Kester's trail shortly. If it is convenient I'll see you at your office at eight o'clock."

It was a tired and haggard Bowen that the banker met eight hours later in the private office. As Harbin was one of the detective's most valuable clients, he took his failure to protect Kester very much to heart, although even with his habitual modesty, Bowen could find little for which to censor himself.

"Let's have the details, Bowen," Harbin demanded, the moment the door was closed behind the two.

The detective went into a brief account of all that had taken place between the time of Kester's departure and



his abduction. He explained fully how he had warned Captain Corwin of the impending attack, what the officer had said in reply, and of Kester's determination to remain on the ferry.

The banker listened without interrupting, then nodded approvingly. "I do not think you are to blame, Bowen," he said, after the detective had finished his story. "Of course you had no authority over Kester or the captain. That's the regretful part of it. What have you done since? What about the yacht on which Kester was taken away? Any trace of it yet?"

"Not yet, Mr. Harbin. There are a number of private yachts anchored off the club along the river and for some distance beyond. I am trying to find out if any one of them sailed last night."

"Didn't get the name of it?"

"No, sir. Too dark for that; and I doubt very much if the conspirators would have kept the name on her."

"Marshall has a yacht!" Harbin exclaimed suddenly. "Just such a one as you've described. Keeps it somewhere along the Hudson, too."

Bowen nodded. "My men are on the job. I'll have a report from them before night. But for that matter, Mr. Harbin, I hardly see where Marshall would fit into this abduction. If he was behind Kester originally, as we have reason to suppose, what object would he have in kidnaping the man? Why, upon Kester's activity, apparently, depends Marshall's success."

"Yes; that's so," the banker conceded. "Marshall doesn't seem to fit in at all. Some of Kester's personal enemies may be at the bottom of the affair."

"Rather powerful enemies, wouldn't you say?" the detective replied. "It took an exceptional man to engineer that attack last night. I never saw a thing better staged or more admirably executed. No ordinary criminal could have directed it. It must have been a man, or men, of unlimited resources, playing a game for high stakes."

"A man like Kester would make enemies, I suppose," remarked Harbin.

"Yes; he might. But from the information I gathered, Kester was an obscure individual until he began to exer-

cise his power. There is no record of his having done anything important enough either in a business way or any other that would gain him the kind of enemies with the cunning and daring to direct a play of this sort."

"Well, when we find the yacht and learn its owner, we'll have something definite to work on. Don't believe Kester was taken far. Probably brought ashore along the river. What else, Bowen? Didn't you say something about a letter addressed to Kester's mother being found by one of your men aboard the ferry?"

"Yes. Here's a copy of it." The detective laid a folded sheet of paper upon the banker's desk. "When Kester left your house last night he took two sheets of paper from his pocket, inclosed them both in envelopes, gave one to his man and put the other into his own pocket. I am assuming that this is a copy of the letter he retained. He might have suspected that something would happen and took means of preparing for it."

"The letter picked up was addressed to his mother at Pineville. I delivered it after making a copy. It doesn't help me much just now, because it is written in code."

Harbin unfolded the sheet of paper and read the following:

748 839 653 847 766 1014 739 763 307 121  
98 617 72 804 9213 328 18 312 496 98 806 748  
139 893 847 166 7314 739 161 947 418 15 8715  
531

After glancing at the rows of figures that meant nothing to him, Harbin looked up at the detective. "Do you think Kester dropped this intentionally?" he inquired.

Bowen nodded. "Yes; I am fairly certain of it. Kester doubtless anticipated trouble, made duplicate copies of this message and figured, in case of an accident, that one of them would reach the person to whom addressed."

"Perhaps the Mrs. Kester, to whom the letter was addressed, is his wife, not his mother."

"I hardly think so."

"Well, at any rate she seems to be an actor in Kester's drama. I wonder how many others are in the cast?" Harbin studied the figures of the message once



more. "Have you made anything out of this mess?" he asked at length, frowning. "Looks to me like a list of bond numbers."

"If I'm not mistaken," Bowen said, "this is one of the simplest of codes to write and one of the most difficult to decipher. As I see it, it is a code where the communication is done by means of giving the number of a page, line and word of a certain book, known, of course, to both writer and recipient. The key to the code, therefore, is the book."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the banker. "With only a few million books in the world, your task is remarkably easy. How soon shall we expect to decipher this message? Fifty years hence?"

The detective smiled. "Hardly that long, Mr. Harbin. I am assuming that the first of each set of numbers correspond to the number of a page, the second to the number of the line on the page, and the third for the number of the word on the line."

"That doesn't seem to jibe, Bowen," Harbin remarked. "I notice there are several four-number sets. How would you divide them? And how do you treat the ciphers in the three-number sets?"

"The ciphers are not to be treated at all," Bowen responded. "Kester has probably tried to disguise the code by arbitrarily adding a cipher to some of the page numbers. We'll disregard them. And from experience I have had with similar codes, the final figure in any four-number set is also disregarded."

Harbin shrugged. "It may look simple enough to you, Bowen. Go ahead and dope it out. What'll it amount to when, and if, you solve the mystery? Surely it will not lead us to where Kester is concealed."

"Certainly not. The reason I have bothered you with the matter, Mr. Harbin, is because something took place last night, after the abduction, that is significant—that lends a great deal of importance to this communication. Do you remember my mentioning the amateur sleuth who saw the signaling lights flashing above Kester's house on different occasions?" the detective resumed. "Seems he wasn't the dunce we took him for originally. I got in touch

with him last night—or rather, he came to me—and learned that these signals were flashed again between eleven and eleven-thirty last night. That corresponds, roughly, to the hour Kester's Zulu guard returned to the house. If the man had a message similar to this one, it was doubtless flashed to some agent or accomplice."

"Did the amateur sleuth you've referred to make anything out of the signals?" Harbin inquired eagerly.

"He kept a record of them."

"What sort of a record?"

"The number and color of the flashes," Bowen answered. "For instance, the message started off with seven white flashes, then a red; then four white and a red; then eight white and two reds. Now look at the first set of numbers on the paper you have."

"It's seven-four-eight," Harbin read off.

"Corresponds to the series of white flashes, doesn't it? The red flashes separate the numbers; a double red signifies the completion of a set. Isn't that clear?"

"Is it now," the other admitted. "Do the flashes correspond throughout the message?"

"Apparently they do. I've checked them over."

"How about the ciphers?"

"A green light was flashed for them."

Harbin sat back in his chair, surveying Bowen with added interest. "Very good," he said. "We have learned something after all. All that remains now is to find the book from which these numbers were taken."

"You're in a position to help me, Mr. Harbin. It is reasonable to suspect that the book we want is in Kester's house. I have no official status in this case. If I had," Bowen added regretfully, "I shouldn't have permitted the ferryboat to leave her New York slip last night. I am merely an unofficial investigator; a common, a garden-variety of private detective. Under these circumstances it would be impossible for me to enter the Kester premises and search for the volume we need. If you wish to place the matter in the hands of the police——"

"Police!" snorted Harbin. "Anything



but that. I've had an example of their activities. No; you'll stay on the job, Bowen."

Harbin turned to his desk, wrote a few lines on a sheet of note paper, folded and handed it to the detective. "Take this to Mr. Coyne, at the post office. The agents of the department of justice are on the case now. They will make it possible for you to search the Kester premises."

As the men passed from the private office, Prentice appeared on the scene, smiling and jubilant as usual. "Been cooling my heels out here for half an hour," he declared. "Don't fancy it at all. Why not take me on as a more or less valuable assistant, Bowen? I'm itching for action of some sort."

Bowen surveyed the younger man with a smile. "Obey orders, will you?"

"All the way down the line, chief."

"Then consider yourself engaged. What I need most of all is an able chauffeur and a Dorlan steamer. My car, you know, is at the bottom of the Hudson."

"Mine's outside the door with steam up," said Prentice, grinning happily. "I can drive her as recklessly as you wish."

"Let's go," said Bowen, starting for the door.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### IT MUST BE DONE!

THE streets through which Bowen's newly engaged chauffeur piloted the Dorlan steamer after a stop at the post office were still cluttered and blocked with paralyzed autos and surface cars. The city was locked fast in the grip of a demoralized and motionless traffic. Hour by hour the situation had become more acute, more distressing.

Overnight, thousands of horses and mules had been rushed into the city in a despairing attempt to clear the principal thoroughfares. Motor cars had been pushed or hauled into side streets or packed into private and public garages, over which the police had charge.

The surface cars were being towed slowly and laboriously toward their barns. All subway and elevated-road entrances were barred. Animal-drawn trucks and drays and wagons of every

vintage were creeping in and out, loaded with market produce, merchandise and, in some cases, passengers. Most of the offices and business houses in the lower part of the city were closed for lack of employees, clients or customers.

Bicycles were at a premium and the stores that dealt in them were sold out long ago. Cars of the steamer type brought fabulous sums and factories that turned them out were working day and night.

Crowds of pedestrians moved dazedly along the walks or stood at the curbs to gaze upon the scenes presented by the stricken city. Occasionally the police swept down, drafted the idlers and put them to work pushing and hauling dead motor cars.

A strange, ominous hush prevailed, pierced now and again by shrill cries of the newsboys. Men spoke in whispers. Scores gathered before the newspaper offices to read the bulletins; moved on again as the mounted police charged them.

The bulletins were cheerless. The abduction of Kester increased the general anxiety. What would happen tomorrow or the next day, or the next, were the questions upon every lip.

Not a tithe of the daily produce and foodstuff could be moved from piers or warehouses or railroad stations to supply the millions who must eat. Already prices had begun to soar. Riots were frequent. So far the police had been able to cope with the situation. But in the next few days, if the tie-up lasted, none could predict the result.

As Bowen and Prentice drove farther uptown, where traffic conditions were better, hordes of silent, frightened apartment dwellers jammed the stores that were open, fought for purchases, struggled out again into the streets with loaded arms. They were preparing for the worst—storing against the famine that seemed inevitable.

Why didn't some one do something? Why didn't the city act? Why didn't the government step in? Let the billion be paid. None of those who set up those cries had the money. But it could be had somewhere, somehow. Let the rich produce the ransom.



Panic-stricken families stormed the railroad stations and ferries seeking transportation to a point—any point—beyond the hundred-mile "dead" zone. They looked and acted like refugees fleeing a fire-ridden city.

Prentice, behind the wheel of his car, became unusually grave and quiet as he continued northward. The scenes he witnessed, the bits of drama he saw enacted, the white, terse faces that flashed by on every side, impressed upon him the need of action.

So far, the scourge that Kester had brought upon the city, had had little effect upon Prentice. He had continued to eat and ride about, to attend to his own business and view the affair as a huge practical joke. The cessation of electrical energy had not, and probably would not for some time, affect his income or pleasures. If necessary, if the situation became intolerable, he could leave the blighted zone, and forget.

Before he turned the Dorlan under the Riverside arch, Prentice had ceased to view the thing as a comic-opera plot. The stupendous catastrophe that impressed itself upon his mind was no laughing matter, no condition to view indifferently. An hour of it—perhaps a day—was a novelty: a unique drama to treat facetiously, speculate upon and enjoy. But two days, perhaps longer—it struck him hard. The barb of realization went deep.

Wrath, indignation and bitter resentment welled into his heart and an oath escaped him. "What is this man Kester?" he broke out. "A demon? Do you mean to tell me a human could look upon what we have this morning, Bowen, and prate about saving America?"

"That's the *Planet's* story," the detective returned, equally affected. "I haven't doped him out myself. Any man—or thing—holding the power he seems to, ought to be annihilated."

"He looked harmless enough last night," said Prentice. "And to think we had him—alone! Now he's gone! What insane mind could have directed that attack?"

"And for what purpose?" echoed Bowen.

"We should have given him the bil-

lion—unconditionally. We were fools to quibble. Suppose Marshall did profit! What of it? Think of the millions who are suffering and will perish if there is no breaking of this hideous bond! Perhaps I am more responsible than the others. I insisted upon the conditions. I was thinking of Marshall all the time instead of—of the poor devils about us!"

The car rolled onto the boat. Half a dozen wagons followed. Behind them, filling the driveways and pouring out upon the upper decks, came a silent, baggage-laden crowd, their eyes fixed hopefully toward the distant Jersey shore.

Prentice watched them with heavy heart. "Where are you going?" he asked of an old man who stood near the car.

"Over there," the man responded, lifting a hand and a pair of frightened eyes.

"Why?"

"To get away."

"But the same conditions prevail over there," Prentice said.

"Yes, yes; but not a hundred miles beyond," the man returned quickly. "The papers have said so. There will be no work here, and soon no food. And Kester has gone. They say he was killed. It will always be like this in New York—now."

Prentice and the detective exchanged glances. What if the old man had spoken the truth! A woman and two children came up presently. The man whispered to them. Apparently they were his family.

"You are going away, too?" the man asked of Prentice.

"Yes."

"I—we thought you would give us a ride," the woman spoke up. "It is a long trip—a hundred miles."

"Good Lord!" Bowen broke out. "Do you expect to walk it?"

"Walk? Yes," the woman answered. "We could not get on the trains back there." She pointed toward the receding New York shore line. "And they tell us it will be hard to get on trains across the river. There is nothing left for us to do."

"Go back home," the detective urged. "This condition will not last much longer."

"How do you know?" the man ques-



tioned. "It is not so! It will last forever. Isn't Kester gone—killed? The papers have said——"

The surge of those behind, as the boat neared its slip, swept the old man and his family beyond earshot. Bowen looked again at Prentice.

"You see what's happening," he said. "The confounded newspapers, even in a crisis of this sort, are out for sensation. They've killed off Kester already! No wonder the more gullible are panic-stricken!"

Prentice drove carefully through the ferry building and did not open the throttle until the Dorlan had reached the foot of the hill beyond. "At noon to-day the electric current is scheduled to be cut off," he spoke up grimly. "Imagine New York without lights!"

"I don't like to think of it," said Bowen. "Perhaps Kester's abduction will interrupt the program," he added hopefully.

"Not if the message he gave the *Planet* is to be credited. It warned us that any attempt to harass or threaten the author would result disastrously. That's been done by some agency we are yet to determine. All we can do now is pray for leniency on Kester's part."

"Might as well expect blood from a stone," the detective returned bitterly.

"Looks as if you've been assigned the job of a lifetime, Bowen," Prentice declared. "Kester can't be dead. We must find him. I haven't a billion dollars, but I'll give all I have and try to raise the rest, if it will end this calamity."

Bowen nodded and dropped a firm hand on the other's shoulder. "We'll find Kester," he said resolutely. "We've got to. Ten million people are looking to us for help."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A MATTER OF DEDUCTION.

**P**RENTICE and Detective Bowen reached the Kester house in Pineville without delay. The troopers were policing the grounds and turning back all curiosity seekers, while the representatives of the department of justice were in charge of the house. One of the Zulus

retained his customary place on the front steps.

Bowen's credentials, obtained at the post office, saw him and Prentice through the sentry lines and gave them an immediate entrance to the house itself. Once inside, both men viewed the large and plainly furnished hall and living room with critical eyes.

Unmolested, they made their way from room to room on the lower floor, ending up in what appeared to be Kester's office, with its telegraph instruments, ticker and radio apparatus. Bowen explored that room with minute care, searching the drawers and pigeon-holes of the desk and examining their contents.

The detective looked up suddenly. "A singular thing," he stated. "Have you noticed it, Prentice? There isn't a book of any description on this floor."

"No; I hadn't noticed it," the other returned. "But it's a fact."

"Plenty of bookcases and shelves," said Bowen; "and not a volume in sight." He smiled. "Well, that makes it all the easier for me. If Kester had had a thousand-volume library we would be facing some task."

Prentice looked questioningly at the detective. "Is that what you're looking for?" he asked. "Books?"

"No; not books. A book! Just one! Forgot you didn't know." Bowen proceeded to enlighten his companion relative to the code letter that had been found and the flashing signals witnessed the night before, and recorded, by the Pineville correspondence-school detective.

Prentice received the news with a brightening countenance. "Say, that's a bully lead, isn't it? The book that'll furnish us with a key to the code must be somewhere about. Let's go upstairs and look around."

At the foot of the stairs, however, the men were confronted by a grinning Zulu, counterpart of the giant black that guarded the outside door. Although the man's words were unintelligible, his meaning at once dawned upon Bowen.

"Kester's mother must be on the floor above," the detective said. "We'll have to announce ourselves, Prentice, and beg an interview."

The men produced cards, which the



black accepted. After disappearing upstairs, the Zulu returned, still grinning. A moment later the men were ushered into a second-floor sitting room that looked out on the front and side of the house.

An elderly, gray-haired woman, whose dainty face and figure reminded one of an ivory carving, advanced to meet the visitors. The faint wrinkles in an otherwise flawless face added distinction and life to a skin that boasted a complexion many a younger woman would have envied.

After presenting himself and Prentice, Bowen explained the reason for the visit. "I have been sent here by Mr. Harbin, Mrs. Kester," the detective began, "at whose home your son visited last night, previous to his disappearance."

There was a slight inclination of the beautiful gray head. "Yes. My son spoke of his visit there the night before."

"Mr. Harbin is greatly distressed at your son's disappearance," Bowen went on. "He feels, in a way, that he should have exercised more vigilance in guarding the man upon whom so much depends. I was assigned to watch Mr. Kester; and Mr. Harbin was responsible for the appearance of the soldiers sent here to guard your son and these premises."

"Did Mr. Harbin do this for my son's sake? Or was it done for the benefit of Mr. Harbin and his associates?" the woman inquired with disconcerting frankness.

"I can assure you, madam," Bowen responded, "that it was done solely in the interests of Mr. Kester."

"Why have you come here to-day?"

"We must find Mr. Kester. That is my purpose here. Mr. Prentice, of whom you have doubtless heard, is my assistant. You understand this is a most critical situation, madam. We are here as friends. Your son must be found. Perhaps you can, and will, assist us."

Mrs. Kester surveyed the men before her with eyes that suddenly misted. Whether or not she felt assured by Bowen's statements was still in doubt; nevertheless the mother instinct asserted itself.

"My son has disappeared," she said at

length, with a futile attempt to control her voice. "That is all I know."

"It is inconceivable that any but the most foolhardy and thoughtless of men could, at a time like this, have designs upon your son, Mrs. Kester," Prentice declared, moved by the woman's distress. "We know—the world must know by now—how much depends upon the presence and the safety of Mr. Kester. Even the bitterest of his enemies would have hesitated to attack him or to spirit him away. I can assure you, madam, that if your son were here now, the demands he has made upon New York for the payment of a billion dollars would be met promptly and unconditionally."

"I know very little of my son's plans or purposes," the mother spoke again quietly; "but I do know his life and being are wrapped up in it. Whatever he has done, or threatened to do, was for the best. It could not have been otherwise."

"I have no doubt of that, Mrs. Kester," Prentice responded tactfully. "And although we, who undertook to raise the money for whatever purpose your son desired, questioned his right and motives, we felt that, for the common good, the sum should be paid. It was only because, at the last moment, we suspected Mr. Kester of being used as a tool by certain unprincipled interests that we hesitated. Upon being questioned last night at a conference held in Mr. Harbin's home, your son withheld the information asked of him; but he promised to give us an answer to-day. I feel certain that had he been unmolested, the matter would have adjusted itself."

"You were with my son when—when he was attacked?" the woman asked. Apparently only of him was she concerned now.

"I was with him, Mrs. Kester," Bowen said. "Although we were looking for trouble, the attack took us by surprise. Your son was placed aboard a yacht and carried away."

"I have read the newspaper account of it," the woman said. "I have tried to be brave. I want to think that no harm will come to my boy."

"You may be assured of that, madam." The detective spoke with confidence.



"We are certain no injury will befall him; that is," Bowen added significantly, "unless you suspect some one, possibly a personal enemy, of having reason to——"

"My boy had no enemies," the mother broke in quickly.

"Are you acquainted with his business associates? Have you met or heard of a man named Marshall? He is known in financial circles as Wolf Marshall."

"I have met some of the men with whom my son is associated," Mrs. Kester replied; "but I do not recall that name."

Bowen hesitated a moment before mentioning the subject that had brought him to Pineville. He had no suspicions, now, that Mrs. Kester was interested, save in a maternal way, in her son's colossal enterprise. Doubtless he had not taken her wholly into his confidence. At the same time the detective felt she might resent too presumptuous questioning.

"Mrs. Kester," he proposed, "are you willing to do all in your power to help us find your son?"

"You should not doubt that, Mr. Bowen," she replied.

"Would you be willing to tell us, Mrs. Kester, the nature of the message flashed from this house last night at approximately eleven-thirty?"

The woman seemed startled at the question Bowen asked; but after a moment she said. "That would be impossible. Besides, what bearing would a signal flashed from this house have on my son's disappearance? Surely it would not give you an idea of his whereabouts."

"Is it not possible that Mr. Kester, anticipating what has already happened, may have prepared this code message and——"

"Code message?" The woman broke in swiftly.

Without further parley, Bowen drew a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to Mrs. Kester. It contained the series of numbers reviewed, shortly before, by Harbin. "Isn't this the message that went out from here last night?" he asked.

The woman did not deny it. "How did you obtain this, Mr. Bowen?"

"I copied it from the letter delivered

to you last night," the detective answered candidly. "The letter was picked up on the ferryboat from which your son disappeared. It was Mr. Kester, undoubtedly, who dropped it."

Mrs. Kester stiffened preceptibly. "The letter was addressed to me," she stated condemningly. "By what right did——"

Bowen interrupted. "Wait, please! Let us not quibble at a time like this. Minutes are precious and Mr. Kester may be in danger. I failed to prevent the kidnaping last night; but when the letter your son dropped came into my possession, I felt it my duty to open and read it. We could not afford to wait. We had to take, without question, whatever clues came our way. The letter was in cipher; so it availed us very little. However, I have reason to believe this message was flashed from here last night. Am I correct?"

Again Mrs. Kester hesitated, as if weighing her answer. "Yes," she admitted presently. "This message was sent from here last night."

"Who sent it?"

"I did."

"Thank you, Mrs. Kester," Bowen said graciously. "Now," he went on, "if I give you my word, and Mr. Prentice will do the same, that we will not use the information in any way to defeat or neutralize your son's work, will you give us the contents of the message? I can promise you that if we use the knowledge contained in it at all, it will be solely for the benefit of yourself and Mr. Kester."

To Bowen's surprise, who figured that he had won the woman's confidence and sympathy, Mrs. Kester smiled and shook her head. Whatever resentment she may have displayed toward him in the beginning, vanished.

"Mr. Bowen," she replied, "I feel that you and Mr. Prentice are here to help me; that you would not, willingly, use the information I might give to the detriment of my son's plans and purposes. But I have no information to offer. None whatever. The cipher contained in this message is as meaningless to me as it appears to you."



"Yet you say you sent the message?" the detective insisted, puzzled.

"Yes." Mrs. Kester, watching the other closely and perhaps reading what went on in his mind, spoke again. "A moment ago, Mr. Bowen, you asked me to believe in you, in your good intentions toward Mr. Kester and myself. I do. Now I ask that you believe in me. I sent the message, but I have no knowledge of its contents."

There was no mistaking the sincerity with which the plea was uttered. The detective bowed. "It would be unpardonable of me to question any statement you might make, Mrs. Kester," he returned gallantly. "I was merely puzzled that you should be required to transmit a message that——"

"That was unintelligible to me?" she finished.

Bowen nodded.

"Perhaps my son does not trust me," she ventured, smiling. "Perhaps he does not wish to have me alarmed or worried. Often, in the past month, I have flashed different series of numbers. But I have never asked that they be deciphered for me."

"From where are the messages sent?" the detective asked. Without the slightest hesitancy, Mrs. Kester turned and led the way into a small, adjoining room where, in one corner on a table, were three contact switches somewhat similar to telegraph-sending instruments.

"These keys are for the different colors," she explained: "red, green, and white."

Bowen's eyes traveled swiftly about the room as the explanations were being made. Except for a chair and the table on which the keys were fastened, together with the wires that ran up through the ceiling, the room was destitute of furnishings.

Upon a table, however, back of the keys and flush against the wall, was a row of books—probably two dozen volumes. The detective scanned the titles quickly. Looking up, he found Prentice watching him. He smiled ever so slightly.

"You have no key to the code, Mrs. Kester?" he inquired, simply for the purpose of conversation.

"None whatever."

Bowen allowed a frown to drift across his countenance: a frown that seemed to indicate regret and disappointment. "Too bad! I had hoped to decipher the message. But let us not waste time assuming," the detective went on. "Besides, we have disturbed Mrs. Kester sufficiently for one morning. You have been very kind to us," he said, bowing to the woman. "I hope, the next time we meet, that your son will be present."

Mrs. Kester led the way from the room, Prentice following. Bowen hung back an instant, standing beside the table as if interested in the signal keys. He joined the others presently, again thanked the woman for the courtesy shown them, and with Prentice at his heels, descended to the lower floor.

After a few words with the department of justice officials, Bowen and Prentice left the house. Out in the yard, Captain Corwin approached.

"Anything definite about Kester yet?" he inquired.

"Nothing," the detective responded.

When they were alone in the car a few minutes later, with the Dorlan rolling smoothly along the road, Prentice glanced questioningly at his companion.

"Say, what's the idea, Bowen? Didn't you want to go through with the job?"

"What job?" Bowen asked innocently.

"Why, the thing you came out here for. The key to the code! You saw those books on the table, didn't you? One of the volumes probably contained the information you were after."

"Undoubtedly," the other responded. "But wouldn't it have been rather presumptuous of me to go through them while Mrs. Kester was present?"

"I suppose so. Still, it was necessary. What's the program now? Going to wait until Mrs. Kester is out of the house? A shame not to have looked for the key when it was right before you."

"But I did get it," the detective answered, beginning to smile at the other's evident confoundment.

"Got it?" Prentice echoed excitedly, applying his brakes and slowing down the car. "Where? How?"

"Right here." Bowen tapped his forehead. "Keep going, Prentice! Time's



valuable. Get across the river and stop at Brentano's. I've a purchase to make."

"Come, now, Bowen!" the other protested, opening the throttle again. "Don't be so infernally mysterious. What did you learn?"

"Didn't you look over the books yourself? Notice any of the titles and their authors?"

"Yes, of course; but what's that got to do with it?"

"Everything, I hope," Bowen returned.

"You mean you spotted one book in the lot and concluded it was the volume you wanted?" Prentice queried.

"Exactly. And I'm on my way to obtain it. Don't you see," the detective continued, "how much embarrassment it saved? And Kester will never know that we have a key to his code. From now on we'll be able to read all the messages sent from his house."

"Well, I'll say you're a wonder if the hunch pans out," Prentice declared skeptically. "You'll elect yourself as one of the superhumans that infest detective yarns."

"Nothing of the sort. Simply a matter of deduction. In glancing over the books I spotted one that convinced me my search was at an end. Use your gray matter, Prentice. I'll give you until we reach Brentano's."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

PRENTICE started an active and determined thinking bout on his way across the river and through the streets blocked by a paralyzed traffic. He found it difficult, however, to recall more than two or three titles of the books viewed on Kester's table. Just what one was responsible for Bowmen's hunch, remained a mystery.

Although Prentice always considered himself possessed of a trained mind and prided himself upon a fairly retentive memory, he discovered that the process of becoming a detective entailed a certain "sense" still undeveloped.

The crowds on the walks, circulating aimlessly, were even greater than when the Dorlan and its passengers passed uptown.

In John Kester's magic power, the press had found a rich mine. Seldom had the adjective-throwers and headline writers discovered more promising material. Pens were unleashed and copy paper consumed. Rumors, speculation and sensational theories were born and put to death in the brief time that elapsed between editions.

Kester had been found unharmed by a *Planet* reporter in a suite at the Ritz! Kester's body had been discovered by a *Review* news hound in the basement of a Third Avenue tenement house! Kester had been seen, an hour before, on a yacht in the Hudson! A mysterious wireless message had been received by an amateur radio operator in Long Island to the effect that Kester was being held for ransom on an abandoned farm near Morristown!

Such was the news one read in dipping into paper after paper. Even the hardened New Yorker, calloused from sensation in its most rabid form, seemed dazed at the extravagant and contrary reports.

Prentice stopped long enough to buy an assorted half dozen of the papers, which he and Bowen scanned and promptly tossed aside.

At Twenty-seventh Street the Dorlan rolled up at the curb. Bowen jumped out, disappeared through the revolving doors of the book store, reappeared a moment later and instructed Prentice to drive on.

"Time's up," the detective announced. "What's your answer?"

Prentice shook his head.

Bowen laughed and thrust the book he had purchased under the driver's nose. Prentice read the title of a thin, paper-covered volume.

"The Betterment of Mankind!" he said, with a glance at the black letters. "I remember seeing a copy on Kester's table."

"And it failed to give you a hunch?" the other queried.

"Why should it? I don't see——"

"Granted! Have you noticed the author's name?"

Prentice glanced again at the book. "Kester!" he exclaimed. "Say, do you mean it's the John Kester we know?"



"No one else," Bowen returned. "I told you the other day he had written and published something, didn't I? Well, here it is. Price one dollar. Worth several thousand times that to us—just at present."

"Better prove it before you crow," Prentice challenged. "Do you think because Kester wrote the book that it's the one from which he made up his code?"

"Why not? Isn't it logical to suspect a fond author of using his own work?" As he spoke, Bowen produced the cipher message which Mrs. Kester had identified as a copy of the one flashed from her home twelve hours before.

Deliberately and with the utmost confidence that his quest was at an end, while the Dorlan rolled swiftly toward the lower part of the city, Bowen began to decipher the jumble of figures.

"Knew it!" he declared, after he had compared the page, line and word according to his theory of the grouped numbers. "Dead easy now. Here's the first sentence: 'This message indicates I am in danger!'"

"Good!" exclaimed Prentice, keeping his eyes upon the blocked and cluttered street. "Read on."

Before Bowen could comply, a man jumped into the street and waved his arms. It was Jenkins, the Metropolitan Traction president. Prentice stopped and the traction magnate climbed breathlessly into the tonneau of the car.

"Much obliged, Prentice," he said. "Saved me a walk. Haven't been able to beg, borrow or steal a Dorlan. Terrible! Maybe you'll rent me this car!"

"About as soon as I'd rent you my right eye," Prentice responded, grinning. "Why don't you attach a shaft to your Reese-Darrow and get a couple of mules? That'll take you about very comfortably."

Perhaps owing to his irritated condition and his despair at not having means of conveyance at his command, Jenkins failed to appreciate the humor of the younger man's remarks.

"The situation is becoming more and more acute," Jenkins cried. "Something must be done about it. With the shutting off of the electric light current at

noon to-day we'll find ourselves in still greater distress. What have you seen or heard, Bowen?"

"I've seen nothing and heard less," the detective responded briefly.

"Too bad! Too bad! With that lunatic, Kester, at large, where is it all to end?"

"Lunatic or fool," responded Prentice, as he guided the big car along the narrow, winding cañon of the financial district, "we wouldn't quibble at his demands now."

"I'm not so sure of it," Jenkins retorted irritably. "A billion dollars isn't small change. If those confounded newspapers were put out of business——"

"They'll get bumped in a couple of days if Kester's program is carried out," Bowen interrupted.

"Kester should have started off with them," Jenkins snorted. "Here, let me out at Fulton Street, Prentice. Much obliged."

"The old boy's all aflutter this morning," Bowen said, after their passenger alighted and the car sped on toward the Harbin offices.

"Yes; and two days ago he was calmness itself," asserted Prentice. "Declared that his engineers would have the cars operating within six hours. He isn't so cocksure of it now."

It was not until after the men passed through the portals of the Harbin Bank and were ushered speedily into the chief's private office, that the decoding of the message was resumed.

Bowen touched in the high lights of the visit to Pineville; and while Prentice and the banker leaned over his shoulder, the detective worked out the cipher and wrote down, word by word, the contents of the message. Completed, it read:

This message indicates I am in danger. Do not interfere with lights unless I fail to appear within a week. At that time cut off every form of electrical energy. Success to the cause.  
KESTER.

The men, staring at the message Bowen had produced from the meaningless jumble of figures, broke into jubilant cries.

"A respite!" announced Harbin. "Thank heaven for that! We've a week in which to work, Bowen."

A look of unmistakable relief was ap-



parent on all faces. Within the next seven days, unless Kester appeared and countermanded the order, no further electrical manifestations were to be affected.

As was customary in emergencies, Harbin acted swiftly. Stepping to the phone on his desk he issued a command: "Send Mr. Frayne in at once."

Before that gentleman appeared, the banker addressed Prentice. "It rests with us, Simon, to do our part toward restoring public confidence. Let us hope that before the week has passed things will be adjusted. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. Between now and twelve o'clock," Prentice said, "we will buy all the light and power, traction, telephone and motor stocks that are offered."

Harbin nodded approvingly. "Our buying will not alone restore public confidence and the market equilibrium, but it may hand a jolt to Marshall and his associates."

Mr. Frayne entered the office. Frayne, a tall, well-dressed, soft-spoken individual, was popularly known as Harbin's right hand man when work of an extremely confidential or delicate nature was required.

In a few crisp sentences, the banker advised Frayne what the Harbin Banking Company proposed to do. "Go the limit. Buy at least a hundred thousand shares for the account of Mr. Prentice and——"

"Make that five hundred thousand," Prentice broke in grimly.

Again Harbin nodded in approval. "Thanks, Simon." Then, addressing Frayne once more, he said: "Please issue a statement of what we are doing to all the news agencies. Play it strong. That is all for the present."

Frayne bowed and withdrew.

Harbin consulted his watch. "Eleven o'clock, gentlemen," he announced. "In another half hour the fireworks will begin."

"You'll have Jenkins, Elder, Dixon and the others down here before noon, Mr. Harbin," the detective spoke up. "They'll demand to know your reason and purpose for this orgy of buying. I think it would be advisable for the present to withhold the nature of Kester's

message. Silence on your part will enable me to work to a better advantage."

"You can depend upon me, Bowen. Not a whisper of this will get out until you're agreeable. And before I forget it, permit me to compliment you on this morning's work. It is an admirable beginning. Keep it up."

## CHAPTER XX.

### SOMETHING WRONG.

SEVERAL hours before the tickers began stuttering quotations and news rumors that plunged Wall Street and hundreds of brokerage offices throughout the country into a state of chaotic turmoil; long before it was apparent that the Harbin Bank had anything to do with the predicted display of fireworks, Mr. Hank Norton lumbered out of bed in a modest apartment on West End Avenue, dressed leisurely and descended to the restaurant on the ground floor, where he divided his attention between a substantial breakfast and a sheaf of newspapers.

Norton's walk and appearance proclaimed a man supremely satisfied with himself. During a wide and varied career, he had staged a number of exceptionally big jobs in anticipation of a liberal remuneration; but not one of them matched the smooth-working, artistic performance he had directed the night before. It was superb! Colossal! Moreover, the reward that would flow his way—some of it already had trickled into his pockets—surpassed his wildest dreams of wealth.

The newspapers flaunted the exploit in great, black headlines and spoke of the genius that must have commanded it. Yet Norton's name did not appear. In respect to this masterpiece of daring strategy, as with others of lesser fame, the author was content to blush unseen.

No more work! No more grubbing for a few paltry thousands. No more living in fear of being tapped on the shoulder by a "flat-foot" and taken to the district attorney for a painful interview. No longer would the financial aristocrats look down upon him as a piker and a grafter.

It was a delightful future that spread



itself before Norton; a future rose-tinted and gold stippled. Particularly of the gold was he concerned. For the first time in years—since the day he had changed into a prison-made garment—Norton felt confident and unafraid. Nothing could hurt him now.

With a spryness amazing for a man of his size, Norton left the dining room, smiled fishily upon the doorman and stepped into his steam-driven Dorlan that stood at the curb.

On the way to his shabby offices, the driver of the shiny new car viewed the evidences of Kester's power with patent amusement. The stalled automobiles and street cars, the assortment of wagons and push-carts, and the throngs of bewildered pedestrians, filled Norton with a sense of vast superiority.

Had those who glanced enviously upon the fat man behind the wheel of the maroon-colored car been gifted to read the thoughts that passed through his mind, they might have behaved differently.

Once within the confines of his office, Norton took down the receiver of his phone and spoke guardedly into the mouthpiece. A voice reached his ears and welcome words cheered him.

"Everything O. K.," the voice responded in answer to his query.

"Good. I'll see you after twelve."

About the time Bowen was writing down Kester's message, Norton took up the tape that was flowing out of the ticker and ran it through his fingers. His already wide grin expanded from ear to ear. The market was satisfactorily wild and stocks were on the toboggan.

At eleven-thirty he was conscious of a mild surprise. The market was still in a turmoil, but stocks no longer sought the depths. In the next fifteen minutes there came over the ticker, between quotations, the news that the Harbin Banking Company was buying heavily for itself and its clients.

Pure dope, Norton reasoned! It was simply one of these rumors that meant nothing; that were always let loose in a wild market.

At eleven-fifty his brows began to furrow in perplexing thought when he saw that the stocks that should have been

tumbling into the cellar were going up by leaps and bounds. They jumped up two, three and even five points at a quotation, with apparently an inexhaustible fund somewhere, ready to take up all that was offered.

Still Norton did not worry. At five minutes to twelve, he switched on his office lights and divided his attention between the glowing bulbs and the stuttering ticker. Point by point the stocks mounted. What fools could be back of this movement? Well, all the more profit for him!

He gazed intently at his watch as the minute hand approached twelve. Just before it reached that mark, Norton turned his eyes toward the cluster of lights that were suspended from the ceiling.

After what seemed to be an unusually long interval, he looked again at his watch. The minute hand had crept past twelve. And the lights were still burning! Was his watch wrong? Undoubtedly. A moment later, now genuinely alarmed, Norton peered from his window. Diagonally opposite, in front of a jeweler's shop, was a large, electrically controlled clock. Dumfounded, unable to believe his eyes, he saw that the clock marked five minutes past twelve.

Norton struggled from his chair. The lights blazed steadily in the office. He stumbled toward the ticker. The last quotations were showing prices near the level of two days before. What did it mean? What could it mean?

A choking rage gripped him. Double crossed! Yes, that was it! His principals had tricked him. They must have known the lights would not go out. That accounted for the strength of the market within the past half hour. Well, they would pay for the trick! He still had the game in his hands. He wasn't defeated yet!

Norton, shaking like a leaf and tramping up and down the floor in a blind fury, heard his phone ring. In response to his savage greeting there came an equally savage voice that he had no difficulty in recognizing.

"Oh, you're there, are you? Thought you'd have made a get-away before this,



Norton!" The voice now moderated to a cold, incisive fury.

"Get-away?" echoed Norton. "You—  
—you——"

"You'd better hunt a hole or make good our bargain," the other cut in harshly. "You can't double cross me by letting Kester escape!"

"What you driving at?" Norton snarled. "You've harpooned me. I'm the goat. Where do you get off about Kester escaping? I talked with one of my men a couple of hours ago. Kester's as safe as a church. There ain't a chance of him getting away."

"Won't do you any good to lie about it!" the other returned. "Kester must have escaped. You know as well as I do that the lights didn't go out at noon according to schedule."

"Sure I know they didn't go out!" Norton snapped back. "What you think I got eyes for?"

"Well, then, what happened?" the other demanded.

"What happened?" Norton fairly shouted. "Everything! I'm cleaned out! Broke! That's what happened."

"Better make sure your bird's caged," the voice at the other end of the wire commanded. "There's a screw loose somewhere, if you're telling me the truth. Get busy!"

As Norton slowly hung up his receiver and was about to remove it again to make a call, the bell rang. Another familiar voice greeted him.

"Yes; I know all about it," he broke in hotly. "The lights didn't go out, the market's going to the skies and we're on the road to the other place."

"But how——" The new voice quavered.

"Don't ask me! I don't know any more than you do. Maybe a whole lot less," Norton went on vindictively. "Kester's safe. I'm on my way to visit him now. Maybe I'll get some information. If I do I'll let you in on it. Good-by."

He slammed the receiver against its hook, rather surprised at himself with the way he had treated the last caller. At any other time he would have groveled at the very thought of speaking to the man.

Again the phone rang and again the voice of the second caller sounded. "How's that?" Norton demanded sharply as the jumble of words failed to register.

"I said you must be very careful," the voice warned. "You're already under suspicion. You'll be watched and followed."

"Where'd you learn that?" Norton queried, his own voice wavering.

"I know. It's Bowen! Look out for him."

"Bowen?" he jeered. "Huh, I'm not worried about that tin-star boob! I know how to deal with him. He ain't even got a car."

With his confidence somewhat restored, Norton drew on his overcoat, picked up his hat and went down to the street. Bowen's presence in the game had not disturbed him. It was Kester, and Kester's failure to live up to his published program that preyed heavily upon Norton's mind.

The next section of this novel will appear in the **TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE** of April 1st, out on that date. Back numbers may be had from news dealers or the publishers.

### Why, Indeed!

CASSIDY walked up to the ticket office. "I want a ticket to New-castle," he said.

"Single or return?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you want a ticket one way," said the patient clerk, "or one that will take you there and back?"

Cassidy looked at him suspiciously. "Why the devil do I want a ticket there and back whin I'm here already?"

### Not Yet

A VERY old man was accosted in the village street by a stranger, who said: "Excuse me, but you must be a great age?"

"Yes," responded the old man; "I be gettin' on for ninety-five."

"And have you lived here all your life?" asked the stranger.

"No; not yet," was the reply.



# TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the  
Editor and Readers.

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MARCH 15, 1923.

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## On the March

**I**N April the young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of march as well as love, if we may credit the poets who favor us so numerous with their verses these days. They are not looking backward to the month just closed. The march they think of is the one along the open road, in the clear sunshine, away from the dingy town, their souls attuned to the music of the birds and the stars.

As sure as the return of soft breezes is the return of the poets with their marching songs. Not a few who sing their spring song in prose come along, and these we welcome when they unfold a human story that marches too. But so often *that* stands still while the vernal world all about keeps moving—the flowers budding, the trout leaping from the stream, red-winged blackbirds flashing in the air, boughs fluttering their new greenery.

All these activities may well make a story in themselves, you may say, and never mind about poor man's pottering on the earth. Well, that has its element of truth; yet people do care for what man is pottering and plotting about, for that is what makes up life. And life is the thing that keeps the story writers busy. Some of them wonder what they would do without it.



## In the Next Issue

**A** WHILE ago a reader sent us a letter in which he was kind enough to say, among other things: "You don't say much about it, but everybody who reads your magazine knows that when you give us a detective story it is a corker." The next issue of TOP-NOTCH will contain a detective story, and one, we think you will find, which comes up to this commendation. It is a novel of somewhat

lesser length than we run usually, but we are going to give you another long story in the same issue, and something had to be done to make room for both, without cutting down the general assortment of stories. This detective tale is called "The Greenwich Village Mystery." Its author is a new contributor to TOP-NOTCH, L. W. Lowenthal.

The other long story has the striking title, "Hard to Fool a Buzzard," and the author is Johnston McCulley. It is a strong, dramatic tale of the Arizona desert for the most part, and the buzzard—well, he is in the sky at times, makes certain people think, and wonder, and that is about the rôle he plays in the remarkable drama. A man's story, we should say, in the main, but without the woman it never could have been.

"Punch in a Pinch," is a baseball story by Ernest A. Phillips, which will be a sport feature of the next number; along with it is a sport story, though not of the outdoor sort, by Harold S. Steevens, called "Luck That Turned."

Among the other attractions, some of them in verse, are:

"Up to the Dumb-bell," a lively affair of circus life, the Dumb-bell being an accomplished elephant.

"Where the Dynamo Hums," a flash of industrial life, by James Edward Hungerford.

"Fightin' Is Fightin'," a strong story of the lumberjacks, by Hapsburg Liebe.

"The Winning Stride," and "Rising Trout," two short bits of vivid interest, by Charles Horace Meiers and S. Omar Barker.

A clever tale of the theater by Neil Moran, entitled, "When a Frost Was a Hit."

"Dragon Light," by Albert Dorrington, a slice of Australian life among men of the great outdoors.

"Fool's Luck," a stirring tale of the sea, by that master hand, Frank H. Shaw.

A good laugh with Thomas Thursday over "Just Imagine It!"

If you take up the big serial novel, "Power Demoniacal," at this point—it



is now in its third installment—you will be able to enjoy it to the end. "Robin of the Fillums," that youngster who makes so much mischief and fun, will fade out in the next issue.



### A Life Member

*Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.*

DEAR SIR: It has been some time since I have seen a letter from this part of the fold. I have always hesitated heretofore to express any opinion on "our" wonderful magazine, because I felt that there were others better qualified.

I always enjoy the different viewpoints of your many contributors from time to time. Some I agree with, while others I pass over, but on the whole there is no other magazine that can be placed on the same level because "ours" tops them all. I use the word "ours" advisedly, for I feel as though we readers were merely one large family bound together by a common interest.

I have been a constant reader for the past seven years, and have not missed a single copy. I have converted at least a dozen of my friends, who now swear by TOP-NOTCH, too, which in itself should be evidence of what I think of it.

In my estimation, one serial, one long complete story, the longer the better, and two novelettes, of from fifteen to twenty pages, would be an ideal state. Personally I don't think so much of the short stories, because there is not enough to them.

I won't mention any favorite authors because they are all pretty much on a par. I have known Burt L. Standish longer than the rest, from the days when I was a younger boy than I am now, and I still enjoy his stories the same as ever.

I have taken it upon myself to become a life member, and wherever I go I boost and recommend TOP-NOTCH. Yours for continued success.

RALPH A. LITT.

Marchmont Road, Toronto, Can.



### Chance for An Editor

*Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.*

DEAR SIR: Just a line to tell you that while I take TOP-NOTCH regularly, and think it an excellent publication, I am not one of those who think it faultless. Indeed, I find it faulty in several respects. It seems to me that there is no excuse for some of these faults, and if I were an editor I am sure I would remedy them. For example, what excuse is there for not having more tales of the sea, more industrial stories, more New

England yarns, more bowling stories? I mention only these defects; there are others. But in spite of them, I keep reading T.-N. If only I were an editor, I would—but I am not. So there you are. Very truly yours,  
Albany, N. Y. H. S. SAVAGE.



### From the Many

*Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.*

DEAR SIR: Read your interesting story, "Right is Left," by R. A. Phillips. When one strikes a good thing, from the many not so good, they are appreciated. The plot and settings of the story are well brought out, and were not overdone. TOP-NOTCH is a good magazine, and I get it most of the time. Respectfully yours,  
CHAS. TOURTELLOTE.

Greene Street, Providence, R. I.



### Going To It

*Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.*

DEAR SIR: I have just finished reading the story "His Rest Cure Dramatic," and it certainly was one of the best stories I have ever read. I am going to try and get your magazine just as often as I can, for it certainly has good stories in it. Yours truly,

HILDA REKONEN.

Stockett, Mont.



### Coming Along

*Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.*

DEAR SIR: Thought I'd write in and tell you that I think you are putting out an awfully good magazine. One of the most entertaining stories I have read for quite a while was "All Aboard the Owl Car!" by William Wallace Cook. I think "Rough Diamonds" is also a good serial, but, in my estimation, it doesn't come up to "Treasure Valley." Let's have a story on horse or auto racing or something like that. Very truly yours,  
H. D. B.

Red Oak, Iowa.



### Quite Easy

*Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.*

DEAR SIR: Having read your magazine for the last five years, I thought I would just say a word or two on the merits of the best magazine going.

The stories are all fine. I would like to see more stories of the Camera Chap.

Why not have a good soccer football story once in a while? I am sure Burt L. Standish, with his knowledge of sports, could do this. Wishing you every success, I remain

A TOP-NOTCH FAN.

Norwalk, Conn.



# New Easy Way to Become a Cartoonist

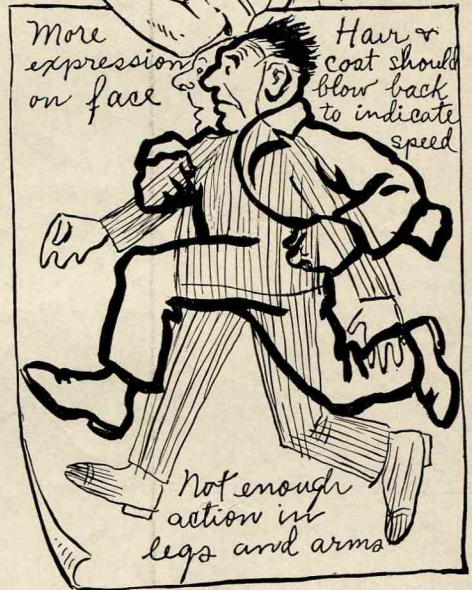
By this amazing new method it is possible for *anyone* to learn Cartooning in a remarkably short time. Many of our students could hardly draw a straight line before they began to study with us. Now hundreds of them are making splendid incomes. And they learned it all *at home—in spare time!*



**T**HE simplicity of this truly wonderful method will astonish you. Although you never leave your own fireside, you receive the personal attention of one of America's foremost Cartoonists. It is almost the same as if you were working in his studio. Your mistakes are not only pointed out, but each correction is illustrated right before your eyes. You see exactly where your faults lie and you never make the same mistakes twice. The speed with which you progress will amaze you. Through this wonderful method many of our students are now making handsome incomes and the same opportunity to enter this splendid profession is now yours.

## No Talent Is Needed

The most astounding part of this wonderful method is that you don't have to know anything about drawing to begin with. The old idea that only those with "inborn talent" could be successful Cartoonists is exploded. ***If you can hold a pencil you can learn Cartooning this new easy way.*** Starting with first principles—straight lines and curves,—you progress step by step through shading, action, composition, etc., until you find yourself qualified for a splendid position as Cartoonist almost before you realize it.



## Work That Is Play at a Big Profit

Right now there is an increasing need for Cartoonists. We cannot train men fast enough to meet the demand and the result is high salaries. \$50 to \$75 a week is not at all unusual for a beginner,—many make much more. And there is absolutely no limit to what you can do.

But aside from the big pay is the wonderful fascination of the Cartooning game. There is no "9 to 5" daily grind. And it really is not "work" at all, but the most delightfully interesting play. You meet interesting people, work in pleasant surroundings and, best of all, you are practically your own boss. And then, think of the fun of creating your own characters, of being able to make quick, catchy little sketches at home, at a big dinner party, at the theatre! Our students say it is the most fascinating profession in the world.

## Write For Free Booklet

"How To Become A Cartoonist" explains this amazing new method in detail: shows you how it works; tells you about our students and what they have accomplished; about the tremendous opportunities in

this great field and how you can qualify for one of them this very year. Get out of the low-pay rut **now**. Get your start in this high-paid interesting profession at once. Clip the coupon below and mail it to us **today**.

**Washington School of Cartooning**  
Room 1117, Marden Building, Washington, D. C.

**WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF CARTOONING**  
Room 1117, Marden Building, Washington, D. C.

Gentlemen:

Please send me your free booklet, "How to Become a Cartoonist," and tell me about the big opportunities for me in this field.

Name

(State whether Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Address

City

..

State

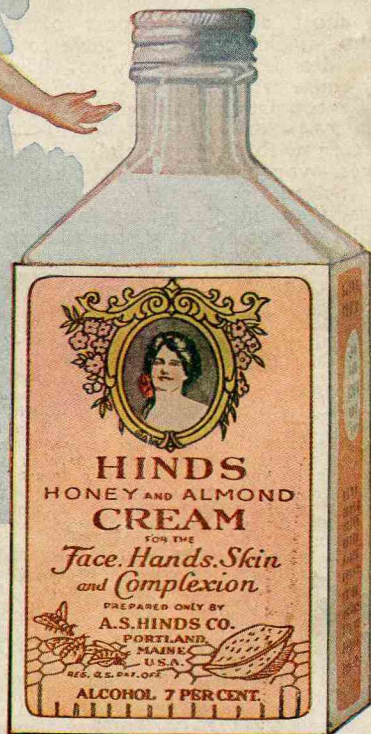


# It's Wonderfully Good

This is the cream that comforts and refreshes the skin;—fragrant, delightful, easy to use, yet always sure in yielding most gratifying results. In midwinter, when frigid winds are injuring unprotected complexions, Hinds Honey and Almond Cream is preventing roughness and chapping, and is adding to the attractiveness of those women who are using it daily. The hands should be moistened with this cream to overcome the slight drying effect of some kinds of soap.

Among its other valuable qualities, this pure liquid emollient forms a wonderfully effective base for face powder and, because it is so simple to apply, the habit of using it is rapidly extending throughout all communities, particularly in women's college towns.

This same Hinds Honey and Almond Cream for years has been recommended as an aid in manicuring because it so agreeably softens the cuticle for removal and prevents soreness: also, as it adds to the lustre of the nails. Altogether, it is a success for the entire manicuring process.



All druggists and departments sell Hinds Honey and Almond Cream in bottles, 50c and \$1.00. Cold and Disappearing Cream, tubes, 25c, Jars, 60c. Traveler size, all creams, 10c each. We mail a sample Honey and Almond Cream for 2c, trial size 6c. Cold or Disappearing sample 2c, trial tube 4c.

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