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Top-Notch Magazine

JUNE 1, 1926

EAST OF SUNRISE

A Powerful Novel of the Southwest

By

WILLIAM WALLACE COOK

KLINE

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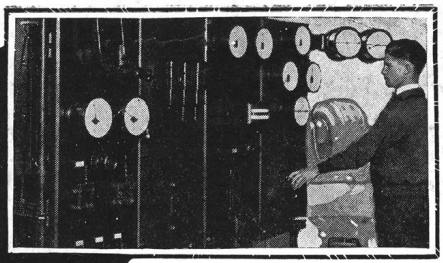

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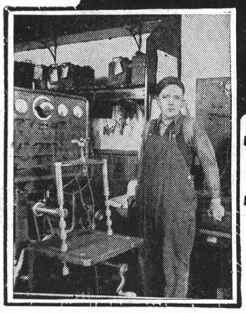

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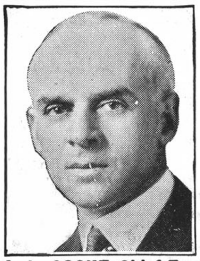

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Even ordinary electricians—the "screw driver" kind—are making big money, but trained men—Electrical Experts who get the top salaries—are needed more now than ever before. Thousands of Cooke Trained Men easily earn $3,500 to $10,000 a year. That's the kind of a job you want—where you can plan and boss and supervise the work of others or go into business for yourself. Get started towards one of these big-pay jobs now. Learn to earn $70 to $200 a week—you can do it with Cooke Training—recommended by more than ten thousand successful graduates. Just mail the coupon below.

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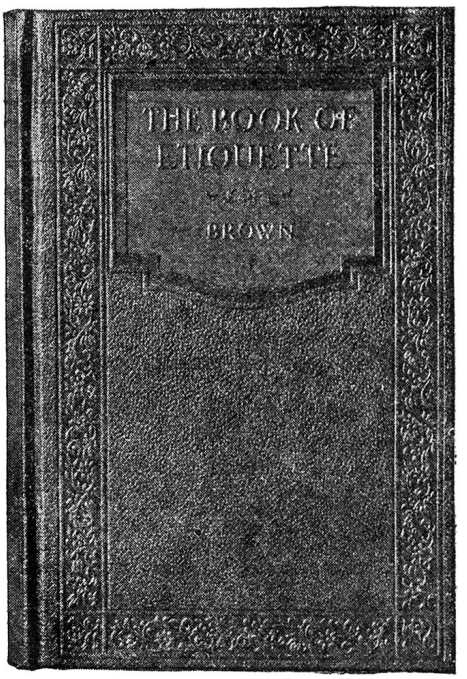

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VOL. LXVI JUNE 1, 1926 NUMBER 3

TOP-NOTCH

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GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

"We novelists are the showmen of life," said a famous English writer once, putting in other words Shakespeare's comment on holding the mirror up to nature; and to be sure it is the writing people who show us how thrilling a thing life can be. They can come with their little words on paper into our commonplace surroundings and change drab existence into glorious adventure. They can take us away with them on desperate affairs, send us to face the most overwhelming odds, give us romance within book covers that transforms all our workaday world.

It is sheer nonsense to say that we Americans are not romantic, that we spend all our time in pursuit of the almighty dollar. As a matter of fact, we are the most romantic of all peoples on the face of the earth to-day. Compared with us, most Europeans are a skeptical, cold, materialistic breed. It may be because we are younger than Europe, because it is still possible for us to cherish the illusions of youth.

Whatever the cause, it is true that we sit at the feet of our story-tellers and listen to their romancing, just as little children gather round some beloved maker of magic.

This is nothing to be ashamed of. We have our achievements in the world of material things. We are unsurpassed in the matter of industry, of organization, of invention. Ours is the right, then, to dream a little, if we will, to find in good fiction escape from modern struggle and strife.

To meet the need that is in all of us for romance, a great publishing house has called on the best of the fiction writers of the day, giving them free play to let their fancy wander, asking that they tell us stories that will hold us in their spell.

Here are reviewed some of the most recent books which that house has published. They are books about the great West, books of mystery, fine, clean love stories. They are Chelsea House books, your guarantee of good reading. The four mentioned here may be had from any reputable bookseller in your neighborhood. Ask your dealer or write to Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, for a complete list of these books.

WANDA OF THE WHITE SAGE, by Roy Ulrich. Price 75 cents. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Continued on 2nd page following

The Cruise of the Colleen Bawn

By Frank Carruthers

Author of "Terror Island."

Shanghaied!

Certain big business interests wanted Sid Livingston out of the way for a while. That was how he came to be shanghaied on board the clipper-built schooner, *Colleen Bawn,* for a voyage to the Pribilof Islands, in Bering Sea.

As you follow Sid Livingston in his adventures, you have the sense of being at sea; you live with the scoundrelly crew of the *Colleen Bawn;* the tang of the ocean brine is in your nostrils; the spindrift lashes your face; you feel the heave and surge of the deck beneath your feet. You participate in Livingston's desperate perils and his attempt at escape—one of the most dramatic episodes in sea fiction.

Glorious Adventure

fills the pages of "The Cruise of the *Colleen Bawn*"—adventure that will make the blood run fast and cause the pulse to quicken, that will set the nerves atingle.

Readers who like a good sea yarn will be delighted with this work of Frank Carruthers. It has all the thrill of an old-time pirate romance, with the novelty of being laid at the present time. The story is filled with drama, action, and tense situations. Men are tested by the sea as by no other element. In its grip, weaklings rise to the heights of heroism, while physical giants quail before its terrors. Frank Carruthers has made a fine contribution to the literature of the sea in writing "The Cruise of the *Colleen Bawn.*"

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Mr. Ulrich in this fast-moving story whirls his readers into one amazing situation after another. If you like books with real pace and go to them, "Wanda of the White Sage" was written for you. It is a love and adventure story of the finest type, one that I have no hesitancy in recommending to the most "choosy" of my readers.

MR. CHANG OF SCOTLAND YARD, by A. E. Apple. Price 75 cents. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

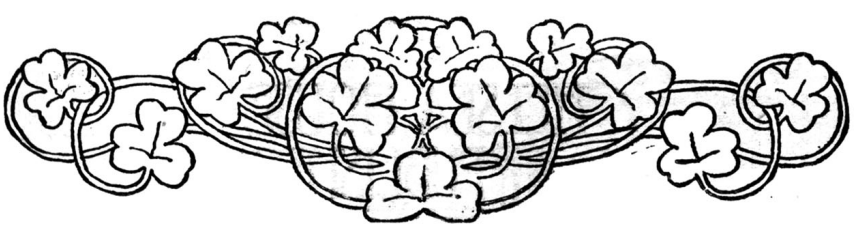
"A murder without a motive is the height of stupidity," thus spoke the remarkable Mr. Chang when finally his pursuers caught up with him. But there were many real motives behind certain of the strange deeds of Mr. Chang that were far from stupid. The story of the unraveling of these motives that set into action this debonair, quick-thinking Oriental is a fascinating one. How well Mr. Apple tells it! He leads you on from one exciting scene to another in masterly style. He makes you hate and admire and almost respect his outstanding character. For those whose appetite for detective stories has become a bit jaded, I recommend "Mr. Chang of Scotland Yard" as a first-class fillip.

BACK OF BEYOND, an Adventure Story, by Ethel Smith Dorrance and James French Dorrance. Price 75 cents. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Do you know what a "chechahco" is? Not to keep you in suspense, it is the Yukon expression for tenderfoot; and Doctor Kirkland and his daughter were all of that. Otherwise, they would never have insisted on pushing on to Back of Beyond Valley in the middle of a raging Yukon winter. No one could dissuade them, however, and the adventures that befell them make a thrilling story of the great North, the sort of yarn that you like to read stretched out in comfort away from the heat of an approaching summer. The book is the tale of as intricate a crime as ever the Canadian Mounted were called on to solve. How well they did the job is for you to say. I think you will agree at the end that here is a smashing and unusual story of real folks in a real situation.

THE WAGON BOSS, a Western Story, by Emart Kinsburn. Price 75 cents. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Those who have read Emart Kinsburn's "Boss of Camp Four" will remember a certain delightful character in that book called Chet Fanning. Those who have never met Chet now have the chance to see him in very lively action. There's a conspiracy to ruin Chet's boss, the famous "Spookmule" Paxton, and Chet goes right after the conspirators. The result is a book that once more gives life and color to the picturesque scenes of the construction camps of the West. An unforgetable yarn that should be in your library.



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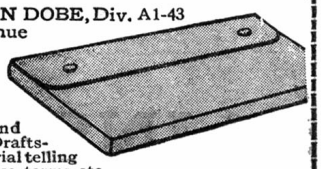

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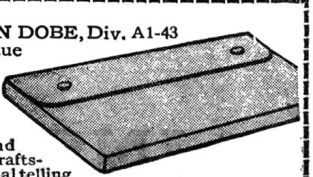

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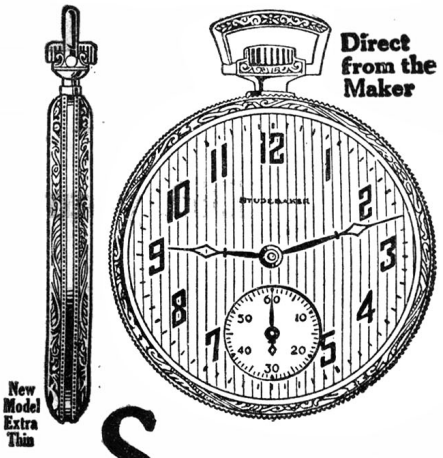

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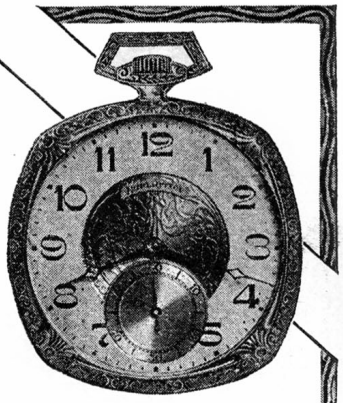

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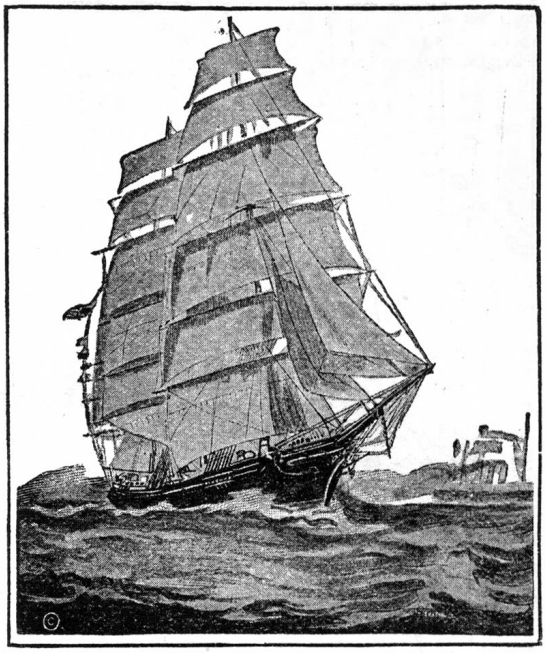

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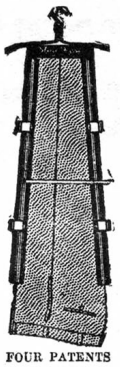

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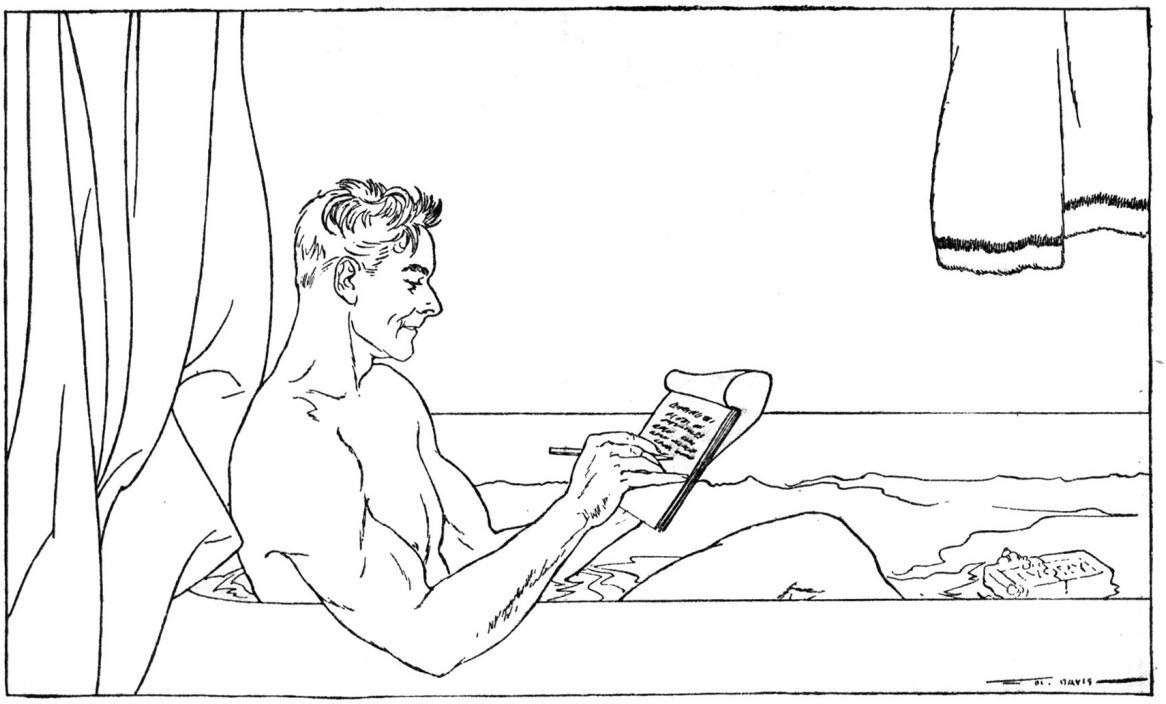

Spring final examination

COURSE: *Bathing* II (*Morning & Evening*)

INSTRUCTOR'S NOTE: *This examination is conducted under the honor system and answers may be written in the bathroom.*

1 If you waste 5 to 10 minutes in the morning chasing an elusive cake of sinker-soap along the tub-bottom, what happens to a soft-boiled egg for breakfast?

2 One man sings while he bathes; another sputters in wrath. What soap does each use, and why?

3 Of the 55 good reasons for using Ivory Soap in the bath, which comes next in importance after *"It floats"*?

4 Bathers for nearly fifty years have compared Ivory lather to (*a*) clouds, (*b*) foam, (*c*) whipped cream. Can you think of a better comparison? (A correct answer to this question insures a passing mark in the examination.)

5 If an airplane travels at the rate of 3 miles per minute, how much faster does Ivory lather rinse off?

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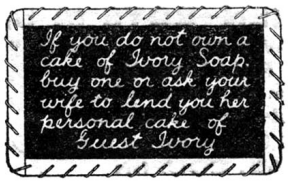

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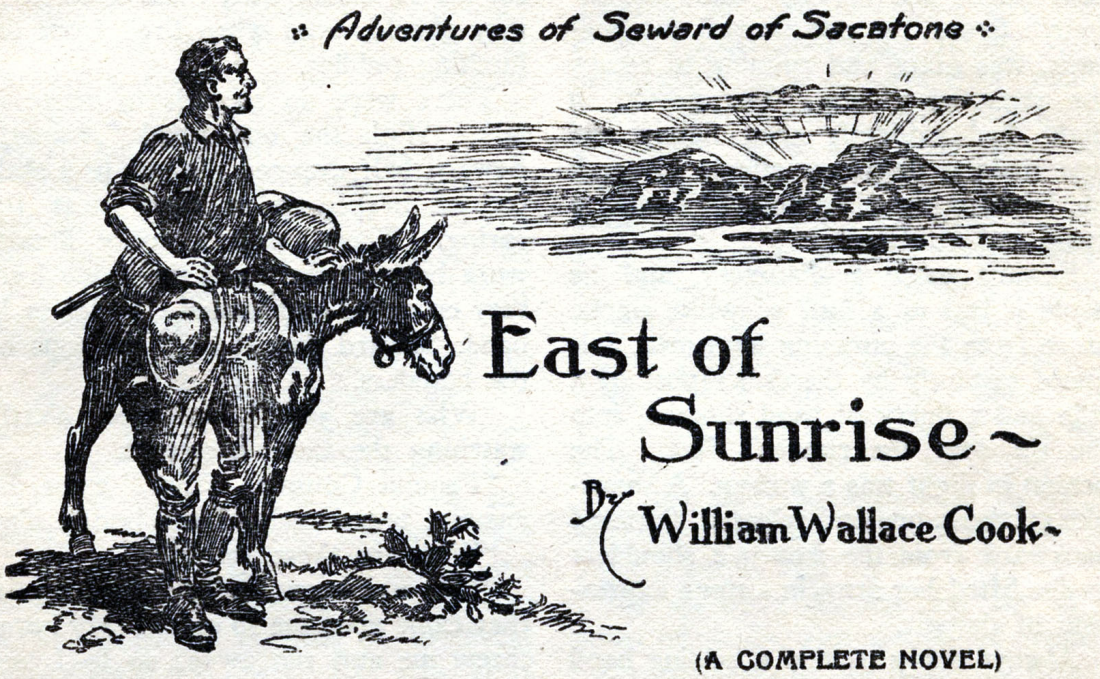


East of Sunrise

By William Wallace Cook

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

DESERT CHIVALRY.

SEWARD was examining the two halves of a piece of "float" which he had just broken with a hammer when his eyes, wandering desertwards for a moment, glimpsed a scene which amazed and startled him. The broken stone dropped from his hands, his tall form suddenly grew tense, and he turned half about in order that he might face squarely the spectacle that was unfolding below him.

The hogback, liberally sprinkled with the white float, was lifted some forty feet above the flat, gray level to the north. Seward was standing on the crest, at the point where the stony slope pitched downward to the spot where he had made his camp. Sandy, his burro, was browsing in the mesquite that fringed the little spring at the foot of the slope. To the south and west arose the higher hills of which the hogback was a spur. Northwest, northeast, and due north the far horizon was fretted with purple peaks, surrounding the flat desert completely and making of it the bottom of a great basin, a sort of natural amphitheater. A moving drama was being enacted along the southern edge of the basin, one of those unexpected dramas with which the wastelands, now and again, do their weird conjuring.

Two minutes before the exciting

scene had flashed upon his eyes, Seward would almost have made oath that he was the only human being within a dozen miles. And now what did he see? A phantasmagoria of four figures, projected by the lantern of chance in clear silhouette against the gray of the desert. Three of the figures were mounted and so distant that they were little more than moving blots; but the fourth figure, the one nearest the hog-back, was afoot and running to escape the pursuing riders. The person in flight had evidently seen Sandy and was making desperate efforts to reach the burro in the plain hope of finding a camp and a refuge.

Seward made a discovery, and he made it just as a puff of white smoke arose from the pursuing horsemen, followed instantly by the dull report of a rifle and a flurry of sand shooting into the air near the runner's feet. The person in flight was a woman. A shawl-like garment, one end released, fluttered backward from the woman's shoulders as she lifted her arms in a mute expression of despair.

Always ready to lend a helping hand to any one in distress, Seward would have hurried to the rescue even if the fugitive had been a man, making the rescue preliminary to an investigation into the rights or wrongs of the case. Now, with the discovery that it was a woman so hard beset, his desire to give aid was redoubled.

Hurrying down the slope to his camp by the spring, he caught his revolver out of his scattered equipment and ran to meet the woman. As she came closer, he saw that she was young, that the fluttering shawl was her only head covering, and that her hair was as black and shining as a raven's wing. Her face, tense and strained with her physical exertions, was of a warm olive tint, and her eyes were dark.

"*Socorro,* señor!" she cried gaspingly.

With one hand she clutched the flying rebozo convulsively about her throat, and half staggered from weakness as she reached out the other hand to Seward. He caught her as she seemed about to fall. The pursuers were drawing close, and they continued to shoot from the backs of their plunging horses. They were poor marksmen, for the bullets all went wide, wider than they should, even when fired from the lurching saddles.

There were no seconds to waste in talk. With the one word "*Animo!*" Seward half dragged the girl to a shelter of heaped-up boulders near the spring. There, with a rocky breastwork between them and the flying lead, they crouched and waited. Revolver in hand, Seward peered over the tops of the boulders.

"Who are you?" he asked, alertly watching the three horsemen.

"Faquita Gonzales, señor," came the answer, breathlessly, from beside him.

"Who are those men?"

"I do not know, señor. *Madre mia,* they came upon me so quick! My horse threw me and ran away; so I—I had to do what I could without the caballo. *Bandidos,* señor—they must be!"

A closer view of the three riders lacked so much of being reassuring that the girl's suggestion of bandits seemed close to the truth. They were not Mexicans, that was plain, but bore the earmarks of desperadoes originating north of the border. They were poorly mounted, and only two of them had rifles.

"Desert scum!" muttered Seward. "Brave enough, the three of them, to attack a lone woman. Let's see if they are as yellow as the average of their kind."

The three men were galloping up and down in front of the rock pile, each turn of the contracting circle bringing them nearer. Seward fired a shot. The distance was too great for accurate re-

volver practice, but immediately the three dug in with their heels and retreated. Seward muttered his contempt, leaped from behind his rock screen, and pushed boldly across the open, firing as he went.

It was ludicrous to see the three desert rats crowd their mounts into the breeze. Now that the señorita had found a champion they lost heart and, after firing a few volleys, they pointed their horses back along the way they had come, turning to shout a defiance which they had not the courage to follow up with aggressive action.

Seward, laughing grimly, made his way back to the rock barrier. "You may as well come out, señorita," he said; "they're coyotes, like most of their kind, and have made off."

The girl arose and stood by the boulders. She was still breathing heavily, and her cheeks were flushed—a rose hue brightening the olive skin. Her eyebrows were straight and black, and her eyes were black—of the same midnight hue as her hair. The rebozo was of silk—black and yellow. A blouselike waist was caught together at her throat with a great red jewel. Her short skirt was ornamented with bright silver buttons, and she wore leggings and high-heeled shoes. About her waist was a fancy, carved leather belt from which swung a small hand bag.

She was pretty, very pretty, and Seward had an odd impression that he had seen her somewhere before. He racked his memory. Was it merely a mistaken fancy?

"You have saved my life, señor," she said softly, leaning against the boulders and flashing her eyes upon him; "and you have saved the money"—here she struck one hand against the small bag at her belt—"which I am taking to Tia Bianca, over east of Sunrise Cañon. *Gracias, mil gracias!*"

Her voice, her manner, still further nagged at Seward's memory. He was sure, by now, that he had seen the girl before.

"Haven't I met you somewhere before?" he inquired.

"Never, señor, that I can remember," she answered, shaking her head and unmasking a devastating smile. "I believe, if you please, that I will have a drink."

She moved toward the spring, apparently as little concerned over her recent escape as though fleeing from desperadoes was an everyday occurrence. Seward's long desert experience had taught him to note little things that would escape the ordinary observer. He noticed her coolness, her quick adjustment to matters as they were following on the heels of a narrowly averted tragedy. He followed her to the spring, got a tin cup from his pack, and filled it with water, all the while with a growing suspicion that something was wrong.

"I am sorry to have been so much trouble to you, señor," she said, returning the empty cup.

He spread a blanket for her in a scrap of shade, and she seated herself tailorwise upon it. She lifted the rebozo to drape her head, and all the while her black eyes were considering gravely the man before her.

"Americano, si?" she asked.

"Si," he answered shortly, for it was a casual question; a foolish question, with Seward's nationality standing out so clear.

"And the name, please? I wish to know in order that I may tell Tia Bianca and Tio Juan to whom I am so very much indebted." Her English was good and with scarcely an accent.

"Seward is the name," he told her.

She started, her eyes widened. "Not —please tell me," she breathed, "not Seward of Sacatone of whom we hear so many stories?"

He laughed again. "Well, yes," he admitted; "I'm a prospector, and I was

sampling the float on the hogback when you happened along. Chance, señorita!"

The girl fell into a dreamy state, a sort of waking trance in which she mused aloud. "In all these deserts," her rippling voice flowed on, "where there are so few real men to be found, it has been my fate to be saved by Seward of Sacatone, the caballero whose fame for good deeds has gone everywhere! His courage, his kindness, his——"

There was nothing pleasing to Seward in all this; it would have been distasteful even if the girl's voice and manner had been sincere, which they were not. He had been rolling a cigarette; as he reached for a match he broke into the flowing monologue:

"Your relations live east of Sunrise Cañon?" he inquired.

"*Si,* Señor Seward," she answered. lifting her head and her white teeth flashing a smile. "I started alone from Forty-mile to take my uncle and aunt a few hundred pesos left to them by Tio Enrico, Tio Juan's brother, who has but recently died. Those *bandidos* must have known; they must have followed to rob me."

Forty-mile! Seward had a clew.

"From Forty-mile to Sunrise Cañon, señorita," he suggested, "is a long ride for a woman; all of sixty miles."

"Not for a woman who knows the deserts, señor! I am at home in the deserts."

"You live at Forty-mile?"

"I lived with Tio Enrico," she explained; "you must have heard of him—Enrico Silva, of the Posada del Rey Niño. Now I shall have to live there with a cousin. It is one's fate," she said with a sigh, "when one has no *padre,* no *madre.* "I suppose," she inquired archly, "that you will take me to Tia Bianca? You are always of so great help to those who are in need."

Here was a complication not at all to Seward's liking. The desert is nothing if not unconventional, but Seward of Sacatone had his own high ideals. Chivalry demanded that much of him, however, and he bowed to the inevitable much as he disliked it. He flashed a look at the sun.

"You must be hungry," he said, "and inasmuch as you are here, and we both must eat, I shall get supper. It will be rough fare," he added.

"It will be a banquet," she returned, "if prepared by Seward of Sacatone."

He went grimly about his preparations; for he had suddenly placed this girl, whose home was at the Posada del Rey Niño in Forty-mile. He remembered the posada, for it had figured almost tragically in an adventure of some months past when he had helped Newton Rance of Quinlan to save his son from a gang of sharpers. The posada housed one of the crookedest gambling layouts in the Southwest; and Faquita Gonzales had dealt faro in that nest of guile and trickery. "La Joya," she was called, "The Jewel," from that sparkling red stone at her throat.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN HATE OVERCAME JUDGMENT.

TWANG! The six-foot bow bent nearly double with the masterful fifty-pound pull on its leathern string. The arrow, long, slender, and tipped with razor-edged steel cruelly barbed, launched itself straight upward into the eye of the midday sun, the polished head flashing like a streak of fire.

Chombo el Arquero, half-breed horse trader by profession and master bowman in his hours of leisure, lowered the bow and stepped backward to lean against one of the four-by-fours supporting the roof of his hay shed. The shaft he had sped sunward was lost to sight, and Chombo's interest was now in the target—a six-inch square of brown paper marked with a bull's-eye

and spread flat on the ground a dozen feet from where he stood.

Ordinary shots of seventy-five or a hundred yards at an elevated target were child's play for him, and he held them in contempt; but to lose an arrow in the sky, and then to have it return and pierce a target not twelve feet from the spot where the bow was bent—that was a feat par excellence, the very chef-d'œuvre of a prince of archers.

So many things entered into the matter, so much depended on the sure judgment, the perfect execution. The aim zenithward must be deflected by just the hair's breadth that, in the course of a long flight, would cover exactly the few feet to the target; the arrow had to be perfect in hang and balance and, above all, there was allowance to be made for the slightest cat's-paw of wind.

Chombo was cunning and certain at all these calculations. He was a half-blood, peon Mexican and Yaqui; and it was the Yaqui strain in him that gave him his love for the bow and arrow.

He made his own bows and went questing into the high sierras for a certain springy evergreen that more than matched the English yew. His arrows were works of art, slim and strong, the haft feathered with eagle's plumage, deftly trimmed, and the point worked from steel, polished and ground to a hair-splitting edge.

Chombo lived alone at his ranch, a few miles off the Quinlan Trail to Tres Alamos. No man ever came to him except for horses or burros; he had no love for company and but little more for customers. He had all grades of harness, saddle, and pack stock herded in his round corrals by night and scattered abroad in his wide grass valley by day. Three half-breeds like himself were his herdsmen.

His target range was the wide space between the rear of his adobe house and his hay shed. He was well-to-do, and while his men cared for his stock, he played soltaire, brewed tiswin from the flowers of the saguaro cactus, smoked cornhusk cigarros, and amused himself with the long bow.

The arrow was gone a long time, as arrow flights are counted, and Chombo lighted a cigarro as he leaned against the hay-shed post. Then, at last, it came rushing earthward, the barbed tip glowing like a falling star. *Plump!* Chombo heaved a grunt of satisfaction. Once more he had accomplished the seemingly impossible, for the shaft had buried itself in the earth by half its length—exactly in the center of the bull's-eye.

"Bravo, Chombo!" exclaimed a voice.

The half-breed whirled in his tracks. A woman had stepped out from behind a corner of the adobe house—a slender woman who walked with a quick, sure step, wore divided skirts and a mannish sombrero. The sombrero was skewered to her brownish hair by a hatpin that showed on both sides of the crown the blade-tip and hilt of a small dagger. The brim of the hat was upturned in front, and over it and the woman's face was a gray veil.

"Huh!" muttered Chombo, scowling. "Who you? What you want, eh? Caballos?"

A short laugh came from behind the veil. "Are we alone here?" the woman asked.

"Me, I am always alone—daytimes. Why?"

A gloved right hand with a quirt dangling from the wrist arose to lift the veil. The ordinarily impassive face of the half-breed showed just a flicker of surprise.

"Lola Sanger! Huh! It is said around you have left the country."

The veil dropped. "Leave the country while my brother's score is unsettled?" There was a tigerish hunching of the slender shoulders, a clenching of

the gloved hands. "You knew Dirk, Chombo; and I thought you knew me."

"How settle?" demanded Chombo, showing interest. "Seward caught the two of you and put you in jail. Me, I came by night and passed you files and a hacksaw. You cut the window bars and make escape on two horses I have waiting. Dirk goes loco, makes fool of himself. He kills, robs, and tries to get Seward. What happens, eh? Seward get him over at old Esmeralda. Now Dirk Sanger is back in cell, in double irons. You want me to help him escape? Mañana." Chombo shook his head. "It is too much."

"There is no getting Dirk away from the sheriff at Tres Alamos," agreed the other. "He has made his bed and must lie in it. But there's Seward of Sacatone. I have him like this!" She put up both hands, open, and clenched them savagely. "Like this, Chombo," she breathed, "if you will help."

"Seward? Get Seward?" The dark eyes of the half-breed flashed at the prospect. But the light faded, and he shook his head ominously. "No can do; nobody can do."

The girl came a step closer, inclining her body forward in her earnestness.

"You hate him; Dirk hates him; I hate him! You have too much sense to believe those yarns about his being in two places at the same time; about his shooting three guns at once and putting three bullets through the middle pips of three treys! Moonshine, all of it, Chombo; just as much moonshine as the story that he is bulletproof or," she added, "arrowproof. How does the arrow fly? With only the twang of bowstring, and you can smother that. At a hundred yards would he be an easy target? Would you care to launch a dart at him at a hundred yards—and from cover?"

The lean, brown face of Chombo twisted into the look of a demon, pleased and trying to smile. Hate Seward of Sacatone? He? All Chombo's heathen gods had been busy listening to his prayers for revenge. Seward of Sacatone had spoiled the sale of a dozen head of choice saddle stock to the Easterner who had taken over the J-O Ranch in Grass Valley—spoiled it by showing how some of the "choice" stock was wind-broken and spavined and double value being asked for all the rest. This was something the horse trader could not forget.

He slapped at the unstrung bow and stepped forward to wrench the arrow from the ground. A wolfish snarl dropped from his lips. "Show me cover," he said; "show me Seward at a hundred yards. Then see!"

The girl echoed the snarl with a laugh of her own. "I knew I could depend on you!" she exclaimed. "Now, listen! The five thousand dollars in gold at Simms & Norcross' has been sent to Cerillas in charge of Seward. He totes it on his burro in saddlebags. But he prospects by the way, for there is no particular hurry about the delivery. Seward is now along the Hermosito Trail. His trail will be crossed by La Joya of Forty-mile. You know La Joya?"

Chombo nodded, listening intently.

"You also know Seward's bluff of wanting to help everybody. Well, when La Joya crosses his trail she will, to all appearances, be needing help. He will give it; and she will lead him to the pass through the hills east of Sunrise Cañon. A prettier place for an ambush you could not find. You know the place, Chombo?"

Chombo's nostrils dilated. He took pleasure in the thought. He regarded his bow—and the arrow, the silent messenger to carry his hate. "What she do, this La Joya?" he demanded eagerly. "Seward is a fox. Your brother Dirk could not fool him."

"La Joya is a woman, and a woman can fool him. He will do for a woman

in distress what he would not do for a man, Chombo. Why, when he was bringing Dirk and me in from Tumbling Stone Mountain, prisoners bound for Tres Alamos, he stopped in the old trail and offered to let me come here to you, get a horse and ride for the railroad. His name for that is chivalry."

"Bah!" The half-breed had the full blood's ideas of a squaw. "What is to be done then?" he wanted to know.

"I want a fresh horse, and a fast one," replied the girl, "and you also must have a good mount. We'll have to start at once for the pass east of Sunrise and ride hard. La Joya knows and will delay until we have time to get there. She has help from Forty-mile, hangers-on of the posada; but they are scared to death of Seward. They will go so far in helping La Joya, but no further. You alone can turn the big trick, Chombo. Will you go?"

The half-breed looked into vacancy, pondering. At last his hate overcame his better judgment. *"Si!"* he burst out suddenly.

The girl laughed gleefully. "I have been hiding out at Forty-mile with La Joya," she went on, "and she and I have gone over our plans so many times that there can be no mistake. Dirk, at the best, will go to Yuma for life; but Seward will pay. He will be made to count the cost of his private war with Dirk. And then I can leave these deserts for good and be content. But get the horses, Chombo," she added briskly. "I'll be waiting for you on the porch of your adobe."

Chombo turned quickly on his moccasined feet and ran in through the rear door of the adobe. There he left his bow and arrow and emerged with a rope and a bridle.

"In half an hour," he called, as he loped away in the direction of the valley and his horse herd.

Lola Sanger passed around the house to the porch. The two had scarcely vanished before a pair of heads arose from behind the hay bales. One head wore a battered sun helmet and a shock of long red hair showed beneath the brim of it; the other head was capped with an old sombrero, and the face beneath was weather-beaten, swarthy, and pockmarked.

The man in the sun helmet whistled. "Say, Eph, what d'y'u know?" he muttered. "Walt Seward's got a kick-off comin'."

"Git the canteen and let's climb out o' this, Red," insisted the man in the battered sombrero. "If Chombo had any notion we was around to listen in, he'd 'a' pinned both of us to these hay bales with a couple o' them arrers. I'm fer pullin' our freight an' doin' it quick. Where's the canteen?"

Out in the valley the day before, "Red" Galloway and "Eph" Springer had bargained with one of Chombo's herdsmen for a canteen of tiswin. It was to be concealed between two of the hay bales; and the price of the tiswin had been a small nugget that the two desert hobos had found or stolen.

"Here she is!" muttered Red, pulling at a strap and lifting a small canteen into view. The canteen was so small, in fact, that Red swore luridly. "That nugget would assay twenty dollars easy," he growled, "and two pints is all we git fer it."

"Anyway," returned Eph, "it's plenty. Now we'll vamose. Moharrie ain't lookin', is she?"

"Nary," returned Red; "the 'dobe is in the way. Hit the ground, Eph."

Like two ill-omened specters they skulked clear of the hay shed, glided across the desert, lost themselves over a "rise," and came to two bony and shaggy cayuses. They stopped only to sample the contents of the canteen.

"Goes down like one o' them there torchlight processions!" declared Springer, smacking his lips.

"Get a move on, get a move on!"

urged Red, and they galloped desertward.

CHAPTER III.

SPRINGING A SENSATION.

THE sheriff at Tres Alamos, Jerry Blake, had a name for men like Red Galloway and Eph Springer. He called them "grubbers." Grubbers are the hobos of the desert country, but they go the ordinary tramp one better. Although their wanderings may be aimless, their purposes have a set direction. Any man who can be begged or cajoled into giving them a grubstake is their quarry.

They pretend to be prospectors. Many of them possess sufficient knowledge of mineral indications and of ore, pockets, and pay streaks to make excellent prospectors. But the professional grubber is too lazy. If he can, by an agreement to turn over half his prospective discoveries to the person who grubstakes him, receive a three-months' supply of bacon, beans, and flour, he will vanish into some comfortable spot in the desert and loaf away his time while the food lasts.

When the food gives out, he will return to the easy mark who grubstaked him with a piece of very rich ore in an empty tobacco sack, or an old sock, or a bit of dirty cloth, and claim that he has found a lead of that kind of stuff but that it will take him another three months to develop the "find" and see just what he's got. The grubstaker, thinking he has a half interest with the grubber in a prospective fortune, furnishes another three-months' supply of bacon, beans, and flour. And the grubber returns to his old camp in the desert and enjoys another three months of idleness. With the same piece of rich ore, which he has stolen somewhere and which is his whole stock in trade, he will look around for another likely person whom it is possible to beguile.

This is the grubber's method. It is the way he supports himself in idleness and keeps his wretched body and soul together. He is a flimflammer; and if any other method of acquiring easy money presents itself as feasible, he will adopt it promptly even though it hinges upon crime.

A grubber is not a true prospector, nor is a true prospector a grubber. The mountains and mesas are filled with honest gold hunters who, if they are grubstaked, go searching industriously for precious metal. But men like Red Galloway and Eph Springer are not of this type.

Some grubbers travel afoot, toting a bag of provisions and a canteen of water; others, more fortunate, own a burro, and some may rise to the dignity of owning a horse. But, between foot-grubbers, burro-grubbers, and horse-grubbers there is a difference merely of degree.

Galloway and Springer were so widely known in those deserts that it was becoming increasingly hard for them to find any one from whom they could secure a grubstake. Because they knew all the water holes and springs where not only water but a forage of grama-grass and mesquite beans could be had, they were able to keep their horses after a fashion; but they were almost at the last extremity when, instead of exchanging a six-dollar nugget for food, they passed it to a treacherous herdsman for a tin canteen of tiswin. It was their plan to forget their troubles temporarily by using a little illegal fire water.

They rode, that early afternoon, to a spot near the old Tumbling Stone Trail where a dribble of water and a few nibbles of scant grass would keep the breath of life in their horses. They had a little bacon, but thought best to save it; for Eph had killed a chuckwalla which weighed three pounds dressed. They built a fire, roasted the lizard be-

tween two hot stones, and had a pièce de résistance to go with their fire water.

For almost a year they had hunted in couples. They called themselves "pards." Tiswin, however, is said to be a drink with fight in it, and they began quarreling as they divided the chuckwalla. There was a division of opinion, too, on another matter.

They knew Seward of Sacatone. He had caught them stealing on one occasion, and instead of taking them to jail he had sent them over the border into Mexico. On returning from Sonora they had another encounter with Seward which fell just short of being disastrous.

They held Seward in dread, for they believed fully all the legends that dealt with his superhuman powers. If he told them to do anything, they did it, for they were convinced that he would put the blight of the evil eye upon them if they failed to carry out his orders. They knew, too, that if they did a friendly act for Seward he would be found grateful; somehow, Seward, although he had never made a "strike," always had money. All this gave Eph Springer an idea.

"Red," said he, over the last of the chuckwalla, "the' ain't no manner o' use o' you and me fightin'. We got a chance to pull down a grubstake."

"Meanin' which?" grunted Galloway.

"Ain't we jest heard somethin' which Seward would be mighty glad to know? A scheme is afoot to do him up. Us two could tell him about it, and like as not he'd come across with ten, twenty, or mebby fifty pesos. We could take things easy fer a spell on fifty pesos."

Galloway had imbibed enough tiswin to feel an unaccustomed energy flowing through his veins. He showed interest, for his wits were not so fuddled but that the logic of Springer's remarks appealed to him.

"Sufferin' sidewinders!" he muttered. "It shore looks like a good bet, Eph. But the moharrie and Chombo is travelin' on a couple o' fast caballos. We couldn't never expect to get to that place east o' Sunrise afore them two got there."

"Say, listen!" said Springer, his enthusiasm growing as his mind developed the plan. "Us two could foller down the Hermosito Trail till we found Seward and this here La Joya moharrie. We could spill the beans about that faro dealer afore ever them two reached the pass east o' Sunrise. Mebby Seward 'u'd shell out a hundred pesos. We'd be savin' his life, wouldn't we? Seems like we owe it to him, after he got us clear o' that Dirk Sanger, otherwise Guido Fresco, like he done.

"Or, here's another scheme," Springer went on, apparently embarrassed by the ideas that suddenly laid hold of him; "us two could go to Tres Alamos, gettin' there afore sundown, and we could bat up the scheme to that moharrie, the Norcross girl, whose dad is a partner o' Simms in the general store. Seward was to pick up five thousand dollars in gold and deliver it in Los Cerillos. Mebby we could stop Seward afore he got started. That Ethel Norcross would whack up a big grubstake right off'n the store shelves for a red-hot tip about what we got next to over at Chombo's.

"And then there's something else," Springer expanded, apparently doing all the thinking for both himself and his partner; "us two could go to the sheriff and tell him where he could find this Lola Sanger. There was a thousand paid fer bringin' in Dirk Sanger, and mebby he'd make a deal fer information about the moharrie?"

"Now y'u are plumb loco," scoffed Galloway. "The farther we can keep away from sheriffs the better we're off. Nary, Eph! Our best bet is to go huntin' Seward out Hermosito way. We're near the end of our grub, but if we can locate Seward and tell him what's

on our minds, I'll bet he'd give us the run o' his camp."

"Tres Alamos is nigher, and we could hit that burg afore sundown. I'm fer goin' there, Red, and seein' what the moharrie 'll do fer us. Simms & Norcross stand to lose five thousand pesos; and I'll gamble a blue stack that they'll be plumb lib'ral with us—with the moharrie on our side."

Galloway was dubious about that. "That Norcross moharrie ain't got any friendly feelin' fer us, Eph, as y'u ort to know," he objected.

"But her and Walt Seward are friends, and she'd do a lot fer Seward."

"Tell y'u what, Eph," Galloway suggested, as a brilliant idea crossed his wits; "we'll sep'rate. Y'u kin go to Tres Alamos and work Simms & Norcross, and I'll take the scatterin' o' grub we got left an' hike out the Hermosito Trail. You put it over in the town, and I'll put it over with Seward. Mebby we'll pick up a couple o' grubstakes by workin' both ends o' this string. How about it?"

It looked promising to the two desert hobos, but they almost came to blows when they reached the point of dividing the scanty store of food and the small supply of tiswin that was left.

"No use yore tryin' to hog everythin'," grumbled Springer; "I'm takin' more chances in town than what y'u are takin' along the Hermosito Trail."

"I'm needin' more grub, in case I can't make a go of it," argued Galloway. "And look what's li'ble to happen if I should fall in with Chombo and the moharrie."

"Y'u'd be all right; y'u wouldn't tell 'em nothin'."

"As fer that, y'u're playin' a safe thing. If Seward's gone on his way, tell what y'u know and y'u're bound to be treated han'some. Me, now—say, I'm takin' all the chances."

Before they had finished the argument, each had reached for his dirk; but calmer counsel prevailed when Springer began to see Galloway's side of the contention.

"Buenos!" he grunted. "One more drink from the canteen, Red, and we'll part comp'ny. Where'll we meet up ag'in? Dead Mule Flat?"

"Shore," assented Galloway; "bring yore grubstake there, and I'll bring mine—if I happen to rustle one." He cocked one eye at the sun. "I allow it's cool enough to be movin', Eph. Let's strike out."

They mounted their sorry steeds, bade each other "Adios!" and Galloway struck out for the Hermosito Trail while Springer pushed for Tres Alamos.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when Springer clattered into the town. The trail he was following led directly into the main street, with the county courthouse and jail among the first buildings he would have to pass. These were public institutions with which he was entirely out of sympathy, for good and sufficient reasons, so he turned into a back street and came to the general store of Simms & Norcross by a roundabout course.

Leaving his horse at the hitching rail, he passed through the open front doors with all the assurance he could muster. A brown-eyed, brown-haired girl was waiting on a woman customer in the dry-goods department. When she saw Springer a look of astonishment crossed her pretty face—a look which almost immediately gave place to an expression of dislike and suspicion. Springer, calling upon all the little courage he possessed, stepped to the counter.

"Miss Norcross," he inquired, "has Seward of Sacatone left for Cerillos with that gold?"

Ethel Norcross dropped the scissors which she was about to use on a bolt of cloth; but, being a girl of determination and spirit, she immediately composed herself. "If you will sit down,

Mr. Springer," she replied, "I will talk with you in a moment."

"There ain't no time to lose if Seward ain't been here yet," Springer told her.

The girl gave him a quick look. "Mr. Seward," she answered, "started on a prospecting trip yesterday morning. Just a minute, please."

A look of worry flooded her eyes, for no doubt she had a premonition that there was evil news about to be unfolded. As soon as she had finished waiting on the customer, she went to a desk in the back part of the store and spoke to the senior partner, Mr. Simms. Mr. Simms' face was presently reflecting his own worry, and he got up from the desk and motioned to Springer. Opening the door of a rear room, he waved Springer inside.

"We'll talk with him, Ethel," said the senior partner, "and find out, if we can, where he got his information."

The three of them went into the rear room, the door was closed, and a very private consultation went forward. For once in his life, at least, Eph Springer was springing a sensation.

CHAPTER IV.

TROUBLE AHEAD!

IN the early morning of the day preceding his unusual experience at the hogback, Seward had trailed his burro out of Tres Alamos. A foreboding of the kind which he humorously referred to as a "trouble-hunch" accompanied him as he left the town. It was with him there in his camp by the hogback; furthermore, it was taking a clearer and more disturbing form with his recent experiences.

It seemed to him that he had a vague, indefinite sixth sense, a mentor which on occasion rose up out of his subconsciousness to warn him of misfortunes ahead. Two days before setting out on this particular prospecting trip he had arrived in Tres Alamos from the old Esmeralda Mine with Dirk Sanger and Three Card Churchill neatly roped astride a led horse. He had turned his prisoners over to Jerry Blake, the sheriff, and Blake had agreed to take him in the official buckboard out to Pete Doble's Ten-strike property where Sandy was being cared for pending Seward's return from his bandit hunting.

The sheriff had told the prospector that Ethel Norcross wanted to see him, and that as soon as the buckboard was ready it would pick him up at Simms & Norcross' General Store. So Seward had gone to the store and had been requested by Norcross to climb the outside stairs to the living rooms where he would find Ethel waiting with a very important message for him.

Having ascended the stairs, Seward waited at the open door at the top. Ethel was playing a melodeon, and singing as she played:

"East of sunrise falls the night,
West of sundown breaks the day;
And we find our brightest light
Where the darkness paves our way!"

In that moment, as he listened to the soft voice lifted in song, the still, small voice of Seward's mentor spoke to him: "That song has a meaning for you, Walt; pay attention!"

Ethel's important message had to do with five thousand dollars in gold double eagles in the safe of Simms & Norcross. It appeared that an Easterner named Sparling, who had taken over the Pelican Mine near Los Cerillos, wanted just five thousand dollars in cash for a deal in which checks, or any other sort of negotiable paper, would not serve. There was no bank in Cerillos, and none in Tres Alamos; and Simms & McCann, later Simms & Norcross, had found it good business to carry a fairly large amount of money in their safe for the cashing of checks, thus accommodating some of their customers who would otherwise have been

obliged to go to Quinlan, the nearest railroad town, to realize on their "paper."

Simms & Norcross, it seemed, had received a letter from one of their Eastern correspondents testifying to the financial responsibility of Mr. Victor Sparling and requesting them to help him in his venture in Los Cerillos in any way possible. So, when Sparling sent them a letter, inclosing his New York check for five thousand dollars and asking them to send him the cash any time within a month, Simms & Norcross wanted to oblige him.

Ethel Norcross was willing to take the money to Los Cerillos, but in view of certain robberies that had recently been committed in that section, both members of the firm thought this proceeding altogether too risky for a woman. It had occurred to Simms that Seward might be prospecting to the south and west; and, if he were, would he take the five thousand dollars in his pack, drop in at Los Cerillos any time within a month, and deliver the money to Mr. Sparling at the Pelican Mine?

Seward was known to be an accommodating person, and he was really planning his next prospecting trip in the direction indicated. Therefore, inasmuch as time did not appear to be an important matter in the delivery of the money, he was glad to oblige the firm —and save Ethel Norcross a venturesome trip—by accepting the commission. A little later he boarded the buckboard for the ride to the Ten-strike Mine with the first vague premonition of trouble taking shape in his mind.

Deferring to his premonition—for he had never found his mentor to be unreliable—he had secured from Pete Doble about thirteen pounds of iron washers. Doble had kept them on hand for years, part of a supply of old junk which he had picked up at an auction. Doble was a great hand for buying stuff at auctions. He was curious to know what Seward wanted of the iron washers, which were too large for ordinary bolts and used largely in bridge building. But Seward did not feel inclined to explain; he merely grinned at his friend and kept his own counsel.

In the early morning, when he had trailed Sandy out of Tres Alamos, he had the five thousand dollars in gold safely stowed in the burro's pack in a pair of saddlebags. In transporting the gold he considered himself under a double obligation. Norcross and his daughter, especially the daughter, were his very good friends; and he had known Mr. and Mrs. Victor Sparling in the East, long years before, and he was eager to serve them in any way in his power.

In a day and a half he had reached the hogback and pitched his camp; for he had for some time wanted to investigate the float, to discover whether it was really float from the mountains above or merely a blow-out. And all the time he was making his journey to the hogback, and after he had settled down there for a few days' investigating, his sixth sense was continually dinning in his ears: "Look out! Trouble ahead!"

His meeting with La Joya was the first bolt from the blue. Her almost tragic experience with the *"bandidos,"* did not ring true; and recognizing her as a faro dealer from one of the worst gambling hells in those parts did not serve to reassure him.

"I think," he told her, after they had finished their supper, and the sun had set and the embers of the camp fire were dying, "I think, señorita, that we had better start for the pass east of Sunrise Cañon to-night. There will be a moon, you can ride the burro, and it will be pleasanter traveling by night than by day. By to-morrow forenoon, before the sun gets too warm for com-

fort, you ought to be with your uncle and aunt."

The señorita, however, was against that. She was tired, oh, so tired! Really, she must rest. She knew that she was a great bother to Señor Seward, and she was sorry; but it was absolutely impossible for her to go on that night. She was used to the deserts, and if he would only give her a blanket she would roll up in it and look out for herself.

Seward was annoyed by this refusal; but he was, as Lola Sanger had told Chombo, a chivalrous knight of the desert. He bowed to the señorita's wishes, cut some soft brushtops, covered them with a blanket, and left the girl the run of the camp. With a sawbuck saddle for a pillow, and a canvas "tarp" for covering, he went off into the chaparral and tried to get his night's rest.

Then something else occurred to oppress him. There was a stinging sensation in his eyes; not painful, exactly, but a burning that suggested dire things. He had experienced it before —three times only in all his desert experience of five years. It was a premonitory warning that the glare of the sun on the sand was affecting his sight very much as the sun's glare on white snow. Sun-blindness was indicated. If he had been by himself he would have passed the next day in idleness, his eyes bandaged to keep out the glare. But with the señorita on his hands, and refusing to cross the deserts by night, it was impossible for him to take the usual precautions which were necessary in the circumstances.

A doctor had given him an ointment for use in such cases, and he got the tin out of his first-aid kit, applied some of the ointment to his eyelids, and covered his eyes with a gauze bandage. He hoped that would prevent the blindness, at least until he had conducted the señorita to the pass east of Sunrise Cañon and had gone on to Cerillos and delivered the money to Sparling.

Next morning his eyes were better, and in the gray dawn he set about building a fire and preparing breakfast. He did not call the señorita until the meal was ready; then, at the first word from him, the girl appeared from the blanket roll bright and smiling.

She had enjoyed a wonderful night's rest she declared in response to Seward's greeting. Such a wonderful air as there was in the deserts! Like wine, was it not? She prattled on, shook the sand out of her rebozo, dusted her clothing, and went to the spring to bathe her face in the cool water. She came to breakfast with every strand of her glossy black hair in place, as fresh as the morning itself.

She found Seward looking at the sun. The orb of day was not as bright as usual, but had a faint, foggy look, as though a veil had been dropped before it.

"Why do you examine the sky, señor?" she inquired.

"The day," answered Seward, weatherwise, "is going to be very warm and still; and it opens with promise of a sandstorm, señorita."

"Then we must not venture across the deserts!" she exclaimed. "I know these storms. We must stay in camp."

"Pardon me," returned Seward, "but I think it will be noon or later before the dust storm comes. We can reach a place I know where there is water and rough country for a refuge. Of course the storm may not come; it doesn't always come when the morning sun is like that. It is best, I think," he added gravely, "to be on our way."

La Joya pouted and tossed her head. "I shall not stir!" she declared. *"Por Dios!* If we were caught in a sandstorm I should perish! I do not choose to be suffocated with heat and strangled with the whirling sand."

She was a like a spoiled child. Se-

ward could have insisted, but it occurred to him that with another day in the camp he could look after his eyes. He brought Sandy closer to the spring and picketed him; then, with a fresh bandage on his eyes, he sought a scrap of shade and composed himself for a day of enforced idleness. The señorita was very curious about the bandage.

"Occasionally," he explained, "not often, but occasionally, my eyes warn me that the sun is affecting them. I feel that warning now, and the bandage is just a precaution. What," he inquired, "does your uncle do in the pass east of the Sunrise Cañon, señorita?"

"He is a hauler of wood, señor," was the answer, "for the Pelican Mine, near Los Cerillos. Tia Bianca stays in the adobe in the pass while Tio Juan is away with his wagons."

"The adobe is in the pass?" Seward asked.

"By the spring, *si;* exactly in the pass."

Of his own knowledge Seward knew that there was no spring in the pass and no adobe. Why was the girl lying to him? But he was a patient man, held his peace, and was eager only to be quit of the obligation he considered himself under to the señorita.

Perhaps it was ten o'clock when the temperamental señorita changed her mind about proceeding to the pass. "I don't believe there will be any sandstorm, señor," she said; "perhaps, after all, we had better be traveling."

Seward's judgment was now all against the traveling, with such a late start. The fog about the sun was thickening, and the air was like the breath of a furnace.

"No, señorita," he told her; "with such a late start it is not wise."

"Very well," answered the señorita; then I will walk."

She would have persisted in that madness and even made a start in spite of Seward's protests.

"All right," said the patient Seward; "if we hurry a bit we may get to the water hole."

He removed the bandage from his eyes and began making Sandy ready for the trip.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACK CURTAIN.

IN dealing with this capricious young woman, Seward was of a mind to use his best judgment and make her abide by it; but the moment he had removed the bandage the swirling black specks that interfered with his vision convinced him that the calamity he had sought to guard against was inevitable. In a few hours the black curtain would fall, and he would be blinded; not for long—a day at the least, a few days at the most. But if he lost his sight even for an hour, with the gold in his charge and a woman under his protection whom he had good reason to distrust, such a sightless hour might easily result in unhappy complications.

With the señorita lying to him about her uncle and her aunt, he was minded to push on to Los Cerillos. If the Mexicana insisted on stopping at the pass, he would leave her to take her own course. Either she must listen to reason or suffer the consequences of her own folly. With luck on his side he might be able to reach Los Cerillos before his eyes failed him completely.

If blindness overtook him while he was in the camp by the hogback, the three horsemen whom the girl called *"bandidos"*—and who might be her confederates and not her enemies—would find him an easy prey. So the señorita's desire to be traveling was assented to as the best move possible in the circumstances.

He cached some of his equipment; and he did this secretly, while the girl went to pull the picket pin and lead Sandy to the spring. With the blanket,

he cushioned a seat for her on the burro's back; and then, with his revolver thrust into a breast holster, and the holster belted against his chest to hold it flat, they got under way.

Crossing the hogback was a trying performance for Sandy in the sweltering heat, but he was a plucky little brute and tireless. Descending the opposite slope, they laid their course toward the distant hills, the pass, and Sunrise Cañon. The water hole Seward had in mind was several miles north of the pass, just where the low foothills began to lift themselves above the flat desert.

There were moments when Seward could not see at all, moments when a rolling, inky cloud obscured his vision entirely, then burst into fragments like an exploding rocket, spangling earth and sky with spots as black as midnight. Then for a time his sight would clear and be almost normal. He closed his eyes as he tramped beside the burro, holding to the rope that secured the blanket to Sandy's back.

At last a sudden hot blast of air struck the back of his neck. It was the first stir of wind and seemed to come over a bed of blazing coals. He opened his eyes to see the desert dust lifting like smoke and rolling knee-deep across the flats. He knew then that they could go no farther. He halted the burro and faced him around.

"What are you going to do, señor?" asked the señorita.

"Get back to the lee of the hogback," he told her; "going on like this is out of the question."

"We can't make it!" she cried shrilly.

"We can try, at any rate."

They were not halfway on the back trail when a dull roaring sound came out of the north. The sky in that direction was filled with a rolling fog of dust; it was the simoon bearing down upon them.

"Get down, señorita!" ordered Seward.

"Why? What for?"

"If you know these deserts then you have asked a foolish question. We must do what we can to weather this storm."

He helped the girl to alight and forced the burro to lie down; then, removing the blanket, he made his companion kneel close to the burro and draped the blanket over her head.

"Madre mia!" the señorita gasped. "I shall smother!"

"It is the best we can do," answered Seward, dropping down and pulling the tarpaulin over his head and shoulders.

The next moment they were in the thick of it. The roaring wind drove the sand against the glazed "tarp" and began piling drifts about the girl, Seward, and the burro. It was difficult to breathe, and what air they did take into their lungs was gritty with sand particles and hot as fire. The señorita began to moan and to huddle closer to the burro; the burro snorted and struggled, and Seward reached out a hand to stroke his furry neck and quiet him.

The tarp, one corner released, was torn out of Seward's grasp. He arose and plunged after it, regaining it again after a wild race of some fifty feet. He found it lodged against a greasewood bush, seeing it plainly for a moment as he gathered it up in his arms. Then, as he turned to face the blast and make his way to the burro and the girl, the black curtain dropped, and he knew it would be hours before he could see again—hours, and perhaps days.

With the wind in his face and the flying sand biting into his skin, he grimly fought his way in the teeth of it. That was his course. He called aloud, shouted at the top of his lungs, and then fell silent as he listened for some answering call to guide him. None came.

Seward groped about in the turmoil, fighting against the blast for every step. Again and again he lifted his voice in a call to the girl. Only the roaring whisper of the sand filled his ears, and

there was no other response. He sank down where he was, resolved to wait until the storm had spent its fury and then to continue his searching.

He could not be far from Sandy and the girl. His plunge after the tarp was only fifty feet; and yet, in retracing his course, he had lost his bearings. If he continued his efforts to reach the burro and the girl he might only succeed in getting farther and farther away from them. Had the use of his eyes been allowed him he could have done no better, for the curtain of sand closed him in completely and to see more than a few feet in any direction was an impossibility.

With his back to the wind he crouched low in a growing drift of sand. Minutes dragged like hours as he panted for air under the suffocating tarp. And then, by degrees, the roar began to die down. The peak of the storm had passed. With the dying whisper of the wind in his ears, Seward arose and threw aside the tarp.

Although it could not have been more than high noon, the blackness of midnight was all around him. "Señorita!" he called, trumpeting through his hands.

Still there was no answer. He kicked himself clear of the sand drift, fumbled until he had recovered the tarpaulin, and began an aimless wandering. The slight breath of wind was from the north, so he faced it confident that he was proceeding in the direction of the hogback. But where was the girl? What had become of her?

He thought of the gold. Had she taken Sandy and made off with him and the weighted saddlebags? Had that been her purpose, all along? Had she fooled him with her *"bandidos,"* her talk of the little inheritance for Tia Bianca, her request that he should help her on to the pass? Had she dared the sandstorm in the hope that it might offer an opportunity for her to escape with the burro and the gold?

He could ask himself numberless questions, but the answers to them were all beyond him. Suppose, on the other hand, he was doing the girl an injustice by his suspicions? There was always that possibility. The faro dealer at the posada might have forgotten his visit at Forty-mile. That had happened long ago. And the wood hauler and his family might have moved into the pass since Seward was through it last. If the señorita was sincere, if she was really in distress, then it was Seward's duty to find her.

He struggled about in the desert, stumbling against the fishhook thorns of cholla clumps, falling over greasewood brush, trumpeting his calls for the señorita through his hands, intent only on covering as much ground as he could in his blind search for the girl.

After an hour of useless effort he began to take a more reasonable view of the situation. The girl, if her intentions were honest, should have been looking for him. She had her sight and finding him would not have been difficult. With the air cleared of flying dust one could see for miles on the desert.

Used to that country, as she professed to be, it was not possible that she had got up and wandered away in the storm. It was not as severe a sandstorm as others Seward had experienced. People had died in sandstorms, but not in one that had worn itself out so quickly. The señorita must have escaped and have taken the burro with her.

It was now high time for Seward to think of himself. He was perishing for water; and if he could not find Sandy and the canteens he must somehow manage to return to the spring by the hogback. The slight ruffle of air from the north still served him as a guide. Moistening his fingers on his hot tongue, he lifted a hand to catch the direction of the moving air. Then he proceeded on his course.

He was staggering before he had gone far. He dropped to the ground and groped about until he had found a small pebble and placed the stone under his tongue. That was something of a help to a man far gone with thirst, but it was not much. Lifting himself, he continued to stagger onward.

He blundered into a stroke of luck when he bumped into some object and, putting out a hand, he encountered a furry neck. A nose was pushed against his arm, nuzzling him companionably.

"Sandy!" he gasped; and then, out of pure relief, he gave vent to a husky laugh. "You're sandy, all right; sandy from nose to heels, old top!"

He groped for the canteen of water, but it was gone; and then for the saddlebags and found them. They chinked as he struck them with the flat of his hand.

What did this mean? Had the señorita taken the canteen and started alone across the desert? Why had she left the saddlebags? Were they too heavy for her to carry?

"For a blind man," Seward muttered, "all that is past finding out. *Agua,* Sandy!" he called hoarsely to the burro. "Back to the camp, Sandy! If you are as dry as I am, you will make for the nearest water, and that's the spring by the hogback."

He started the burro, letting him take his own course, and followed at his side clinging to the packsaddle. Presently he climbed to the burro's neck and dismounted only when he sensed that they had reached a rise and were ascending a slope.

The hogback! "Good boy, Sandy!" he croaked. "Before many minutes, now, we'll have water."

Having gained the top they crossed the flat crest and began a descent of the opposite bank. Sandy was making straight for water; and presently, at the foot of the incline, the burro quickened his pace for a dozen yards, halted abruptly and lowered his head. Seward could hear him splashing his nose in the pool below the spring.

"At last!" Seward muttered and, guided by the drip of water, made his way to the spring, threw himself down at full length and drank.

He was back at his camp again. Blind though he was, he was safe for the present. He could use food from his cache; and that, with the water, would keep life in him. Staying there until his sight was restored would not be a difficult matter; awkward, it was true, but he had passed through more difficult experiences and had survived. "I'm lucky, after all," he thought.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WHIP HAND.

RETURNING to the pool just below the little basin that caught the drip of the spring, Seward laid aside his coat and hat, unbuckled his holster harness and laid the gun on his coat, then unbuttoned his shirt at the neck, rolled up his sleeves and plunged his head into the water.

His hair was caked with sand, and his face was grimy with it. All his weariness seemed to drop from him with that refreshing dip. Now if the black curtain would only lift from before his eyes! If he could only see! Nevertheless, he still considered himself in luck, and he laughed softly as he shook the water out of his hair and dried his face on a bandanna handkerchief.

He had ceased to worry about the señorita. She was a designing person, and she had taken the canteen and had abandoned him to his fate in the desert; and she must have known that he was blind as she skulked away while the sandstorm was blowing itself out. Just what her designs were was a puzzling question; but she had missed the gold. If the *"bandidos"* were her confeder-

ates, then undoubtedly they had picked her up; very likely they had been keeping track of her from the hills all the while she was in his camp and afterward during that futile start for the pass.

Being well rid of her, he thought, was a cause for congratulation. He was smiling to himself as he reached gropingly for his six-gun, his coat, and his hat. His hands failed to find what they were searching for, and in a flash he realized that his luck was not all that he had believed it to be. Hat, coat, and gun had vanished; and, as that fact came home to him, he sensed the presence of some one else in the camp. It might be the girl, or the *bandidos,* or all of them. Ah, if he could have looked around! He would have given a year of his life for one minute's use of his eyes.

Seward's ability to think quickly in a pinch had many a time stood him in good stead during his desert experiences. He made use of it now and adjusted himself to the evil circumstances as best he could.

"Where in blazes did I put that gun?" he said aloud, trying to make it appear that he did not suspect the presence of unseen, thieving hands. "Oh, well," he added, rising, "I'll find it later."

Placing his fingers to his lips he gave vent to a shrill whistle. Sandy answered the call, drew close, and pushed his nose against his master's shoulder. Seward removed the heavy saddlebags from the burro's back and carried them into the encircling chaparral. He bent down under the mesquite, dipped a hand into his trousers' pocket with all the eye-defying swiftness of a conjuror, and pushed the saddlebags out of sight in the bushes. From under the buckled flap of one of the bags glimmered, in plain view, the half of a twenty-dollar gold piece. Seward lifted himself, paused a moment to get his bearings, and then returned to the burro.

"Now, Sandy," he remarked, "whatever happens that gold is safe. I'll strip the pack gear from your back, and we'll both try and take our comfort."

Before he could begin, there was a stir behind him, and another voice broke the silence:

"Jest a minute, Seward; jest a minute. I reckon y'u thought y'u was alone here, huh? Well, it ain't that way at all. Y'u see, old-timer, *I'm* around."

Seward was not startled by the sound of the voice, although he sprang to an about-face and pretended to be. What really surprised him was the fact that the voice had a familiar ring.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "It's a comfort to have somebody around just now. Who are you?"

A throaty chuckle prefaced the answer: "Yore old friend, Red Galloway, Seward. Can't y'u see at all, amigo?"

Seward shook his head. "Sun-blind, Galloway," he answered. "It came on me during the sandstorm. How is it that you happen to be here?"

"Jest a chance, Seward. I was ketched in that flurry o' dust, and my caballo got away from me. That hoss is on his way to Cerillos by now, I expect. That's where I got him from, and whenever he breaks away, or I give him his head, he lays a bee line fer his old stampin' ground. I'm feelin' tollable good over this, myself. I didn't allow y'u was the sort that ever had any hard luck, same as bein' sun-blind. Accordin' to the stories about y'u that's bein' passed around, y'u're bulletproof and hard-luckproof. Nothin' to it, is the'?"

"No, Galloway," returned Seward; "there's nothing to it. Where's your pardner, Eph Springer?"

"Him and me has cut adrift, Seward. We was to meet at Dead Mule Flat, but I'm changin' my mind about that. I reckon I'll cut loose from Eph for keeps. By goin' through the pass east

o' Sunrise Cañon I'll be within two days' hikin' of Sonora. With the five thousand in gold in them saddlebags, I reckon I can do right well acrost the line. One spell, Eph and me made a dead set at that gold, but y'u called the turn on us. Ever since then Eph and me has been yore little dog Fido, walkin' lame, rollin' over and playin' dead whenever y'u crooked yore finger or cracked the whip. Them times, Seward, y'u could see; but now, bein' blind, it makes a heap o' difference. Don't y'u allow it does?"

There was a quick sound of feet, and Seward felt a stinging blow across his face. He struck out with his fist, but the blow spent itself on space. There came the throaty chuckle again.

"Y'u was hittin' south, Seward," taunted the voice, "and I'm here to the north. I'll admit I was scairt o' y'u, one spell, but bein' blind that a way sort o' pulls yore fangs. I lost my hat durin' the sandstorm, but now I got yore'n. Got yore coat, too, and that six-gun with the neat, little holster harness. That'll come handy, I expect, down there in Sonora. I ain't never comin' back this side the line any more. If y'u ever meet up with Eph, jest tell him I said good-by; tell him I had a chance to make off with the five thousand pesos, and that I made the most of it. Him and me has about played out around these parts. Grubstakin' suckers ain't so plenty, and the old game has got so slow we're apt to starve to death. Jest excuse me a minute, Seward, while I get the gold."

"You can't take that gold, Galloway!" cried Seward.

There was another quick movement, another blow, another throaty chuckle. Seward put up a hand to his face; and he could feel the warm tickle of red that rilled across his cheek from the broken skin.

"Shore," gibed Galloway, "I'm yore right good friend, Seward! Nothin' on earth I wouldn't do fer y'u; and ain't I provin' it? If some o' these old alkalis could see y'u now, I'll bet they'd change their minds about y'u're bein' ten feet high and wearin' horns. I can pound y'u around all I blame' please, and it ain't in y'u to put the double-cross on me. And don't lie about my not bein' able to take the gold. I seen where y'u put them saddlebags, y'u four-flusher! And I heard the bags clink as y'u toted 'em. Wait a minute!"

There followed a sound of scrambling in the chaparral. Under the little smudge of red a grim smile worked its way over Seward's face as he stood and waited. There was another crashing of brush, a fall of heavy feet in the sand, and this time a dull chinking noise.

"Didn't get the gold, huh?" jubilated Galloway. "Why, Seward, one o' them double-eagles had spilled out from under the flap o' the saddlebags! I'm takin' the burro, too, and makin' the bags fast to the pack saddle." The saddlebags rattled as he maeuvered with them. "So fur, so good," he mumbled. "There ain't much more'n half yore pack on the burro, Seward. Here's grub, but no canteens. Where's the canteens? I'm askin' y'u right friendly, Seward, about them canteens. I don't want to strike out fer Sonora without a water supply."

"The small one is lost, Galloway," replied Seward; "you'll find the big one in the brush to the east of the spring."

"Losin' yore nerve, ain't y'u?" jeered Galloway. "Y'u know when somebody has got the whip hand of y'u, don't y'u? Now I'll fill that big canteen, if I can find it where y'u say it is, and I'll be on my way. Somebody is liable to come huntin' y'u, and I'm going to make myself scarce, *muy pronto.*"

Seward sat down in the sand, hunched up his knees in front of him, and clasped his hands about them. He could hear Galloway splashing in the water as he filled the canteen; then Gal-

loway returned to the burro and secured the canteen to the packsaddle.

"Now," he went on, "I allow I'm fixed till I cross the border. After that, I'll get along fine. I ort to be able to loaf two or three years, down among the greasers, on five thousand pesos."

"Let me tell you something before you go, Galloway," said Seward.

"Spit it out, old-timer; I ain't got much time to spare if I get through the pass and to the water hole beyond, come night. What's on yore mind?"

"Just this," Seward went on coolly, dispassionately: "I'll have my sight again in a few days, and then I'll be after you. I'll have you, Galloway, if I have to chase you from Mexico to Central America, down through Panama and clear to Cape Horn. You've got my gun, and you could kill me with it; but you are yellow, clear through, and haven't the nerve. The only way you can save your red scalp is by leaving those saddlebags, the burro, and the rest of the plunder. You can take the canteen, if you want to go; but you'll do better by yourself if you show good sense, stay here, and lend me a helping hand. Make your choice, and make it now."

The old look of fear rose in Galloway's face. Seward had been his Nemesis, and his orders were backed with an appalling reputation to evil-doers for making good his threats. For a moment it seemed as though Galloway's nerve would fail him. He dropped back against the burro, striking the saddlebags with one extended arm as he did so.

The clinking sound that followed focused his greed for gold upon his shrinking courage. He took heart. There had come to him, by the spring near the hogback, one chance in a million to make a big stake. Seward was blind and helpless. Suppose, with sight returned, he did trail him? Sonora was wide and filled with hiding places, and Galloway was adept at keeping himself out of sight.

"All right," yelled Galloway, "I'm makin' my choice! How d'y'u like it?"

Again he struck at Seward; but Seward, sensing what was coming, threw himself backward, and Galloway's big fist cleaved the air. As Seward rolled to get out of the way, Galloway jumped on him with crushing force. Seward caught at the two feet on his chest, but Galloway kicked himself clear.

"Trail me!" shouted the grubber defiantly. "Find me if y'u can! Mebby I'll have some greaser boys handy at my back, and we'll give y'u more'n a handful."

There came the dull thud of a kick, followed by a wheezy groan from Sandy.

"Get down there to the water, y'u imp o' the devil," roared Galloway, "and take yore last drink this side o' the water hole t'other side the pass!"

Seward groped over the ground for a rock, but he could find none. A few minutes later, while he was crawling toward the spring in the hope of encountering Galloway and coming to grips with him, he heard the padded fall of hoofs on the slope of the hogback. From above floated the raucous voice of Galloway:

"Adios, Seward of Sacatone! Y'u're some man, with yore eyes in workin' order, but y'u couldn't even side-step a sidewinder the way y'are now. Drop in on me over in Sonora! The latch-string is out fer y'u, any old time!"

"Galloway," answered Seward, "you don't know what you're up against!"

CHAPTER VII.

TO THE RESCUE.

IN the back room at Simms & Norcross', Eph Springer had told his story of treachery and vengeance to Ethel and Simms. "I'd like to get a grubstake out o' this," finished Spring-

er, noting with satisfaction the sensation his story had caused. "I'm gettin' in wrong with Chombo, and he's a hard case. What I've told y'u ort to be worth a good grubstake, hadn't it now?"

The girl's face was white; she had clenched her hands convulsively and was staring into space with fear-filled eyes.

"I wouldn't take it so hard, Ethel," said Simms; "this man may be lying just to wheedle us out of some supplies."

"Is it true, Eph Springer?" the girl demanded.

"S' help me, ma'am, every word is gospel!" declared Springer. "D'y'u reckon," he went on, appealing to Simms, "that I'd come here with a lie like that ag'inst Chombo? All the grubstakes in the world wouldn't be worth the risk. I'm tryin' to help Seward."

Ethel was apparently convinced that the information was reliable. "We've got to do something for Mr. Seward, Mr. Simms," she declared, "and without loss of time. If he hadn't been trying to help you and father by taking that gold to Los Cerillos he wouldn't have fallen into this trap. We must get a car and hurry over the Hermosito Trail to the pass east of Sunrise Cañon. Can't you see," she cried wildly, "that it's the only thing to be done?"

"It would be dark before we could make the trip," said Simms, "and we couldn't find Seward after sundown. It will probably be hard enough to find him in broad day. He'll be prospecting through the hills as he works his way south."

"At any rate," insisted the girl, "we can go to this pass. We must get there as soon as we can and wait for him and warn him. I'll go alone, if that's the only way."

"You are excited, Ethel," Simms told her gently, "and this is a case where we must remain calm and do some cool thinking. A wrong move, just now, would be worse than making no move at all. Go over to the jail and ask Jerry Blake to come here."

"No!" broke in Springer apprehensively. "If y'u're goin' to get Blake in on this, right here's where I duck."

He jumped from his chair and would have bolted for the door had not Simms caught up a rifle leaning in one corner of the room.

"You sit down!" he ordered. "If you're giving us a square deal you can't object to talking with the sheriff and telling him exactly what you have told us. Get back in that chair."

Springer dropped into his seat. "I'd never 'a' come here," he complained, "if I'd knowed I was to be jumped on like this. Only tryin' to do somethin' fer Seward—and mebby clear up a grubstake."

"You'll get one of the biggest grubstakes you ever had, Springer, if we find we can depend on what you've told us," said Simms; "but if we find you're lying there'll be something else coming to you."

Fortunately the sheriff was in his office, and Ethel brought him at once. He tossed a grim look at Springer as he came into the back room and pulled up a chair.

"Now then, grubber," he remarked, "you use a straight tongue in talking with me. I know more than you think about the operations you and Red Galloway have been putting across, and I won't stand side-stepping from you. What's this about Chombo and Lola Sanger and Walt Seward?"

"If I give y'u facts, Blake, y'u won't make me any trouble?" faltered Springer.

"No; but I'll make you a lot if you don't. Go ahead with it."

Springer repeated the story he had already told Ethel and Simms—how Lola Sanger and Chombo had started on two fast horses for the pass east of Sunrise Cañon to lay an ambush for

Seward, and how La Joya, from Forty-mile, was to delay Seward on his way until the ambush was in readiness.

Blake sat back in his chair, lowered his brows, and tossed a glance at the girl. "I thought you were keeping Seward's work with that money a close secret," he remarked.

"We are, Jerry," put in Simms; "Norcross, Ethel, and I haven't told a soul."

"Then how did Lola Sanger get hold of it?"

"Wait!" spoke up Ethel. "I have a suspicion about that, and we'll see how close it is to the truth."

She left the room and could be heard climbing up the outside stairs. Presently she returned, bringing with her Francisca, a Maricopa girl, who helped her with the housework. Francisca was a stolid person and did not seem in the least awed by the sheriff or by any business that might be afoot.

"Francisca was in the kitchen, Mr. Blake," Ethel explained, "while I was talking with Mr. Seward in the front room, upstairs, and asking him if he would take the money to Los Cerillos. It just occurred to me that she had overheard the conversation and had told of our plans to others. Did you, Francisca?" she asked.

The Maricopa girl nodded. *"Si,"* she answered, evidently with no desire to hold anything back.

"Oh, you did?" said Blake. "How many did you tell, Francisca?"

The girl held up a stubby brown finger. *"Uno,"* she answered.

"Only one? Who was that?"

"La Joya, of Forty-mile."

Here was evidence to bolster up Springer's report, and everybody was interested.

"Where did you see La Joya?" went on the sheriff.

"She come to door when Miss Ethel was downstairs. She ask 'bout Seward, who had just left. She give me cinco pesos"—five stubby fingers were lifted—"and I tell her 'bout Seward taking the gold."

"There you have it," observed Blake to the others; "five dollars is a lot of money to a girl like Francisca. It appears from what Springer says that Lola Sanger has been staying at the posada at Forty-mile since she and Dirk made their get-away from the jail. La Joya hid her away there, I suppose. The Jewel rode back, told the news to that tiger cat, Lola, and she made up her mind that she'd be revenged on Seward for the second capture of her brother. She rang in Chombo. That half-breed is an enemy of Seward's and a friend of the two Sangers. I'm inclined to think, from the indications, that Springer has told the truth. Just to be on the safe side, though," he added, "I'm going to lock him up until I sift this thing and make sure his story is O. K."

A wail went up from Springer. "And that's what I get fer tryin' to do the right thing," he growled; "I'm to be locked up. I wish to thunder I'd stayed away from Tres Alamos and let Seward take his medicine."

"You'll be treated like a white man, Springer, maybe for the first time in your worthless life," said Blake reassuringly, "if your information pans out."

"What will you do, Mr. Blake?" asked Ethel anxiously.

"By sunup, to-morrow," was the answer, "I'll hit the Hermosito Trail for the pass east of Sunrise Cañon, in order to head off Seward. Joe Reeves, my best deputy, will go with me. Maybe we can make a good haul and bring in Lola Sanger and Chombo, and then pick up The Jewel at Forty-mile."

"But why not go to-night?" demanded Ethel.

"We'd be apt to miss some bets, Ethel, if we tried to do anything to-night. It's too late for a start."

"But already La Joya may have met Mr. Seward and——"

"Haven't you learned enough about Walt Seward to know that La Joya won't be able to fool him for a minute? I'll gamble that if we never stirred a hand in this thing, Seward would come out of it as he comes out of everything else—top hole. I'm not worried about Seward and this fool talk of an ambush at the pass. I'm all set to recapture Lola Sanger. It was supposed she had left the country, but I'm going to show her that she was foolish for stickin' around. This is too good a chance to miss."

"Anyways," put in Springer, "Seward will be tipped off afore he can tumble into any trouble at the pass. He's goin' to have plenty o' warnin'."

"How?" asked Ethel eagerly. "In what way?"

"My pardner, Red Galloway, started out the Hermosito Trail to find Seward at the same time I rode in here. I was aimin' to head him off with that money if he hadn't got started."

"I wouldn't trust either you or Red Galloway as far as I could throw a steer by the tail," said the sheriff; "you're both of you bad medicine. You're playing this little game straight, looks like, just for what you can get out of it. Maybe Galloway will find Seward and tip him off about Chombo, and maybe he won't. If he does, then that's something on the right side of Galloway's account, and I'll not forget it. If he doesn't—well, I won't forget that, either. Come along, Springer, and we'll stroll over to the jail."

"What time do you intend to start in the morning, Mr. Blake?" queried Ethel.

"Oh, about sunup. It won't take us long to cover the ground in the flivver."

"I'm going with you," the girl declared.

Blake shook his head. "No, Ethel," he told her; "it's going to be a rough trip. Joe's a fast driver, and he'll hit all the bumps on 'high.' And there's plenty of bumps, believe me."

"You think I'll be in the way!" exclaimed Ethel.

"You? In the way?" Blake laughed and patted her shoulder. "Why, you stood in that door, there, and took a shot at Dirk Sanger with a rifle when he was forcing Simms to open the safe and get out that five thousand dollars in gold. If you get tired clerking in the store, come over to my office and I'll swear you in as a two-gun deputy."

Mentioning the gold started the sheriff on another tack. "I'll be glad when those double eagles are transferred to Los Cerillos. They have made me more trouble, first and last, than any other gold that was ever minted. I suppose you want to drive with us to-morrow to make sure they're delivered to this man Sparling?"

"That gold, Mr. Blake," the girl answered, "is the least of my worries. I'm afraid for Mr. Seward."

The sheriff gave her a quick look, and there was something in his eyes that brought a vivid color into her cheeks. He laid a fatherly hand on her arm. "You haven't known Seward as long as I have, Ethel," he told her gravely, "and you don't understand how thoroughly capable he is of taking care of himself. There was a time, not so very long ago, when something happened to him that caused me to worry a lot; but when the returns were all in, I found that I had been making a fool of myself. Seward doesn't thank any one for worrying about him. But I'll tell you, Ethel; if it will ease your mind any, and your father is willing, you can ride south with Reeves and me to-morrow."

"Thank you, Mr. Blake," returned Ethel gratefully; "I know father will let me go, and I shall be ready by the time you and Mr. Reeves are. I'll send a good supper over to the jail for Eph

Springer, for I'm sure he is trying to do what is right."

The next morning disappointment awaited Ethel. The weatherwise sheriff, reading the storm warnings, refused to start until after the sandstorm, which he was almost certain was coming. But directly after Tres Alamos had opened its doors and windows and was enjoying a little relief from the sweltering heat, the official car pulled out of town, with Reeves on the front seat, Blake beside him, and Ethel in the tonneau.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE GATHERING GLOOM.

IN all the Seward of Sacatone stories, told and retold between the Mogollon Mesa and the Mexican border, there is none in which the incidents so interlock in drama and tragedy as in this one.

In the early afternoon following the brief sandstorm, Seward, blind, was robbed of his burro, saddlebags, and much of his equipment and left helpless at the spring by the slope of the hogback; Blake and Reeves, with Ethel Norcross, were leaving town in a fast motor car, hoping to rescue Seward and to effect the capture of at least three black conspirators. Lola Sanger and Chombo, the bowman, had hastened southward along the Hermosito Trail late on the preceding afternoon, passing a mile to the east of the hogback where Seward and the rescued La Joya were having their frugal supper in Seward's camp, had reached the pass east of Sunrise Cañon during the night, had gone into hiding, had weathered the simoon, and were now eagerly awaiting the coming of Seward. The designing La Joya, as it appeared later, had been picked up in the desert, as the sandstorm was blowing itself out, and had returned to Forty-mile with the three riders who had helped her stage the little play of beguiling treachery; and Red Galloway——

Every rogue in carrying out his lawless plans is bound to come upon some complication in which he will overreach himself. This lapse in craftiness is not always attended with serious results, but the brutal and treacherous grubber was playing a game the danger of which was beyond his ability to foresee and guard against. Perhaps his wits were still befogged by the tiswin; or perhaps, even without the tiswin, they would not have been keen enough to cope with the situation. Be that as it might, however, he was pushing southward as fast as possible, driving Seward's burro before him and wearing Seward's hat and coat.

Behind the bales of hay in Chombo's shed Galloway and Springer had overheard all the red-handed treachery plotted by the half-breed and the vengeful sister of Dirk Sanger. Galloway knew that the master bowman would be waiting for Seward under cover in the pass; that the way to Los Cerillos and Sonora was through the pass; that Sandy, the burro, was known everywhere to be Seward's pack animal; and, trifling in itself, but of utmost importance in Fate's general scheme of reprisal, Galloway was wearing Seward's hat and coat.

Did Galloway's thoughts, however, discover anything of personal peril in all this? No; he could not draw out his imagination so fine. As he kicked and pounded the burro along and listened to the occasional chinking in the saddlebags, there was nothing but exultation in his lawless heart. Now and again he would draw from his pocket a twenty-dollar gold piece and stare at it with greedy eyes. There were two hundred and forty-nine more of them in the saddlebags—so ran his speculations—and how he would lord it over the greasers of Sonora with all that wealth!

He would draw about him a gang as ambitious for plunder as himself, and in some fastness of the Sonora mounatins

he would take life easy and merely direct the forays of his followers. If Seward came searching for him—as undoubtedly he would if he did not die of hunger there by the hogback—Galloway would have some desperate men for his own protection. It was a most entrancing picture for a desert hobo of Galloway's type.

The sun was setting as Galloway drove Sandy into the pass. The flaming red hair under the brim of Seward's hat was darkened by the shadows cast by the rocky walls rising on each side of the fleeing grubber.

"And there's Eph," Galloway was muttering; "he can wait fer me till the crack o' doom on Dead Mule Flat. I'm done with him. He's too slow and too keerful, anyways. I'd 'a' turned on Seward long ago if it hadn't been fer Eph. I wish to thunder Eph could know how easy Seward was when I finally made a set at him."

Remembering the blows he had rained on the blind Seward and then how Seward had fought back like a shadow boxer, Galloway gave his throaty chuckle and finished it with a low laugh.

That laugh over his successful treachery was still on his lips when a bowstring twanged a hundred yards on the right. From a brush clump flew a feathered dart, its head gleaming a little in the faint light. Galloway halted in his tracks, an expression of weird astonishment on his heavy face. Gone for him was every hope of an easy, lawless life in Sonora! He crumpled slowly where he stood, both hands clutching at a long, slim shaft clinging to his chest. Dropping forward, he sprawled on his face, his limbs twitched convulsively, a last sibilant whisper escaped his lips, and he lay still.

The brush parted and Chombo, stepping softly in his moccasined feet, emerged into view. Coolly he paused and began unstringing his bow. About his forehead, holding his long, black hair in place, was a red headband. A glimmer of satisfaction shone in his cruel little eyes.

"Despachemonos, señorita!" he called, as calmly as though he had just planted an arrow in the gold of a straw target. "Get the double eagles, and we will be traveling. Your *hermano's* score is settled; and me, I have settled mine. Get the double eagles, and we will ride."

Lola Sanger, her face white as death, led two horses clear of the scrub farther along the pass. She trailed the reins on the ground and wavered a little as she left the horses and approached the burro. Sandy had suffered such brutal treatment during the last few hours that he was restive, suspicious of every one. He tried to break away, but the excited girl overtook him and halted him. With trembling hands she unbuckled one side of the saddlebags, reached into it and drew forth—a handful of iron disks!

A startled cry escaped her lips. Frantically she continued her search. There was no gold—only those big iron washers that had somewhat the shape of the gold pieces and something of their chinking music as they were shaken in the bags.

"Bien, y que?" came a voice behind her.

It was the voice of Chombo, but the tone of it was new to Lola Sanger. The face of Chombo was new to her, too; black and stormy under the red headband, ominous in the shifting shadows of the pass. He was cleaning an arrowhead on a bit of brush, wiping it carefully, for the bowman counted his arrows among his treasures.

"There is no gold here, Chombo!" cried the girl. "Nothing but these!" and she held up some of the iron disks. "Seward he has fooled us!"

"Oiga, but he is clever!" The words came with a snarl through the half-breed's thin lips. "I have wasted an arrow, señorita." His eyes flamed. "That is Seward's burro; back there"—

he motioned behind him—"is Seward's sombrero, his coat. But not Seward at all; no, not Seward! I have been fooled!"

"What?" whispered the girl.

"Go and look."

"No!" Lola Sanger shivered. "Who is it, Chombo, if not Seward of Sacatone?"

Chombo reached out his hand, caught her roughly by the arm, dragged her back along the pass. "You not like to look, eh?" he sneered at her. "You not got much courage now, when all is done? You very fine schemer, señorita, but here your scheme go wrong and you make a fool out of me. There!"

They halted beside the still form.

"Red Galloway!" whispered the trembling girl.

"*Si!* And how he come to have Seward's burro, his sombrero, his coat?"

"I can't understand this, Chombo! I tell you I am as amazed at this as you are."

Chombo shrugged his shoulders. "Seward too much for us," he growled; "too much for everybody. You stay here; bymby, I come back."

He hoisted the bulky form in the road to his shoulders and staggered off with it. With horror growing in her eyes, Lola Sanger watched him climb the slope of the pass, a ghoulish figure in the fading daylight. At last he vanished with his gruesome burden, and it was ten minutes before he returned.

"Old prospect hole," he announced briefly; "Red Galloway heap better off there—heap better for me than out here in the trail. As for you," and he whirled on the girl like a rabid wolf, "you got me in this trouble! Me, I no sabe what you got at the back of your head. Now you walk back to Forty-mile. *Le deseo un buen viaje!*"

Chombo whirled away and ran for the horses.

The girl followed him, screaming: "You can't leave me here! Chombo! You were my brother's friend! You can't desert me in these waterless hills like this, with the night coming on!"

He swung to the back of one of the horses, his face set with stony determination, the flash of a relentless purpose in his eyes. He was all Yaqui now, enraged by the thought that somehow he had been double crossed and that the girl must have had a hand in it.

"Chombo!" The cry was a shriek, and two hands clasped convulsively at his stirrup. "Chombo——"

He struck his horse with the spurs, and the animal leaped away. The other horse, led by the bridle reins, likewise jumped forward along the trail. The girl was dragged for a few yards and then fell to the ground. Rising to her knees and sobbing hysterically, she watched Chombo fade from sight in the gathering gloom.

She got up and ran after him, calling wildly for him to come back; and then, reaching the spot where Red Galloway had fallen, she halted in a sudden hysterical fear. Turning, she ran southward along the pass until she was breathless and staggered to a boulder. She crouched beside the stone, fighting against her superstitious fears.

By degrees she got her emotions under control. It was necessary, situated as she was, to think and to think to some purpose. She had lost her hat somewhere, and she pulled a shawl that lay across her shoulders over her head. What was she to do?

She thought of the burro. She could ride the burro, if she could find him. Perhaps, if she gave him his head, he would carry her to water—possibly into Los Cerillos. She knew little about that country, but there was a trail to Cerillos, and she could follow it. Anything was better than staying in that pass, spending the night there, and waiting for some traveler to come along who could give her a lift.

She wandered back and forth for

nearly an hour, but the burro was nowhere to be found. Even that dumb brute had fled from her, she told herself, as from something evil.

Then, abruptly, two streaming lights blazed through the pass. Her heart leaped as the two red eyes glowed in the dark, halted perhaps a hundred feet away, and remained at rest. A car! She started toward it, keeping to the bushes at the trailside. When she had come close, she heard a voice:

"You look on that side, Joe, and I'll see what I can find over here on the left. Too bad we had all that engine trouble and couldn't make the pass before sundown, but we'll do the best we can."

Lola Sanger caught her breath. The voice was familiar; she knew that Blake, the sheriff from Tres Alamos, was there, and that he was looking for some one. This was the last straw, the last drop in her cup of misfortune. But she would rather die in the waterless hills than be taken by Blake.

She crept away southward along the pass, skulking through the brush, making as little noise as she could. Looking backward, she saw flash lights twinkling in the chaparral. On and on she hurried until, worn out and exhausted, she crawled up the stony bank to a ledge, crouched behind some stones and waited breathlessly.

Later, in half an hour it may have been, the gleaming headlights swept on down the pass and the car disappeared in the direction of Los Cerillos.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RAY OF HOPE.

ROBBED of his burro, the saddlebags, and some of his supplies, and left by Galloway to get along as best he could, Seward went hunting for the cache where he had concealed the rest of his equipment. He was half an hour finding the pile of stones. He knew that camp and its surroundings as he knew his two hands, but groping his way to any particular point, other than the spring, was a difficult feat.

The drip of water, where it oozed from the rocks and rilled into the little basin below, was the one constant sound by which he guided all his sightless maneuvers. He could always get his bearings when he stopped to listen to that musical drip, drip, drip, at the spring.

In the cache were his first-aid kit, a side of bacon, two or three tins of sardines, his fire jack and cooking utensils, and his short-handled pick, shovel, hammer, and gold pan. It had been necessary to lighten Sandy's pack in order to make it possible for La Joya to ride the burro with some small degree of comfort. The box of ointment with which he treated his eyes was in the pocket of the coat stolen by Galloway. Seward's dirk knife was also in the coat.

All he could do for his eyes was to bandage them with gauze; and if he had thought himself equal to starting a fire and frying the bacon, there was no way of slicing it. He crushed one of the tins of sardines between two stones and managed to get at the contents. It was a slim meal, but enough.

His tobacco, cigarette papers, and matches were in the pockets of his khaki shirt. Hunting the shade of the dusty mesquite bushes, he spread out the tarpaulin, rolled himself a smoke, and tried to forget the aches and pains caused by Galloway's fists and feet.

"I'm tough as a piece of rawhide," he told himself, "and it's a mighty good thing. The situation could be a whole lot worse than it is."

That was always the way in which Seward faced his reverses. There was a satisfaction in knowing that ebbing fortune had stopped short of rock bottom. He was thankful for his strength for his ability to endure.

"And Galloway," he reasoned grimly, "might have cut short my career with a bullet from my own gun. But I knew he hadn't the nerve to go that far. I'm sorry for Sandy; that's all."

Burros' ears are said to be long to catch curses, but Sandy's ears had yet to catch the first curse from Seward. In all his five years of coming and going about the deserts, Sandy had been cared for and treated as a faithful friend. And the burro, in his brute way, showed his gratitude for kindly treatment. A whistle from Seward always brought him. Yes; Seward was deeply sorry for Sandy; in fact, he was fretting more on Sandy's account than on his own. He could get out of his troubles, but the burro would suffer every kind of brutality if he ever reached Sonora with the hard-hearted Galloway.

" 'East of sunrise falls the night,' " Seward murmured as he smoked. "I'm beginning to understand now what that hunch meant for me. My night is pretty complete, for the present." He smiled a bit at the fancy. "I'll be here for two or three days, I suppose, before that black curtain lifts," he went on musingly, "and I'll be down to raw bacon before then. Oh, well; even that might be worse."

Having finished his cigarette he lay back on the tarp and was soon asleep. How long he slept he could not know, but he was aroused suddenly by a thumping of hoofs in the sand. Lifting himself on one elbow, he listened intently. What was this? Was La Joya returning with the *"bandidos"* to look for the gold?

This thought gave Seward a good deal of concern until at last he had resolved the hoofbeats into those of a single horse. They passed very close to him, so close that a rider could scarcely have failed to see him; but they went on, with a rustle of mesquite branches, until they halted near the drip, drip, drip of the spring. There followed a sound of disturbed water.

"A riderless horse!" Seward reasoned, getting off the tarpaulin with sudden hope rushing through him. "That *would* be luck, if it were true. But it seems too good to be true!" he finished.

He moved forward toward the spring, guided by the splashing in the pool. At last he put out his hand, and it rested on a bony back. But only for a moment. At the first touch of his fingers the horse snorted, threw up his head, and would have shied off had not Seward made a haphazard grab for the animal's head. The reins were trailing, and by luck Seward caught one of them.

"Steady, sport, steady!" he coaxed. "I'm not going to hurt you."

With a tight hold on the rein he proceeded to make further investigations. The horse was lean and shaggy. The empty saddle on his back was a dilapidated affair, with one oxbow stirrup on the right and no stirrup at all on the left. A small canteen hung from the saddle horn, and a little bag was tied at the cantle. Bringing the reins together and tying them, Seward thrust his arm through the loop and removed the canteen. Unscrewing the top, an odor of tiswin was immediately in evidence. He untied the bag and found it to contain about half a pound of bacon—all that remained of the slab.

Then Seward had a most engaging thought: Could this, by some stroke of remarkable luck, be the horse that Red Galloway had lost in the sandstorm? Was this the animal that had been foaled in Los Cerillos, the one that always made for that camp whenever he could break away from his owner?

"Jumping sandhills!" exclaimed Seward. "Just think what that would mean!"

It was a plausible theory. The horse, on his way to Cerillos, would turn aside from his course and hunt for water. It

might be that he had been at that spring before and that the remembrance of it was still fresh in his brute mind. If he was really Galloway's horse, he probably knew all the springs and water holes of that desert country.

The idea electrified Seward. He saw an opportunity, blind though he was, for getting on to Los Cerillos.

"Maybe you can turn the trick for me, old top," he said jovially, stroking the shaggy neck of the animal; "but you're tired, and we'll wait till evening; then, in the cool of the night, we'll try a little experiment. I'll mount, let you go as you please, and see if we fetch up in Cerillos."

His pack rope was at the cache; he got it, after a deal of troublesome searching, looped it about the horse's neck and made the free end fast to a stout paloverde. Then he removed the bridle and saddle and listened to the animal's contented grunts as he rolled in the sand.

Emptying the canteen of the small amount of liquor that remained in it, he took it to the spring, rinsed it out, and filled it with fresh water. If the horse really belonged to Galloway, then here was something to explain the grubber's vicious attack.

"Dutch courage," commented Seward.

When the air began to cool he knew that day was drawing to a close; as the coolness intensified, he knew that the big, clear-cut Arizona stars were spangling the blue-black sky. "I think we can start now," he decided, and went about his preparations.

First, he got the riding gear back on the horse, but left the animal tethered by the rope while he made a search in the chaparral. He knew what he wanted, but had difficulty in finding it. Half a dozen times he dug with his hands at the roots of as many scraggly ironwoods; and then, at the seventh effort, he found a heavily weighted canvas bag. The contents of it clinked cheerily as he lifted it out of the hole. He laughed softly.

"Anyhow," he murmured, "this is something that trouble-hunch did for me. The saddlebags were of the same weight, and they rattled almost as musically as this bag does. That gold piece slipping out from under the flap was the only thing that kept Galloway from making a more thorough examination. Even a blind man is able to do a thing or two if he sets his mind to it."

He hung the canteen around the saddle horn, tied the bag securely to the cantle with a few feet of the pack rope, and left the rest of the rope dangling in a coil. Then he swung into the old saddle.

"Now, sport," he said to the horse as he dropped the tied reins on the saddle horn, "take your own course and take your own time. The night is cool and pleasant, and we can go far. I'll stay in the saddle to the end of the ride—and hope for the best."

He heard galloping hoofs in the trail to the east, but could not determine whether they were going north or south. They faded into silence through a night that was clear as a bell. Chombo was riding for his ranch with the led horse, and it was well for Seward that he did not encounter the half-breed on the Hermosito Trail.

Seward's mount moved aimlessly about for a few minutes, evidently wondering why his rider gave no hint of the direction to be traveled by a push of the knee or a pull at the bits; then he began an ascent which Seward knew to be the slope of the hogback.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "We're getting a beautiful start in the right direction."

The flat crest of the uplift was crossed and the descent made on the other side. By taking an angling course the horse would come into the Hermosito Trail, but whether he was taking

that course or not Seward could not know.

It was a long ride and doubly long for a man who was unable to see or to have any definite idea of the course he was traveling. All Seward knew was that they had started right when they crossed the hogback.

He was pinning his hopes on the chance remark of Galloway's that the horse Galloway had lost was so fond of Los Cerillos that he headed for the camp whenever he got the chance. It was a forlorn hope, but forlorn hopes have often been realized.

Perhaps it was three hours later—three hours according to Seward's guess at the passing time—when the horse began climbing again.

"This," reflected Seward, "may be the approach to the pass east of Sunrise Cañon."

A few minutes more and he was sure of it, for the horse's hoofs echoed in a way that suggested high banks to left and right. A quarter of an hour later the echoes ceased, and there was another descent. The horse struck into a slow lope, and there was an air of certainty about his movements that was most promising. And then, abruptly, the horse halted, flung backward with a frightened snort and refused to move farther.

"What's the matter now, sport?" inquired Seward. "A ditch across the road, or some other kind of a barrier?"

The animal dropped his head and began sniffing as at some object in front of him. Seward slid stiffly from the saddle, the looped reins over his arm, and bent down with one groping hand extended. His fingers twined themselves in long, soft tresses.

"Good Lord," he gasped, "it's a woman!"

A shawllike garment was about the woman's shoulders, and her head was bare.

"La Joya!" he muttered, amazed. "Can it be La Joya?" He knelt down and lifted the woman's head in his arms. "Señorita!" he called.

There was no answer. But the woman was alive, for her flesh was warm, and he could hear a faint, sibilant breathing. He groped for the canteen, uncapped it, and awkwardly pressed it to her lips. Then he poured some of the water over her face. She heaved a long, painful sigh and began to stir.

"Help me!" she begged. "Whoever you are, please help me! I have sprained my ankle and can't walk a step."

"Who are you?' he asked.

There fell a silence; then, "Seward of Sacatone!" the woman cried, and struggled to free herself from his supporting arm.

CHAPTER X.

A BIT OF STRATEGY.

SOMETIMES a story of Seward of Sacatone which deals with a series of connected incidents will be broken into fragments, and each fragment will be told and retold as complete in itself and as having no bearing on other incidents that made it plausible or possible.

Perhaps this is not to be wondered at; for when a really remarkable figure, such as Seward, appears in a thinly settled, inhospitable country and plays daringly and successfully the rôle of a righter of wrongs, his deeds are sure to become a popular topic in camps or in the settlements. And when an unselfish desire for service prompts the deeds, and no reward for their accomplishment is ever accepted save that of an approving conscience, the protagonist inevitably achieves heroic stature. He is mute on the subject of his own performances, and the record must be received from those whom he has helped or from witnesses. Thus it is that fragments are made to stand by themselves as complete tales, with no hint of their

relation to events preceding or following which would give to such fragments their true value.

Among the more ignorant and superstitious, Seward became a superman, infallible in judgment, certain as fate in all his activities, and proof against all the ills that flesh is heir to. This type of hero-worshipers scoffs at the story of Seward's temporary blindness and asserts that he merely assumed such a condition in order to develop facts which were difficult of discovery in any other way.

There was an opposing camp of Seward's admirers, a more intelligent and logical faction, which admitted the fact of his blindness although sorely puzzled to account for the affliction; both sides argue a pretty fair case from this woman whom he found in the trail during his night ride to Cerillos.

Nevertheless, it is a truth that Seward was sun-blind; and that alone makes of an unusual adventure a most extraordinary proof of his resourcefulness. Properly to appraise the La Joya incident, it must be considered in connection with the other fragments that have to do with Lola Sanger, Chombo, and Red Galloway.

The woman in the trail recognized him, cried out his name, and tried to get away. She had not taken a step, however, before she fell moaning to the ground.

"Then it is true," said Seward, "and you are Faquita Gonzales, the La Joya of Forty-mile!"

There followed another silence; then, "*Si,*" came the answer, followed by the query, in a faint voice: "What is the matter, Señor Seward? Why do you grope like that with your hands?"

"Sun-blind, señorita. You know, it was coming on yesterday."

There was a murmured exclamation. "I remember! *Si,* I remember!"

"It is all right," Seward went on, "and we will forget yesterday. You want to return to Forty-mile? Well, I can take you as far as Cerillos, and no doubt you have friends there."

"I have friends there," the other answered eagerly, "just outside the town, on this trail. But how will you take me?"

"You can ride the horse, and I will walk. How far are we from Cerillos? Do you know?"

"No; I am not familiar with this cross trail."

He helped her up, then lifted her bodily into the saddle; but he kept the reins in his own hands as he walked beside the horse.

"You remember what you told me at the spring by the hogback?" Seward asked as they plodded along.

"No; I forget; what happened seems more like a dream than anything else."

"Perhaps," said Seward, "I can refresh your memory. The *bandidos,* now; as I understand it, they were your friends and not your enemies. You were merely pretending."

"I am sorry, señor. Yes; I was only pretending."

"And when, after the sandstorm, Red Galloway came and took the burro away from us, you thought you could find the men you said were *bandidos,* and you went after them to get help for me."

"I tried hard, señor, but the walk was more than I could bear. I turned my ankle while I was coming through the pass; but I so wanted to help you that I kept on until I gave out completely."

"You were after the gold, you know, but you decided that you wouldn't take it."

"No; I—I couldn't take it."

"You must remember the rattlesnake you killed by the spring."

"*Si;* I recall killing the rattlesnake."

"And you called those double eagles 'phantom gold.'"

"Well, isn't that money phantom gold? It has caused much trouble."

"It caused Dirk Sanger a lot of trou-

ble. He will go 'over the road' on account of it—and some other things he has done. A scoundrel if there ever was one!"

Seward's hand was on the saddle cantle, and he felt a sudden tensing of the girl's body in the saddle. The slow, grim smile that twitched at his lips was hidden by the darkness. The girl muttered something indistinctly, but made no other answer.

"What time do you think it is, señorita?" Seward inquired.

"It must be three or four in the morning, señor. It has been a long, hard night for me. There is no stirrup on the side where I have my injured foot. Could you not fix something to support it. Oh, it hurts, hurts!"

"Certainly, señorita! Pardon me for being so thoughtless. When a man is blind there are things he fails to realize."

Seward released the lines and took the coil of pack rope, one end of which was binding the heavy bag to the saddle cantle. The moment he released the lines the girl caught them up; then she struck the horse.

The pack rope was uncoiled, and Seward twisted it about his hands. The sudden start of the horse flung him from his feet, but he clung to the rope. The drag of his body presently brought the horse to a halt.

"I'm sorry," faltered the girl; "something must have startled the horse."

"Yes," agreed Seward; "something certainly startled him"

"You were not hurt?"

He laughed. "Hurt? You ask a desert man if he is hurt by a little tumble like that?"

Gropingly, he made a loop in the pack rope, adjusted the dangling foot in the loop, laid a firm hold on the reins and once more started the horse.

"I suppose," he remarked casually, "that dealing faro must be a very fascinating pastime?"

"Si," said the girl; "but keeping track of the hands always bothered me. I never can seem to get it straight whether three of a kind beat what is called a 'full house,' or a 'straight,' or some of the other combinations. I wouldn't make a very good gambler, señor."

"I should think not—dealing that kind of faro. *Que dia es hoy,* señorita?"

There was no answer to this, nothing but a strained silence broken only by the dull footfalls of the horse.

"Qué dice usted?" went on Seward.

The silence continued. *"No estoy acostumbrado a que nadie juegue conmigo,"* Seward remarked. "Do you understand that, señorita?"

"It has been a long time since I have talked Spanish," said the girl, "and I know only a few words of it. At Forty-mile we talk English all the time."

Seward's lips again twisted into a grim smile. His little tests, which he had started with the questions about the rattlesnake and the phantom gold, were bearing fruit.

"You have seen Tumbling Stone Mountain, señorita?" he continued.

"I have heard of it, but I have never been near it," was the answer.

"Now, in going through the gorge that brings one to Tumbling Stone Mountain from Quinlan——"

"There is no gorge," the girl cut in; "at least," she added, hastily correcting herself, "I have heard that there is no gorge—nothing but flat country after you turn from the main Tres Alamos Trail."

"You are correct about that; quite correct."

Seward had discovered all that he wanted to know. For an hour or more he plodded along in silence beside the horse.

It was the girl who roused herself at last to announce: "Dawn is breaking, señor."

"Gracias," said Seward; "I am sorry I cannot see the dawn, for watching the sun rise and set is one of my greatest diversions out in the desert. There is nothing more beautiful in nature, señorita. We must be drawing close to the end of our journey. But, tell me: Was Dirk Sanger ever at Forty-mile?"

"Why do you mention Dirk Sanger?" demanded the girl almost fiercely.

"Because he seems to be very much in my mind, just now. He has a sister, Lola. Did you ever meet Lola Sanger?"

"I never did."

"There is a very remarkable girl, if I am any judge. She helped her brother in some of his lawless escapades, but never of her own choice, I am convinced. Her brother forced her to help him."

"Why are you so sure of that?"

"By observation. Being a prospector trains one to be a close observer, señorita. When Dirk Sanger was captured the first time he was attempting to hold up a motorist by Tumbling Stone Mountain. His sister was with him at the time. The attempt failed, and the motorist brought Sanger and his sister into Tres Alamos and turned them over to the sheriff. It just happened, señorita, that I was the motorist."

The girl twisted in her saddle, and he heard her uneasy movements.

"As we neared Tres Alamos," Seward proceeded, "I was so deeply impressed with the character of Miss Sanger that I offered her her freedom. And she would not accept it. She was very devoted to her brother and declared that she would share his troubles and go through with them to the bitter end. I was sorry. You see, I cannot make war on women. I hated to think that I would be the cause of sending Lola Sanger to the penitentiary. Well, as it chanced, I did not have that to think of, after all. The two Sangers escaped from the jail; they had friends on the outside who helped them, of course. Miss Sanger, it was supposed, left this part of the country and went East. Her brother remained in the deserts, continued his lawlessness, and was captured at the old Esmeralda Mine. I had something to do with that, too. I am wondering——"

"I am not interested, señor," broke in the girl shortly. "Anyhow, there is Los Cerillos in the distance, and we are now at the place where I must leave you. The house of my friends is close to the trail at this point."

"I will take you to the house," Seward offered.

"No; I prefer to go there alone. I can attract their attention, and they will come and give me any help I may need."

Seward helped her to dismount from the horse and then climbed into the empty saddle.

"All right, Miss Sanger," he said. "How you came to be where I found you and in the plight in which I found you, I do not know, but I am giving you the same chance which I offered you, weeks ago—the chance to keep your freedom and get out of this country. I hope you feel differently about the matter now. Adios!"

And Lola Sanger, in blank amazement, watched him as he rode onward toward Los Cerillos."

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE PELICAN MINE.

WITH Ethel Norcross as a passenger in their car, Blake and Reeves had a trying trip southward along the Hermosito Trail. They had two blow-outs; for the intense heat, coupled with the grinding of the tires through the sand, expanded to the bursting point the air in the tubes. Then engine trouble developed, and much time was lost while Reeves experimented with the motor.

Had everything gone well with them they might have reached the pass east of Sunrise Cañon before Red Galloway,

driving Sandy, had entered it; or, better still, they might have overtaken Galloway on the trail between the hogback and the pass. In the latter event a tragedy would have been averted. But it was not to be.

Nor did they meet Chombo, racing northward with the led horse. The far-flung rays of their headlights, gleaming across the desert, was sufficient warning for the half-breed, and he had turned from the trail and lost himself in the greasewood brush until the car had passed.

Blake and Reeves searched the dark pass with their flash lights as well as they could, but the search was in vain. The delays they had experienced had brought them into the pass after sundown, and there was not much chance of making any important discoveries. They decided to proceed to Los Cerillos and return to the pass the next morning to make a thorough investigation by daylight.

There were no more than a dozen adobes in the camp, the more pretentious being the store and hotel operated by the proprietors—now by the proprietor—of the Pelican Mine. It was the mine alone that gave the camp its excuse for existence.

Ethel, anxious to find and warn Seward and grievously disappointed because they had failed to do so, went to the hotel and there passed the remaining hours of the night. Blake and Reeves stayed with a deputy who was the sole representative of the law in that region. In the morning, Blake and Reeves had breakfast with Ethel at the hotel; then, following the meal, they took the girl to a corral back of the hotel and showed her Sandy, Seward's burro, contentedly munching a ration of hay inside the inclosure.

"I told you, Ethel!" exclaimed Blake "Seward's here, and you have had all your worry for nothing."

A magical change came over the girl. Her face brightened, her brown eyes glowed, and then her brows knitted in a puzzled frown. "But where is he if he's in the camp?" she asked.

"Probably over at the Pelican Mine," Blake told her; "his business would take him there, wouldn't it? Besides, Sparling, the new owner of the mine, is an old friend of Seward's; they used to know each other in the East."

"I'll go over there at once," said Ethel, turning away.

"Just a moment, before you go," interposed Blake.

He led her to a shed beside the corral and showed her the pack taken from the burro. "What's all this, do you suppose?" the sheriff asked, dipping a hand into one of the saddlebags and bringing into sight a handful of iron washers.

Ethel was amazed. "Why," she exclaimed, "he put the gold in the saddlebags! I saw him!"

"Have you any theory to account for these iron washers being in the bags now, in place of the gold?" Blake asked her.

The girl shook her head, bewildered.

"Well, Joe and I have a theory," the sheriff went on; "somehow, Seward got the idea that he was going to have trouble on the trip south, so he made up a dummy package." Blake laughed. "That's a regular Seward trick play," he added. "These are big washers, and they'll probably weigh as much as five thousand dollars in gold." He kicked the bags vigorously. "Certainly they rattle like the real thing."

"When was the burro brought in?" asked Ethel.

"We weren't concerned about that. He wasn't here last night when we arrived, and he was here this morning when we got up and started for the hotel. You can't down Seward of Sacatone, by gorry! A hundred Chombos and a hundred Lola Sangers wouldn't be equal to it. Run along to the mine, Ethel. Joe and I will smoke

our pipes in the hotel office until you come back with Seward."

The mine was just over a hill, and the stamp mill was pounding away on the ore as Ethel came down the slope toward the headquarters' adobe. The office door was open, and she had a look inside before she stepped across the threshold.

The adobe contained a single room, meagerly furnished with a desk, a letter file, a mineral cabinet in one corner, and two or three chairs. A woman of twenty-eight or twenty-nine, as Ethel judged, was sitting before the desk. A man in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers was walking up and down beside the desk. He was a small man, and both he and the woman bore about them the unmistakable impress of the East.

"I tell you, Leora," the man was saying, "I'm going to be the mining king of this part of the country. With five thousand dollars in cash I can buy out old man Holsaple's prospect, next to the Pelican property, farther down the valley. The Pelican lead is under the Holsaple holdings. That's what I'm going to use that money for when it comes from Tres Alamos. Holsaple is an old hassayamper, and he won't take my check; he's got to have the money, cash down."

There was something in this that brought a flutter of apprehension to Ethel Norcross. The money, then, had not arrived from Tres Alamos. Where was Walt Seward? His burro was in the corral; but where was he?

Ethel entered the room. "Pardon me," she said, "but I came here to ask about Mr. Seward. Can you tell me where he is?"

The little man in the knickers whirled to an about-face. The woman at the desk rose instantly to her feet.

"You mean Seward of Sacatone?" asked the man.

"Yes."

"What makes you think we know anything about him? He is one of these desert adventurers, rowdy, and half desperado. He——"

"Stop!" cried Ethel. "You're the only man I ever heard speak of Mr. Seward in that slighting way. I am Miss Norcross, daughter of the junior partner of Simms & Norcross at Tres Alamos. The money you wanted was sent to you several days ago by Simms & Norcross, and Mr. Seward was bringing it to you. Mr. Seward told us that you were an old friend of his, and that he'd be glad to oblige you. But I guess," the girl added with biting sarcasm, "that he was mistaken."

"He was not mistaken, Miss Norcross," said the other woman. "I am Mrs. Sparling, and my husband here spoke hastily—and ungenerously." She took Ethel's hand in a friendly way and then presented her to Mr. Sparling. "We are already under a great obligation to Mr. Banford, and when he brings the money we shall be still further in his debt."

Mr. Banford?" echoed Ethel blankly.

Sparling laughed. "This desert hero," he explained, "goes by one name in the East and another in the West. It's a habit of some people, you know, to change their names west of the Missouri. Banford did that, probably because he found it necessary."

"He did not find it necessary," said Mrs. Sparling, shooting a glance of sharp disapproval at her husband; "his name is Walter Seward Banford, and he chooses to be known here in the Southwest as Walter Seward. He has made no change—merely dropped his last name."

"I am not interested in that," returned Ethel, "for if Mr. Seward changed his name, or dropped only part of it, it would make no difference to his friends out here. We know him for what he is, and that's enough."

"All the same," insisted Sparling, who

seemed determined to be disagreeable, "if you started him off with that money, more than likely I'll never see it."

Ethel turned on the little man with flashing eyes. "Do you mean to infer that Mr. Seward is untrustworthy?" she demanded.

"Well, figure it out for yourself. He started with the money, and he hasn't delivered it. What's the answer?"

"There might be several answers, and all of them more to Walt Seward's credit than his discredit." Ethel was indignant. "I was planning to bring your money myself, as Mr. Simms could not leave, and my father was not well enough to make the trip. There have been a number of holdups lately, however, and Mr. Seward did not think it safe for me to act as the messenger. He offered to bring the money himself, because father and I were his friends, and he considered you and Mrs. Sparling his friends. He wanted to do whatever he could for all of us.

"Since he started for Los Cerillos," Ethel continued, "we have discovered that certain enemies of his learned that he was bringing the gold, and they laid a trap for him. That is why I am here this morning. In his effort to oblige you, Mr. Sparling, he has been plunged into terrible danger. The sheriff of Tres Alamos and one of his deputies came with me, and they are at the hotel now. Mr. Seward's burro is in the hotel corral, and we supposed that Mr. Seward must be here. I—I don't know what to think."

Mrs. Sparling seemed genuinely alarmed, but her husband appeared rather exultant.

"All I've heard since I've been at this mine," he remarked, "are wild yarns about this Seward of Sacatone. He seems to have done more things that couldn't be done, more things that are humanly impossible, than any little tin god on wheels I ever heard of. And my wife," he went on angrily, "has been questioning everybody and writing the fairy tales down in a book! I'd be glad to lose that money, just to know Seward had decamped with it. He's bound to show his true colors, give him time."

"My husband," observed Mrs. Sparling, "wishes to become the mining king of this part of the country. He is jealous, I think, of the fame of Seward of Sacatone; and he doesn't mean a word he says, Miss Norcross; not a word!"

Sparling puffed out his chest and stamped the floor. "And my own wife can say that of me!" he exclaimed tragically. "I wish this Seward of Sacatone was here, so I could tell him a few things!" he finished fiercely.

"Then," said Ethel, suddenly sobered, a happy light glowing in her brown eyes, "you are to have your wish, for here he comes."

Mrs. Sparling had brown eyes also. There was a haunting light in them, a light of mystery, as she looked through the open door in the direction in which Ethel was gazing.

Yes; Seward of Sacatone was coming. His hat was gone, his khaki shirt was thick with alkali dust, and there was an ugly bruise on his face. But what really aroused apprehension was the fact that Blake, the sheriff, was coming with him, and Blake was leading him by the hand. In the crook of his left arm Seward was carrying a weighted bag.

"What is the matter?" whispered Mrs. Sparling agitatedly. "What do you suppose can be the matter?"

"Nothing matters," said Ethel calmly, "so long as he is really here. He is bringing your money, Mr. Sparling, and it is plain that he has had to fight to keep it for you. But that is like him. He will fight and fight hard to help—a friend."

Slowly, stumblingly, Seward approached, guided by the hand of the sheriff.

"It seems good, Jerry," those in the

office heard him say to Blake, "to be around where my friends are, once more."

"That's the idea, Walt," answered Blake. "Steady! Here we are."

CHAPTER XII.

FINISHING A GOOD JOB.

HERE'S Sparling, Walt," said Blake, as the two entered the office. "He can't see, Sparling," he explained; "he has covered forty miles of desert without the use of his eyes. Some stunt, if anybody asks you!"

"No," said Seward, smiling; "it was easy. You see, I had a Cerillos horse to bring me in."

"Blind!" gasped Mrs. Sparling, her voice throbbing with sympathy.

"Sun-blind, Leora," explained Seward, apprised of Mrs. Sparling's presence by the sound of her voice. "Merely a slight inflammation of the cornea—I think that is what the doctors call it—brought on by the glare of the sun. The pupils of the eyes close up, as no doubt you can see. But it's unimportant; two or three days with ice packs on my eyes and I'll see as well as ever. The important thing is, Vic, that here's your money, minus just one twenty-dollar gold piece. I'll make that up to you."

He reached out the bag, and Sparling relieved him of it. "Kindly excuse my battered appearance, Leora. I just this minute rode in, and Jerry here was the first one to meet me. I came directly to the mine, because the quicker I get out from under that bag of gold the better I'll feel. I'll thank you for a receipt, Vic, so I can give it to Simms & Norcross next time I'm in Tres Alamos."

Blake looked at Ethel, grinned, and shook his head. The message he meant to convey, as Ethel translated it, was that he had not told Seward she was there.

Sparling had dumped the gold eagles upon a table and was busily counting them. "All here but one," he announced; "Leora, kindly write Banford a receipt for the full amount, less twenty dollars."

Mrs. Sparling turned to the desk and tightened her lips. After writing for a moment she turned and put the sheet of paper in Seward's hand. "There's a receipt for the full amount, Walt," she said; "after all you must have gone through with this money of ours I don't think we need to haggle over a missing gold piece. A receipt isn't necessary, either, since——"

She was about to say "since Miss Norcross was there to see that the money had been delivered," but Blake restrained her with a gesture.

"I want you to know, Walt, that I am grateful to you," Mrs. Sparling went on, a tremble in her voice; "I am pretty sure you took all this trouble for me and that——"

"You are wrong there, Leora," Seward interrupted; "I'd do a lot for you and Victor, of course, but I'd never have undertaken to transport that gold to Cerillos if I hadn't been afraid a little girl I know in Tres Alamos would have tried to bring it herself. It wasn't exactly safe for her, and I'm rather fussy about letting her take any such long chances. A wonderful girl, Leora! Her name is Ethel—Ethel Norcross. I want you to meet her some time."

Mrs. Sparling shifted her gaze to Ethel. A wonderful light had leaped into the girl's eyes. She stepped forward quickly and flung her arms about Seward's neck.

"Walt, Walt!" she whispered. "And Mr. Blake didn't tell you I was here!"

Seward's arms tightened about the slender form. Mrs. Sparling looked away again, with the haunting light in her eyes—a light that suggested dreams that might once have been realized, but were now lost forever.

"Well, anyway," grumbled Sparling, "twenty dollars is twenty dollars, you know."

Blake pulled a roll of bills from his pocket, stripped a "twenty" from the outside and dropped it at Sparling's feet. "There it is, you measly little tightwad!" he snapped. "Come on, Walt, and let's be going. Why do you want to hang around here. I thought you said Sparling was a friend of yours?"

"So he is, or was," Seward answered; "a New York friend. He means all right. So long, Vic!" He put out his hand. "If I can ever do anything more for you, just get word to me."

Sparling laid a flabby white hand in the sunbrowned palm.

"Good-by, Leora!"

"Good-by, Walt," said Mrs. Sparling in a voice scarcely audible.

Then she stood and watched Blake striding away up the hillside, and Ethel and Seward following him, hand in hand.

"I'm ashamed of you, Vic!" she remarked, turning to her husband.

"All right," he told her; "that evens the score for the way you flung Seward of Sacatone at me."

"Does it?" she returned.

Sparling stared at his wife, but she was engaged in some work at the desk and did not look up.

Blake strode rapidly back to Los Cerillos, but Ethel and Seward went more slowly. Ethel started to tell him of the story brought to Tres Alamos by Eph Springer.

"I've had all that from Blake, Ethel," he told her.

"Is it true, Walt?"

"Some of it. The plan was laid, and an attempt was made to carry it out. La Joya did her part, but if Chombo and Lola Sanger hadn't failed I would not be here."

The little hand that was guiding Seward tightened on his.

"Who brought Sandy to Cerillos?"

"Nobody, Ethel; he seems to have come of his own accord."

"How did he get away from you? I thought that you and Sandy were inseparable."

Seward laughed. "Eph Springer told you that Red Galloway had come south to find me and warn me," he said. "Well, he found me after I had lost my sight. His horse had got away from him during the sandstorm, and he managed to reach my camp by the hogback on foot. He had more nerve than I ever gave him credit for, Ethel, and he made off with Sandy and what he thought was the gold. He took my revolver, too, and my hat and coat. Galloway thought he was making a pretty complete job of it, I reckon."

Ethel had an idea. "About what time did Galloway leave you, Walt?" she asked.

"Early in the afternoon."

"And which way did he go?"

"Toward Sonora. He wanted me to tell Springer that he was cutting loose from him for good. With five thousand dollars in gold he thought he could cut a pretty wide swath in Mexico."

"Red Galloway would go south through the pass, wouldn't he?"

"Yes."

"And about what time would he reach the pass, driving the burro ahead of him?"

"Probably before daylight failed."

"And wearing your coat and hat, and driving Sandy——" Ethel paused, a tense note in her voice. "Walt," she exclaimed, "do you think—would it be possible——"

"I was just thinking of the same thing. Sandy, wandering by himself into Los Cerillos, makes it look rather plausible, doesn't it? Well, I don't suppose we'll ever know the facts in the case."

"If Lola Sanger can be found——"

"She'll not be found," returned Seward briefly.

"Then perhaps La Joya, at Forty-mile, would know."

"I have asked Blake not to make any trouble for La Joya. Or for Chombo," Seward added.

"Why did you do that?" Ethel wanted to know.

"They were acting according to their lights," Seward explained; "I spoiled a big sale for Chombo once, and he had reason to hate me in his half-breed way. As for Lola Sanger, I have twice captured her brother, and his career is at an end. Lola is devoted to Sanger, consequently she felt it her duty to be revenged against me. And who and what was Red Galloway? A desert rogue and a thief, as you well know. If one of Chombo's arrows picked him off in the pass, then unwittingly Chombo did a good turn for law and order. It was Galloway's horse that wandered to my camp by the hogback. Cerillos was the animal's home camp, and whenever he got away from Red he put out always for Cerillos. I was lucky to capture the horse, for he brought me straight here when I gave him the rein. Why not let well enough alone?"

"You're a strange man, Walt!" exclaimed the girl. "Don't you want to play even with your enemies?"

"Somehow," he replied with a smile, "I never do—unless my enemies make things too warm for me. If Chombo hasn't had enough, I'll take care of him; but if he's had a lesson and is through, what more could I ask? Are we in the camp, Ethel?"

"Yes; and I'm going to take you to the hotel and take care of you until you get your sight back."

"No," he answered; "you're riding back to Tres Alamos with Blake and Reeves. I'm not going to the hotel, but to Hank Beesley's shack. Mrs. Beesley and Hank will look after me."

"And when will you be in Tres Alamos again, Walt?" asked the girl eagerly.

"As soon as I'm able to see, I'll return to the camp at the hogback. There's some floats there I want to investigate. As soon as I discover that it doesn't lead to anything important—as I probably will—I'm coming to Tres Alamos."

"And you'll see me?"

"Every time I'm in Tres Alamos, after this, I'm going to call on you, *mujercita,*" said Seward; "and every time I call I shall want you to sing for me that song beginning: 'East of sunrise falls the night.' How does it go? Just once, Ethel, right here."

And there, by the corral back of the hotel, with Sandy cocking his long ears to listen, Ethel's clear, sweet voice was lifted:

"East of sunrise falls the night,
West of sundown breaks the day;
And we find our brightest light
Where the darkness paves our way!"

"There's truth in that," averred Seward; "it was east of Sunrise that the night fell for me, novia; and through that darkness I have found a light that, it had seemed for a long time, had gone out for me forever!"

Blake and Reeves, coming around the corner of the hotel, halted suddenly on seeing Ethel and Seward by the corral. They turned back and hastily effaced themselves.

"Jumpin' catamounts!" gasped Reeves. "Them two think a heap of each other, don't they? Who'd ever have guessed it, Jerry?"

"Well, Joe, I guessed it—when we started south to look for Seward. And Mrs. Sparling guessed it, too, if I'm any judge."

Chombo el Arquero remains unmolested at his ranch, launching arrows at the sun and pinning bull's-eyes to the ground a dozen feet from where he twanged his bow. But there is no hatred for Seward of Sacatone. He has heard that Seward kept the sheriff off his trail.

Out at the Posada del Rey Niño, La Joya still deals faro; but she has heard something, too, and would go far to help Seward of Sacatone.

Somewhere in the East is Lola Sanger. Revenge for her brother is no longer a part of her creed.

Over on Dead Mule Flat Eph Springer, outfitted with the biggest grubstake he had ever toted into the deserts, waited in vain for his pardner, Red Galloway.

And above the pass east of Sunrise Cañon, vultures floated on lazy wings, dipped earthward, and soared aloft again. "The end crowns the work," always, for good and ill.

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

By E. B. Kay

OH, I don't like to wake,
And I don't like to play,
And I don't like to dream in the sun;
And I don't like to work,
And I don't like to shirk,
And I certainly don't like to run.
But I'll tell you "sumpin'" I'd like to do—
It's a complex I shall not hide—
I'd just love to sit on the top of the world,
With my feet hanging over the side.

Oh, I don't like to swing,
And I don't like to sing,
And I don't like to gossip and chat;
And I don't like my boots,
And I don't like my suits,
And I don't like my new Sunday hat.
But I have a hobby that's all my own—
Some day on its back I shall ride—
I'd just love to sit on the top of the world,
With my feet hanging over the side.

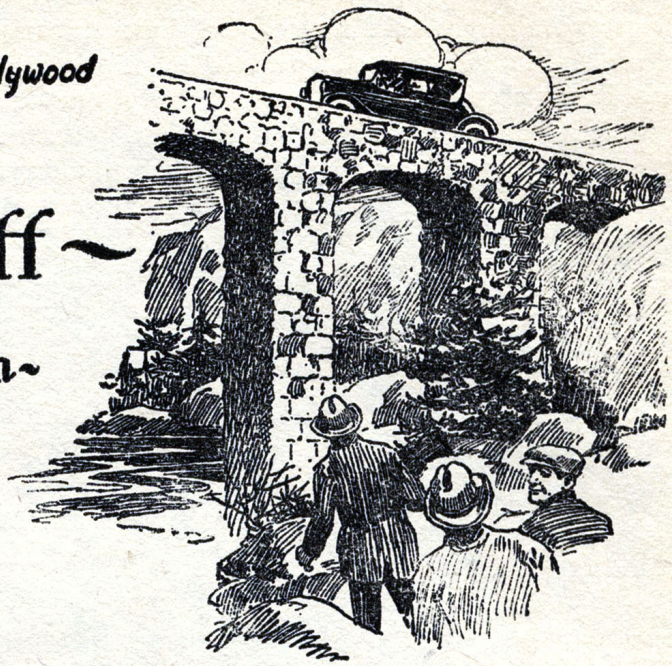
I do like my girl,
She's a jewel, a pearl,
And her eyes are as soft as can be;
And she's tiny and neat
From her head to her feet—
Much too good for a duffer like me.
But some day I'm going to ask her again,
And boy, if she'll just be my bride,
I'll *be* sitting up on the top of the world,
With my feet hanging over the side.

Tale of Picture Making in Hollywood

Stunt Stuff

By Frank X. Finnegan

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)



CHAPTER I.

MAKING THE ROUNDS.

"THERE'S nothing doing to-day, Slater. Look in again in a week or so." Through the shiny brass grille of his little window, the casting director of Peerless Pictures smiled cheerily out upon Sam Slater—a smile that the director bestowed freely to soften the refusals he was obliged to shower upon the eager seekers for work who besieged him.

Slater turned wearily away, as he had so often done before, with just the faintest reflection of the casting director's smile on his features. It is much easier to smile when one is on a pay roll, and this was a distinction Sam Slater had not achieved since his arrival in Hollywood.

A leader in college athletics, who had helped his varsity team to reach many a proud position in football and track, Slater had gone to Hollywood, Mecca of hope and ambition, with only a vague idea as to how he was to bring his gifts and his prowess to bear upon the "movies." In one way or another, as an actor or as an athlete, he was certain it could be done; but he had been unable to impress any one else with that belief, and his hopeful smile had become daily fainter and more wan as he turned away from the wickets of the casting directors.

After the director's words, Slater moved slowly toward the open door of the casting office and stood for a moment trying to determine what studio he would visit next, for it is only by constantly making the rounds that an "extra" can hope to break in.

"Oh, Slater! Just a minute," the casting director called.

Slater turned to see the all-powerful hand beckoning to him through the wicket that had so long proved a barrier he was unable to storm, and hastened back to the window.

"Yes, Mr. Hawes?" he said hopefully.

"I just remembered—there may be something here for you," Hawes returned. "Come in a minute." He pressed the button that released the latch of his office door.

As Slater stepped inside he realized that the casting director was regarding

him appraisingly—six feet of well-knit bone and muscle, topped by a handsome head with abundant wavy hair and finely molded features. Slater hoped that, given the opportunity, he might become an actor—perhaps a leading man, a star—as he knew so many even less favored had done.

"Get out Mr. Slater's card," Hawes directed his secretary, and while the girl busied herself at the filing cabinet, he turned again to Slater, whose pulses had begun to beat high with expectancy. "You're a college man, aren't you?"

Slater nodded smilingly. "I took a small flock of letters at Ann Arbor," he said; "but somehow the world hasn't grown much excited over it as yet."

"Went in for athletics, I suppose?"

"Yes; I played on the football team and did something in hammer throwing and broad jumping." Slater wondered what these long-forgotten feats had to do with his appearance before the camera as a movie hero.

Hawes had seated himself at his desk, waving Slater to a chair beside it as the secretary laid before him the registration card that the college man had filed weeks before with his photograph.

The casting director glanced at the card. "This looks pretty good," he said. "I see you ride, swim, box, fence, and drive an auto.

Slater nodded.

"Ever do any stunts?" Hawes asked.

Slater's high hopes fell with a mental thud. Stunts! He had been picturing himself in a drawing-room scene with a beautiful heroine—both she and he in evening dress—leaning over her as she sat demurely upon a divan and whispering ready-made words of movie-land love into her ears, while the lights bathed them in a flood of radiance and the camera caught and prisoned the girl's growing responsiveness to his pleadings.

And now he was asked about—"stunts!" Swinging at a rope's end across a dangerous chasm; leaping lightly from an airplane wing to a flying auto; swimming rapids from an overturned canoe—these were things he had always thought any one with sufficient nerve and muscles could accomplish.

He knew, however, that casting directors are not given to asking aspirants for the movies to pick their places in the celluloid hall of fame, and he realized that this was the chance he had been waiting for.

"Well, to be quite frank, I have no record as a stunt man," he said; "but I'm willing to try anything once."

"That's the talk!" Hawes returned. "Come in here—I want to have a chat with you." The director led the way to an inner office, where they were shut away even from the ears of the stenographer.

When they were seated at either side of a desk, the casting director plunged at once into the proposition he had in mind. "In Cyril Rand's picture that's now in work," he said, "there is a sequence in which he drives an auto across a bridge that is being destroyed by striking miners. For the purposes of the story it is absolutely necessary that he cross that bridge at that time. We see the strikers plant the powder and prepare to fire it. Rand discovers the danger at the last moment, but he won't turn back. He drives across the bridge, and it is blown up while the car is rolling off the far end of it. Will you double for Rand in that scene and take a chance on being touched off into the sky?"

Slater did not answer immediately. While the director talked, the younger man had conjured up a vision of Cyril Rand, the star, world famed as the hero of scores of such thrill-producing stunts, handsome, dashing, and a king among the ladies—on the screen. Was it possible that he was a coward at heart? Were men like Slater himself expected to have more nerve than the

much-vaunted and high-salaried star? He wondered.

"Why doesn't Rand do it? Is he afraid?" he asked bluntly.

The casting director laughed. "Well, I don't know anything about that," he said; "but the company wouldn't let him do it if he wanted to. We couldn't take a chance on his high-priced back and legs and neck—to say nothing of his handsome face. You can see how that is, Slater. If Rand was killed, for instance, Peerless Pictures would be out a good many hundreds of thousands of dollars they figure to make on his pictures while his popularity lasts—three or four years more, probably.

"If he was hurt and laid up in a hospital for a few weeks," the director continued, "even with a sprained back or twisted ankle, it would cost thousands to hold up production on the picture, lay off people drawing salary under contracts, and all that. So you see why we must put it up to somebody else to fool with the dynamite." Hawes laughed.

"Yes; I see," Slater returned. "Engaging a double for the dangerous stunts is like taking out an accident-insurance policy on your star. And just how does the company figure the premium it is willing to pay for this protection?"

"Your end of it? A hundred and fifty," Hawes replied promptly; "and don't you ever think there aren't a few hundred birds here in Hollywood who would jump at the chance of grabbing it. I thought of giving you a chance because you're about the same build as Rand and you look enough like him to double for him nicely."

"Is that all I would do in the picture?" Slater asked.

"There's a chance for some more work—stunt stuff," the casting director said. "However, Jackson is going to shoot this bridge scene right away, he tells me. They start for location tomorrow morning, and anything else you would get would depend on how you came out on the explosion scene."

"Or whether I came out at all." Slater grinned. "All right, I'm on. And I won't ask the company to send any flowers if I come down with the pieces of the bridge."

"You don't need to ask—the workmen's compensation law compels 'em to bury you and fix up the widow and the orphans, if any," Hawes said. "Report to Billy Reed, assistant director of Jackson's company, to-morrow morning."

Slater left the studio with the first feeling of elation he had experienced since coming to Hollywood. At last he had a job. He had broken through the barriers that had so long proved impregnable. That what had been offered was far removed from his dreams of glory on the screen, that it was a hazardous stunt occupying but a few minutes in the making, which would dwindle to a mere "flash" when the picture was shown—these considerations did not at all tinge his gratification.

He felt that at last he was "in," and what the future held depended upon himself, and he was as determined to make good with Jackson, the irascible and temperamental director, as though he had been given a contract for a rôle in support of Cyril Rand.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHINING STAR.

WHEN Slater reached the studio next morning, Director Jackson's company, with more than a hundred "extras" in flannel shirts and scarred boots who were to enliven the mine-strike scenes, were being piled into autos and huge sight-seeing busses at the main entrance.

Trailers filled with box lunches, bottled milk, and other joys of the luncheon period were being checked over by "prop" boys under the guidance of Billy Reed, the assistant director, who seemed

to make a light task of being in seven places at once, with ten or twelve different lists and schedules in his hands requiring immediate attention.

The big, gleaming car of Cyril Rand, with the star lolling upon the cushions and basking in the admiring gaze of the inevitable group of tourists, stood apart, awaiting what members of the cast Rand should deign to invite for the trip. Just behind it was Director Jackson's car, the rear seat occupied by Margaret Phillips, the leading woman, and two other actresses bedizened in the war paint of the movies. The director chased madly to and from the general offices on a dozen last-minute quests.

It was all familiar enough to Sam Slater, for he had witnessed scores of such starts to "location" in the back country, and he seized the first opportunity to catch Billy Reed on the wing and report for duty.

The assistant director thumbed over a list of names until he found Slater's and then gave him an appraising glance.

"Oh, you're the stunt man."

"That's what they tell me." The other smiled, suppressing a little wince at his new title.

"Just climb into that bus," Reed ordered, indicating one of the big cars that already held fifty or more extras, "and hunt me up when we get out there."

Slater nodded acquiescence and walked to the bus, where he surveyed the not too prepossessing assemblage of "strikers" with whom his lot was cast; but he was in for it now. He was an extra, like the rest of them, when he had fondly hoped to be an actor, and, with a shrug of the shoulders that seemed to shake off his distaste for his surroundings, he climbed aboard. A minute later Director Jackson's car pulled out, heading the caravan, the big bus swung into line behind half a dozen autos, and Slater felt with a little thrill that at last he was launched on his movie career.

It was a drive of more than an hour to the narrow cañon in the mountains which had been selected by Jackson as the location for the thrilling scene in which the hero made his dash for life across the threatened bridge, and on the way Slater chatted as amiably with his seat companions as though "extra work" had been his vocation for years. He made no revelations as to the part he was scheduled to play in "Other Men's Wives," though he realized that his well-groomed appearance, without costume or make-up, must have aroused much curiosity on that score.

When he climbed down from the bus, into a bedlam of chatter, laughter, cries of greeting among the players, and the shouted orders of a dozen subbosses on Director Jackson's big crew, Slater found his attention centered upon the bridge which had been built over a roaring cañon stream for the explosion in which he was to enact the most thrilling rôle of the picture.

He walked to the abutment to inspect the structure more closely. It was sturdily built of timbers and planks masked in a shell of field stones that gave it an appearance of solidity; but these, Slater noted, were not set in mortar and would fall into heaps of ruin under the shock of the blast.

Along the underside of the bridge a set of wires led from the tangled underbrush to the center of the arch, and there Slater saw something that made his eyes widen a trifle—a long box into which the wires passed and through the open end of which he could see two kegs of giant powder awaiting the spark that would send the bridge skyward.

For the first time the actual danger of the stunt for which he had enlisted dawned upon him as Slater saw the businesslike wires leading from a concealed battery to the explosive, and he no longer wondered why Cyril Rand was not keen for driving the auto across

the bridge in a mad dash to beat that deadly spark.

An error of an instant in firing the blast—a miscalculation in the transmission of signals—and it would be all over with the driver of that car.

However, there was not a thought of flunking in Slater's mind as he turned away with a little grin and went in quest of Billy Reed. Slater had signed up with fate, and he was determined to see the stunt through.

He found the assistant director busier than any four other men on the location, as usual, but with a welcoming smile for him.

"Oh, here you are," Reed said. "Thought you might have taken it on the run back to town when you saw the fireworks. Come over and meet Jackson—he wants to talk to you."

"Not a chance of my going back ahead of the outfit unless they take me back in an ambulance," Slater returned. "How soon do we shoot the big shot?"

"Jackson wants to get at it right away because we'll have to build another bridge and retake the whole business if it doesn't look good," Reed said. "There's always a chance for something to go wrong in this kind of a shot."

"That's it—cheer me up!" Slater rejoined. "If anything goes wrong, I'll probably go with it."

They had been walking toward a group in which Director Jackson was the dominant figure, although Cyril Rand, the star, was a member of it. Slater saw that the director was talking with tongue, head, and hands while the others listened. He stopped and turned inquiringly as Billy Reed and the good-looking stranger joined them.

"Here's your stunt man," the assistant director said, "moving under his own power and all rarin' to go."

Slater was immediately conscious of sharp glances not only from Jackson but from Cyril Rand and a charming young woman who stood beside the star, and whom Slater recognized as Margaret Phillips, leading woman of the company.

"Oh, yes—Hawes spoke to me about you," the director said to Slater as he took in the big fellow's dimensions. "You're new to this work, Hawes tells me."

"Absolutely," Slater returned; "but I'm here to do what I'm told as long as I hold together."

"There's nothing to this explosion scene," Jackson said. "I'll have things timed so it will be absolutely safe, but it ought to produce a great effect. I want you to meet Cyril Rand," he went on, turning toward the star in a manner of introduction. "Since you're to double for him, you ought to see how much you look like him. And Miss Phillips—whom you are supposed to drive over the bridge," he added. "This is Sam Slater."

Slater acknowledged the introductions with a bow toward the actor and actress. Miss Phillips awarded him a friendly smile; but Rand's only recognition of his presence was a supercilious nod and a slow stare that took him in from head to foot.

To Rand, it was apparent from his manner, Slater was just an extra whom the celebrity was not disposed to accept upon terms of social or professional equality.

"There's just one thing you'll have to keep in mind, Slater, while you're doubling for me," the star said, "and that is don't look at the camera."

Slater flushed, and a very suitable retort rose to his lips, but before he could voice it, Director Jackson intervened.

"That'll be all right, Cyril," the director said sharply. "I'll take care of where Slater looks and where he doesn't look. I'm going to direct the scene, you know."

The import of the incident was not lost upon three other members of the

company who had stood by looking on and listening, nor was it lost upon Billy Reed. The disposition of their star to adopt a "high-hat" attitude toward every one in his support was no secret among the members of Jackson's unit, and naturally it did not tend to endear him to them.

"You're going to take this bridge stuff first?" Reed asked of his chief when Cyril Rand had turned and strolled away, with a little sneering smile that was meant to hide the rebuke in Jackson's retort.

"Yes. Order those fellows down there below the bridge right away, and we'll get busy," Jackson said. "I'm going to work two cameras on this scene, you know, and it takes Doolittle half an hour to set up, usually."

The assistant director nodded briskly and turned to Slater, who had been curiously watching Rand's departure and wondering how he had incurred his displeasure. "Come on, Slater," Reed said. "Stick around with me, and see how we do it."

They walked on half a dozen paces before Reed spoke again. He knew the other man was thinking of Cyril Rand's behavior, and he sought to mollify him.

"Don't pay any attention to what Handsome Hector says," the assistant director began. "It takes him four hours a day to make up, because he can't tear himself from the mirror. We have to use a double for him every time he rides a horse or jumps into a river or drives a car, and he has an ingrowing fear that his dear public will find out about it because all the other men in the world are such ugly brutes, you know."

"I'm not worrying about him." Slater laughed. "If I ever get to be a star I'll probably be a little bit Ritzy myself when an extra dares to look up at me. I can keep out of Rand's orbit, all right, and let him shine without wasting any of his light on me."

CHAPTER III.

SEEKING ADVENTURE.

IT was nearly two hours later before Jackson was ready to shoot the big bridge scene—two hours crowded with work for the director, Billy Reed, and the camera men, and during all of it Slater kept as close as he could to the busy assistant director.

In that time a hundred extras had been herded before the cameras under and around the bridge while the preliminary scenes were taken in which they were supposed to be "planting" the explosives under the structure. Wading into the water and climbing on heavy boulders in the stream, they carried out empty powder cans which had all the terrifying appearance of reality and tucked them into place, while the cameras ground merrily and the scores of bewhiskered "strikers" not actually engaged in the "dirty work" madly cheered on their confederates.

"Of course, those powder cans are empty and we will have a big fuse lighted to burn up to them for the spectacular effect," Reed explained to Slater, "while the real charge planted in that big box will be fired at the proper moment by electricity. When she lets go, the auto will have to be just at the far end of the bridge because things are going to fly high just as soon as that box of giant stuff goes off."

"Didn't I hear Jackson say Miss Phillips was supposed to be in the car with me?" Slater asked anxiously.

"Yes; she's supposed to be," Reed replied with a grin, "and we'll show her in the car with Rand just before the dash for life, of course; but when you take the car over, you'll have a handsome dummy seated beside you, made up to double for our leading woman so far as clothes go. We can't take chances with Miss Phillips any more than we can with Rand."

"Oh, of course," Slater said. "That's a big relief. I was worrying about that feature of my pleasant little job."

"Jackson's ready for the scene now," Reed told him. "Let's get up there at the end of the bridge where the auto is before he has a fit. This is one scene that can't be retaken half a dozen times."

When they reached the spot where the director stood with Rand, Margaret Phillips, and half a dozen technical assistants beside the touring car, they found Jackson in the midst of an argument with the star, as usual.

"But it's so unnecessary!" Cyril Rand was protesting.

"That's for me to decide," the director returned. "You're not afraid the bridge won't hold up under the car, are you? It's been tested a dozen times!"

"I'm keen for it, Cyril," Margaret Phillips interposed. "I rather like the thrill of it. I'm not afraid!"

Billy Reed looked from Cyril Rand to his chief questioningly while Slater stood back, watching and listening.

"I've decided to send Rand over the bridge with Miss Phillips in the car before we make the explosion stuff—just for a safety shot," Jackson explained to his assistant. "We don't know how the explosion is going to look, and I'm not anxious to build that bridge again for retakes; so I'm going to make this straight scene of Rand on the bridge, to cut in if I should need it."

"Good idea," Reed assented. "What's the objection?" And he flashed an inquiring look at Rand.

"Oh, it's such tommyrot!" the star protested. "We can't use a scene of my crossing the bridge in safety when the script requires it to be blown up behind me. And I don't see any common sense in driving a car over half a ton of dynamite to make a scene that can't be used! That's rational, isn't it?"

"Not only rational but ridiculous!" Jackson snapped. "We'll take it right away, Billy. Get Doolittle to set up back there where he can get the whole bridge and both banks."

As Reed hurried away to instruct the camera men on the new order, a property boy touched Slater's elbow.

"Here's your make-up," the boy said, extending an overcoat and a cap. "Mr. Reed said all you'd need was a duplicate of Mr. Rand's cap and coat."

"Thank you—these will be fine," Slater said, taking the garments that were to make of him an imitation of the star, and he grinned a bit at the thought. Tossing aside his own hat, he slipped on the overcoat and donned the cap. Even without a mirror he could recognize what a faithful replica of Cyril Rand the clothes made him, for the two men were doubles in build and strikingly alike in features.

By the time he turned again to the group near him, Jackson had evidently prevailed upon Rand to forego his objections to making the bridge scene, for the star was seated in the touring car, with Miss Phillips beside him. Jackson, through his megaphone, was shouting orders to the two camera men as Rand slowly moved the car toward the entrance to the bridge. Slater walked up close, hidden from the cameras by the automobile, to watch and listen.

"Ready?" the director shouted toward the group of assistants behind the cameras. "Now just one thing more! Light that fuse!"

"Oh, my Lord!" Rand gasped. "What for? What's the idea of the fuse? Isn't it—isn't it dangerous now?"

"Don't be a dumb-bell!" Jackson yelled at him. "The fuse isn't connected! It will burn out at the bridge; but we've got to show it burning to get any kick into the scene, don't we? Now you get ready to drive when I give the word—and don't forget to step on it! You're rescuing this girl from the heavy and his gang. You're supposed to be risking your life and hers for a getaway! Make it snappy!"

"Yes and I've got one of the confounded old company cars that I'm not used to," Rand complained, as he fumbled with the gear shift and tested the gas. "I've got a swell chance to show speed with this old boat!"

"We'll use your new roadster—if you want to take a chance on having it blown into the creek," the director countered. "But don't forget for an instant this incident is the punch of the picture—and we may have to use this shot. Get ready, now." He turned to hurry down behind the cameras.

Meanwhile one of the extras had waded into the stream and stood ready to light the long fuse under the bridge when Jackson should give the word to the camera men; this was a scene preliminary to the entrance of Rand upon the bridge in the auto. The director shouted to Doolittle, and the cameras began grinding as the man applied a match to the fuse and started on a quick climb back to the bank.

When the fuse was sputtering and flashing, Director Jackson, who had reached his post behind the cameras, waved and shouted his signal to Rand. "All right, Cyril! Come ahead—lively!"

All this time Slater had been standing well back of the auto, close to a wall of dirt through which a cut had been made for the temporary road by the studio workmen. Neither Rand nor Margaret Phillips, intent upon the active group of workers away off on the bank of the stream, was aware of his presence.

As Rand stepped on the starter and prepared to make the drive, Slater was seized with an inspiration for a mad prank, the idea behind which he was never able to determine. Stepping forward quickly before the car began to move, he stepped on the running board at the rear door and crouched there out of sight, clinging to the door handle and resting against the curve of the broad fender.

For good or for evil he was in on Cyril Rand's dash across the bridge, and Slater smiled as he contemplated the surprised and indignant face that self-sufficient star would have shown had he known that his double was clinging to the outside of the car, seeking adventure.

Rand started the car, and as it rolled out on the bridge and began to pick up speed, Slater could hear the director, from far off on the left bank, shouting orders and impatient admonitions to the actor, who had never shone as a driver; and he lost none of what Rand confided to Margaret Phillips was his private and personal opinion of the director, the automobile, and the stunt upon which they were engaged.

Then Slater felt the speed of the car slacken instead of picking up as they got well into the camera angle.

"I told Jackson this bum old boat would fall down on him," Rand said to the leading woman, and Slater chuckled silently over the star's discomfiture.

"What's the matter with you?" the director's strident voice came to them through his megaphone. "Step on it! Wake up, Rand! You're wasting film on this funeral procession!"

Rand snorted his disgust as he pressed the accelerator without result beyond a spasmodic jump or two of the car; but he did not try to reply. Jackson was too far away.

"Wish that chump was driving this thing!" he growled to Miss Phillips. "Probably some of his hired hands forgot to put gas into the tank."

"That can't be it," the leading woman said. "We wouldn't move at all without gas."

"Well, there's something wrong!" he grumbled as they approached the center of the bridge. "I don't pretend to be a chauffeur, so I don't know what it is. I have my man look after those things, and——"

"What's all that smoke?" Miss Phil-

lips interrupted him with a quick little cry of alarm.

"It's that confounded fuse Jackson had 'em set off," Rand replied.

"No fuse could make that much smoke!" she protested. "The bridge is on fire!"

Slater leaned out quickly and looked ahead. Clouds of smoke were curling from beneath the arch of the bridge, and there came to him the unmistakable odor of burning pine.

Shouts of alarm, orders, directions—a medley of excited calls—came from Jackson, Billy Reed, the property men, and actors on the bank of the stream as Rand wakened to the fact that Miss Phillips was right. The fuse had fired the flimsy false work of the bridge, and a brisk mountain breeze was fanning the blaze into a formidable danger.

CHAPTER IV.

WITH A SHARP ORDER.

"DRIVE! Drive faster!" the director shouted. "We're grinding on you, Cyril! Step on it, and you're all right!"

However, shouts and orders and Rand's frantic desire to get across the blazing bridge did not inspire the laboring old auto to swifter motion. It moved uncertainly forward under Rand's desperate jabs at the accelerator and raking of gas and spark levers on the quadrant.

The car reached the center of the bridge, wreathed in billows of smoke and with flames crackling briskly beneath it. And there, in a climax of contrariness, it stalled.

As it ceased to move, and Rand's plunges at the starter brought no answering whir, a sudden recollection brought a shriek of terror from Margaret Phillips.

"The powder!" she screamed. "We'll be killed!"

And she collapsed in a faint against Rand's shuddering shoulder.

The babel of shouted advice and directions from the excited group on the bank swelled to a confusing roar as the actor fumbled helplessly with the car and half rose as though to jump out and run for safety.

Less than a minute had elapsed from the time the car stalled until Slater opened the rear door beside which he had been crouching and climbed into the machine, keeping his head and shoulders below the line of vision of the watchers on the shore. Raising the seat cushion, he felt among the scattered tools until he found the crank and dragged it forth.

Then he revealed his presence to Cyril Rand with a sharp order. "Climb over the back of that seat and get in here!" Slater told him.

The startled actor turned as though he had been jabbed with a knife and stared uncomprehendingly at Slater. The face of the star was blanched with terror. Startling events had succeeded one another so rapidly that he was in a mental daze.

"Quick! Climb over!" Slater shouted.

At last the command stirred Rand to action. Pushing the inert form of Margaret Phillips to the outer edge of the seat, he waveringly clambered over into the rear compartment.

"Now get down here on the floor—and stay there! Don't show your head!" Slater ordered. "They're shooting this scene, and I don't want to spoil it!"

Rand slumped to the floor. Slater stood up, stepped over the quaking star, and climbed down from the car, crank in hand, on the side nearest the cameras. He stopped long enough at the front seat to release the clutch and assure himself that the ignition was on, then, hurrying to the front, he cranked the old engine desperately.

Three times—four times—he tugged and heaved in vain; but at the next effort the motor turned over, and with a

roar of protest the sulky old mechanism went back to work.

Leaving the crank dangling in its place, Slater jumped into the driver's seat and with careful and steady hands started the car on its way. He speeded it up through the smoke and fire and guided it across the shaky bridge.

And as the rear wheels took the solid ground beyond the structure he heard a mighty blast behind him; the bridge shot skyward in blazing fragments and the imposing-looking stonework rattled and splashed into the stream.

CHAPTER V.

"A HUMDINGER OF A SHOT."

THERE was a rush of actors and extras, technical men, and the rest of the crew, the oncomers headed by Director Jackson, to greet Slater as he stopped the car and turned quickly to raise Margaret Phillips and carry her from the auto.

His back was toward the oncoming crowd, but Slater heard their cheers and shouts of commendation before they were near him.

"Good boy!" "Great stuff, Cyril!"

"Fine work, Rand," the director exclaimed as he ran to the auto. "We never quit cranking, and that ought to make a humdinger of a shot! Couldn't have planned it that way, old man and——" Jackson stopped short as Slater turned to face him, holding Miss Phillips in his arms.

"Give me a hand with Miss Phillips, please," Slater said. "She'll be all right in a few minutes, I guess."

"Slater!" Jackson shouted while Billy Reed and the rest of them piled around the car in dumb amazement.

Cyril Rand's head and shoulders slowly appeared above the rear door of the automobile, his face still white and drawn. "We'll have to call it off for to-day, Jackson," he said. "I'm not feeling quite fit."

Instant revelation of what had occurred came to those in the forefront of the crowd, and, as two of the men took Margaret Phillips from Slater's arms, Jackson smiled grimly.

"All right, Cyril," the director said, "you can knock off for the day. I guess we can make out for a few scenes with Slater—if he's careful not to look at the camera. He's just given us, after taking your place when you were too scared to act, the best shot we've had since Noah was a baby."

The Right Idea

REGINALD was dining out, and under the watchful eyes of his father and mother he was behaving really well.

"Will you have a little of this rice pudding, Reggie?" asked the hostess.

"No, thank you," replied Reggie.

Mother nearly gasped. Never before had her little darling refused pudding.

"Oh, come, dear!" the hostess said. "Do have a little."

"No, thank you," said Reggie.

"Then what will you have?" asked the hostess.

"A lot, please!" replied Reggie firmly.

Eye for Business

SOMEHOW young Rushabout had prevailed upon his rich grandfather to buy him a big, flashy automobile.

The agreement was that Rushabout should pay the money back in installments, and that the machine was to remain the grandfather's property until the last payment was made.

Long before this was made, Rushabout met his grandfather on the road.

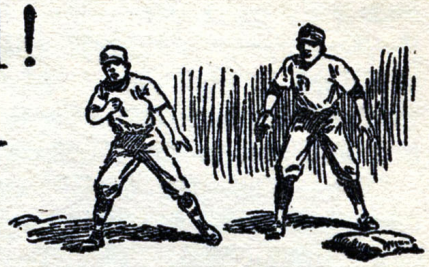
"Who does this machine belong to?" the younger man asked politely.

"It's mine until the last installment is paid. But why do you ask?"

"Well, I just wanted to make sure. Er—your car needs four new tires."

Bases Full!

By George F. Peabody



(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

SUDDEN CHANGE.

OUTSIDE of the manager's door Jack Allen hesitated. His hand, reaching for the knob, trembled slightly and he drew it back, evidently trying to master the sudden weakness that surged through him. His shoulders drooped perceptibly, and the shadow of despair darkened his gray eyes, for Jack Allen knew that he had lost the game that afternoon—knew, in fact, that he had never looked worse. Young Thomas, just up from the sticks, had finished the contest brilliantly, and in view of that, and the other fact that the Gulls' roster was overcrowded, Allen could place but one construction on the manager's summons—the blue ticket.

The next instant, however, he shook off the depression. "It had to come some time; might as well be now," he said and with a shrug of his shoulders swung open the door of the hotel room.

"Hello, Jack!" the manager greeted him from behind a desk.

"Hello, Jess," returned Allen easily. It would never do for an old star, though traveling the down grade, to show emotion before a man who never was in the big leagues.

"Sit down, Jack; I want to talk to you a bit."

"Thanks." The big pitcher pulled a chair close to the desk.

The manager, Jess Whitford, wrote rapidly for a minute or two and then pushed paper and pen away as he looked up quizzically. "You did a rotten job of pitching out there to-day, old man," he began.

"I know it," Allen said.

"Too bad," commented the manager. "I'd like to give you a chance to redeem yourself, Jack, but I can't do it. Sorry, but I've got to let you go!"

Allen looked up stony eyed. His tongue darted out to moisten dry lips, but his protest was mild. "You'd ought to have known that game was coming, Jess," he said slowly. "You've worked me to death saving games and a man forty years old isn't what he was at twenty. I've done my best for you, and I think I've done pretty well. I'm not through quite yet. But I know how it is. Youth must be served, and a young man coming is worth more to you than an old one going. It's all right, Jess. Of course, I'm a free agent."

There might have been bitterness in Jack Allen's heart, but little of it got into his voice. He was accepting the

inevitable. His gaze wandered to the window and then came back with a jerk when the great booming laugh of the manager's burst out.

"Free agent nothing!" roared Jess Whitford in high glee. "Man, listen! You're going back to the big time! I've just sold you to the Panthers!"

"Wh—what—the devil!" stammered Allen, half rising as a lightninglike thrill shot through him. Then the strength left his legs, and he sat down heavily.

"Fact," announced Whitford. "You go East to-night to join the Panthers, who are about to start on their Western swing. They're within one game of the lead and going great guns. Old Gil Black figures your experience and cunning will save just enough games to put them over." He rose and came around the desk. "Mighty few have done what you are going to do, old boy. My congratulations and best wishes." Whitford held out his hand.

Dazed, Allen rose, too. "Good Lord, Jess! I—I can't realize this!" he exclaimed as he grasped the manager's hand. "It's eight years since I left the big leagues! Forty years old and—and going back to the big time!"

"To make good again, too," supplemented Whitford. "You've cut out the old ways, lived carefully out here on the coast, worked easy, and the climate has done something to that old whip. Jack, old man, if you work cautiously, pitch with your head more than with your arm, you'd ought to stick it out up there for a couple of years yet—and that would help, wouldn't it? I got another two thousand stuck onto your salary." The manager coughed and looked away. Tears in a man's eyes are disconcerting.

"Jess, you—you're the goods!" Jack said thickly. "This will put me on my feet. I'll save every possible nickel of my salary, and if I can last two years there'll be enough to come back with and start some kind of a business. Jess," he added, "I know just about how that bird in the old story, 'Pilgrim's Progress,' felt when that load fell off his back. I—I feel great!"

"Good!" Whitford laughed. "The boys are giving a little party for you in the dining room, and after that we'll see you off on the one twenty train. And know this, old boy, we'll all be watching the tickers and we'll all be pulling for you. Listen—what's that?" He cocked up an ear as a shrill cry came floating up through the window.

"Extra; extra! Jack Allen, Gulls' star, sold to the Panthers! Extra! Extra!"

The manager turned with a grin to the big pitcher who stood transfixed like one caught in the magic spell of exquisite music. "How's that for speed?" Whitford asked, chuckling. "I gave it out not a half hour ago!"

"It's great!" Allen exclaimed. "Let's go down and see the boys!"

Waiting for the elevator, Allen was silent. The thing that had happened to him was too big, too marvelous, too wonderful. A thing that had not happened half a dozen times in the game's history. A quirk of fear that it was a joke, a cruel dream, kept recurring. Still, he knew he wasn't asleep and he knew that Jess Whitford wouldn't lie. It must be so.

"You won't be lonesome up there, Jack," Whitford was saying. "You know Bob Berry, don't you? The kid that's burning up the big stuff this year? He's from here you know. I know it to my sorrow. Had a chance to get him, but couldn't see it because he is one of these slow-ball pitchers—no fast one at all—and I never had much faith in 'em. So Tom Nolan got him and cleaned up a nice pile when the kid went to the Panthers." Whitford made a wry face at the recollection.

"Tom got seventy-five thousand for him, didn't he?" Allen grinned as he rubbed it in.

"Yes, dang it; he did! I get a headache every time I think of that youngster begging me to give him a chance and me turning him down. Funny thing happened just after he was sold. Benny Cartwright ever tell you of it?"

"No. Cartwright and I don't talk. Too much patter in his old sport sheet about me being through, and such rot."

"Huh, guess he'll have to haul in his horns now," Whitford said; "but that hasn't anything to do with this story about Berry. Only a kid you know, but somewhere he'd met Cass Yorke's daughter Flora. Old Cass is worth about a million, and though he wasn't much of anybody twenty years ago he high hats the whole town now. Made his money in coal and lumber."

"Yes; I know all about Cass Yorke," Allen cut in, his voice vibrating with deadly hatred.

Whitford looked up in surprise, his gaze taking in the pitcher's flushed face and narrowed eyelids. "Eh?" the manager said. "What can——"

"Plenty; but never mind—go on." Allen's tone refused to soften.

Mystified, the manager continued: "Well, young Berry fell head over heels in love with Flora—she's a beauty, all right—but when the old man heard of it he kicked the lad out bodily and forbade Flora going out to the games when Bob's team played here. Then last fall Nolan sold the kid to the Panthers for that long price, and the newspapers touting him from coast to coast naturally swelled the youngster's sense of his own importance a bit.

"The upshot of it was," Whitford continued, "he bearded old Cass in his den and demanded the right to see Flora, swearing if the permission wasn't forthcoming he'd do it without permission. It seems the girl had been doing some talking, too, and they had old Cass in a corner. But he's a slippery customer, and it at last ended in a deal. Bob, of course, thinks he's the best pitcher in the world, and Yorke got him on that by letting on he feared the boy was but a flash in the pan. The deal is the boy must win twenty-five games for the Panthers this year. If he fails he fades out of the picture. Of course, old Cass feels safe in that, or did, before the kid stepped out and piled up ten victories to three defeats.

"However"—the manager laughed as the elevator stopped at their floor—"I've an idea he feels safe, anyway, since he packed the girl off to Europe with an aunt to look after her. Even if Bob wins, he'll have a fine time getting to the girl."

"That's like Cass Yorke," commented Allen bitterly as they shot downward; "he couldn't play square nohow."

CHAPTER II.

UNDER AN IRON HEEL.

ENTERING the dining room, Allen and the manager were immediately pounced upon by a score of excited ball players. Congratulations and good wishes came out in a perfect babble. Old Jack Allen was decidedly popular.

The dinner and fun was at its height when an interruption came.

"A lady to see you, sir. She says it's very important," a bell hop whispered in Allen's ear.

"What?" asked the ball player, surprised.

"A lady, sir, and she says——"

"Who in blazes is she? I——"

"She gave no name, sir. Just asked me to tell you and to say it is urgent. She is middle-aged, sir, and rich, I should say."

"All right; tell her I'll be out at once." As the boy vanished, Allen turned to his teammates. "Excuse me a minute, boys, and hold up that yarn till I get back. Somebody wants to see me."

In a quiet corner of the lobby Allen found her. She rose to meet him, and her face flushed slightly as she held out

a hand half timorously as though fearful he would refuse it. With one look recognition came to Allen, and his own face paled.

"You!" he exclaimed breathlessly. Then, coldly, as he dropped her hand, he asked: "Why am I so honored? According to the society pages, Mrs. Cass Yorke is not in the habit of calling on ball players!"

An expression of pain crossed the woman's face; her voice came low and troubled. "Please, Jack, don't! You are justified, I know. You hate us, of course, and with good cause; but, please, can't you believe I had nothing to do with it? I implored Cass not to do that awful thing, but he would not listen to me. Oh, he is a hard man, Jack! Perhaps I should not say this, but it is truth. He thinks only of himself and his horrible greed for money and power. Even his daughter, and I, his wife, are ground beneath the iron heel of his purpose.

"I've found little joy in this mad social whirl, and Flora hates it," the woman went on. "My old friends were dear to me, and I wanted to keep them, but could not. Jack, the flower of my life is gone. It is past. But my daughter is just coming into hers. And now he schemes out a future for her. Consult her? No! So I've come to you for help."

Allen looked at her in wonder. The bitterness in her voice was genuine enough. "But, Grace, how—I don't see——"

"Oh, yes; I think you can!" she broke in eagerly. "I read in to-night's papers that you are going East to the Panthers again. And, by the way, Jack, I thrilled at the magnificence of it—going back a hero again after eight years out of the big leagues—but the thing is, Jack, you are going where Bob Berry is. You know him, of course?"

"I know of him," he replied.

"Well, my daughter loves him, really and truly, and I know he loves her. But——"

"Yes; I know all about that, too. Cass won't have it," remarked Jack dryly.

"That's it; but not all of it," she told him. "Cass has his eye on some vast lumber interests over the border in Canada, and he's preparing to sacrifice Flora to get them. There's a flabby-jowled, watery-eyed Englishman, James Cuninghame, who owns the timber and, having seen Flora, wants her, too. She's in Europe now by her father's orders, in company with Cuninghame's sister. That's to get Flora away from Bob and give Cuninghame a chance to dazzle her. Now, when Bob went to the big——"

"Yes; I've heard about that—skip it," Allen cut in.

"Oh! You seem to know quite a bit about us," she commented. "Well, I want Bob to win that bargain. I—I've stood for a lot in the past twenty years, and I've got to the end of my rope. Cass thought he'd made a sure bet with that boy, but it begins to look as though the lad could win. If he does I'm going to see that he gets a square deal. If he doesn't win—well, my daughter isn't to be sold to Cuninghame, anyway!" she finished with a sudden flame in her eyes.

"Good! I'm sure for you there, Grace. But how can I help in this? I've often thought I'd never lift my finger to help a Yorke; but, well, I begin to see you weren't a party to that rotten deal of long ago."

"Thank you, Jack. You're right. That deal is a scar on my heart, and I hated, no one knows how much, to come to you with this, but I had to. I want you to take care of Bob for us—Flora and me. He's just a boy, Jack. A boy like you were twenty years ago. And a boy needs a square deal. My eyes dim now when I think of what a crooked deal did for you.

"Bob is a star, just as you were," she went on. "The papers praise him, the

great crowds idolize him, and always in the fringe of those around him lies temptation. And I know Cass Yorke is not above putting ruin in the lad's way if he thought it necessary. Oh, but he's ruthless, Jack! But the boy must win. You are older, now, and wise. You know the game and all that goes with it. Jack, will you look after Bob? Will you watch over him, take care of him, bring him back to us the victor? That's all I've come to ask, Jack." Her eyes were misty with pleading; her soft voice trembled with feeling.

A half smile flitted over Allen's face. Many a time he had pictured a situation similar to this and thought out the blistering things he would say; but now that the chance had come things seemed different somehow. The conditions did not seem to fit. Too much of life lay in the past, and here were young lives, young hearts, all tangled up. The smile faded away, and grim resolution entered the lines of his brown face.

"Yes, Grace; for you and your daughter and for young Bob Berry I'll do all I can. Anyhow, it's one way of getting even, if we can win out. But don't count too much on it—twenty-five games is a lot of 'em in the big time!"

"Thank you, Jack. It—it shames me, but it is wonderful to come back after so many years and find the old friends still true. I wish you much success in this late return to the big leagues. I'll watch the scores and rejoice when you win." Tears were rolling down her cheeks when she turned to leave, and it was a sober ball player that went back to the hilarity in the dining room.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD MASTER.

IN the "big time" the race was hot and growing hotter. From being considered scarcely a contender when the season opened the Panthers had snarled and scrapped and fought their way to second place and were now right on the heels of the Green Sox to whom everybody had conceded a second pennant. It was the first week in July, the season's halfway mark; the spring beauties had faded, the early bloomers had been killed off, and now the steady, straining grind began to show where the real strength of the league lay.

Sport writers all over the circuit freely predicted that the final struggle was cast for the Green Sox and the Panthers. The edge was given the Sox because they were an older team. The Panthers were a nervous, fighting bunch of youngsters with a world of punch, spirit, and raw ability; but they lacked the confidence and smoothness of the green-hosed machine. And knowing that, crafty old Gil Black had gone on a hunt for a balance wheel, a stabilizer; which accounted for the purchase of Jack Allen, who was a veteran when he left the league eight years before.

The Panthers were playing a series with the Green Sox. The fans were keen for this meeting between the two leaders and whooped it up in great style for their favorites when the Green Sox took the other team into camp easily in the first game. The stands were filled early for the second contest, and, half an hour before game time, when the pitchers came out to warm up, the throngs along the third-base line, and above and back of the visitors' bench, noted an unusual activity among the photographers. Young Bob Berry, the Panther ace, was one of the two warming up; but the camera men seemed interested in the other. At length an old-timer in a box just back of the Panther dugout recognized the stranger and let forth a roar. "It's old Jack Allen, back from the grave! Hi, there, Jack!"

Instantly the subtle drama of it caught the crowd. For nearly a dozen years the old master had been a favorite around the circuit, and now hundreds

more recognized the long, loose-jointed swing. A storm of handclapping arose, burst beyond that into a cheer, until the whole throng took it up and a tremendous ovation came rolling out of the stands. The old pitcher's heart warmed to the spectators. They had been good to him in the past, and he was still remembered. Ah, it was fine! He doffed his cap, and when the sunlight gleamed in his silvered hair the crowd cut loose again.

"Give us the old zip ball, Jack!" they pleaded. "Show these bushers what a fast ball really is, old boy!"

Over in the box with a flock of boys around him the old fan first to recognize the returned star beckoned. "I want to shake hands with you again, Allen," he said as Jack came up, "and I want these lads to shake hands with you. They're my grandsons, and I've often told 'em about you. Never expected to see you up here again. But say, old man, I'd just like to have these boys see that old smoke ball. I believe it's written in the records that you threw the fastest ball that ever hit the big league."

"Glad to meet the boys"—Allen smiled as he shook hands with the proud youngsters—"but I can't show them the old fast one. Don't dare. When a man's past forty, you know—— The doc tells me, and I know it's true, if I ever throw the smoke ball again I'm done. The old whip won't stand it. Nope. I'm a slow-ball artist now, boys."

"Too bad," the old man said with real disappointment; "but I tell you, boys," he continued as the pitcher went back, "he used to throw one you couldn't see!"

That afternoon Jack Allen went to the hill and with consummate skill slow balled the raging Green Sox to death, beating them four to two. And all through the game old Gil Black sat with his kid pitchers to point out the wizardry of the old master.

"Watch him, now," Black said. "He isn't going to pitch another full game. Can't stand it up here any more. He's here to finish games, save games, for us; but I wanted you to see, just once at least, the greatest pitcher of them all in action through nine innings."

Allen immediately became the team's hero. He owned a quiet, genial manner that charmed, and he had a way of giving advice without offense. After dinner a dozen of the boys wanted to take him to a theater; but the old star shook his head. "Nope," he said, laughing; "an old man has to have his rest, you know." Early he retired to his room.

Half an hour later Bob Berry knocked on the old pitcher's door.

"Come in," called Allen.

"Wh—what—in blazes!" stammered the youngster as he entered. "Say, old man, we've got a high-priced bird on this club who does nothing else but rub arms, legs, and backs. What're you doing it for?"

Stripped to his waist, old Jack Allen sat on the edge of his bed rubbing his right arm. He grinned broadly. "Nobody else knows as well as I do where the sore spots are, and nobody else has quite the patience I have for this job. You see, Bob, the old whip is all that's between me and the cold; so I'm taking care of it. If I can make it last two years more I'll be set. I've been foolish a long time, and now that the gods have given me another chance I'm going to use it right. Besides, I'd rather Black didn't know how that game to-day hurt me!"

There was quiet pathos in the forty-year-old player sitting there rubbing his arm; pathos in the admission he had nothing saved, and in the expressed hope to last two more years. Young Bob Berry, gloriously alive, with each one of his one hundred and eighty pounds vibrating strength, felt it. His heart went out to the old star.

"Here," Berry said almost gruffly, "let

me rub that old wing—you'll have the other one sore. I came in here to ask you something and while we talk I can rub." Acting instantly on the thought, the boy sat down on the bed and began a vigorous massage of the tired muscles. "I say"—he grinned at the astonished Allen—"how many times do you suppose this old whip has swung out there in the broiling sun?"

"Don't know"—Allen grinned back—"but a lot of 'em."

"I guess so," Berry agreed musingly. "Twenty years is a long time for a pitcher to last."

"Too long," Allen told him. "Save your money, Bob," he advised abruptly; "hang on to it like a pup to a bone, keep away from the bright lights, and in five or six years you'll be able to start in some business while still young. Don't, for Heaven's sake, do like I did. It's fine, of course, to come back now and hear the plaudits of the crowd; but it's terrible to *have* to come back!"

"I've thought of that," Berry said, "and that's something I wanted to talk with you about. You come from the same town I do. Do you know Cass Yorke?"

A black scowl settled over Allen's face. "Do I know him?" he growled. "I'll say I do. There's nobody that knows him any better. He's to blame for my being where I am to-day."

"Do you happen to know his daughter?" Berry asked tensely.

"No." A slow smile chased the scowl from the old pitcher's lined face. "Cass and I had quit speaking when she was born. But," he added, "I know her mother, and a fine woman she is. Also, I know all about your affair there, young man, and I'm here to help you all I can."

"Hooray!" shouted Berry. "I say, old top, this is ripping. Great! Say, man' I'm glad you're here. We're going to be great friends; I can see that right now. Whoop la! Now's the accepted time; let's begin laying plans."

"Nope," Allen said. "It's your turn on the hill to-morrow. The thing is, you've got to win twenty-five games, somehow or other, and it's some job for a kid up here—I know. I'll watch you work to-morrow; then if you like, we'll have a session after dinner, and I'll try to polish up your style a bit. You must be pretty good, but a youngster always has some weaknesses and up here they're pretty wise. Once or twice around and they'll get hep to you, then—look out! But I know a few tricks myself, so hold your nerve lad, and we'll win. It's time somebody took a trick from Cass Yorke."

Berry's fingers slid down the old star's arm to grasp his hand. "Say, you're a brick, old-timer, and I'm for you strong; but would it be impertinent to wonder what it is you've got against Cass Yorke? You seem to dislike him about as much as I do!"

"No; not impertinent," Allen replied soberly. "I've got plenty against him, and maybe I'll tell you—some day."

CHAPTER IV.

STAYING UNDER COVER.

THE next afternoon Bob Berry did his best; but in spite of that and his brilliant support the Green Sox beat him five to four. His rating then stood eleven victories and four defeats. Fourteen more games must somehow be won, and there remained but fourteen weeks to do it in.

Carefully that night he and Jack Allen figured it out. If nothing happened to Berry in the way of an injury, and if he didn't go stale, he could probably get into nineteen or twenty more games before the season closed. Not more than five or six of those could he lose and be triumphant over Cass Yorke. Looking at it that way, with the hardest part of the long grind ahead, the job took on colossal proportions.

"But you can do it, boy; you can do

it," the old hurler encouraged. "I did it three times up here. Of course it would be easier with a good fast ball to mix in; but since we haven't got it we'll get along without." And then he plunged into an analysis of the game, pointing out specially the faults Berry had shown and then telling him how to correct them.

Within two weeks the two pitchers became genuine pals. Old Gil Black was delighted beyond measure and readily consented to a change making them roommates.

Jack Allen found Berry an apt pupil. The young player was in deadly earnest and labored with might and main to master the fine points the old master daily drilled him on. Those two weeks, with the Panthers playing against weaker teams, yielded three more victories for the youngster. From coast to coast the papers proclaimed him the greatest pitching find in years.

Near the end of the third week, Berry came bouncing into the room one night in a state that approached ecstasy. He had won another game that day for one thing; but the real cause of the joy was a letter that he fluttered before the old hurler's eyes.

"Lookit!" gleefully cried the boy. "Another epistle from Europe, Jack, old-timer! It's a dandy, too. Listen, you old hard head, I'll read the last part of it to you."

"I'm listening, Allen told him, grinning.

"You'd better," warned Berry. "It says: 'I've good news, Bob. I've found an American club here that gets the baseball returns from the States every day by cable. All I have to do is ring them up and I know every day just how you're making out. You're doing fine, Bob, dear, and I'm sure you—we're going to win. My; won't father be hopping mad! But maybe he'll see the light and show us he's a good sport, after all. I'm so glad that old pitcher is with you. And glad, too, that he's the right sort. Listen to him, Bob, and try to do what he tells you. Please give him my best regards and my thanks for his aid.'

"I won't read you the rest—it wouldn't be good for calloused ears like yours!" said the lad as a faint flush tinged his cheeks a deeper color. "But isn't she a brick? Fancy, hunting up a club where she can get the daily returns!"

"She's in love," commented Allen dryly.

And so the days swung on. Summer faded into golden September. The Panthers and the Green Sox fought tooth and nail with never more than a game separating them. Skillfully old Gil Black worked his boys and in the ancient arm and cunning brain of Jack Allen found a heroic helper. Some half dozen games the old star saved by going in when the morale of the youngsters seemed cracking. He had a way of standing on the hill and looking around at them that almost by magic smoothed out their ragged nerves and held them up.

Bob Berry was setting a world's record for a young pitcher. With every game he appeared to gain confidence, and his nerve seemed made of iron. However, watching over him like a hawk old Jack Allen had seen signs and secretly began to worry. The strain was telling on the young pitcher. Daily his face grew leaner, a little line appeared between his eyes, and Allen knew he wasn't sleeping well.

Two weeks before the season closed the Panthers came home to finish on their own field. At that time Berry's record stood at twenty-three wins and five defeats. And Allen, going in frequently as relief pitcher, had piled up a rating of eight wins with but two reverses. Under the faithful ministrations of Bob Berry his arm was holding out well, and for the first time in

years Allen was really happy. Black was delighted and promised him an even better contract for the next season.

"I'm all set, Bob," the old star told the young one. "Two or three years up here and I'll have enough to start a business, sure. Believe me, I'm saving my dough now."

"Didn't you ever save any, Jack?"

"Yes," replied the old pitcher soberly; "the first two years I was up here—twenty years ago—I did. But something happened that—well, about ruined me."

"Can you tell me about it, old boy?" They were sitting on the edge of the bed, Berry having just finished rubbing the veteran pitcher's arm.

Allen laughed a little. "No," he said; "I guess I better not. It's all over now, and I'm coming out all right. A little late, but I'll get there."

The boy looked at him a bit wistfully as the older man pulled on a bath robe. but the tale was locked behind tightly shut lips.

"There is something, though, I want to tell you, boy," Allen declared suddenly as he came close and placed a hand on each of Berry's shoulders.

"All right, shoot; I'm listening."

"I will. And you'd *better* listen. We've got thirteen more games to play. You're due to work three, possibly four of 'em. You've got to win two of those three or four. Now, boy, keep your eye peeled. Cass Yorke hasn't struck a blow all summer; but don't for a minute think he doesn't know just how you stand. I don't know how he intends to do it, but he'll strike before you've rung up that last game.

"So look out," Allen went on. "Stick close to the hotel and near some of the boys. I don't think you drink, but don't take one now even if your favorite brother offers it to you—somebody might have put a pill into it. Don't meet anybody; don't see anybody. Just remember there's a little American lady across the briny deep all but holding her breath for a certain cablegram that you and I want to send." In his earnestness old Jack nearly talked himself breathless.

"Egad, Jack, I hadn't thought of that! But you're right. Thanks for taking care of me, old top. I'll stay under cover."

The next day, from over in the "bull pen," Jack Allen watched Berry work against the weak Lions. The youngster was very bad—ineffective and wild.

The old relief pitcher shook his head. "Cracking," Allen said to himself, "and going stale at the same time. And next week the Green Sox come!" Gravely worried, he continued warming up, expecting every minute to be sent in to relieve the younger man.

The Panthers, however, were furious to hold the one-game lead they had secured. They fielded like phantoms and hit like demons. It was a slam-bang affair all the way through, and in a desperate rally in the ninth the Panthers put over the marker needed. The official scorer hung up game No. 24 for young Bob Berry. One more—only one—and victory would be his!

That night, however, old Gil Black laid down the law. "Berry," he growled, "you're going stale! You stay in bed to-morrow, all day. You don't work again, young man, until next Wednesday. That will be the first game of the final series with the Green Sox, and I want all four of those games. Mind what I say," he added, "and do as I tell you."

"Good Lord," Berry exclaimed to Allen in their room later, "you heard what he said! I've got just one chance left, and that's against the Green Sox!"

"That's enough, lad. Get some rest, and get ready to put it over."

For three days Bob Berry remained away from the ball park. Allen saw to it that he got a daily dip in the ocean

and a brisk walk through the park. Also, the old-time moundsman took the lad down in the hotel court and gave him light throwing practice to keep his control in line and prevent stiffening of the arm. Tuesday he went to the ball park and had a good workout.

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE GAME TIME.

WEDNESDAY, in high feather and full of confidence, Berry started against the slugging, never-quitting Green Sox who had dropped two contests the week before and were now three games behind the Panthers, but were still fighting.

For three innings Berry hurled brilliantly. Not a man reached first base. In the fourth two singles and a stolen base brought in a Green Sox run. In the fifth the young star blew up, and before "Red" Haven, Black's only real fast-ball pitcher, could get in to stop it, six runs had pattered over. Haven toiled like a giant and the Panthers fought like their namesake, but to no avail. The game was lost seven to six.

That night Berry flung himself onto the bed and would not go down to dinner. "I've lost, Jack, I've lost!" he exclaimed when his roommate came in.

The old-timer did not reply but walked over to the bed, grasped Berry by the shoulders, and yanked him to a sitting position. "What are you acting like this for? Are you a quitter?" he asked sternly.

"No; I'm not!" the other cried blazingly; "but I've had my chance, haven't I? I blew it, didn't I? Black is no fool—he won't start me again. I——"

"Get down there and eat and then get back up here!" ordered old Jack Allen. "I promised Flora's mother to bring you home a winner if it was possible, and I don't propose to slip on the last game. Who in blazes is going to pitch these last three set-tos? Red Haven is out of it now. Ash will work tomorrow; Curry the next day, and that leaves whom for Saturday?

"You know there's nobody else," Allen went on. "The boss wouldn't trust me, nor Dixon. And certainly none of the youngsters except yourself, unless, of course, Ash or Dixie should come through and we don't need that last game. In that case he'd use you, anyhow, because he wants to give you all the big-game experience he can.

"The truth is, however, I think we'll need that game and need it badly," Allen continued. "The Green Sox are all primed for slow-ball flingers and that's about all we've got! But perk up now, boy, and get ready for Saturday. You blew to-day's chance higher than a kite, but you'll be just about ripe for game No. 25 Saturday."

Without a word, chiefly because he couldn't utter one, Berry grabbed old Jack Allen's hand, then made quickly for the elevator.

When Bob Berry cracked in the first game something happened to Gil Black's young team. Thursday, Tom Ash pitched like a hero; but the Panthers could not hit and went down to a two-to-nothing defeat. Friday, after a searing lecture by old Gil, they did better—they scored a run. The Green Sox, however, got three off Curry.

So Saturday came, with the two teams tied in the pennant race, and the Panthers in a slump.

One thing continued to puzzle Jack Allen—nowhere had the hand of Cass Yorke appeared. "It may be," he thought, "that Yorke figures Bob is licked. If that's it, then he'll be caught flat-footed if the kid starts to-day's game."

On arriving at the park the manager called Allen to one side. "Frankly, Jack, I'm puzzled," he said. "I'm in a hole, of course, and the Green Sox

know it as well as you or I do. I'd send Haven back in to-day, but he lamed his arm Wednesday. I'll have another fast-ball pitcher next season if I have to mortgage the club to get him! But without speed I guess it'll have to be brains. How's your arm, old boy?" he asked suddenly. "Do you think you could go in there and get away with it?"

"Thanks, Gil, for the compliment," the old star said soberly. "I'd like to, and maybe I could get by, but trying it wouldn't seem good judgment to me. Listen, chief—start Bob. I give you my word he's ready. I've been working with him, and he's your best bet. He's beaten them three times this season, and I think he can win to-day. I'll be ready to go if he wabbles."

Old Gil Black searched his adviser's face for a long time. At last he said: "All right, we'll see how he warms up. But you get ready, Jack."

Ten minutes before game time Catcher Steve Hart reported to the manager. "He's got everything to-day, boss. Everything. Send him in—he's right!"

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE LAST MAN.

TEN thousand fans were turned away from the Panthers' park that day because there was no place for them. The stands had already overflowed to fringe the playing field with a shouting, screaming bank of humanity. The excitement was tense, and the feeling was terrific.

Never had the league race ended in such dramatic fashion, and the crowd was making the most of it. Had they known the full story of young Bob Berry whom they now were cheering to the echo there is no telling what their hero worship and enthusiam might have led them into.

Only one man on the field, other than Berry, knew that story, and he was down in the bull pen with a catcher, lobbing a ball ceaselessly back and forth, keeping himself warm and ready should the youngster waver. Now and then he turned for a moment to watch the boy and smiled. On these occasions those close enough heard the old relief pitcher mutter over and over: "Go it, Bob; go it, boy; you've got 'em!"

And what a battle it was! The Green Sox, all of them veterans, played with that steady brilliance, that easy assurance, that comes to men who have often experienced critical moments and in consequence learned to control their nerves. However, the Panthers, nearly all youngsters, quivered like leashed hounds. They ran like startled deer, they flung themselves at every batted ball as though life itself depended on getting it. They made errors, but in the next moment some seemingly impossible play wiped the errors out.

In the sixth, with neither team having a run, "Tiny" Vincent, Panther left fielder, worked the Green Sox hurler into a hole. Instantly the clatter in the stands died down. Some unseen force seemed suddenly to make the vast throng aware of a moment hung heavy with drama. And the next instant it happened. Crack! Vincent had leaned against the ball, and it was speeding far over the wall in right center. There were those who declared solemnly that that roof on the stands rose a foot then. And down in the bull pen an old star smiled quietly as he rubbed the muscles of his shoulder.

As so often happens in a tight game, however, the scoring of a run seems to break a cord in the defense of the lucky team. Often it apparently has some peculiar effect on the pitcher. It may be that he loses some of his effectiveness, or perhaps the other team is driven to greater effort. At any rate, in the seventh the Green Sox got three clean hits, and only the most spectacular fielding behind Berry prevented the score

from being tied. Grimly Jack Allen watched, and when the last out was made dropped his ball and ran for the bench.

"The boy's slipping. Now's the time to tell him!" he exclaimed as he ran.

Under pretense of rubbing Berry's arm, Allen pulled the lad to one end of the dugout and as he rubbed whispered in his ear: "Bob, you've got 'em licked! You've won a wife, and you've licked old Cass Yorke, too! Listen sharp now. I'm going to tell you what that old pirate did to me; if you're the friend I think you are, it will help you through the last two innings."

"Go on; I'm all ears, Jack."

"Twenty years ago Cass Yorke and I were friends. He was older than I, and I thought him a prince. I trusted him. Neither of us had anything. But I was a ball player and coming to the big league. Still, I knew that was good for only a few years, so Cass and I planned a business—the business he now has. I was to play ball and turn in my money; he was to stay home and build the business. When it got big enough I was to quit the game, and the two of us would work on our dream.

"Well, for two years I turned in every cent I made," Allen went on. "For two years he took it and lied to me. Then, at last suspecting something and demanding a show-down, I learned of his thieving crookedness. The business was booming, but—I wasn't in the company. Cass Yorke had built it on my money and then incorporated the whole thing in his own name!

"I was out, and did not have a scrap of paper to prove my position," Allen continued. "It did something to me, Bob. Discouraged me, broke my faith. He stole more than money, too, but there's no need to talk about that now. I drifted along and played ball till now I'm past forty. But right at this time you've got a chance to square me a little. I'm counting on you. Get in there, now, and do it, will you?"

Berry reached and grabbed old Jack Allen's hand. The younger man's voice was husky. "The beastly thief! Yes; I'll beat these birds, you bet! Lead me to 'em!"

In the eighth not a Green Sox player got to first; the score remained one to nothing. Young Bob Berry showed such cool, determined mastery that even the cloud raised from the brow of old Gil Black. And still the blow from Cass Yorke had not fallen. Down in the bull pen, methodically tossing a ball, Jack Allen was wondering why.

No ball game, however, is over until the last man is out in the ninth, and with the score one to nothing nobody feels safe, or beaten, until that happens.

As the Panthers left their bench for the field to start the final inning a telegraph messenger came bursting out of the club entrance, and at the same time a grizzled man sitting with a young girl in the stands, his eyes fastened on that door, smiled evilly and leaned back with a sigh.

"Bob Berry!" called the messenger. "Where's Bob Berry?"

The catcher indicated the player wanted, and the messenger ran over to him.

"Cablegram, sir," the boy said and handed over the envelope.

A smile lighted up Berry's face, and his heart jumped. "Game little sport!" he muttered as he ripped open the message. "She's trying to help me." Then the crimson drained away from his face, leaving the tan a dead gray. He shivered as with cold, and his eyes blinked; his fingers seemed to numb, and the message slipped from them.

"Any answer?" queried the messenger.

"Answer—answer? Heaven, no; there's no answer!" Berry said as he picked up the paper, stuffed it in his

shirt pocket, and with unseeing eyes started toward the mound.

CHAPTER VII.

AS THE WORLD GREW BLACK.

THE first Green Sox player walked on four straight balls. The crowd groaned, and the catcher went out to talk to Bob Berry. The next batter spanked a single to center on the first ball pitched; the man on first scooted to third. Old Gil Black stood up in the dugout and chewed the end off his pencil. The Green Sox bench resembled a beehive, and the coachers were yelling like madmen. Jack Allen, his brow deeply wrinkled, had come in from the bull pen.

When the sonorous voice of the umpire rolled out "Ball three!" on the next batter, Black jerked his thumb at Berry and roared to Allen at the same time. "Get in there, Jack! The kid's done. It's up to you!"

At the first-base line the two met.

"What's the matter, Bob?" snapped Allen.

"No use, old boy. That cablegram was from Flora. She—she's married, Jack! Married that Cuninghame!"

The world grew black for Allen for just an instant; then a clear white light struck through. A rage that mounted and blinded took possession of him. "It's a lie, Bob! A contemptible, rotten lie! And you're a blithering idiot for falling for it! Cass Yorke did that to beat you. He's struck at last, and it looks as though he's won!" Tragic bitterness rang in the old star's voice.

Wild, dazzling hope sprang up in Bob Berry, however. "You're right, Jack! By all that's holy, you must be right. Oh, what a blind fool I am! Go in there, old boy, and save this for me! You can do it, Jack. The game is still mine if they don't score. Hold 'em, Jack—hold 'em for me!" For a long while afterward thirty thousand fans wondered what was said in that moment when the old star stood on the base line with his arm across the shoulders of the youngster.

Slowly Allen walked out to the box; he took his famous look around, and his practice pitches to the plate.

"Play ball!" roared the umpire, and the game was on again.

The first pitch was a slow curve. "Ball four!" cried the official.

Bases full, none down, a pennant and the happiness of two young people hanging in the balance! Old Jack Allen knew that he must work carefully on the next man.

The next effort was a slow floater. Whang! The ball went sailing over the distant right-field wall, and three runners started for home.

"Foul ball!" bellowed the umpire, and the fans breathed again.

Allen next tried a curve. Crack! This time the ball went to left field, foul by inches. Two strikes!

"Lord, if I can make him miss one!" Allen thought.

However, the next ball the batter straightened out. It went like a streak for center.

"Shorty" Davis, second baseman, took two steps, made a wild leap, and speared the ball. Again the roof of the stands seemed to rise, although, with the enemy runners taking no chances, a double play did not result. In the dugout an inarticulate noise broke from Bob Berry's lips.

"Thanks, Shorty!" Allen grinned at Davis.

"Stick 'em in there, Jack!" yelled the second baseman. "We're set now. They'll have to knock our hands off to get one through!"

When, however, the next batter hit two long fouls in a row over the right-field stands, Allen became worried. He knew the Green Sox had solved his slow balls, and he knew what was

needed. Speed! But that he dared not use. There were those two years yet and the business that would take care of him when at last his arm quit. After all, if the Sox did score, the Panthers had another chance and might win.

As his foot dropped into place on the rubber and he stretched out his long arms preparatory for the next pitch, his eyes went to the bench. On the far end of it, alone, Allen saw Bob Berry hunched over with his face hidden in his hands, and the old-time star knew the young pitcher was waiting for the bat crack that would spell defeat. Something gripped the old hurler's heart A great pity and sympathy, almost paternal, rose in him for the lad and in the instant he knew the sacrifice must be made. A look, at once resignation and determination, swept over his face as Allen signaled to the catcher and ran up to meet him.

"Look out, now, and hang on to 'em," Allen ordered sharply when they met. "I'm going to show you fast balls you never saw before. There'll be a hop on 'em, so don't let 'em get away!"

"Right!" The catcher grinned. "Steam 'em in—I'll get 'em!"

Using the same old style, Allen wound up. The batter set himself for a slow one. Then the lanky form on the hill unlimbered like a coiled spring. The long arm whirled like a flash, the body lunged and followed through. Whiz—bang! Like a gleaming, leaping streak the ball shot into the big mitt, and the man behind the mask rocked back on his heels.

"Strike three! You're out!" boomed the umpire as his right thumb snapped up.

The batter looked dazed; he hadn't even swung. The stands were silent a moment, and then an old man in a front box roared:

"Hurrah, old Jack has found his fast one!"

The crowd sensed it then, the drama of it, and a cheer that shook the flagpole went zooming across the field. None saw the spasm of pain that crossed the old star's face. Two down!

"Look out!" warned the man just retired as he met the next batter coming up. "It's the fastest ball you ever saw and a wicked hop on it."

In the dugout Bob Berry was staring wide-eyed, and but half of old Gil Black's pencil was left.

Tight lipped, Jack Allen wound up for the next pitch. Zip! Like a living thing the ball sped to the catcher's mitt.

"Strike one!" shouted the umpire, himself amazed as the batter picked himself up, having fallen as the result of his fearful swing which missed by a foot.

Thirty thousand fans were on their feet now, pleading for that strike-out. The din was terrific. On the mound Jack Allen's teeth were shut till the muscles in each jaw stood out in lumps.

Once more he wound up, the fielders set themselves, the base runners scurried along the lines. Again the long form unlimbered, and the ball sped like a darting shadow plateward. The batter did not swing.

"Strike two!" roared the umpire, his own heart pounding in admiration for the old player out there who the world said could pitch only with his head.

The crowd was silent now, breathless almost. One more! Could he do it again? Over in the dugout old Gil Black was tense, speechless; Bob Berry was standing on the edge of the steps; the small colored mascot was wildly kissing a rabbit's foot. The world, it seemed, stood still waiting for that last ball, as slowly old Jack Allen wound up.

None heard the groan that escaped him as his arm rose above his head, and a searing agony went shooting from shoulder to wrist. But mind still mastered; his body folded up and straight-

ened, the old arm swung. Halfway over, though, something snapped, the power faded out, and thirty thousand hypnotized fans gasped to see him fall forward on his face as the ball left his fingers.

The batter saw it coming, set himself, and swung. Swish! The catcher, galvanized to action, lunged forward and caught the falling ball just off the ground behind the plate.

"Strike three! You're out!" cried the umpire, but nobody heard him.

The game was over, the pennant won, and the fans came pouring onto the field amid a veritable rain of cushions, hats, and score cards. Out on the diamond the excited Panther team rushed in to pick up and protect old Jack Allen, who still sat on the ground where he had fallen.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOMETHING FILMY.

"A MASTER stroke, Jack!" old Gil Black cried later in the clubhouse. "That's where brains come in! He was looking for a fast one, and that slow one caught him flat. But why in thunder did you fall down?"

A far-away look came into the old pitcher's eyes; then he smiled sadly. "Couldn't help it, Gil," he said simply. "Here, help me put my coat on, will you? I saved your old pennant for you; but you'll have to tackle the world's series without me—I'm done."

"Maybe for the series, but we'll have that old souper in shape for next year, Jack, old boy!" the manager said.

The old star smiled, however. He knew better. The arm had quit.

As he waited for Bob Berry, the old pitcher fell to wondering a bit what the future held in store for him now. "Oh, I'll get a job somewhere selling cars, or something," he thought. "It doesn't matter much."

At that instant young Bob Berry, wild, disheveled, and almost incoherent, came bursting out of the office. "Jack, Jack," he cried, "she's here! Flora's here! She—she saw the game! Ran away and came home; but of course her aunt cabled and old Cass met her. Then she made him bring her out here to the game. He—he sent that cable just as you said—it was a fake—but come on in and let her tell it!"

Jack Allen knew the gray-eyed, dark-haired girl instantly. In her fresh, clear beauty she was a picture of what her mother had looked like twenty years before.

"When I explained to dad that Bob gets credit for winning the game even if you did finish it, Mr. Allen, he was furious and made quite a scene in the stand. He's a poor sport, I guess, because he said I couldn't marry Bob, anyway. Well, that riled me a bit, and I said I was coming down here to see Bob and you. He tried to stop me, but, my, some men up in the stands carried him off! Goodness, how he kicked and yelled! But here I am."

"And from here," Berry put in, "we're going to the marriage-license place, and from there——"

"You'll go with us, won't you, Mr. Allen? You helped us win, and we want you," the girl interrupted, blushing.

"Sure, I'll go," the old ball player said, with a chuckle, "if—you'll call me Jack."

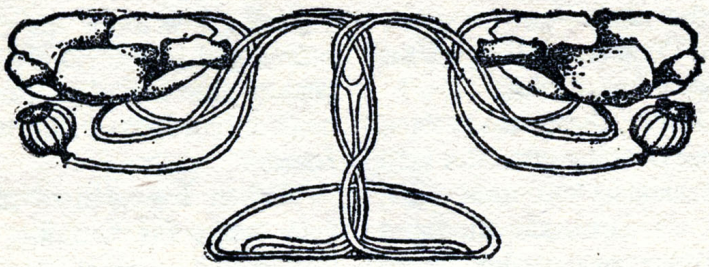
"It's a bargain. And now, Jack, there's something else I want to say. I know what it cost you to do what you did to-day. Your career is done. What are you going to do now?"

"Oh, I'll find something. Maybe my arm will come back next year," he added carelessly.

"You know better than that," the girl declared. "Now see here. I know your story; I know what father did to you. Let's make that right. I know something about the coal-and-lumber busi-

ness. Let's start another company. Bob can play ball for a year or two and put in his money; you and I will stay home and run the business, and we'll soon be successful. What say, Jack?"

Something seemed to tangle up the old ball player's vocal cords and something filmy got into his eyes; but he at last managed to say: "Sure, kids, I'm game; we'll do it! Shucks!" he mumbled as he reached for his handkerchief. "What's the matter with me?"



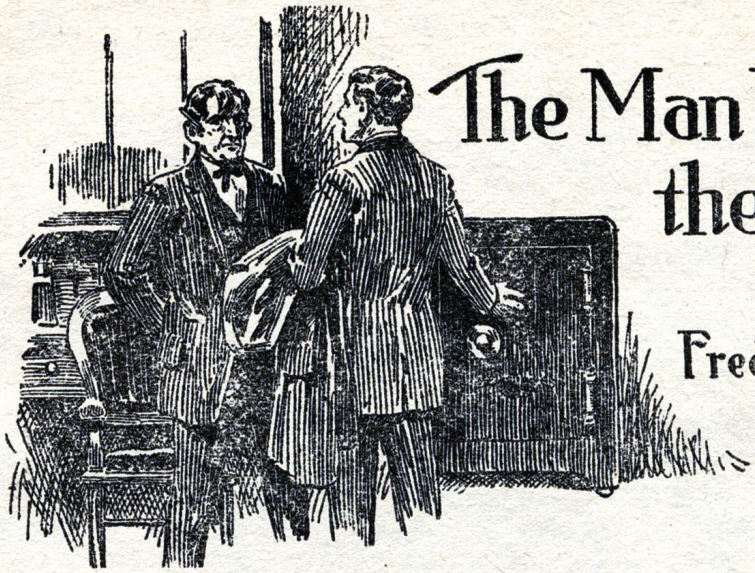
THAT FOOLISH FLAMINGO

By Clarence Mansfield Lindsay

ONCE I had a pet flamingo;
Ev'rywhere I went
That strange bird went, too, by jingo!
All its time it spent
In my company; and never
Was it out of sight;
But, like Mary's lamb, was ever
With me day and night.

Now, I like a pet flamingo,
With its corkscrew neck;
Still, its uncouth ways and lingo
Pall on one, by heck!
And I do not greatly fancy
Being trailed each day
By a foolish bird which can't see
When it's in the way.

So one morn I up and traded
That ungainly fowl
For a beautifully shaded
Hoot—or great horned—owl.
Now whene'er I walk or ride, it's
Always by myself;
Ne'er that owl is by my side; it's
Stuffed, and on the shelf.



The Man Who Ran the Town

By Frederick Davis

WITH one easy glance Steve Simpson, star salesman for the Impregnable Safe Corporation of New York, encompassed the entirety of Still Creek Junction, Vermont. The village snored beside a saffron road. From the Star Drug Store came the drowsy *rrrrr* of an electric fan, and on the step of the Bargain Meat Market a slumbering bird dog twitched one ear feebly under the droning of a fly; no other sign of life was detectable. All about lay dust-browned hills like bubbles in a steaming pie-crust.

"Industrious place!" Steve Simpson observed laconically.

He entered the Dry Goods Emporium. A sifting of dust covered the shelves; a solitary salesgirl was dozing with head on curled arm at the front counter. Simpson strode to an office in the rear where a pen was stuttering at a sheet of paper.

"Afternoon, sir!" he greeted breezily the man inside, giving his brief case a hitch. "You're the proprietor of this busy store, aren't you? I can tell by the air of an executive about you that——"

The proprietor's lock of rusty hair dangling over one eye, and his corrugated neck, made him look astonishingly like a turkey. The uncovered eye blinked at Simpson.

"Nice little city you've got here," the salesman said with a flourish. "Who's the mayor?"

"I'm pres'dent of the board of selectmen," the proprietor answered. "Pott's my name."

"Zat so? Good roads leading in, too——"

"I'm chairman of the county roads commission. My name's Pott."

"Congratulations! Quite a neat little school you have down near the hotel, and——"

"Yep," said the turkey. "I'm principal. Pott—my name's Pott."

"H'm!" observed Simpson thoughtfully. "Is the justice of the peace named Pott, too?"

"Yep." A whiteness appeared between the proprietor's lined lips. "It is."

"Well, I'm honored to know you, sir." Simpson beamed, getting to business. "A man with as many responsibilities as you probably worries under the weight of them. And you can't afford to worry—you've got to keep that big mind of yours clear. Safety first always—you know that. You can't do business well if you're not sure of the safety of your papers and securities.

Now, the Impregnable Safe Corporation is putting out a new——"

"Don't need a new safe," interrupted the school principal, justice of the peace, and the holder of other honors.

"We're putting out a new model which is small and more compact than anything else ever offered to the market. Just look at these photographs, Mr. Pott—your name's Pott, isn't it? Just look at the beauty, Mr. Pott, of those safes. Aren't they something you'd be proud to put into this well-furnished office? And the Impregnable guarantee is back of every one."

"I don't need a new safe," repeated the thin man, his rusty forelock flicking with a nod of his head. "The old one is good enough."

Simpson turned critical eyes on the steel box sitting in the corner. The dial of it was corroded; the enamel was chipped off, and the exposed steel was freckled with rust. One of the casters was missing, for which half a brick was doing substitution service.

"She's served me well," Pott stated proudly, "ever since I got 'er in 1880."

"Good Lord! You mean it's forty-six years old? And still you dare to use it?" Simpson looked pained. "Mr. Pott, you're giving yourself unnecessary risks. Why, some day a tramp will come along and open that thing with a toothpick and walk away with all your money. Well, he could do it with a can opener, anyway. Why, nothing could keep a real crook out of that box—except maybe he'd laugh himself to death at sight of it."

"I guess you didn't hear me say," a stern justice-of-the-peace tone interrupted, "I don't want a new safe."

"But, Mr.—er—er——"

"Pott," said Pott implacably.

"Pott," went on Simpson, compressing a smile from his lips. "You could get as much protection from a ten-cent-store cake box. Now the new model Impregnable is offered on easy terms and——"

Pott sat straight and said with nods that sent his lock of hair swinging over his eye with each word: "B' glory, I don't—need—a—new—safe! Good day!"

"As I was saying, the new model will make it a pleasure to purchase, because the amount——"

A sound came from Pott's throat that was uncommonly like an angry gobble.

Simpson waved one hand dismissingly. "All right; very well, as you say. You've made your judgment. This part of the country must be thick with tramps because of the railroad junction; but if one of them kicks that toy of yours apart, don't blame anybody but yourself." With an air of righteousness he rose. "Well, I'll say good day, Mr. Watt——"

"Pott," corrected the chairman of the county roads commission severely. "Good day."

II.

SMILING, Simpson walked into the languid street. His bearing as he made his way toward his hotel was not despondent. He was not worried by Pott's resistance. He was confident, in fact; he had a system of his own that worked. His method had actually put him at the head of the list of the Impregnable's sales force. And he was prepared to employ his effective scheme on the estimable Pott, principal of the school, justice of the peace, and what not.

As though his business in Still Creek Junction was closed, Simpson took the next train for the near-by town of Green Valley. There he called upon several merchants, recited his sales talk glibly and succeeded in selling a small order. That evening, before retiring, he hired an automobile from the Valley Garage—leaving a suitable deposit—took a re-

freshing spin into the hills, then parked the car conveniently beside his hotel.

He went to his room. After the town was asleep, he raised his window, toed down the fire escape, dropped silently to the ground, and stirred the motor of the car. He sent it purring over the highway through the blackness toward Still Creek Junction.

Half a mile out of the village he parked in a weeded side road, and went ahead on foot, carrying a canvas-cased tool kit under his arm.

Still Creek Junction was more than still. The night was so vacant that even the darkness was audible as an all-pervading hum. Not even the wind stirred the weeds along the edges of the paths. Simpson picked his way gingerly and silently through the rank growths and paused at the rear of the Dry Goods Emporium.

From his black kit he took a jimmy. Only a slight pressure was necessary to snap the rusted lock on the rear window. He waited a long time, and, when no alarm came, he told himself: "This is too easy!"

He legged himself in. The interior of the Emporium was solid blackness. Simpson switched on his blue-lensed hand lamp. Guided by the sepulchral glow he circled to the partitioned office. The door was unlocked.

The safe sat sheepishly in the corner. The rusted dial turned with reluctance. The door rattled in its setting.

Simpson smirked. "I could open you," he told the thing, "with a good, hard sneeze!"

Actually he used a hammer. One well-placed blow, silenced by an old felt hat which he had brought, knocked the dial off. Another deft swing drove the pin inward. Then Simpson's nimble fingers reached inside the hole and moved the tumblers. The door swung open with a discouraged creak.

Simpson's blued light showed a packet of currency lying neatly inside. He slipped the money into his pocket. Several negotiable bonds followed the bills to his person. Various civic papers he scattered about the office. Then he backed away.

His blue light played over the floor carefully as he made sure that he had left no telltale marks. He dropped the old felt hat as a plant to dupe the proprietor into thinking a tramp had broken the safe. Gathering his tools, he rubbed his footprints from the dust. Then he went through the window and moved into the darkness.

"Taking lollypops from a kid is hard work compared to this!" he told himself gleefully.

Simpson found his car, aroused it, and slid back over the road to his hotel. Leaving the auto, he swung himself onto the fire escape; he glided up and silently dropped into his room.

He counted the money and bonds he had stolen. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed.

The securities were of five hundred dollars each, and the bills amounted to forty-odd dollars.

"All this money in that tomato can! The boob!"

He dropped the loot into a concealed pocket in the lining of his traveling bag and pronounced the night's work good. He tucked himself into bed with a feeling of contentment.

III.

NEXT morning Simpson proceeded on his route as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. A day later he told himself:

"To-morrow I'll go back to Pott and just walk in and get that order. The old man will certainly want a new safe now!"

Whenever Simpson met a particularly tough customer he employed the unusual device of blowing the old safe and later taking the order for a new

one. Not only did he avoid suspicion, but he actually won the buyers' gratitude for happily providing them with needed protection. Being careful not to overdo the thing, he achieved an enviable total of commissions to add to his loot. Success was his doubly.

Two thousand dollars! It was a plump little haul from Mr. Pott! Simpson chuckled over it. With the heartlessness of a born crook he did not stop to consider the immensity of the loss to the turkeylike man. During Simpson's double-dealing career his burglaries had thrown one little store in Massachusetts into bankruptcy; he had deprived another retailer in New Hampshire of his life savings; in Vermont he had robbed a young fellow of his cherished dream of college by stealing the painfully accumulated funds. Over these, as over the robbery of Pott, Steve Simpson gloated.

"I didn't leave a trace," he told himself. "They can't possibly get me. Besides, these hick-town cops don't know they're alive."

Simpson caught the morning train which, by afternoon, dropped him again into the deserted junction village in Vermont. The street was torpid, as before. The salesgirl inside the Emporium was dozing against the counter. Simpson swaggered into the partitioned-off room in the rear. The proprietor, slumped in his chair, looked up with the lock of hair dangling before one dulled eye.

"Afternoon," Simpson said breezily. "Well, strange things happen, Mr.—er—Port——"

"Pott," corrected the turkeylike storekeeper.

"Lucky for you, I was able to come back," Simpson told him. "Now you've learned your lesson, and it meant something to you. You wouldn't listen to me; if you had ordered a safe when I advised it, you'd still have your bonds. Now you've lost a lot of money. One of the tramps did it, of course. And you certainly need a new safe now."

IV.

TOGETHER the two men looked at the wrecked safe in the corner, Simpson triumphantly, Pott sadly.

"She was a good safe," said the proprietor, "while she lasted."

"Now, Mr. Pott, how about a New Model Impregnable—or will you be interested in a little stronger type?" Simpson asked, leaning across the desk.

Pott's eyelid lowered behind his lock of hair.

"Oh, don't be discouraged!" Simpson cheered him. "A good safe is a good investment. You'll be perfectly secure from anything like this ever happening again. Just sign right here—on the dotted line, and——"

"Where'd you hear about the robbery?" Pott interrupted, his lean hands fishing in a drawer of his desk.

"Oh, it's all over, of course," Simpson answered broadly. "A salesman who came through here told me about it. It certainly is fortunate I stayed so close."

"Yep," said Pott; "it certainly is."

His hands reappeared suddenly. Click—click!

Simpson's eyes widened. Two shining handcuffs were coolly locked around his wrists. "What—what's this?"

"You robbed that safe of mine yourself," Pott declared. "No tramp did it, even though that hat was left by the ruins. You did it!"

"That's a lie—you can't prove it. You didn't find any clew!"

"Nope; nary a clew did I find. There wasn't any left; but you did it, you crook!"

"You can't prove it. You didn't see me—nobody saw me."

"That's right—nobody saw you, but I know you did it!"

"Take these things off! I'll sue you

for false arrest. You're just making a crazy guess, and——"

"I'm not guessin' at it. I *know* you robbed my safe. I been tryin' to think ever since it happened who could have done it, and when you came in here a minute ago I knew you had."

Simpson grew pale. "How—how could you——"

"Because you didn't hear about this crime from any salesman. You didn't hear anybody talkin' about it. Because I didn't tell a soul I was robbed—not even the salesgirl here. An' since nobody knows about it except me and the crook—you must have done it!"

Simpson tried to protest, but his throat grew tight.

"I reckon," the turkeylike man went on proudly, "there wasn't much use o' my tellin' it around, seein' I'm constable o' this township myself!"

"What! You're con—con——"

"I arrest you in the name o' the law!" The town factotum shook his rusty forelock sternly. "Now you come along with me! Later you'll return what you stole from me." This last remark turned out to be a correct prophecy.

Simpson went, dazed. Five minutes later he entered an iron-barred cell.

The lock of the door, as strong as any Impregnable safe, turned under the firm hand of the official warden of the township jail—a turkey-faced man named Pott.

SONGS OF THE CRAFTS

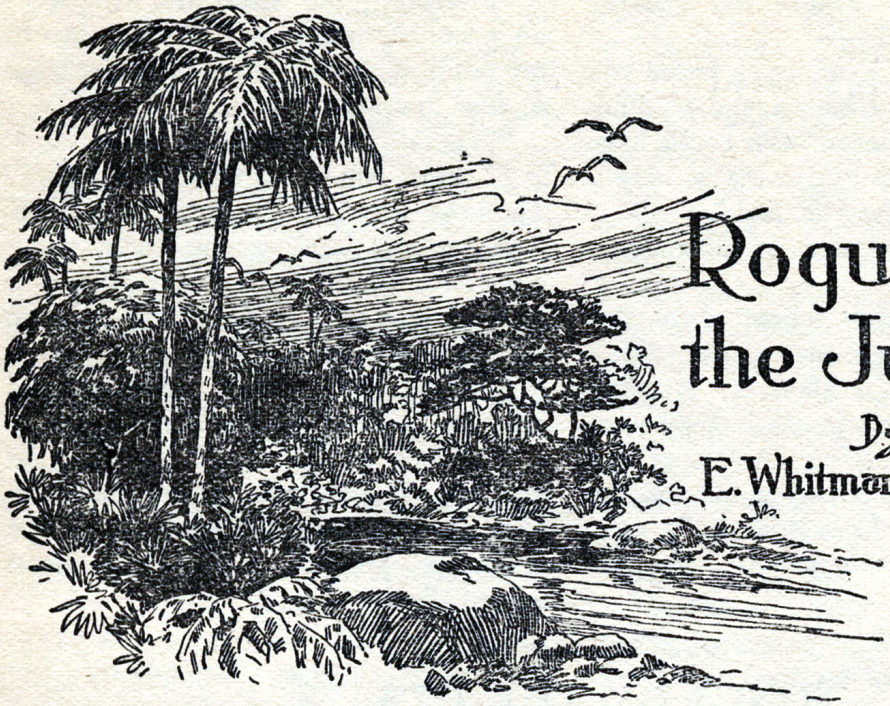
THE WIRELESS MAN

By Ted Olson

WHEN Noah went a-sailing with his zoo,
He was forty days and nights upon the foam,
And he had to send a bird to report on what occurred
In the weeks when he was far away from home.
Times have altered for the better since that Biblical adventure,
As I think you will not censure me for saying.
Now at sea, thanks to me and my palpitating key,
You're in touch with home no matter where you're straying.

When a mad typhoon comes loping down the sky,
And the ship acquires a bucking-broncho reel,
And you feel somewhat suspicious that the avaricious fishes
May be waiting round to use you for a meal;
When the combers rake the crow's nest, and the boats are split to flinders,
And your chances seem not worth a thin piaster,
Some young chap, serene and tireless, sending S O S by wireless,
Is the lad who puts the crimp in grim disaster.

From the rip and grind and crash of Arctic floes
To the languid, odorous isles of spice and palm,
All the seven wide seas over, from Calcutta round to Dover,
We are on the job in hurricane and calm.
"Shipping News—Arrived and Cleared"—it's there you read our simple story,
Harsh, intrepid, void of glory, primitive;
Yet the chronicles dramatic that we send through storm and static
Aren't a patch to the adventures that we live!



Rogues of the Jungle-

By E. Whitman Chambers-

HAVING been successful in a search for platinum in a South American mountain range, Jack Sadler, a young man from the States, and a Swede named Larson were seized with fever. In the lowlands, drifting along a rain-swollen river in their canoe, they were closely pursued by bands of natives bent upon robbery. During a tremendous rainstorm and under the cover of darkness, Sadler and Larson left their canoe and struggled through the jungle toward some lights in the distance.

The lights were in the residence of Franklin Tremaine, a Californian who, with his daughter Dale and Ralph Maxwell, had come to South America to dredge for platinum. He had obtained as security a concession and a dredger from Howard Bettincourt, a prospector to whom Tremaine had lent a vast sum of money. Later Tremaine heard that Bettincourt had been drowned. Ralph Maxwell, to whom Dale Tremaine seemed to be informally engaged, was the dredging superintendent.

Sadler and Larson, after reaching the Tremaine residence, recovered slowly from the remorseless fever which had attacked them. Sadler soon found out that all was not well with the company which Tremaine had formed. Little work was done, Maxwell refusing to carry on operations unless the weather was clear. Maxwell clearly disliked the presence of Sadler about the property.

One night, when Sadler and Larson were nearly recovered from the fever, a terrific storm broke, causing a rise in the river along the bank of which Tremaine's dredger was moored. Under Maxwell's direction the men tried to get additional lines out to the boat; but the effort failed. It seemed that the dredger would be lost. Then, after Sadler had taken charge, it was at last saved.

Maxwell, angered at the other's success, hinted to Dale Tremaine that Sadler was staying in the South American jungle because he did not dare return to the States. The girl rebuked Maxwell for the remark.

Sadler felt that a strange mystery pervaded the affairs of the Tremaines, because he knew that, contrary to what Franklin Tremaine evidently believed, Howard Bettincourt was still alive.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEEP MYSTERY.

SOMEHOW Jack Sadler was greatly puzzled by Dale Tremaine's explanation of how her father got possession of the dredger and the concession from the Colombian government to work the river. Howard Bettincourt, soldier of fortune and ne'er-do-well, was alive. At least, he had been alive a few weeks before and there was no reason for believing that he was not alive at that minute.

"Well, Lars, how do you explain it?" Sadler asked the Swede, Larson, as they were slipping out of their clothes.

"I ain't trying to," Lars said, still grinning. "It ain't none o' my business."

"Now listen, Lars! It's all right to talk that way about an ordinary matter, but this is something out of the ordinary, something unusual."

"Yes," Lars admitted, with a wise nod of his head; "she's unusual purty girl."

Sadler colored swiftly and to hide his confusion hurled a shoe at the Swede. He missed his mark, deliberately of course, and then stooped down to unlace the other shoe.

"Never mind Miss Tremaine!" Sadler growled. "We'll just leave her out of it. As near as I can figure, she's engaged to marry Maxwell, anyway. At least, I saw her kiss him when I went by their house this morning."

Larson's round, good-natured face darkened. "I don't like dat," he said slowly. "Dat faller Maxwell is no good."

"Oh, well, Lars, we don't know anything about that. The fellow may be a decent-enough sort. Of course, he doesn't know any too much about dredgers, but we can't hold that against him. How, though, do you explain this other thing? Here Bettincourt ropes old man Tremaine into putting up the money for this dredger and for building this camp. In return, probably, he gives him an interest in the proposition and puts up his concession on the river and the whole business as security for the money.

"Then Bettincourt disappears, is supposed to be drowned, and the old man is forced to come here and take over the show to protect his investment," Sadler went on. "Now we come to the mystery. Why did Bettincourt disappear? He wasn't kidnaped or anything like that. He isn't suffering from aphasia or loss of memory. I know that, because, although he tried to avoid me up there in Condoto, I cornered him and made him pay me a month's back wages that had been due me for several years. What's his game?"

"Crooked, whatever it is," Lars decreed.

"Of course. That's Bettincourt for you. One of the biggest scoundrels this side of the Canal. But what has he got up his sleeve? The concession that he turned over to Tremaine, by appearing to get drowned, is one of the most valuable in the country. I know that he and the Choco Metals and half a dozen other mining companies have been trying for years to get hold of it. Bettincourt beat them, by playing dirty politics, but he got clear title to the concession.

"Now why, with an outfit like this at his disposal, with nothing to do but assemble the dredger and go to work, did he pass out of the picture?" Sadler continued. "What has he got up his sleeve?"

The Swede grinned wisely. "I think, when we get to Buena Ventura in a few days from now," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, "that we ought to buy that little tugboat we was talkin' 'bout. That's good liddle craft an' tugboat business is good business for——"

Sadler hurled the other shoe and rolled into bed. "You make me sick, Lars!" he exclaimed. "You've got about as much curiosity as a mud turtle. I'm going to sleep."

However, despite his best intentions, Sadler did not fall asleep for an hour or more. There were so many things that puzzled him, there were so many things that he wanted to have explained —if for no other reason than to satisfy his curiosity—that he could not forbear going over them. And the more he thought about the situation the more bewildered he became.

There was Ralph Maxwell, for instance. What part was the good-look-

ing young superintendent playing other than that of openly wooing Dale Tremaine? Sadler felt certain that the man had other irons in the fire besides the mere task of getting the dredger in operation. His delaying of the work on account of rains, his crude handling of the boat in the storm the night before, his general inefficiency which Sadler had noted on more than one occasion—these things seemed to point toward the conclusion that Maxwell had some ulterior motive in slowing up the work; either that or he was a fool. And, cordially hating the man, Sadler inclined toward the former hypothesis.

Then there was the Choco Metals Corporation, with its two boats a mile down the Capistrano—and with José Gonzales in charge of them; Gonzales of the smooth manner and the disarming smile, who could make love to another man's wife or stab a business rival in the back with equal facility. A nice man to have for a neighbor on a job like this!

Dale Tremaine had said that he had gone out of his way to help them on several occasions! Gonzales would, of course! That was the way he played the game of business—and of love! Sadler writhed. It was a nice situation, he told himself bitterly. An old man, unschooled in the dark ways of the Choco, trying to work one of the most valuable platinum properties in the district! And a young girl, as charming and beautiful as any woman Sadler had ever met, accepting favors from that yellow greaser Gonzales!

Then there was Bettincourt, abandoning a valuable property which he had been fighting for years to acquire, allowing it to revert to Tremaine without five cents in payment. Looking backward, Sadler could read Bettincourt's plans as clearly as though they were written before him: Bettincourt never had any cash; he got hold of Tremaine in some way and induced him to finance the purchase of the boat and the building of the camp, intending to freeze him out as soon as he had squeezed him dry.

For some unfathomable reason, however, Bettincourt had changed his plans and had caused to be circulated a rumor to the effect that he had been drowned. Instead of freezing out Tremaine, as he had most assuredly planned in the first place, he had deliberately frozen out himself! And the reason?

Sadler tried to force the problem out of his mind. After all, as Lars took so much pains to impress upon him, it was none of his business. Still he felt sorry for Tremaine—good-hearted old duffer—didn't have a chance, fighting these cutthroats of the Choco—— And Dale was in love with Maxwell—and was very beautiful—and was accepting favors from Gonzales—and was very lovable—— Oh, well—oh, well!

CHAPTER XI.

A SUSPICIOUS MOVE.

THE following afternoon Sadler was sitting on the porch of the Tremaine home conversing idly with Dale. Lars had disappeared, probably having discovered a crap game, and Tremaine was inside the house. It was a hot, stifling, sunshiny day; the air was heavy with humidity. Dale, who was not thoroughly acclimated, had not gone up to the dredger that afternoon as was her wont. It was too hot and unpleasant on the river—at least, that was the reason she gave herself for staying at home.

The talk, naturally enough, had drifted to the work that was being done on the boat.

"It takes a long time to get a dredger assembled and in working order, doesn't it?" the girl remarked casually.

"It is quite a job." Sadler glanced at her, saw that her eyes were not on him, and scrutinized her narrowly. Did she suspect what he knew now to be

almost a certainty—that Maxwell was deliberately delaying the work? No; she hardly would be so friendly toward the superintendent if she did.

"I sometimes wish Mr. Bettincourt were here," the girl went on. "He bought the dredger, you know, and disassembled it in the States before shipping it down here. He could probably have put it together much faster than Ralph or any one else. It's a shame that he was drowned."

"Yes, indeed. It's too bad."

Sadler was on the point of telling her that Bettincourt was very much alive; but something restrained him; a small voice seemed to say, paraphrasing Lars, that this affair was none of his business and that men who mix into the affairs of others without invitation in the Choco are apt to find themselves in serious trouble; not that Sadler was afraid of trouble—he would meet it with as bold a front as the next man—but he sensed that the time had not yet arrived for him to take a hand.

Sadler became conscious that Dale's eyes were on a figure which was just disembarking from a canoe down the river. Sadler followed the gaze and saw an immaculate, white-clad man starting up the path toward the house. He frowned suddenly as he recognized the arrival and glanced at Dale. She was smiling, apparently in pleasurable anticipation. Sadler's eyes hardened, and he took a deep breath that was half a sigh. Smiling—over seeing José Gonzales!

The employee of the Choco Metals Corporation was a prepossessing figure of a man. He was well above average height, very straight, and carried himself with admirable poise. He wore a small mustache which was always carefully waxed and curled. His face, while just a bit gross, was really handsome. He reminded Sadler of a photograph he had seen in a motion-picture magazine which had come in from the States a few days before. The picture had been captioned: "The Screen's Perfect Lover." And somehow Sadler's mental comment had not been favorable.

Gonzales claimed to be a pure-blood Castilian. However, an old-timer had once remarked to Sadler: "There ain't no sich animal in Colombia. I've heard tell that there was some pure Spanish families up round Bogotá; but I ain't never seen 'em, an' I don't believe they're there." And to Sadler and to every white man in the Choco, José Gonzales, for all his fine manners, his fine talk, and fine clothes, was just a plain native. He was a Spaniard, no doubt, but certainly not a pure-blooded one.

Gonzales bowed low, as he reached the porch, and swept off his hat. "*Buenas dias,* señorita," he greeted Dale with his most engaging smile. "I trust I find you well."

"I'm very well, thank you." The girl smiled, and took his hand. Sadler was writhing inwardly as she turned to him. "Mr. Sadler, are you acquainted with Mr. Gonzales?"

For the briefest moment the gazes of the two men met and clashed. There was venom in the eyes of both, venom and distrust and uncompromising hatred. Then Gonzales smiled and held out his hand. In any other circumstances Sadler would have knocked the man down for his presumption. Now he could only shake hands with him—what a ripping up the back Lars would give him if he saw him clasping the hand of this native!—and say:

"Yes; I am well acquainted with Mr. Gonzales."

"Yes, indeed," the other said. "Señor Sadler has worked for me several times." He apparently did not think it necessary to add that on the occasion of Sadler's last resignation from the employ of the Choco Metals the young American had hit him a well-timed blow on the jaw that had knocked

him into the river and sent him eventually to Buena Ventura for four new teeth.

For an hour or more the three persons sat on the porch and talked of commonplaces, Gonzales making no move to reveal the object of his visit. Several times Sadler caught the handsome Spaniard glaring at him, anger smoldering in his black eyes. Despite Gonzales' apparent calmness and poise, Sadler knew that he boiled with suppressed rage and that he would have given much to have the opportunity of slipping a knife into the back of this interfering "gringo;" but Sadler made no move to leave the two alone, and Gonzales was at last forced to make known the reason for his visit.

"I am taking our No. 4 dredger up the river," he told Dale. "We have a concession up there, just above yours, and while the property is not particularly rich, we have decided to work it for a time. I wanted to ask if you would be kind enough to drop your lines and let our boat pass."

"Most assuredly," the girl answered readily. "Of course, I have no authority to give you permission to pass; but I am certain it will be all right. I'll speak to Mr. Maxwell about it this evening and tell him to be ready."

"That is very kind of you," Gonzales said graciously. "We should be up here some time to-morrow afternoon."

Gonzales departed shortly afterward, with much bowing and many thanks. Dale's blue eyes were warm as she watched him stride down the path and embark in his canoe. Once out in the river, he raised his hat to her in a courtly gesture of farewell.

"He is very nice, isn't he?" the girl remarked softly to Sadler when Gonzales had disappeared around a bend in the river. "You know before I came down here I had an idea that all Spaniards were desperados; but Señor Gonzales is certainly a perfect gentleman. I like him immensely."

Sadler nodded quietly, not quite willing to take it upon himself to disillusion the girl. A few minutes later he excused himself and went in search of Lars. From the direction of the Jamaican camp he heard a bellowing voice.

"Cum sax! Cum sax! Cum on you liddle sax-spot! Ah! Sax ban right! Shoot twenty reals!"

Sadler pulled him away from the game with difficulty and hurried him down toward the river. He said nothing until he had picked out a canoe from several which were drawn up on the bank, tossed Lars a *palanca,* stepped in, and shoved off into the stream. Then he remarked, smiling at the puzzled Swede:

"Miss Tremaine just had a visitor in the person of one José Gonzales, who asked permission to take his No. 4 dredger up the river past the Tremaine boat. According to our friend, the Choco Metals has a concession on the San Miguel just above the Tremaine concession. What do you think of it?"

Lars scowled, plainly put out over the fact that Sadler was forcing him to mix into another man's business. "That ground above Tremaine's concession won't run two cents a yard," the Swede remarked at last.

"Of course it won't! That's the point. When Howard Bettincourt took up this section of the river, he got every foot that was worth while. Now why is Gonzales taking a dredger up the river?"

Lars shrugged disinterestedly. "Mebbe you better ask him."

"And that is exactly what we're going to do." Sadler smiled at Lars' obvious discomfiture. "We're going down the river to have a talk with Gonzales. And if we don't come right out and ask him why he is going up there, we can at least use our eyes and ears

and pick up what we can. That fellow has something crooked up his sleeve, Lars. I don't know what it is; but, despite the fact that it's none of our business, we're going to try to find out. Now bear down on that *palanca.*"

CHAPTER XII.

ABOARD THE DREDGER.

SOMETHING less than a half mile below the Tremaine camp, Sadler and Lars came upon the No. 4 dredger of the Choco Metals Corporation. A large crew of men was warping the big boat up the river, and, despite the fact that the only motive power was the dredger's own winches, which worked on cables anchored on the bank, Sadler saw at once they were making unusually good time.

"You keep the dugout alongside and wait for me," Sadler told his companion. "I'll go aboard and do the talking."

Skillfully maneuvering their craft to the port side of the big dredger, Sadler swung hastily aboard, knowing that if he tarried at all he would probably be ordered to keep off. Crossing the deck, he came upon Gonzales, who was just emerging from the winch room.

"How goes it, José?" Sadler asked. "You seem to be making good progress."

Gonzales regarded his visitor with a scowl, the Latin's black eyes narrowing as he scrutinized him in silence for a moment. "I don't remember inviting you aboard this boat, Sadler," he said pointedly.

"Oh, don't worry about that." The American grinned. "I'm not the one to wait on formality. I just thought I'd drop down and find out if you couldn't use a couple of good dredger men."

"I thought you were working for Tremaine," Gonzales told him coldly.

"Oh, no! We've just been staying there a few days. Got a touch of fever up the river and stopped off there to recuperate. We're not tied up with them at all. They have all the men they can use." Sadler saw the relief that came over the Spaniard's face and smiled inwardly. "How about giving us a job?"

"I have all the men I can use," Gonzales told him.

"We're experienced dredger men," Sadler reminded.

"Experienced scoundrels, I should say!" the other snapped.

"Suit yourself." Sadler shrugged, smiling easily. "Opinions differ on that score. However, I'm not the man to argue about it. I guess Lars and I will have to drift down to San Juan."

Apparently in no great hurry to leave, Sadler glanced casually around the boat. "Nice little dredger you have here," he remarked. "That is, it would be if you had a bucket line and a stacker belt and a few riffle boxes. How do you expect to do any dredging without a bucket line?"

"I am afraid that is my business, Sadler," Gonzales answered tersely.

"Of course it is," came the easy answer. "I was merely wondering."

"It might be well to do your wondering somewhere else than on this boat," the Spaniard snapped. "I'll give you just about ten seconds to get off of it."

"And then?"

"I'll throw you off!"

"You and how many more?"

"As many more as I need," Gonzales answered.

"You pay me a great compliment, señor," the American said, bowing; "but I won't put you to the trouble of making good your threat. I am very interested in how you are going to operate a dredger without a bucket line; if you won't tell me, though, I guess my curiosity will have to go unsatisfied."

"The bucket line and the rest of the equipment will be brought up later!" Gonzales exclaimed testily. "Now get off!"

"With the greatest of pleasure, señor."

Calmly and with exasperating slowness, Sadler walked across the deck to the place were Lars waited with their canoe. "No luck," Sadler called down, smiling good-naturedly. "I guess we'll have to drift to San Juan as soon as we feel able."

He dropped into the canoe, grasped his *palanca,* and shoved off.

"So long, José!" he called smilingly to the angry, white-clad figure on the deck of the dredger. "I wish you luck in bringing that bucket line over the mud flats."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAYS OF THE CHOCO.

AS he swung about and bent to the task of poling the dugout up the river, Sadler's smile faded. "Lars, this is the most baffling problem I ever tried to work out," he began after a time. "I just can't seem to get head nor tail to it. Take that boat Gonzales is warping up the river, for instance. Did you take any notice of it?"

"Not much," Lars said with a shrug. "I'm not much interested in Gonzales' boat."

Sadler regarded his companion keenly. The small blue eyes were on the river, but Sadler could see that they were sparkling, and he sensed that Lars was far more interested in the affair than he pretended.

"Well, even if you won't admit it," Sadler went on, "I know you noted the absence of a bucket line on that boat. A lot of other equipment was conspicuous by its absence, too. What is more, the hull is so rotten that it's about ready to fall to pieces. Now we know, and Gonzales knows, that the only way to get a bucket line up the river is on a dredger.

"That boat was built for seven-foot buckets. I've forgotten just what a seven-foot bucket weighs, but it weighs plenty! Gonzales wouldn't stand a chance of getting a string of them up the river in boats, because the water is too shallow for launches and the buckets are too heavy to haul around by man power.

"Remember," Sadler continued, "this alleged concession that Gonzales claims his company owns begins about eight miles above here. The river is mighty shallow up there, and unless he puts on the rest of his equipment before he passes Tremaine's boat, he'll never get it up. He told Miss Tremaine that he'd be passing to-morrow afternoon. That means that he intends to run the boat up without that equipment, because he hasn't time to put it aboard in the next twenty-four hours.

"All of which brings us back to the original question—why in Sam Hill is Gonzales dragging a rotten, worthless, dismantled hulk up the river?"

Lars grinned over his shoulder. "That's some more of Gonzales' business," he answered calmly.

"Lars, I've got a notion to hit you over the head with this *palanca!*" Sadler threatened impatiently.

"Go ahead, if you want to break the *palanca.*"

"Oh, you're impossible!" Sadler exclaimed. "Haven't you got a speck of gratitude in your make-up? Don't you realize that we are under obligation to Miss Tremaine and her father? They took us into their camp without question, put Doc Pailthorpe to work on us, and no doubt saved our lives. The least that we can do is to try to pay them back."

"Here they are," Sadler went on, "an independent company, with mighty little experience and probably no financial backing, fighting the largest and the most unscrupulous mining company in South America. Their superintendent is either a fool or a scoundrel. Bettincourt has put up some kind of a job on them that we can't figure out. Miss Tremaine is treating Gonzales as if he was on the level. They are being hoodwinked on

every side. Now the least we can do is to step in here, on the quiet of course, and try to get at the bottom of the thing. Don't you think I'm right?"

For a long time Lars pondered the question. Sadler watched him from the stern, watched the powerful muscles rippling under his shirt as he plied his *palanca,* watched the great head with its straw-colored hair move rhythmically back and forth to the strokes of his pole.

Good old Lars! There wasn't a kinder, bigger-hearted, squarer man in all Colombia. He needed him, too, needed his level head and his powerful physique and his knowledge of the ways of the Choco. And Lars would see the light; he would take the only view of the situation possible—even if it were in violation of his most sacred precept. Lars would help him get at the bottom of this mystery which grew deeper and more complicated every day.

The huge Swede nodded his head at last, very slowly and thoughtfully, and looked around at Sadler. "You're right, Jack. I guess we owe them big debt. We try to square it."

That was all, but Sadler knew that henceforth Lars would be behind him, ready to back him up in anything he might do toward unraveling this mystery. They poled along in silence for a time.

"That's funny thing—that dredger," Lars remarked at length, with a slow shake of the head. "We got to find out 'bout that."

"I did all I could," Sadler said, smiling. "If I had stayed aboard another minute we would have had a fight on our hands. We'll probably get our fill of fighting before we see the end of this thing, and there's no use beginning now. It seems to me that it is up to us to use our heads rather than our fists."

"Yes; that's right. We got to do plenty thinking."

"And in the meantime," Sadler remarked, "it wouldn't do any harm to drop down to San Juan and look up these concessions. We're strong enough to stand the trip now and I'd like to find out if Tremaine's title is all right. Also, it might be a good idea to find out if the Choco Metals actually has a concession above Tremaine's. If they haven't and we could convince the old man that Gonzales was up to mischief, he could refuse to drop his lines to let them pass."

"That's good idea." Lars nodded. "But I'm 'fraid it's too late to stop him. We can't find out 'bout those things till to-morrow morning. From San Juan back here is good eight hours, poling lak mad. And by that time he's passed."

"Yes; that's right," Sadler admitted. "We haven't got time enough to keep him from passing Tremaine's boat, even if we could talk the old man into refusing to drop his lines—which in itself is mighty doubtful. Tremaine is so blamed honest and unsophisticated that he thinks everybody else is on the level. That may be more or less true where he came from, but it is certainly not true down here in the Choco. All of which naturally makes it that much harder for us.

"We're up against the proposition of trying to help him without his coöperation, without even telling him what it's all about," Sadler continued. "He isn't much of an executive, Lars, and while he may have a keen enough brain when it comes to working out some things, he isn't much better than a second-class moron when it comes to handling the proposition he's up against here. Now his daughter——"

"She's mighty purty liddle girl," Lars interrupted, smiling over his shoulder at his companion.

Sadler felt the color rising in his cheeks under Larson's scrutiny. He cursed himself silently. He was as bad as a high-school kid! Blushing at the mere mention of a girl! What, in the

name of common sense, was coming over him lately? Must be losing his head!

"I wasn't thinking of her looks," he made hasty response, trying unsuccessfully to hide his confusion. "I was thinking about her head. She has brains, Miss Tremaine has; more brains than her father and Maxwell and all the rest of the crowd put together. Once she begins to sabe how things are worked down here, she'll start to use her brains."

"Why not tell her?" Lars suggested.

"Tell her what?"

Lars pondered this for a moment and then shook his head bewilderedly.

"After all," Sadler reminded him, "there isn't much we could tell her. A lot of suspicions, yes, but not many facts. And she is the kind who would demand facts. Of course, we might tell her that Maxwell was stalling; but it would be our word against his, and naturally, being in love with the man" —Sadler choked a bit over the words— "she would believe him.

"We might tell her, too, that Bettincourt is alive; but that, in itself, proves nothing and sounds rather fishy in the bargain. She would probably say that we were mistaken, that it was some other man we saw in Condoto, or that there were two Bettincourts in Colombia. And if we tried to tell her that Gonzales was a crooked cutthroat, she would refuse to believe us, not being acquainted with these Colombian natives.

"No, Lars," Sadler continued; "our cue right now is to keep our mouths closed and use our eyes and ears and brains. Sooner or later we'll stumble onto something that will lead us to the bottom of this mess. And until we do, we'd better keep our own counsel."

"Yes; that's good advice," Lars agreed. He chuckled softly, and his voice was not without anticipation as he added: "Should somebody ask me, I'm thinkin' there's goin' be hot time in de old Choco purty soon now."

CHAPTER XIV.

NO MEN NEEDED.

AT about four o'clock that afternoon, Ralph Maxwell returned from the dredger, went at once to his cottage, changed his clothes, and then strolled down to the Tremaine home. He found Dale seated alone on the porch, idly turning the pages of a magazine. His rubber-soled shoes made no noise on the path, and the girl did not notice his approach. He stood a moment and watched her in silent admiration.

She wore a simple white dress of some soft, clinging material that became her gloriously well. Her black hair, brushed straight back from her forehead, was tinged with copper by the rays of the low-slanting sun. Her deep-blue eyes, the silken texture of her skin, the grace and poise with which she held her head, combined to make a picture that Maxwell would never forget.

He advanced slowly, hesitantly, almost afraid to break the spell that her charm had seemed to create. Then she raised her head and saw him and smiled —a smile that was so exquisite, so filled with radiant happiness that it left him breathless with longing.

"My dear!" he exclaimed reverently. "You're the most beautiful thing I ever saw in my life!"

"Now, now, Ralph!" she chided gently. "Isn't it a little early in the evening for compliments? How did you get along with the work to-day?"

"Oh, very well," Maxwell answered, obviously displeased at changing the subject. "Anything new here?"

"Mr. Gonzales was down for a while this afternoon. He is bringing a boat up the river, to work a concession above ours, and he wanted to find out if we would drop our lines and let him pass. I told him that it would be quite all right."

"Yes, of course. We have to let him pass."

"That's what I thought. I was sure it would be all right with you. It was rather nice of him to come up and ask permission, though, wasn't it?"

Maxwell smiled, a bit wryly. "I'm afraid that's not the only reason he came," he remarked. Oddly, there was more pride than resentment in his tones, as though he were very sure of his own position. "Gonzales would travel a hundred miles to talk to a beautiful woman. By the way, was Sadler around when Gonzales came?" The faint tightening of the muscles about his mouth passed unseen by the girl.

"Yes; Mr. Sadler was here all the time. It seems that they are old acquaintances."

"Old, possibly, but not any too dear," Maxwell commented laconically.

"Why, what do you mean, Ralph? They certainly seemed friendly enough."

"There's quite a bit of hard feeling between them, or so Gonzales gave me to understand a couple of days ago when I happened to mention Sadler to him. I don't know much about it, but they had trouble. I believe he caught Sadler robbing a sluice box. Had to fire the man."

The color ebbed slowly from Dale's cheeks. She stared at Maxwell for a long time, as though striving to read his thoughts, and then dropped her eyes. Her slender hands clasped the arms of her chair until the knuckles showed blue. "I don't believe it," she said very calmly.

Maxwell shrugged carelessly, smiling. "I tell you only what Gonzales told me. And, after all, it isn't particularly important. I understand they plan to leave in a day or two."

"I'm sorry," Dale said slowly. "They're such good dredger men that I wish we could keep them here." Chancing to glance down toward the river, her eyes brightened perceptibly. "Here they are now. They've been taking a little run on the river."

"H'm. Funny!" Maxwell's countenance was suddenly grave. "They've been down the river. Now I wonder why."

"Probably to get a little exercise," Dale answered readily. Quite unconsciously a defensive note had crept into her voice.

Maxwell caught it, and his eyes narrowed, but he made no comment.

"Ralph," the girl began after a moment, as Sadler and Lars started up the path to the house. "why don't we offer them positions with us?"

"We don't need any more men, Dale, until we start operating," Maxwell told her. "And when we're ready to go to work, I plan to go down to San Juan and hire my own crew."

"But Mr. Sadler and Lars are such good men that I should think you'd try to hire them before it is too late," Dale pursued.

The two men under discussion were so near that there was no time for further argument.

"No!" Maxwell said sharply under his breath.

CHAPTER XV.

CAREFUL PLANS.

WHILE Lars went on up the path, Sadler stopped a moment at the porch. The girl flushed almost imperceptibly as Sadler raised his hat to her; he sensed vaguely that he had been a very recent subject of discussion.

"We're leaving in the morning, Miss Tremaine," he said abruptly, wondering why it was that the words came so hard. "I have some business to attend to in San Juan," he added, "and I can't delay any longer."

Dale's eyes dropped before his steady gaze. "Are you sure you're quite recovered?" she asked, fumbling for the words. "You're welcome to stay as long as you wish, you know."

"That's very nice of you, I'm sure; but we're strong enough to make the trip, and I don't like to waste any more time. I want to thank you, too, for being so kind to Lars and me. We certainly appreciate it. If there is anything we can ever do for you, don't fail to call on us. We're pretty well known through the Choco, and you shouldn't have much trouble getting hold of us if you need us."

"Thank you," the girl said with a smile. She glanced quickly at Maxwell, saw that his lips were set in a thin, straight line, and did not again refer to the subject that was uppermost in her mind.

There was a moment's embarrassed silence, broken by the click of the latch; Tremaine opened the door and walked out onto the porch.

"Mr. Sadler and his friend are leaving in the morning, dad," the girl told him.

"Oh, so soon? I'm sorry to see you go, sir. You're certain that you are completely recovered?"

"We're as fit as two fiddles." Sadler smiled. He held out his hand to Tremaine. "We'll be leaving early in the morning, so I probably won't see you again."

He shook hands with Tremaine, thanked him, and apologized for Lars' not dropping in to say good-by, explaining that the Swede had gone over to the Jamaican camp to buy a canoe.

As Sadler turned to Dale he felt the color mount suddenly to his cheeks. "Good-by, Miss Tremaine. I may see you again before long."

Her hand was in his, pressing it with a warm clasp. For an instant his resolution wilted; he felt an impulse to tell Tremaine the whole situation, to tell him that he was not leaving for good, to ask him to take him on the job; but Sadler put down the impulse [illegible]utely. His plans were worked out. He would be a fool to deviate from them just because the friendly pressure of a girl's hand sent thrills coursing down his spine and left him speechless for the moment.

Their gazes met and held; the warm brown eyes of the man looked into the deep-blue eyes of the girl for a space that might have been eternity. The world had sloughed away. For the brief moment of that handclasp they were utterly alone, united by a sense of comradeship, a sudden rush of emotion that was stronger than any material bond.

A sharp, nervous cough from Maxwell shattered the spell. Sadler released the girl's hand almost regretfully, smiling reassuringly into her eyes.

He swung around hurriedly to Maxwell, shook hands, and said: "Adios, old man! See you again some time."

Then, lest they perceive that his whole body was atremble, he turned and hastened down the path toward the *bodega*, where he intended to make a few purchases.

CHAPTER XVI.

FROM AMBUSH.

FOR a time the silence on the porch was unbroken. No one moved.

Then Dale, striving to dispel the air of constraint that had fallen over the three, remarked with an effort at casualness: "I hate to see them go."

"Why?" Maxwell asked promptly.

The girl smiled up at him, quite cognizant of and not wholly displeased with the state of mind that prompted the hasty question. After all, he must love her a very great deal to be so jealous of her.

"Mr. Sadler and Lars are such good hands," Dale answered. "I think we'd be very lucky if we could add them to our crew. Don't you, dad?"

Tremaine nodded absently. Sadler and Lars seemed little better to him than the next men—he had not been on the

river that wild night when they had saved his boat.

"But even if we needed men right now," Tremaine responded, "we don't know that they are looking for work. They have ten thousand dollars in platinum nuggets in the *bodega* safe, and it is quite likely that they want to cash them in and have a good time in town before they settle down to a job again. Men of that type usually do."

"What type, dad?" the girl asked in level tones.

"Oh, these rough adventurers whom one finds kicking around this part of the country."

The girl laughed softly, not without a certain vague disappointment. "One could hardly expect two men who had been months in the mountains, out of touch with civilization, half dead with fever, to look as if they were on their way to an afternoon tea party. They lost everything they had that night they came here, except their guns and their platinum, and they have had no opportunity to buy new clothes. Of course, they look rough; but looks are often only skin deep."

"True enough." Maxwell smiled thinly. "But just the same, I'd like to know where they got that platinum."

"They mined it, up in the Cordilleras," Dale told him steadily.

"Well, more power to them if they did," Maxwell said. "All the platinum in these rivers came down out of the mountains, and if a man were game enough and knew the country he might do better up there at the source of supply than down here. Still——" Maxwell shrugged meaningly.

"Are you insinuating that they might have stolen it?" Dale asked.

"No—not at all. I'm just telling you that I'd want to be mighty certain that they were telling the truth about it before I hired them. A platinum dredger is no place for a man who is not entirely trustworthy."

"But I am positive that they are entirely trustworthy," the girl said warmly.

Maxwell was fast losing his temper. "And I am equally positive that I will not have them on the job!" he flared.

Dale stared at him, a little taken aback, surprised at the color which had mounted to his cheeks. "For no other reason than that you think they may have stolen that platinum?" she persisted after a moment.

"No; I have a very excellent reason for not wanting them here."

"What is it?"

"I'd rather not tell you," Maxwell evaded.

"But I'd rather you would," Dale returned emphatically.

For a moment the superintendent stared straight into the girl's blue eyes. He was thoroughly exasperated now. "Very well," he said, keeping his voice steady with an effort. "As long as you are so insistent, I'll tell you. It is because I don't think they are fit for you to associate with. They have no standing with the right people in this part of the country, their morals are not of the best, and their reputations are very questionable. Since they have been here you have made no effort to keep them in their place. In fact, you have gone out of your way to be friendly with Sadler. If he were a decent sort of a fellow, it would be different; but I happen to know that he is not."

The color had ebbed from Dale's cheeks until they were as white as chalk. Maxwell's insinuation had stunned her, left her bereft alike of words and of the spirit to deny the charge. It had hurt, too, like the lash of a whip.

And Maxwell, who made the old, old mistake of thinking he knew women, could not forbear another and last touch of the lash. "I am sorry to have to make things so plain to you, Dale," he said in his gentlest tones; "but down in this country decent people will have

nothing to do with a man who's such an utter scoundrel as Sadler is."

The girl leaped to her feet, her eyes flashing with humiliation and anger. "Oh! You beast!" she cried passionately.

Maxwell stepped back a pace, thoroughly aghast. Dale swept him with one contemptuous glance and then fled into the house. The superintendent watched the door close sharply behind her. Then he turned to Tremaine with a slow shake of his head.

"Great heavens!" he said in amazement. "One would think that it was I who had done wrong instead of that lowbred soldier of fortune!"

The white head of the old man moved slowly from side to side. He, too, was apparently quite bewildered by his daughter's sudden burst of temper.

"Women are hard to understand, Maxwell. Frankly, I think she liked young Sadler rather well. I suppose it was rather a blow to her to find out that he was no good, and she took it out on the first man who was handy." He laughed quietly, knowingly. "Give her a day or two, Maxwell, and she'll come out of it all right. They always do."

"Yes; I suppose she will," Maxwell said. "Still I don't see that I have committed any unpardonable sin." He shrugged wearily. "Oh, well, I've got to drop down the river and see Gonzales now. Have to make arrangements for getting his boat past ours to-morrow. You needn't wait dinner for me. Good evening, sir."

The superintendent of the Tremaine dredger found Gonzales eating his dinner in a tent pitched on the river bank. For various reasons, the most important of which was Dale Tremaine, there was little love lost between these two men. Their conversation was brief and to the point; oddly enough, it contained no reference to the "arrangements" Maxwell had mentioned to his employer.

"Those two meddlers are leaving for San Juan in the morning," Maxwell said abruptly.

"Well?" Gonzales' black eyes regarded him with a complacent, questioning smile.

"They were down here to-day, weren't they?"

"Yes."

"And they used their eyes and very likely their heads?"

"I'm afraid they did, Maxwell."

"Well, they will carry ten thousand dollars in platinum with them when they start down the river in the morning. A word to your men—a little ambush——"

"An excellent idea!" Gonzales interrupted him enthusiastically. "Excellent! Do you know what time they plan to leave?"

"Probably some time after daylight," Maxwell replied.

"Thank you for the information." Gonzales bowed. "You can trust me to make the most of it." The Spaniard chuckled softly, his piercing black eyes on Maxwell. "After all, you and I can work together on some things, can't we?"

"On some things, yes," the superintendent returned coldly; "but there are certain other things, or persons, that I would advise you——" Maxwell broke off, shrugging.

"Yes; go on," Gonzales said with a cool smile. "I'm always ready to listen to advice. Of course, I don't always heed it. But——"

"I think you understand me well enough," Maxwell interrupted, a sinister gleam in his cool blue eyes. "Anyway—— Oh, well, adios!"

Maxwell strode out of the tent and down to his canoe. Although not entirely pleased with his visit, his displeasure was not occasioned by any pangs of conscience. For, as he told himself again and again during the trip up the river, all was fair in love and war—in the Choco.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN A MAZE OF INTRIGUE.

AS he made his way down the path to the *bodega*, the camp store, Jack Sadler's head was whirling dizzily. Some vital change had come over him during that brief moment when he had held Dale Tremaine's small hand in his own. Or was it a change? Well, hardly; rather, it was the conscious culmination of certain emotions which had been growing stronger and stronger in his heart ever since the day when he had awakened from his delirium and gazed up for the first time into Dale's clear blue eyes.

There was not time to analyze these emotions, even had his head been clear enough; but he had a suspicion, an awesome, terrible suspicion, that he had fallen in love with Dale Tremaine. And he was afraid, more thoroughly frightened than he had ever been in his life before. He could face natives who plotted to kill him, he could stand the fever, unasked he could hurl himself against the most powerful mining corporation in South America. But love! Well, it was a strange sensation and not a pleasant one, either.

He wished vaguely that the eddy in the Capistrano had not drifted their canoe against the bank that night. He might have been able to fight off those natives, he might even have kept his wits about him until their dugout drifted down to San Juan. But love!

Sadler found Doc Pailthorpe, the diminutive Englishman, in charge of the *bodega*. After making several purchases in preparation for the trip on the morrow, Sadler withdrew the buckskin bag of platinum nuggets from the safe.

"Leaving, old chap?" Pailthorpe asked gravely.

"Yes; we're pulling out in the morning. We're quite fit, and we can't waste any more time."

"H'm. Sorry to see you go." The Englishman's pale eyes were vaguely appealing as he gazed at Sadler.

"Sorry?"

"I'd hoped you and Lars would stay. Tremaine needs you. Miss Dale needs you."

"I don't believe I understand, Pailthorpe. Just in what way do they need us?"

The Englishman smiled and flashed Sadler a knowing look. "You aren't as badly dense as you try to make out, old chap. You've been using your eyes while you've been here. And I guess you've seen that certain things are going on around here; eh, what?"

"What things, for instance?" Sadler pursued quietly.

"Well, they're rather hard to explain if you haven't seen them yourself; but it seems that there's dirty work at the crossroads, as your American playwrights would say. However, I'm only the storekeeper here and what goes on outside of the *bodega* is not my affair. Only I'm bally well sorry to see you two fellows pull out."

Sadler realized, without further conversation with the little Englishman, that the man had either told him all he knew or, knowing more, intended to keep his own counsel. It was useless to try to draw him out further. Sadler was gratified to know, however, that Pailthorpe was not on the inside of the ring and that in the event of future trouble he could doubtlessly be relied on as an ally.

"Well, we're leaving in the morning," Sadler remarked, walking toward the door; "but I wouldn't be at all surprised if you'd see us back here before long. Adios!"

"So long, old chap."

It was after they had their dinner in the mess hall and were packing up the few belongings they had acquired at the Tremaine camp that Sadler turned suddenly to the Swede. "Lars, we'll leave

here about midnight to-night. We're not going to take any chances by waiting until morning."

"You seen Maxwell go downriver, too?" Lars grinned.

"He was just shoving off when I came out of the *bodega* before dinner. You've got it figured about the same as I have, haven't you?"

Lars nodded thoughtfully. "Mebbe it's all right—mebbe not. But I don't think we better take any chances. A tip to Gonzales and, by yiminy, that's the end of us. I don't trust that faller Maxwell."

"You and I together, Lars. I've got a pretty strong hunch that he is working hand and glove with the Choco Metals crowd. Either that, or he's all kinds of a fool, and I rather incline to the former hypothesis, don't you?"

"Well, I don't know much about them hypo things," Lars said, grinning, "but I guess you're right, by yiminy. Now suppose we turn in and get liddle sleep. We've got hard trip in front of us."

"Good idea, Lars; but I don't believe I'll sleep much. That dredger Gonzales is bringing up the river worries me a lot. Can't seem to understand his game. If it were a real dredger that he could work, I'd say he was going to try to steal some of Tremaine's ground; but he can't do any dredging with that boat. So why in the name of common sense is he bringing it up the river?"

"Mebbe we better sleep a while on it," Lars said. "That's purty hard problem. Well, here goes!" The Swede rolled into bed and said no more.

Sadler turned out the light and lay down, knowing that he should get some rest before the hard trip down the river, but realizing at the same time that his mind was far too active for sleep. The problem of Gonzales' dredger alone was enough to keep him awake, to say nothing of Maxwell's intentional delaying of the work, Bettincourt's framed-up drowning, the maze of intrigue into which Tremaine had been unwittingly hurled.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TEN TO ONE.

WHEN his watch told him that it was midnight, Sadler was still wide awake. However, as he slipped out of his bed and crossed the room to awaken Lars, there was a certain confidence about his movements and his bearing that showed that his long hours of thought had not been fruitless. He shook the great form of the Swede.

"Lars, Lars!" he whispered. "Wake up, old man! I've got it!"

Lars rolled over, wide awake in an instant. "Glad to hear it," he answered. "What you got?"

"Oh, you old ruffian!" Sadler exclaimed in an impatient whisper. "What do you think I've got? I've solved that riddle, of course!"

"The dredger?"

"Yes! But come on and get into your clothes. I'd rather not talk too much around here. One never can tell, you know. And don't try to turn on the light. We're leaving in the dark, and as quietly as possible."

Ten minutes later they were on the river, had found the canoe Lars had purchased, and were embarked. Their *palancas* moved rhythmically, cutting the oily, black water in silence, driving the light dugout down the river. Some distance below the Tremaine camp, they swung around a bend and came suddenly upon Gonzales' dredger, not more than two hundred yards away.

Lars cursed sharply. The dredger was under way, the grinding of its winches clearly audible. It was lighted, too, with more than the ordinary number of lights; there were so many that the river was illumined faintly from bank to bank.

"He has more brains than I gave him credit for!" Sadler exclaimed. "He must have figured that we were suspi-

cious and would try to pull out during the night. Those extra lights have been rigged since we were down here yesterday. Well, I guess it's a case of run for it and take our chances. It's ten to one that they'll open fire on us, but it's also ten to one that they won't hit us. The boat is on the west side of the river, in the channel. We'll drop down along the east side, close to shore, and as soon as we get in the light we'll make a quick dash. Are you game, Lars?"

Lars laid down his *palanca* very deliberately. "No; Ay an't ban game," he growled tersely. "Ay an't ban goin' mak' no quick dash."

Sadler started, hardly crediting his ears. In all the years that he had known Lars, he had never seen him show the white feather before. Lars afraid to face the guns of a few natives in practical darkness! If it had been daytime he would hardly have blamed him; but in that faint light—well, it was incredible!

"Shall we go back?" Sadler asked sharply.

"No! Ve skol not go back!" Lars answered.

"Then what shall we do?"

Lars cursed softly in Swedish. When his feelings had been thus relieved, he pointed ahead toward the dredger. "You ban seeing dem lines?" he queried.

Sadler peered ahead through the darkness and suddenly caught his breath. The steel cables by which the boat was being warped up the river ordinarily ran from the deadmen on the bank to heavy sheaves ten feet or more above the deck and thence to the winches in the winch room.

Usually the cables, which ran to either bank, were high enough above the river to permit a small boat to pass under them. Now, however, Sadler saw that additional sheaves had been fitted close to the water-line of the dredger. The lines, instead of being well above the water, were so close to it as to make the passage of a boat impossible.

Sadler drove his *palanca* into the bottom and brought the canoe to a stop.

"I understand a little better now, Lars," he said apologetically. "At first I thought you were afraid."

"You tank Ay ben 'fraid of dem native faller? Huh! In 'bout five minoot Ay ban goin' pull few of dem faller to pieces to see what mak' dem run, by yiminy!"

"There's no use picking a fight with them, Lars," Sadler cautioned hastily. "We're outnumbered ten to one and it would just give Gonzales an excuse to kill us."

"But they ban goin' drop t'ose lines an' let us t'rough or I'm goin' raise plenty hal!" Lars declared steadfastly.

"Now just a minute, Lars," Sadler said. "Let's think this thing out. There must be some way. Wait! I've got it! Suppose we creep along the east bank as far as we can and then land. We'll find three or four bank men in charge of that port headline. We'll pull our guns on them and force them to drop the line. Then we'll march them up the river, make them get in our canoe and pole us down past the dredger. If we work it right, we'll be past the boat and have the natives chucked into the river before Gonzales knows what has happened. And even if it does dawn on him, he won't dare to shoot for fear of hitting his own men."

"By yiminy, Yack, you ban bright faller!" Lars exclaimed with enthusiasm. "Come on."

Swinging their dugout into the east bank, where it was invisible in the shadows of the heavy foliage which overhung the stream, they poled a short distance farther down and then landed. Fortunately the undergrowth had been cleared to some extent here, to make way for the bank men who handled the dredger's lines, and the two men could make their way in comparative silence.

They had just stepped out on the bank when Sadler grasped the Swede's arm.

"It may be lucky for us that we couldn't make a dash for it," he whispered. "See those men on the boat?"

Lars stared down the river. He made no sound, but his great body began suddenly to tremble with anger as he perceived three natives seated in the shadows of the superstructure of the dredger, rifles resting across their knees.

Lars and Sadler moved slowly now, creeping forward through the high grass. Occasionally they heard the sound of voices below them, and at last they made out four natives, lazily engaged in the task of burying a deadman, on which the boat's lines would be fastened for its next step ahead. They crept as close as they dared.

"Now!" Sadler whispered.

As one man, he and Lars leaped forward with drawn revolvers. They were on the natives before the men realized what had happened.

"Get your hands up!" Sadler ordered tersely in Spanish.

The natives complied with alacrity, thoroughly surprised.

"See if they have any guns on them, Lars. If they have, throw the guns into the river."

Larson ran a rough hand over each of the half-clothed, barefooted workmen; the Swede growled vague threats that would have struck fear into the hearts of most any men. He found no weapons save a machete, which he calmly tossed into the river.

"Now you men get down there and cast off that headline," Sadler ordered. "Quick, now! Unless you want to feel some hot lead between your ribs!"

The natives needed no urging. They scurried down the river to the deadman on which the dredge was moored and fell to work. A moment later the heavy cable slid off into the water.

"This way now! Quick!" Sadler commanded, and herded the men back up the river to the canoe.

They embarked swiftly. Thrusting *palancas* into the hands of the natives, Sadler bade them pole downstream as though a thousand devils were after them. They had just got under way when they heard a lusty hail from the dredger.

Sadler thrust his gun against the ribs of one of the natives. "Call back to them and tell them the line carried away," he ordered. And then, as the man hesitated, he added: "Hurry, or I'll have to kill you where you stand!"

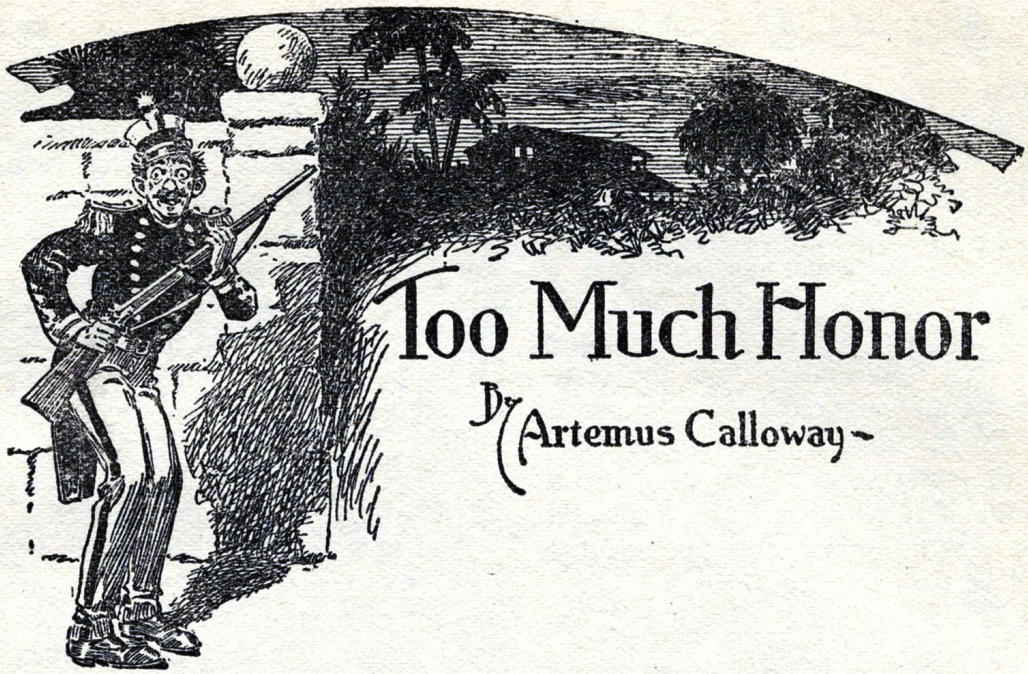
The native obeyed, bellowing the message to the dredger in a great voice. The canoe gathered headway, swept swiftly into the circle of light about the dredger. For a brief while they moved unchallenged. Then the men on the boat awoke suddenly to life. There was a scurrying about the deck, excited shouting, men appeared as if by magic —and then the white-clad form of Gonzales emerged from the winch room.

"Took 'em by surprise, didn't we?" Sadler grinned at Lars. "By the time they wake up and start after us, we'll be half a mile down the river."

Unfortunately, however, Sadler had underestimated the ruthless nature of José Gonzales. The canoe was directly opposite the dredger and distant less than a hundred feet when they heard the Spaniard shout an order. A half dozen rifles in the hands of as many men leaped up.

"He's going to risk the lives of his own men by shooting at us!" Sadler cried.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out June 15th.



Too Much Honor

By Artemus Calloway

CHAPTER I.

THE MIGHTY WARRIOR.

IT was true that Soldado Antonio Cordoba felt an overwhelming desire to wring the neck of the woman he loved. Had she been his wife instead of fiancée, the desire might have won. She was, however, only the girl who had promised to marry him some day, and Antonio felt a certain hesitancy in engaging in such a delightful pastime as marriage so long as there might be a question as to his legal rights in the matter.

"You should not interfere with my affairs!" he howled. "We are not yet married, and——"

"We may not be married at all," Dolores Trevino interrupted him. "If you have not the sense to see that I, my family, and friends seek only honor for you, I——"

"Your family and friends are fools! Honor—to me—is nothing. I have no desire to be shot in order to obtain honor."

"You will not be shot," Dolores said, soothingly. "You will only protect the noble commandante from that bloodthirsty villain Santiago Velasco who seeks to slay him."

"And who," Antonio wanted to know in a loud voice, "will protect *me?*"

"You need no protection. You——"

"So that is it?" The soldier spoke shrilly. "*I* need no protection? You care not what happens to me."

"But I would care. I would weep on your grave."

"Say no more!" roared Antonio. "If you think I enjoy your talk of weeping on my grave you have as little sense as your actions indicate."

"But you do not understand the whole of this, and——"

"I have no desire to understand even part."

"But listen. Now you are only a private in the army of Yorando, so——"

"And if I listen to you I will be a fool who has ceased to live. Woman"—he glared at her—"the more you talk the less I like to hear you."

She frowned slightly. "You are unappreciative. My plan is simple. You are merely to guard the commandante, and when Santiago comes to slay——"

"Let him kill the fool," Antonio took

up the theme, "and I'll look out for myself."

"You will not. You will kill or capture Santiago, and be made sergeant. Then we will marry. You know what it would mean, Antonio, for you to be a sergeant. It is fortunate that once my father did the noble commandante a favor, and, also, fortunate that my father learned Santiago was coming here. He immediately told the commandante and suggested that you guard him. Never have your people or mine been of importance. With us, to be a sergeant is as great as being a general would be with others. And perhaps that would be only the beginning."

"It is the beginning of the end for me! Santiago is a killer."

"And so can you be. Then will come honor, and I will be the wife of an officer—not the wife of a barefooted laborer or private soldier. Always has my father been nothing more than a fruit cutter on the plantations. Never have you been more than one who helps load the fruit steamers of the gringo company, or just a soldier in the ranks of the army. Always have I seen for you possibilities in the army, and when you enlisted as a regular I was happy, knowing that your opportunity would come. Being a regular is much better than just being a soldier ninety days each year because of the law; when one has sense, he——"

"If I had sense," muttered Antonio, "I would have left here before this fool idea was born in your head."

She stiffened. "If it is that you do not love me, I——"

"But I do! I was only excited."

She read the truth in his face; knew that he did care a great deal, and because she cared he could forgive much. Then you will do as I say. And it is not for myself alone that I want to see you a sergeant. It is for you. It will give you standing. You will be able to wear shoes all the time, and so will I. And people who do not notice you now will be glad then to claim you as a friend."

Antonio knew that Dolores was speaking truth. He knew that in the army of this little Central American republic a sergeant was of much more importance than in many other countries. And he was as anxious for the honor as the girl; but, being the one called on to face the danger, he realized the difficulties in his path. Santiago Velasco was no gentle creature. He was fully as bad as his brother, bandit and revolutionist, who had only a short time before been captured by the commandante's men.

And now Santiago had sworn vengeance; was coming to Puerto Arturo to slay the commandante. This much Antonio knew. He felt that further information would be his before the affair ended.

"It has to be handled quietly," the girl told him. "The secret service informs the commandante that there is danger of a revolution. Santiago Velasco is very popular with some people. Many liked his brother. Should these people know that he is likely to get in trouble when he comes, they might do many things. So the commandante cannot send forth the men at the barracks to capture him, nor can he place a number of guards. That would give the whole thing away.

"Always, though," Dolores went on, "he has a special guard of honor at his home at night. You are now to be that guard. You will be released from further duties. All you will do is report at his office each afternoon at four o'clock, and escort him home, and remain outside until eight o'clock the following morning."

"While he remains inside—safe!"

"Yes. And Santiago will come. Your rifle will fire."

"And miss him," commented Antonio bitterly, "and he will be upon me with knife and gun."

For several seconds they gazed out across the coconut-dotted plaza at the

beach where the restless waves lapped hungrily at the sands. Antonio wished that he might be on one of the sailboats anchored a short distance from shore, with the command already given to up anchor and away. He envied every one and everything he saw, even to the homeless dogs fighting over a bone alongside the Hotel International. The shrieking of a locomotive whistle as it carried a well-filled train of bananas out onto the dock for loading on a New Orleans steamer caused him to jump.

Dolores broke the silence. "I go now. I see the sergeant approaching to assign you to your new duties. He knows nothing of this. The commandante told my father when he realized the danger and they decided what was to be done. And I think no less of you, Antonio, for disliking this task. I realize that you do not understand all it means. You will be covered with glory."

"I will be covered with dirt."

"But no. You are a brave man, Antonio. It is only that you have not been tried that you hesitate. I know you are brave because I could love only such a man—and I love you. Some day you will thank my father and me for what we have done."

CHAPTER II.

NO LESS THAN SERGEANT.

SOON after Dolores had left Antonio, the sergeant came and officially assigned him his new duties.

"I envy you," the sergeant, in his great ignorance, told Antonio. "It is a great honor, this which is being shown you. You should be thankful that our noble Colonel Mateo Cabrera is indeed a soldado who believes in having a guard of honor at his house, and that you are to be that guard."

It was shortly after eight o'clock that evening that the colonel called Antonio to him. "You understand why you are here. The sergeant does not; so I will show you the manner in which you are to guard."

He took Antonio to the rear of the house, and pointed into the darkness. "There is a high wall there, and two very fierce dogs. Santiago Velasco will not come that way. It is the front you are to guard."

Colonel Cabrera mopped a moist brow. "It is very warm these night, so I leave the front door open. You will remain in front of that, and see that he does not enter."

"You sleep on the first floor?"

The colonel shook his head. 'No—on the second. There will be no one except you down here. And be careful. Some time soon he will come. Of that I am sure. And he will come at night. It is only because you have been so highly recommended that the honor of meeting him is to be yours. And I shall reward. I have so promised the man who is to be your father-in-law, and I always keep my word. Once you have settled Santiago Velasco, no less than a sergeant shall you be!"

Antonio took his post, much disturbed in mind. At last the sounds within the house told him that the commandante and his family had retired. This was what Antonio had been waiting for. He felt that he could remain still no longer. He must walk. He would pace the veranda. And then came the thought that the colonel would hear. He must wait.

Midnight came and Antonio felt it safe to pace. He paced. The wind rustling through the coconut trees surrounding the house made him jerky. The booming of the waves on the beach away across town eased his nerves not one bit. From down the street came the screechy song of a cheap phonograph. Somewhere a woman laughed. Antonio swore. He could not understand any one's laughing at such a time.

Once his heart came near ceasing to beat. A man stopped midway in the

block, eyed the house intently for a moment, and then turned and walked rapidly away. Antonio eased to the door and peered down a long, wide hall. He remembered having noticed a large closet on one side of this hall. The closet struck him as being a good place for a frightened guard should trouble arise.

CHAPTER III.

FROM A WINDOW.

THE night was a terrible one, and Antonio was truly thankful when it came to an end. The commandante eyed him sharply when he came down. "Did I not hear you walking?"

Antonio went weak all over. "Si, Señor Colonel. I thought I saw some one, and thought best to walk back and forth a bit."

Colonel Cabrera stroked his black mustache. "Perhaps that is better. You will be near the door all the time, and can see in all directions."

Antonio was nervous during the walk from the commandante's house to the barracks. He started as he saw a man peering from a cantina window. It helped not one bit when another man stopped on a corner and watched them pass.

These men, Antonio believed, were friends of Santiago, spying out the lay of the land, and about the first thing they would do once their plans were made would be to shoot him, Antonio. Right then the commandante came near being deserted.

He was glad when the commandante was in his office, and he was free to go. Guarding the colonel now would be the duty of the soldiers at the barracks, none of whom had heard of Santiago's threat, and whose watchful care would be in the general line of duty.

Antonio slept little that day, and at last left his house with a bright idea. He would find a friend he knew he could trust—to a certain extent—and persuade this friend to go to the commandante with bad reports concerning Antonio. Once the commandante should get this information he would most certainly ask for another, and different, guard.

Antonio found the friend, secured the promise of his help, and breathed easier. The gallant lover of Dolores showed up at the barracks at the appointed time, fully expecting to be cursed out and sent to loaf with the other soldiers; but not so. The commandante was smiling when they started home, and once there he broke the news to Antonio.

"There came to me to-day a terrible liar," the commandante said. "He told some queer things about you."

"Si, colonel?"

Colonel Cabrera laughed. "He is now in prison, where he will remain for a week to think the matter over. I cannot allow a man who would slander my guard to remain unpunished. I have heard so much good about you that I cannot believe such lies."

Antonio's brown skin became ashen. He could not escape from this danger, and in attempting to do so he had got a friend into trouble. Of course, the friend would be liberated soon; but Antonio really regretted that he should suffer even temporary discomfort. However, he would manage in some way to make amends.

It was near midnight when his first big fright came. Something moved under the house. One of the dogs at the rear barked. Antonio's eyes came near popping from trembling sockets. He tried to raise his gun, and found this well-nigh impossible.

Then there came another noise. Antonio started to run—and could not. The moving thing was under the veranda now. Suddenly the shuddering soldier was conscious of the most terrifying racket he had ever heard. It was fully half a minute before Antonio realized that the terrific yowling and

spitting was nothing more nor less than a cat fight.

At last the fight was over, and Antonio's nerves became somewhat quieted. He paced back and forth.

Toward morning the moon rose, for which he was thankful—until he saw a man skulking under the trees. Antonio drew as near the wall as possible, and prayed for the best, feeling sure that the worst had arrived.

Eventually, however, the skulker disappeared, and soon daylight came. After another walk to the office with the precious commandante, again Antonio was free; but that morning he saw three men watching instead of two as on the previous day. He hurried to the home of Dolores.

"I hear good news of you," she told him; "the people say you look fine as guard of honor to the commandante. Of course, they do not realize how brave you really are."

"That is enough," Antonio told her sternly.

"But there is more. My father says it is almost certain that Santiago Velasco will come soon!"

"Soon? Why——" The words died in Antonio's throat.

"Yes. And you will get him! Then you'll be a sergeant, and we will be married."

Antonio lingered not long after that.

CHAPTER IV.

WITH A CRASH.

THE third night of Antonio's torture came at last. Never before, it seemed to him, had there been so many and such terrifying night noises. Once he came near leaving the earth when a prowling dog leaped a fence across the street. He choked when the dogs behind the commandante's house, hearing this one, let up a roar, and tried to get to him. A night bird flew along overhead, crying shrilly, and caused Antonio's hair to stand on end. Twice some one walked past.

All things, however, must come to an end. Darkness gave way to light, and again it was day.

Toward noon the father of Dolores came to Antonio. "Soon," the old man said exultantly, "you will have your chance."

"What?"

"Si. I have heard that Santiago Velasco was seen in a village near here only yesterday, and I heard that he swears he will kill the commandante as he sleeps."

"I—ah——"

"And you will be a hero!"

"I will be dead."

"Nonsense! I am going to be very proud of my son-in-law."

A sudden suspicion entered Antonio's brain. "Is it that you would have your daughter wed another, and desire to have me killed?"

"You talk"—there was pain in the old man's tone—"foolishly, my son. It is only that I love you."

"You have a poor way of showing your love!" cried Antonio. "If I loved one I would not place him where he is to be shot, and then have his throat cut."

"You are excited. You will get over that." The old man turned and walked away.

He left Antonio thinking. Antonio was not going to remain there to be killed. He would desert. That was what he would do. He could be well on the way before he was missed. And then he knew that he did not dare desert. He had witnessed the punishment of recaptured deserters. It was no pleasant thing. No, he would remain—and die. Perhaps, when he was no more, Dolores would regret her cruelty to him.

However, that night as he paced the veranda he felt strangely alone and afraid. In every shadow there was an enemy. He thought more of deserting.

Once he thought he heard something move behind the house, and wondered why the dogs made no noise. A little later he could have sworn that he heard a window raised gently.

He eased to the edge of the veranda, and again he saw a man moving along under the trees. He whirled, and there was another, crawling on hands and knees—toward the house.

That settled it. Antonio forgot Dolores. He forgot what it meant to desert. He forgot everything except that danger was near and he was going from the place.

He dropped his gun with a crash and hit the street running. At the corner he came to a sudden stop. A man stepped from behind a little house and spoke to him. Antonio thought dazedly that he had seen him running and had hurried to head him off. Hardly knowing which way he was headed, Antonio wheeled and was again running toward the commandante's house. And there in front he stopped again, but only for an instant. A man was running swiftly toward him. He glanced behind; the other was near.

A wild squawk escaped Antonio's lips. He darted onto the veranda, and then into the wide hallway—and remembered the closet. A second later he was inside.

Then there arose a noise that made the cat fight of the night before sound as nothing. Antonio had jumped on something in that closet, and that something was alive; more, it was fighting. Antonio fought back. They bit; they swore; they hammered with fists; they kicked; they butted with heads—and at last rolled out of the closet into the hall, and continued to fight.

In a few seconds they were on their feet. Antonio jerked loose and struck. The enemy went down.

The soldier felt a touch on his shoulder, and he turned fighting. There burst from the lips of the second man before him an oath as Antonio's fist caught him in the chest. This man, like the one in the closet, was willing to strike.

Fight number two was under way. They locked in tight embrace, paraded the hall, and crashed to the floor.

From upstairs came the shrieks of a woman, and the wild yells of the commandante. Away off somewhere policemen, hearing the noise, blew shrilly on their whistles, and waited patiently for some one else to go to the scene of the trouble.

There came a roar as Antonio's teeth closed on the thumb of his second antagonist. The roar was followed by a wild yell for mercy.

Then Antonio felt other arms about him; a fist caught him on the side of the jaw, and he tumbled over, unconscious.

CHAPTER V.

AH, BRAVE MAN!

IT was perhaps five minutes before Antonio opened his eyes. A flash light was glaring in his face, and over him stood the commandante and four other men.

The commandante was smiling. "These"—the commandante indicated the men beside him—"are secret-service men. The one whose thumb you chewed is also a secret-service man. It was dark, and you jumped on him through mistake. I did not tell you that while you guarded me in order to get Santiago Velasco in the event he gained the house, that these men were watching to see that he did not get here; but he slipped past them, and poisoned my dogs, raised a rear window—and was hiding in the closet. Soon he would have stolen upstairs to slay me. You, brave man that you are, prevented this tragedy!"

Slowly, very slowly, Antonio comprehended. These were the men he had seen slipping about the house, watching on the street; the men that had fright-

ened him. He hoped they would not inquire into his reasons for running.

His fears as to this were soon quieted. Evidently, in the excitement, his strange behavior had been forgotten, or it may have been attributed to the eccentricities of a brave man.

The commandante was speaking again. "Santiago Velasco is securely tied, and ready to go to prison. There will be no further trouble from him. And you shall have your reward. You will be a sergeant. I am sure you will understand why I did not tell you about the secret-service men. You see, it is not always well to tell too much."

Antonio in that instant became the man Dolores wanted him to be. No longer was he timid and afraid. He was an officer—a man of importance. He now had almost too much honor. He puffed out his chest. "No, Señor Commandante; I, Antonio Cordoba, undoer of the wicked, do not have to be told anything!"

Antonio smiled benevolently as he added: "I know for myself all that is necessary."

WHEN ROMANCE FALLS

By Jo Lemon

COULD the furs but talk, what a tale they'd tell
Of the life they used to know,
In the cold clean land where their brothers dwell,
Till the man pack laid them low!

Up the winding trails go the trapper hosts
Of the French and breed and Cree,
From the far-flung line of the trading posts
To the Northland wild and free;
Where the wolf pack howls in the winter night
On the wastes of ice and snow,
And the ghost world hangs in the eerie light,
And the pallid moon swings low.

Down the winding trails come the killer bands
Of the French and breed and Cree,
With the dripping skins in their bloody hands
Of the things that once were free;
And the romance falls from the men who slay
As a growing pity stirs—
But the fashion calls, and they must obey,
So my lady wears her furs.

Could the furs but talk, what a tale they'd tell
Of the life they used to know,
In the cold clean land where their brothers dwell,
Till the man pack laid them low!

The Rise of Setting Sun

By Tom S. Elrod

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

A MODERN PIONEER.

IN their infinite wisdom, some historians have woven about the Middle-Western pioneers the glamour of romance. Perhaps the history of most early settlements has justified this attitude, but in the case of Setting Sun it was stern reality, rather than romance, that brought the settlement into existence.

Dave Barbour had led a little band from North Carolina across Kentucky, and somehow the Ohio River had been negotiated. They had pushed on to the north, complaints increasing from the footsore and weary. On that October evening in 1812, when the maples, oaks, and hickories were flaming in their autumn glory, Dave piloted the party to the bank of a stream.

"Th' sun's a-settin'," Dave announced. "Let's 'light an' eat."

They alighted and ate. Around a camp fire that night a vote was taken, and the majority favored remaining right where they were. Water there was in plenty, and timber grew all around them. As they had arrived when the sun was setting, they named the place Setting Sun.

The years that passed had been no kinder, no more unkind, than the same years had been to many another community, founded in much the same way. When the State came in and was organized, Setting Sun became a county seat, and a rude courthouse was constructed. Dave Barbour went the way of all flesh, but there was a son who bore his name.

Generation followed generation. Various industries came, some to flourish and grow too big for the community that had nourished them, others to wither and become memories.

Setting Sun became a city. According to the law whereby cities were classified, and told the form of government they must adopt, Setting Sun was included as a city of the fifth class. Something of the feeling of the citizens may be sensed when it is realized that they did not protest—did not demand a step up.

Again, when the Federal census counted five thousand three hundred and forty-six heads in Setting Sun, there was no movement for a recount; no clamor that the city had a population of at least ten thousand.

Down the line, somewhere, there had been another Dave Barbour. He was eligible to join the Society of Pioneers, but the wanderlust that drove the original Dave through the wilderness to the north, reached down and touched him. As he had played with the little boys of his own age, and sometimes with the little girls, he had been a cowboy, riding over the great prairies. One day he and Ruth Derby had taken some cookies and started for parts unknown, but she was afraid of the dark, and he had to bring her back.

Dave and Ruth wrote notes to each other in the eighth grade. They became conscious that they were members of the great families of boyhood and girlhood when they went through high school together. This knowledge both drove them apart and drew them together. There was a certain shyness between them; also a great and nameless longing.

At the senior picnic in Howland's Woods, the day after commencement, Dave and Ruth trailed off together and sat on a fallen monarch, commonly called a log.

"What are you going to do, Dave, now that you've graduated?" Ruth asked, as she chewed a stem of grass.

"I don't know," Dave replied, something vague and uneasy in his answer. "I can get a job clerkin' in the drug store, and there's a chance to work in the sawmill, but, shucks, I'm getting tired of this old place! What are you goin' to do?"

"Oh, I don't know, either." Ruth pulled more grass and bit off the tender stems. "Maybe I'll go to college next fall."

"Yes; and get stuck on some college fellow just because he has good clothes to wear."

"Do you think I'd forget you, Dave?"

"I ain't so sure about that," Dave replied.

They heard voices coming in their direction. Dave reached over and took Ruth's hand. He was sixteen, and she was a year younger.

"Here's something you needn't forget," said Dave as he suddenly drew her to him and kissed her.

Ruth jumped to her feet, her face flaming. The voices were closer now. Their classmates would find them in a moment. Then she leaned toward Dave, who still occupied the log, a little doubtful now about the propriety of his recent salute.

"If you don't want me to," she whispered. "I'll—I'll never forget it."

Next week Dave hopped a freight train and left for parts unknown. He was unconscious of the fact that he, too, was pioneering. Joe Temple, who saw him leave, predicted that he would turn out to be a tramp. The spirit of adventure did not burn in Joe's breast. The greatest excitement in his life had been a journey to Benton Harbor on a dollar excursion and sleeping on a stranger's shoulder most of the way home.

Chicago did not send out a reception committee to meet Dave Barbour and present him with a key to the city. However, Dave did not need a key. The door evidently had been left unlocked. The city awed him with its speed, bulk, and magnificence, but he fought back with the valor of a country boy who deals his hardest blows to save his pride.

As the original Dave had looked upon the tallest tree as something to bring crashing down, so the modern Dave sized up the tallest building within sight and bore down upon it, determined to prove the truth of the assertion that the bigger they are, the harder they

fall. He decided to begin at the top and work down.

An express elevator whirled him to the eighteenth floor and there, before his somewhat startled gaze, he saw a door upon which was lettered the announcement that The Eclipse Advertising Agency, Inc., was to be found within.

Dave knew about advertisements. He had read them in the Setting Sun *Enterprise*. They told that John Matthews was a dealer in staple and fancy groceries, canned goods a specialty; or that Gus Pugh had the largest assortment of patent medicines in town; or that Henry Porter's Mammoth Bee Hive was the place for bargains—"If we please you, tell others; if we don't please you, tell us."

Therefore, Dave opened the Eclipse agency's door and encountered Nathan Kirchman, who was preparing to entertain a stroke of apoplexy for the reason that the office boy's grandmother had died that afternoon for the sixth time, and the boy had gone to attend the funeral, which apparently was being held at the White Sox park. Kirchman was president of the Eclipse agency, and when no office boy had answered, although he had flattened his thumb against the buzzer button repeatedly, he had come charging through the office and run into Dave. Opportunity had not knocked at Dave's door; rather had Opportunity opened the door, and invited Dave to step in.

All that the boy knew about the art of obtaining employment was to ask for it. That was the way they did in Setting Sun. So he demanded a job at once, and as the regular office boy was absent without leave, Dave Barbour got his place.

"Take this proof to Johnson Brothers as soon as you can get it there and wait for corrections," Kirchman instructed him. "Then hurry back here, and I'll have something else for you to do."

Thus Dave Barbour became an advertising man.

CHAPTER II.

TAKING A CHANCE.

EVENTUALLY Dave Barbour reached the place where his copy forced millions of people to brush their teeth with a certain kind of brush; where jaded appetites were tempted solely because of the alluring things he wrote about baking powder. He toyed with qualifying words as if they had been taught to obey him from infancy. Advertising experts spoke of him in awe, as one of the hignest-paid copy writers in the country.

Meanwhile, what of Setting Sun?

Dave had not gone back. His father and mother had died when he was little, and the aunt, with whom he lived as a high-school student, had followed them to Garland Brook cemetery a year after he ran away. Of course, he had sent a picture postal to Ruth, and occasionally he wrote her a note. Pete Fleming came up to see him one day, after visiting the stockyards and Lincoln Park.

"How is the old town?" Dave wanted to know.

"Well, she ain't the burg she used to be, and she never was!" Pete exclaimed. "Seems like she ain't got no pep. Some of them towns, down around there, have been lookin' up a right smart. They've been gettin' factories, an' organizin' an' doin' things like that, but you know how Settin' Sun always was. There's a lot o' old mossbacks down there that don't know what progress means. Start out t' raise money for a band concert, an' they won't give a dime unless you promise to have the band play in front o' their stores. We tried t' put on a Chautauqua an' couldn't sell enough tickets t' meet the guarantee. Durned if I don't believe Settin' Sun's dead and don't know it!"

After Pete left, Dave fell to thinking of the old days. The chap who said

distance lends enchantment knew something after all. Memory knocked off the rough spots of Setting Sun for Dave Barbour and left a sparkling little gem over which he pondered. He sighed and relaxed, realizing for perhaps the first time the strain under which he had been living.

After all, it wasn't good to pull up all the roots of youth. There should be some sort of bond between him and the place where he had spent his boyhood. He called a stenographer and wrote a note, subscribing for the Setting Sun *Enterprise.*

Events of the next few months interested Dave more than he realized. From day to day, as he read the *Enterprise* in a search for names that were familiar, he realized a change in the spirit of the place. They were trying to do something after all.

A paid organizer, of the civic-evangelist type, was announced for a series of get-together meetings. He came and told the community that what it needed most was a chamber of commerce. Steps were taken to provide cluster lights around the public square.

On another day, Dave read about a booster sale to which the entire countryside had been invited. The inducement was a five-per-cent reduction from list prices on the part of all Setting Sun merchants. Moreover, there would be handsome prizes for all who held lucky numbers.

A city-improvement club was formed and prizes offered for the best-kept lawns. A bandstand was advocated for the public square, and a petition was being circulated asking the city council to appropriate money to pay for concerts.

"Gosh," Dave exclaimed after reading a late copy of the *Enterprise,* "they've gone in for sloganeering!"

The chamber of commerce was offering ten dollars in gold for the best slogan that could be used to advertise Setting Sun. So far there had been many suggestions, such as "We lead, others follow;" "Excuse our dust;" "The Sun never sets on Setting Sun," "Setting Sun shines for all;" "We've got the rep for plenty of pep," and so on.

Pete Fleming sent Dave a letter and inclosed a booklet, giving to all the world certain salient facts about Setting Sun.

"After all it's no laughing matter," Dave told himself, after he had chuckled over some of the assertions in the booklet. "It's more or less pitiful to hear them shouting about four miles of paved streets, when they probably wouldn't have had any if one of the State highways hadn't gone through. All that talk about how many miles of cement sidewalks they have and not a word about the old flagstone pavements in other parts of town!"

Suddenly Dave realized he was resenting the laughs that other and more thriving cities would give Setting Sun on its effort to get somewhere and be somebody. He had the feeling that the campaign would fail. The town evangelist had planted some seed, but the chief thing he had done was to take away a percentage on every member who joined the chamber of commerce during his campaign.

Two or three letters to the editor of the *Enterprise,* printed in "The Voice of the People" department gave a clew. These letters protested that Setting Sun should be left alone; that there was no call for all this effort toward putting on new airs and graces, and that if the town was not good enough for some folks they might as well move away. So said "Constant Reader," "Citizen and Taxpayer," and "Interested Subscriber."

Dave knew that any factory fund Setting Sun might raise would not be enough to attract more than one modern pop-corn stand. He appreciated the spirit that some of the newer citizens

were showing, but he concluded that the spasm of civic spirit and community consciousness would be followed by a relapse of serious consequences.

Suddenly Dave admitted that he was tired. He was tired of telling the public what it should eat, what brand of collars it should wear, what make of tires to buy, and the kind of springs on which it might seek repose at night.

"It's been ten years since I was back there," he said, running his fingers through his hair. "I've been too busy making good, as they say, coining money and all that sort of thing, to give the old town the once-over. I know they expected me to fail when I ran away, and here I've been wanting just a little higher stack of dollars before I went back to shake hands with every one of them and do whatever I could to show them that success had not made me stuck up."

He gazed through a big window that gave him an unobstructed view of the lake, but it was not the lake he saw. Before him, as if it had been yesterday, stretched away the meadow behind the house where he used to play with the Harrison boys. He could hear the musical murmur of Driftwood Creek as the water ran over the ripple and on to the deeper reaches of the old swimming hole. He glimpsed the wonders of spring as it came to Setting Sun, studding all the fields and woods with flowers. There was a flash-back to autumn and the witchery of color as nature came to lavish that mysterious, all-golden blend with which the foliage flamed for a time, as if to say: "We, who are about to die, salute you."

Old, familiar faces, old scenes, old memories, paraded before Dave as he sat there, his chin in one hand while he drummed on the chair arm with the idle, yet restless, fingers of the other.

"I don't suppose they would listen to me," he muttered, "but it's worth taking a chance, and I'll do it."

CHAPTER III.

LEARNING THE FACTS.

FIVE minutes later Dave Barbour was telling all and sundry that he was fed up; that he needed a rest; that he must have a rest and that no man knew —least of all himself—when they might expect to see him back. Let somebody else tell the world what to eat and wear. He was going home, and he realized for the first time that he was intensely in earnest about it.

"I don't know that I've done the square thing by the old town," he told himself. "If those of us who went away had plugged along, we might have pulled it out of the rut. But, then, if we hadn't come away, perhaps we never would have known how to pull, or when."

Dave began to wonder how much old friends had changed. He had become acquainted with plenty of people in Chicago; some of them he called friends. Occasionally there had been a young woman who stirred his pulses, for he was young, and there was no reason why his heart should not respond. However, the next day had seen him plunged deeply in a problem of winning the public to some new idea, and the young women were forgotten.

It was characteristic of Dave that he did not herald his return to Setting Sun. He had taken nobody into his confidence when he boarded a freight and went away. While he rode in all the splendor he could buy of the Pullman Company for his return journey, he was the personification of meekness when he alighted from the coach and took his bag from the porter.

Henry Land, who used to drive a bony horse to the station and cry aloud that he hauled baggage, was not there any more. Dave recalled, vaguely, that Henry was dead. Probably the horse was also. In Henry's place a flock of flivver drivers solicited patronage by

shouting "Taxi!" Dave intrusted himself to one of them and told him to drive to the leading hotel. He smiled as he gave the directions, for there was only one hotel in Setting Sun, and to call it leading was to be charitable and humorous at the same time.

"A room with bath," he told the clerk, as the latter shook his pompadour out of weak, blue eyes.

"Sorry, mister," the clerk replied. "All our rooms with bath is taken. I can give you a nice room that looks out on Washington Street, though, and there's a bathroom not twenty feet away from it. There's a fellow in No. 26 that's liable to check out this afternoon, and if he does you can have his room. It's got about the best bath we got."

Dave checked his bag and started out for a stroll. He wondered who the first person would be to recognize him; if recognition would be mutual; if he would pass old acquaintances without knowing them. The courthouse clock struck. How natural it sounded! Dave suddenly decided that he had been missing those tones for ten years.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the country people were in town. Washington Street was lined with automobiles, mostly flivvers, but here and there a big car had nosed its way up to the curb, just as the horses a few years ago had rubbed their muzzles against the hitch rack around the courthouse.

Disappointment was beginning to be registered on Dave's face. Nobody seemed to know him. He was not able to find a familiar face; then around a corner came Pete Fleming.

"Well, you old son of a gun!" Pete exclaimed as he pumped Dave's arm and clapped him on the shoulder. "If you ain't good for a case o' th' sore eyes! Are you travelin' or goin' some place?"

"Both and neither," was Dave's laconic answer. "I've come down to see the old place once more. Thought maybe I could win that slogan contest the chamber of commerce is putting on. It might reduce the cost of the journey."

"They've about gave that up," Pete started to explain. "They's a lot o' fellows that say we don't need a chamber o' commerce, anyhow. There's a good many retired farmers in this town, an' they're opposed t' too many improvements. They say it raises taxes. They got along without all them fancy doin's, an' they don't see why other folks can't be content with what they've got."

"Well," Dave inquired, "which way is the town going—forward or back?"

"She's a slippin', Dave," Pete replied after a moment's reflection. "I wouldn't admit that to anybody but you, but she's a slippin', just th' same. Last week we lost th' Settin' Sun Machine Works. It's moved t' Clear Creek. That takes away six families. Jim Howard—he was our best saxophone player—he's goin' with 'em. Jim was a good second baseman, too. Al McGuire, he's goin'. His girl played the organ at the Methodist Church, an' Al sung in th' choir. We'll miss him a right smart. Th' shirt factory's a lookin' for a new location an' may move next week or th' week after.

"They've been tryin' t' organize one o' them unity clubs that meets ever' Wednesday, an' has lunch together," Pete went on, "but most o' th' men say it's easier t' go home to eat than it is t' buy something t' eat downtown. I was t' one o' them unity meetin's down at Monroe last summer, an' they ain't so worse. Ever' fellow is called by his first name, an' they wear buttons tellin' who they are an' what they do. Them folks down at Monroe was workin' t' get a public drinkin' fountain an' a lot o' things like that. They're really doin' somethin' t' attract attention in Monroe."

"And they're not doing anything in Setting Sun," Dave remarked.

"Don't seem like they can get together," returned Pete. "We can't get

no factories t' stick, we can't get a lot o' paved streets, we're needin' a new city hall, an'—oh, Dave, you know how it is. Th' town droops like a chicken with th' pip."

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING IN CONFIDENCE.

A DISCREET inquiry or two and Dave learned that Ruth Derby still lived in Setting Sun and was teaching in the high school. She had stayed there to take care of an invalid mother, and when the latter died, Ruth did not seem to have any desire to go away.

Dave found her, putting her door key under the porch mat, a custom he remembered as one that had bridged the gap of years.

She came down the steps as he waited, his hat off, a little uncertain about how she would greet him. Then she recognized him, extended both hands, and smiled.

"I always knew that you would come back here some day, famous, rich, and —and——"

"Yes," Dave prompted; "and——"

"And unspoiled," she finished.

"That's the greatest compliment anybody ever paid me," he told her. "And as for you, well—I always felt that you would stay here and be unspoiled. The town seems to have had a deadening influence on practically everything else."

"If you've come back here to gloat over Setting Sun's fancied shortcomings, I won't talk to you," Ruth said with a little show of feeling. "To me it's the dearest place in the world."

"I suppose that's the other side of Main Street," Dave suggested. "You've been living on that side, where folks are friendly and run in with a fresh batch of cookies, or give you a glass of jelly, or something like that."

"Well, nearly everybody is friendly here," Ruth insisted. "Some people are not very friendly because they don't know how to be. I pity them, because they miss so much out of life."

They walked along together. She was going to Billy Dunkle's shoe shop for a pair of shoes that had been left there to be repaired. Dave remembered Billy. Yes, Ruth told him; Billy still dispensed philosophy with half soles, and between jobs he worked on what he fondly hoped would be the solution of perpetual motion.

At length they separated, Dave having obtained permission to call that night. He went back downtown and found the chamber of commerce. The secretary, James Byron Thorpe, was a man he never had known. Thorpe had moved to Setting Sun the year after Dave ran away.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Barbour," Thorpe announced when Dave introduced himself. "I've heard people here speak of you. Let's see, you're in the advertising business, are you not?"

Dave admitted that he was and studied the secretary. That worthy was a little man, nearsighted, slightly stooped, and terribly in earnest. In a moment he was spouting pathetic statistics about Setting Sun. James Byron Thorpe had seen a vision, and in it Setting Sun was outstripping any of the larger cities of the Middle West. All that remained to be done was to tell the world about the advantages of the town.

"That," said the secretary, "is where you might be of some service to us if you cared to participate in our gigantic booster campaign. It might be that some of your suggestions would be looked upon with favor by our board of directors. You never can tell, as they say, you never can tell. I do not believe in passing up any pointers or possible pointers, no matter how trivial they may seem to others."

Dave asked when he could meet the board of directors.

"Well, now, let's see," and Thorpe

mused a moment. "This is choir-practice night, and Mr. Johnson could not come. Mr. Blake went to Monroe on No. 6 and probably will not return until late. Mr. Sticken is absent from our city and serving on the Federal grand jury up at the State capital. No; it wouldn't be possible to have a meeting to-night. But to-morrow night—I might call a meeting then."

So it was arranged. Dave met with the board and listened. The members tried to draw him out, but he insisted that he must hear their suggestions first. One thought that what the city needed was a free tourist camp. Another was certain that signboards along the highways would be the thing. A third placed great faith in the slogan contest.

They worked at cross purposes, but were as one in their enthusiasm for the place. They yearned for a chance to be able to say that their home town was famous for something; that a certain element about the place would attract people and thereby swell the population.

"See here," said Dave, after the others had finished. "I went away from this place ten years ago and left it flat on its back."

He paused and smiled to show them that he was trying to be funny in a mild way. At length they smiled with him.

"I've come back now," he continued, "with the interest to pay on the debt I owe. Setting Sun was reasonably good to me. All these years, while you men have been struggling with its problems, I've been up there in Chicago, getting rich. I hope you'll pardon me when I say that I've had some success in writing advertisements that persuaded people to do things. Now here's my proposal: Turn this problem of increasing population, and making the town known, over to me. I'll finance it and agree to get results. If I fail, an amount equal to what I have spent will be donated to your organization. All I ask is a free hand and the privilege of spending my own money."

They looked at each other and then at Dave. They realized at length that he was entirely sober. They were not so certain that he was mentally all there. However, they accepted his proposal.

"Just one thing, Mr. Barbour," suggested Thorpe, as the meeting was breaking up. "Doubtless you recall a tract of timber that has been known for a great many years as Howland's Woods."

"I played there when I was a boy," replied Dave.

"Well," the secretary went on, "Hiram Howland is an old man now, and he wishes to sell the grove. It is wholly within our corporate limits, and it contains about twenty acres of as fine walnut timber as can be found in the State. Some say it is the largest grove of walnut we have left. As I was saying, Hiram is willing to sell. We have been discussing, here in our meetings, what a splendid thing it would be if we could raise the money to buy those woods and donate them to some furniture factory.

"You see," Thorpe continued, "that would be our bonus to get a new industrial plant. The factory would come; it would bring many families with it. Our population would grow, and as the factory succeeded we might be able to attract others. Mr. Barbour, you have no notion how many board feet of veneers we could get from the walnut trees in Howland's Woods. Then, after the timber had been cut, we could plant the twenty acres and sell the lots to the new residents. It's quite a scheme, Mr. Barbour, but as you can see, we've never exactly been able to finance it."

Dave thanked him for the suggestion and went down in Setting Sun's only elevator. It ran by water power, and he could have beaten it down the stairs from the third floor, where the chamber of commerce offices were situated. However, he realized that Setting Sun looked

upon this elevator as a bond linking it with modern cities.

That night Dave told Ruth something in confidence. He unfolded to her a plan, which was at the same time a scheme. She hesitated at first, but he had sold merchandise to people who did not believe they cared to buy. He was persuasive, but, more than that, he was convincing.

Shortly after that Dave went away, promising to return within a few days. The reason he left Setting Sun was because he did not care to be there when the blow fell. He had taken space in newspapers of Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Louisville, Indianapolis, and other cities of the territory he wished to reach, even taking a flyer in Chicago papers and putting a feeler out in New York.

Through these mediums he sought to tell a few millions of readers that if they were tired of hurry and bustle, if they were fed up on the jazz age, bright lights, noise, strife, competition, slogans, banquets, parties, dances, week-ends—all the modern inventions that rob one of his peace and quiet, his health and happiness—then Setting Sun offered them a restful haven.

It was a place where they did not have to dress for dinner; where they did not have to get up early in the morning or stay up late at night. It offered natural beauty, rocks and rills, shady nooks and wooded hills, but it positively abhorred anybody who happened to think he was in a hurry.

The reader got the impression that Setting Sun's other name was Sleepy Hollow. He had the feeling that he was going to yawn before he finished the advertisement and usually did so. Then his memory carried him back to some place he had known in his youth—a place he had visited only to find that jazz had taken it over, that Aunt Molly's old home was now a road house and they were dancing in the public square while the saxophone wailed through some brand of "blues."

CHAPTER V.

AN IDEA TO SELL.

AT first Setting Sun was shocked, humiliated, then blazing mad. James Byron Thorpe put on his Sunday suit and straightened his shoulders. There was talk of damage suits, of stern reprisals. It was even suggested that when that smart alec, Dave Barbour, returned to Setting Sun they might as well take him riding on a rail, after having given him a coating of tar and feathers with their best regards.

James Byron Thorpe sat in his little office, endeavoring to fashion a statement for the Setting Sun *Enterprise*. It bristled with such words as "traitor," "base ingratitude," "hustling community of proud progress," and others equally potent. He marched into the *Enterprise* office with it, and the editor threw it into the wastebasket.

"Let's wait a bit," advised the editor. "I'm beginning to smell a mice. Maybe I'm no more farsighted than some of the rest of you, but I've got a hunch."

He fished the communication out of the wastebasket and jabbed it on a hook. "Suppose we let it ride for a day or so," he counseled, "and see what happens."

Nothing happened all that day and the next except indignation meetings. Neighbors went to see Ruth and quizzed her. She made no defense of Dave. Apparently she was as sorry as all the others.

Then the postman put a bigger pile of letters on James Byron Thorpe's desk than ever had been put there before. They came from all over the country from men who were tired and wanted some place where they actually could rest without all modern conveniences. Was it true that Setting Sun was a quiet place? Did they have good food? Could it be true that there

was no factory in the town? Was it possible that in this day and age a city of five thousand inhabitants had no jazz orchestra?

The secretary of the chamber of commerce was both stumped and swamped. He was polishing his spectacles for the tenth time when his door opened and Dave Barbour came in.

"Sir, I'll have you know——"

"Shut up!" commanded Dave. "I know what you're going to say. You'll have me know that I have wounded Setting Sun's pride, that I've damaged the town's reputation, and I've played the devil generally. Well, you haven't heard anything yet! You didn't have a single thing in this place whereby you could go into competition with towns that are really up and coming. What was there to do? I capitalized all the alleged shortcomings of Setting Sun and wrote some copy. *You* thought all these things were drawbacks, and you were ashamed of them. You were ashamed for the world to know the truth. That's all I did. I told the truth about Setting Sun and now look at the mail on your desk."

"B-but—you've—you've humiliated us before the nation," Thorpe contended.

"A little humiliation is good for the liver," was Dave's dry comment. "Now let's get busy. Get me a stenographer who knows how to stenog, and I'll show you some results."

Within a week real-estate values were booming in Setting Sun. Tired business men from various cities had been yearning for such a city without really knowing how weary they were of the daily and nightly grind. Dave's advertisements lured them on. He played with flagstone pavements and grass growing between the flags. He wrote about the quiet, shady streets, with never a word about a single thing that had a modern tag. There was a back-home appeal about his copy. He had an idea to sell, and hundreds were ready to buy it.

CHAPTER VI.

ONLY ONE PROVISION.

IT was late summer in Setting Sun. The population had increased by leaps and bounds. All of the vacant houses were rented, and many a home had been sold for more money than the owner had dreamed would be paid. Carpenters were busily engaged decorating vacant lots with bungalows.

All through a lazy summer the new residents of Setting Sun had been resting. They had come there to retire, and they were busily engaged in telling all and sundry that they had retired.

Now a retired farmer retires, and that's all there is to it. He moves to town and stops work. Dave knew that from observation and experience. Also he knew something else, but he did not tell everybody about it; not right away. He waited to see if his belief would come true.

With the first hint of fall some of the retired captains of finance became a little restless. As they met each other on the streets and in different homes they seemed to yearn for something. Dave believed that the time was ripe and wrote to a friend to come on. Jimmy Burkett arrived and talked to the editor of the *Enterprise*.

A mass meeting was called, and everybody went. Jimmy Burkett spoke. He said that everybody in the country had heard about Setting Sun's experiment in the simple life. The newspapers had discussed it editorially. Magazine writers had investigated it and written that here was a new Arcady.

But—were these men who had made a success of industry, of finance, of the law, of various things, satisfied to be quiet all the rest of their days? Were they convinced that Setting Sun always should be known as the town that died of sleeping sickness?

The only reason his questions were not answered by a hoarse bellow is be-

cause hoarse bellows come only from mobs. Jimmy Burkett's audience was composed of gentlemen and their families. If there had been a dotted line, they would have walked right up and signed on it.

What they did do was to ask Burkett to stay over. The next day they offered him ten thousand dollars a year to become a citizen and run the chamber of commerce. Each of the new residents had influence and money.

"In five years from now Setting Sun will have a population of twenty-five to forty thousand," one of them declared. "And when I say that, I'm making a very conservative estimate. Now let's get busy and bring some industries in here. I guess we'll make some of these towns laugh out of the other side of their mouths before long. I was getting mighty tired of this rest business anyhow."

Dave Barbour was going back to Chicago. He had done his work, had paid his debt to Setting Sun. He smiled when he heard they were changing the name to Rising Sun as soon as the legal procedure could be arranged.

"It was the reverse English that got them," he told Ruth as they strolled along a quiet street together. "First, I convinced them that they were tired, and after they were rested I knew what would happen. You can't keep a good man quiet any more than you can keep him down."

They talked but little as they walked toward Howland's Woods.

"To think," Dave exclaimed, "that James Byron Thorpe, the little boob, would have cut down all those walnut trees and sold them to make veneered furniture!"

He glanced down at Ruth, who was strangely quiet. Almost as brilliant as the harvest moon to come was the great burnished shield that hung in the sky above them. The moonlight clothed Ruth with a new beauty; made her even more lovely to Dave than ever she had been before.

They were standing now among the stately old trees, listening to the whispering of the leaves as a vagrant breeze stirred them. A few more steps and their path was impeded by a log. To each of them came a memory, and the realization that it was the same log, where ten years before——

"Oh, by the way," said Dave, "I bought these woods. Got them for twenty thousand. I did that the first thing, after I heard Thorpe's talk about furniture and veneers. Also, I was getting in on the ground floor before the rise started. I'm going to give it to the town for a park, with only one provision."

"And that?" Ruth turned to him.

"And that is, that they leave this old log right here where it is. For me it's woodman, spare the trees; touch not a single bough—and leave that old log undisturbed for I must kiss you now."

And he did.

A Treat for the Elk

An obscure poet took his wife and his eight children to the zoo. The children had made repeated demands to see the elk, so the poet pleaded with the man at the turnstile.

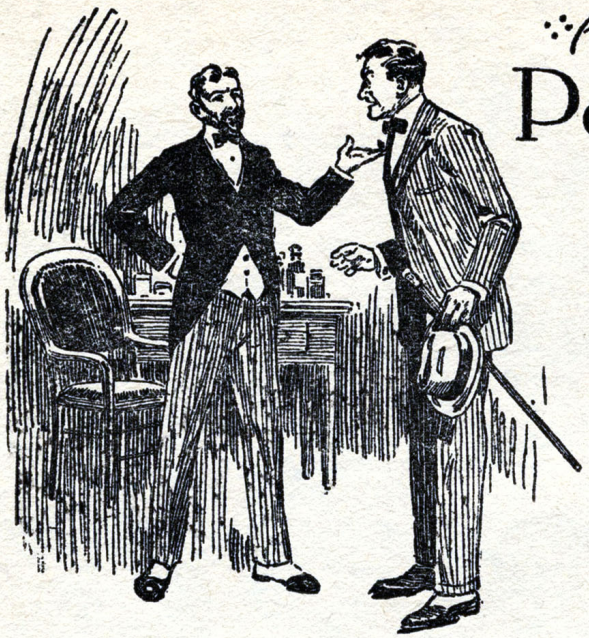
"I'm a poet," he said, "and I have a wife and eight children. Can we get in to see the elk without paying the full price?"

The man at the turnstile craned out of his little box.

"Half a minute," he said. "You are a poet. That is your wife, and those are your eight children, and you want to have a look at the elk?"

"Exactly," said the poet.

"If you wait a second," said the man, "I'll fetch the elk along to have a look at you!"



A Boxing Story

Pep Wanted—

By John Mersereau—

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

ALL THE RAGE.

WELL, friends, the wise crackers have it that history repeats itself; so I guess little Martha Sherwin, boss of a circulatin' library in an uptown drug store, ain't the first queen since Cleopatra that's gummed up the pages of human progress. At the least, she sure caused some rapid changes in the fistiana-yearbook records, however, when she told "Kilts" McFee, the ace of my pugilistic stable and middle champ of the world, that he was too old for her to marry.

Of course, that was only her excuse to let him down easy. And you really could hardly blame her for givin' him the go-by when he calls on her—after we've been away doin' the vaudeville circuit for three months—with a pound box of chocolates to show his generosity and that absence makes the heart grow fonder.

It wasn't that McFee was stingy, exactly. He was only Scotch—like I tried to tell her. But she had her own ideas on the subject. And she let me down flat as a fixer when I furthermore explained that McFee had taken her May and December prattle serious and was all gloomed up to drop his title to Micky Flynn, the hard-sockin' son of Erin, in their forthcomin' mill.

As a matter of fact, Kilts McFee was only thirty-two and a prime athlete yet, with plenty of championship slambango class to tip over a dozen biffers that fought as wide open as Monte Carlo, like Flynn did. But my boy had got to thinkin' he was a relic, and once a box artist begins to imagine he's slippin'—well, you know!

That was exactly what happened. It's expectin' too much of a boxin' manager to ask him to chew over the tragedy of his champion bingler's Waterloo. But everybody that saw the meetin' or reads the sporting green knows that McFee entered the arena as far off his feed as Kalamazoo from Miami. Also, those that sat in at the session saw the sluggin' Irishman knock my entry stiffer than one of old King Tut's petrified greyhounds in the second.

However, nobody but Kilts McFee and yours truly know the bitter truths I spilled to his cauliflower listeners

down in trainin' quarters the morning after the night before. But McFee only pulled a poker face, and repeated the silly little patter he'd hypnotized himself into believin'.

"Martha was right," he kept sayin'. "I'm gettin' old. I did my level best last night, but Flynn was too good for me. I'm a has-been, Jack."

I guess I'd heard this about a hundred times when the door opened and in breezed Stan Jones, my college-fed press agent and idea specialist de luxe. I'd sent him South to look over a promisin' young heavy that was setting the Mississippi Valley afire, and so he'd missed McFee's flivver. But he'd heard all about it, never fear!

"Well, well!" he began, as per custom, before he'd got the door half open. "The sword of Damocles hath fallen, eh? History repeats itself, and——"

"Forget it!" I snarled at him. "Maybe you don't know it, but right now you and me and Kilts are worse off than the Three Musketeers without any muskets. In other words, it looks like we'll have to go to work for a livin'. That's tragedy, ain't it?"

"Yea, verily!" Jones replied feelingly. "But I don't descend to the ignominy of toil without a terrible struggle first. Not me! So let's get busy. What's the inside dope, now, on Kilts' here flop-pin' to an easy-mark like Flynn?"

Well, I gave him the lay—which didn't faze him at all, however.

"Boola, boola, bosh and bunk!" said the idea merchant when I finished. "People don't get old nowadays. If that's all the matter, I'll have Kilts runnin' around in a pair of rompers in a couple of months and stealing jam out of the pantry. But this one is too easy," he expanded with his usual modesty.

"Glands! That's the answer," Jones went on. "They're all the rage this season. And there's a young medico named Booth right here in the city that's making his pile doing the job. According to report, he can make an octogenarian dance the Spanish tangofango in nothing flat after having one of these glands transplanted in him, and——"

"I ain't any octogenarian!" McFee hollered, insulted, and one-stepped over toward Jones with his fists up. "And you're dizzy if you think you can make a ballet dancer out of me by feedin' me goat steak."

"Now look here, Kilts!" I cried. "Let's get the low-down on this Doc Booth's childhood elixir before committin' assault and battery in the college degree. You want to get your championship belt back, don't you? And maybe this stuff will make you so youthful that Martha'll call a referendum on that Methuselah line she gave you."

This at last pacified McFee enough to save the life of one press agent—for the time bein', at the least. "But I'll gool him sure," the boxer said, "if he don't lay off me with this rah-rah lingo and talk American. I want to know it when I'm being insulted."

CHAPTER II.

MEETING A SLICK BIRD.

WITH his best college manner, Jones made the date over the phone, and the next p. m. the press agent, McFee, and myself headed for Booth's office for a preliminary hearin'. I didn't take much stock in this youth restorin', understand, but I'd figured it out that it would at least force Kilts to lay low for a while and rest. Which is really all that ailed him, accordin' to my private diagnosis. He was staler than bakery bread on Monday morning from our long vaudeville tour; and he took on Flynn, against my advice, before he'd got back into good ring form. The broken heart, I figured, would mend itself in time.

Well, this young sawbones of a doctor had a flat that John D. himself wouldn't have sneezed at. He was a

slick bird, too, with black hair and an ambitious business eye. And he wasn't anybody's fool—as I and you are slated to find out. He examined my boy and, after the usual terribly-rushed-these-days stall, agreed to take on the job—for a reasonable fee.

"What do you mean—reasonable?" asked Kilts McFee.

"I was just coming to that," said the gland farmer. "Ordinarily my fee for such cases is two thousand dollars. However"—and the medico's eyes had a fishy look in 'em the reason for which I didn't tumble to till later—"however, I've never had a patient just like you before; I don't know absolutely that I can benefit you; so I'm disposed to let the matter of fee hang fire. After you're on your feet again, you can reimburse me according to the benefit you feel my work has done you. How's that?"

"Fine!" chortled McFee. "That suits me kayo!"

And so it come to pass that McFee leased a hospital room and was put under the treatment of the great Doctor Booth. Almost at once, I'll admit, I could see a big improvement. And McFee felt it, too. In fact, at the end of the second week, he nearly bowled me over with a startling symptom of recovery, plus.

"Better make out that check for the two grand for the doc and leave it here for me to give him," McFee told me. "He's certainly puttin' the hop back into me, and the jack's coming to him fair enough. That's a lot of mazuma for goat meat"—he sighed—"but when you run acrost a square shooter you got to fade him on the high and handsome."

So I made out the check for McFee to sign and was about ready to breeze when a new blow falls. Jones came bustlin 'in.

"Flynn's manager has heard we're in dry dock and has made a play about bein' ready to give us a return go—immediately," he related. "The four-flusher has sent a letter to all the sporting sheets for publication that Flynn is goin' to be a fighting champ; also, that they're all set to give us a return go—no later than a month from now. Get the point?"

I got it. It was the old rush act. My boy, accordin' to Doctor Booth, wouldn't possibly be released for work for two weeks more yet; and bein' soft from the long rest up, he couldn't hardly train right for the agile Irishman in the remaining time. But we had to call the new champ's bluff or forfeit our last hope of regainin' the crown; for Flynn's manager was cagy enough to know we'd taken the count on a off night and that his man couldn't repeat when we was goin' right. So I sent Jones down to sign up for us at once.

What surprised me, though, was the way Kilts McFee took it. He was as chipper over it as a kid and didn't seem to worry at all that he was goin' to be awful cramped on trainin' time.

"Don't you fret, Jack," he said with a grin. "This gland stuff is the kayo. And I'll battle this goofy champion off his number tens when we scramble together again."

Well, I beat it before Kilts caught on how doubtful I really was; but I'd hardly gone a block when I bumped into Martha Sherwin.

"How's Kilts?" she asked me hesitantly, after steerin' the conversation toward the proper openin' for a minute.

"Why, he seemed to be comin' along fine when I left him at the hospital just now," I said. "And there's no cause for worry, really. He's under the care of the best specialist in the city, young Doctor Radford Booth."

"Radford Booth? The hospital!" she cried. "That's certainly all news to me. And the doctor didn't mention a word about it to me when——" And she stopped, sort of confused.

"You know Booth, then?" I asked her.

"Yes; I know him—quite well," she admitted. "I—he comes quite frequently into the drug store where I work. In fact, I've gone out with him before—and after—Kilts and I had our little trouble. He hates Kilts."

"Nonsense! He's treatin' the boy fine," I returned, and told her all about it. "Furthermore, we're comin' along so swell that we've signed up for a return bout with Micky Flynn."

"Just the same, I'm afraid," said the girl. "The doctor—well, he's dreadfully jealous, and that might lead him to injure Kilts while he's in his power. He could do it very easily, without anybody being the wiser." And of a sudden she broke down and started in to dab her eyes. "And I thought Kilts stingy; I misjudged him when he was ill and too brave to complain! I—I——"

"Then why the tears?" I tried to console her. "And Kilts will be only too tickled to make up, I guess, if you're over bein' sore with him."

"Of course, I'm not angry with him—now that I understand." She smiled at me shakily. "And I didn't ever want him to squander his money on me for expensive presents. I only wanted him to want to. Don't you see?"

I didn't, so I did the next best thing. I invited her to go back to the hospital with me, as a sort of little glad surprise for McFee. And it turned out to be a wild surprise, I'll radio Mars and way points! Inside our private room, Doc Booth was sittin' at McFee's bedside—who'd just passed over the check for the two thousand. And it's a stand-off which one of 'em is knocked the dizzier by our dramatic entrance.

"Martha! What in Heaven's name are you doing here, dear?" asked the doc; and it was plain to be seen that he was a trifle nonplused, as it were.

"'Martha!'" echoed Kilts. "Where does this zobo get that 'dear' stuff at?" He sat up, wildlike, and he looked from Martha to the doc with his lips tight and his eyes gone hard. "Booth! Booth!" he repeated, sort of to himself. "So this fly sawbones is the Booth you was keepin' company with and quit on my account, hey? Yeah! And I trusted you!

"Where are my clothes?" McFee asked me loudly. "I'm goin' to get up. Booth, hey? Well, his name'll be mud when I get my hands on him!"

But the doc showed rare judgment in the emergency. Naturally McFee couldn't do murder in pajamas in front of a lady; and the doc saw he had plenty of time to blow, which he did. Martha blew with him, too, her head up proud; and she never looked back once as she swept down the hall.

CHAPTER III.

THAT SCHEMING DOCTOR.

SOON after I had got McFee from the hospital, I had a guaranteed M. D. look him over—the same pronouncin' my boy absolutely perfect, exceptin' as to gray matter, which is only a side line with him anyhow and no cause for worry.

Moreover, on account of the fine rest he'd had, my entry was in tiptop fettle for the trainin' grind ahead. And with that added to the bone he had to pick with this rush actor Flynn, it was only natural that he went to work like a raw-meat eater. Right from the start, the work-outs had a vicious snap to 'em that was good to see. And before long he was down nearly to the weight again, and his old form was fast comin' home to roost.

And everything went as hunky-dory as you could ask right up to the day before the battle; which, I'm telling you, is the jinx day in the fistic game. McFee had wound up training that p. m., and I'm not boostin' him a bit when I say he was back in his old championship form. Everything was there—stamina, footwork, clever and accurate boxin'. And McFee knew it.

"No matter how much I hate Booth for keepin' me in bed so's he could have a clear field with Martha," he confided while he was dressin', "I got to admit he put me back on my feet." Then he sighed. "I wonder what she's doin' now?"

I sidetracked this idea quick by sendin' him and Stan Jones off to a comedy show. After which I took a little tour of the sporting circles by way of recreation. And I discovered that the odds had taken a big jump for Micky Flynn to cop. "A bird named Booth has put up ten grand that Flynn will kayo McFee," I was told confidential by one of the gamblin' fraternity. Which wasn't exactly soothin' news to yours truly.

But it was the next p. m. when the boomerang really hit back. It was the afternoon before the mill, remember; and I was sittin' in my office daydreamin'—when in trotted Martha Sherwin. She was really agitated; and so was I when her story unfolded.

"I suspected the doctor right from the start," she raced along, "and—and so I guess I led him on a little to get at the truth. And I was right. He boasted to me last night that Kilts would never win his fight with Mr. Flynn, and that——"

"Impossible!" I interrupted. "Kilts'll eat the fellow alive."

"You don't know Doctor Booth," the girl remonstrated. "He's a marvelous surgeon—but absolutely unscrupulous, I've found that out. He told me everything last night. He didn't give Kilts the gland treatment at all!"

"He didn't?" I gasped.

"No," she hurried on. "He said that Kilts didn't need rejuvenation to begin with, that he was a perfect athlete—except for a worn-down and depressed condition."

"Well," I said, shrugging, "the doc told him to pay only for the good he thought the treatment had done him, so there ain't a hope for a comeback. And at that it was worth it if it only gave the boy back his confidence—which it seems to have done."

"But Doctor Booth has some scheme to make Kilts lose," she finished. "He wouldn't tell me what it was, but he's sure it will work. And don't breathe a word to Kilts that I came here to see you," she said from the doorway. "I—I hate him!"

Which went for Riley and the Swiss marines, but I promised just the same. I was worried, too, over what she'd said, though I tried to hide it.

And Stan Jones couldn't figure it out any more than I could when I gave him the lay. "All we can do is guard Kilts from talkin' with any one," he advised, "and if he doesn't get in touch with any stranger, I don't see how Booth can put over his stunt—whatever it is."

We did guard the boy, too. And furthermore, we got him into the ring without his havin' exchanged speech with anybody we weren't sure of.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL SET.

THE fateful hour was at hand. The biggest crowd of the season had turned out to see Kilts McFee stage his comeback; for the papers, thanks to Jones, had been givin' us columns about McFee's bein' out for business in this return set-to.

And he was. He came into the arena all set, and it did my heart good to see the way he carried himself. Confidence? Say, it radiated from him! And when he and Flynn got together with the referee, my boy gave his playmate the cold eye, and said: "You want to keep covered, Micky, boy, because I'm goin' to smack you for a home run the second you open up!" This was the proper spirit, I figured.

Then the gong busts into the buzz of voices—the timekeeper callin' for round

one. The fight was on. The battlers touched gloves, circlin' each other. McFee hitched up his trunks with a quick, nervous jerk. Flynn sent a last quick look to his corner. The seconds had ducked down out of the ring. The house was dead silent for a second—like it always is when a mill begins. The fans were craning forward, spellbound by the openin' of a mill that would carry a world championship crown to the winner.

Then suddenly into the silence a voice blared forth. "Ba-a-a! Ba-a-a!" it chortled.

"What in the name of Jim Corbett!" said Jones, who occupied a ringside seat beside me.

"Ba-a-a! Ba-a-a!" rang forth the voice again, in a pretty fair imitation of a billy goat. And this time I saw that it came from—sittin' pretty in another ringside seat down the line from us—his nibs Doc Booth!

The fans had woke up. Kilts McFee was in on top of his man like greased lightnin', and the spectators were gettin' excited. Booth's mouth was still open, but it couldn't be heard any more. With his dignity throwed to the four winds and his black Vandyke workin' up and down, he actually looked somethin' like a goat.

Up in the ring, Flynn had grabbed Kilts McFee in a desperate clinch as soon as he could after the doc started ballyhooin'; and while my boy was wrestlin' him around and tryin' to break free, Flynn was whisperin' a deadly secret to him. We couldn't hear it, of course; but it evidently meant a lot to McFee. You could almost see the confidence and pep leavin' him, and the old fighting spirit goin' into total eclipse.

From then on that first round was a nightmare. McFee, after that beginnin' flash he showed before Micky Flynn talked to him, just settled down to takin' a beatin'—with only a feeble effort at reprisal. And he returned to his corner at the finish of the round, battered, hopeless, and dead on his feet.

"For the love of mud, what's the matter, boy?" I asked him, while his seconds worked over him frantically.

"Booth double crossed me!" McFee panted. "He didn't give me any rejuvenating cure at all. And he's put Flynn wise to it, too. I'm due to get copped again—I can feel it comin'!"

The secret was out! Booth had put it over pretty. And I was so absolutely foozled that for once I couldn't put up an argument. Martha was right—this medico was clever!

Well, round two starts out the same as before; McFee was takin' the pastin' of his life. There was only one redeemin' feature—Kilts, in wonderful condition, was still standin' up under Micky's hammerin'; and they're always dangerous till they're counted out.

But I'd given up completely; not so with Jones, however, praise be! The idea expert sat in deep thought for only a shake after I gave him the line. Then he began to squirm around in his seat, whisperin' to himself, his face grim.

Flynn staggered my boy again, and Jones groans.

"I got to do it," he whispered. "I got to. Lord, if Kilts can only last the round until I can put a buzzer in his bonnet!"

"What?" I asked.

"You sit tight, and let me handle this," he said. "And don't you dare go near the ring until the battle's over. You're liable to queer my play. Kilts may murder me afterward; but I'm goin' to put the old T N T back into him or know the reason why. No plug medico can put the Indian sign on me and get away with it. If Kilts can only hold up until I can get to him—if he only can!"

That looked doubtful. The lad was throwin' himself into a clinch every chance he got; but the referee was gettin' sore and strong armin' him loose the second he grabbed. And each time they

broke, Flynn brought over a killin' swing. But McFee was the boy to take 'em when he had to—and he did. It got to be a regular formula, in fact. He'd take a stiff one, sag a little, pull himself up—but slower every time—and clinch. Then a break, and they'd do it all over again.

At first the fans booed McFee, but after seein' what punishment he was spongin' up, they began to be lost in wonder. There wasn't a thread of yellow in him, they could see that, even if he was as bad off as a polar bear along the equator. And after three minutes of the most disagreeable manhandlin' I ever saw a battler take, McFee stiff legged it to his corner and slumped onto his stool.

"Sit tight, do you get me!" Jones cried in my ear and rushed up to the side of our dyin' gladiator.

I watched Jones, hypnotized. For just a split second the idea merchant poured the magic words into McFee's right listener; and the effect was immediately apparent. The honeyed words Jones spoke, whatever they were, did more to stiffen up the boy than could have the youth restorer pickled in a barrel of the gone-but-not-forgotten.

Jones came back to his seat, grinnin'. "Just watch!" was all he'd tell me. "Flynn is goin' to wish he was somewhere else from now on."

CHAPTER V.

WITH A BANG.

WELL, I watched. Right away I saw Kilts McFee take a brace on his stool. He arched his chest and breathed deep, while his small ribs were bein' massaged. He came to life. And tell me old Bob Fitzsimmons couldn't fight if a slow grin didn't begin to grow on McFee's bruised pan while he gulped in the breeze from a snappy-swung towel.

The next session opened with a bang. I don't know who was the most surprised—me, the fans, or one Micky Flynn—but I do know it gave the champ the biggest jolt of any when Kilts McFee met him halfway with a correctly timed uppercut that almost won the three cigars.

Micky Flynn's eyes rolled like the briny deep; his head snapped back; but he kept comin'. As a ring scientist maybe he won't never make the late lamented Marquis of Queensberry tremble the daisies, but, with his dander up, he was a sluggin' fool. That boy wasn't afraid, and he could take 'em, too.

And he did. He took 'em and gave 'em, while Kilts McFee stood there facin' him, his shoulders rockin' back and forth, shiftin' from left to right, and from right to left again—McFee's whole body, from the toes up, back of those drivin', hammerin', killin' jabs and hooks. Every one of 'em landed fair and clean; every one of 'em was the old black-bottle stuff without any antidote except a ten-second rest; and every one of 'em should have toppled the sluggin' Irishman.

But they didn't. Micky Flynn was staying with it like a pat hand before the draw. And those big shoulders and arms of his were workin' to fast time themselves. Wild swings all, but the kind that rattle the rafters when they connect. Which more than a few did—smashin' clouts that trembled my boy from head to shoe leather when they struck.

Well, the spasm ended with both lads still on their feet, still thirstin' for more, and still millin' with everything they had. Both badly roughed up, they broke clean with the bell and headed for their corners.

Of the two, Micky Flynn was now the worse off for visible wear and tear; while my entry, though he was dog-tired, still bore up nobly under the spell of our idea expert's mysterious pepifier.

Worn down to a whisper in those first two stanzas, McFee was comin' back stronger every minute; and for an old man he was showin' quite some energy. Quite! The fightin' Scotch claret was boilin' over from a split lip and a bad eye cut, his body was pommeled and battered from Flynn's mule-heel smacks. But McFee sat there tense in his corner, his muscles quiverin', waitin' for the bell. He was the battlin' son of the clan McFee once more. He was a champion, with a champion's heart, again.

Once more we were off—with the gallery on their feet to a man, roarin', shoutin', clappin'—carried back to the primitive by this comeback of a beaten ringster, by this epic sluggin' bee between two dead-game, clean-fightin' lads who could give and take kayo punches with a stiff lip and hearts that didn't falter.

And the battle proceeded for two more cantos at the same white heat. For two furious rounds those terriers tore at each other, swingin', sockin', sluggin'. Neither went down, and neither clinched. It was Flynn's meat, this sluggin', but Kilts McFee proved right then that he wasn't a vegetarian, either.

Round seven opened like a fury. For five seconds there was a glorious rally. Then Flynn pulled loose somehow, dragged a death dealer up from wild Borneo, and caught McFee square on the chin—comin' in!

It was a real kayo wallop. The leather popped like a toy balloon when it struck. My hope pitched forward in a stiff dive, flat into the canvas. He was out! The referee started the count. Micky Flynn stood there wabblin' on his pins, but all the time as watchful as a cat. The stands were in a riot.

But Stan Jones kept his head. The idea merchant came through with his last ace. With his program crumpled into a makeshift megaphone, he climbed his seat.

"Ba-a-a!" Jones roared. "Ba-a-a! Ba-a-a!" Just like Doc Booth was doin' before our rally paralyzed his voice.

The tantalizing sound seemed to reach McFee crumpled there in the resin. At the count of five he was on his knees, his head bumpin' the canvas crazily, beating the sense back into his dazed brain.

"Ba-a-a! Ba-a-a!" Jones kept it up, in a sort of insane, carryin' screech.

"Nine!" The referee swung down his arm.

"Ba-a-a!" Jones cried simultaneously.

Kilts McFee, his face chalk white under the red smear that covered it, was on his feet again, swinging like a wild man.

Some one in back shoved Jones off his chair, and he fell to the floor; but flat on his back, he never let up on that tantalizin' yodel that was bringin' the life and fight back to good old McFee.

And the battlin' Scot came through. Lord, how he fought! In another minute he had the fightin' Flynn backin' up. McFee rushed him to the ropes with solid drives to the body, and, just before the bell rang, my ring expert planted his man with a final bull's-eye to the jaw.

It was a wind buster, and Flynn was through. He cuddled the mat for ten and out—and then some.

CHAPTER VI.

TREATING HIM GENTLY.

BEFORE long, Jones and I climbed the ropes to escort our world's champion back to his dressin' room in state. He was standin' there in the center of the arena yet, grinnin' like a hypnotized goofy I once saw, his glance searchin' out through the still petrified crowd.

Only one cash customer had left the ringside. And a sad-lookin' gazabo he

was, doin' a dismal march to the nearest exit. It was that double-crossin' gland gardener, Doc Booth, M. D. And this practitioner sure looked sick enough to try one of his own prescriptions.

McFee spotted him, and he tumbled to the fact that young sawbones was strugglin' out under a capacity load of grief, which the boxer couldn't improve on by a personal interview.

"I guess that settles him!" McFee turned unwillingly from the mournful but satisfyin' fadeout. With an arm of the winner draped around the shoulders of me and Jones, each, and with the police reserves plowin' a trail for us through the cheerin' mob, we made a grand triumphal passage to our dressin' room.

And it was in there, while McFee was bein' rubbed down, that I began to smell a rodent in the immediate vicinity. My man told his handler not to mind his body so much, but to patch up his face and to do it as quick as possible.

"I'm steppin' out to-night," McFee said, "and I've got to look halfways presentable."

"Steppin' out!" Jones echoed, in a shrill falsetto. "You're crazy, man! You're all beaten up, and, besides, your face looks like mince pie."

But McFee just tossed him a meanin' wink, like the idea specialist has been kiddin' him with a hot one. "Yes; I'm steppin'," McFee answered complacently, "and you know where, you old fakir. Get me a taxi in line, won't you, Stan, like the good scout you are?"

This puzzled me considerable, particularly as I piped a sort of pallid and frightened look come into Jones' eyes when McFee turned away. And knowin' the idea merchant as I did, it didn't take much savvy to figure he'd overplayed his hand pretty bad somewhere in the near past and hadn't drawn pasteboards to cover.

But Jones showed true to form, as I expected, by musterin' a hearty, but hollow, laugh and saying: "Sure, Kilts, anythin' to oblige." But he came back in a jiffy, sayin' that the only cars in sight had been spoken for.

"Buy one then!" McFeed cried excitedly. "Buy one! What do I care for expense? This is my night to celebrate!"

So Jones had to do it. He rounded up one of the taxicab brethren and had him pilot his chariot to the curb; but Jones was pretty pale under the gills when he returned.

When McFee took his hurried departure, the idea expert went to pieces completely. "Good Lord, I've got in wrong this time!" he confessed in one of those I'm-a-poor-sinner-save-me wails. "Kilts will murder me when he finds out! I had to do it; it was the only way to get him to fight. But it'll mean my finish sure if he ever lamps me when he comes back from that taxi ride!"

"What's the big idea?" I wanted to know. "You seemed the best of friends at partin'."

"Them days are gone forever!" moaned Jones. "I told him his sweetie had sent word she'd marry him if he kayoed Flynn. And that she'd sacrifice her heart and hand to Doctor Booth if Kilts flivvered the go."

"Wow!" I said. "I'll say you did get into something, Stan! You better begin packin' now." Then a dizzy idea came to me, and I stopped. In my pocket memo book was Martha's phone number, which she'd given me in case of emergency when Kilts was in the hospital. And that emergency was now!

"Jones," I told him, "here's Miss Sherwin's call number. And it's up to you to do some quick fixin'—before Kilts gets there first and wrecks the lay. Lubricate your words, boy, and talk convincin'—and fast! There's a phone in the box office, I think."

Jones followed directions—almost.

"Miss Sherwin," he said, when he got Martha on the line, "this is Kilts McFee's manager speakin', and——"

"Lay off!" I interrupted.

"Yes; Mr. McFee's manager," Jones continued, like he was prayin'. "Somethin' awful has occurred. . . . No, no! Kilts hasn't been hurt—that is, not badly—but he's been terribly punished, and he's still light-headed. He got away from us after winnin' the fight, but his brain is temporarily affected, and he's rushin' up to see you in a taxi under the impression that you have sent word that you'll accept his suit now that he's again a champion. . . . Yes; a hallucination, of course, due entirely to his condition; but the shock might work a permanent injury if you were to disillusion him at once. . . . Yes, yes; I knew you'd agree with me. So handle him gently, for all our sakes, won't you?"

Jones gulped in a deep breath before goin' on. Then the line went suddenly dead at the other end, and Jones sagged back weakly with the receiver danglin' from his fingers. "The doorbell rang—I could hear it over the line!" he cried to me, gasping. "He's come, and she's gone to meet him. But she promised to treat him as gently as possible."

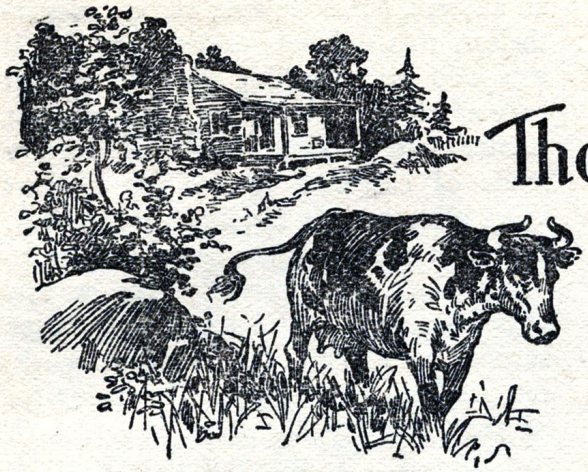
And Martha did! Very much so!

That may explain why one idea merchant is this day partin' of his own free will with a full month's salary for a chest of sterling-silver chow implements—with joy and gratitude in his heart. The package is liberally sprinkled with orange blossoms, and labeled: "To Mr. and Mrs. Kilts McFee. Heaven bless the bride!"

POPPY DREAMS

By Pat. Costello

POPPIES, crimson, in a field
Far across the sea;
Underneath them are concealed
Relics, dear to me.
Poppies, plucked from over there,
Grace each vase of mine;
Faded, but they blossomed where
Lonely breezes whine.
Poppies, blood-red, like that part
Shed by those who fell!
Maybe my pal stained their heart
Vivid! Who can tell?



Those Hated Horns

By Harold de Polo~

THE little Pekingese felt extremely out of place in this backwoods cabin close to the New Brunswick border. Not that Sen-Sen exactly disliked the crude surroundings or the remarkable change of diet, but he decidedly missed the companionship of the other dogs that had been in the household wherein he had formerly dwelt. So far as the people themselves were concerned, he wasn't quite sure that he didn't prefer them. The lean and gray-eyed man and the kindly and smiling woman, anyway, didn't pester him to death with their pampering.

All in all, Sen-Sen was not tremendously sorry that his master and mistress, when they had come up to their hunting camp in the wilds, had presented him to this other man who guided for them every season. No; the complete change, really, was rather amusing. If only he was able to have some animal companionship!

From his warm spot in the sunny window, where he was languidly reclining, Sen-Sen looked out at the pleasant clearing about the wilderness home. It was a late autumn day, with a typical Indian-summer sun that further glorified the reds and golds and yellows of the trees that fringed the property. It was a gorgeous sight, and Sen-Sen liked it. He had never had that in the big city, where his only real outings had been his walks on the end of a leash along hard pavements. His two other friends, of his own breed, were certainly missing all this. They were getting asphalt and annoying collars and cramped apartment quarters.

Around the corner of the small barn, then, there came into view the farm creature who was really at the bottom of all Sen-Sen's mental disturbance—Lucy, the ancient brindle cow. He had liked her quite sincerely at first, but, upon closer acquaintance, he had found that the cow had an atrocious habit of tossing her head about. This, in itself, would not have been so bad if she had not had those long and curly horns. Somehow, they frightened him, for they always brought up a vision of himself being impaled upon one of them, and such a vision was not pleasant. In fact, it caused a shudder to run along his spine. So, as she always insisted on playfully using those horns, Sen-Sen had settled the matter by absolutely refusing to have anything further to do with her. But it was lonesome—mighty lonesome!

Sen-Sen started to do some deep thinking then, some daring thinking. Seeing that Lucy was not a satisfactory

playmate, what was the matter with his going out and looking for another one? Occasionally, this thought had previously come to him, but he had always thrust it away immediately as being too dangerous. Those woods off there, fringing the cabin, seemed ominous. Dark peril, he had always felt, lurked there. This morning, however, the sun, bathing the red and gold and yellow leaves in its soft light, somehow made the forest appear less formidable and even friendly.

Sen-Sen made up his mind suddenly, the decision to act coming to him in a rush that made his heart throb with excitement. Before more sober cogitation might cause him to change, he hastily leaped down from the window sill. The genial woman who was now his mistress had gone out to the lean-to in the rear for more wood, and before she had started to return he had made his way to the door which she had left open.

Here he paused for the fraction of a second. He stared at the fringe of forest, doubt again assailing him; but then he saw Lucy playfully toss her head and make as if to come toward him; so, casting all caution to the winds, he streaked it across the clearing as fast as his little legs would carry him, and disappeared into the heavy timber.

Sen-Sen had embarked upon his great adventure.

II.

FOR the first hour or so, the Pekingese had a grand and glorious time. It was sheer virgin wilderness into which he had taken himself, and the very bigness of it awed him, but awed him pleasantly. He found the woods remarkably free from all signs of animal life, and he wondered about it, not realizing that many of the wild people, no doubt, were watching from their hiding places this decidedly strange specimen.

Sen-Sen barked occasionally in his shrill, high staccato and halted to await an answer, but none ever came. Nevertheless, this did not sadden him, for it was odd and thrilling just to be out here all alone. He forgot Lucy and his master and mistress and his former mode of existence in the joy of just being alive on this tingling autumn day. So on he went—aimlessly on and on.

He discovered presently that he was somewhat tired. His small legs, never having been built for distance work, felt the least bit wabbly. This being so, he very sensibly lay down in order to rest himself. He was not allowed much of a respite, however. Somewhere behind him he heard a foreign noise—a sort of "woof," given in a tone of surprise. Looking around, he beheld a most interesting creature who appeared as if he might make a charming playfellow.

The newcomer was round and brown and curly-haired, with awkward paws of great size, and little eyes that seemed to squint mischievously. He uttered another grunt, as Sen-Sen studied him, and began to amble forward with a bearing that was one of friendliness.

As the Pekingese watched the yearling brown bear approach, he could not help having some doubts. The aspect of this dweller of the woods, as he came closer and closer, took on an air that, to Sen-Sen, seemed almost ferocious. Perhaps, even though he had no horns such as Lucy possessed, he had some other weapon—hidden, of course—that might prove to be even more dangerous than the ones worn by the farm animal.

In fact, he became absolutely certain of this, when the bear had taken half a dozen more steps, and he gazed wildly about him as his heart began to flutter alarmingly. Now, the peering eyes of the other—filled with no more than downright curiosity, as a matter of fact—impressed the dog as burning with a light that meant murder. And so, completely in the grip of blind panic, poor Sen-Sen managed to make his nearly

paralyzed muscles function as he bounded up into the air and scampered off at a speed he had never known he could attain.

III.

EVER afterward that furious retreat was slightly hazy to the distracted Pekingese. Although no part of him was fashioned for rough going, he made a creditable record in his mad charge through the forest. Through underbrush and thorns he went, over logs and boulders, across swamp and hard stubble. But behind him, no matter where he went or how fast he went, that lumbering creature could always be heard grunting.

Sen-Sen was not aware, of course, that the bear tribe is perhaps the most curious of all the wild folks, and that this particular young member of it had unfalteringly determined to become more closely acquainted with the odd stranger he had found wandering in his neighborhood.

At last the little dog came to the shore of a long and narrow lake. His first impulse when he saw the body of water was to plunge desperately into it and try his fortune at swimming. On second thoughts, however, it occurred to him that his pursuer, possibly, had even more speed in the water than he had on land. Also, the bear was no more than forty or fifty feet behind him; so apparently this was no time to try this mode of retreat. On the solid earth, so far, he had succeeded in keeping in the front, and he therefore concluded that it would be worse than folly to switch his tactics. He would trust to his legs on land for just as long as he could make them hold up under him.

When he had covered another couple of hundred yards or so along the shore line, Sen-Sen realized that unless he had a rest pretty soon his legs would quickly give out. They were trembling with weakness now, and his heart was palpitating so swiftly and heavily that he felt as if it would either leap out of his throat or positively break through his ribs.

Wildly, as he made his staggering way onward, he looked about for some place of hiding, some place where he might find a haven, safely out of reach of the bear, at least until he became rested. With just a brief breathing spell, he was confident that he could regain sufficient strength to allow him to take up the retreat again and outrun his enemy. But where was this spot that would give him a new lease on life?

As if in answer to his fervent questioning, there loomed up before him a fallen tree—a slim and once stately old spruce that had, in its crash to earth, come to rest on a huge rock that had kept it from the ground and allowed a good twenty feet of its tip to stretch out over the water. The mere sight of it to Sen-Sen was a wonderful thing. He did not stop to think what he would do if he once reached the end of that perilous perch; he thought, only, that if he could ever get out there to the end of it he might have a chance to devise some other scheme before his pursuer was able to follow such a difficult course. Anyway, he bravely ran along the spruce, exhibiting remarkably steady nerves and sure-footedness, and getting out at last to the very tip. There, he deftly turned around, clung grimly on, and faced his foe.

The young bear, whose curiosity was now more fully aroused than ever, was nevertheless too well versed in forest lore not to pause to examine the tree before he began the tricky journey. Feeling that he now had his quarry where he could not get away from him, he took his time, as he had always been taught to do.

He walked out a few yards, very slowly, on the old spruce, and then suddenly got down from it with phenomenal alacrity. He did not like the crackling

sound that had come to his ears. After a minute or two of contemplation, he decided to try it again. On this occasion, he went no more than a foot or two before scrambling down to earth again. The crackling noise had been quite loud, now, and he had noticed that the tip had sagged even closer to the water. So, with a yawn, he settled down on his haunches to wait. Let the other fellow make the first move, now that he had him cornered. That was how *he* felt.

IV.

BEFORE very many minutes had gone by, Sen-Sen began to realize that maybe he had catapulted himself from the well-known frying pan into the fire. He had apparently succeeded in discovering a place to which the bear would not follow him, but, now that he had it, what was he going to do with it? He could not get back to the solid old earth; and so far as trying to make a swim for it went, he would have even less of a start than he would have had before. The only thing to do, it seemed, was to wait; to stay here on this perch that was now becoming uncomfortable in the hope of tiring the patience of that placid sentry who was lazily squinting at him with such a satisfied expression.

An hour went by, another, and still another. During this time poor little Sen-Sen did a lot of fidgeting, for he found it was getting harder all the while to keep his seat on that tip of spruce. This he had to do, for the moment he tried crawling farther down it, and nearer to the shore, his captor would deliberately rise, put his forepaws onto the log, and cause that creaking and crackling again. This was always enough to make the dog retreat to the end, when the bear would once more settle down on his haunches with a yawn that intimated he had all the time in the world to spare. Things looked very sad for the little Pekingese who had ventured out in search of friendly companionship.

From across the late, however, there came to his ears at last a long-drawn and plaintive wail—a sound very much like that frequently made by Lucy, the brindle cow, only much louder. Sen-Sen wondered, as it was repeated, what it could be. The bear, down there below him, seemed to take no notice of it. As for himself, it immediately brought back memories of the pleasant home he had left, of the kindly master and mistress whom he had deserted, of the safety and protection that had been his. Why, oh, why, had he been so foolish as to come out on this mad and futile journey? Probably he would never get back from it; probably he would perish right here, without even having a chance to swim; probably——

Sen-Sen never had a chance to finish his thoughts; instead, he came dangerously close to losing his hold and tumbling down into the water. A roar had suddenly broken out on the stillness—a roar that sounded like a thousand trumpets going off all at once. Somehow, though, Sen-Sen managed to retain his place, although his body was trembling and his heart was beating madly, high up in his throat.

Before he had much time, however, to wonder about the noise, it was followed by a crashing and crackling of underbrush and branches not a dozen yards away from him, and the dazed little Pekingese saw a mighty antlered head appear. Then the whole body of the great creature came into view—the biggest body, the dog told himself, that he had ever seen. Astounded and stunned by the arrival of this latest character on the scene, Sen-Sen just clung there and watched with his eyes popping.

Again came the plaintive wail from across the lake, again came that trumpeting bellow from the giant on the

bank, and then the powerful bull moose, with a challenging toss of his head, surged out into the water in answer to the call of the cow.

The stranded Pekingese, his brain in a wild turmoil, nevertheless managed to do some fairly sane thinking. If he stayed where he was, he would never get anywhere, unless it were into the hands of the bear; then this monstrous creature who had just started swimming looked to be of the same breed, roughly, as Lucy; perhaps the cow, after all, was not as dangerous as he had thought, for if she were, the people in the cabin would probably not have her around them. Anyway, the immense animal, who was now almost under the spruce, was certainly going in the direction Sen-Sen himself favored, and that was away from that brown watcher.

Gathering together his nerves and his muscles, Sen-Sen lost no time. As the moose went by beneath him, the little Pekingese gritted his teeth and hurled himself through the air. In a seething spray of water, he felt his claws sink into heavy fur, and then he opened his jaws and closed in with his teeth. There was a single toss of that antlered head, as if the bull were merely flicking away some insignificant insect, but the dog hung on grimly. The moose, apparently not further bothering with his slight burden, got into his stride and swam along straight for the opposite shore, while his passenger, with what amounted to a grin of triumph, gazed back at the sadly disappointed bear.

V.

IT was a tired and bedraggled little Sen-Sen that staggered into the farmyard toward sundown, but he was happy. On that journey across the lake, between those sturdy antlers, he had developed a theory, and now he immediately put it to the test. He went over to Lucy, who was contentedly munching the grass. On his arrival, she went through her usual antics of pretending to catch him with her horns, but this time the dog did not retreat. Instead, he snapped back at her and barked joyously as he found that he had been right in deciding that her horns just playfully grazed him. A great contentment overtook him, for he had made a merry friend at last.

So, being extremely tired out, he flopped down on the ground right where he was and took a snooze, while Lucy continued to munch the grass beside him.

Using the Boy Right

THE old customer was astonished to find one morning that instead of his usual barber, there had been assigned to him a mere child, the son of the proprietor.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed the old patron. "Surely you don't intend this boy to shave me?"

The assistant barber paused from his hair-cutting and, going to the rear of the shop, called the proprietor. The old gentleman repeated his former question.

"Oh, come, sir!" cried the proprietor. "Don't be harsh. Let the boy have his fun for once. It's his birthday!"

The Versatile Teacher

WITH a view to learning the art of boxing a young man went to a "professor."

Soon after they had begun the first bout the instructor floored his pupil with a neat half hook.

"I say," spluttered the novice, as he struggled to rise, "is it necessary to knock me down like this?"

"Bless your heart, no, sir," said the old pugilist. "Stand up and I'll show you a dozen other ways."

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGER BY THE WAYSIDE.

SLANTING rays from the newly risen sun struck athwart the face of the man lying on the ground, and he opened his eyes and sat up like one to whom swift and definite awakening is a habit. Also like one to whom the consulting of the sun as a timepiece is another habit, he looked at the eastern hills. Deciding that the hour was about five, he shook himself free of the tightly rolled, brown blanket in which he had slumbered as peacefully as if springs and not the hard earth had made his couch and got easily to his feet.

That swift ease marked all his movements then. He went about what he had to do noiselessly, but with no effect of attempted secrecy. It was only that he was lithe and graceful about his tasks. Stumbling or fumbling would have been like a discord.

The night before, he had chosen this hilltop for his resting place because he had known that if there was a night breeze he would catch it here, and also because there was some grass for the horse which he had picketed at the edge of a gentle slope. At sundown he had eaten a plentiful but simple supper, had smoked two cigarettes, and then had rolled himself in his blanket. For hours he had lain motionless in a dreamless sleep which renewed him, mind and body. The flow of an abundant vitality was in him now. It showed in his red cheeks and in his bright gray eyes.

He was so tall a man, an inch over six feet, that there was about him an effect of slenderness. However, if he had been half a dozen inches shorter, he would have been called stocky. His height belied the breadth of his shoulders, and even the actual slenderness from the torso down did not emphasize it.

Picking up the big gray hat which he had cast down the night before near the saddle, a saddle which had served for a pillow in lieu of feathers, he set it on his head, pulling the brim down over his eyes. The hair which the hat then covered was reddish-brown and close-clipped. The face below the hat was lean. It was drawn so fine that there was almost but not quite a suggestion of hollows in the cheeks. The cheek bones jutted just slightly above these suggested hollows.

The nose was big but straight, without any hint of being bulbous. The mouth was wide and full, but the lips, because of their being firmly held, did

not seem too full for that face. The chin was the chin of a resolute man, broad with a cleft in it, but not too defiantly thrust out. A rough-hewn face it was, capable, it would seem, of picturing many emotions, but just now, in the dawn, placid, contented.

The man's first act was to care for the horse. He had apparently fed well enough, for there was a circle, to the end of the picket rope in every direction, within which the grass had been eaten. The man freed him of the rope, and the horse, a rangy, bony sorrel, stood still and waited. Fifty feet from where the man had slept there was a trickle of water down the hillside, with a little pool in the rock at the bottom. Leading the horse to this, the man let him drink, and then he saddled and bridled him.

Fifteen minutes later, having washed, eaten, and smoked a cigarette, the man stepped up into the saddle. He was so tall that the act was one merely of stepping up, not of leaping. He crossed the hilltop at a walk and set the animal down a trail which led to a mountain road, this road leading in its turn, as he knew, to a village below.

The sun was well up above these foothills now, with the promise of another warm day.

Just before the man left the hilltop, his eyes swept the surrounding country, as far as they could reach. Just beyond him there was a ragged, brush-grown ravine; beyond that, farther away than the casual eye would have guessed, there were squat, brown mountains, devoid of vegetation, like huge potato hills newly drawn up with the hoe. To the left of these were other mountains upon which juniper trees grew and, still farther on, the broken, rugged line of the higher mountains, green far up and still with a little whiteness of snow on their peaks. And in between and beyond and to his right and his left and behind him, the man knew, was the cattle and sheep country. Thousands of head of each were grazing unseen all through this country.

"Good country!" The man nodded and went on.

The descent was not marked. He covered half a mile and was not more than fifty feet lower down than he had been when he had left his sleeping ground. Here there was a turn in the road, and the village which was his destination was revealed to him. From now on the road sloped down steeply, ending in the hollow which chance or design had made the site of the little town.

The man swept the place with one glance. He had never been in it before, but he knew just what it was like. It would not differ from a thousand other villages of the West. There would be a hotel of a sort, probably a pretty bad hotel, just possibly a first-rate hotel. Sometimes these little towns had a surge of civic pride that found an outlet in the erection of a hotel to the cost of which everybody, far and wide, contributed.

There would be a church and a pool-room, a school and a garage, one store, two, or three. Then on each side of these, on the one main street, would be small houses that continued till they ceased altogether and the open country began. All these would represent the places of business and the homes of a few men and women who had gathered together to serve a country many miles in extent.

No railroad, as the newcomer was aware, ran within seventy-five miles of this village. Those who lived there got out of it by automobile when the roads permitted, by horse when they did not; and those who came to trade got in by the same means. Freight was brought in once a day by an automobile truck from the county seat. This ran on a schedule, but was usually several hours late. Though transportation was

poor, communication was better. This man, now riding down to the town, had taken pains to discover that there was a telegraph office; a post office, too, of course, but it functioned no better than the truck because it was dependent for its mail service on the truck.

"Well, horse," said the man, "let's slide down and see what the news is."

His eyes brightened as he spoke. There was an anticipatory interest in those eyes, as if the man expected that whatever news there was would be intensely interesting.

He was in the act of gathering up the horse to send him into a gallop when he saw a man sitting at the side of the road. The stranger stopped his horse at once. The fact was that there was something in this man's attitude which was in keeping with a tense and critical situation which he knew would develop in the village that day. The man did not need to be especially clever to sense that this other man was undoubtedly an actor in the drama into which the stranger himself was about to plunge.

That the sitting man was suffering agony of mind there could be no doubt. He had cast his hat down beside him and had plunged both of his big browned hands into his jet-black hair, The fingers of the hands were spread, and he ran them back through the hair, tugging at it as he pulled the fingers forward. He rocked his body from side to side, and now and then a murmur came from him. A little beyond him stood a gray horse, motionless, its head drooping.

The man astride the sorrel knew the propriety of minding his own business. In this country a man was allowed to have his troubles by himself if he so wished, and apparently this man wished to be alone with his, else he would not have withdrawn himself as he had done. The stranger, however, had known all along that he could not observe the ordinary amenities. He had decided again the night before, while he had smoked his cigarettes, that he would have to intrude if intrusion became necessary. Besides, he more than half suspected who this man was.

"Anything I can do, stranger?" he asked gently.

CHAPTER II.

A PICTURE OF HORROR.

LIKE many rugged, self-reliant men, the man on the sorrel had the strain of gentleness in him. He was not one who, being strong, plunged along to the satisfaction of his own desires. He had never been trained to be considerate of others, but he was considerate. It was a gift to him. He had always been ready to extend a helping hand and, contrariwise, he had laughed off the helping hand extended to himself, or would have done so if a helping hand had ever been necessary for him. It had never been necessary because he was rarely in a quarrel, seeking no entrance to it, and he had never been sick and had infrequently been dismayed. A lucky man he was in temperament and in body, and luckier still because he was aware of his first luck.

He did not know, of course, how this man in mental pain would take his address. He was prepared for anything —anger, coldness, defiance, the unreasoning petulance of one who fights with woe. But the man displayed none of these emotions as he slowly lifted his head. He showed only a kind of bleakness and blankness, as if he had suffered so much that his capacity for emotion, except that dull rocking and moaning, had passed out of him.

There was nothing shown in his brown eyes. They seemed to have been made shallow by pain. It was as if they had been so filled with so many things lately that they had become too weary to mirror more. They looked

upon the horseman, but did not seem to see him. Pity welled up in the stranger's heart. It was as fine a pity as any woman could have bestowed on the hapless man. It was untouched by any scorn to which these signs of weakness might have given rise. Besides, if this man was he whom the stranger suspected him to be, the stranger was already enlisted in his service; had been enlisted in it from the time he had set out on his hundred-mile journey, and, in fact, before that.

The rocking of the other man's body had now ceased, and no more murmurs came from his lips. The horseman let him take his time, only fixing his quiet gray eyes on his face, so that, as he looked into them, the sitter might gather the signs of friendliness from them. This the sitter seemed, rather dully, at last to do. When he spoke, the horseman perceived that he had heard the question addressed to him, but had not caught its meaning.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"You seem to be in trouble," the horseman said. "Is there anything I can do?"

The man beside the road stood up, after he had lifted his hat slowly and put it on his head. He stood for a moment looking down at the village, with that same effect of dullness.

"I swear, stranger," he said, "I'm just about beat out. I ain't had no sleep in I don't know when. I been sittin' here since midnight, just like you found me. I didn't know day had come till I looked up when you spoke to me. I been in a kind of a daze; all of us has been in a kind of daze for a long time."

He rubbed his chin upon which there was a heavy stubble of black beard, and then he turned his eyes back to the horseman. "Stranger hereabouts, ain't you?" he asked.

"Yes; I live north beyond the mountains, hundred miles or so."

He slipped down from the horse and walked up to the man. "Name's McGregor," he went on. "Foreman of a ranch up around Scanlon. Everything goin' pretty good this time of year, and thought I would take a little trip and see this part of the country. Fine country, isn't it?"

There was a very slight kindling in the other man's eyes. It seemed, for a moment, as if a tiny flame of interest and pride might begin to burn there, but it died swiftly.

"Stranger," he said, "I'm sufferin' the tortures of hell."

"Take it easy, ol' boy," McGregor said. "You been tearin' yourself to pieces with grief or worry or somethin'. If you don't let down, somethin' is liable to bust inside you. I reckon you have got a fight on your hands. If there is anything I can do, I'm right here. Like I say, I'm on a vacation. I am foot-loose for a month. I got a little money. I can fight if a fight is on."

There was not even a hint of boastfulness in his tone. Even this brain-dulled man seemed to see that what he said was merely for the sake of emphasizing his offer.

"Yeh," the other said. "I can see you stack up all right."

"When did you eat last?" McGregor asked.

"My name is Hammersley," the man said, as if he remembered that he had not met the stranger halfway in the matter of introduction. "We got a ranch over the hills here. I ain't eat nothin' since—I don't know—last night, some time yesterday. Oh, I don't remember!"

"Smoke?"

Hammersley fumbled in his breast pocket, but his fingers came empty out of it. "Don't seem to have no tobacco," he answered.

McGregor gave him tobacco and papers, and he rolled a cigarette with

unsteady fingers. While his head was bent to his task, McGregor studied him. He was not so tall as McGregor by half a head, but he was thick-bodied, from his big, well-poised head to his feet. He was an inordinately strong man, McGregor believed, but McGregor did not wonder that he was so beaten down just now. He was that kind of man, McGregor was sure, who would face without a tremor any danger which threatened himself alone, but who would come to this condition when he found one he loved threatened, with himself powerless to ease the loved one's suffering.

Hammersley put the cigarette in his mouth, lighted it, and inhaled deeply.

"I'll fix up some food for you," McGregor said, and Hammersley said nothing.

McGregor built a guarded fire, produced food and coffee from his saddle roll, and presently offered bacon sandwiches and a steaming cup to Hammersley.

Hammersley cast the smoking cigarette from him. Then habit asserted itself. "Put your foot on that, will you?" he asked.

As McGregor turned aside to stamp out the butt, Hammersley attacked the food. He ate and drank in silence. Then he lifted his head and wiped his mouth.

"You kind of caught me off my guard, McGregor," he said. "I'll have another cigarette, if you don't mind."

The fingers with which he twisted the cigarette together were steadier now. A foreman on a cattle ranch comes in time to be a swift and sure judge of men. He has to figure what a given man will do in a given situation. McGregor was thirty-two, and he had come to his high position young—when he was but twenty-five. He had, however, been born in the cattle country and had been able to ride almost as soon as he was able to walk, so that his apprenticeship had been long enough. So now McGregor judged that if Hammersley were given a chance, if he were offered sympathetic silence, he would talk. He would be glad to ease the burden of his mind, since he seemed to trust McGregor with that swift trust which men who spend much time alone know.

Hammersley smoked for a space in silence. At last he dropped the cigarette in front of him and put the heel of his boot on it. "Murder is an awful thing, ain't it, McGregor?" he asked.

McGregor did not start; he showed no sign of surprise. The other man was not looking at him, and he kept his cool eyes only on the square, black-bearded face.

"It is an awful thing, Hammersley," he agreed, when Hammersley did not at once speak again.

Hammersley looked up then, squarely into McGregor's eyes. Hammersley's own eyes were now hot with passion. He was returning, McGregor supposed, to an earlier phase. He must have been like this at the beginning of the drama; he would have continued like this if grief for some one else had not torn at his heart. Here was a strong man, a resentful man, a fighting man.

"A fight that ends in a man's bein' killed ain't nothin'," Hammersley pursued. "In a thing like that each man gets his chance. The two men are settlin' somethin'. But this murder I'm speakin' about wasn't no fair fight. It was as brutal a murder as ever was. It was done for money, and how one man can kill another man for money is beyond me. Money ain't so hard to make. We've made it on our ranch; not a lot, but enough. It gets me how one man can sneak up behind another and put a bullet into him, killin' him on the spot, just to take a wad of money away from him."

"It's done, though," returned McGregor gently.

"Done! I reckon it is done. It has been done right here in this country, right over there on the Camas Trail. This fella Moody was known to have money on him. He was a blowhard. He came into the village with his money in a bag and didn't make no bones about it. He was goin' to buy a ranch. He had the money to pay for it. 'Trot out your ranches, men, and lemme have a look at them,' Moody would say. You know the kind of abs'lute fool I mean."

"I've met up with that kind," McGregor said.

"Well, they come on him lyin' beside the trail, dead as a man could be, a bullet through him, a bullet throwed into his back, and the bag of money gone."

Sweat had come on Hammersley's forehead. He wiped it away with a thick forefinger. Terror was in his eyes now. In his brain, McGregor knew, there was a picture vastly more horrible than the verbal picture he had just drawn.

"You got another cigarette?" Hammersley asked.

McGregor gave him the "makings," and when Hammersley had finished, rolled a cigarette for himself. He waited.

"What a pack of liars men can be," Hammersley grated. "Swearin' an innocent man's life away!" A mild oath dropped from his lips. "You wait," he went on. "If they hang that brother of mine, if they kill my sister, too, doin' it, I will shoot the heart out of each one of them. I know they lied. They know they lied. But it was four to one, them four against my brother, all by himself. I s'pose the jury couldn't do nothin' else."

"They found your brother guilty of this murder you speak of?" McGregor asked.

Hammersley put his cigarette between his lips, but it had gone out. He dropped it onto the ground and fixed his eyes on it, as if he had to hold them to something. "They found him guilty," he whispered, "and they hung him this mornin' about the time that sun was comin' up over the hills. They hung him unless—unless——"

He could go no further. He was shaking like a man with a chill, though, curiously, his lips seemed to be stiff and drawn.

CHAPTER III.

WAITING FOR NEWS.

STILL McGregor showed no surprise. Hammersley's statement had no effect upon him except to make him continue his steady regard of the man. And he did not speak. He let Hammersley take his time to regain a little of his self-control.

"They hung my brother unless our lawyer got to the governor strong enough to persuade the governor to stop the hangin' for a while at least," Hammersley went on at last, very wearily. "But I reckon it's all over. I don't suppose the governor would do anything. It would be just an ordinary murder and hangin' to him. No; I expect my brother is dead by now. I'll have to go an' get him an' bring him home an' bury him, if the governor hasn't done nothin'."

"You were expectin' word this mornin'?" McGregor suggested.

"Yes; as soon as the telegraph office opens. That won't be till round eight o'clock. It must be after six now. I tried to sleep last night, but I couldn't, and so I set out along about midnight an' rode over here. I think I been sittin' here for hours. I don't know just what time I got here."

"There isn't anything we can do for a while then," McGregor said. "Let's sit down, an' you take it as easy as you can."

They sat by the side of the road.

"I got an idea they didn't hang your

brother this mornin'," McGregor said. "I've heard this here governor is a pretty square sort of a chap. They say that if you can prove anything to him, he will do what is right in spite of what anybody might say. You just keep on hopin', Hammersley, and while you're doin' it suppose you just gimme the inside of this thing. Mebbe I could lend you a hand. If the governor should stave off the hangin', we would have to do some snappy work mebbe, an' if I knew the inside of the thing, I would be ready to hop to it."

"Why," replied Hammersley feebly, "it ain't nothin' that could int'rest you, McGregor. You are on a vacation. You don't want to get yourself tied up to a thing like this and spoil all your fun."

The color in McGregor's cheeks deepened a little. He leaned over and plucked a blade of grass and put it into his mouth, as if he sought by the simple act to cover some confusion he felt.

"I take it you are up against a gang of crooks, Hammersley," he went on. "You are tryin' to fight 'em all alone, and you ain't in no shape to fight. You'll need help. I'm here to give it to you. Why, I would have to, wouldn't I? That's the way the game is played, ain't it?"

"You might be tied up for some time," Hammersley pointed out.

"I'll stick," said McGregor quietly. "I'll stick for the big show."

Hammersley turned his head and looked at McGregor. He seemed to be puzzled, but in the end, after his scrutiny, his need being so great, he held out his hand. "If you help me," he said solemnly, "I'll never forget it as long as I live."

"I'll help you," McGregor returned with equal solemnity. "Now, tell me what you know."

"The thing happened a coupla months ago," Hammersley began. "My brother had driven some cattle over to our shippin' point. He had taken a coupla men with him, extra hands we had put on in the spring. They was leavin', and when he had got the cattle off, he paid them and started home alone. He come at midday to the village down below. This here fella was there, shootin' off his mouth as usual. He had been hangin' around the town, at the hotel, for a month.

"He was a tenderfoot, and he was always kiddin' everybody about the West an' what a meek place it was an' all that. He said he hadn't seen none of the wildness he had read about. Somebody told him once that if he didn't quit shootin' off his mouth, he would see somethin'. He was a big chap an' had nerve in his own way, an' he told this fella to trot out what he had to show.

"Well, the night my brother was restin' up at the hotel was chilly, and a bunch of men was sittin' around the stove. This chap come in. He began to talk right off as usual. He said he knowed where there was a ranch that could be had cheap, and he would be leavin' in the mornin' to buy it.

"'I think it'll suit me,' he said. 'An' I got the money to buy, an' that's that.'

"He had that kind of a line of talk. Somebody asked him where the ranch was, and he told 'em, an' they all knowed whose ranch it was. He told 'em what the price was, and they said, honest enough, that it was a good buy. It was ol' man Hansen's place, about twenty-five miles over here. His wife died last Christmas, an' he wanted to sell out, him gettin' old an' all.

"My brother was always a silent man. He's five years older'n I am. He didn't say nothin' for a while, an' pretty soon the men that was stayin' at the hotel drifted up to bed, and the others went home, leavin' my brother an' this fella alone. My brother was always a polite an' considerate man, and when the stranger begun to ask him questions he

answered, an' he told this fella that the Hansen place was worth more'n Hansen was askin'. He said he knowed the ranch, as he always had to ride by it when he come to town. An' he said he knowed Hansen, an' anything Hansen told the fella the fella could rely on."

"'Why,' the fella said, 'if you go by the Hansen place, me an' you can ride together in the mornin'. I'd be glad of company. I ain't never been over that way yet.'

"My brother said that would be all right. In the mornin', about sunup, they was ready to start. This fella had a bag strapped to his saddle. My brother looked at it, an' he saw that it kinda bulged.

"'You ain't carryin' money in that bag, are you?' he asked. 'I heard you talkin' last night about havin' your money with you.'

"The fella patted the bag an' said he had the dough right in it. He said he wasn't afraid to tote it around.

"'I got a gun on me, an' I know how to use it,' he said.

"He must have been a bigger fool than most men of that kind," McGregor offered.

"He was, I reckon," Hammersley agreed. "I reckon he was the worst fool that ever hit these parts, all eat up with conceit, you know.

"Well, him and my brother rode for twenty miles till the Camas Trail branches off to go up to Hansen's place. They had jogged along, seein' nobody, and this fella had kidded my brother some about what my brother had said.

"'This here trail is lonely,' my brother said. "'If you like I will ride on to Hansen's with you.'

"The fella just laughed. He said my brother could make the trip if he was interested in seein' a man grab off a ranch in jig time, but my brother said he wouldn't be interested in nothin' like that. So they laughed and parted right there at the head of the trail.

"It wasn't till toward evening that the fella's body was found. He was lyin' beside the trail, dead. His money was gone, every cent of it. He had been shot through the back."

"How far had he gone up the trail?" McGregor asked.

"There was somethin' queer about that," Hammersley answered. "Just before my brother come to a turn in the road, he looked back. This here Camas Trail winds up quite considerable, and my brother could see that this fella had rode for about a half a mile. He was still going on steady. When his body was found, it was only about five hundred feet from the head of the trail. There was marks as if he had been shot right where the trail begun, and his body had been dragged that far up the trail. How he ever got back there I don't know."

"What were the signs?" McGregor asked.

"There was blood where the body was found and at the end of the trail, but none where my brother had last seen this chap. The men that found the body, or two of them anyway, rode up to Hansen's right away to see if Hansen knowed anything. Then Hansen rode down with them, and later there was more ridin' back and forth on the trail, so when the sheriff got over from the county seat, there was no way of tellin' whether this fella had gone up the trail as my brother said or not. Anyhow, all signs indicated that he had been shot at the end of the trail and his body dragged up it a ways."

"You say your brother and Moody didn't meet nobody as they rode," McGregor said. "What did they have against him except that he had been ridin' with this man like anybody might have done?"

"That's where the crookedness comes

in," Hammersley replied passionately. "Four men swore that they had been up on a bench above my brother and this man when the two of them parted. They testified that the man rode up the Camas Trail a ways just like my brother said, and then that my brother called him back. They had some words together, and the man seemed to be mad. He threw out his hand at my brother and turned and started to ride up the trail again. My brother pulled his gun, shot him in the back, got down, dragged the body up to where it was found, took the bag, and rode off. The men, bein' strangers, said they couldn't see no way but for them to ride to the county seat and get the sheriff. They said they knowed the man was dead. Before the sheriff, knowin' my brother had ridden out with the man, got to our house, the body had been found."

"Who were these four men?" McGregor asked.

"Each one of 'em worked for a different outfit," Hammersley answered. "One outfit was north, one south, one east, and one west. They claimed they had been to town and was ridin' over south to call on three girls that lived in the neighborhood where one of them worked."

"Tough citizens, are they?" McGregor inquired.

"I don't know nothin' about law," Hammersley said. "Our lawyer was allowed to ask them some questions about themselves, like had they ever been arrested or mixed up in trouble an' so forth, but they testified they hadn't been arrested and hadn't been into nothin' special. Just a little drinkin', a little gamblin', a little runnin' around, like some young fellas will do. Their testimony stood up.

"And my brother didn't have no witnesses. He had only his own word. He told about partin' with this fella an' goin' home. He said he didn't know the fella had been shot till the sheriff come."

"It was just one man's word against the word of four others."

"Well," Hammersley said uneasily, "there was the matter of the gun."

"The gun?"

"Drivin' cattle, a man takes a gun with him, you know," Hammersley went on. "My brother took his. First thing the sheriff asked him was where was his gun. When my brother got home, he had took off his belt and hung it up, layin' the gun on a table in his room. He told the sheriff where it was. The sheriff went an' got it, and when he come downstairs, he stood lookin' at my brother with the gun in his hand.

" 'You fired this gun, did you, Henry?' " he asked.

" 'Why, no,' Henry answered, lookin' surprised. 'I didn't have it out of the holster from the time I left here till I got back.'

" 'Well,' the sheriff said, 'you knowed it had been fired?'

" 'Why, I didn't look at it,' Henry replied. 'I just stuffed it into the holster when I was leavin'.'

"Henry ain't no gunman. He was always that way about guns. He would wear one if the occasion demanded, but it was just like him not to look at it. Then I see I made a mistake. I made a mistake because accusin' Henry had seemed so ridiculous that I hadn't thought it necessary to figure things out at all.

" 'Why, sheriff,' I said. 'I fired that gun.'

"He stood lookin' at me then with a queer kind of a smile on his lips. " 'Tell it to me,' he says.

" 'Why,' I said, 'you know we been bothered with a bunch of wild horses up this way lately. They been comin' up to the barns and the corrals in the night and gettin' our horses to millin' around, them that was in the corrals.

One of our mares got herself hung up one night. About a week ago I stayed up, layin' for them. It was moonlight, and pretty soon a big gray comes lopin' up to the corral. He was a pretty sight, with his head flung way up and his mane and tail streamin'. I always liked a horse, you know, sheriff, an' this big boy took my eye. I made up my mind that if he liked the place so well, I would let him make it his reg'lar home.

" 'So I went into the barn to get my rope. When I come out he was jammin' himself up against the corral, and some of the horses inside was jammin' up on the other side. This gray was such a powerful beast I thought he would tear the corral down. I fired one shot close over his head, and then I run toward the corral, expectin' to rope him as he dashed away. He was too quick for me. My rope missed him, and he was gone like a streak.'

" 'I'll take you along with me, Henry,' the sheriff said. "I am accusin' you of the murder of Walter Woody.'

" 'Why, sure, I'll go along with you,' Henry said. 'I haven't done anything, sheriff.'

" 'Where's that bag?' the sheriff asked.

" 'I haven't seen it since I left that man,' Henry answered.

"The sheriff had a deputy with him, and they searched the house and then the barn. They found the bag hid in the barn."

"Planted there," said McGregor.

"Oh, sure! The sheriff tried to make Henry tell where the money was, but never havin' laid eyes on it, Henry couldn't tell him. So he carted Henry off to jail, the trial was held, and Henry was found guilty and sentenced to die. He's dead now unless the governor stopped it last night."

"Well, this thing interests me," said McGregor, his eyes averted. "I don't think your brother is dead. In fact I'd make a long guess that he ain't. I don't know why I got the feelin'—er—but it's strong enough so that I ain't worryin' none. Now, what do you think we'd better do? Think we'd better go down into the village together as if we had met up or go down separately as if we didn't know each other?"

"I wish I had your feelin' about my brother." Hammersley sighed. "An' I'll let you decide what we'll do. I ain't thinkin' none too clear."

"I think we better be strangers for a while," McGregor suggested. "I'll mosey on down, an' you come in about half an hour. The telegraph office will be openin' up before long. I'll be hangin' around there when you come down. Stable down there, is there?"

"Back of the hotel."

McGregor mounted and rode down into the village and stabled his horse. As he had ridden up to the hotel, he had seen a small building with the telegraph company's sign on it, across from the hotel. A dozen or so men were gathered in front of it.

McGregor walked across the street, edged through the knot of men, and tried the door.

"Operator ain't here yet," a man volunteered. "Won't be here for half an hour. He's eatin' his breakfast. Yuh couldn't hurry that bird if he was goin' to get news about the end of the world."

"Expectin' some news, are you?" McGregor asked.

"News? By gosh, we are expectin' to learn whether a man is dead or alive. That's news, ain't it?"

"How do you mean?" McGregor asked.

The man started the story all over again, and he was still telling it when the operator came across the street and unlocked the door. He was chewing a toothpick, and he seemed the least in-

terested of all the men in the news he might get.

As he threw the door open, a horse came galloping down the street, and Hammersley flung himself from it as he drew it to a halt in front of the office. The men fell back from him, eying him in silence.

"You got anything yet, Matt?" he asked the operator.

"I just got here," the operator answered. "I ain't even cut in yet."

"Find out if there is anything for me, will you?" Hammersley asked in a hushed voice.

The operator pulled a plug from a single hole below a double row of holes, and a sounder on the table began to clatter. Hammersley pressed up against the railing, and the other men, including McGregor, crowded in behind him.

"What's it say?" Hammersley breathed.

"Why, that ain't for me," the operator answered. "County seat is sendin' to somebody down the line, I guess. Sendin' sounds like that ham at the county seat."

"How will my message come?" Hammersley asked.

"Be relayed at the county seat from the capital."

"Oh, can't you ask him if he has got anything?"

"I can't break in on him," the operator snapped. "Keep your shirt on, and I will get in on the wire in a minute."

He seated himself before the clattering instrument and opened the switch, keeping the key closed with his forefinger. He idly chewed his toothpick as he gazed out of the window.

"You must be expectin' big news, stranger," McGregor said to Hammersley.

"Big news," Hammersley assented.

"Well, I would take it easy if I were you," McGregor advised.

The clattering of the sounder suddenly stopped. There was an instant of silence during which McGregor could hear the heavy breathing of the men behind him, and then there were snapped-out Morse characters, as the operator who had been receiving gave his "O. K.", and then there was silence again.

The local operator took his finger from the key and sounded a call. There was an immediate response. The operator manipulated his key and again held it closed. The sounder clattered. The operator manipulated his key again. There was the brief "I, I," of assent. The operator definitely closed his key. He did not turn around.

"There ain't nothin' for you yet, Hammersley," he said. "I told the county seat to ask the capital if they had anything. I'll be hearin' later on."

Hammersley turned about and made his way blindly through the group of men as they fell away before him.

CHAPTER IV.

A TENSE DRAMA.

WHEN Hammersley left the office McGregor followed him out into the street. The others came close behind McGregor. Across the street men stepped down from the platforms in front of the hotel and the store next to it and came toward the group. Hammersley and McGregor were immediately the center of an enlarged group.

Those who had come across the street wanted to know what the news was, and when they were told, they clucked and murmured and commented.

"Well, yuh know," a man offered, "no news is good news."

"There is something in that, Hammersley," McGregor said. "If the worst had happened, your lawyer would have let you know."

Hammersley turned his red, dazed eyes on his new friend. "It's the other way around," he returned. "The

lawyer would have had to see the governor last night. If he had got a stay from him, he would have filed his message in the night. If he waited for—for the other, he wouldn't file the message till this mornin'."

McGregor opened his lips as if he were about to speak, but then he closed them again. He linked his arm through Hammersley's and led him out of the crowd. "Keep up your nerve," he said. "I haven't given up by a long shot. I just got a feeling that your brother is still all right. Let's get away from these people."

"I got to stay near the telegraph office," Hammersley told him.

"We'll go to the hotel."

As they started for the platform, McGregor saw two horses turn into the village street. They dashed down the street at a gallop.

At the increasing sound they made, Hammersley turned. "There's Annie, my sister," he said, "and I ain't got no good news for her."

The horses sped up to the hotel, and a man and a girl dismounted. The girl ran up to Hammersley. He took her hands and only shook his head.

While brother and sister stood clinging to each other, McGregor looked at the girl. She was tailer for a woman than Hammersley was for a man, but there was a suggestion of his bodily strength in her. Her hair was very black, and beneath it the oval of her cheeks was without a suggestion of color.

As her brother shook his head, a tremor passed through her, but she conquered it and then stood there in a kind of rigidity which spoke of a strength of mind as well as of body. She was not, McGregor saw, worrying so much for herself as her brother was worrying for her.

"I couldn't wait," she told Hammersley. "I just couldn't. Of course I didn't sleep last night, and the long night was all I could stand. You mean there is no word, Jim?"

"No word," he answered.

He glanced at McGregor, and for a moment McGregor thought he was going to forget their agreement and introduce him as one who had offered his assistance. Then he seemed to remember, and his eyes went to the man who had accompanied the girl. McGregor's own eyes followed that glance.

McGregor saw a tall, sunburned man with cold, hard, blue eyes and an impassive face. There was something very still about this man. His eyes met Hammersley's, and they did not waver, and no emotion of any kind seemed to show in them. The eyes were steadily held; the lashes did not stir. The man's hands were at his sides, motionless at the end of long arms.

The girl, watching her brother, seemed to see his gaze go to this man's face. She roused herself out of her rigid self-control and, turning, beckoned to the man. He went up to her and laid his right hand lightly on her arm. She was either unaware of the contact or gave it no significance. She permitted the hand to lie there.

McGregor, watching the three narrowly, felt his face burn. This familiarity on the man's part angered him. The girl was suffering. The man was taking advantage of that. And there was something more, as the girl at once proved.

"Jim," she said, "I feel that there is still hope. Mr. Harbord is helping us, too."

"Is he?" Hammersley asked. "How's that?"

"I took it on myself to send a message to the governor last night," Harbord told him. "I got twelve men to sign it—twelve of the most influential men I could think of. I took the liberty of saying that new evidence had

been discovered. That is about the only thing that would lead the governor to intervene. Of course there isn't any new evidence yet, but there may be. We shall just have to keep on working."

"You think there's a chance the governor may do somethin'?" Hammersley asked.

"I think there is more than a chance," Harbord answered. "I have met the governor. In fact I entertained him when he was through here, campaigning. You know, the governor is a cattleman himself, and in my telegram I played on that, told him who you folks were and all about you."

"I don't know how I'm ever goin' to thank you," Hammersley said. "I didn't know as we had such good friends."

"The men who signed the telegram don't believe your brother is guilty," Harbord added. "I don't believe he is guilty. I don't think he was the kind of man who would kill another man in cold blood."

The hand which had been resting on the girl's arm slipped down and clasped her hand briefly. She did not seem to notice it. She did not withdraw her hand, but McGregor was sure there was no answering pressure. The girl seemed to be oblivious of everything but her thoughts about the man in the death cell over at the capital.

Harbord's action stirred anger in McGregor, however. He strode up to the trio, where they stood apart from the watching crowd.

McGregor fixed his eyes on Harbord's face. The man was looking at the girl as he went on further to express his confidence that his telegram would result in action by the governor. As he finished, however, he seemed to become aware of the steady regard which McGregor had fixed upon him. He lifted his head, and blue eyes and gray met.

Harbord apparently had an abundance of self-control. Not only that, but he seemed to be of a cold, unemotional nature, so that habit and natural inclination combined to make him master of himself in emergencies. On the surface there seemed to be no emergency here. A stranger, caught up as he might easily be in this tense drama, had approached to discover whether the principals in it were about to do or say anything interesting. At its worst it was only an act of discourtesy, and a man might be forgiven for forgetting to be courteous just now.

However, as McGregor had judged he would be able to do, Harbord seemed to probe at once beneath the surface. His first intention, McGregor believed, was to stare him down. His blue eyes, as he fixed them on McGregor's face, were steady, cold, and unwinking as they had been all along. He seemed to believe that he could abash this intruder with his stare.

McGregor, however, could be cold and hard, too, if the occasion required. There was a strain of gentleness in him, but this gentleness was rarely aroused except by those who were weaker than himself, whether it was a natural weakness or a weakness induced by emotion as in the case of Hammersley. With men who stood on equal footing with him McGregor was simply a man in his turn, playing the game as developments made it necessary to play it.

Because of Harbord's attitude toward the girl in her time of distress, he disliked the man intensely. That was another thing characteristic of him. He leaped to likes and dislikes quickly, and he had proved to himself that he usually leaped to them justly. He had a safe instinct in that.

Therefore his eyes were as cold and hard as Harbord's own as the two men faced each other. Harbord's eyes were the first to change. The coldness in them was replaced by little, fiery

gleams, showing that he could be suddenly and swiftly angered. McGregor guessed that Harbord had expected to stare him down at once and was nettled because he had been unable to do it.

"What is it, fellow?" he asked.

That sneering word "fellow" was as sandpaper on McGregor's pride. Harbord gave it an insulting inflection. McGregor had not meant to announce himself as a friend of Hammersley's, but now all his straightforwardness urged him to step out as just that. He didn't trust this man Harbord. He was a little too "smooth" for one thing. He was interested in the girl, and he was selfish enough to thrust his interest on her when she was suffering as she was. McGregor was sure that she had not noticed the touch of Harbord's hand on her arm and then on her hand, but that did not temper the man's intention.

"What is what?" McGregor snapped back.

Before Harbord could retort, the girl looked around quickly at McGregor. He was conscious of her gaze. He tried to fight back the flush that swept up into his cheeks, but he could not. He tried not to look at her, but he failed in that, too. Slowly he turned his head, and his eyes met hers. Whatever emotion might have been aroused in him by looking into her deep, brown eyes, if the circumstances had been different, more conventional, died out of him at once.

There was no terror in this strong girl's eyes, not so much as there was in her brother's from time to time, but there was something which stirred McGregor's pity vastly more. It was the abiding, steady, heartrending sorrow of a good woman. Her soul, McGregor felt, had not been seared by this sorrow, but the sorrow had gone down into her heart, and it dwelt there as an agony of longing and grief.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEWS ARRIVES.

UNDER the girl's scrutiny, McGregor removed his hat. He felt as he would have done if he and she had been standing in the presence of her loved dead. He was conscious only of a welling up of kindness and a profound pity for her. He was proud to enlist for her, openly. To hide himself, he perceived now, to try to work for her under cover, would have been a kind of cowardice in him. He forgot Harbord and his insulting questionings. He forgot Hammersley. He had a strange feeling as if he and she stood alone together, ready to confront whatever there was to confront.

"Ma'am," he said, "I am here to help you in any way I can."

He did not realize that he was a total stranger to her; that she had not been aware, till a moment before, that there was a man like him in the world. He remembered only that he had known her for half a year; that she had dwelt in his mind and in his heart so long; that she had been there like a sweet dream of repose and contentment.

He stood looking at her a little wistfully, a little boyishly, the respect of a clean, young boy shining in eyes no longer cold or hard. Something of his feeling, he gladly saw, must have communicated itself to her. A little color lifted itself into her cheeks and trembled there. Her lips parted slightly, but she seemed unable to find the question she wished to ask. That, he supposed, might rise from the fact that any one who could offer help would be welcome and also from the fact that she was puzzled as to his identity.

"I am a friend of your brother's," he added simply.

"Oh," she said quickly, relieved and glad, he thought; and she turned to Hammersley.

Hammersley seemed to be puzzled for a moment. He had not, McGregor saw, expected McGregor to disclose himself, at least so soon, but he, too, appeared to find relief in this open lining up of an ally.

"Yes," he said, too quickly McGregor feared; "he's a friend of mine, a good friend of mine. Cattleman from over the mountains. I met him several times last year. He's on a vacation an' was lookin' me up."

The girl turned and put out her hand, a warm hand, even now, with strong fingers. McGregor took it, but he could no longer look at her. He had to veil his eyes. Even so he felt that Harbord's eyes were on his face.

"My name is McGregor, ma'am," he said.

"I am glad you are here," the girl returned, and there was more in that than McGregor had hoped for.

Harbord now stepped forward. "Where do you say you are from?" he asked, a little harshly.

"I didn't say," McGregor retorted, his confidence returning. "Hammersley said I was from over the mountains. Whatever he says goes with you, doesn't it?"

"You have a ranch over there, have you?"

"I haven't."

"Understood Hammersley to say you were a cattleman."

"He's foreman of a ranch over there," Hammersley volunteered.

"Whose ranch?" There was suspicion in Harbord's voice; it rang with a sort of challenge.

"Monroe and Sullivan outfit," McGregor replied easily. "Ever hear of that outfit?"

"Why, yes; of course. Everybody has heard of it."

There was a little respect in Harbord's voice now. The outfit which McGregor named was one of the biggest in the State. If McGregor were foreman for that outfit, he had a job that any man would be proud of. He was young, too; might be superintendent one of these days. McGregor guessed that something like this was running in Harbord's mind, for the man had been thrown off his guard, and his face revealed more than it had before.

Hammersley and his sister had turned toward the telegraph office. McGregor followed their gaze. The operator was sitting inside, his feet on the table.

"Nothing yet!" the girl breathed.

"There will be," Harbord assured her. "Don't worry. The governor won't ignore my telegram, not with all those names on it."

"If anything results from your telegram, we will owe you more than I can say."

"There will be much to do afterward, and I will do it," Harbord returned.

McGregor, glancing at Hammersley, to discover how he was bearing up under the strain, saw the man's eyes leave the telegraph-office door and wander over the crowd on each side of it. Suddenly he started, and his body went rigid. Just as McGregor withdrew his eyes from his face, Hammersley glanced in his direction, and then he began slowly to move away from his sister's side. McGregor's eyes were down, but he could still see the slow withdrawal of the lower part of Hammersley's body. At last he saw Hammersley turn fully around.

McGregor looked up. The girl was talking to Harbord and was not aware of her brother's action. McGregor stepped around behind her and followed Hammersley. As Hammersley neared the group at one side of the door, his hand went into his coat pocket. Two men, who, McGregor saw, had become aware of Hammersley's approach, detached them-

selves from the crowd and stepped toward the corner of the building.

"There's two of them that swore my brother's life away!" Hammersley suddenly screamed.

He whipped a thirty-two caliber gun from his pocket. It occurred to McGregor that he must have bought it with this intention in his mind; for it was not such a gun as he would carry when he carried one at all.

Hammersley's hand came up. The two men started to run. Hammersley called out to them to halt, and they came to a stop and fell back against the building, their hands in the air.

McGregor had been only a few feet behind Hammersley when Hammersley had drawn the gun. He covered the space in one long, easy leap and caught Hammersley's arm and brought it down. Hammersley struggled violently, exerting the strength which McGregor had known all along was in his stocky body. But McGregor had a greater strength. He pinioned Hammersley's arm and wrenched the weapon from his hand, stepping back then.

Hammersley confronted him with tears of rage in his eyes. "Why didn't you lemme do it?" he cried. "They got it comin' to them!"

There was a swift step behind McGregor, and the girl ran up to her brother and took hold of him and held him against her. At length he straightened up and passed his hand across his eyes.

"I forgot myself," he said.

McGregor knew that he was merely seeking to throw them off their guard. He had doubtless planned this thing deliberately, and he was the bulldog kind of man who does not give way. McGregor was aware that he had another task. In addition to helping the man and his sister he would have to guard him against himself. The lust for revenge was in him, though McGregor did not blame him for it. He had undoubtedly lived a calm and contented life, and now he dwelt with the specter of tragedy at his elbow.

McGregor walked past the two and up to the men whom Hammersley had menaced.

"You boys seem to kind of stir Hammersley up," he said quietly. "He ain't himself. He ain't exactly responsible. If I was you, I would move on to where he can't see you."

The danger past, the courage of the two men seemed to be returning. Resentment showed in their faces.

"You ain't runnin' the town, are you?" one of them asked.

"No, boys; but you might as well sift along," McGregor replied.

They eyed him, and he them. He had spoken quietly enough, but there was a resolute look on his face. His eyes were steadily on their faces. At last one shifted on his feet; the other shrugged his shoulders.

"Mebbe we'll be seein' you again, fella," the first said, but they moved away.

McGregor said nothing. He knew that he had made two more enemies, but that did not matter. He did not regret his having stepped out into the open. He had a sense of freedom.

Now, as he started back toward Hammersley, there was a stir at the telegraph-office door. The group on each side pressed up to it. There were murmurs, then cries.

"Hammersley! Hammersley! Telegram for yuh, Hammersley! Where is Hammersley?"

They seemed to have forgotten that he was only a little distance from them. He left his sister and ran to the door. They let him pass, and he darted into the office. The crowd pressed up. One glance showed McGregor that the girl was clinging to Harbord, trembling in excitement and dread.

Hammersley's head appeared above

the heads of the others about the door. They yelled to him to tell them the news. He shouted back to them to let him pass, and when they found he would tell them nothing, they made a lane for him.

Hammersley did not at once come down that lane. He flung up both arms and grasped the door jambs with his hands. McGregor saw that one hand clutched a sheet of yellow paper.

"Annie, Annie," Hammersley called, his thought all for her, "it's a stay, a stay! It's a stay of execution for thirty days! Henry is still alive!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN A TIGHT PLACE.

AT once McGregor turned to look at the girl. She was still clinging to Harbord, but, as her brother finished, she slowly stood erect. It was only by a great effort that she succeeded, McGregor perceived. She was getting her breath with difficulty through parted lips, as if her heart were pounding.

She suddenly pressed one hand above her heart, and then she freed herself from Harbord entirely. She smiled, the bravest smile McGregor had ever seen. It struck at his own heart.

"You good girl," he said, very softly.

Hammersley now came down through the lane of men and ran up to his sister. As he came, he smoothed out the telegram and handed it to her when he reached her. She read it with swiftly traveling eyes.

"Well," she said, "we have thirty days for work."

"You betcha," Hammersley agreed, "and we will do somethin' in them thirty days. I got a feelin' now that everything is goin' to be all right. The governor wouldn't have done this much if he hadn't thought there was a big chance that Henry wasn't guilty."

"The governor'll probably be doing some work on his own hook," McGregor said. "You know, I told you, Hammersley, that he was on the level."

"Friend of the governor's, are you?" Harbord asked with a sneer.

"Oh, no," McGregor answered; "but he has got the reputation of being on the level. You know that if you ever read the newspapers."

The eyes of the two men met again, and there was even a more definite hostility than before in those eyes. Harbord did not continue his stare, however. He turned to Hammersley.

"May I ask who the telegram is from?" he queried.

"Why, it's from Sobey, our lawyer," Hammersley answered.

McGregor, watching the man, saw a shadow of anger pass across his face.

"There was no telegram for me?" Harbord asked.

"I didn't stop to find out," Hammersley replied. "I was too excited, I reckon."

"I'll find out," Harbord said, more savagely than the situation seemed to warrant. He turned and strode toward the telegraph office.

Annie looked after him. "He's acting queerly," she said. "I wonder what's the matter with him?"

"Why, he expected the governor would wire him," McGregor told her. "He wanted the credit for getting the stay."

"Oh, I see," she said softly.

"Well, we better be gettin' on home," said Hammersley. He looked at McGregor. "You're still of a mind to help us?" he added. "I shouldn't ask you, I suppose, but I'm grabbin' at everything that comes my way. We got only thirty days, and they ain't goin' to be any too long. I got you sized up, McGregor, and I'm willin' to trust you."

Before McGregor could answer, he saw Harbord emerge from the tele-

graph office and come toward them. The shadow which had passed across his face had returned and remained, and as he looked at McGregor it deepened to a black cloud.

He strode up to the trio. "You ridin' home, Hammersley?" he asked.

"We're startin' now," Hammersley answered.

"I'm going, too," Harbord said. He hesitated, and then he turned to McGregor. "I suppose you're riding out that way, too, are you?"

"Not just at present," McGregor replied smoothly. "Think I'll hang around town for a while."

Harbord had asked him a question about his business, and he felt that he had a right to ask Harbord one. Also he was human enough to indulge a light malice toward this fellow who thought so well of himself. "Did you get a telegram from the governor?" he inquired.

"That's my business," Harbord snapped.

Annie's glance flitted to McGregor's face. His lips curved just perceptibly. In the relief that had come to her she could meet his suggestion of a smile with a like suggestion. Then she looked at Harbord.

"I'd like to know whether you got a telegram, Mr. Harbord," she said. "If the governor answered you, we would have that much more right to hope. It would show that he is ready to assure any one that he is interested in the case."

"I didn't get a telegram," Harbord answered. "I will get one, though," he added with a show of confidence.

"Oh, yes," Annie said. "We'd better start for home now, Jim."

"All right," Hammersley said. "You're comin', Harbord?"

"I'll wait and see if I get a telegram," Harbord replied, and, in spite of himself, it seemed to McGregor, his eyes went to McGregor's face.

"You'll be out this afternoon, McGregor?" Hammersley asked.

"Or to-night," McGregor answered.

Annie looked at McGregor and nodded, a little gravely, and then she and her brother went down the street to get their horses. In a few minutes McGregor saw them ride out of town.

Without a word to Harbord, he turned and started toward the hotel. He knew that Harbord had lingered more to see what he was going to do than to wait for a possible telegram, and he was willing to let Harbord make whatever move was to be made or to say whatever there was to be said.

Harbord seemed to be ready. From his tone, when he spoke, McGregor saw that he was thoroughly angry now.

"Just a minute, fellow!"

McGregor wheeled and walked back to him and confronted him closely. He was angered, but he fought back the anger. He did not want to show it to Harbord; indeed he did not want to feel it. He knew that an angry man thinks less clearly than a calm one. Also, anger was an unusual emotion with him. He had always been glad of that, because he had observed that anger was a devastating thing in other men. It bred mental ill health. He always liked to be cool, quiet, eminently sane.

"There's no necessity that I can see for you callin' me 'fellow,' Mr. Harbord," he said.

He permitted himself a little smile as he spoke. Harbord seemed to think that the smile was an indication of an intention to placate him. McGregor guessed that Harbord believed he had "put up a front" in the presence of Annie and Hammersley and was now inclined to be peaceful, since they were gone.

Harbord proved that he was a bully, whether naturally, or whether temporarily because he had not made the

showing he had expected to make, McGregor did not know.

"I'll do something more than 'fellow' you," he declared. "I'll give you a straight tip. Let me tell you: Those Hammersleys are in trouble. They're not capable of exercising good judgment. That's why they picked up with you. They would grab at any help just now. But what help have you got to offer, I'd like to know? Cow-puncher on a vacation! I suppose you think you will step in and unravel this thing and make a hit with Miss Hammersley. Fat chance! If Henry Hammersley is set free finally, it will be because somebody does some head work. We don't want you butting in. In fact this town isn't big enough for you."

"Why," said McGregor, "the town don't need to be big enough for me. I'm not stayin' in it. You heard me tell them folks I would be out to their place to-night. Lots of room out there, ain't there?"

"Lots of it, but still not enough for you."

Harbord glared at him, and McGregor only smiled. What little anger he had felt had died in McGregor. This was only a bluff, and a man would be a fool to let himself be stirred up by a bluff.

"I'm goin' out there to-night," McGregor stated.

"You're liable to run into something."

"Well, what?"

"You look here," Harbord said, his anger apparently growing in the face of the other's coolness. "I know why you have butted in on this thing. You're attracted to Miss Hammersley. You think you can make up to her. You can't. I won't stand for it. She—I am going to marry her myself." His anger, McGregor saw, was carrying him out of himself. "I aim to protect her from any damned cow-puncher that comes drifting along. If you were decent, I wouldn't care. I would be willing to let you make your play, knowing it would do you no good. But I've seen your kind before. I know your game."

McGregor was the simple-hearted kind of man who can place a woman on a pedestal and give her a clean, unwavering devotion. McGregor had done that with Annie Hammersley. He had dreamed his dreams about her—golden, beautiful dreams. He felt now that Harbord had not only accused himself, but, in some way, had accused Annie. The slow-gathering, strong anger of his type came to him.

If he had waited thirty seconds, he doubtless would not have done what he did. But he did not wait thirty seconds. He did not wait two. The first instant gave him sufficient time to send his right fist curving over Harbord's shoulder. Harbord received the blow full on the side of the jaw. He wavered very briefly, went to his knees, and then fell to the ground.

McGregor stepped back. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that the men who had still remained about the telegraph-office door were now running toward him. He retreated still farther from Harbord. He had a notion that he was in a tight place. The minds of these men had been dwelling for some time on a violent act, an act which had placed the life of Hammersley in jeopardy. He knew how thoughts of violence breed further thoughts of violence.

He was a stranger here. These men might vigorously resent his attacking one who was well known to them. They would not be aware what his reason for striking Harbord had been, and, perhaps unfortunately for himself, he could not give them the reason. He would not use Annie Hammersley's name in an effort to justify himself. If he could, he would strike Harbord down again if Harbord attempted to use that name.

He confronted the men as they stopped, the body of Harbord lying between him and them. At first the men

regarded Harbord in silence. Then their eyes went to McGregor. They studied him, still in silence, from hat to toe. What it was in himself that struck them favorably McGregor did not know, but suddenly one man laughed. Grins came to the faces of the others. McGregor knew then that he was in no danger from them.

As he looked at Harbord again, the man stirred and lifted himself to an elbow. It was a minute before the dazed look went out of his eyes and the blankness out of his face. In another minute he sat up and then got to his feet. His face was twisted with passion.

McGregor understood then, what he had guessed all along, that pride was a ruling emotion with Harbord. To be struck down in the presence of so many witnesses would be such a blow to that pride as he doubtless had rarely suffered before. Swift on his sense of injury, McGregor was sure, would come a desire for revenge.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out June 15th.

A Mere Detail

ALTHOUGH the lovers had known each other only three days, they had to part.

"Come along, please!" cried the railroad guard, and the young couple lingering on the edge of the platform started.

"It'll be terrible without you," the young man observed.

"And I'll miss you, too," said she. "I never was so happy, and all because we met three days ago."

"But think how dreadful it's going to be," he wailed.

"Stand away, there!" yelled the guard.

"You'll write?" she called from the window.

"Every day," he answered.

Then suddenly he tore after the train, and as he almost overbalanced on the extreme end of the platform, he made a trumpet of his hands and cried: "Darling, darling! What on earth did you say your name was?"

Oh, Well!

BRIDGET, the maid, approached her mistress. "Can I take the week off, mum? I'm goin' to be married."

Her mistress gave her the week off, and at the end of the week Bridget returned.

"Oh, mum," she said, "I have been having a splendid time. I was a lovely bride! The dress was so nice, and the cake a wonder!"

"Well, Bridget, this sounds delightful," said her mistress. "I hope you have got a good husband."

Bridget's tone changed to one of indignation. "Would you believe it, mum," she answered, "but the wicked man never turned up!"

The Bold Offer

HE was rather inclined to blow his own trumpet, was the young clerk, and the boarders in the house had stood about as much as they could.

Suddenly one, braver than the rest, said: "Look here, young man, I think we've all heard what you can do; now, would you mind telling us something you can't do, and I'll undertake to do it myself."

"Well," replied the talkative one without the slightest hesitation, "you're a sport. I can't pay my bill, for a start, and I accept your offer."

Worth It

SWEET YOUNG THING: "Claude says he worships the very ground I stand on."

A Rejected Suitor: "I don't blame him. A farm of that size is not to be sneezed at."

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the Editor and Readers

JUNE 1, 1926.

One Good Surprise

LIFE is full of surprises, good and bad, and a pleasant surprise is just as delightful an experience as an unpleasant one is the reverse. We all know the pleasure of getting a surprise that brings us happiness; such things were common to us as children, and as we grow older we still like to be surprised; the unexpected happening continues to give us a thrill.

One of our new friends got a surprise recently. Here is his letter:

DEAR EDITOR: I got hold of a January number of your TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE and, more from curiosity than anything else, I read it. This was the first one I had seen, as I have always held the opinion that all magazines are alike. Well, I got one good surprise! Your magazine is now occupying a prominent place in our home. We buy it regularly and enjoy every story in it. It is one of the very few magazines that publishes clean, big, interesting stories that may be read by young and old alike.

Hoping I may enjoy many more of them,
Yours very sincerely,
M. A. SCHOENBERG.

Chicago, Ill.

We were certainly pleased to hear that Mr. Schoenberg got such an agreeable surprise when he read TOP-NOTCH for the first time, and this makes us think what a number of pleasant surprises are in store for those who have not yet joined the TOP-NOTCH circle of readers. We feel sure that a great many TOP-NOTCH fans, when they think of this, will make a note to give some of their friends a real surprise by introducing this magazine to them. An acquaintance thus formed will grow steadily into an enduring friendship.

Of this we are certain. We have faith in the quality of the fiction we are publishing, and we know that the variety we offer makes an appeal to a vast number of readers. Only the introduction is necessary to gain us a host of new friends.

Nearly everybody reads something, and, after all, as one of our friends remarked recently, good reading is the cheapest and best form of entertainment. The cost is trivial; the pleasure is great. And, as our readers are aware, TOP-NOTCH is good reading. It is guaranteed not to bore you. If you don't like one story, there are sure to be half a dozen others you will enjoy. Tell this to your friends. Advise them to spend fifteen cents at the nearest news stand to get a genuine surprise, and after that they will be better friends of yours than ever, for you will have done them a real service.

In the Next Issue

ONCE upon a time there was a dramatic critic who used up all his superlatives upon the first play he reviewed, and he had none left for the second one. We feel ourselves in this position all the time. We give you the very best we can in each issue, and then along comes something we know is even better. The "something" in this case is the complete novel which you will get in the June 15th number, entitled "King of the Desert," by H. R. Marshall, a newcomer to these pages, and it is one of the best bits of fiction we have read in a long time. The strapping cowboy, the society maid, and the funny little taxicab driver, form a fascinating combination, and the graphic description of their adventures will hold you spellbound.

"Terror of the Isles" is the title of

the novelette, and the author is Kay Breckenridge, also a newcomer to Top-Notch. This is a gripping tale of a mystery of the South Seas, told in a vivid style, the sort of story that always makes a hit with our readers.

Among the shorter stories there will be: "Oars and the Man," a tale of college rowing, by Herbert L. McNary; "Home Runs to Order," a baseball yarn, by Harold de Polo; "Down on the Suwannee River," a story of Florida and its famous river, by Hapsburg Liebe; "The Terrible Tenderfoot," another tale of "Crawdad" and "Dreamy Gus," the peanut-eating sheriff, by Claude Rister; and "No More Work," the delightful adventures of the young man who decided that he would toil no more, by M. Allen de Ford, another contribution by a new author.

"Rogues of the Jungle," the powerful novel by E. Whitman Chambers, will be continued, and there will be the second installment of "Crimson Trail," by Charles Wesley Sanders, the big Western serial which starts in this issue. Both these authors are well known to our readers, and their latest novels will ably uphold the reputations they have already won.

In the department of poetry we have an admirable selection to offer you: "Radio Fun," by James A. Sanaker; "Lure of the Open Road," by Olin Lyman; "Nature's Magic," by Blaine C. Bigler; "Time-Hidden Trails," by S. Omar Barker; and "As Seasons Change," by L. Mitchell Thornton. Mr. Bigler is making his first appearance here.

Congratulations from Norway

Editor of Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: "Where the Eagles Are Gathered" was great! Keep Mr. Cook "on the jump," and give us some more of his stories about "Seward of Sacatone."

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours, H. Ecktell.

Oslo, Norway.

After Six Months' Trial

Editor of Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Editor: Through the insistence of Mr. Barger some six months ago I secured my first copy of Top-Notch, and I am certainly well pleased with it and feel as though I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation. I have never missed a copy since then. The stories are of such a concise nature, rapid moving, and of intense action that one's enthusiasm is continually at its highest from the beginning of each story to the end.

Your stories of baseball are certainly appreciated, and if an occasional tennis story could be run in, it would be complete. No doubt from this you will learn that I am an ardent tennis fan. Your story, "That Thousand-Dollar Flyer," by Moore and Edholm, was especially enjoyed, as well as the shorter story, "Phantom Gold," by Roemer. I like your sport stories better than mystery and detective stories; however, I realize that all must be combined to make a magazine the Top-Notch.

Let me take this opportunity to extend my best wishes for the continued success of a great magazine—Top-Notch.

Believe me, Sincerely yours,

Loyd R. Steelman.

Lamar, Mo.

The tennis stories will appear in due course.—Editor.

Likes Thursday Best

Editor of Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: I have noticed the letters from the readers in Top-Notch, off and on, for the past eight years, and I want to say that I think the circus stories by Thomas Thursday are the best of all. They are full of life and fun, and that's what I like to read. Even my family likes them.

Hoping you will tell Thomas Thursday what I have said, I am,

Yours truly, B. H. Hawes.

Wareham, Mass.

More to Praise Than Censure

Editor of Top-Notch Magazine.

Dear Sir: For several years I have been reading Top-Notch, and as a rule am very well pleased with it. There is no issue that I have been unable to find pleasure in, though there is rarely one in which I enjoy everything. However, I find more to praise than censure, so let it go at that.

You have only one regular contributor whom

I do not read at all of late, my sense of humor not being capable of seeing the comedy of his efforts. I refer to Thomas Thursday. However, he pleases most of your readers, and there is plenty of other matter for me, so that lets me out of that. I suppose my sense of humor is to blame.

I am always glad to get the new copy of TOP-NOTCH. I am not permanently located, so must depend upon news stands. They seldom fail to provide, though I am sometimes too late. Let TOP-NOTCH continue, and may it outlive us all!

Thanking you for your time, I am,
Yours for good reading,
W. H. WALTER.

Hotel Metropole, St. Joseph, Mo.

Another Thursday Admirer

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR EDITOR: I would like to see several sword fighting and fencing stories in TOP-NOTCH, as this is my favorite sport. I would especially like to see a serial novel in TOP-NOTCH featuring the flashing Toledo blade.

I am very interested in "Coals of Gold," by E. Whitman Chambers, and the "shorts" by Thomas Thursday are most enjoyable. They alone are worth the price of the magazine. Sincerely yours,
J. WASSO, JR.

Pen Argyl, Pa.

Hitting the Spot

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have just finished reading "Where the Eagles Are Gathered," by William Wallace Cook, and I want to say that this is the kind of story that "hits the spot." I am going to watch future TOP-NOTCHES for more news of "Seward of Sacatone."

Very truly yours. C. H. MAEBLER.

Seabright, Calif.

P. S. Make it snappy, too!

A Poet Scores

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have been a reader of TOP-NOTCH for the last eight years, and can truthfully say that I have never found in any magazine the equal of TOP-NOTCH's clean, wholesome stories and poems.

I have been especially interested in James Edward Hungerford's poems.

I am, yours truly,
JOHN K. SCOTT.

E. Park Drive, Philadelphia, Pa.

Puts Cook On Top

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: About two months ago I stopped at a news stand to get a magazine, and happened to pick a TOP-NOTCH. When I got home and had finished several stories, you had won an ardent reader.

Several issues ago I read one of William Wallace Cook's novels about "Seward of Sacatone." I must say that I enjoyed it immensely, for I was oblivious of all my surroundings, and when the story ended I was still in a daze. In every issue I buy I always look for another of Mr. Cook's stories.

In the April 1st issue I read several letters by fellow readers, and I agree with one of them who said that William Wallace Cook surpasses his fellow authors. I sign off,

Ever your reader, F. CROSSLEY.

W. Market Street, York, Pa.

A Call for Kescel

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I'm a TOP-NOTCH booster, and I just want to say that I hope Mr. Joseph T. Kescel gives us some more of his stories. "Desert Luck" was great. Yours truly,
JIM CARTER.

Detroit, Mich.

Without an Equal

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Just a word of praise for TOP-NOTCH. I have been reading the magazine for about a year, and I cannot find another magazine to equal it. None but itself could be its parallel. I especially like the "Jimmy Lavender" stories. Let's have more of them. Sincerely yours,
WILLIAM POPP.

Lake Street, Madisonville, Ky.

How did you like this issue of TOP-NOTCH? Which stories appealed to you most? If there were any stories you did not like, please tell us that, too. What kind of stories do you enjoy best?

Letters from our readers are a great help to us in getting out a magazine for your entertainment, and we want to hear from every member of the TOP-NOTCH circle.
THE EDITOR.

People You Admire . . .

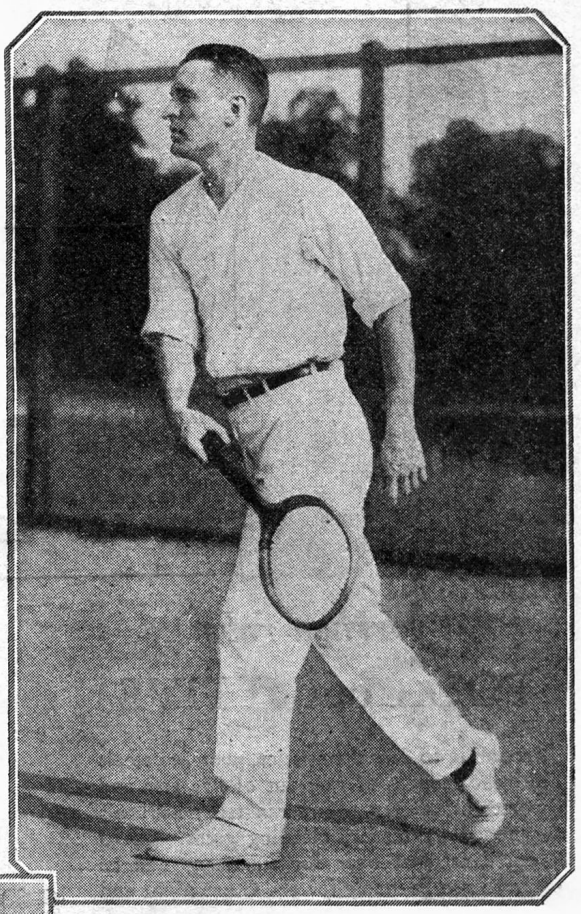
Buoyant, vital, they banished their ills—found fresh joy—through one food

NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices, water or milk—or just plain, nibbled from the cake. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

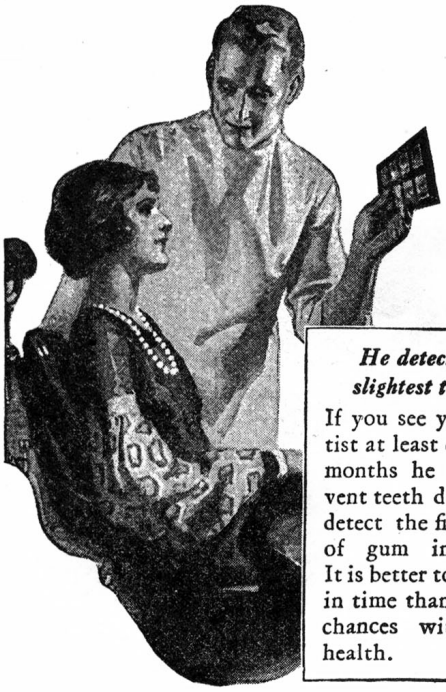
Let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-29, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.



"'YOU LOOK SO MUCH BETTER than we, who have had vacations, do' remarked several of my teachers today. 'Is it the arduous work of summer school or prosperity that agrees with you?' The truth is that Fleischmann's Yeast has cured the constipation that sapped my strength for so long. Today I feel like a new man."
CHARLES F. WILLIS, Baltimore, Md.

"RUN-DOWN, IRRITABLE AND DEPRESSED, my nerves were in a dreadful condition. My physician recommended Fleischmann's Yeast. I took three cakes a day for two months. I noticed a remarkable change. My energy returned, my complexion regained its freshness. And I still take my Fleischmann's Yeast to keep fit."
VIRGINIA B. MAURICE, New York City.

THIS FAMOUS FOOD tones up the entire system—aids digestion—clears the skin—banishes constipation.



He detects the slightest trouble

If you see your dentist at least every six months he can prevent teeth decay and detect the first trace of gum infections. It is better to see him in time than to take chances with your health.

Pyorrhea robs

FOUR out of FIVE

According to dental statistics, pyorrhea steals into the mouths of four out of five men and women after forty. You can tell pyorrhea's approach by tender, bleeding gums. Go to your dentist at once for treatment and be sure to use Forhan's for the Gums night and morning.

Forhan's prevents or checks pyorrhea. It contains Forhan's Pyorrhea Liquid which dentists use in combating pyorrhea's ravages. It firms the gums and keeps them pink and healthy.

The entire family should begin to use Forhan's today. Besides safeguarding the health it cleanses the teeth perfectly.

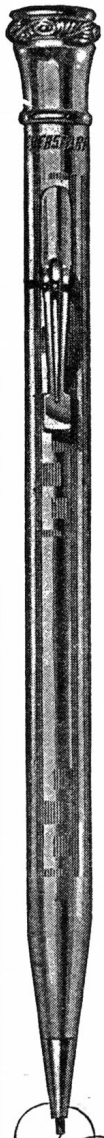
You owe it to your health to make Forhan's a regular daily habit. At all druggists 35c and 60c in tubes.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company, New York

Forhan's
FOR THE GUMS

More Than a Tooth Paste . . *It Checks Pyorrhea*

DAYS 1 2 3 2 0



There's an Eversharp for you in any style and size you want. This one, the popular standard gift and business model, with 18 inches of lead up its sleeve, gold-filled at $5

School days end— Commencement is here — and workaday life is beginning. Give the graduate a gift that carries both sentiment and practicality.

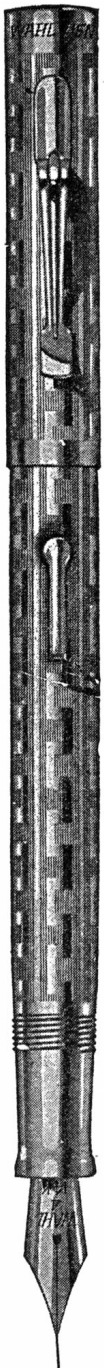
Give something that bridges these momentous days between theory and reality, and helps translate the chance thought into sure advancement.

Give the gift that better than any other teaches Success' first lesson:

PUT IT ON PAPER!

√ √

Success waits on the man who keeps in line with his thinking those best friends of an active brain— EVERSHARP AND WAHL PEN.



Perfect writing mate for Eversharp is the new Wahl Pen. Finely balanced; beautifully and lastingly made of precious gold and silver; precisely designed to match your Eversharp, in combination sets, or individually at $8

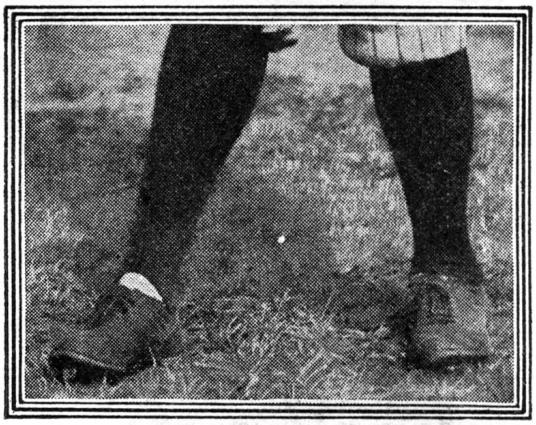
Put it on paper

EVERSHARP
and
WAHL PEN

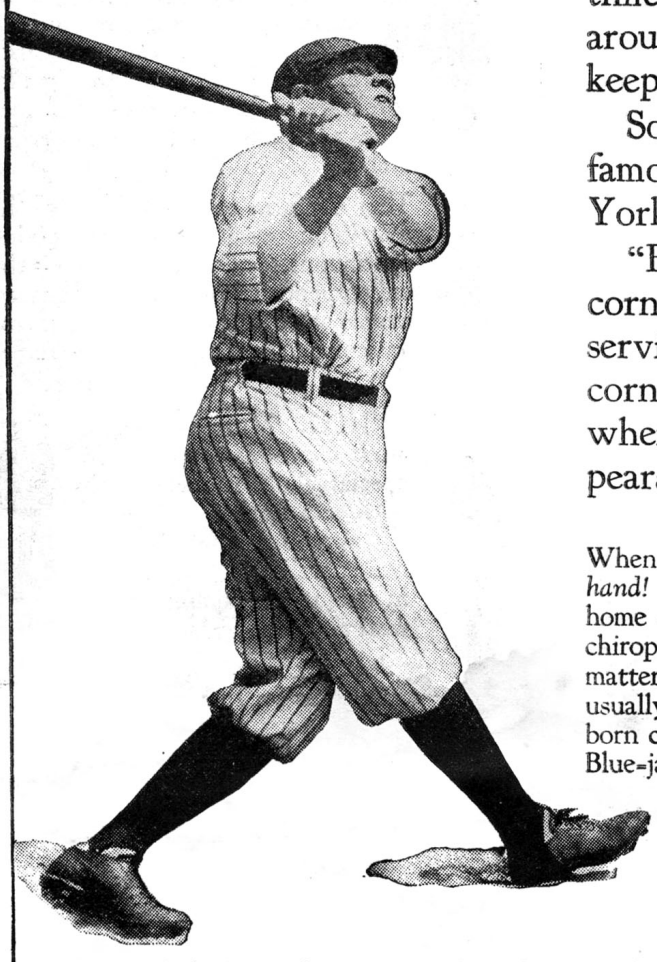
© 1926, The Wahl Co., Chicago. Canadian Factory, Toronto

FAMOUS FEET

..how they're kept free from corns..



BABE RUTH'S *Home Run Feet*



"It isn't always the length of the hit that scores the run. Sometimes it's the speed in getting around the bases. So I have to keep my feet in prime shape."

So writes Babe Ruth—the famous "Bambino" of the New York Yankees.

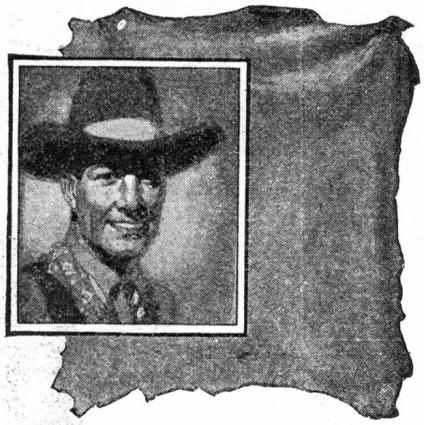
"Ball players are prone to corns. Our feet get pretty rough service. But I keep mine free of corns by putting on a Blue-jay whenever a potential corn appears in the offing."

When trouble is *a-foot*—have Blue-jay at *hand!* For 26 years it has been the standard home corn-remover. Ask your physician or chiropodist. Blue-jay goes to the root of the matter and routs the troublesome offender—usually in 48 hours. But even the most stubborn corn seldom needs more than a second Blue-jay plaster . . . . At all drug stores.

Blue-jay

THE SAFE AND GENTLE WAY TO END A CORN

© 1926



Leather face
or baby face

Spreading the gospel of the Mennen Shave naturally makes me notice faces a whole lot.

I've been handed the keys of the city by men with faces as tender-skinned as a baby's and others with faces that looked like a Sunday roast-of-beef on Wednesday.

And they all swear by Mennen Shaving Cream. Here's a lather that can reduce the horniest whiskers to absolute and complete limpness. The great Mennen discovery—Dermutation.

If you're one of those 3-brush-dabs and 7-second-razor artists, it gives you a *shave*—a close shave—better than you've ever had before. A shave that stays all day.

And if you've got a tender, shave-every-other-day skin, your razor goes through literally without any pull or scrapy feeling. A clean, smooth de-bearding *every* day.

Next, a little squeeze of Mennen Skin Balm rubbed over the shaved area. Tingling, cooling, refreshing. Tones up the tissue—soothes any possible irritation. Greaseless—absorbed in half a minute—and as sensible as putting on a clean collar to go and see your best girl. Comes in tubes.

Same way with Mennen-Talcum-for-Men. Made so it won't show on your face. Dries the skin thoroughly. Antiseptic. Leaves a gorgeous silk-like film that protects against wind, rain, sun or a scraggly collar.

Step into your corner drugstore today and get the makings. It's a good habit to get habituated to.

Jim Henry
(Mennen Salesman)

MENNEN
SHAVING CREAM

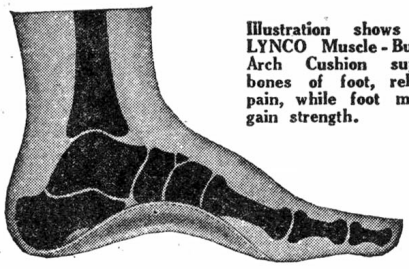


Illustration shows how LYNCO Muscle-Building Arch Cushion supports bones of foot, relieving pain, while foot muscles gain strength.

Rest Your Tender Foot Arches On Soft, Springy CUSHIONS

Never permit them to be propped up by some hard, unyielding support. LYNCO Muscle-Building Arch Cushions are entirely flexible—they're Nature's first-aid protection against foot aches and pains due to weak or fallen arches.

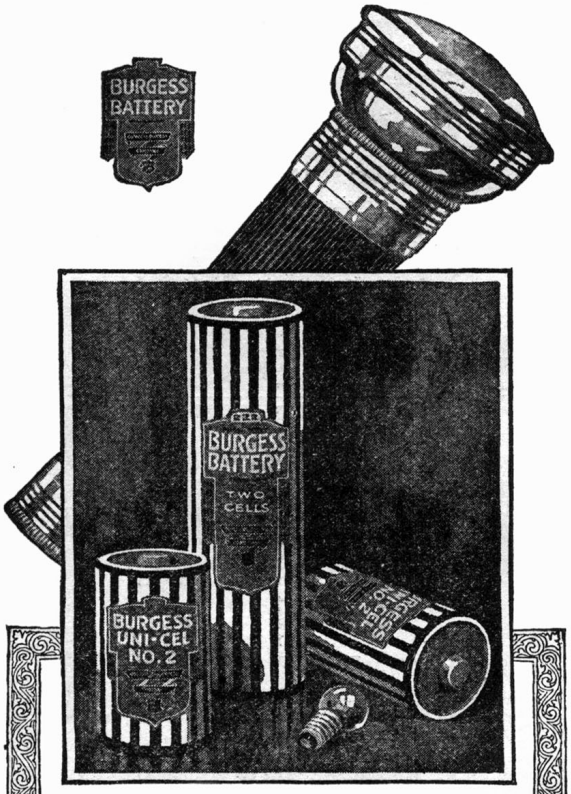
They conform to every curve of the foot in any position it takes, giving continuous, resilient support. It is the only type of support that follows every movement of the foot and allows free muscular action and normal circulation.

LYNCO Muscle-Building Arch Cushions are made of special cellular rubber covered with soft leather—***no metal.*** They give immediate and permanent relief from pain. Light in weight and comfortable to wear any time with any shoes.

See your doctor, chiropodist or shoe dealer —or write us for full information.

KLEISTONE RUBBER CO., Inc.
70 Cutler Street **Warren, R. I.**

Lynco
EASY-WEAR FOOT AIDS



Why Buy a Burgess Flashlight?

WHY buy fire, life, theft or automobile insurance? Or, why lock your doors?

Simply to guarantee that in emergencies you will receive definite assistance and protection in one form or another which will overcome the immediate danger and possible loss.

Burgess Flashlights have for many years been a convenient and positive guarantee that will guard, guide and aid you against the dangers and inconvenience of darkness.

Don't buy just a flashlight. Ask for Burgess. Look for the distinctive package. The success of Burgess Radio Batteries has proved conclusively the quality of all products of the Burgess Battery Company.

A *Laboratory Product*

BURGESS BATTERY COMPANY

GENERAL SALES OFFICE: CHICAGO

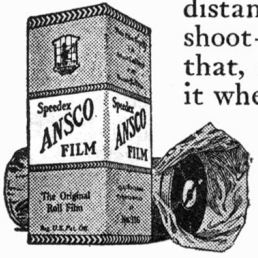
Canadian Factories and Offices:
Niagara Falls and Winnipeg

BURGESS
FLASHLIGHTS &
BATTERIES

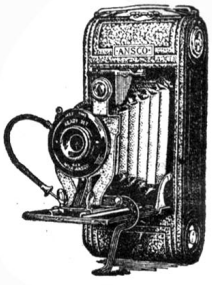
Prove your fish stories —take pictures!

The largest always seem to get away but the big beauty that took so much skill to land makes a tale worth telling—if you can prove it with pictures.

Your Ready-Set camera is prepared for instant action required without setting for light, speed or distance. Open—aim—shoot—just as easy as that, and you can prove it when you tell it.



Ansco Speedex Film—in the red box with the yellow band—fits all roll film cameras and is made for inexperienced picture takers to get just the pictures they want.



ANSCO

CAMERAS & SPEEDEX FILM

Pioneer Camera Makers of America

ANSCO—Binghamton, N. Y.

Velvet Grip

GIRDLON

Patented Feb. 10, 1925

With skirts so short, the younger set are now wearing stockings over the knee instead of rolled, and, still uncorsetted, have joyously welcomed the Girdlon to hold their stockings trimly taut.

The Girdlon is of dainty webbing or shirred ribbon, and is a perfectly comfortable "garter belt." There is no pinching at the waist, because it is worn around the hips where it is scarcely felt—and it cannot possibly slip down.

If you don't find it readily, your favorite shop will order it. Or we will gladly serve you direct—webbed garters $1.25, shirred ribbon $1.75, postpaid. Give hip measure only and color preference.

GEORGE FROST COMPANY, Boston

Makers of the famous Boston Garter for men

DIAMONDS

LOFTIS BROS. & CO. 1858

Stores in Leading Cities

THE OLD RELIABLE ORIGINAL CREDIT JEWELERS

Dept. A222 108 N. State Street Chicago, Ill.

CASH or CREDIT

It's Easy to Own a Genuine Diamond Ring

Our immense stocks include thousands of the latest mountings in platinum and solid gold, and set with brilliant blue white Diamonds of exceptional quality. Order today and get your ring at once. **Pay 10% down—we ship goods immediately. Balance weekly, semi-monthly, or monthly as convenient.**

Big Diamond Book FREE! Write for it Today!

No.28 $37.50 **$1.00** a wk.

No.31 $187.50 **$4.70** a wk.

No.27 $69 **$1.75** a wk.

No.30 $97.50 **$2.45** a wk.

Wrist Watch

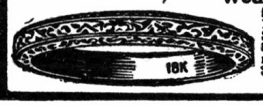
14-K white gold hand engraved case. Fancy wing ends. Silver dial. **High grade 15-Jewel movement, $25. $2.50 down and $1.00 a wk.**

17-Jewel Elgin

No.15—Green gold, 17-Jewel Elgin Watch; 25-Year Quality Case; 12 Size; Gilt Dial; $30. $3 down and $1.00 a wk.

Wedding Rings

No. 624—The "Elite" $7.50
18-k white gold
Set with 3 Diamonds, $22.50; 5 Diamonds, $32.50; 7 Diamonds, $42.50; 9 Diamonds, $52.50; 12 Diamonds, $67.50.



Genuine Diamond Wrist Watch

$1 With Order

10 Months to Pay

Simply clip this ad, pin a $1 bill to it, and mail it with your name and address TODAY. This guaranteed 15 Jewel Wrist watch with 14 K Solid Gold case, set with 4 Blue-white Diamonds and 4 Blue Sapphires will come for your approval and 15 day trial. Price $42.50. If satisfied, pay only $4.15 a month, otherwise return and your $1 will be sent back. No Red Tape—Prompt Delivery. All Dealings Confidential.

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Send for This Book—It's FREE!

Over 3,000 other bargains in Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry and Silverware, — appropriate gifts for Graduations, Weddings, Anniversaries and Engagements. Send for it NOW.

Be Popular Play Jazz—

It sets them going. Young folks are enamored by those tantalizing tunes. Be the Jazz King with your

BUESCHER True Tone

SAXOPHONE

Teach yourself, 3 free lessons give you quick easy start. Try any instrument in your own home 6 days free. See what you can do. Easy terms if you decide to buy. Send now for beautiful free literature. A postal brings details.

Buescher Band Instrument Co. (6X)
1556 Buescher Block Elkhart, Indiana

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30 Days' Free Trial

Select from **44 Styles,** colors and sizes, famous **Ranger** bicycles. **Delivered free** on approval, *express prepaid,* at **Factory Prices.** You can easily save $10 to $25 on your bicycle. Prices **$21.50** and up.

$5 a Month on any Ranger if desired. Parents often advance first deposit. Boys and girls can easily earn small monthly payments. Pay as you ride.

Tires best quality, at factory prices, *express prepaid.* Lamps, wheels and equipment, low prices. **Send No Money,** do business *direct* with makers.

Mead CYCLE COMPANY DEPT. M-4, CHICAGO

Write today for free Ranger Catalog, factory prices and marvellous easy payment terms

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$100 a Week Selling Shirts

Others Earning $100 Weekly selling direct to wearer. Custom Quality Shirts made by Carlton, 5th Ave., N. Y. America's greatest shirt values, silks, staples and exclusive patterns. We deliver and collect. Your profit; 25% paid daily. Big, beautiful sample outfit **FREE.** Permanent position. Salesmen and Salewomen write today for outfit.

CARLTON MILLS, INC.,
98 Fifth Ave. Dept. 73-E New York

FRECKLES

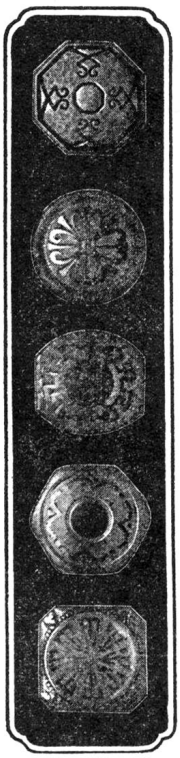
Tells How to Get Rid of These Ugly Spots and Have a Beautiful Complexion

There's no longer the slightest need of feeling ashamed of your freckles, as Othine—double strength—is guaranteed to remove these homely spots.

Simply get an ounce of Othine from any drug or department store and apply a little of it night and morning and you should soon see that even the worst freckles have begun to disappear, while the lighter ones have vanished entirely. It is seldom that more than an ounce is needed to completely clear the skin and gain a beautiful complexion.

Be sure to ask for the double strength Othine as this is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove your freckles.

They do notice your cuff buttons



A HUNDRED times a day your cuff jumps into the foreground of the picture—telling your taste in dress!

Kum - a - part Buttons in your cuffs add that touch of correctness that only good jewelry can give.

They're convenient for you to use, click open, snap shut; and they're guaranteed to last a lifetime.

At jewelers or men's shop you can easily match Kum-a-part designs to your favored shirt patterns.

Prices according to quality up to $25 the pair.

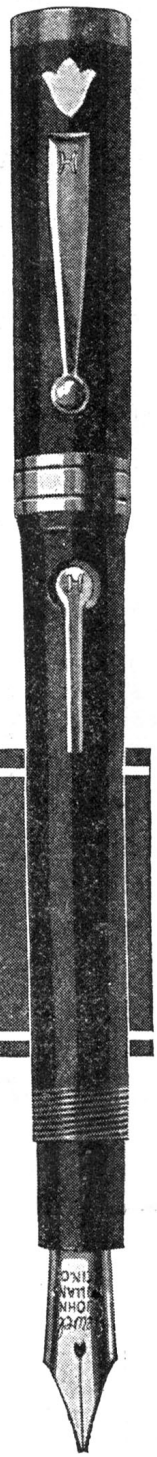
Write for Correct Dress Chart "E"

The Baer & Wilde Co.
Attleboro, Mass., U.S.A.

KUM·A·PART
UFF BUTTON
TRADE MARK REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

No Other Pen *invites* this test

More convincing than thirty years of everyday use is this *proof* of the *fine quality* and *remarkable endurance* of the JOHN HOLLAND *Drop Test* Fountain Pen. Let it fall six feet—point down—on *hard*wood. Then pick it up and write *perfectly* with it. We guarantee the Drop Test pen unconditionally.



The GIFT for Graduation

For 61 years, John Holland Fountain Pens have been favored graduation gifts. No fountain pen gives greater value in beauty and service.

JOHN HOLLAND Drop-Test
JEWEL Fountain Pens

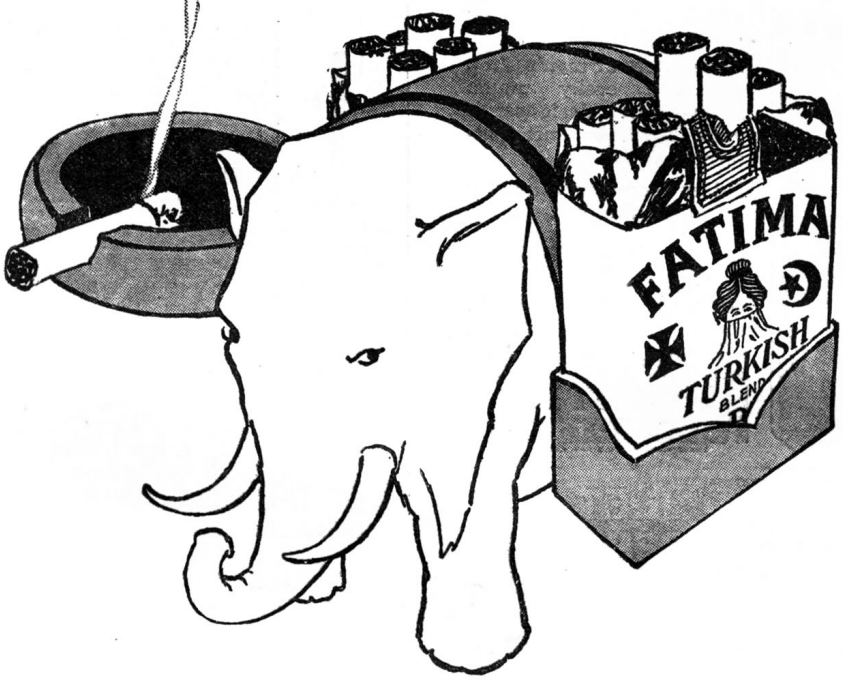
Sir Jewel - - - $7.00
Lady Jewel - - $5.00
Unconditionally Guaranteed

In black or colors, as you prefer. Barrels and caps are indestructible. Other John Holland Pens, $2.75 up. Write today for name of nearest dealer.

John Holland
The JOHN HOLLAND GOLD PEN CO.
Pen Makers Since 1841
Cincinnati, Ohio

Without question

BECAUSE it costs us more to make Fatima the retail price is likewise higher. But would men continue to pay more, do you think, except for genuinely increased enjoyment? The fact cannot be denied — they *do* continue



What a whale of a difference just a few cents make

LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO.

Let Kodak keep your vacation

Autographic Kodaks, $5 up

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., *The Kodak City*

Black Jack

"that good old licorice flavor!"