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FORTUNE'S TOUCHDOWN

A Gripping Football Novel

BY JOHN MILTON EDWARDS

LAWRENCE HERNDON

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Fortune's Touchdown

By John Milton Edwards

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

THE "RABBIT."

"GREAT hocus-pocus!" The Honorable Percy Tedrow groaned and, removing his hat, ran his fingers perplexedly through his graying hair. "What's come over old Chelton, anyhow?"

For several weeks everybody had been asking that question. All the undergrads were mulling over the problem with lowered brows to emphasize their wonder and discontent; and even the coaches were baffled.

The football season was well started, but it had not started well for Chelton. Two games had already been dropped to minor colleges, and these were games which in former years Chelton had merely considered in the way of practice and had always won handily and with little effort.

The Honorable Percy Tedrow was a middle-aged Chelton alumnus, a football enthusiast with the gridiron honors of his college so dear to his heart that he had left his important duties as lieutenant governor of the State to come in person to help captain and coaches solve the problem: "What's wrong with the varsity?"

So, too, William Brent had returned to help lick the squad into shape. He was another alumnus, but of a much later vintage than Tedrow. "Tough Old Bill," they had called him at Chelton in his early twenties, when he had distinguished himself as guard on the college eleven and had been picked for the "All-American." Barely turned thirty, he was as tough as ever and so keen for football that he was on the field in his playing togs.

He was watching a seven-minute clash between the varsity and the scrubs. As the scrubs tore through the varsity line

and planted the ball back of the varsity goal posts, Old Bill began to rumble like an active volcano.

"Take a breathing spell, you men!" yelled Marvin, the head coach, distractedly; "and hey, you varsity, see if you can't get a little more backbone and head work into your play. Scrubs," he added, "if this keeps up, we'll have to let you carry the Chelton honors in the big game with Fordney."

"Send 'em back to the gym, Marvin," exclaimed Brent, "and give 'em a bag of marbles." He shook his thick shoulders and tramped heavily on the turf. "How did you ever collect such an assortment of misfits?" he wanted to know. "Any high-school eleven in the country can play this varsity crowd off its feet."

Grim depression had settled over the warriors as they flung themselves down for their period of rest. Even the scrubs took no glory in their victory, for they were overwhelmed with the thought that football honors for Chelton were leaning on a weak reed.

And then, while Marvin and Reardon, the varsity captain, and Tedrow and Brent got their heads together in an animated discussion of whys and wherefores, a sudden titter went galloping from the side lines and the sparsely occupied grand stand across the fading chalk lines of the field. The powers in conference turned wonderingly at that unseemly flutter of mirth. All eyes had shifted to the open stretch of ground that lay between the athletic field and the college "quad," partly shrouded by the great trees, whose foliage was just taking on its first touch of yellow.

A lonely figure was moving uncertainly in the direction of the field, a figure in stained and tattered football regalia, a figure well knit and muscular, that would have been commanding except for the shrinking timidity that marked its every movement. The figure advanced, turned back, advanced again, hesitated, and finally, in what seemed like sheer desperation, came on to the side lines at a dog trot and dropped down among the substitutes.

"Who's that freak?" demanded Bill Brent curiously.

There fell a strange silence. Marvin merely pursed his lips, and Reardon stared and shrugged. Duncan Frawley, right guard for the varsity, lifted himself to his knees and gleefully whooped:

"Look who's here! 'Rabbit'—oh, The Rabbit!"

"Rabbit, eh?" asked Brent. "Well, he looks the part, I'll tell the world!"

"Who is he, Reardon?" demanded Tedrow, fixing his eyes on that lonely, solitary figure among the grinning substitutes.

"He's a junior, Mr. Tedrow," answered Captain Reardon, with a gesture not at all complimentary to the junior; "a 'greasy grind' with a football complex. He waits table at one of the eating clubs and tends furnaces for the citizenry."

"My case, over and over," remarked the lieutenant governor; "I did the same for two years at Chelton, and I had a bad case of football complex at the same time."

"Oh, well," said Marvin, "there's no comparison between your case and The Rabbit's. You had sand and got somewhere, but you can hardly see The Rabbit for his white feathers."

"If he is so well equipped with white feathers, what is he doing here as a candidate?"

"He's a perennial candidate; that's the way his complex works. Frawley, the best of our varsity linesmen, is The Rabbit's cousin."

"His name—what's his name?" demanded Tedrow impatiently.

"Fortune." Marvin laughed as he said it. "Odd name for a failure, that. To make it more binding, Mr. Tedrow, this chap is Victor Fortune."

The lieutenant governor gave a start. "The son of Leonidas Fortune!" he exclaimed; "Leonidas, Chelton's old-time

football star and one of my class. For the last few years I've been so busy with politics I haven't kept track of Chelton as I ought to have done, but you can't make me believe that the son of Leonidas Fortune, now dead and gone, is a quitter at any sort of game. I believe in heredity, Marvin."

"All right," returned Marvin; "just to give you a chance to judge for yourself, Mr. Tedrow, I'll put Fortune in the scrub line for the next practice period and let you see him in action against his cousin, Dunc Frawley. It will be a massacre!"

"I'll chance the massacre part of it," said Tedrow. "Leonidas Fortune's boy," he muttered; "and they call him The Rabbit!"

"Take out Frawley, Marvin," said Brent, throwing aside his sweater, "and I'll step on this Rabbit, myself."

"Handle him easy, Bill," begged Reardon.

Brent sniffed. "I'll give him all he can stand and no more," he answered; "but maybe this Rabbit is a prize, and you've overlooked him on account of his reputation. Not every greasy grind is a has-been. Tedrow, here, is a case in point. But we'll see."

CHAPTER II.

SPINELESS.

THERE was only one of the undergraduates who gave Fortune any serious attention, or who showed any but a jeering interest in his football aspirations. That man was a classmate, Marcus Aurelius Clinker.

Clinker was long and thin. His chest caved in, and his back humped forward. This lack of robust symmetry, he explained genially, was known as the "scholarly stoop." He was emaciated, and he looked anæmic, but he stoutly denied that he was either. He had bulging brows, and he wore huge tortoise-shell glasses which gave his face a particularly owlish look. He wrote poetry, which few people could understand, for the college paper, and he was specializing in psychology and the higher mathematics.

He was a thinker and Marvin's right-hand man for devising trick plays. He was a chess and checker expert, for he had no natural aptitude for sports of the track and field. He came from the grand stand, along the side lines, and pushed past the little knot of substitutes to the side of the humble and dejected grind.

"Well, old top," said he in a friendly way, "you're out for football honors again, eh?" He slapped Fortune on the shoulder and tried to make it hearty and comforting.

The Rabbit looked up at him as suspiciously as a cotton-tail might look at a meddlesome bulldog. "You see, Clinker," he apologized, "I heard things were going badly with the varsity, and I thought"—he flushed painfully—"that if there was anything I could do to help I ought to do it."

There was another titter from the substitutes, and there were only two serious faces in the vicinity—Clinker's and Fortune's.

"Let me see your hand," requested Clinker; "no, Vic, the left one." He studied the palm a moment, a palm roughened and calloused by shovel work. "You are getting your chance this afternoon, old dear," he announced with a certainty there was no mistaking, "so stand up for yourself and make good."

Those who were close enough to hear gasped at that. For Clinker could read the palm as easily as he could read the stars, and his prophecies had a way of coming to pass. Sly Clinker! He had probably heard enough of the talk of the "higher-ups" to give him a line on coming events. At any rate, he had hardly finished speaking before Marvin, approaching a few steps, lifted his voice authoritatively:

"Hey, Fortune! Take Dalrymple's place on the scrubs for the next period!"

"Yes, sir!" answered Fortune eagerly, bounding to his feet, as if propelled by a suddenly released spring.

After two years of striving for football recognition, his chance had dropped on him like a bolt out of the blue sky. At the weeding out of candidates for the varsity, early in his junior year, he had been among the first to fall by the wayside. No one took his pretensions seriously, and it had discouraged him; now, with the playing season well advanced and two games lost to colleges that Chelton had taken into camp with ease in other years, the call had gone out for fresh material. and Fortune was really being considered.

There were gasps of astonishment along the side lines and something more than gasps out among the pigskin warriors.

"Marvin," commented Dunc Frawley, with intense sarcasm, "must be going balmy! But watch me," he said, another phase of the matter crossing his mind, "watch me skin that Rabbit and nail his hide to the barn. I'll show him up."

"The side lines for you, Frawley," shouted the coach; "Mr. Brent is taking your place in the line-up for the next period."

Frawley spat out something under his breath, something that might not have pleased the coach if he had heard it, and he left the field with a regretful, backward glance at his cousin, the greasy grind who had finally succeeded in breaking out of his shell.

"Oh, well," declared Frawley, "The Rabbit will get his from Bill Brent and I'm only a mucker beside Tough Old Bill when it comes to a rough-house." He laughed inwardly until his shoulders shook. "It's going to be worth the price of admission," he assured himself, "just to see The Rabbit crawl and do a fade-out. Here's where he kills his football chances for all the rest of his career at Chelton!"

As a man in a dream, Fortune had taken his place in the rush line of the second eleven. The figure of beef and brawn in the opposing line was looking him over with a coldly appraising eye and a relentless grin that foreboded trouble.

Part of Fortune's dream was an old familiar sinking sensation that made his waking vision a veritable nightmare. Every time he tried to show his mettle, something faced him like this. He had steeled himself to meet his cousin, and now in the place of Frawley there was Tough Old Bill, getting ready to pull him limb from limb. That sinking sensation always preceded defeat, and Fortune knew that he was doomed.

The ball flew out of the tangle of players to the waiting varsity half back; the lines came together, and then the earth seemed to open for Fortune, and he went down into an abyss as deep and as black as his own unfortunate state of mind.

What really happened was a push from Brent that toppled Fortune off his unsteady legs like a struck pin in a bowling alley. He spun around and collapsed without an effort to save himself; then a hurried player, with his eye on the ball, stepped on him, and the disaster was complete. Fortune's horrid dream faded into blank unconsciousness, and when he woke up he was back among the substitutes, and Clinker was dashing water in his face.

The playing was going forward with Dunc Frawley in Fortune's place and scrappily giving Brent a handful.

"What—what happened?" inquired Fortune, sitting up and peering about him wildly.

"A rabbit tried to play with a bulldog," remarked a substitute unfeelingly, "and got the worst of it."

"Wrong," spoke up Clinker; "a mistaken complex got in its work at the

critical moment. It might happen to any of you," he added, helping Fortune to his feet.

Fortune peered about him into the jeering faces of the substitutes, and the hurt in his heart flooded into his eyes, and his head drooped.

"I—I guess I'll go ho-ome, Clinker," he mumbled.

"And stay there, Fortune," suggested Marvin, coming closer; "you're not fitted for this grueling work."

Marvin was experiencing a touch of sympathy, for he realized that he was responsible for what had happened. He ought never to have put Fortune into the line-up, even to convince the doubting Tedrow.

Wearily Fortune turned away and, still supported by Clinker, moved slowly off across the field toward the buildings in their bower of yellowing trees. A voice, the voice of Bill Brent, reached his ears and penetrated to his aching brain:

"Good work, Frawley! You're giving me a hot session!"

And another voice, a voice Fortune could not hear, took up the echo of that loud, approving cry: "Spineless! Can it be possible? The son of Chelton's old-time star, Leonidas Fortune! Isn't there anything at all in heredity? If there is, what's wrong with that greasy grind?"

The lieutenant governor had something unforeseen to ponder over.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE WRONG FOOT.

BEFORE he had stepped from active practice of his profession into high political honors, the Honorable Percy Tedrow had been a famous lawyer. After a close watch of the players and their playing, he brought his technical knowledge acquired in the law to bear on the troubles of the varsity football squad.

"Coach a witness too much, and he is apt to give a poor account of himself on the stand, Marvin," said he, when the practice was over; "you have been driving the men too hard; they have been overcoached and are in danger of going stale."

"My notion precisely," agreed Brent; "all except Frawley. That guard is as hard as nails and as full of fight as a wild cat."

Marvin grew thoughtful. "It may be you are right," he said, "although I didn't realize it, and none of the trainers have guessed at such a calamity. Fordney, Chelton's most formidable football rival, has turned out a great team this year. Our scouts have all stressed that point, but after Chelton's easy victory over Fordney last year it has been hard to make our eleven believe that this fall they were to have a real job on their hands. I have been trying to push the squad hard and knock some of the rash confidence out of their heads. Perhaps I have overdone it."

"Cancel the game with Horton," suggested Brent, "and for the next two weeks give the men light work-outs. After that, and just before the game with Rivington, I'll run over here again to help you weed out any of the varsity who have failed to stage a comeback. There is some mighty good material in the second eleven."

"Oh, Frawley," said Tedrow, "just a minute."

Leaving Brent and Marvin and Reardon in consultation, the lawyer turned away and walked off to meet the guard who had won the admiration of Tough Old Bill, three times a choice for the All-American in his college years.

Duncan Frawley was a black-haired, black-eyed junior who seemed to possess every qualification necessary for a brilliant success in the rush line of his team. He was trailing his mates toward the training quarters for a shower and a rubdown, when Tedrow halted him.

Frawley must have thought that he was due for more praise and from one of the most noted of Chelton's alumni. Always ready for an approving slap on the back, he turned with a wide smile to meet the lieutenant governor.

"Brent is a hard proposition, Mr. Tedrow," he remarked, "but he said himself that I gave him plenty to do."

Tedrow's eyes sharpened as they fixed themselves on the darkly handsome face of the guard. There was vanity and smug confidence in the face, and the lieutenant governor was not very pleasantly impressed.

"It looked that way to me, Frawley," he said, "but I want to speak with you about something else. You are Fortune's cousin, I understand?"

The guard's expression changed swiftly. There was dislike in it now, and something like craftiness in the black eyes.

"That's some of the hard luck I've had to drag around with me ever since I've been at Chelton," he remarked. "It's a handicap, too, when you happen to be the most popular man in your class."

Here was a gratuitous show of snobbery that dropped Frawley several more notches in Tedrow's estimation. But a good lawyer can wear a gambler's face on occasion, and Tedrow gave no outward sign of his inward feelings at the moment.

"I suppose it is a handicap to some fellows," he remarked, "to have as a classmate a greasy grind who happens to be your first cousin."

"Not so much that, Mr. Tedrow," Frawley went on; "there are several mighty good men who are working their way through college, but The Rabbit has a yellow streak. He doesn't seem to know it, and he's always trying for football honors and always making a show of himself, just as he did this afternoon. He insists on getting off on the wrong foot." Frawley indulged a sly grin. "There's a reason for that, though."

"There is?" queried the other. "I'm interested to know about that."

"Uncle Wesley put The Rabbit through prep school and started him in here at Chelton—gave him a big allowance; and you ought to have seen how The Rabbit sported around in his freshman year. His eating club was the Baker's Dozen, and he trained with a fast crowd that lapped up this bootleg stuff and played a lot of poker. He had his own car, and he was pretty busy with his wild oats. Then, toward the close of his freshman year, a gambling joint was raided, and The Rabbit was part of the haul. Prexy sent him home to Uncle Wes, with a letter that made a considerable difference in The Rabbit's scheme of things."

"Ah," murmured Tedrow, "I am beginning to understand."

He was beginning to understand a good deal more than Frawley, in his altogether too frank indictment of his cousin, even faintly surmised. Frawley, however, in this matter of Fortune's delinquencies was turning a pleasant morsel under his tongue, and he continued his revelations.

"The Rabbit wasn't expelled. Uncle Wes built the gym and gave it to Chelton, and he's always one of the first of the rich alumni to come across when the college needs a little financing. The Rabbit came back for his sophomore year, but he was a different Rabbit, believe me. Instead of lording it around with plenty of jack, he had to move from his quarters in Ludlow to an attic in the old Brick Hall; he had to sell his car, and he began doing janitor work, peddling books in the long vacation, and waiting table for the Baker's Dozen, instead of sitting in with the rest of the bunch and ordering his chuck like a gentleman. Also, that sophomore year, he began trying for the varsity football team, trying every chance he got and

not getting anywhere because of the yellow streak."

"What I can't understand," said Tedrow, "is why he doesn't give up trying."

"I'll tell you the secret, Mr. Tedrow," said Frawley, chuckling; "Uncle Wes has promised to restore him to his old princely estate when, and only when, he makes a winning touchdown for his varsity. Get the idea? Fortune is fighting for fortune. He hasn't the sand to make good, but he keeps up the fight because he's hungry to get back in the good graces of Uncle Wes, and he hasn't the sense to understand that he is tackling the impossible. Say, Mr. Tedrow, it would be a scream if it wasn't so blamed humiliating to the rest of his relatives. I'm his cousin, all right, but The Rabbit hasn't anything else on me."

CHAPTER IV.

MAKING A DECISION.

LED by Clinker, Fortune arrived at the gymnasium which Uncle Wesley Fortune had built and presented to the college. Here the baffled football candidate had a shower and a rubdown by one of the trainers. These attentions were personally supervised by Clinker, and they put Fortune into a normal condition.

"Much obliged, old man," said Fortune at the door of the gymnasium; "I'm feeling tiptop and will get along all right. So long," he added nervously, as he started down the steps.

"You can't shake me just yet," remarked Clinker. "I want to talk with you, Vic, and I'm going over to your room with you."

"Oh—er—well, that's all right, of course," returned Fortune, his embarrassment growing, "but you won't find much of a room, Clink."

"I don't care a hang about that," was the answer; "it's you that I'm concerned about."

Clinker had been wanting to do something for some time, and that was to champion the cause of this underdog against the high and mighty Dunc Frawley and Frawley's pernicious influence. But Clinker had always hesitated. If he got Frawley down on him there would certainly be unpleasant consequences, and Clinker was instinctively a peaceful soul who hated disturbances. That sorry exhibition of Fortune's on the football field, however, had somehow dug through Clinker's philosophic shell and reached his heart. Hang Frawley! he was thinking; he'd help Fortune, no matter what came of it.

Psychologist that he was, he believed he had an inkling as to Fortune's particular complaint; and he was willing to bet something that he could work a little magic and turn this Rabbit into a lion.

When the two juniors reached the front door of Brick Hall, Frawley and two or three others of the varsity, as Fate would have it, came trotting along the walk on their way to training quarters. Dunc Frawley pulled up and stared at the two on the stone steps.

"Weren't hurt at all, eh, Rabbit?" said Frawley and contrived to throw into the words a mean significance that made Clinker see red; "just got scared and played off. Yellow—clear into your gizzard and down to the soles of your shoes."

Fortune whirled, flushed hotly, and his fists clinched. For a moment Clinker had hopes; but only for a moment. With the same old uncertainty that had become habitual with him, Fortune turned his back and opened the dormitory door. His shoulders sagged, his head drooped, and the flush faded and left his face white.

"Hit him, Fortune!" exclaimed Clinker, excited; "why don't you hit him?"

"No," said Fortune in a low, tense voice; "you don't understand, Clinker."

He passed through the door and closed himself away from the derisive laughter of the men at the foot of the

steps. Clinker pulled his hat down on his bulging brows, descended the steps, and faced Frawley.

"Say, you big bully," he demanded, "why don't you lay off that cousin of yours? Why don't you give him a chance?"

For just the fraction of a second Frawley seemed taken back by this unexpected explosion; then he reached out, planted the flat of his hand against the narrow chest of the philosopher, and gave him a push. Clinker sat down abruptly on the stone steps. The shell-rimmed glasses had been jarred crosswise on his owllike face. He was anything but a dignified figure as he looked up at the grinning Frawley, with anger burning in his eyes.

"Why don't *you* hit me, Marcus Aurelius," the guard insolently demanded, "if you are so anxious to have some one do it? The Rabbit hasn't got sand enough to kick a stray dog, but maybe you could mesmerize me and land a knock-out."

Clinker straightened his glasses and picked himself off the step.

"You're a four-flusher, Frawley," he remarked, picking at the guard as coolly as an entomologist might dissect a particularly fascinating bug; "you have bluffed your way through this college from the day you first hit the campus as a freshman. You think you have fooled everybody, I suppose, but you haven't. I know you, and I've got the nerve to brand you for a false alarm, and I'll bet Fortune knows you, too; and one of these days, if I can be of any assistance to him, he's going to reckon with you."

This outburst was received in silence by the other men of the squad. For Clinker was known to have a deep knowledge of abstruse subjects, and because of his knowledge was held in respect. They might mock at his pretensions behind his back, but to his face most of them felt that it was best to take him seriously.

"Oh, come on, Dunc," said Frazer, one of the backs, slipping an arm through Frawley's, "let's be getting on to the gym."

Frawley shook himself clear of Frazer's arm. "Do you think I'm going to stand for letting this little shrimp hand me a bunch of talk like that?" he demanded angrily. "He's barking up the wrong tree, and it's about time I made that plain to him." He pushed forward a step. "What are you circulating around with The Rabbit for, Clinker?" he demanded.

"None of your business," said Clinker.

"It's nothing to me if you take all the greasy grinds at Chelton under your wing and——"

"This particular greasy grind happens to be a better man than you are," declared Clinker, "and I'm going to make it my business to see that he proves it. I'm going——"

Slap, slap! Frawley brought his right hand and then his left smartly against Clinker's face, knocking off the glasses and smashing them on the cement walk. A gurgle of wrath escaped Clinker. He doubled his puny fists, and his arms shot out like a pair of awkward flails. Frawley was not touched by the fists, and Clinker was overset by a bit of deft footwork and sat down again, this time with considerable force.

"I guess that will be all for now, Clinker," said Frawley. "You say you know me. Well, if that's a fact, draw in your horns, or something worse is sure to happen to you. Come along, fellows!"

The football warriors started off. Clinker arose, caressed his bruises, kicked his broken glasses off the walk, folded his arms, and stood watching Frawley until he was out of sight.

"The fun has only started," he muttered to himself coldly and methodically; "before I'm done with this Fortune-Frawley complication I'll make

that muttonhead look like one of his simian ancestors. I will, so help me! And I might as well begin laying my wires right now."

He went on into old Brick Hall, climbed three flights of stairs to the attic, pushed open Fortune's door, and walked into those humble quarters under the roof.

CHAPTER V.

RESPECTFULLY DECLINED.

THE room was a mere cubby-hole, with a single dormer window. Half the ceiling was a downward slope, with the window let into it, and when a person walked around that part of the room it was necessary for him to bend in order to avoid knocking his head. Possibly Fortune had acquired the bending habit on account of that low ceiling.

The furniture was painfully meager and painfully hard, even to the cot bed, with its skimpy mattress and thin pillow; and there was not so much as a rag rug on the bare floor. There were three pictures on the pine study table, one of an elderly man, another of an elderly woman, and the third was of a girl with bobbed hair.

Fortune, as Clinker entered the room unannounced, was balancing himself on a chair with a broken leg and mending an apron—one of the white aprons he used as a waiter at the eating club of the Baker's Dozen. He started at the sight of Clinker, and the broken chair nearly went over with him.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "Say, Mark, I should think you had got yourself into enough trouble on my account without trying to make the score any heavier. Sit down, old man—on the cot, there. I'd give you the chair, but you have to do a balancing act when you sit in it, and it takes time to get the knack."

Clinker threw himself down on the cot. "Say, Vic," he burst out, "I'm mad—mad as blazes."

A bit of a grin stole over Fortune's face. "I didn't think a philosopher ever forgot himself like that," he commented.

"You're wrong. *Mutatis mutandis,* a regular philosopher can get as mad as anybody. And that's me, right this minute. Why didn't you wade into that insulting cousin of yours and wipe up the ground with him? Why don't you show him where he gets off, once and for all, and pile up a little dignity and respect for yourself here at Chelton?"

Fortune crinkled up his blue eyes, brushed back his brownish hair, and stared hard at his caller for a moment; then he dropped his head and went on with his mending.

"I had my reasons," he said, "and they're not what—what the rest of the crowd here at Chelton suppose. I'm carrying a load; it dropped on me at the end of my freshman year; I worried along with it as a soph, and now as a junior it seems to be getting heavier and heavier. But every man, Clink, has got to be bigger than his troubles. It's a pretty hard job in my case, but I'm equal to it."

He was threading a needle. That was a hard job, too, for there were repressed emotions in his soul that clamored so hard for expression that his hands shook. Clinker, analyzing him psychologically, experienced a deep feeling of sympathy.

"Get rid of the load, Vic," he advised; "it's breaking you mentally. That's what downed you over on the gridiron this afternoon. You can do a lot for yourself by giving Frawley a whale of a licking. It's your job, but, by thunder, if I had your build I'd do it myself. That guy is bluffing his way through college, and it's about time somebody called his bluff."

"I'll call it, Clink," answered Fortune, "when I get good and ready, and not before."

He got the thread in the needle's eye

and pulled it through with his teeth; then he went on with his sewing.

"I'm a good friend of yours, Vic, but sometimes you make me mighty tired," Clinker went on. "I can see you going from bad to worse, your complexes all wrong and riding you to the worst fall you ever had in your life. Honest, it gets my goat. If I didn't know that deep down under all your rubbish there's a regular he-man, I'd have passed up your case long ago as hopeless. You can shine here at Chelton if you'll only make up your mind to do it; you can step out of the ruck of the undesirables right into the king row, if you'll only take a brace. But you can't wait any longer; some mean little autosuggestion at the back of your head is pushing you on into the human scrap heap, and once there you'll be junked for good. Your initiative is badly crippled as it is, but there's still hope, if you take a grip on yourself right now."

Clinker was in deadly earnest; there was no doubt about that.

"You're as good a football player as any man on the varsity in any position, front or back field," he continued, "and you're better than any of them in one or two places I could mention. I know what you did at prep school, and I know that, with all your drudgery, you are keeping in training. Last summer, while you were peddling books, you played on a scratch eleven at a summer resort, and you were the star of the performance. Neither Marvin nor Reardon has ever taken the trouble to find that out. Away from this campus, you're a man to be reckoned with; but here at Chelton the shadow of Dunc Frawley falls over you, and somehow it saps your spirit. Smash that bogey, Fortune—smash it!"

Clinker was breathing hard, so intense was his earnestness. Fortune finished his mending, rolled up the apron, and laid it aside; then, mute and thoughtful, he balanced himself on the chair.

"The varsity needs you," Clinker pursued, "and Tedrow and Brent have come down here to focus their intellects on the situation and see what they can do to pull the eleven out of the hole. They say the squad is overtrained. Bosh! There's too much Dunc Frawley and not enough Vic Fortune in that aggregation. Where's your college spirit? What's become of it?" Clinker leaned forward and paused. No answer came to him. "I'll tell you," he added; "your sand is running out through a mean little complex, and you've got to patch up that hole for the good of the college, if not for your own. No use trying for the varsity until you accomplish that.

"And I can help," Clinker said, in finishing; "you come over to Buxton this evening and let me show you how, Fortune."

Then it was that Fortune found his tongue. "I believe," he said, "that you're the only friend and well-wisher I've got at Chelton, and I appreciate it, Clink," he declared, with a bit of a shake in his voice; "I want you to know that. Do you think it's any pleasure for me to keep trying for the varsity, handicapped with what you call a complex that makes me a by-word and a failure? No; you don't understand how Fate has juggled things for me, and I can't tell you now. I've got to help myself—stand on my own legs and not try to walk with yours. I'm just as much obliged, though, old man. I can't come over to Buxton to-night."

"To-morrow night, then?" asked Clinker.

"Maybe, Clink, but it all depends. You're a good scout, and you've been fine to me, and I'll never forget it. But I've got to start for the Baker's Dozen," he said hurriedly, snatching a glance at a tin clock hanging by a nail against the wall. "There are only ten there now, for three are at the training table."

He caught up his rolled apron and left the attic room with a sorely disappointed Clinker.

CHAPTER VI.

DUE FOR A SURPRISE.

WHEN Fortune finished serving the ten who made up the Baker's Dozen, he had his own dinner and returned briskly to Brick Hall. He had other work to do, and he lingered in his attic room only long enough to shove a textbook into his pocket. After that he began his round as furnace tender.

This wasn't much of a job as yet; it was too early in the season. He had four fires to look after, however, and he gave them his careful attention. Then, making for the main street of the little town of Fairfield, he halted at a fruit store and bought half a dozen oranges.

As he left the store, he came face to face with Dunc Frawley and Lucille Murray. There was a story about Lucille. Fortune had become acquainted with her in his freshman year, when he had his own car and plenty of pocket money; but the fallen fortunes of his sophomore year brought a change, and Dunc Frawley was now Lucille's escort and gentleman-at-arms.

This Lucille episode was perhaps as hard a blow for Fortune as any that had been dealt him. For he had been immensely fond of Lucille Murray; but, as Clinker would say, Fortune had reconciled himself to the course of events.

"Well, Rabbit, how's the janitor work?" inquired Frawley flippantly, evidently trying to belittle him before the girl.

"Why, Vic!" exclaimed Lucille, putting out a gloved hand; "it has been ages and ages since I've seen you." Her gray eyes traveled over his threadbare coat and dwelt for a space on the sprinkling of ashes on his shoulder. Her eyes softened. "I do wish you'd come over to the house once in a while."

Frawley scowled, for this sort of talk wasn't what he had expected. Fortune mumbled some reply and moved off along the street. If he felt any bitterness he failed to show it.

Turning into a side street that led into the poorer quarters of the town, he stopped before a dilapidated little cottage and rapped on the door. An elderly woman with a thin, pinched face answered his summons and smiled happily at sight of him.

"Come right in, Victor," she said; "it's just about your time for coming, and Jode's been watching for you. And what's this? Oranges?"

"For you and Jode, Mrs. Wilby," said Fortune, with as grand an air as he could manage; "how is he to-night?"

"About the same." Now she lowered her voice. "But he's growin' weaker, Vic," she whispered. "I can notice it right along. But I must scold you for bringing us something every time you come," she went on; "you're as poor as we are, and I know you can't afford it."

"Splash!" protested Fortune, with more of the grand air; "I've got prospects, you know. All I've got to do is to make a winning touchdown for the varsity and—biff!—back I go on Easy Street and take you and Jode along."

The Wilbys knew about that famous prospective touchdown, but they did not know how impossible it was becoming, as the playing season went on.

"And here's a quarter, Mrs. Wilby," Fortune went on, tucking a coin in the woman's limp hand; "you're going to put on your bonnet and run away to a picture show, while I sit with Jode. Yes, you are!" he insisted and went on into a little bedroom about the size of his own attic lodgings.

Possibly Jode had been watching for Fortune, but more likely that was no more than a figure of speech on the part of Mrs. Wilby. At any rate, if Jode had been watching he had got tired of it and had dozed off to sleep.

His eyes were closed, his head was deep in a pillow, and his emaciated, unshaven face had a ghastly look. Yes;

Jode was failing, there was no doubt about it; but he slept, and Fortune refused to disturb him. Softly drawing a chair to a table on which stood a lighted lamp, Fortune quietly seated himself, pulled the book from his pocket, and began to read.

Mrs. Wilby looked in a few moments later, wearing her bonnet and cloak. She glanced at her husband, then at Fortune, and the latter put a finger to his lips.

"I'll be late, Vic," Mrs. Wilby whispered, "for it's nearly time for the second show. I don't want to keep you away from your——"

"I'm doing here just what I'd be doing in my room," he broke in with an echoing whisper, "so you just take your time and don't fret about me."

Then Mrs. Wilby did something she had never done before, and Fortune was startled for a space. She crossed the room softly, bent down, and gave him a motherly kiss. "You're a good boy, Vic," she murmured brokenly, "and always doing something for others. You'll get your reward one of these days, you see. I expect, like enough, it will be that winning touchdown."

She left him then, after indicating the medicine Jode was to have when he roused up; and Fortune, when she was gone, raised his fingers to his lips and allowed them to rest there.

Yes; the Wilbys were his friends, and Jode, who for years had driven the college hack, had always shown that Fortune was his favorite. All through that dreary sophomore year Jode Wilby had stood up stoutly for the ex-spender, now the greasy grind. A sickness had come upon Jode during the preceding summer, and his age had made it impossible for him to throw it off. He was bedfast when Fortune returned from his book peddling during the summer vacation; and, as the weeks passed, he was steadily growing worse.

Fortune, with his slender resources, did what he could. The hack and the old horse were sold. They didn't bring much, and old Jode hadn't been able to lay by much. The taxicabs in Fairfield had almost put him out of business.

Fortune stood by the Wilbys to his limit and even beyond it. It was no more than reciprocity, he argued, and he was repaying his friends for some of their kindnesses to him in happier days.

Nine o'clock passed, and ten o'clock came before Jode roused out of his sleep. "Maria!" he called feebly; "I say, Maria!"

Fortune started for the bed and picked up a glass that had a spoon across its top.

"You'll have to whoop it up louder than that, Jode," he said cheerfully. "Maria's at the Palace Theater watching a good picture show."

"Why, Vic!" exclaimed Jode, lifting himself on an elbow and swallowing the medicine. "I might 'a' knowed you'd be here, boy. And you sent Maria, I'll bet."

"That's the how of it; now, you be good, and we'll have a bit of a visit."

"You bet we will, Vic. I got somethin' on my mind, and here's the chance, with Maria away, to get it off my chest at once."

"If it's on your mind, Jode, how in Sam Hill do you figure on getting it off your chest?"

Jode cackled. "You're a case, ain't you! But never you mind, boy. Pull a chair up to the bed. After you hear what I got to say, mebby you won't be feelin' so friendly to'rd the Wilbys. I've had this on my mind for some sort of a while, and I jest can't stand it no longer. But Maria don't know, Vic, and I'm wantin' you to promise not to tell her."

Fortune, as he drew the chair to the side of the bed, felt as though he were merely indulging a sick man's hazy notions. But he was due for a surprise—one of the surprises of his life.

CHAPTER VII.

PIECES OF SILVER.

"FIRST off," said Jode, "open the bottom 'draw' o' that old bureau, Vic, and take out what I got in the left-hand corner. It's tied up in a handkercher."

Knotted in the faded bandanna was something that jingled and was a bit heavy.

"Maria has been mighty curious about this for more'n a year now," Jode went on, his shaking fingers fumbling at the knots. "I told her it was a souvenir, and that's jest what it is; but you can bet I never let on to her that it was a souvenir of the time I knifed my best friend in the back."

He spread the handkerchief on the coverlet, and five silver dollars lay in the middle of it.

"It ain't no secret to you, Vic, how bad I been needin' money these last few years," said Jode. "Them gasoline go-devils has put many an old-time cabby out o' business, so I knew I'd seen my day some while ago. There was a few up to the college that always throwed some odd jobs my way; you was one, and once in a while Dunc Frawley was another. But Frawley, I've been thinkin' since, was jest workin' me for all he was worth."

The bringing of his cousin's name into the revelations had whetted Fortune's curiosity. At that moment he began to have hopes that what old Jode had on his mind and was trying to get off his chest might be rather important.

"Instead of hanging on to that money, Jode," reproved Fortune, "you ought to have turned it over to Mrs. Wilby, so she could use it."

Horror twisted the old man's face. "Blood money!" he said, with a sort of spasm, "and I jest couldn't bring myself to it."

"How long have you had it?"

"Ever since that night the room over Pollock's cigar store was raided, along to'rd the end o' your freshman year, Vic."

The mystery was deepening and taking a trend that still further piqued Fortune's curiosity.

"Oh, well," said he, "I guess you don't need to let your conscience bother you very much over this 'blood money,' Jode. My advice is, give the money to Mrs. Wilby and let her spend it."

"Wait till you hear; wait till I tell you," declared Jode. "You know about that night, Vic. Spring was in the air, and the varsity nine had been out on the diamond that afternoon. I hadn't had a job for two days, and I was pretty low in spirit, thinkin' of bills I had to pay. I was drivin' home for supper from my stand by the library buildin', when who should stop me but Dunc Frawley! And he stopped me at a place where nobody could see us talkin' together. He acted mean and underhand, too, and kept lookin' around, ready to duck if any one came in sight."

Jode brushed a shaking hand across his forehead and moistened his dry lips with his tongue. It was plain that what he had to say was coming hard for him, but that he was determined to say it.

"Frawley says to me," he went on, "would I like to make five dollars? That sounded like a providence, and I barked 'yes' right at him. He took them silver pieces from his pocket and jingled 'em in his hand. 'You can make the five mighty easy, Jode,' he says; ' 'cause all you got to do is to be in front of Pollock's cigar store at seven this evenin'; then, when you see my cousin, Vic Fortune, go into the store, you jest hike for police headquarters and tell the chief that the students are gamblin' in the room over Pollock's. But don't say a word to Vic,' he says.

"Honest, I had a mind to take them silver dollars and throw 'em in his face. But the devil got hold of me, Vic, and the chink of them dollars Frawley was rattlin' in his hand jest sort of scrambled

all my good intentions. So I says: 'All right, Frawley, it's a go.' "

Jode lay back on his pillow. "And I done it," he added; "yes, sir, I done it. Prexy, over to the college, had been demandin' that the police clean out that dive over Pollock's and run out o' town the gamblers that was victimizin' some of the students. But the gamblers and the gamblin' students was purty foxy. The police had to have the right tip in order to corner 'em, and they got it from Dunc Frawley through me.

"Next day I seen you sent home. If I could have undone what I did, Vic, I'd have crawled forty miles on my knees. But it was too late. I seen you sent home in disgrace; and the follerin' term I seen you come back and begin tendin' furnaces and waitin' table and tryin' for a place on the varsity eleven, so'st you could make a winnin' touchdown. I ain't been the same man since, Vic, and that's a gospel fact."

Fortune stood over the old man and took his hand cordially. "You haven't got a thing to blame yourself for, Jode," he told him; "if you hadn't notified the police, Dunc would have got some one else to do it. It's a big thing for me to know this, and it's mighty lucky that you were the one who did it, because if any one else had done the job it wouldn't have come out. See what I mean?"

"You stringin' me, Vic," demanded Jode, "or is that the way you honestly feel?"

"I honestly feel that I'm under an obligation to you, and I'm going to give you a five-dollar bill and take these silver dollars. What's more, you are going to pass the five on to Mrs. Wilby and tell her to spend it. Now, don't fret any more about your part in that police raid."

Jode fumbled under the edge of the mattress and pulled out an envelope. "I wrote it all down about Frawley and them five silver dollars, Vic," he said. "I done it to-day, and I've been scared stiff that Maria might get holt of it. You see, I was calculatin' on your bein' here to-night and turnin' the thing over to you. I——"

Some one was heard opening the front door. Jode broke off abruptly.

"Quick," he begged; "put that envelope out of sight—and the silver."

Fortune slipped the envelope into his pocket and dropped his last five-dollar bill on the coverlet and pocketed the silver. When Mrs. Wilby, back from the movies and happy and smiling over her evening's entertainment, entered the room, the bureau drawer was closed, and Fortune was sitting at the bedside, chatting innocently with Jode.

With the old cab driver's help, Fortune had that evening acquired the material for writing the first paragraph in his personal declaration of independence. He had hooked up his cousin, in black and white, with a piece of treachery that might have far-reaching effects.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE ROAD TO CHELTON.

IT was eleven o'clock when Fortune left the Wilbys. Ten minutes later he was striding through the edge of town along the paved road that led to the college. Jode had given him plenty to think about, and, as his thoughts milled around his cousin and his cousin's treachery, his temper flared, and hot resentment burned in his eyes.

"The two-faced coward!" he muttered; "it was all a frame-up from beginning to end. If I could meet Dunc now——"

If the wish was parent to the thought, then the thought was parent to the realization; for, as Fortune turned a brush-grown corner of the road, he came face to face with Frawley in the moonlight.

"Oh, it's you, eh?" sneeringly asked the cousin. "I heard your feet crunching the gravel, and I thought it might be some fellow from Chelton, some decent

undergrad that would be company for the rest of the way. You can trail along, Rabbit, but keep in the background. I've had enough of you for one evening."

It was plain that Frawley had not enjoyed himself very much that evening. Lucille must have talked about Fortune in a way that Frawley did not fancy; at any rate, he was more tyrannical and insolent than usual in the way he treated his cousin.

"I'm not anxious for your company, either, Dunc," said Fortune, "although I was just wishing that I might meet you. That was a neat little frame-up you pulled on me along toward the end of my freshman year, and it's going to cost you something."

There was a new note in Fortune's voice, indicating a decision of character that had long been missing in the greasy grind. Frawley, who had started on, whirled, and came belligerently back toward his cousin.

"If you're looking for some rough handling," he said, "you'll get it. Frame-up? What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you what I mean." There was nothing uncertain about Fortune now; he stood straight as a dart, his shoulders squared, his eyes on the shadowy face before him. "Over a year ago, Dunc, you asked me as a favor to meet you at Pollock's," Fortune went on tensely; "it was something very important, and you didn't want to talk about it anywhere around the college. I was a fool to trust you, I suppose, but I did. I went to Pollock's at a little after seven in the evening, and Pollock told me you were upstairs and showed me where to go. I found a gang of poker players there, a lot of sharks, but you weren't among them, and I was the only student in the room. I was told that you'd be along soon, that you always happened along in the evening. While I waited I was asked to get in the game, but I stayed out of it.

"I couldn't explain all this afterward, because I was afraid of doing you an injury. That's just how badly I was fooled and have been fooled up until to-night. You sent a man to the police to tell them to raid the place over Pollock's. You knew I was there, and you wanted to get me in wrong with the faculty and Uncle Wes. Some of your blackleg friends suffered, too, and they might have told something on you if they had known where the tip for the raid came from. But they were as much in the dark as I was."

Frawley was dashed for a moment; then he answered in a voice choking with anger: "You've been talking to that old idiot, Jode Wilby, eh? Instead of me framing something on you, you and Wilby have got your heads together and are trying to hatch up a scheme to clean your slate with Uncle Wes."

"That's cheap talk, Dunc!"

"Maybe you won't find it so cheap!" replied the other. "Seeing me with Lucille this evening must have given you the nerve to start this line of bunk." He leaned forward and shook his fist in Fortune's face. "Drop this right here, Rabbit, or I'll pound a little sense into your head."

"I'll admit that I haven't had much sense, or sand either, for a long time, Dunc, but I guess you know why, and you have been taking advantage of it. From now on things are going to be different, both at Chelton and back in Baxter Springs."

"You mean," asked Frawley, "that you're going to Prexy and Uncle Wes with that cock-and-bull yarn?"

"Just that," averred Fortune with finality.

"You'll go on a shutter, then!" said the guard, and his shadowy fist darted toward Fortune's face.

That the revelation made to Fortune that evening had worked a transformation in him was proved conclusively during the next few minutes. With the

ease and skill of a trained boxer, he ducked the first blow and came back with one of his own that landed fairly and staggered Frawley in his tracks. Clinker, the philosopher and the man of peace, would no doubt have rejoiced greatly if he could have been with the two cousins at that moment. But Fortune, although the advantage of the fight was with him from the very beginning, did no rejoicing.

To use violence against one of his own blood, or against any one else, for that matter, was distasteful to him; but there was only one way, as he knew, to handle Dunc Frawley.

After Frawley's first staggering surprise in finding such manful, two-fisted resistance where he had not expected it, he tore off his light overcoat, his hat, and his gloves, and fought with all the care and skill at his command.

But the astonishing fact remained that his best blows were neatly blocked, and that he found it impossible to reach Fortune. Victor Fortune was pounding him all over the road; at last Frawley fell and after a moment sat up weakly.

"Don't hit me again, Vic!" he moaned, as his cousin stood over him.

"Did you frame me, Dunc," Fortune demanded, "or are Jode Wilby and I trying to put something over on you?"

"You—you've got it right," said Frawley huskily, clasping his head with both hands. "But it'll ruin me, Vic, if it comes out. Uncle Wes will stop my allowance and I'll be expelled from Chelton. Do you want that to happen? Think what it'll mean in Baxter Springs! Vic, you're not going to treat me like that, are you?"

As a crawling exhibition in this stalwart, domineering football guard it was revolting.

"I'll not take you off the varsity, Dunc, because the eleven needs you," Fortune conceded, "and I'll not send any information on to Baxter Springs until I see what your next line of action at Chelton is going to be. Meanwhile, you play white with me, if you know what is best for you."

"I'll be square with you, Rabbit!" Frawley declared, with a half whimper. "You—you almost caved in my ribs, and——"

"You christened me Rabbit at the beginning of our sophomore year. That's something else you're to cut out. I've been a rabbit, I'll admit, for quite a long time, but the greasy grind is going to be something different after to-night. And another thing: training rules call you to quarters at ten every night. It is after eleven. From now on you keep to your training schedule."

Fortune turned on his heel and moved off along the shadowy road in the direction of Chelton. He did not see the impotent fist that Dunc Frawley shook at him, as he lamely picked himself up and began collecting his hat, overcoat, and gloves.

"Score one for you, Fortune," he mumbled; "but wait—wait till I get my innings!"

CHAPTER IX.

"GIVE HIM A CHANCE!"

THE letter from the Honorable Percy Tedrow was important—amazing, in fact, from some of its angles—and Marvin and Captain Reardon went into a private session over it.

"DEAR MARVIN: I haven't been able to get young Fortune out of my mind; so, on my way back to the capital, I dropped off the train for a few hours at Baxter Springs.

"I was never so intimately acquainted with Wesley Fortune as I was with Leonidas. Wesley was in his senior year at Chelton when Leonidas and I began as freshmen. Wesley has had a permanent injury, a stiff knee, from his childhood; and while he has always been a football enthusiast, that game knee of his barred him from taking any active

part in college sports. That was his bitter lament all the four years he was at Chelton; and he was bound that his younger brother, Leonidas, should carry the Fortune honors to glory on the football field at his loved Alma Mater. And that, as everybody knows, is precisely what Leonidas did.

"We lived over the old days during my brief visit with Wesley; and now, while every detail of our talk is fresh in mind, I feel it my duty to pass on the high points for your consideration.

"Victor, the lad called Rabbit, lost his mother when he was thirteen, and his father when he was sixteen. Leonidas was as poor as a church mouse, and Wesley took Victor into his home and began grooming him to inherit all his vast property. Victor's playing on his high-school eleven rejoiced his uncle's soul, and Wesley set his heart on having the boy duplicate his father's success on the Chelton gridiron.

"Then another factor entered the situation. Ethel, the only sister of Wesley and Leonidas, had eloped with a worthless scamp named Frawley and had married him. For a long term of years the sister endured a life of misery, and then her husband died, and she and her son, Duncan, were left without a roof over their heads. Wesley threw open his doors to them, and they came to Baxter Springs to live with him and Victor.

"Wesley is a bachelor, and his sister and his nephews gave him a home life which he very much appreciated. Ethel Frawley, although an invalid and spending most of her time in a wheel chair, contrives to look after the house with the aid of a housekeeper. She is a wonderful woman and has a lovely character. She was almost as a second mother to Victor.

"But, reading between the lines, I gather that Duncan Frawley has too much of his worthless father in him. He is a fine athlete, but overbearing, tyrannical, and shifty in his methods. His Uncle Wesley saw that from the start, but thought that four years at Chelton would shake him down and give him a proper view of things.

"Oddly enough, Wesley has this impression: Chelton has been the making of Duncan and the unmaking of Victor. The lad he favored has sorely disappointed him, while the lad he merely tolerated has won the place in his heart formerly held by Victor.

"Both Victor and Duncan entered Chelton liberally financed by their uncle. When Victor was caught in the police raid and sent home, Wesley got the idea that he had been handling him too gently; so, when Victor went back to college for his sophomore year, he had no allowance at all, and only his uncle's displeasure and an inspiration to do better.

" 'Vic will either stand on his own feet,' Wesley said to me, 'or go to the dogs altogether. If he fails to retrieve himself at Chelton, I'm done with him for good and all. Ethel's fighting for Vic, but all her talk can't sway me by a hair's breadth.' And then, Marvin, Wesley Fortune said this:

" 'I've set Vic's pattern for him, and if he can work it out I'll take him back and let him in for all I planned for him in his high-school and prep-school days; but if he fails, he's never to show his face in Baxter Springs again.'

"And what was it this unreasonable old man had set as a 'pattern' for the greasy grind? To make a winning touchdown for the varsity!

"That looks from here to be a rank impossibility. From the Chelton angle, with things as they are, it looks even more impossible. You'll have to admit that Wesley has set a real job for the greasy grind.

"But, as I said in the beginning, the unhappy fortunes of Victor have been very much in my mind. As his father's best friend, this is only natural. Nor

can I help thinking that under the surface of Victor's failures there lurks some tremendously important reason which he is keeping hidden, out of his love and devotion to his Aunt Ethel, the invalid mother of Dunc Frawley. Rather than cause her pain or sorrow, I believe that Victor would sacrifice football honors and his uncle's fortune and favor. Furthermore, I believe he is deliberately doing that very thing. Yes, Marvin, as a lawyer, cold-bloodedly fishing for facts, I believe in my soul that The Rabbit, down in the heart of him, is just that big a man.

"Now, such a man is altogether too good material to be wasted on a plain misunderstanding. I want you and Captain Reardon to give Victor the benefit of the doubt; I want you to pull him out of himself, put him on the firing line, and find out just how much his sandless exhibitions are due to a haunting memory of Dunc Frawley's importance at Baxter Springs, and how much is due to Vic's own ignoble weakness.

"My stand is this, and I take it squarely: You can't fool heredity. Dunc, with the worthless father, shines at Chelton; Victor, whose father was a star of the first magnitude, hovers among the shadows, like some ill-omened thing that fears the light. It isn't humanly possible that this can be based on any of the laws of heredity, and I want to go on record as saying that it is all wrong.

"Something else: While you are watching and experimenting with Rabbit Fortune, don't neglect watching Dunc Frawley. It was tipped off to me in Fairfield, on the quiet, that all the fast living and poker playing in the Fortune family is exemplified in Frawley; that Frawley is consistently breaking training rules with his dissipations, but that it doesn't show in him because he has the constitution of a horse. But it might crop out suddenly, during the game with Fordney, for instance.

"That's about all. You will pardon me for inflicting this long letter upon you, and for going so deeply into the family life of the Fortunes. You couldn't get all this from Vic, and certainly not from Dunc; and you'd have no reason to make such an investigation, anyhow.

"But, as a favor to me, even though you cannot think it is for the good of Chelton, give young Fortune a chance."

"What does he want?" asked Captain Reardon, after reading the letter. "Does he suppose that we're going to make the Chelton eleven a football for The Rabbit's fortunes? Is he trying to force an incompetent player into the varsity? He's one of the most powerful of the alumni, but if that's his scheme he's going too far."

"He can't do it, Reardon," returned the coach; "and I don't think that is what he's after. He's too shrewd and too square even to think of such a thing as letting the varsity sacrifice its chances of success with an incompetent player, no matter how many millions might be at stake. The question he brings up, and it is a fair one, is this: Are we getting The Rabbit all wrong?"

"Actions speak louder than words, Marvin," averred Reardon; "if a man's yellow, he shows it. If he lies down and rolls over before he has much more than a look from Tough Old Bill Brent, I can't figure how a 'haunting memory' of his aunt in Baxter Springs has anything to do with it. Dunc Frawley wasn't concerned in that play at all, so far as I can see."

"We can't be so sure of that," mused Marvin. "We're taking Dunc Frawley on his face value. Publicly he's good, about the best on the team; but privately—well, we haven't concerned ourselves very much about his private behavior. The way he handles himself in the field has been enough for us. The more I think of this startling letter of

Tedrow's, the more I'm inclined to take stock in it."

"In other words," countered Reardon, "you're going to send a gilt-edged invitation on a platter to Rabbit Fortune imploring him to come out for practice and to try and cover up his lack of sand with a show of spunk. Is that it?"

Marvin laughed. "No, Reardon, that's not it," he answered. "There'll be no invitation to Fortune. But if he continues to invite himself to the football field, in spite of that sorry exhibition with Brent, then, by George, I'm going to give him another chance, just as Tedrow asks me to do."

"And I'd be the happiest guy at Chelton if Fortune made good," said Reardon generously; "but he won't; he can't, in spite of this thing Tedrow calls heredity. When a man has been a has-been for a year or more, it becomes too much of a habit."

"Well, we'll see."

"Anyhow," finished Reardon, "the varsity isn't going to sacrifice any chances in order to help Rabbit Fortune."

They were both agreed on that.

CHAPTER X.

WORKING A SPELL.

AT eight o'clock on the evening following his encounter with his cousin, Fortune climbed the stairs at No. 40 Buxton Street, and rapped on Clinker's door. The voice of the philosopher from within bade him enter, and he crossed the threshold to find Clinker, in an old dressing gown, gravely considering a human skull in the light of his student lamp.

No one roomed with Clinker. He preferred to lodge alone; yet, even if he had not, few of the undergrads would have cared to share a room with a fellow who surrounded himself with such queer, not to say ghastly, things as Clinker thought necessary in his studies.

"Well, Fortune," exclaimed Clinker, genuinely pleased, "I had about given you up. Didn't think you intended to come. Take a chair, old dear, and compose yourself comfortably."

He dropped the skull with a gruesome rattle on the table; then he squared away and gave his caller a careful scrutiny.

"I guess my little talk yesterday must have done you some good," he went on; "there's a new fire in your eye, a new spring to your movements, and you seem like a different Fortune."

"I am, Marcus," averred Fortune; "I've taken a new stand, and if it's possible for me to play with the scrubs against the varsity, I'll fight to get in the line-up."

"Scrubs!" Clinker sniffed. "Say, Vic, if you'll be guided by me, I'll guarantee to have you in the varsity when we have the big game with Fordney."

Fortune chuckled at that. "How'll you do it, Marcus?"

"By working a spell," answered the philosopher owlishly, "a regular Class A, none-genuine-without-the-trade-mark, Marcus Aurelius Clinker spell. It's great stuff, Vic. It has done big things for others, and I'll bet it will do the same for you."

Whether Clinker was joking or not was hard for Fortune to determine. The philosopher had a way of saying the most preposterous things with a straight face.

"Tell me about the spell," requested Fortune; "what sort of a spell do you think I need?"

"Yours is a tough case," confided Clinker, "and what you need, and are going to get, is the best I've got in the shop. What I've got to do is to smash a lot of complexes; some of them are your own, and some are Marvin's and Reardon's. We'll take up Marvin's and Reardon's first.

"What do you imagine their reaction is to that scene you staged with Tough Old Bill? It couldn't be at all compli-

mentary to you, could it? What chance have you got for the varsity after that? None at all, Vic, until I smash the complex. I'm going to have the coach and the captain eating out of your hand."

"Thanks," said Fortune; "but you'll excuse me if I don't believe that until it actually happens."

Clinker made a few finger and whole-arm movements in the air. "It will happen," he declared theatrically; "I've convinced a lot of doubters, and I'd go to greater lengths to convince you than any one I know.

"After taking care of Marvin and Reardon," he continued, "I'll begin on you. There's a psychic knot in your top-piece, Vic, that has got to be unraveled. You have been the underdog for so long that the failure complex has shattered your initiative, throttled your enterprise, and laid you wide open to what we eminent psychologists call the 'flight instinct.' Every time anybody whistles, you want to lie down and roll over, walk lame, or play dead. Now, I can take care of that in just one treatment."

Fortune wanted to laugh, but thought it best to dissemble his real feelings and appear impressed.

"How in thunder will you manage it, Marcus?" he asked.

Clinker went over to a cabinet in one corner of the room. He returned to Fortune with a little packet, which looked as if it might contain a small pill box. The packet was wrapped securely and sealed.

"Did you," he asked dramatically, "ever hear of the 'coin of Confucius?' "

"No," said Fortune; "but then, I haven't been on good terms with any sort of coin for some sort of a while, Marcus."

"Well, it's guaranteed to bring good fortune to anybody that carries it. Vic," he declared, "it's a sure-fire luck-producer. You remember, last spring, when Jerry Hoover pitched a no-hit game for Chelton and won from Fordney six to nothing?"

Fortune remembered it. Coming after Hoover had been batted all over the field for three straight games, the sudden manner in which he had found himself had been the talk of the campus.

"Well, Hoover brought his troubles to old 'Doc' Clinker," the philosopher went on, smacking his lips; "and when he pitched the no-hit game, he had that little packet in the breast of his shirt. He couldn't lose! Absolutely, he couldn't. I could tell you a lot of things equally mysterious that packet has done, but they are secret, and I'm in honor bound not to tell. Get me? You'd be surprised how many upper classmen come to Doc Clinker and have him juggle with their personal jinxes. Take it," said Clinker, pushing the packet into Fortune's hand, "and guard it as the apple of your eye, Fortune.

"First off, that will give you the jump on Dunc Frawley. When you get ready to pound him all over the lot, wade in with confidence. The shade of Confucius will be smoothing the way for you. To-morrow afternoon, put on your football clothes and go over to the field. See what will happen, Vic! Take it from me, you'll be surprised! And when you get your chance, jump into the play for all you're worth. You can't get hurt; that's the lovely thing about this spell of mine. It's as harmless as a drink of soda pop, but there's more kick in it than there is in a hogshead of bootleg whisky."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Fortune, half convinced that Clinker was spoofing him; "you know that I don't believe in that sort of stuff."

"You don't?" demanded Clinker. "You know you've got a mean little complex, don't you?"

"I don't know anything about complexes; I——"

"Why did you drop in your tracks when Brent made a pass at you? Ah,

ha; you can't deny it. You believe in complexes, unlucky habits that grow in us and are hard to shake. But I don't ask you to believe until you have a demonstration. Try it, that's all; try it!"

"All right, I will," said Fortune, slipping the packet into his pocket, "just to please you, if for nothing else."

"And you'll be out for practice tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Then that's that," said Clinker; "now let's talk about something else."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHADE OF CONFUCIUS?

WHAT Clinker couldn't know—in fact, what no one could know except Fortune himself—was this: A weight, which was the cause of that demoralizing "sinking sensation," had been lifted from Fortune's shoulders.

His form had straightened and stiffened, he carried his shoulders back, and his head up; and there was no shamble in his gait, no uncertainty in his movements. Overnight this amazing transformation had been wrought in him.

Clinker had spoken more truly than he realized when he said that Fortune was under the baneful shadow of Frawley—a shadow that was draining him of his courage, his enterprise, and his independence.

Tedrow had written that Fortune's Aunt Ethel had been as a second mother to him. Before the eyes of the greasy grind, struggling through his sophomore year against the rankest injustice at home and at Chelton, there was always the vision of that white face in the wheel chair, of his one true friend, Dunc Frawley's mother. Whenever he sought to assert himself against the jeering contempt and tyranny of his cousin, that wheeled chair rolled in front of his mental eye, and the white face reminded him of a promise he had made in the days when he and Dunc had gone to prep school.

The promise had been made to his Aunt Ethel. "You are steady and reliable, Victor, and you can be a sort of balance wheel for Duncan. He has a good heart, and he means well, but he is apt to be wild, and he is easily led. I want you to stand by him and help him. Will you promise?"

Of course he had promised; his aunt's slightest wish was a law to him. He had done his best in prep school to keep Dunc going straight. It had been no easy job, and he had received no thanks from Dunc for it. Dunc, in fact, got the idea that he was trying to be bossy, trying to star himself with Uncle Wes, and so secure more than his share of what Uncle Wes would one day leave his two nephews.

Then in college there came that disastrous police raid, with Fortune caught in the net. Fortune had gone to Pollock's at the request of his cousin, but, before Jode Wilby made his revelation, Fortune could only suspect the things he did not absolutely know.

He had suspected Dunc of setting the trap in order to bring him into disgrace with the faculty and with Uncle Wes. It was all in line with Dunc's shiftiness, with his littleness of soul which was urging him at all times to profit at his cousin's expense.

And how could Fortune be true to the promise he had made his aunt and, at the same time, run down suspicions which, if proved, would result in Dunc's ruin?

That was the weight Fortune carried through his sophomore year and on into his junior year; that was the crushing obligation that was saddled upon his spirit. It sapped his will to do and staggered him always at the critical moment when the best was demanded of him. It was the secret cause of that old sinking sensation which had a way of leaving him like a rudderless ship in a choppy sea. Uncertain in his mind as

to what he ought to do, this habit of thought had come to reflect itself in all his activities; and, as a failure complex, it was well-nigh complete.

But there had been a flash of revelation at Jode Wilby's that night. With proof of his cousin's treachery in black and white, Fortune saw his course clearly mapped out before him. Wilby's confession gave him the whip hand of Dunc, and he could use that mastery in making Dunc "toe the mark." What Clinker would have referred to as the "king-slave" complex, or the rule of superior and inferior, was now twisted into reverse; for Fortune could be the boss by virtue of that testimony of Wilby's which would spell ruin for Frawley if it were made generally known.

With all his energy Fortune proceeded to make the most of his advantage. His call on Clinker was an evidence of his newly won independence.

The football season was so well advanced, and Fortune had been out of all athletic sports at Chelton for so long, that he knew his chance for making the varsity was a foolish dream; but, if he could make the second eleven, perhaps he could give such proof of his abilities that coveted honors would be lured his way in his senior year. That was his fondest hope, and he had called on Clinker to get his advice regarding a place on the scrub team.

And Fortune had been disappointed. All the advice the philosopher volunteered was for Fortune to keep on as a candidate for a place in the ranks, something which he was going to do anyway. And Clinker had given him a magic packet by which luck was to lift him out of misfortune by his own boot straps! Fortune had taken the packet to please Clinker, and not because he was superstitious enough to believe in anything but his own unaided enterprise.

Next afternoon, during football practice, players, substitutes, and hangers-on about the field were again electrified by the sight of The Rabbit. The perennial candidate was in the offing and approaching this time at a dog trot. There was no hesitancy, no milling around, no backing up and false starts in that approach. The titter that had started its rounds fell dumb and silent at the determined attitude of the grind. It was noted, too, that Frawley flushed, but had not a comment to make.

Marvin turned to Reardon with a wide grin. "Here's The Rabbit once more, Reardon," he remarked; "you can't step on him hard enough to kill his ambition."

"He's coming back for more of the same," grunted the captain. "I wish to thunder Tough Old Bill was here to throw a scare into him. But we're not to have any hard work."

"We're going to have a little, just enough to see if that heredity which Tedrow talks about has made up its mind to get on the job."

"Oh," returned Reardon, with a sly grin, "just enough rough stuff to make The Rabbit show yellow. That ought to fix him. Another of his sandless exhibitions, and I guess he'll have sense enough to keep out of this."

"I don't know about that," mused Marvin thoughtfully; "somehow Fortune has a different way with him this afternoon."

He moved down the line toward the spot where Fortune had dropped down among the substitute players.

"I say, Fortune," he called, "get in there at right guard on the scrubs!"

Fortune leaped erect and caught his breath. He had no more than reached the field before he was called on. Was Clinker right, after all? Had he worked a spell to some purpose? Was the shade of Confucius——

But here Fortune caught up his vagrant thoughts. "Splash!" he said to himself, as he moved from the side lines into the playing field; "this is no time

for nutty notions. I've got another chance, and it's up to me to do something with it."

CHAPTER XII.

FOR ALL HE WAS WORTH.

AT once Fortune took his place in the scrubs' rush line; opposite him was Dunc Frawley, looking most unhappy. "Now," thought Fortune, "I'll find out in short order whether Dunc intends to play fair with me."

The ball flew rearward to the waiting scrub half back. The second eleven had orders to get the ball through the varsity defense if they could, and the two lines collided with a mighty impact.

Frawley was a hard man to face; that was his reputation. But, after his encounter with Fortune on the preceding evening, he had no illusions left as to the reaction of his reputation on his cousin. The varsity guard's mind was in a bewildered state so far as Fortune was concerned. Something had happened very recently that had given the greasy grind a fresh grip on himself. How long would this new condition of affairs last? Frawley was hoping against hope that his cousin's display of courage had been merely a flash in the pan, and that he would duplicate with him the performance he had staged with Bill Brent.

Frawley tried to trip Fortune; but, by a miscalculation, instead of throwing his cousin he went over himself. As he fell, he tried to block the scrub guard low, was deftly evaded, and, on hands and knees, was mortified to see his cousin plunging after the fleeing half back.

The scrubs were stopped, in spite of their game offensive, and, in scrimmage after scrimmage, the two cousins were again and again in violent contact, always with Fortune getting a shade the better of it.

Fortune must have had some idea how closely he was being watched. Whenever he caught a glimpse of Marvin, he was thrilled to see the coach's sharp eyes bent on him appraisingly. And Marvin was not the only one who was considering this man who had been dubbed The Rabbit. The substitutes, the few undergraduates on the side lines and sprinkled through the stands, and the players when they had a chance, were all taking note of Fortune's work. It was so different from what they had been led to expect that they were amazed.

"Fortune—*redivivus!*" exclaimed an excited voice from somewhere.

Only one man at Chelton could have given that yell, and that one man was Clinker. It penetrated eerily the smashing undernote of battle and came clear and distinct to Fortune's ears. "Fortune—revived! Fortune—a new day for Fortune!"

This was the thought that leaped uppermost in the mind of the scrub guard. It enthused him like a war cry. His black sophomore year was in the past, and there he would bury it so deep that no one at Chelton would recall it. And this was his start in the good work, this was his beginning; this——

The next moment his head jerked backward under the smarting impact of a blow under the chin. That was Frawley, landing a close-armed jab at close quarters. It was agonizing for Frawley to see his cousin rehabilitating himself in such brilliant fashion. Somehow, he must have read into it signs of his own downfall. He thought he was safe, and that he could commit the treachery unseen; and then, as Fortune stood swaying and fiercely getting the upper hand of himself, the coach blew his whistle.

Instantly the grunting lines fell apart, and Marvin came running to Frawley and Fortune.

"You're roughing!" he said to Frawley. "You hit Fortune. I saw it. What's the idea?" he demanded sternly.

Fortune spat out a mouthful of sand and grit; then he laughed. "It was ac-

cidental, Mr. Marvin," he explained; "my own fault. No harm done."

The head coach stared at Fortune, a slow wonder rising in his eyes. "You are sure it was accidental, are you?" he demanded.

"He's playing hard," said Frawley; "I didn't mean to rough it."

"All right," said Marvin and turned thoughtfully away.

The practice work went on. The varsity had the ball. As it flew toward the reaching hands of the varsity full back, Fortune dodged inside the opposing guard, raced clear of him by dint of dodging and nimble footwork, and flung onward, with the mortified Frawley hard on his trail; but Fortune was charging the second line of defense. He did it as craftily as he had evaded his cousin. With a wild leap into the air Fortune took the ball in his hands and made no attempt to fall on it. He saw ahead of him a clear path to the varsity goal, and away he sped with both varsity and scrubs pounding after him.

As well might the baffled opposition have tried to lay hold of a cyclone as to overhaul that fleeing scrub guard. He made the touchdown.

Reardon it was who pulled him to his feet and at the same time clapped him on the shoulder. "Beautifully done, Vic!" he declared enthusiastically. "You're just beginning to show us that you're the son of your dad."

"Say, you old streak of greased lightning," said one of the other varsity men, "you for the cinder path next spring. Any man who can run like that ought to be out for track honors."

Marvin had no comment to make on the play. "That will be all the rough stuff for this afternoon," he said. "Take a rest and then go on with the signal practice. Get over among the substitutes, Fortune. I'll speak with you later."

He beckoned Reardon to one side. "He never flinched once, Reardon," remarked the coach; "I watched him closely all the time."

"I give up, Marvin," answered Reardon; "he's the wonder of old Chelton. He doesn't seem like the same chap who faced Tough Old Bill. Do you think Tedrow has written him a letter?"

"I don't know, and I don't care how or why he has staged a comeback; but here he is, game as a hornet and there with the headwork."

"It may be only a spurt," suggested the captain warily.

"We'll find out, long before we meet Fordney, whether he's a consistent player or only good at intervals."

Reardon looked alarmed. "You're not thinking of him for the varsity, are you?" he demanded.

"No; for the substitutes. If he keeps on like this he'll be a good man to fall back on."

He walked over to the little group of substitutes. "I guess, Fortune," said he, "that you had better report to-night at the training table. That is," he added, "if the eating club can get along without you."

"They will, you can gamble on it!" exclaimed Rice, varsity end and one of the Baker's Dozen.

And two others chimed in to the same effect, back field men temporarily absent from their pet eating club.

CHAPTER XIII.

POPULARITY PLUS.

MASS psychology, in so far as it has to do with popularity, exhibits the tendency of the pack to follow the leader.

In his sophomore year Fortune had seen his friends fade out of his sky line, and they had been led by those men in whose judgment the rest of the undergraduates seemed to place the most confidence. Dunc Frawley had a class following, and when he christened his cousin The Rabbit all his close friends took

up the sobriquet and put into it the regular Frawley sting.

But Frawley's influence by itself was too weak to cause all Fortune's disasters in his second year. To be trapped in a police raid and get in wrong with the faculty was no weighty matter with the students; the thing of real importance to them was what they considered to be Fortune's yellow streak. This they could not overlook; for none of them had any means of knowing that what they thought was cowardice in the greasy grind was merely a demoralizing sense of obligation to his aunt in Baxter Springs.

The really big men among the students took Fortune on his own showing; and when Ed Rice, "Chet" Baker, and "Derry" Fanshaw proved by their actions that the white feather at Chelton was a calamity and not to be condoned, all the undergrads went against Fortune in a body. Clinker was the one exception, but Clinker never allowed anybody to do his thinking for him.

Rice, Baker, and Fanshaw were members of that select little circle called the Baker's Dozen, an aggregation that set the pace at Chelton. It was Rice who started the stampede back to Fortune, and Baker and Fanshaw were not slow in hopping into the band wagon. Baker, when the afternoon's practice was over, took the greasy grind chummily by the arm and led him off to one side.

"Vic," said he, "I don't know, of course, how you are situated financially, but if you've got to lay off feeding those pups at the Baker's Dozen in order to carry out your training schedule, I'd consider it a pleasure and a privilege to be allowed to stake you."

Embarrassment as much as pride caused Fortune to flush. One of the most influential men at Chelton had singled him out for this particular mark of favor.

"Thank you, Baker," he answered; "it's mighty fine of you to show your confidence in me like this, but I've got a little laid by from my book-selling campaign last summer, and I can handle it comfortably."

"Great!" exclaimed Baker. "Now tell me: Was it really a fluke the way Frawley smashed you in the jaw?" His eyes were on a spot of red at the point of Fortune's chin.

"Accident," asserted Fortune, "just as I told the coach."

A wide and approving grin came to the face of the senior. He put out his hand. "You're a he-man, son, and a good sport!" he declared.

Fortune walked back to training quarters with Rice, Fanshaw, and Baker, the big three, and they were more than friendly. Possibly they were trying to make amends for their previous mistakes in sizing up the greasy grind; if that was the case, they did it handsomely, for Fortune's return to favor was signed, sealed, and delivered by the events of that afternoon. No one was calling him Rabbit any more.

On his way back to Brick Hall he encountered Clinker who had evidently been lying in wait for him.

"Now, then!" exclaimed the philosopher. "Now, what do you think about that spell? Didn't I tell you I'd put it over? First, we took Marvin into camp; then, you starred yourself; and now, all the big guns are shaking hands with you and clapping you on the back. Great is the shade of Confucius!"

Fortune was given a start. He had thought of that magic packet when Marvin had called him to line up with the scrubs, but not once since then had the packet come into his mind. He had forgotten it.

"You think that is what did the trick, Marcus?" he inquired somewhat blankly.

"What else could it have been?" countered Clinker. "And, listen: That right hook to your jaw wasn't an accident. Marvin may have been fooled, but I wasn't. It rocked you on your

pins, Vic, and it was an ugly welt. Frawley was trying to down you."

"He was a bit excited, that's all," insisted Fortune.

"Gloss over it if you like. You're coming fine and can afford to be generous even to a jealous old bluffer like your cousin. Some day, though, you are going to pound Dunc to a frazzle, and you'll never feel right with yourself until you do. I get the idea, Vic. You don't want to lay the big boob out while he's so necessary to the varsity eleven; but the day will come—it's bound to come."

Here Clinker was groping in the dark. He could not know that the day had come and passed. It was Fortune's secret and Frawley's, and no one else was to be let in on it.

"There are other ways to bring Dunc to time besides beating him up, Clink," Fortune suggested.

"No," asserted the philosopher; "and if you don't wade into him and clean his clock when the right time comes, I shall be disappointed in you."

Meanwhile Frawley's discontent and unhappiness were growing. He was still puzzled to account for his cousin's sudden awakening, still hoping that it would prove only a flash, and that presently Fortune would get back into his Rabbit clothes and begin walking lame, jumping through the hoop, and playing dead. But Frawley knew it was only a forlorn hope.

He watched with anger and chagrin the sudden expressions of favor with which his cousin was showered on all sides; and he listened to the talk around him with mute but surly disapproval.

"The grind has pipped his shell and knocked old Chelton for a twister!"

"He has proved himself the son of Leonidas, Chelton's old-time football star!"

"Keep your eye on him! He's out for big things!"

So the sentiment had changed, during one brief practice period, from an attitude of tolerance and contempt to one of admiration. Frawley's heart was bitter, and he nursed a growing grudge.

"If this gets back to Baxter Springs," he thought, "I suppose Uncle Wes will kill a fatted calf for the prodigal! And if something else ever gets back there, my own goose will be properly cooked. I've got to side-step that, somehow."

No one was paying much attention to Frawley. Fortune had proved the sensation, and the guard was in eclipse. Even Teddy Mechem, Frawley's particular crony, was reversing himself in the matter of The Rabbit and was joining the crowd of lionizers.

"I've got to jump on this, somehow, and jump on it hard," muttered Frawley, embittered by a guilty conscience quite as much as by his loss of prestige. "But how? That's the point. Vic's got the goods on me!"

CHAPTER XIV.

VILLAINY AFOOT.

THE three weeks that followed the memorable afternoon when Fortune was summoned to the training table passed like a pleasant dream. Whether Tedrow and Brent were right in thinking that the varsity eleven had been pushed too hard and were going stale was a much-debated theme on the campus. The fact remained, however, that two weeks of light practice seemed to have put the players into condition. The scrubs, with Fortune in the line-up, were rarely able to score in their practice clashes.

And Fortune was doing some remarkably good work, playing better than he realized. He proved beyond all doubt that the touchdown he had made for the second eleven was not a lucky fluke on his part. His game was consistently brilliant every time he went into the field. But he never had a chance to line

up with the varsity. Marvin kept him on the scrubs, stating that he wanted all the opposition in the second eleven that he could get.

Brent showed up at Chelton two days before the important game with Rivington and went out to the field to pass judgment on the varsity. He got in the work, as usual, and for a second time Fortune faced him, giving such a good account of himself that Tough Old Bill sang his praises.

"Son, I can't step on you; you're too many for me. How did you ever do it? I never had a bigger handful than you pushed into my mitt. I always made your father's work on the gridiron my pattern, and I'm here to say that you are romping along in his footsteps. Fine, old top! Keep it up."

Not often did Bill Brent let go of himself like that. Fortune's nerves tingled, and his joy was complete when he saw Marvin nod in smiling approval. Later on Marvin and Brent went into an animated discussion, and Fortune was the theme of their private conference.

Brent wanted Fortune in the varsity for the big game with Fordney, then only ten days off; and he wanted him to prove his worth by facing Rivington in the Chelton line-up.

"He's good, Brent," agreed the coach; "I've never seen anybody, out of the game for so long, shape up as Fortune is doing, but I can't take a chance on him in the varsity. We've got the eleven molded into a pretty perfect machine, with every cog doing its work beyond reproach. Rivington is our dress rehearsal for the performance with Fordney, and I refuse to take any new players into the cast."

"Maybe he'll get his chance as a substitute?" said Brent tentatively.

"Maybe," was all Marvin answered laconically.

Rivington had a good eleven, an eleven second only to Fordney's. Hence a victory over Rivington was a straw in the wind as to Chelton's prospective luck against the old, traditional rival.

Fortune was among the substitute players on the afternoon that the Blue and White of Rivington mixed and rolled and tumbled with the Blue of old Chelton. He had Clinker's magic packet inside his sweater, too, but nothing availed. Chelton took Rivington into camp by a phenomenal score, and Fortune had no hand in it.

Among several who distinguished themselves in the playing, Dunc Frawley received prominent mention. He had done some fine work, and for the first time since Fortune had "pipped his shell" he felt more comfortable in his mind and on better terms with himself.

There were bonfires and parades on the campus that night; for, while this wasn't the big victory, it was big enough to revive the depressed spirits of the undergraduates and to release their pent-up enthusiasm. Frawley considered himself a hero. There were several other heroes, but Frawley privately agreed with his crony, Mechem, when the latter told him they weren't in his class.

Once more the guard was tasting the joys of popularity. The only fly in his ointment was his cousin and his cousin's ability to stir up trouble for him.

"I've got to get the jump on Vic," he had been telling himself over and over, as the days passed, and he saw his own popularity wane, and Fortune's increase. "He's got some good backers—Bill Brent's one of them—and he might get into that Fordney game. I've got to do something to make that impossible."

But what could he do? Fortune was proving himself to be as steady as a clock in the field; the old hope that he might show the tip of a white feather had faded into the limbo of impossibilities. If anything was to be done, it was up to Frawley to do it.

He was equal to anything, no matter how treacherous, because he felt that he had his back to the wall. Fortune could

discredit him very easily, and he was in continual fear that this might happen. There was so much at stake, back there at Baxter Springs. If Fortune could be discredited, then Frawley knew that anything he could say about the police raid being inspired would look more like a frame-up for revenge than anything else.

"But what can be done?" muttered Frawley. "Where is the weak spot in his make-up that I can reach?"

That weak spot dawned on him suddenly. He considered it a happy thought and wondered why it hadn't occurred to him before. It was as rank a piece of villainy as one could imagine, and it looked exceedingly promising.

"I'll use Jode Wilby," Frawley told himself, in another flash of inspiration; "that will help to discredit Wilby, too, and if Fortune tries to stage a comeback, it will fall like a dud."

For several days he considered his plans. He turned them over and over in his mind, plugging every loophole and strengthening every angle that showed the least sign of weakness.

At last he was "all set." "This," he told himself, "ought to be his finish. I don't see how he can possibly side-step and escape calamity."

In order to understand Frawley's deliberate malice one would have had to understand the inner workings of Frawley's soaring ambition—and one would have had to know something about Frawley, senior. Heredity was at work here, just as it was in Fortune's case undoubtedly.

When Uncle Wes shuffled off, Frawley had long ago made up his mind that he would have only one heir, and that heir was to be Duncan Frawley. Frawley had been playing his cards to that end ever since he and Fortune had come to Chelton. The first move to discredit Fortune with Uncle Wes had been that police raid. That had proved something of a boomerang, although Frawley had profited beyond his deserts. But this new move, planned to clip the wings of Fortune as he was beginning to soar again in public favor, ought to drop him with a finishing stroke.

"It will do the business," decided Frawley comfortably. "It's a bit rough, and I wouldn't think of it, if he didn't have the goods on me."

CHAPTER XV.

BEFORE THE BIG GAME.

IT was the evening before Fordney was to come thundering down on Chelton, and the defenders of the Blue were rollicking around on the campus, either by way of easing their apprehension or of expressing their confidence.

Fortune was starting out to look after his furnaces. He had been obliged to quit serving the Baker's Dozen when he went to the training table, but a concession had been made regarding his janitor work. A few householders were depending on him, and he could not disappoint them.

As he came down the steps of Brick Hall, his attention was drawn to a small bonfire around which a number of students were gathered. Serious business seemed to be going forward, and Fortune walked over to the fire for a closer look.

Marcus Aurelius Clinker held the center of the stage. The handle of a feather duster was pushed into the back of his coat, so that the overhanging feathers would serve as a war bonnet. With a knife in one hand and a hatchet in the other, he was hopping about the blaze, doing a war dance and "making medicine" for Chelton.

Fortune laughed and turned away. Clinker gave a war whoop and leaped after him.

"Say, Vic," he asked, "what's that rat, Mechem, doing up in your attic?"

"Well," returned Fortune, "Mechem rooms on the second floor. Maybe he

went up on the roof to fly a kite or something."

"That's the trouble with you," complained Clinker, stabbing at the dark with his butcher knife, "you're never suspicious of anything. I went up to your coop to see you, while I was getting ready to put on this dance, and you hadn't got back. Mechem, though, passed me at the head of the stairs, and it looked for all the world as if he had come out of your room. Why don't you lock up when you leave?"

Fortune chuckled. "I haven't a thing in those quarters that's worth anybody's time," he answered.

"You've got the packet?" whispered Clinker huskily.

"Yes."

"Well, keep it right with you, for you'll need it to-morrow."

He went back to the fire, and Fortune, with another quiet laugh, took the high-road to Fairfield. He might have told Clinker how he had seen Mechem following him into Fairfield for two successive evenings, but he didn't consider it worth while. What Mechem might be up to he didn't know and didn't care particularly.

At eight o'clock he had finished his rounds and was at Wilby's. He never failed to look in on Jode. It wasn't possible for him to stay so long at the house as had been his habit before taking his seat at the training table, but even his brief calls were very much appreciated.

"And what have you brought this evening, Vic?" inquired Mrs. Wilby, taking the bag he gave her. "Bananas!" she exclaimed. "I reckon I ought to scold you for being so liberal. You're in training now, and you can't wait table for the Baker's Dozen, and I'll bet you're having a hard time to make both ends meet."

It was easy for him to assume a grand air now, and he did it to perfection, as he brushed aside Mrs. Wilby's protests.

"Everything's coming my way," he said, "and I've just got to pass the good luck around or blow up. How's Jode?"

"He's a trifle brighter, seems like, the last few days. Go right on in, Vic; he's expecting you as usual."

Jode was sitting up in bed, bolstered with pillows, and he reached out an eager hand to Fortune. After the friendly clasp, Jode brushed some coal ashes from his friend's coat sleeve.

"You're like a miller, Vic," he said, "and carry the marks of your trade around with you. You ought to be more careful of your clothes, boy."

"I've got two suits, Jode," said Fortune, "and this is my other one—my janitor suit. I guess it will last till my next summer's book-selling campaign, then I'll blow myself to a brand-new outfit."

"By next summer," said Jode with confidence, "the winnin' touchdown will have you back on Easy Street. I jest got a feelin' and I can't shake it. I——"

He was interrupted by a loud knock at the front door; it boomed through the house and Jode gave a startled jump and disarranged his pillows.

"Say," he asked, "who d'you reckon that is?"

"Some of the neighbors, no doubt," replied Fortune.

He was about to pull up a chair and sit down at the bedside when a familiar voice reached his ears. He stood amazed and wondering, his hands on the back of the chair.

"Is one of the college men here, Mrs. Wilby?"

That was Marvin, the coach.

"Only Mr. Fortune, Mr. Marvin," Mrs. Wilby answered. "He's with Jode, and I'll call him. Step right in and make yourself comfortable."

Fortune did not wait to be called. He was curious as to why Marvin had followed him to Wilby's when he could have seen him at college before he left for town. Something of importance

might have come up suddenly, he thought, something that had to do with the game on the following day. Marvin's face wore a serious look.

"What are you doing here, Vic?" he asked.

Fortune was puzzled. "Why," he answered, "Jode is sick, and I usually drop in every evening for a while after I finish stoking the furnaces."

"You do that every evening, do you?"

"He does," chimed in Mrs. Wilby, "and it's a blessed good thing for us, too. He's a real friend to us, Victor is."

Marvin had not seated himself. Reaching into his pocket he drew out a letter, took the sheet from its envelope, and folded it over so that only the signature was visible.

"Did you sign that, Vic?" he asked.

It was an odd signature: "One Who Needs the Money."

"Certainly it looks like my handwriting," said Fortune, "but I never wrote a letter and signed it like that."

"Do you mind if I search your pockets?" was the coach's next question, and it nearly floored Fortune.

"Certainly not," he answered; "go ahead."

Marvin made the search, and from the breast pocket of Fortune's work clothes he drew a plain envelope, sealed. Holding the envelope in his hand, he stood frowning over it. Fortune collapsed suddenly into a chair.

"Now how the deuce did that get into my pocket?" he asked dazedly.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THUNDERCLAP.

"WOULD you mind leaving Fortune and me alone for a few minutes, Mrs. Wilby?" Marvin said.

Mrs. Wilby was greatly perturbed. There was a seriousness about the football coach and such an air of evil mystery surrounding his call that her fears for Fortune had been aroused.

"Yes," she said in a flurried way, "I'll —I'll go. I do hope there isn't anything wrong."

Marvin did not answer, but watched her grimly until she had passed into the kitchen and closed the door behind her. Then he faced Fortune.

"Vic," he went on, "a mighty serious matter has come up. The letter I just showed you was from Hornaday, the football coach at Fordney. He is as square as a die, and he sent the letter on to me after he had received it in the mails. I wish you'd read it."

Fortune, vastly puzzled, took the letter; then he caught his breath as his eyes scanned the following:

> You can have the Chelton signals and trick plays for fifty dollars. If you are interested, send a man, a stranger in Fairfield, to the home of Jode Wilby at eight p. m. Friday. I'll be there to trade my information for your fifty.

So much was typewritten. Underneath it was the hand-written signature, "One Who Needs the Money."

The color left Fortune's face. In a flash he saw the treacherous snare that had been laid for him. He swallowed hard, braced himself, and looked Marvin squarely in the eyes.

"That sealed envelope you just took out of my pocket probably contains the information mentioned in this letter." His voice nearly broke, but he kept it fairly steady. "Mr. Marvin, on my word of honor, I never saw that sealed envelope before. If any one from Fordney had come here with a million dollars, I would not have given up our signals. The traitor who wrote the letter must have known that, so what good could all this treachery do him? Evidently he wanted to get me, but how could he get me if I refused to deal with a stranger from Fordney? I—I can't see through this."

Fortune had touched on a point that caused Marvin's face to clear a little.

"In the same mail that brought the

letter from Hornaday," he explained, "I received another typewritten letter telling me that if I wanted to unmask a Chelton renegade I should be at this house about eight o'clock and take a look through the pockets of the student I'd find here. Whoever is back of this frame-up never expected that the signals would be exchanged for Fordney money; he counted on my being here to halt the transaction. All his deviltry then, if I am to believe you, was aimed at implicating you. The letter that tipped me off to come here was signed 'A Friend of Chelton.' Usually I pay no attention to anonymous communications, but something told me I had better look into this one. Have you any idea who would try to put this over on you?" he concluded.

Fortune, still white to the lips, shook his head. He had an idea, but he was not telling Marvin or any one else.

Marvin opened the sealed envelope, and he scowled blackly as he glanced at the contents.

"Both letters," he went on, "were typed so that the handwriting might not be recognized. The signature to the letter sent me by Hornaday is palpably disguised in imitation of your own handwriting. It's a devilish piece of work, Fortune, any way you look at it. Let me have that letter again."

Fortune passed over the Hornaday letter, and Marvin compared it with the typed script that had been inclosed in the plain envelope; then he took another letter from his pocket and compared that with the other two samples.

"One typewriter," was his conclusion, "wrote all three. There's something about every typewriter, especially if it has been used for some time, that identifies its work—a letter out of alignment, or defective, or too closely spaced. In this case it's a hyphen, too high and too far to the left. There are probably other individual marks, but this is enough for me. The scoundrel who is back of this frame-up missed a bet in his scheming. He——"

"Hey, Mr. Marvin!"

This was Jode, his thin voice coming excitedly through the open door leading into his bedroom. Mrs. Wilby, retiring to leave the coach and Fortune alone, had neglected to close Jode's door, and the old cab driver must have been "listening in."

"Come in here and shut the door after you. I got somethin' to say to you, Marvin, about this."

Marvin went into the bedroom and closed himself in with Jode. Fortune at the moment was too shaken to consider all that this might mean. He was thinking of his cousin, his teeth clenched and his hands gripping. Dunc! Was it possible that Dunc would carry his underhand meanness so far? A stab of pain went to his heart, as he thought of his aunt, Dunc's mother. If this came out, it would ruin Dunc Frawley both at college and in Baxter Springs. More than that, vastly more than that, it might prove serious to the invalid in the wheeled chair.

As a piece of treachery it was rattle-brained. The author of the whole black business hadn't the wit to see that Marvin, of all men, would-be the one to weigh carefully every atom of evidence.

The coach was in the room with Jode for possibly five minutes. When he came out his face was flushed and angry. Walking over to Fortune, he took his hand.

"Don't let this bother you, Vic," he said. "We've run down a traitor tonight, but you're not the man."

Fortune struggled to his feet, wondering if Jode had told Marvin about the police raid and Dunc Frawley's part in it.

"We can't be sure of anything, Mr. Marvin," he said eagerly; "we can't be positive who the traitor is. Let's not do anybody an injustice."

The coach looked sharply into For-

tune's face, now flushed and filled with a tense appeal.

"Let's call a spade a spade," returned Marvin. "You're thinking of your cousin, and so am I. Jode has told me some of the things you have had to put up with from Frawley, and as much as he knows of your reason for it. What I've learned is all to your credit. A man with a guilty conscience will show it; and if Frawley shows signs of being unreliable, I'll take him out of the game. That's as far as I'll go—as far as I can go, with what evidence I have. As for the rest of it, I'll leave your cousin to you. All that's happened is between ourselves. I'm glad I came here tonight; glad Hornaday is such a good sport; and more glad than I can tell you, Fortune, that I've had a bit of an insight into a few things you've known all along and have been keeping to yourself. It isn't going to hurt you any, I can promise you that. You'll be back to Chelton by ten?"

"Yes," Fortune answered in a stifled voice.

Marvin left the house without further word, and a shrill, jubilant cackle came from Jode's bedroom.

"I may be flat on my back," he exulted, "but I reckon I can still do a friend a good turn. I'll bet that four-flushin' cousin' o' yours won't try to pull any more bonehead plays—not over at Chelton, and with you for the goat, Victor!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE SECOND STRING.

THE first automobiles, bringing Chelton alumni and relatives and friends of the players and students, began arriving at the athletic field by the middle of the forenoon; and by noon the machines were coming in flocks from all quarters. Fordney colors began to appear, the scarlet pennants touched as by fire with the autumn sun.

Tense excitement hovered about old Chelton; for this game with Fordney was the most important of the season's schedule. As far back as the oldest alumnus could remember, the two colleges had been spirited rivals. It was against the Red that Leonidas Fortune had carried the Blue to victory and won eternal fame for himself in his college annals. Against Fordney, too, Tedrow had battled; and, years later, Bill Brent, three times the All-American choice for guard, displayed his brilliant prowess against Chelton's ancient foe.

Leonidas Fortune would not be there to-day; but at noon his brother, Wesley, was aboard a special train en route to Fairfield. Wesley Fortune, like Tedrow, Brent, and others of the loyal alumni, never failed to be numbered among those present at the big game of his loved college. Tedrow, as it chanced, was on the same train with Wesley Fortune, and they found each other, from Baxter Springs on, and talked with enthusiasm about the old days at Chelton.

"That nephew of mine, Dunc Frawley, has the making of a great player," remarked Wesley fondly; "if they'd ever pick him for the All-American, I guess I'd be about the happiest man in the country."

Not once did he mention his other nephew, and something like resentment flamed up in the heart of the lieutenant governor. He would have liked to say something in Fortune's favor, but he had no knowledge on which to base any statement whatever, so he wisely smothered his impatience and held his peace. The one thing, and the only thing, he did say was this:

"Too bad, if any of the Fortune blood is chosen for the All-American, the Fortune name couldn't bear the honor."

Old Wesley Fortune scowled at that; and no doubt some thought of the greasy grind, who was fighting his way through college, must have crossed his mind. He grew crabbed and leaned his head on his hands atop his heavy cane.

The Chelton eleven began saving their strength and conserving their energies for the crucial test from the hour that they piled out of their beds. There had been a brisk walk before breakfast, with all the second-string men dodging along in the rear of the procession. Dunc Frawley tramped with the stalwarts and, although he held his head high and chaffed with his teammates, back of that calm face of his rankled the darkest and most perplexing thoughts.

Why hadn't his sensation come off? Why was it that on this morning the name of Fortune had not become a by-word? And what was Fortune doing among the substitutes? Apparently he was in as high favor with Marvin and the players as ever. Not a word had been spoken anywhere about a treacherous bartering in football signals. Something was wrong, and the unhappy Frawley did not know what it was.

Fortune was as cool and placid as a summer's breeze. But he was doing some thinking, too. There was Mechem, for instance. That crony and toady had passed Fortune near the training house, had given him one scared look, and then had slunk away.

"I've got his number," thought Fortune grimly. "When Clinker saw him in the attic of Brick House, he was coming from my room and had placed that sealed envelope in my pocket; and when he followed me for two nights, it was to make sure I was at Wilby's every night at eight. One thing dovetails into another, and the game may go hard with Dunc because of his conscience."

After the early walk there was a good breakfast, and after the breakfast a morning of idleness, watching the cars of visitors straggle in. Dinner was a light meal.

The stands were filling when Chelton players went to their training quarters; and before they descended upon their lockers, the blare of a band took them to the windows.

That was Fordney, coming as usual with their band. They were a husky-looking lot, as their automobiles rolled on to the track house, where they had been assigned quarters. Marvin could be seen welcoming Hornaday, the rival coach, and giving him a cordial hand-clasp. But only one of the Chelton men knew what that might mean, and that man was Fortune.

As Fortune got into his playing togs, Marcus Aurelius Clinker appeared among the trainers and players. He singled out Fortune.

"Fix it inside your shirt with a safety pin," he whispered huskily. "You've got it, haven't you?"

Fortune knew he was referring to the magic packet. "Sure," he answered; "I'd do anything for you, even to carrying that jinx-buster."

"It's the only thing that will pry you loose from the second-string men," Clinker insisted, "so make the best of it, Vic. Your uncle's on his way here with Tedrow and Brent. That's old Wes, isn't it, walking with the limp and the cane?"

"Yes," said Fortune softly and turned away.

Wesley Fortune, who had given one of the finest gymnasiums in the country to Chelton, was loudly cheered. He took Dunc Frawley's hand, pumped his arm warmly, and engaged him in a brief conversation. Tedrow and Brent walked over to Fortune.

"How are you coming, Vic?" inquired Brent.

"Top hole," answered Fortune. "I shall probably not be needed, but I'll be ready if I am."

"I know you will!" declared Tedrow. "Just remember what your father would do in your shoes, Victor, and jump in and do the same."

Wesley Fortune came up, distant but civil. He shook Fortune's hand in a perfunctory way.

"I hear you well spoken of by the coach and trainers, Victor," he said.

"One of the substitutes, I understand. Too bad you weren't playing last year. It would have helped you now."

"Yes, sir," agreed Fortune; "it certainly would have helped me. How is Aunt Ethel?"

"As well as usual. If I can carry home the news that Dunc has made a winning touchdown for his team, it will do her a world of good."

That was an indirect slap. Fortune ground his teeth and swallowed hard; and even the knowing Tedrow's slap on the back and cheery word could not entirely pull the sting. Uncle Wes limped away with Frawley, arm in arm.

The coach had little to say before the men went trotting out into the field. Cheers for the Red were filling the air as he talked.

"I don't have to say anything to you fellows," he remarked. "We were down, but we were not out; we have come back, I think, and you are going to prove it. That's all."

The Red warriors, their band at their head, were marching around the field. Not till the music ceased, and the cheers had died out, was the word given for the Chelton eleven to get under way.

"If I don't give Uncle Wes a few thrills," Frawley was thinking, "it will be because I don't know how!"

And Fortune: "If I can squeeze out a chance, I'll remember what Tedrow said about dad."

But he knew, as well as Frawley, that he had only a forlorn hope of getting into the game.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NOTHING TO NOTHING.

AT the start Fordney won the toss and chose the south goal, then kicked off to Chet Baker, who ran the ball back twenty yards to the twenty-eight-yard line. Without signals, Fanshaw, Chelton's full back, passed to Bailey, right end, the ball being grounded. Baker gained two yards around left end. A pass, Fanshaw to Rice, left end, was intercepted by Roberts, Fordney's full back, on the fifty-yard line. Staley, right half for the visitors, went off tackle for five yards, but on the next play failed to gain; then Fordney fumbled, and Fanshaw captured the oval for Chelton on his own forty-seven-yard line.

Fortune, with the rest of the substitutes, watched the playing with absorbed interest. Cheer leaders were hopping around in the side lines, and salvos of college yells burst from the massed ranks on either side of the field. The stands, fluttering gayly the Red on one side and Blue on the other, were waking up. As the preliminary clashes went on, Fortune noted that it was anybody's fight, the two teams being so evenly matched that there was hardly a toss-up between them. And he noticed another thing, and with a feeling of regret vastly to his credit: Dunc Frawley, at right guard, was trying so hard to star himself that he made the poorest showing of any man on the Chelton eleven.

Chelton, with the ball on her forty-seven-yard line, gained nothing on three plays. Fanshaw punted to Fordney's thirty-yard line, and Roberts kicked back to Trimble, Chelton's left half, who was downed on his own thirty-second stripe. A pass, Fanshaw to Rice, was incomplete; then Fanshaw gained three through tackle and punted to Davis, Fordney's quarter, on his thirty-yard line, and Davis ran the ball back to Chelton's forty-yard line. Frawley's awkwardness on defense was so startlingly in the limelight that the Blue partisans in the stands gasped, and Wesley Fortune scowled and leaned hard on his cane.

Staley, the Fordney half back, went around the end for twenty yards, plunging to Chelton's eighteen-yard line. Fordney's next play gained nothing; and then he grabbed off nine yards through

tackle, and Roberts, the Red full back, made it first down on Chelton's eight-yard line. Staley made two yards more. The ball, now on Chelton's six-yard line, had the Blue fans yelling for a "stone wall," and the Red partisans whooping for a touchdown.

Then the blow Fortune was expecting fell. Frawley was taken out, and Burton was put in his place. There were yells for "Fortune! Fortune!" No attention was paid to them. And Fortune, again to his credit, was glad of it. To replace his cousin, who had so strangely fallen down in his playing, would have added to Frawley's bitterness. The relieved guard dragged himself clear of the field, mopped the moisture from his scowling brows, and jerked a warm sweater over his shoulders. He was angry, considered himself imposed upon, and was muttering to himself. Undoubtedly he was hoping that his chance might come again later. He was too good a man to be ignored when the playing was mostly in Chelton's end of the field!

As that opening quarter proceeded, Fordney was getting the best of it. With second down, Fordney's right half made one yard more, leaving five to go; Roberts tore another yard off tackle, and Haggerty, the Red half back, attempted a drop kick, but it was a bungle, and, as the ball rolled along the ground, Burton went for it, like a hawk for a June bug, and had it safe on Chelton's ten-yard line. Trimble went around right end for a splendid gain of twenty yards, landing the oval on Chelton's thirty-yard mark.

Cheers for the Blue rocked the stands. Burton, playing in Frawley's place, had pulled the team out of a hole; and Trimble, rising magnificently to the occasion, had carried on the good work. Clinker, in a white stocking cap, a white sweater, and shoulder sash of blue, was the most active of Chelton's cheer leaders. He went into the air, and the Chelton yell, with Burton and Trimble on the end of it, made the welkin fairly ring.

Fordney was penalized five yards for being off-side. Then, taking heart, Chelton in a series of plays carried the ball to Fordney's fifteen-yard line, but Roberts punted out of danger to Chelton's forty-yard line. Fanshaw made two yards on two line plays, and then passed to Trimble, who made twenty-five yards. It was first down on Fordney's thirty-three-yard mark; Fanshaw added two more, kicked to Fordney's four-yard line, where Eustis froze to the pigskin before it could roll over the goal line.

Then the whistle blew, the quarter ended, and the score stood nothing to nothing. And it was plain to Wesley Fortune, up in the stand, that Chelton was doing better with Burton replacing Frawley in the line-up. What chance had Frawley for the All-American on that afternoon's showing?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CALL TO ACTION.

THE second quarter was full of thrills, with Fanshaw starting the excitement, after Roberts had made a pretty kick to midfield placing Fordney well out of danger. After a few plays, with the ball on Chelton's forty-five-yard line, something happened. Fanshaw went around end and reversed his field for a spectacular fifteen-yard gain.

Then, after a series of nerve-wracking plays, the ball was worked back to Chelton's five-yard line. A minute was left for play before the half ended, with old Chelton fighting for life at her own goal, and neither of the two cousins in the struggle.

The stands were in an uproar as Haggerty, for Fordney, took half a yard off tackle, and Staley gained one yard around end. The tumult was so great that the Fordney men could not hear

the signals, and Davis had to repeat them. Roberts forced the ball to the yard and a half mark—the fourth down and goal to go. And then, with all onlookers in a frenzy, the whistle blew, and the half ended.

Chelton had braced herself and was putting up a remarkable defense. The Reds claimed that another half minute would have seen them scoring a touchdown. This the Blues denied, and apparently with good logic.

"The whistle saved Chelton!" A loud voice shouted the words from the Fordney side of the field.

"Never!" exclaimed Uncle Wes hoarsely, shaking his cane; "not in a thousand years—against that defense!"

Then the band played.

Back in training quarters, with the rubbers at work, Frawley begged Marvin to be put back in the line-up.

"It's your off day, Frawley," said the coach.

"We all have them, son," put in Bill Brent, who had come to training quarters for a little talk with the eleven; "your work was ragged, and Burton is delivering the goods."

Marvin moved over to Fortune. "Remember what I said, Vic, about a guilty conscience?" he asked. "Nobody can get away from it."

"If you could give Dunc another chance," returned Fortune, "with Uncle Wes up there looking on——"

"I'll do as I think best," cut in the coach; "it's Chelton, and not the Fortune family troubles, that concerns me. Why aren't you asking for a chance yourself?"

"I haven't earned it," said Fortune; "if I'd been in the game last year it would be different."

The coach turned away with an odd look in his face. He was beginning to have a mighty respect for Vic Fortune.

"Never knew that grind before."

It seemed impossible for either Chelton or Fordney to score. Near the middle of the quarter all nerves grew taut when Fordney, on Chelton's twelve-yard mark, executed a triple pass behind the line, and Baldwin, the right end, carried the ball to the six-inch line; there Fanshaw, the full back, and Terry, left tackle, got to Baldwin so hard that he fumbled the ball, but Terry recovered it for Chelton. From behind his own goal line Fanshaw got off a short, high kick, the Fordney quarter back getting the ball and biting the dust on his twenty-five-yard line.

Then the ball was carried up and down the field. During one of the plays Bailey, Chelton's right end, was stopped so hard that he went down with a wrenched back. He continued to play, however, until Fanshaw kicked to Fordney's thirty-five-yard line, and then the quarter ended.

"Bailey can't go on," muttered Frawley, as the end was helped out of the field between the sitting and prone forms of the panting gladiators; "he can't go on, and some one will have to replace him. I can handle the end. Marvin and Reardon know it. Here comes Marvin now," he added.

He had half risen to answer the fancied call, but fell back gloomily as the coach passed him by.

"Fortune," said Marvin, "report to the referee. You're going in at right end."

His chance! He had his chance! He would willingly have sacrificed it to his cousin, but the coach had spoken, and his word was law. To have a part in that grueling game, to fight for the Blue in one of the hardest battles the varsity had ever waged, this was the honor that had fallen to him. As he cast aside his sweater and loped out into the field, a mighty yell went up.

"Fortune! Fortune! The son of Leonidas! Oh, you Victor!"

Uncle Wes turned to Tedrow, and his eyes were moist, and his voice shook as he spoke: "I heard something like that

forty years ago on this very field. It was different football then, but it called for as much nerve as anything they pull these days. If only that boy had the bulldog grit and the never-say-die spirit of his father!"

"Watch him, Wes," answered the lieutenant governor confidently; "you can't fool heredity!"

"I know more about Victor than you do, Ted," replied the uncle.

"We'll see about that," was the answer.

CHAPTER XX.

"TOUCHDOWN! TOUCHDOWN!"

DAVIS passed the ball to Roberts, the dependable Fordney full back, who made a run of forty yards and was downed on Chelton's twenty-five-yard line. Staley won five more for the Red off tackle; then Reardon tore through and dropped Baldwin, Fordney's right end, for a six-yard loss on a triple-pass play behind the scrimmage line. A pass, Davis to Roberts, went through for ten yards. With fourth down and one to go, Trimble was hurt in a play, but regained his breath and pluckily hung to his job at left half. Rice, left end for the Blue, stopped Haggerty, left half for the Red, and dropped him for a five-yard loss around end. The ball went to Chelton on downs.

After a few plays, a pass from Fanshaw to Fortune got the ball to midfield, but was called back, and Chelton was penalized for off-side. Third down and ten to go on Chelton's twenty-five-yard line. Baker couldn't gain for the Blue, and the tired Fanshaw let go with a poor kick. Davis, for the Red, was downed on Chelton's thirty-five-yard line. Staley flashed around the end for fifteen yards, making first down, ten to go, on Chelton's twenty-yard line. Two line smashes gained five yards; then Roberts, the redoubtable, plowed through the defense for thirteen yards, bringing the pigskin to Chelton's two-yard line. First down, and two to go for a touchdown!

Haggerty, valiant fighter for the Red, took a yard more from the Blue in a bull-like rush; then Roberts made another half yard.

The stands went into a frenzy. From one side an imploring roar went up: "Hold 'em, Chelton, hold 'em!" From the other side came the jubilant howl: "Touchdown, Fordney, touchdown!"

"Oh," groaned Uncle Wes, "for just one minute of Leonidas!"

"Watch the son of Leonidas, Wes!" said Tedrow. "He's no weak reed."

Fortune was alert and steady. His big opportunity came to him on the third play, for Roberts fumbled the ball, dropped it, and it lay in front of him for a second. He went after it; so did Fortune. Roberts had a shade the better of the struggle, and it looked as if he would get it; but Fortune hunched forward, shouldered Roberts aside, and, instead of falling on the ball, scooped it up and, with perfect interference in his wake, traveled like a flash the full length of the field and dropped behind Fordney's goal posts.

It was unexpected; it was sensational. The Fordney rooters sat as if stunned; and Wesley Fortune sat as one under a spell, his eyes staring, while all around him the Chelton fans, gone wild, were swarming into the field. Tedrow and Brent had gone with the rest of them.

It took time to quiet that demonstration and clear the field so the playing could go on. There was one name, and one name only, on the lips of all, and that name was "Fortune!"

"What's in a name?" exclaimed an old Chelton alumnus. "A mighty lot, I'll tell the world! How can you keep down a fellow by the name of Fortune? And when you call him Victor Fortune, he's got a double cinch."

Uncle Wes was still like a man in a dream when Tedrow and Brent returned to their places at his side. What mat-

tered if Rice's drop kick, hoisting the oval squarely between the posts, was disallowed for "holding?" The score was Chelton 6, Fordney 0, and why worry about an extra point?

Four minutes were left to play, and the stands were in a riot. Fordney never came within sight of Chelton's goal during the four minutes; and when the last whistle blew, there was that 6 for the Blue and 0 for Red on the scoreboard.

It was over. Undergraduates lifted Fortune to their shoulders and tramped around the field with their band in the van. The greasy grind had retrieved himself and made his mark beside his father's on the football scroll at Chelton.

"Well, Wes, what do you think now?" inquired Tedrow.

"I think," answered the old man wearily, "that I have been fooled into doing Victor an injustice. He had it in him, but it was a long time showing up. Better late than never, though. I want to get down there and offer congratulations. Not many people know all that this touchdown means to Victor!"

Bonfires blazed on the campus that night, and the joy of Chelton was unconfined. But the hero of the day had his furnaces to look after, and he had just changed into his janitor clothes when Marcus Aurelius Clinker burst in on him.

"Great is Confucius!" said Clinker, striking an attitude. "I guess you think so yourself about now, don't you, Vic?"

"Look here, Clink," returned Fortune; "when I made that touchdown I fell so hard on your precious packet that I broke it open. When I got to the gym, I found that it was a little pill box, and that there wasn't any coin of Confucius in the box at all—nothing but a scrap of paper on which you had written just six words: 'Great is the power of suggestion.' Say, you old false alarm, you're a quack!"

Clinker dropped down on the cot with a laugh. "That's all anything is, old dear—just suggestion. I suggested that the packet would pull you out of the ruck and put you on a pinnacle. And here you are—the biggest man at Chelton to-night!"

"It wasn't the pill box at all," asserted Fortune; "it was something else."

"What else?"

Fortune declined to go into particulars, and the philosopher refused to admit that anything save the power of suggestion had made Fortune what he was. During their talk, an uncertain knock fell on the door.

"Come in!" called Fortune.

Dunc Frawley, humble and properly chastened, walked into the room.

"Excuse *me*," said Clinker, with dignity, starting for the door. "I have business elsewhere."

He strode out without giving Frawley a second look. "Can't I call on you, Vic," Frawley asked, "without driving your friends away?"

"Never mind Clinker, Dunc," Fortune told him. "What can I do for you?"

"You can't do it if you aren't as big a man as some of the upper-classmen think you," was the answer. "I'm here to ask you," he said falteringly, "to ask you to let bygones be bygones."

"I've done that already, Dunc," said Fortune.

"I mean to drop everything; you know what I mean."

"Exactly; and I've done it. Not more than ten minutes ago I set fire to Jode Wilby's written confession regarding the police raid; and, along with that, I burned three pieces of writing, all turned out by the same typewriter: a letter to Marvin, a letter to Hornaday, the Fordney coach, and a list of the varsity football signals. All that is dead and buried, so far as I am concerned."

Frawley looked at his cousin as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

"But what of last year," he asked

breathlessly—"the tough luck you had, and all you had to put up with?"

"Your mother, Dunc, is back in Baxter Springs," explained Fortune, "and I know she's the best friend I've got in this world. What I went through during my sophomore year did me good. I'm mighty glad I had the experience, for I was getting too top-heavy as a freshman."

"I'll go to Uncle Wes," said Frawley, "and tell him all the facts. I'll let him know——"

"You'll do no such thing," interrupted Fortune sharply. "Aunt Ethel isn't going to know anything about the facts. We can keep them to ourselves, Dunc, turn over a new leaf, and go on like a couple of real cousins. Is it a go?" He put out his hand.

"I ought to crawl," said Frawley, as he took the hand. "If I had been square I'd have played a better game to-day, and I would have been in it from start to finish. That's what unsettled me."

The door flew open, and Uncle Wes stood framed in the doorway. The sight of his nephews, with their hands clasped, brought a slow smile to his lips.

"That's fine, my lads!" he exclaimed, limping into the room and resting an affectionate hand on the shoulder of each of them. "It pleases me to find Dunc, out of the game after the first quarter, congratulating the cousin who got into it during the last quarter and won the victory for old Chelton. You have met my own terms, Vic, hard as I made them for you; you have proved your worth, just as Dunc has, and henceforth I make no distinction between you. You have shaken hands with each other," added the old man tremulously, "now do the same with me."

WINTER SIGNALS

By L. Mitchell Thornton

THE wild ducks feed in the marshes;
I heard them at dawn to-day;
The wild ducks feed in the marshes,
Ready to hasten away,
And winter is surely coming,
Though never a flake of snow
Falls on my garden blossoms;
For the ducks are gathered to go.

The wild ducks feed in the marshes;
I could not number them all;
The wild ducks feed in the marshes
To rise at the leader's call.
So kindle my hearth fire early,
For winter is on the way,
A snowstorm sweeps from the arctic
And the ducks will be off to-day.

More Than Skin Deep-

By Erle Stanley Gardner-

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

THE CONSTABLE KEEPS COOL.

OLD Silas K. Mears dashed madly down the main street of the little mountain town, his arms waving excitedly, whiskers blowing back about his ears. "Robbery! Murder! Thieves!" He was shouting at the top of his voice.

From stores and houses people poured forth into the early morning sunlight, babbling questions, calling back and forth, mingling comment with exclamation. Soon a ring of excited townsfolk barred the progress of the excited man, and he slowed his gait to a walk and looked wildly around him.

"Telephone the sheriff!" he said. "We gotta get him out here at once, an' we'd better get some man from the city that knows all about such things. This here ain't no ordinary job. This is a real crime."

Pushed inward by the eager newcomers who gathered on the outside of the noisy circle, those about Mears pressed forward until he was fairly touching the ring on all sides. Then the men parted, as H. F. Horn, local justice of the peace and oracle of the law, came waddling his way through the men.

"Calm down, Mears, calm down an' tell us about it in a connected way. Mebbe I'd better have ye come down to the office an' tell me in private, because there might be some things that had better be kept secret, so's we won't tip off the crooks."

That suggestion was greeted by silent opposition on the part of the crowd. The circle, having opened wide enough to allow the pompous justice of the peace ingress, walled around him with unyielding finality, standing on tiptoed hostility, refusing to be balked in its desire to hear the news.

Judge Horn was not particularly popular, anyway. He had blossomed out with a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles after a trip to the city, spectacles that he really didn't need, since he had gone more than sixty years without any aid to his vision, and there was more than a suspicion on the part of the inhabitants of Mesa Flat that the judge had been merely trying to "high-tone" the boys. Judge Horn waddled not so much because of his excessive flesh as because of his ponderous dignity. His face was

never seen when it was not puckered into a portentous and scholarly frown. He delighted to walk down the main street of the town, a calfskin law book under his arm, a cigar in his mouth, and his eyes fixed straight ahead in a determined stare of studied preoccupation.

Silas Mears recognized the authority of the law, regained his breath, and launched into a disjointed account of his troubles.

"The safe—they got everything—cleaned me out. This here nitroglycerin stuff blew her all to smithereens and busted everything wide open; ten thousand dollars an' murder; yep, Ben Drake, my old clerk, the one that does the sweepin' out an' all that stuff, is lyin' there with his head smashed in, an' his eyes rolled up, and ten thousand dollars gone, an' lots o' papers blown here an' there and everywhere.

"I'm tellin' you fellows we gotta get busy. We gotta get the sheriff, an' I'm goin' to get this here detective from the city that puts on the radio talk about guardin' against crime. I want a regular smart feller to handle this here crime."

There came the soft pad of a horse's hoofs in the dust of the unpaved street, and "Dad" Anderson drew rein on the outskirts of the milling circle of humanity.

"Hi, there—you, Mears! What's the trouble?"

Mears looked up at the sound of the voice, his eyes ranging over the heads of the spectators to the grim, lined face of the man on horseback, a face that was seamed with years, bronzed with the sun, and in which there twinkled a pair of kindly gray eyes.

"Come on down to the store an' see for yourself," said Mears. "I ain't goin' to tell this here story more than a dozen times. I've been robbed of ten thousand dollars, and Ben Drake's been murdered; that's all that's happened. You're a fine constable, bein' home asleep, while these here crooks was dynamitin' my safe. Me bein' robbed o' ten thousand dollars, an' you comin' down after it's all over to ask what it's all about! That's the trouble with this here town. We got a lot o' pensioners on the list o' peace officers, an' we ain't got no real police protection."

Dad Anderson's eyes retained their kindly twinkle. "All worked up, ain't yuh, Mears? Guess I'd better git on down there an' take a look."

Mears fought his way forward through the crowd. "Don't go down there an' start disturbin' anything, Dad Anderson. I'm going to have a regular detective from the city come up here an' take charge o' this here case, an' I don't want none o' you local fellers bunglin' up the clews."

Dad's eyes hardened just the faintest bit of a glint. "Say, you'd better wait with all that line o' talk until yuh get yore feelin's calmed down a mite, Mears. Yuh might say somethin' yuh didn't mean."

The words had no calming effect on the merchant. He flushed and pointed a bony finger at the constable.

"I mean what I said, an' I'm sayin' what I mean. Yore just an' old has-been. What do you know about crime? Nothin'! What safe robber did yuh ever arrest? Nary one. Yuh don't know nothin' more about safe robberies than I do."

Dad Anderson smiled, a slow, whimsical smile. "Waal, now, don't start gettin' all het up about it. I aim to keep peace in the town, an' the only reason I ain't arrested no safe robbers durin' my term o' office is because there ain't been no safe robberies. I've done kept peace in the town by sorta lookin' after things a bit. An' as for safe robberies, there ain't nothin' about 'em no different from anything else. Just use your head a bit an' keep cool, an' you can find out all there is to find out. It's like trackin' a steer or breakin' a hoss.

All yuh gotta do is to keep cool and keep pluggin'."

Mears sneered. "Oh, is that so? Well, if you had a radio like I have and heard the way these here modern detectives talk about how safes is blowed up an' all about the classifications o' finger prints an' suchlike, yuh wouldn't show yore ignorance in public. This here business o' detectin' safe robbers is a regular business in itself. I heard 'Big Bill' Poindexter himself say so over the radio the other night. He said it took the best brains in the whole detective profession—that safe-blowin' business—an' he went on an' told about how safes got dynamited, an' how the automobile was makin' it possible for crooks to come into the small country towns, where the authorities didn't know what was goin' on in the world. Oh, go ahead on down there if you've got to, but don't disturb none o' the clews none, because I'm goin' to get Big Bill Poindexter to come up here on this case. I'm goin' to dig down an' pay the money outa my own pocket. I lost ten thousand dollars, an' I can't afford to lose that outa my business. I'd go into the hands of the board o' trade if I couldn't get that back. I can't afford to monkey with none of you fellows that don't savvy this here safe-blowin' game. I gotta get that money back, and I'm goin' to get the man that can get it back."

Dad Anderson made no rejoinder, but swung slightly in the saddle. "Come on, 'Prince,' " he said softly to the high-strung horse.

The crowd shuffled along in the rear. Judge Horn, trying to maintain his official dignity by keeping in the vanguard, and at the same time maintain his strutting gait, found himself laboring under a handicap, and he turned savagely upon the people who were pressing forward.

"Git back there!" he exclaimed. "You fellows can't see anything until after I've inspected the premises, anyway. Hold up there, constable. I ain't got any horse, and I've got first right to git in that place. The court has got to view the premises before the officers. You're just an officer of the court."

Patiently, deferentially Dad Anderson checked his horse. "I didn't know yuh was there, judge. Why didn't yuh speak sooner? Slow down, boys! Let's let the judge get there the same time we do."

Always patient, never known to lose his temper or to speak an unkind word, Dad Anderson smiled out on life from his weather-beaten face and let his gray eyes twinkle forth their friendly message. No amount of officious authority on the part of Judge Horn could ever lead the patient constable to expose the old fraud or to question the judicial prerogatives which were so frequently assumed by the pompous justice. Always riding his horse, always with a kind word for every one, knowing the name of every dog and every child in the city, Dad Anderson looked out upon the world, made due allowances for human weaknesses, and found that the world was worth saving.

CHAPTER II.

MODERN METHODS.

AT the store of Silas K. Mears, a store which was well isolated from the more pretentious establishments farther up the street, there was a scene of great confusion. The doors had been opened and were left swinging wide on their hinges, presumably as Silas Mears had left them when he had made the fateful discovery and dashed forth into the street to apprise the town of Mesa Flat with his gruesome discovery.

There were scraps of paper, torn pieces of books, and bits of leather bindings scattered all over the floor. The huge, old-fashioned, iron safe stood in the corner, the outer door ripped clean from its hinges, bulging and sagging. The inner door, ripped and torn open

in one spot, warped and twisted, lay on the floor. Within the open and gutted safe all was confusion. There were scraps of blackened paper, great dents in the sides of the safe walls, and long torn strips in the metal lining.

Upon the floor, lying in a tumbled mass of contorted arms and legs, his head twisted, his eyes staring at the ceiling, was the body of Ben Drake, a mild-mannered old bachelor who acted as clerk for Silas Mears and opened the store mornings, sweeping out and taking care of the early trade.

Upon the door of the safe appeared in gilt letters the words "S. K. Mears, General Merchandise." The safe had done duty in that corner of the wooden building for countless years. S. K. Mears, sometimes called "Skinflint" Mears, had carried on his business of selling general merchandise for many years. Of late he had branched out with new show cases, increased stocks, and so-called "sales," going after the trade of the community with "city methods."

Some months before Silas Mears had purchased a radio, and the inspiration he had derived from the business talks he heard nightly had caused him to expand his business, to talk of modern methods of merchandising, and to belittle the country methods of the town of Mesa Flat, always referring to it as an old-fashioned, moss-covered town, a town which supported pensioners in public office at the expense of the taxpayers and stifled progressive business men with its lazy indifference to good goods, properly merchandised.

Hat in hand, Dad Anderson looked over the scene and stood for several long moments over the body of Ben Drake, his attitude more that of one who pays silent reverence to a dead friend than of a peace officer seeking clews with which to avenge the deed. Judge Horn puttered about, ordering the crowd back from the doors, frowning learnedly about him at the walls and show cases, and, at times, bending carefully to scrutinize some microscopic piece of evidence which none but the judicial eye behind its horned-rimmed spectacles could perceive.

After some minutes had elapsed, while the two officers inspected the premises from the inside, and the crowd gathered at the doors and windows craned their neck, there came the sound of running steps, and Silas Mears rushed through the crowd, his arms waving, his eyes cold and hostile.

"Git outa here, the whole darn lot of ye! I've got Bill Poindexter on the telephone, an' he's jumped in his car an' is coming up. He's on his way here now, Bill Poindexter himself. I've got him at my own expense to solve this here mystery an' get me back my money, an' I don't want to have none o' you local pensioners clutterin' up the premises an' tramplin' over the clews. Bill says to me, says he: 'Keep all the hayseeds outa the place until I can get there;' an' that's what I propose to do. It's bad enough for a taxpayer to have to dig down into his own pockets an' pay the expenses of a regular detective because there's a bunch o' old pensioners kept in office by the chicken-hearted voters, without havin' you come in here an' mess up all the evidence."

Judge Horn turned on the old merchant, his pudgy finger leveled and raised, as if the judicial eye were squinting along a pistol barrel. "Not another word o' that kind, Silas Mears. You can say what yuh want to about the constable, because he's just an' officer of the law; but when yuh mention anything about the justice o' the peace yore violatin' some o' the penal codes an' a coupla constitutional amendments. You're gettin' mighty close to contempt o' court, an' if this court has to stick you in jail to enforce respect for itself, it's mightly likely to do it."

Silas Mears sputtered a bit after that,

but his sputterings were directed more at criminals and less at officers. He realized the sanctity of Judge Horn's ponderous dignity, and knew within his soul that the old judge was perfectly capable of carrying out the threat of imprisonment. Judge Horn's stock in trade was his ability to pose as a judicial oracle before the people, and the actual extent of his powers were defined by his own mandate. As a result, any derogatory comments were always made well out of earshot; and, such is the weakness of human nature, a majority of the citizens had really become convinced that, while Judge Horn was a bit stuck up and probably didn't know it all, he nevertheless knew a lot more than most lawyers and was possessed of that mysterious something known as a legal mind.

CHAPTER III.

DAD ANDERSON CHUCKLES.

SO far as appearance was concerned, Big Bill Poindexter lived up to his reputation. He came sliding into town that afternoon in a long gray touring car and slipped up to the curb in front of the post office, where a crowd had gathered, discussing the crime and making various conjectures as to the probable capture of the criminals.

"Where can I find S. K. Mears?" he asked and instantly became the focal point of every pair of eyes within earshot.

Big Bill Poindexter was a huge figure of a man, big of frame, rather stout, heavily jowled, keen of eye, and determined of jaw. He emphasized his size and general belligerency by holding a thick cigar thrust upward at an aggressive angle.

A dozen eager tongues answered the question. Fully half of the number gave direction by pointing their index fingers, and the other half started for the running board of the big car, offering to point the way.

Big Bill Poindexter, skillful advertiser that he was, basked in the limelight, rolled the cigar in his massive jaw, and started for the scene of the crime, followed by a large crowd, made up, for the most part, of the men of Mesa Flat.

Silas Mears was overjoyed to see the big detective. "I'm mighty glad to meetcha, Poindexter. This here is Sam Anderson, the constable; Harry Dunton, the sheriff; and Don Finch, the district attorney. The boys from the county seat just got here a bit ago, an' they been mighty nice about waitin' for you. Ole Dad Anderson's been messing around considerable since mornin', and I couldn't get him to lay off." Mears stroked his whiskers and glared truculently at Dad Anderson.

Bill Poindexter removed his cigar, bit off a portion of the moist butt, stuck the weed back in a corner of his mouth, and surveyed the officials.

"How do, boys," he said at length. "Glad t'meetcha. Now let's get down to business. Offhand, this looks like the work of the Pemberton gang, papers all scattered around and the place wrecked that way; but the first thing to do is to look for finger prints; that's where the country constables fall down nine times outa nine."

With these words Bill Bill extracted a leather case from the wide pocket of his overcoat, took up a camel's-hair brush, and began to dust over the surface of the safe door with a white powder. The citizens of the country town gathered around in breathless wonder, watching, wide-eyed and silent. Even Don Finch leaned forward to get a close view of the mysterious process.

Under the magic touch of the brush white blotches began to appear upon the face of the door. Big Bill took a magnifying glass from his pocket and examined these prints, then grunted, took an ink roller from the leather case, and held out his hand toward Silas Mears.

"Better lemme see your finger prints,

an' then I'll take those of the bird that got croaked. Those prints'll be on the safe in the ordinary course o' business, an' there's no need o' me wastin' my time on them. It's the strange finger prints that we want to watch."

Within half an hour Big Bill had completed his investigations. He pointed to a row of white blotches along the upper end of the door and to another series some inches lower down on the door.

"There we are, boys. Them's the finger prints that can't be accounted for. They're prints that don't belong to anybody that had any business in the store or with that safe. Offhand, they don't look so much like the Pemberton gang, but maybe the boys have got a new box man since the last run-in I had with 'em. I'll just make a photo of them prints, and then we'll have the door put away where it'll be safe. We'll want to use it at the trial."

"What trial?" asked Dad Anderson innocently.

Big Bill Poindexter straightened and shifted his cigar a couple of notches upward. "The trial of the men that did the job," he declared. "When I get after 'em I never give up. I'll get 'em, an' when I get 'em they have to have a trial. See?"

Dad Anderson nodded almost apologetically. "I see," he said, his kindly gray eyes appraising the stern ones which beat down from beneath the shaggy brows of the big detective.

Presently Big Bill brought in a box equipped with tripod, electric batteries, and lights. Carefully he placed the box against the door of the safe and turned on a switch, while he stood by, watch in hand. At length he turned off the switch, shifted the plates, and changed the location of the camera. One by one he covered the finger prints which he had pointed out upon the door of the safe.

Having secured his plates, Bill went into the dark room of the local photographer and emerged after a while, looking very mysterious.

"Those ain't the prints of any of the Pemberton gang. I'm beginning to think that it was a local job. Mears, was the money in the safe in big bills or small?"

Mears hung his head. "It was in gold. Somehow or other, I been savin' every bit o' gold I could lay my hands on. I really didn't need that much cash in the store, and I should have sent it down to the city bank, but the vault in the bank here ain't no better than my own safe, and it was dangerous sendin' it down to the county seat to be deposited in the bank there, an'—well, I guess I'm a bit of a miser. I had money comin' over a period of years, and every time I could get a bill changed I'd send over to the bank and make 'em give me gold. The sack's been there for a long time, and it's grown up into a big wad o' money."

"So that's where all that gold was going," exclaimed one of the spectators, Dick Lamb, cashier of the local bank. "I know that what he says is the truth, sir. He has come in every once in a while for quite a spell and had bills changed into gold, or had checks cashed and demanded gold. We don't get very much of a supply of gold up here, so we've drawn the line at giving out too much, but we've always passed out small amounts to Mears, from time to time, and never thought much about it."

"He never deposited any gold?" asked the big man suddenly.

Lamb shook his head. "No, sir."

"And you mean to stand there and tell me that you fellows in the bank didn't suspect what was going on—didn't know that Mears had a little hoard of money stuck away here in his safe?" The detective's voice was suddenly as thunderingly accusing as a trumpet of Fate.

Dick Lamb flushed at the tone, but stood his ground. "I don't know as I ever speculated very much about it, one

way or the other," he replied. "The amounts were small, although there's been a whole lot more taken out recently than there was before. And you must have had some large bills there in the safe, too, Mears. You've had a few hundred-dollar bills that we've given you on cashed checks as well as gold."

Mears nodded. "Maybe a thousand or so in bills," he admitted. "The bulk of what I had was in that stack of gold." Poindexter stood with his square-toed feet planted heavily on the floor, his eyes squinted, and his cigar traveled from one side of his heavy mouth to the other. "I guess I'd better run down this here bank end of things," he said at length. "It don't just sorta look right to me."

Dad Anderson snorted and walked out of the store at this last remark. He picked up the bridle reins and swung into the saddle of his mount. "Prince," he remarked, as he gave a gentle pressure to the reins about the horse's neck, "let's you and me get out of this before one of us loses his temper."

At the dry humor of his own remark Dad Anderson chuckled slightly, and he rode down the street absorbed in his own thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

MORE THAN FINGER PRINTS.

IT was growing dark when there came a patter of steps upon the porch of Dad Anderson's bachelor establishment, and a timid knock resounded through the little shack. The constable lowered his stockinged feet, adjusted his steel-rimmed spectacles, and opened the door.

"Well, well," he remarked kindly, as he stood aside, "it's little Margy Lamb. What are you doing out here, Margy?"

The girl looked up at him pathetically. In one arm she held a rag doll, clutched by a chubby hand, and there were the streaks of tears on her rosy cheeks; her eyes were swollen and red.

"They're taking my daddy away to a big stone house with bars, where daddy can't get out and come home to see us. My mummer is talking to the men that came for daddy, and she said for me to come and get you, and that you'd get my daddy away from them men."

Dad Anderson made one bound for his shoes. Without a word he drew them on, then bent his face to that of the little girl.

"You sit down here by the fire, Margy, and rock your doll to sleep, while I get a saddle on Prince, and then we'll go and see what all this is about. They ain't goin' to take your daddy to jail if I've got anything to say about it."

Having soothed the girl and placed her in a comfortable chair, Dad Anderson hurried to the stable. Here he threw a saddle on his horse and then, returning to the house, stopped long enough to pick up the little girl, rag doll and all, and place her on the saddle before him. Presently they were making a wild dash to the store of Silas Mears.

Here he found the sheriff and district attorney; here also was the automobile of Big Bill Poindexter, and, milling about in the aimless way of a crowd, were some fifty or more men, women, and children.

"Yuh heard the news, Dad?" called out a voice, as the shape of the horse materialized from the gloom of the street. "They caught Dick Lamb, got him dead to rights, finger prints, stained clothes, and——"

The voice died away, as the speaker caught sight of the little girl whom Dad Anderson was holding before him on the saddle. Now the old man swung from the horse, lifted the girl to his shoulder, and made his way through the crowd which had suddenly become quiet. Within the store the officials were gathered about one of the show cases, while pompous old Judge Horn was gazing learnedly about from a chair behind the counter.

"We can hold the preliminary hearing right now," the judge was saying, his tortoise-shelled spectacles glinting in the light, "and bind the defendant over."

His words showed the extent to which his mind was made up, but there was no one in the crowd who caught the unconscious humor of the judicial announcement in advance of what his decision would be. Dick Lamb was standing beside the sheriff, and his young wife clung to her husband's arm, her lips set, tears in her eyes. Big Bill Poindexter, a cigar standing almost straight up from the angle of his heavy jaw, was conferring earnestly with District Attorney Finch.

Dad Anderson addressed the official gathering, and for once there was absent from those old eyes the kindly twinkle which had been one of his identifying features for years.

"What's all this foolishness? You fellows know that Dick Lamb never harmed any one in his life. He wouldn't steal a dollar or a million dollars, and as for beatin' in the head of poor Ben Drake, there ain't a chance in ten million that he'd ever even think of such a thing."

Big Bill Poindexter swung slowly around and pointed to the safe door. Then he extracted some photographs from his pocket.

"Finger prints don't lie, constable. There's the finger prints on the safe door, right where a crook would plant the soap to hold the 'soup' he was pouring into the safe. Finger prints don't ever make a mistake, and they don't lie. I've got no less than eighteen points of identification between the finger prints of this prisoner and the finger prints that are on the door of that safe. I've seen men hung on less than six points of similarity."

Dad Anderson snorted, and those about him noticed that his gray eyes caught the light of the room and turned cold.

"Look here, yuh detective: finger prints may not lie, but there's something else that don't lie, too. Human nature is human nature, and character is character, and character don't change overnight. I've known Dick Lamb since he was a kid, and I knew his wife when she wasn't any bigger than this here little tot that I'm holdin' on my shoulder. When a man builds up a character by years of clean livin' an' being a decent citizen, it's worth a heck of a sight more than a finger print."

The detective's cigar drooped just a bit before the cold fire of the old man's indignation, but, after a second, he regained his assurance, cocked up the cigar, and openly sneered at the prisoner.

"Law-abidin' citizen, eh? There's lots about this case you don't know. You've been away all afternoon, while I was gatherin' evidence. Those finger prints are just the things that cinch the case. There's lots of evidence that we've dug up. What'd yuh go away for if you wanted to be so interested in the case?"

Dad Anderson glared coldly at the hulking man before him. "I went away because I was plumb sick and tired of every one not usin' their senses and missing the obvious because of a lot of newfangled finger-print ideas."

The detective's cigar shifted a bit, as his jaw clamped. He was now on familiar ground.

"That's what's making it so easy for the criminal to-day. The automobile affords him a means of transportation away from the cities, and the local constabulary are ignorant of the scientific method of crime detection." Big Bill was working into the formula of one of his weekly radio speeches, and he spoke with calm, sing-song assurance. "The average country constable or sheriff is elected because of political friendships rather than because of any ability to cope with crooks. He is merely a

figurehead, an animated title, a name on the public pay roll.

"Why, look at this case! You have the finger prints to clinch things, and there isn't a jury on earth that wouldn't hang this man now. But would he have been arrested? Would he have been detected if I hadn't shown up and investigated this crime? He would not. The mystery of the robbery and murder would have gone down in the annals of the community as one of the unsolved crimes.

"I first suspected the man when I heard his statement about the gold withdrawals of Silas Mears. Here was a man who had opportunity to know about the deposit in the safe, to realize that there must be something in that safe worth getting. I asked him questions and saw from his manner that he was concealing something, and then Mears remembered that Lamb had been in the store on several occasions of late, snooping around, looking at the safe, and always working over toward this corner where the safe is.

"I didn't say much, but I went over into the dark room of the photographer to make some prints, and I took Mears with me. Mears showed me the way out of the back of the photographer's place and up to the place where Lamb lives. We made a quiet little search around the place, and out in the little garden in the back there were some signs of digging, indications that the earth had been recently disturbed. We got a shovel and dug down and found some overalls that had bloodstains on 'em, and then we went from there and made a search of the woodshed and found a canvas bag that had some gold pieces in the bottom of it, a couple of fives that had stuck in the folds of the sack, when the gold had been dumped out. Then I came back and made this here Lamb put his finger prints on paper, and they checked up with the finger prints on the safe."

CHAPTER V.

DAD TAKES A HAND.

SLOWLY Dad Anderson looked around at the circle of wide-eyed, white faces.

"And yuh fellows, who have known Dick Lamb for years and trusted him with your money and all of that, let a smart guy from the city come in and run a blazer on you like that!" he exclaimed.

Here and there a man squirmed uncomfortably and lowered his eyes. "Yeah," went on the old constable, "what's more, yuh was gettin' all worked up and talkin' about lynchin' him and all that sort o' stuff. I heard yuh when I come ridin' up. That's the sort of neighbors yuh are. Here yuh have been takin' yourselves seriously and gettin' set against a man yuh've known for years, and gettin' real hysterical about it. Yuh wanted to do somethin' to show how yuh felt an' to give yourselves a chance to share in the detectin' of this here crime, an' yuh was goin' to form a mob.

"Now, like I said before, there's other things that don't change besides the skin on the tips of a man's fingers. If a man's finger tips stays the same I guess his soul does, too. Does any of you people know whether Ben Drake went to the picture show last night?"

There was a moment's silence at this abrupt change in the constable's manner, and then one of the men on the outskirts of the crowd raised his voice.

"Yes; he was at the show. He sat three rows in front of me."

The old constable nodded. "That's about the way I figured it. Now, Dick, if you'll think back you'll remember that yesterday was a pretty warm day. I'm wonderin' if yuh didn't happen to drop in here for a drink o' sody water?"

The prisoner nodded, and, as he nodded, Mears spoke up in a thin, piping voice, rasping with exasperation.

"Anderson, you're an old fool! That's what I been tellin' yuh all the time. He's

been hangin' around here every day, watchin' that safe like a cat watches a mouse. I never thought of it until after this detective here pointed things out to me the way he done."

Dad Anderson held up his hand, while he addressed another question to the prisoner. "Dick, I wonder if yuh happened to sit up on top o' that safe while yuh was in here. Maybe you dropped in after the bank closed and had the sody water an' a chat?"

Suddenly there came a voice from the crowd again. "Yes, he did, Dad. I remember seeing him up there on the top of the safe. There's nearly always some one sits up there when we're waitin' for the mail, and I remember Dick Lamb was sittin' up there yesterday, drinkin' his soda."

"That's the way I figured things," modestly explained the constable, edging his way, a bit at a time, around the show case, where the principal figures in the drama were gathered. "That's the way I figgered those finger prints were made on the top o' that safe door. They looked just like some one had been sittin' up there and took a hold of the top of the safe when he jumped down. Yesterday was a pretty warm day, and a man's hands would be sweaty. Nobody seemed to notice that them finger prints was upside down. I figgered that out as soon as I seen them; but every one was so busy lookin' at the finger-print stuff and watchin' this here city detective that they didn't take the time to use their heads, so I decided that I'd sort of hold up, until things got quieted down a bit, before I started out to find out about what happened. I liked Ben Drake, just the same as yuh all did, and I wouldn't lay down on investigatin' his death; but there's times when there ain't no use runnin' around and tryin' to get any place, because yuh run in circles.

"Yuh was all so busy lookin' around at these here finger prints that there was a lot o' things about the blowin' up o' that safe that yuh didn't notice. Take the books, for instance. Yuh notice they was all blown to bits, and that there was scraps o' paper all around the office, and then that inner door. Yuh folks didn't notice that inner door very much. If yuh will notice where the hinges were on that inside door, yuh will see that the inside door was blown out instead o' in. I ain't never had very much experience with safe crackers, but I've read a bit about how they work, and how it's done; and it stands to reason that when a man pours soup down inside of a little hole in the top of the door and lets it run around the edges of the safe, and then sets it off, that the inner door will be left just about as it was or else blown in. Bein' away from the center of town, there wasn't much chance of an explosion bein' heard way down here, but it wasn't such an awful heavy explosion.

"If yuh folks will just take a look at that safe and use your heads a little bit, you'll see that the safe was opened and then a stick o' dynamite put inside, and then the safe was closed after the fuse was lit. At that, old Silas Mears ain't as mean as lots o' people think. He just played in hard luck. He'd been saltin' away cash, and lots o' people knew about it, and his books showed it. Then he got to listenin' to these here radio talks and got infected with the city bug, and he started in to make his store a big thing, and he got indebted for lots o' merchandise and fixtures, and it occurred to him it might be better to salt away all the cash he could and then, just before his creditors grabbed holt, to dynamite his own safe, after he'd taken all the money outa it, and let the creditors hold the sack.

"He'd been hearin' over the radio all this talk about finger prints from this here city detective, and he figgered that, if he could get that bird on the job, none o' the rest of us would have any chance of gettin' a look-in, and that the city chap would be busy with the finger prints.

He waited until the time was about ripe, and then he saw that Dick Lamb had planted a good set of finger prints on the safe, so he decided to stage the robbery that night, figgerin' that Lamb would come in for some suspicion, and that he could plant a little gold out in Lamb's barn and cinch a case on him.

"It just happens that sometimes, when Ben Drake's been out at the picture show, he drops in here to clean up the place on his way home, instead of gettin' down so early in the mornin', and he dropped in that night and caught old Silas Mears at work, and the thing gone so far that Mears couldn't back out. Yuh see, Ben Drake is pretty big and powerful, and he hadn't been in no scrap. He was just struck down, and there ain't any evidence that he done any strugglin'. That shows that when he dropped in here and found some one workin' over the safe, it wasn't any one that made him raise a holler or start a fight. He just walked over to see what Mears was findin' wrong with the safe, and then's when Mears got frightened an' acted on impulse an' banged him over the head."

Dad Anderson interrupted himself to stretch forth a long arm and grab the frightened Silas Mears by the collar, as that merchant started for the door.

"No, ye don't, Silas, no, ye don't! I know how yuh feel, and I'm sorry for yuh, but I ain't as sorry as I would have been if yuh hadn't set back and fixed things so Dick Lamb here would have been tried in your place."

Over the face of Big Bill Poindexter had come a flush. His jaw sagged, and his cigar drooped to a point where it was pointed toward the floor. Somehow, the big frame of the man seemed to deflate, and he listened to Dad Anderson and saw the cringing attitude of Silas Mears.

"I'm tellin' yuh," continued old Dad Anderson, turning to the detective from the city, "by the time yuh get as old as I am and have seen as much of the world as I have, yuh'll learn that there's other things than finger prints and these here newfangled contraptions. Finger prints is only skin deep, but a man's character is a whole lot deeper than the skin on the tips of his fingers.

"Come on, Dick, let's take the missus and little Margy home. The kid's been without her supper so long she's gettin' faint, poor little cuss."

HAIL, THANKSGIVING!

By Peter A. Lea

THERE'S everything, and so much more
Than people ever had before;
There's more of zest in present living
Than in past days—I say, *Thanksgiving!*
Do be in order, brother!

The Pilgrim Fathers knew something,
Let's tell it for remembering;
They knew that gratitude must sweep
The heart and mind, if we would keep
Our present blessings!

Oh, let's be thankful we have got
Some things that other folks have not;
And let's be grateful they have much,
We wouldn't care to own or touch.
All hail, *Thanksgiving!*

West Seems Best

By Walter A. Sinclair

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

THE DROP ON THE WEST.

AT the sound of that vigorous slap, Lee Buckley paused uncertainly in the doorway. Only for a second, however, because the tableau thus suddenly presented to him called for action. The cowboy stared through the doorway leading from the outer hallway into the shallow office-reception room of the photograph gallery. The girl had risen from her desk to deal the stinging reprimand, and into the sharp blow had gone all of her strength and courage. The effort had expended her wrath and bravery at one sweep, and now she shrank against the wall, a terrified look upon her face. Above her head was the stenciled sign: "Twenty-four-hour Service on Passport and Motor License Photos."

Facing her, crouched a stocky young man wearing a cap and puttees, with a dark-gray suit. Upon his heavy, coarse face lay the print of the girl's hand in burning red, struggling with the look of black anger which surged over his features. He leaned forward, his arms bent at the elbows, and the fingers of his raised hands crooked, ready to grasp. The desk stood between him and the girl. Slowly and without taking his glittering gaze from her, the man began circling the desk to reach her.

"Just for that," he announced in a spiteful, hissing voice, "I'll make you kiss me. Who d'you think yuh are, trying to ritz me when I was just being playful wit' you?"

"Keep your dirty paws off of me," the girl ordered defiantly.

"Hold it," retorted the man, grinning evilly. "'At's 'e pose. Watch the birdie! This is gonna be a time exposure."

"Cain't you hear the lady?" inquired Lee Buckley, who had stepped as softly into the room as his high-heeled boots would permit. He moved uncertainly toward the facing pair.

The other man, whose get-up suggested that he was a taxi chauffeur, threw a startled look over his shoulder. Immediately his face took on a scornful expression.

"Well, look what the wind blew in," he said satirically. "Tom Mix, mebbe;

anyway, one of them big red-bloods from the great, open spaces to the rescue. Camera!"

His fierce scorn was disconcerting to Lee. The cowboy was conscious of his appearance, what with his boots and his big gray Stetson. Buckley hadn't climbed two flights of dark, dirty stairs to burst in as a cowboy hero to the rescue. He had gone to the gallery to get the two prints of the photograph made of him the preceding day. Vanity had not directed his having his picture taken, either. When Lee reached New York to take passage overseas for the big London rodeo, he learned he could not sail without a passport bearing his photograph. One of his friends had directed him to this little quick-photo service place on Seventh Avenue, and he had gone there.

This girl, who now cast a relieved, hopeful glance at him, had been friendly on the preceding day. Slender, wiry, sun-tanned cowboys in big hats and boots were not every-day customers at this gallery. Most of the customers were applicants for drivers' licenses at the State Motor Vehicle License Bureau near by. In recording his order, she had learned Lee's name and the fact that he was from New Mexico. She had asked interested questions. Was life out there anything like the screen "Westerns?" Did men shoot to protect life and property. Her friendly interest had emboldened him bashfully to ask her name.

It was Gath Curtis; Agatha, really; but if Elizabeth could be cut to Beth, why shouldn't she change Agatha to Gath? This was an age of condensation—shorter and snappier names. Wasn't that the truth? To a young chap several thousand miles from home, this cheery, interested feminine chatter had been extremely agreeable. When Lee had ascended the two flights of dark, dirty stairs this afternoon, he had been nerving himself to ask Gath Curtis to go to a show with him that night. The subject had been touched on vaguely by him the preceding day. Lee Buckley had decided at once that Gath was a nice girl, and he wanted to get better acquainted with her.

And now he had stepped in, as she shrank away from a coarse leering fellow, who evidently had tried to kiss her and had been slapped properly for his presumption. Lee Buckley was a peaceable, deliberate Westerner, and the thought of starting trouble in a big city like New York wasn't to his liking. As a visitor from the great West, he had been shocked by reading in that morning's newspaper of the indiscriminate shootings that marked a day in the metropolis. But here was a girl who needed protection. Buckley kept on moving briskly toward the other man.

"Let this young lady alone," the cowboy began mildly, as he stretched out a hand to seize the other man's shoulders.

"You big sap, stick 'em up!" snarlingly ordered the city man, whirling about to face Buckley, and in the same motion flashing out a mean-looking little automatic pistol. This he dabbed instantly at Buckley's midriff.

There was no argument here. The man had Buckley covered completely and unexpectedly. His speed on the draw won a look of admiration from Buckley, who promptly raised his hands. These city rats shot without provocation or reason, he had read. He was taking no chances.

The glow of hope which had illumined Gath Curtis' face went out as suddenly as a candle in a gale. A look of unbelief and disappointment took its place. The cowboy hadn't measured up to expectations.

"Youse guys been gettin' away with a rep for gun play long enough," declared the city chap, prodding the snub nose of his automatic viciously against Buckley's flat abdomen. "I've a good mind to use this rod on you as a warning

to cow chaperones what crash into town. But, why waste a good bullet? You're dead with this dame, anyway."

Buckley could see that. The girl was staring, puzzled, at the two men. The lean, bronzed cowboy, with his serious, bony face and its mild, reserved expression. The city man with his cap pulled rakishly over his glittering black eyes, a cold sneer on his heavy, pugnacious countenance. Sharply contrasted, they faced one another. The East holding the drop on the West. It was incredible. Miss Curtis' rosy lips curled in scorn for both her annoyer and the cowboy who had failed to live up to the hero part she had expected of him.

CHAPTER II.

NOT WITH HIS BARE HANDS.

"NOW, I guess you see what false alarms these Western he-men are," gloatingly remarked the man with the pistol. Never taking his gaze off of Buckley, he reached with his free hand for his own photographs lying on the desk. He twitched them out of the yellow manila order envelope, which he let drop to the floor. Tucking his pictures in his pocket, he circled around Buckley, keeping his gun trained on the cowboy, as he backed to the door. There he fired his parting salutation in triumphant malice:

"Don't try to get fresh with me, you poor sap. If you stick your nose out this door for ten minutes, I'll puncture you."

The door closed on his evilly grinning face. Lee Buckley lowered his arms cautiously and looked apologetically at the girl. He realized his face was redder than usual.

"I reckon you saw how he'd th' drop on me befo' I knowed it," he remarked propitiatingly.

"You came for your pictures?" inquired Gath crisply—too crisply, almost a trifle shakily. She stared coolly at Buckley and patted her bobbed dark hair into order to conceal her disappointment. This man was no Western hero cowboy. He was just a yokel, an apple knocker from the tall alfalfa, who had failed miserably in the very kind of crisis where booted-and-big-hatted Westerners were pictured as shining. Gath searched through the file of envelopes which held the pictures ready for delivery.

"Why, shuh now, Miss Gath, you ain't angry with me, are you?" asked Buckley, sensitive to the fact that she was treating him disdainfully. "I reckon you saw he carried a iron, and I didn't. You shore didn't expect me to take it off him with my bare hands."

"No; I didn't expect you," Gath replied dully, putting just a tinge of bitterness into the last word. She had expected him to; that's what hurt. In the twenty-four hours which had elapsed since they first had chatted so gayly together, Gath Curtis had thought of him doing just that. She had made a mental moving picture in which this serious-faced cowboy played opposite to her. There had been a paucity of continuity, but the big scenes had been clear, as they flashed across her imagination. In them he had snatched her from before the stampeding herd; he had lifted her to his saddle and had galloped ahead of a prairie fire; he had crashed in the stout door of a cabin in which she was imprisoned; he had walked up to a hard guy who had insulted her, and he had taken away the fellow's pistol with his bare hands. The very words mocked her dream of a hero from the golden West.

The real Lee Buckley was stammering something about theater tickets. Gath motioned impatiently for him to conclude his business.

The abashed cowboy picked up the manila envelope with his name and address written neatly on the dotted lines below the order serial number. His fingers were all thumbs, and the envel-

ope fell to the floor. As Buckley stooped to retrieve it, he saw the envelope discarded by the other man also lying there. Dumbly he offered to return it to the girl, but she was very pointedly writing in her records. Buckley stared at the envelope, reading: "Ben Tripp, 126 Ridge Street, New York City." That was the fellow's name and address. Lee Buckley stuffed the envelope in his pocket decisively. He would keep it and look the gentleman up. There were matters to be settled.

However violent Buckley's intentions were when he stalked sadly out of the quick-photo place, they had to be postponed for the time being. If one may master anger by counting forty before letting go, how much more secure is the temper which must delay a fourth part of a year. Buckley had to hurry downtown to complete his passport arrangements.

There he met Mort Franklin, the registering secretary of the rodeo, and "Buck" Barnes, head horse wrangler, who acted as his witnesses. As soon as the red tape was wound satisfactorily, Buck Barnes commandeered Lee Buckley's services. Another hand was needed to herd the stock on board the lighters at Jersey City. Sailing orders had come suddenly, and the slat-sided lighters plied all night to the Manhattan shore, where the steers, the buckers, and the cow ponies were transferred to the transport. At noon a tug started the ship on its way to England, with a hundred cowboys and cowgirls waving their big hats at Miss Liberty. Nearly three months were to elapse before the big bronze queen of the harbor welcomed them back.

CHAPTER III.

BUCKLEY SNAPS OUT OF IT.

FOR Lee Buckley, London was a dispiriting experience. A succession of fog, vast crowds, and bad breaks of luck. He had entered for the saddle and bareback-broncho riding and wild-horse race events.

He had appended to his entry a modest, but admirable, record of wins at several of the smaller rodeos, as well as day money at Las Vegas Cowboys Reunion. For a rodeo contender new to the big league of cowboy contests, he was a promising young broncho rider when he left the West. Something now was so radically wrong in his reversal of form that, after Buckley had been bucked off on the opening day at the great British exposition rodeo and was compelled to grab leather on his second day out, his poor riding drew comment.

"Lee, you shore aire ridin' pow'ful loose," commented "Slim" Stanton, who, being a bulldogger, felt privileged to speak right out to a broncho rider. "Don't fork 'em pretty, liken you did at Fo't Wo'th—none whatsoever. You ain't been imbibing these oddities which are pushed out as American cocktails at these so-called American bars, have you? No? Then you must have some gal on yore mind. Boy, you kin ride. Don't let these ole crow hoppers make you chaw gravel."

Slim didn't insist on an answer. He had hit on the truth for something vitally necessary to a broncho rider had slipped right out of Lee Buckley's system. He had lost his self-confidence. Ever since Gath Curtis had given him that look which plainly stated she doubted that he had any nerve, Buckley's belief in himself had evaporated. That thought rode him more successfully than he rode the buckers. He had let a city slicker throw down on him and get away with it. He had been made to appear cowardly before a girl who had been ready to make a hero of him.

Perhaps he was cowardly. And yet, what was he to that girl that he had to risk a bullet from a hard-boiled city guy to prove his courage? She hadn't any right to expect him to be a target just to satisfy her dramatic instinct.

Oh, but hadn't she? He was no good, and he had no nerve. The thought would not be shaken. It ruined his riding.

This brooding made him careless in his efforts to discount caution. Perhaps animals cannot communicate their thoughts, but this assumption seems debatable. There was every evidence that news passed among the twenty outlaws of the broncho-bucking string that Lee Buckley's nerve was out of control. "Tanglefoot," a bad horse for any man to ride, took Buckley's measure confidently in ten seconds. As the cowboy hit the earth, Tanglefoot kicked him in the head as a farewell warning.

Buckley emerged from the hospital two days later and insisted on riding; he wanted to finish his part in the rodeo. He alone knew that he lived in a complete daze, taking his falls or making his rides without any clear consciousness of what he was doing. Not until the sea breezes of the homeward-bound voyage blew the fog from his brain was he able to think clearly. And then his thoughts dwelt on only one theme. He must restore his self-confidence, no matter how great the risk it involved. No risk was greater than the danger of losing his belief in himself. And then there was the girl to be put right.

He was broke, and the whole summer rodeo season was gone. Buckley brooded over his condition. If he had stayed in the West, he could have made money, riding at the rodeos there. Competition in the rodeos had been simplified by the fact that so many top hands had gone overseas. The champion was riding for the pictures at Hollywood. The field had been open to your comers at Cheyenne, Pendleton, Calgary, and a number of other places. And he had crossed the Atlantic to take a beating.

"Just as soon as I get ashore——" he muttered over and again.

"Snap out of it," urged Slim Stanton, who had slipped quietly alongside. "Yore going to be a candidate for the funny house if you keep on letting them nightmares buck you. It's all in the game. Don't let it get yore goat. Boy, thar's plenty rodeos coming."

They raised Sandy Hook Lightship at night. Considerable will power was needed to keep Lee Buckley from slipping over the side when he learned that they had to anchor for the night at quarantine. A night's sound sleep fortified him against the exasperating delay which held back until early afternoon their berthing in North River. Buckley walked down the gangplank with assumed calm, waving mechanically at his friends who were shouting farewells. His steamer cap was pulled low to conceal the excitment in his eyes. The moment he cleared the pier shed, he broke into a run and overtook a passing taxi on West Street.

"Take me to this address in Ridge Street," he commanded, producing the creased and thumb-marked manila order envelope which he had picked from the floor of the photograph gallery," as fast as you can go."

Presently they were bumping over cobbles on a shabby cross street and then swerving suddenly into a strange, bewildering region of odorous tenements and narrow, crowded streets running at odd angles. Evidently this was the other river front, for above loomed the great spans that Buckley had seen from afar when his ship came up the bay. As he rode, his mind began to clear and to plan what he would do. He would thrash Tripp and then make him apologize to Gath. Just that simple. It did not strike him as odd or unusual that there was not a single thought of possible danger in his plan.

"Wait here five minutes. I may want you," he told the driver, adding a dollar tip to the fare clicked off on the meter. The man viewed the honorarium without emotion and sank into a waiting attitude, while Buckley stared up at the

building before which they had stopped. A dingy, forbidding-looking place it was, one which had been deteriorating for fifty years. Boards were nailed over the ground-floor windows, where a small saloon had existed in the days before the great dryness.

A dirty-faced urchin stared dully at Buckley when he asked where Bennie Tripp lived. Suddenly seized by inspiration, the cowboy displayed a silver coin. The urchin condescended to hear him.

"Thoid floor, foist door to yer right," he said, closing his fingers on the coin. The returned voyager hurried up the stairs and knocked at the door indicated. After some hesitation it was opened a crack.

"Ben Tripp?" demanded Buckley harshly. The crack was widened a few inches, revealing a slatternly woman of uncertain age, who looked at him sharply. In the gloom of the unlighted hallway she saw a young man whose cap was pulled low over a scowling face.

"You Graff?" she parried. As he tightened his lips and nodded, not knowing what to say, the woman, without waiting for reply, went on: "You're a hour late. They've went to pull it. Ben said that if you come in time, to hop over there by quarter to three, and they'd be cruising along the east side of Hudson Street near West Third."

Buckley waited for no more, but bounded down the stairs. Nearing the street door, he nearly collided with a young man going up, a young man with his cap pulled down above a scowling face. This fellow turned to stare after Buckley and then redoubled his haste in ascending the stairs. The cowboy had no eyes for this chap, as he ran out to the waiting taxi and ordered the chauffeur to reach the Hudson Street corner by a quarter of three. A glance at the clock on the driving dash warned him that this would require fast driving.

"If you're hoping for another tip, get me there on time," said Buckley, speaking to the back of the chauffeur's head. The latter nodded indifferently and shot his car away at top speed through the thronged streets. He was going back in the general direction from which they had come. Lee recognized that much. The clock pointed to two forty-four when the cab reeled around a corner and stopped in a main thoroughfare.

CHAPTER IV.

WORTH THE RISK.

"HERE y'are," announced the taxi driver, pointing to the street signs. Lee Buckley thrust his last dollar at him and jumped out.

"'Cruising along the east side of the street.' That mought be walking, but most likely it means in a car," mused Buckley, casting a quick, comprehensive glance at the pedestrians and then turning to scrutinize the occupants of automobiles.

Something peculiar was happening in the street. Buckley's mind realized it almost before his gaze came to rest on this peculiarity. A north-bound sedan had gone dead suddenly, so it appeared, and its driver hastily stuck out a hand to halt the traffic in the rear. Directly in the sedan's wake came a big mail truck. Its driver jammed down to an abrupt stop in time to avoid ramming the rear of the smaller car which had flipped into the path of the truck just before stalling. Almost instantly a bedraggled black touring car of nondescript model surged alongside the mail truck. From the touring car two men stepped to the driver's seat of the halted mail van and jabbed pistols against the startled driver.

Lee Buckley's gaze captured the entire picture. But all of these details were mere background for the figure seated at the wheel of the bedraggled touring car. Undoubtedly that was the man he sought—Ben Tripp. The latter

was devoting himself to driving and to scanning the startled spectators, while his two companions stuck up the mail truck in complete disregard of their surroundings.

The cowboy gathered himself and made a lunge toward the touring car driver, utterly ignoring the fact that a daring daylight holdup was in progress, with one bandit now menacing the spectators with his gun. Behind Buckley a taxi slowed up at the corner. A hard-faced young man, with a cap pulled low on his brow, sprang out to join the converging forces.

"You!" exclaimed the once mild-mannered broncho rider. He had leaped on the running board of the touring car and had seized Tripp's wrists before those lightning-fast hands could reach that automatic hidden in his coat front. All the righteous anger stored for three months was compressed into that one harsh word.

Tripp's look of startled surprise mingled a moment with a puzzled expression. The cap, replacing the big cowboy hat, delayed recognition a moment. Then alarm surged into Tripp's eyes, held for an instant, and promptly died out.

"You say!" he said, a triumphant leer suddenly breaking through his worry lines.

At that same moment something heavy descended on the back of Lee Buckley's head, and everything went black, as he dropped to the pavement.

The skull which had survived Tanglefoot's kick managed to remain intact under that deadening blow. A gun butt had dealt the knock-out. Excited voices, eagerly shouting the news back and forth, told Buckley this much, as he struggled back to consciousness. A man had run out behind him and clouted him with the handle of a gat. Such was the explanation that somebody was giving, as the cowboy opened his eyes. His head felt as if it were made of lead. It was pillowed on the hot cement sidewalk, where he had been stretched out to await an ambulance. Water was dashed on his face. A score of gaping, chattering faces crowded above him, shutting out the breeze. They were asking or answering questions.

"The poor sap didn't know no better than to butt in without looking behind him," was the tribute to his daring which next penetrated his understanding. He tried to struggle to a sitting posture.

"Where is he?" Buckley inquired heavily.

"All got away in their bus, with five sacks of registered mail," said one of the crowd, whose faces floated above him.

Eager for the larger audience, this speaker turned impatiently from the recumbent Buckley, and excitedly told his eye-witness story. Buckley, he explained, had been hit by a man who later joined the other three in robbing the mail truck. He escaped with them. They got, perhaps, a quarter of a million in registered mail. Well, anyway, a hundred thousand—mostly jewelry and money that was being trucked from the foreign-mail station to the main post office. Some nerve, eh? Right before every one, in broad daylight. They got away before the cops appeared. No; what difference did it make whether any one got the touring car's number or not? Probably it was stolen for this job, anyway, and would be abandoned somewhere. Funny about that sedan, stalling just there and stopping the truck. The driver of the sedan had beat it, too. No; the cops wouldn't get them, although everybody on the block had had a good slant at the bandits. The cops might have a chance if they could broadcast a picture of any of the criminals.

"Picture?" Lee Buckley repeated the word, as he staggered to his uncertain feet. The sky line still was swaying uncertainly, but he braced himself with an effort. Two indifferent, but human

citizens steadied him, mechanically urging him to remain on his resting place until the ambulance arrived. The cowboy shook loose from them, brusquely demanding the way to the nearest Seventh Avenue subway station. Hands waved toward an entrance up the street, a short distance off. Lee Buckley reeled toward it, leaving the idlers to stare after him.

"Poor sap," they murmured not unkindly. "If he hadn't been such a sap he'd known better than to horn in."

A policeman, with a notebook in his hand, tried to intercept Buckley near the subway station. He blocked the way, demanding:

"You saw this, didn't you? We want witnesses."

"There's where the touring-car driver lives," said Buckley. Into the surprised policeman's hand he thrust the envelope which he had carried so long.

From the earth's depths came the rumble of an approaching train. Abruptly Buckley quitted the patrolman and darted down the station stairs, shouting back:

"I'll get his picture. Got to hurry."

Too late the policeman pursued; he reached the platform in time to see the train pulling uptown, with the battered cowboy on board. Hastening to the nearest telephone, the cop notified headquarters of the incident.

Sprinting in high-heeled boots is not easy, especially if the high heels are run down. However Lee Buckley lost no time in rushing from the subway and dashing to the photographer's. He would ask Gath to turn up Tripp's photograph for the police. Then he would join in the hunt for the chauffeur. Buckley believed that he alone knew the identity of the driver of the bandit car and where to get his picture immediately. The prompt circulation of the picture among the police in the metropolitan area, before Tripp could run far, would increase greatly the chances of capture. A stranger to New York ways, Buckley did not know whether or not a taxi driver's picture would be filed at a license bureau. For that matter, he was not sure that Tripp had had photographs made for a driver's license. He merely knew where to get Tripp's picture for the police.

Buckley ran softly up the stairs to the photographer's door. Outside of it some premonition caused him to pause for a quiet reconnoiter. Then, just as on that previous occasion, he opened the door noiselessly. Standing at Gath Curtis' desk, with his back to the door, was Ben Tripp.

"I want my negative, see?" he was saying, using restraint to make his words sound casual. "I paid for the fillum as well as the pitchers. I wanna print off some more pitchers, and I don't like your prints, see? I gave youse the name and date. Gimme my prope'ty. Youse oughta be able to dig it up in a second. Make it snappy."

Lee stared. Why had Tripp risked going to the photographer's at a moment when the police might be searching for him? To establish an alibi? That was Buckley's first swift thought. Then in a flash the explanation burst on his perplexed mind. The man's own words gave the clew.

Tripp, startled by being confronted by Buckley, probably had remembered that they had met first at the photographer's. This Western sap probably would not know that drivers' license pictures were on file, but he would know where Tripp's picture had been made. He had last seen Buckley lying lifeless on Hudson Street. Hours might elapse before he would recover or have sense enough to lead the police to this photographer's. Tripp did not know that Buckley knew his name, but he feared that eventually the cowboy's tip would lead to the photograph. It was worth the risk involved, this effort to recover the negative in the few minutes following

the get-away and before the police were given his description. Evidently Tripp had abandoned his car after dashing uptown.

CHAPTER V.

THE WILD EAST.

GATH faced Tripp, her glance disdainful. He had made his demand brusquely, but not threateningly. Not wishing to arouse her suspicions, he had offered a plausible reason for his demand. Lee tensed his muscles and sprang. At the same instant Tripp whirled around, whipping out his gun.

Unwittingly Gath had betrayed Buckley's presence. Tripp had seen the troubled look in her eyes suddenly change to joy and relief. He had read her eyes accurately and had acted simultaneously. His gun covered the cowboy, as Buckley sprang forward. The pistol clicked. It had missed fire.

Buckley's wiry body struck the stockier man with a jolt which jarred Tripp. Together they reeled about the small office, the cowboy's arms locked about Tripp's body. His clinch prevented the bandit from bringing his pistol to bear, but Tripp kicked and gouged, while he pounded his weapon down on Buckley's aching head.

Tripp drove one knee upward in a foul thrust which brought agony to the cowboy; but Buckley held on. Hardened by two years of battering and kicking at rodeos, Buckley gritted his teeth and fought on. Here was his chance to prove to the girl and to himself that he was no coward.

Suddenly his hands slid up the bandit's right arm and gripped the wrist of the gun hand, with a steellike grasp. Putting all his strength there, Buckley twisted that arm, as he bent it around behind Tripp's back. The roar of exploding cartridges filled the small room, as the bandit desperately tried to land a chance bullet. One missile clipped through Buckley's coat, as he bent down the bandit's arm, and with a supreme twist forced Tripp to drop his weapon.

Kicking the gun out of reach, Buckley heaved upward with both arms and a knee, raising Tripp's body clear of the floor, as he was accustomed to hoist a calf destined for tying. Then, just as a cowboy would dump the calf, he dashed Tripp to the floor. This is a maneuver which knocks the wind and fight out of a calf. It proved equally discouraging to his human opponent. As Trip fell, face downward, on the floor, Buckley dropped, knees first, on the fellow's back. He glared triumphantly at Gath who hovered near by, clutching Tripp's pistol. He had shown her.

"Rope," he ordered laconically.

"Picture wire," she responded with equal tenseness, producing a coil from her desk drawer. "Only thing we have here, and that's what New York bandits use to tie up people."

She was gazing at him, hero worship in her eyes. Their hands touched and withdrew, as they trussed up Tripp. There was something electrical in that contact which made both of them self-conscious. Buckley jumped up, as heavy sounds of running feet clattered on the stairs. The door was flung open, admitting three policemen.

"There's your man," announced Buckley calmly.

He told the bluecoats his story, omitting the romantic motif, which they guessed. When he explained that it was he who had given the envelope to the policeman at the scene of the holdup, the sergeant in charge took up the story. That envelope had given the police two addresses to work on. Squads had been rushed from the nearest stations to the photoshop and to the Ridge Street house, as well as to the drivers' license bureau. After going over the details again, the sergeant telephoned to Police Headquarters. He received enlightening news in return.

"Tripp never took out a driver's li-

cense," he explained, after hanging up the receiver. "I thought it was queer, his wanting to get back this negative, if his mug was on file at the Motor License Bureau. I figure it out now. He got his photo made, intending to apply for a driver's license. Probably he wasn't mixed up with any crooks then, but just a tough guy. After pulling a gun on you that time in a fool rage, maybe he figured you'd put in a rap that would queer him for a license. Or else, about then he fell in with this gang. Naturally he didn't apply for a license, which would have meant having to file his picture with the bureau. When he saw you, Cowboy, he remembered the negative and figured you would, too. So he took a chance to get it before you tipped us off."

Lee wasn't listening. He was gazing rapturously into the adoring brown eyes of Gath Curtis. She was saying:

"I've never forgiven myself for treating you so unfairly. I knew you were a brave, real Westerner. Do you remember what we talked of doing that night? Now, if you asked me to go to-night——"

"I'm broke," Lee found courage to admit as he searched his empty pockets. Gath laughed reassuringly. As if money mattered!

"You'll probably cut in on a reward, Cowboy," remarked the sergeant, pushing Tripp through the doorway. "You did a clever collar. We need lads like you. Why don't you get on the cops?"

"Me?" demanded Lee. "Ex-cuse me! I'm from the West whar folks live plumb peaceable. I don't crave none of this wild East."

Unwilling to let the policemen go with a false idea of her hero's courage, Gath, snuggling so close to Buckley that their shoulders touched, called after the officers:

"Don't forget to say, when you give this out, that Lee took that bandit's gun away from him—with his bare hands."

SUNRISE GLORY

By Pat Costello

IT'S a lot of fun just living
When the morning sun is giving
All the world a touch of gladness with its glow;
Then you're brimming with ambition
For the job that is your mission,
And you start for work and whistle as you go.

Cares that yesterday seemed heavy
Fail to-day even to levy
Half a minute of your time in vain regret;
As you swell your chest with breezes
Tainted with the tang that pleases,
You would think yourself a criminal to fret.

Then you realize to-morrow
Is the proper time to sorrow,
For to-morrow never comes; dawn brings to-day,
With the sunrise glory staining
All the skies you thought were raining,
Just to warm your heart and cheer you on your way.

Rarin' to Go ~

By Albert M. Treynor ~

POSING as Gregory Leigh, a Kentucky horseman, Johnny Jason joined a boy who said he was Billy Bromwell, an ex-jockey, in a search for Blueboy, a famous race horse which was believed to have survived a train wreck some years before and escaped to the desert with two mares. Jason had found Leigh dead in the desert and had taken his clothes and his name to escape capture, as he was wanted for killing Bromwell.

Three desperadoes, Martin, "Brick," and José, also wanted the horses. The men were driven from Jason's camp by "Cappy" Kidd, who then joined Jason's party. Billy, Jason had found, was a girl, but he said nothing about it.

Martin's gang killed Jason's horses, but Jason found two camels, escaped from a circus, and the camels made their way to water. Lebba, an Arab girl whom Martin left behind him, knew how to manage the animals.

Out on one of the camels, after the elusive Blueboy, Jason let Billy know that he was aware she was a girl. She was riding back to their camp, leaving Jason to herd Blueboy toward a trap that had been sprung for him, and before leaving she told him she knew he was not Leigh, and she pulled a photograph of Leigh from her shirt pocket and threw it on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A KNOCKDOWN BLOW.

AFTER the girl had disappeared, Jason stooped and picked up the photograph she had thrown to him. He looked at the picture, and his mouth widened in a silly, self-mocking grin. She had told the truth, sure enough. It was a photograph of the poor unfortunate whom a rattlesnake had killed under a cactus plant, back in the dunes by Coahuila Well—a most excellent likeness of the one-time racing man, Gregory Leigh.

Jason shook his head and laughed with gentle emotion. "Why, the ornery little scamp!" he fondly chuckled. "Kidding me all the time—Johnny Jason the smart alec who thought he was getting away with something!"

For a while he stood still, looking into the blue twilight, listening, his glance searching the obscurity that somewhere held Alfalfa's moving shape. There was no sound, no hint of life about him. The girl and the camel had been blotted out in the gloom of night. Jason sighed, turned reluctantly, and set off afoot to retrace his way toward the wasps' gully.

Instead of pursuing the direct route back, he climbed to the higher ground and presently gained a lofty outthrust of the hillside, whence he could look down into the ravine of the wasps on one side or gaze off toward Bullfrog Mountain in the other direction.

Here he decided to halt. If by

chance Blueboy's band crossed back over the mesa he would hear their hoofbeats in time to drive them away from the gully. At the same time he was perched above the hills and buttes that stood between him and Bullfrog Mountain. It gave him comfort to know that he could look off in a direct line over Billy's course of travel, even though for the hours to come darkness shut off his view of the green mountain.

He spread out his blanket and stretched himself listlessly on the ground. It was not his intention actually to sleep, but as he lay sprawled on his back, fascinated by the calm beauty of the starlit sky, overpowering drowsiness stole upon him. It had been a hard day crowded at the end of a terrific week. Before he knew what was happening to him, he sank into leaden slumber.

The night was black when Jason struggled back to vague consciousness. There was no moon in the sky. Either it was too early for the slice of moon he had expected to see that evening, or else too late. He was like a drugged man, neither asleep nor awake. A dim sense of uneasiness intruded in his sluggish perceptions as he tried to arouse himself.

He looked up, gradually untangling the significance of the constellations blazing overhead. Suddenly he flung away his blanket and sat up in dismay. According to the astronomical clock it was around two o'clock in the morning. Scorpio was gone, and Arcturus hung on the rim of the western sky. No mistake! He had slept in stupor nearly the night through.

In a second he was on his feet, in full possession of his faculties. He condemned himself without mercy. Anything could have happened in those unwitting hours. Instinctively his glance turned toward Bullfrog Mountain, where Billy had gone. And his body went rigid in acute attention.

Off in the distance he saw a ruddy glow of fire—not a star, but a flame of earthly light akindle in the night.

His glance ranged across the horizon to make certain that his points of direction were correct. He was not in error. Bullfrog Mountain lay off that way. The light was in the breached wall high up the mountain where he had instructed Cappy Kidd to build a signal fire if anything went wrong—if for any reason the urgent summons must be flashed across the desert. And there was the fire.

Jason left his hat on the ground, never thought to recover his blanket. He picked up his carbine and started off at a jog-trot toward the twinkling light.

It was seven or eight miles to the middle slopes of the mountain, and Jason was not used to running. There's a difference in the muscular development of a foot racer and a horseman. But there are not many men who could have broken the cross-country record Jason established that night. He did not spare himself, nor let himself consider what might happen to an overtaxed heart at the end of such a journey.

The oncreeping dawn was beginning to reveal the misty outlines of the high peaks when he stumbled into the dry watercourse leading to the cañon of *Vikan Shootak*. By the time he had staggered up the rock-strewn slope to climb over the lip of the narrowing gulch it had grown light enough to make out the blurred columns of tree trunks standing stiff and unreal in the whispering morning wind.

He was blundering upward into the thickets when he caught sight of an erect figure coming through the brush toward him. There was something reassuring about the blocky, squat-built shape, and without a check in his stride he rushed forward and almost fell into the arms of Cappy Kidd.

"What is it?" he gasped. "Wha' y' want?"

Cappy tucked a steadying hand under Jason's elbow and stared in amazement. "What in the world—what brought you in all this rush?"

"The fire!" Jason panted. "You—sent for—me—didn't you? What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," replied Cappy. "Gosh! I didn't mean to scare you to death. I didn't think you'd kill yourself. Yeh; I touched off the signal for you——"

"Why?"

"Why do you suppose?"

Jason shook his head impatiently. "How the—Sam Hill do—I know?"

"Guess!" said Cappy, his voice swelling with the important news he had to tell.

"Go on! You don't mean—Blueboy?"

"Blueboy!" Kidd answered jubilantly. "Got him! In the trap! That big race horse and seven others!"

"No!" Jason caught spasmodically at the other's shoulder. "Blueboy! Wait a minute! You say you've got him—and the others?"

"All of 'em! Every last one! They went into that gully last night a little after midnight. And I was watching and threw the tree. They're in there now, milling around, trying to get out. And they can't get out. We've got 'em!"

Jason somehow managed to digest the information and believe its truth. And after that his first thought was of Billy. "Oh, my!" he exclaimed, his eyes shining. "And what did Billy have to say?" he asked. "If I'd only been there!"

"Billy?" echoed Kidd. "Billy doesn't know it yet."

"But——" Jason stopped dead. He looked at the other man. His eyes contracted, and then suddenly grew wide, glaring. "Billy!" he blurted out. "She came here ahead of me—early last evening! Where is she?"

Cappy started to answer, failed to find his voice, and swallowed with a gulping sound.

"Well?" Jason shouted.

"Why, I——" Kidd looked and acted like a man trying to shake off a feeling of dizziness after a knockdown blow. "I haven't seen Billy!" he gasped. "Billy hasn't been here!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CAUGHT IN THE TRAP.

FOR a space of several seconds the two men faced each other aghast in the wan light of the morning. Then, breathing thickly, Jason turned and started on a run up the cañon, with Cappy Kidd tagging at his heels. They reached the break in the gully wall, from which lofty point they could see off across the open plain.

Day was breaking over the desert. Jason could see the distant hilltop where he had spent the night, the upper reaches of the painted mesa and the expanse of the chaparral-clad benches spreading like a fan to the eastward. His straining eyes nowhere picked up any sign or semblance of life.

His glance shifted leftward, traversing the rocky barrens along the edges of the dunes, and stretching onward to scan the remote wastes of sand. In the gray distance, miles away, his attention was arrested by a small, dark object that seemed to be moving, crawling along a trough of the ground.

His glasses were unsheathed in a moment, and he focused the lenses and sighted. He found the place again, picked up the far-off figure, which now was magnified, drawn into closer perspective. His lungs filled with an audible sound. The vague dot had resolved itself into a camel with a rider sitting on his back.

"Billy and Alfalfa!" With an un-

steady hand he passed the binoculars to Kidd. "They must have lost their bearings last night and wandered into the dunes. But it's all right. They're coming in this direction now. I'll saddle up Alkohol and go down to meet them——"

Jason's speech trailed away to a dry whisper, his mouth sagged open, and his body went limp for a moment as his roving glance was suddenly caught by other pygmy shapes, alive also, moving on the dingy landscape. Without thought of apology he snatched the glasses away from the startled Kidd and leveled the lenses in the new direction.

"I thought so!" he groaned. "Men on horseback! Look! Off there! Martin's gang—undoubtedly!"

"Where?" faltered Cappy.

"Coming down that sunken stretch—'way off to your left. Ten miles maybe. They must have caught some of the strays that stampeded yesterday. We fought 'em—they tried to kill us. They'll cross ahead of Billy. Only that line of dunes keeps 'em from seeing the camel now. But they'll be out of the arroyo in a half hour—or less——"

Kidd threw up his arm with frantic gestures, as if he hoped to wave the girl back.

Jason drew a harsh breath. "You're crazy! Nobody can see this far!" He turned and started back down the slope as fast as his legs would take him. "Come on!" he shouted; "we haven't a second to lose!"

The two men ran past the spring of Lasting Water, crossed the cañon, and reached the forking ravine, where the three big oaks had stood. Only two of the trees were left now to rear their heads by the rocky wall. The third had fallen from its ax-chopped stump among spangled and twisted boughs, its shaggy trunk a breast-high barricade, reaching across the entrance of the ravine.

Jason crawled under the big trunk, and scrambled through the thicket that screened the drinking well. Lebba was sitting before a bed of hot coals with a frying pan in her hand. The girl raised her head at the sound of the footsteps, rubbed the smoke from her eyes, and caught sight of the man. A welcoming smile flickered like sunlight upon her swarthy little face.

"Hello, Lebba," said Jason absently. "How are you?"

He did not check his stride, scarcely looked at the girl. Beyond the bushes that fringed the well he heard the trampling of hoofs, and the movement of big, restless bodies. He broke his way through the tangle to step into an open triangle of ground, hemmed in by converging walls of sandrock. In the farthermost corner of the inclosure, huddled together in quivering excitement, Blueboy and his followers stood with uptossed heads, staring at the intruder.

The horses knew that they were in a trap, and they shouldered and jostled one another, backing against the dreadful wall that shut out the sky and the wide horizon and penned them in like cornered sheep. Blueboy and the two mares once upon a time had been acquainted with men, but much may be lost or unlearned in five reckless years of freedom, and the three runaways sidled off in the liveliest dread, as wild-eyed as the five uncurried colts that had never tasted the iron of a bit nor felt the touch of a booted heel.

Jason looked at the group with hurried glance. At another time he could have exulted in the magnificent capture, standing almost within hand's reach of the fiery-blooded colts, seeing the slim, lissome grace of the Queen of Spades, the curveting beauty of Lady Marigold; rejoicing in the big, deep-chested stallion with muscles flowing like quicksilver beneath his velvet hide.

Jason, however, was thinking of Billy

then, not of race horses—Billy, who at that moment was far out among the dunes, riding into danger. He would find no joy in horses, nor in anything else that Billy was not to share.

It had been in his mind to mount Alkohol and strike off for the sand hills. But the baggage camel was a slow and plodding beast, and Jason knew that Billy must encounter Martin's outfit long before he could go to her aid. His despairing glance wandered back toward Blueboy, and his eyes kindled all at once with a dazzling hope.

Blueboy! If he reached Billy in time he must travel in desperate haste. And here in front of him stood one of the fastest-running horses in the world.

"Cappy!" Jason yelled. "Bring the lariats! Come quick!"

He grinned somberly at the anxious animals. Never in his life had Jason mishandled or rough-broken a horse. Even in dealing with untamed, refractory mustangs he had always found that the way of gentleness and patience was the surest in the end. It had been his plan, if he caught the renegade stallion, to reclaim him by soft-handed methods. But there could be no temporizing or paltering now. Blueboy must be forced to remember that he was a saddle horse, if needs be by brutal persuasion.

Jason was edging forward warily when Kidd came running up trailing two reatas behind him. Cappy instantly divined his comrade's intentions.

"He'll break you up against the rocks if you try to mount him in this narrow place," Cappy predicted gloomily. "He'll kill you."

"Maybe not," returned Jason, reaching for one of the ropes.

The horses were panic-stricken at the approach of the man. Blueboy stood in the fore, his red nostrils distended, his eyes fairly blazing, wheeling to meet the danger that threatened his herd. Jason slid a running noose through the honda of his lasso and carefully dandled the loop. He advanced on balancing toes, shifty as a boxer watching for his opening, ready for the rush of hoofs.

The frantic animals had been crowded back as far as they could go, and still the appalling human slouched toward them. One of the colts shrieked in pealing terror as fretted, high-strung nerves gave way to madness. They all held together for a moment in a tight knot, hoofs prancing, shoulders and flanks rubbing in tremulous pressure; then, in a single volleying movement the jam split apart, and galloping bodies broke past Jason, right and left, smashing through the bushes, fleeing in thunderous confusion along the walls of the blocked-in gully.

For one tremendous second Blueboy's white socks flashed in the open. Jason was no fancy roper, but his eyes were quick to see and his hand prompt to obey the eyes. The loop went out from him in a snaky curve, hovering close to the ground, and dropped in front of the stallion just as one of his high-stepping forefeet came down.

Jason snapped up on the noose, and the alert Cappy grabbed the free end of the rope and jumped swiftly to snub the line around the trunk of a nearby tree. Blueboy fetched up at the end of a plunging stride, the rope stretched with a twang and burned into the bark of the tree, but the hard-braided strands of manila held. A horse less agile would have been thrown like a bag of shot; but at the last instant the stallion saved himself, wheeled with a furious snort to tug backward on three legs, his right fore hock lifted, trying desperately to break free from the tightening noose.

"Got 'im!" grunted Jason, coughing in the flurry of dust. "Hang on, Cappy!"

He caught up the other rope, watched

for his opportunity, and in a moment had cast a second anklet over the horse's rear left leg. A triple turn was taken around another tree, and the big runaway was pegged out fore and aft, balancing precariously on his two unhampered legs.

Jason fastened a knot in the rope. Then, with a word to Kidd, he ran back to the spring. In a few seconds he returned, bringing a saddle and bridle, and followed by the wide-eyed Bedouin girl.

The two men seized the off rope, watched the horse's frantic struggles, and suddenly heaved back together at the precise instant that Blueboy lurched unsteadily toward them. The slight added strain threw the big body completely off balance, and the stallion pitched sideways and landed on his withers with a jarring thud.

Before he could attempt to scramble up, the men were upon him. Jason threw himself upon the neck and pinned the thrashing head to the ground, while Cappy stooped with the bridle and skillfully forced the bit between the animal's teeth. The headstall was slipped over the flattened ears, the throatlatch buckled, and the two men stood clear.

Blueboy struggled to regain his feet, mouthing the bit, shaking his head furiously.

"You'd think the old pirate never wore a bridle before in his whole life," remarked Kidd as he bent to lift the saddle from the ground. "He'll be worse than a horse that was never broke." He shook his head dubiously. "You'll see!"

"Wouldn't doubt it," assented Jason.

The stallion was making frantic efforts to get up, but the ropes kept his body stretched in an awkward position, and although two or three times he heaved his weight off the ground, he always toppled over again before he could recover his equilibrium. Cappy edged near him as he sat up, and suddenly flopped the saddle on his back.

Jason meanwhile had found a long stick of wood. He moved to the off side of the horse and, as the big, panting body momentarily lifted, he poked the cinch underneath. Cappy was waiting on the other side. He grabbed the ring, threaded the latigo strap through it, and caught a hitch in the leather. Jason ran to his assistance, and between them they tightened up the cinch until the webbing seemed to sink into Blueboy's blowing barrel.

"First time the old speed demon's sported a saddle in five long years," muttered Kidd. "And ain't he mad?"

"The tree next!" exclaimed Jason. "We'll have to clear it out of the way. Come on!"

Leaving Lebba to watch the knotted ropes, the two men hurried down past the spring, picked up axes, and dashed for the entrance of the ravine. Jason started chopping into the prostrate oak, and Cappy took his stand a few paces away and likewise set to work with an ax. They applied themselves furiously to the task and in a short while their cuts went through, and the middle section of the trunk dropped out. The way from the gully was open.

"All right!" said Kidd as they heaved the log aside. "You give me a leg up, and if he can be ridden I'll ride him."

"What do you mean—you'll ride him?" Jason caught pace with Kidd as he ran back up the ravine.

"What would I mean?" returned Kidd as they reëntered the clearing where Blueboy was still trying madly to get back on his feet. "If any one can stick that bucko, I'm the guy. Huh! You don't know who I am!"

"I can't say that I do. I knew you gave me a phony name. But what of it? What's that got to do with Blueboy?" Jason brought out his knife, opened the blade, and tossed it to Lebba. In pantomime he made the girl

understand that she was to cut one of the ropes when he gave the word. "I'm riding this horse," he informed Kidd.

"Oh, no!" Cappy shook his head stubbornly. "This is a job for the best man, and I'm the best. If you want to know, I used to be a jockey, and there weren't any of 'em any smarter. I've been up on Blueboy before. I sent that gee-gee through for a win at Santa Anna a few days before that train wreck." He threw out his chest and started toward the horse. "I'm Billy Bromwell!" he declared.

Jason turned with a sharp stare, and Cappy faced him level-eyed and confident. It was impossible to doubt the truthfulness of his straightforward gaze.

"I thought Bromwell was dead," said Jason after a tense pause. "But it doesn't matter. You can be old man Centaur himself for all I care. My friend Billy needs me, and I'm the one who's going."

He brushed the smaller man aside, strode up to the prostrate horse, and motioned to Lebba to use the knife. The girl promptly slashed with the sharp blade. There was a snap as the heel rope parted, and Blueboy struggled up and hoisted himself off the ground. But Jason's toe had found the stirrup, and he was seated lightly in the saddle when the stallion scrambled to his feet.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THEN THE MIRACLE HAPPENED.

BLUEBOY was so astounded at finding a living weight upon his back that for a few seconds after he got up he stood in his tracks, shivering, flinching under the saddle. Jason was vouchsafed a briefest interval to ease his hips against the cantle and to gather up the reins.

"The other rope," he rasped at Cappy—"cut!"

Kidd was too mild-tempered a man to bear grudges or sulk when events turned out contrary to his wishes. Jason was up, and there was nothing more to be said. Cappy snatched up an ax and chopped through the strands of the second lariat. Then he grasped the severed rope and shook out the noose that held the horse's forefoot. Blueboy was free.

"Ride 'im, boy!" admonished the unselfish Kidd.

"Why, he's a lamb! He's just——"

Without the slightest warning the horse opened up like an uncoiling spring, whirling and towering on his hind legs. "Rarin' to go!" Jason reconsidered, the words fairly snapped through his shutting teeth.

"Hang on!" yelled Cappy in an agony of apprehension. "Don't lose 'im!"

The little Bedouin girl skipped out of the way and turned with clasped hands to watch, her eyes gleaming with excitement. Jason grinned as their faces flashed by, and then his jaw set as nerve and brain and flexing muscles all concentrated on the business of sticking on. After that he sat in a vortex of motion with his blurred surroundings swinging about him in circles and loops.

Blueboy was thewed with whalebone and spring steel, he was tempered with wild fire. But he was no bucker in the sense that a pitching broncho bucks. It would seem that he had never learned the tricks of the rodeo. He was not a caterpillar, a sunfisher, nor a sidewinder—luckily for Jason. His power and speed coupled with a real outlaw's wickedness surely would have proved too murderous a combination for any saddleman to survive. But Blueboy was only a high-poler, and a good rider can stay to the death with a towering horse.

Not that Jason imagined for an instant that he was in any rocking-chair. He was out of his seat too often for that. The stallion would fling himself erect, pirouetting while he reared, paw-

ing high with his forefeet; and in those seconds the rider stood behind in the stirrups, the horn bumping his chest, while his hand, level with his head, pushed into the horse's mane.

Time and time again the stallion launched up on his hind legs, to spin and drop sledge-hammering hoofs to earth again. He was snorting, shaking his head, fighting for the bit. In his wild dancing he had loosened the noose from his hind hock, and the rope dropped off. He was unhampered, except for the tightened rein.

Jason critically observed every move, ready to leap from under if the horse should topple backward. But in spite of his tremendous exertions Blueboy never lost his delicate sense of balance. He pivoted and whirled in the restricted space between the trees, wildly bent on shaking off his rider; but he was not blinded by fear or rage; even in the heat of conflict his good horse brain was alert to the menace of stone walls and hedging tree trunks. He stayed in the clearing, swinging in circles, plunging and uprearing, while Jason swayed with him, backward and forward, up and down, yielding to the lurch and surge of the big body beneath him.

Cappy Kidd, who had been looking on anxiously, suddenly yelled encouragement. "He's spoofing, the big fraud! He'll ride! Let 'im go!" he exclaimed.

"Righto!" shouted Jason in the choking dust. He laughed and loosened the reins. "Take it!"

Blueboy's teeth seized the bit; he changed direction with his hoofs in the air and started headlong for the mouth of the gully.

The other horses were roaming nervously to and fro along the ravine walls, but as yet they had not discovered the opening that led to the main gulch. Instinct must have told Blueboy that the way was clear. He went through the scattering group, dashed down the hollow past the drinking well, drove straight for the tree that had barricaded him in the pocket. But the fallen trunk had been lopped away, and he saw the gap. Jason ducked his head just in time, and they shot forth under the oaks and struck the gravel wash of the broader cañon.

Jason would have preferred to turn to the right and follow the dry-brook course down to the foothills, but Blueboy was of a different opinion, and he held the bit. Before his rider could think of turning him, he was rushing up the slope, heading for the high gate of the cañon wall.

The runaway stallion clattered past the spring of Lasting Water, reached the ledges and climbed in prodigious jumps, as if he were taking hurdles. He gained the heights overlooking the hills and the desert plains, and before Jason could catch breath again he flung himself through the breached wall and plunged over the brink.

Jason caught a fleeting glimpse of far-off dots moving along the edge of the dunes. There were four of them, one traveling ahead, three in a group behind—Martin's hunters and Billy. They had sighted Alfalfa, and the chase was on—horses pursuing a racing camel!

So much Jason saw in distant prospect, and then he lost sight of the remote little figures as Blueboy dipped over the lip of the mountain. He leaned back in the creaking saddle, his breathing smothered, his heart hammering his chest. He was terrified for Billy and badly scared on his own account at the same time.

Blueboy was taking the steep descent without any appreciable check in pace. Jason had seen horses and a mounted man climb down these same paths a few days before, but the face of the rocks looked much steeper, viewed over the laboring shoulders of an unruly

stallion. A single misstep and they would roll sickeningly together to the bottom. If anything happened now—— "Steady, boy!" his muted voice begged. "Easy!"

Blueboy, however, was ungovernable. Head down, rump high, he scrambled recklessly from one outcrop to another, dropping, sliding, jumping boldly for a new foothold, going down and down, sending stones and rubble crashing ahead of him, while Jason rocked in the saddle, keeping a limp hold on the jerking reins, trying hard to pin his faith in the horse.

Almost before he had time to think, the worst pitch of the mountainside was left above them. Blueboy spraddled out to leap across a jagged fissure of rock, landed on his forehoofs a dozen feet below, and clattered forward over the slanting benches that graduated less dangerously down to the flatter levels of the mesa.

For an instant Jason had an empty sensation beneath his ribs, as though an elevator had fallen from under him, and then somehow he found his place in the saddle again, recovered the use of his lungs.

As they wheeled across the hillside a shrill cry, clear as a trumpet call, pealed from the mountain heights. Jason half turned, looking backward and up, and saw seven saddleless horses clambering down the steeps. Blueboy's band, fearful of being left behind, were following where he went, calling to him plaintively.

Jason's pulses tingled with the rhythm of cantering hoofbeats. The sense of danger had left him. He was exalted, carried out of himself, swept along with the joy of racing feet. This was the meaning of freedom, of unfettered motion, the wild thrill of living.

"Go on, Blueboy!" he shouted. "The gang's all here! Shake 'em out!"

The big horse had sent his answering whicker echoing back to the mountain, but he kept on going, and mares and colts came streaming down the slope, loyally tagging after their leader.

Blueboy galloped with unbroken stride across the upper stretch of the mesa, but as he approached the first of the descending terraces he swerved sharply, heading toward the north. This time his rider was ready for him, and wrenched back powerfully on the off rein. The stallion's mouth opened, and his tugging head came slowly around. For twenty seconds the horse and man fought it out, trampling orbits through the greasewood and manzanita bushes, while the mares and colts hovered on the outskirts, looking on in fidgeting curiosity.

In the end Blueboy gave in to his rider's will. His single idea was to run out from under the saddle, and it didn't matter especially in which direction he went. He shot forward suddenly like a bolt, and his madcap band came thundering at his heels.

They coursed across the rolling tablelands, topped the last ridge of the foothills, and once more beheld the open desert. The rising sun was just beginning to tinge the landscape with a glory of pink and gold. In a moving cloud of dust, four or five miles away, Jason again picked up the galloping figures that he had first seen from the mountain notch.

He was several miles nearer now, and the shifting scene strung out before his eyes in sharp detail. The blue horizon held the ungainly shape of Alfalfa, with a small, straight figure on his back, fleeing for his life. Hot on his trail rode three horsemen—a half mile behind, perhaps—lashing their bronchos as they ran.

The horrible sensation of tightness about Jason's heart abated a trifle as he gazed across the flats. He could see at a glance that the horses were overtaking the camel, but they were gaining slowly. It would be a long

chase. And he was on his way—he was riding Blueboy.

Then the miracle happened.

CHAPTER XL.

AN ALARMING OVERSIGHT.

THE chafing of the saddle girth, the click of the bit in his mouth, may have awakened Blueboy to old recollections. There may have stirred through brain and blood a familiar recalling of other days as he felt the sure, friendly hand on the bridle rein, the gentle lift and fall of the skilled rider sending him along. Perhaps he relived long-forgotten moments; the valiant dash down the home stretch, the pressure of fleet bodies, the gleaming wire, faces along the rail, the roar of crowds.

Whatever it was that happened, from that instant he was another horse. Jason felt the change, and with rash laughter he shook out the reins and eased his weight toward the curving neck. Blueboy had sighted the animals ahead, and his flattened ears cocked forward, sensitive, inquiring. He was no longer a runaway mustang; he was a race horse. There was a pack of dogs up there—selling platers that in some unfair way had got the jump on him. There were horses yonder to be overtaken. He was Blueboy—the Kentuckian—the Derby winner. And hail and glory be! He was in a race!

Blueboy had merely been a runaway before; he flung himself into his tremendous stride now and really began to run. He was power unleashed; he was the wind; he was Nemesis on the trail of the three unsuspecting horsemen.

Jason half shut his eyes and bowed his head to the rush of air. He was thinking scornfully of horses he had owned and galloped. Some of them he had imagined to be fast. But he had known nothing like this before. This was speed.

"Go on, boy! Go on, boy! Go on, boy!" He crooned the words over and over like a happy little refrain.

The headstrong stallion, however, needed no urging. He was running his own race; he was after the pack.

An ordinary race horse is good for only a few furlongs at the top of his stride, but for five years Blueboy had been ranging desert and mountain, training himself for distance. What were a few miles to him? Jason watched him anxiously, but there was no sign of faltering, no let-up in the terrific pace he had set himself.

And as he coursed onward his thoroughbred followers came after him, hoofs flying, tails and manes streaming in the wind, lean bodies drawing out to the utmost as they dashed over the ground behind their leader.

The three bronchos ahead were overtaking the camel, but meanwhile Blueboy was overhauling the bronchos. The distance was scarcely two miles now, and the gap was closing fast.

Jason was near enough to identify the pursuing riders. He recognized José's buckskin cayuse, picked out the thick, hunched-up shape of Brick, kicking his spurred heels, spotted the smaller figure of Bart Martin, who rode a few jumps ahead of his comrades.

They were intent on the chase, and none of them so far had thought to look back. As Jason bore down upon them he saw Martin draw a weapon from his holster, aim at the camel rider and fire.

Ordinarily Jason would have been amused by such a futile act. The chance of any one's hitting a moving target from the back of a galloping horse was very slim. But in this case they were shooting at Billy, trying to stop the camel or bring her down from the saddle. As he watched, Brick likewise pulled a gun and started blazing away. It was too far to hear the shots, but he could see the faint stabs of smoke, and savage

anger assailed him as he and Blueboy went onward in their headlong rush.

Billy would glance behind her now and then, swaying to Alfalfa's rocking canter. No doubt she had observed the band of loose horses with the solitary rider galloping before them. The sight of the strange cavalcade must have filled her with wonderment.

Billy was fleeing down a long, rocky hollow, trying to turn back into the dunes, where Alfalfa's padded feet would give him an advantage over the horses. It was bad going over the broken stretches, but Blueboy picked his way by seeming instinct, avoiding loose stones, taking small boulders in his stride. The bronchos were hammering along at their last notch of speed, but the race horses were closing the gap with every leap. It was incredible how rapidly space diminished.

Two miles were shaved down to a mile. Martin and his riders kept on banging away with their guns in hope that a chance shot might tell. They were crowding their cayuses remorselessly, pressing closer and closer on the camel's heels. The clatter of steel shoes on the rocks would raise a great din about them. They had not yet heard the storm of hoofs in the rear.

Blueboy had the bit, and he was on the last stretch, in his final sprint. His white socks flashed in a breath-taking burst of speed. Jason could feel the fluid movement of the far-reaching legs, the play of magnificent muscles rippling under him. It wasn't a half mile now.

Jason found a second to glance over his shoulder. The wild racers were coming along at their topmost gallop, straining desperately to hold the pace. But gradually they were losing ground—all save one. The Queen of Spades had fallen behind a dozen lengths, and Lady Marigold ran with her, shoulder to neck. Four of the colts followed in a straggling line.

The fifth colt, however—a sturdy three-year-old—had left his brothers and sisters in the rear, he had passed both of the mares, and he was coming headlong, full-tilt, his nose almost level with Blueboy's streaking tail. And inch by inch he was creeping up.

Jason felt something choke up in his throat as he looked back at the dusty little stranger. He almost wanted to cheer. The youngster was a colt no longer. He had found himself. The son of his sire—he, too, was a race horse. And he was no longer playing the game of follow your leader; he was trying to overtake and pass the old Derby-king; he was beating Blueboy. His unkempt coat was a slaty blue, he carried a blazing white star on his forehead, and he wore neat hockey stockings. The nameless youngster in that glorious moment won his name, and it was Little Boy Blue.

On they went in tandem, Blueboy and the white-starred colt, stride for stride, nip and tuck, strength and fleetness and gameness, fighting it out, heads forward, bodies stretched like arching bows, hoofs barely flicking the earth, gallantly running the lengthy course. The laboring bronchos were not a quarter of a mile ahead, and each second was cutting their lead. The distance was only six hundred yards—five hundred—three.

For some reason José, the Mexican, was prompted at that instant to turn in the saddle and glance behind him. His head jerked up, staring, and then he began sawing madly on the reins, yelling to his comrades to halt. Martin and Brick looked rearward, and they likewise hauled back on their bronchos, swinging them around in frantic haste. The three men wheeled in a line to face the oncoming horses, waiting with revolvers in their hands.

That was the moment when Jason was reminded of an alarming oversight. In the excitement of coercing Blueboy he had neglected to borrow Cappy's gun. He was unarmed.

CHAPTER XLI.

RIDING THE WHIRLWIND.

BLUEBOY and his namesake were almost chest to chest now, their shoulders nearly touching as they hurled themselves along. The men on the bronchos were sighting their revolvers—began firing. The reports banged out heavily, sounding above the rumble of hoofs. But the race horses never flinched or wavered. There was no stopping them. Jason's eyes gleamed in a devil-may-care way as he clucked encouragement, sending them on.

The bullets had gone wild so far. Bart Martin sat his broncho between his two comrades; and Blueboy and the colt were headed straight for him. Probably he thought they would swerve aside before they ran him down. At the last second he tried to move out of the way, but he was too late to save himself.

Little Boy Blue flashed on past, but Blueboy would give no ground. He collided with the broncho shoulder-on. The huge stallion grunted, rebounded, and then almost instantly regained his stride; the lighter pony was thrown off his feet, went down in a heap, flinging Martin among the rocks.

Two seconds later a frightful scream broke above the sound of hammering hoofs. Jason peered back in time to see the band of mares and colts sweep over the ground where the fallen horseman lay. They went on in a rush, leaving a motionless, broken shape flattened face downward on the rocky slope.

Jason wrenched hard on the bridle rein as Blueboy overran his distance. "Whoa!" he gasped. "Pull up, boy!"

To his surprise the stallion responded without protest to the touch of the bit. The old horse at last had remembered all about himself, why he was, what he had been. He was bridlewise; he was willing; he and his rider were in this thing together.

As the pistons of a braking locomotive ease down in the steam chests, Blueboy slackened his prodigious stride. A hundred yards ahead Billy had halted her camel and was gazing back in amazement. Jason waved at her, motioning her to stay where she was.

If he had had any discretion left he would have gone on and carried the girl away on his saddle horn. At least he might have had the use of the gun, which he knew she carried. But all prudence was gone. This was the place of reckoning; this the moment. An overweening confidence sang through him like a clarion note; he was still riding the whirlwind. With eyes recklessly ablaze, he turned Blueboy, and they headed back toward the two remaining horsemen.

It may have been that something of his rider's fury was communicated to the big stallion. Perhaps Blueboy knew Brick's mustang as one of the band that had been harrying him for days through the desert. He whistled wickedly, and with his mouth open he plunged at the other horse.

Brick had time to fire once, and he missed; and then the rearing stallion was upon him. Blueboy's forefeet hammered the air as he swung up on his haunches. Brick dipped backward in his saddle as the two horses rammed together, just escaping the descending hoofs. He tried to use his gun again, but Jason was a shade ahead of him, striking from the shoulder.

By the luckiest of chances the blow went true. Jason had a close-up view of the man's swollen, wasp-stung face, he felt the solid impact of his fist battering against flesh—at precisely the same freckled spot where he had landed on another memorable day—and then the face was gone as Brick catapulted out of the saddle to tumble with arms and legs asprawl, almost under his pony's prancing feet.

José was left. The Mexican had held his fire at the last minute, in fear of

hitting his comrade. He wheeled his buckskin now, head down, finger on the trigger. Jason tugged back on the stallion, pulling him almost to a standstill. With a lightning movement he threw his leg over the cantle and leaped to the ground on the horse's off side. Leaving Blueboy to look after himself, he darted, crouching, for the place where Brick was lying.

A heavy explosion echoed behind him, and he felt something like plucking fingers twitch at his jerkin collar. Stooping low, he ran on and threw himself on the rock behind the unconscious Brick. A revolver was lying beside the man, and Jason snatched up the weapon and returned José's shot.

No hit! But the bullet must have sung close enough to give the Mexican a scare. José aimed in haste, and the report rang out across the hillside. A spat of dust flew up in front of Jason, not a foot from Brick's unwitting face.

Jason chucked the butt more firmly into his fist, raised the muzzle this time with deliberation. At that instant the Mexican reached the conclusion that he offered too bold a mark on his horse's back. He had kicked his foot out of the stirrup, was just starting to wriggle over the saddle, when Jason let go his shot. Again Jason cocked the gun and drew the trigger; this time, however, the hammer snapped on an empty shell.

It was of no consequence, however. As he looked in detached curiosity he noticed that José was swaying slightly in his saddle. The man's right arm slid downward, dangling at his side; his grip opened slowly, and his revolver clattered on the rocks. A little stream of red was trickling out of his coat sleeve.

Jason stood up and walked forward. "Down! Get off that horse!"

"*Si,* señor!" José spoke through gritted teeth. He came out of the saddle in a heap to land on swaying legs. "I am shot," he said.

"Let's see!" Jason confiscated the Mexican's revolver and knife, felt him over for hidden weapons, and then helped him to remove his coat, and rolled the sleeve back over the swarthy arm. A bullet had plowed through the biceps, a raking hole bleeding profusely.

"We can stop that, anyhow. You're lucky." Jason used José's neckerchief for a tourniquet and fastened it tight above the wound. Then he assisted the man to a seat on a near-by rock. "You keep on doing nothing," he advised.

The Mexican apparently had no fight left in him, but that was no reason for being careless. Jason broke the lock of his carbine over a rock and then strode back to find out how the two other men had fared.

Brick was unconscious, but a hurried examination discovered no sign of broken bones. His breathing seemed to foretell that destiny was saving him for future bumps and knocks.

It was a different story with Bart Martin. His crumpled body held neither breath nor trace of pulse beat. The mares and colts had trampled out his life.

Jason left the tumbled shape, and with a long breath he turned up the slope to meet Billy.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CONQUEROR'S HOUR.

THE girl had climbed off Alfalfa, leaving him to hunt for forage or to wander away, whichever he felt like doing, while she ran forward with hands outstretched, her tanned, dusty face reflecting the glory of the morning sunlight.

"Johnny, Johnny!" she was crying, calling the name over and over again as she hurried up the slope.

Jason was still riding the emotional crests, borne by the high currents of achieving. Men or wild horses, or one small girl—who was to deny the conqueror's hour? Before Billy could think

what was happenenig to her, she was in Jason's arms.

"Billy, my girl, my darling!" The resilient little figure strained momentarily for release, but there was no resisting him now. His hand was behind her head, caressing but unrelenting, pressing her flushed face to his.

"Johnny!" she gasped, and then he found her lips, stopped her faltering speech, her breathing.

"I love you!" he said. "And you—we love each other!"

She relaxed and swayed to him, gave herself to his embrace. "Of course we do—of course! How could we help it, Johnny?" Her mouth was soft and sweet and eager. "It just couldn't be any other way!"

"You had me scared foolish," he said after a tremendous interval, "this morning—when you hadn't reached Bullfrog Mountain—when I looked off here to see you and Alfalfa and those three devils. What happened to you?"

Her hand had found its way over the curve of his shoulder, and she still rested in the comfort of his arms. "Alfalfa ran away with me last night, and by the time I stopped him we were hopelessly lost in the dark. At daylight I got my bearings and was starting back for the mountain. Those men sighted me and chased me, and then you came."

Her voice thrilled suddenly with the recollection. "I never saw anything like it—all those horses coming, and you at their head—riding Blueboy! It was gorgeous!" Billy drew a quivering breath. "But you—how did you ever catch Blueboy? How did you dare get on his back?"

"Dare? With you needing me? Why, I'd ride——" Jason paused and shook his head. "But this time it didn't amount to shucks. Blueboy must have known what it was all about, and I swear he was just as determined to get here as I."

"Look!" whispered the girl and gently disengaged herself from the arm that still lingered about her shoulders.

"What?" Jason followed her half-guilty glance to see José seated on a stone, puffing a cigarette he had rolled with one hand and sourly watching them.

"Oh, that!" said Jason lightly. "What do I care for him?" He grinned largely at the Mexican, feeling almost sorry for him. At that moment he was on friendly terms with all the world.

"I'm afraid we'll have to take him and Brick back to the sheriff," he said. "We'll deliver Lebba and the camels with care to their circus, and then, after we've rounded up the race horses again, why, I guess we'll have time to get married, won't we?" He regarded her wistfully. "You're figuring on that, aren't you, Billy, dear?"

She smiled tenderly. "My name isn't Billy," she replied. "I forgot to tell you. It's Sarah."

"Never!" he objected.

"But it is. Billy's my brother—Cappy Kidd, that is to say—Billy Bromwell."

"Your brother—Cappy?" Jason's brows knitted in perplexity. "Wait a minute! Cappy said something about his being the jockey, Bromwell. I was too busy at the time to give it much thought——"

"He's my brother," she repeated; "he's Billy Bromwell."

"But—let's get this straight. Bromwell was shot, killed——"

"No; not killed. The bullet grazed his back—spinal column—shock to the nervous centers. He was knocked out for a while, but the skin was scarcely broken. He was able to travel the next day."

Jason whistled under his breath. "And here I've been traveling all over the desert with the real Billy Bromwell, trying to make him believe I was the racing man Leigh."

The girl's mocking dimple reasserted itself for an instant. "Billy had arranged to meet Gregory Leigh at Coahuila Well

next morning," she went on to explain. "But not knowing how soon he'd be able to leave, we decided that I'd better go on ahead to the meeting. I didn't want to tell my story to the sheriff, so I pretended to be a boy and called myself by my brother's name. And when you announced yourself as Mr. Leigh, I let it go at that, waiting to find out what part you were trying to play."

Jason chuckled, and then his face sobered. "Gregory Leigh was bitten by a rattlesnake and died. I was forced to trade places with him."

"Yes; we knew Leigh was dead," said the girl. "Billy met the sheriff bringing the body when he rode on that afternoon to overtake us."

"But why the Sam Hill did you let me go on with you—making myself ridiculous?"

"We wanted to find out what it was all about—to have you where we could watch you, if you were intending to upset our plans." There was faint laughter in her dewy eyes as she lifted her glance to his. "Later on," she said, "I got to liking your company a little—perhaps."

"And there was I," said Jason ruefully, "running away from a murder with the man I was supposed to have murdered! It was Bart Martin, however, who shot your brother that night by the circus train."

"We suspected as much. Martin and his friends had found out somehow that Billy intended to hunt the lost race horses. They were planning to go, too, and I guess they thought they saw their chance to rid themselves of a rival."

"I was there, also," Jason told her. "Martin's crew lit out after the shot was fired, and I was left to face the circus mob. So I ran for it, too, with the sheriff after me. I found Gregory Leigh when I was stumbling across the dunes, soon after the rattler killed him. I changed boots with him, took his name and his letter, and came on to meet you."

"What a queer tangle!" she exclaimed.

"Fate!" he returned gravely. "Fate moving in roundabout ways to bring me to you!

"Martin's gang were at the circus siding trying to steal a couple of camels for their desert trip," he went on musingly. "They stampeded them off into the dunes. Later, after things had quieted down, they sneaked back and abducted Lebba. They hoped to pick up a couple of the runaway camels, and they wanted some one who knew how to manage them."

"How did you find that out?"

"Lebba told me."

"Lebba? Why, you can't talk her speech!"

"You'd be surprised what an expressive way Lebba has. She can say a lot with just her hands alone. I got the main facts from her the morning you objected to our talking so much." Jason's mouth twisted for a second into his old, tormenting grin. "Remember—that morning when you were jealous?"

"I!" The girl flashed him an indignant look. "I wasn't jealous!"

"All right! We'll let it go at that."

"Well," she went on after a little pause, "I—— What would you expect? Falling head over heels in love and not being able to help it—and the prettiest sort of a girl making eyes at some one—and I—playing I was a boy, not being able to compete!"

"And here's something else!" put in Jason, scowling. "You're not Sarah. That's a deuce of a name! Sarah!"

"But I am Sarah. I can't help it.'

"You're nothing of the sort. I don't care two whoops what your brother calls himself. Let him be Cappy. You're Billy. You're my little boy scout. You're my Billy! Understand that? I love you, Billy."

"Yes, sir," she said with tremulous laughter. "And I——" She broke off suddenly, her fingers reaching furtively to grip his wrist. "Johnny," she whispered tensely, "look at that!"

As Jason turned, he heard a clicking of hoofs on the rock, and his eyes widened in amazement. Blueboy was coming back. The big stallion had turned and was walking toward them, his nostrils sniffing. And in a wavering half circle came Lady Marigold and the Queen of Spades and all five colts, tripping daintily after him.

On the ground where Martin's broncho had fallen lay a cloth sack that evidently had been broken from the saddle lashings. The mouth of the bag had burst open, and its yellow contents were spilling on the ground.

"Oats!" said Jason with bated breath. "He hasn't had one in five years. My gosh, he smells 'em!"

Blueboy walked up sedately to the bag, snuffed in greedy recognition, and then began munching the oats.

With Billy's trembling hand in his, Jason moved forward. The stallion's bit was chinking in his mouth as he nibbled the grain. He paid no attention to anybody. They stole up to him, and he did not budge. The girl's hand strayed out to touch his dirty coat, and he lifted his head to nuzzle her shoulder, as if he were begging to have his bridle taken off.

"Oh, Blueboy!" Billy's arms slipped around the horse's arching neck. "Oh, you beautiful—my beautiful!"

Blueboy sniffed at her fingers, and then spread his feet and bent down again to his pile of oats.

"I know a place," said Jason in a slow, dreamy voice, "not a hundred miles from here—grass and hills and timber and sweet running water—five thousand acres that can be bought for a song. I've got the money in the bank to buy it. You could fence it and build a little ranch house, and you could raise horses there. You could raise the finest blueblood race horses the world has ever seen. Do you want to come?"

"Yes, I want to come," answered Billy solemnly, so softly that Jason barely heard.

Jason filled his lungs with a long, quivering breath, and his glance wandered past the girl, up the rocky slope. The mares and colts had halted and were gathered in a ring, looking on. A full length in advance of the others stood Little Boy Blue, not a bit afraid, by the bold look of him, but curious, his forefeet restlessly stamping the ground as he stared, wondering what these people were like.

"The railroad will come through some day," said Jason after a moment. "In the meanwhile, you won't be lonesome, will you, Billy?"

"Lonesome?" She looked up with misty eyes. "I've been lonesome all my life until this minute. And now—never any more!"

"I guess I've been pretty lonesome myself without knowing it," Jason said pathetically.

"You?" Billy shook her head, facing him with ironic laughter. "You don't know what it means. You've been too much like Blueboy—wild and gay and gallant—running free."

"Well, anyhow," he replied, "I'm tamed now; you've tamed me down."

"Oh, please, no!" Billy looked at him in consternation. "Not too tame, Johnny!"

"I'll tell you, then." He grinned. "Just tame enough so's not to stray off the home pasture."

"I think that'll be about right," she agreed ecstatically. With a sudden, breathless impulse she stooped, gathered Blueboy's head in her arms, and kissed his velvet muzzle. Then she straightened and held up her smiling lips. "You're next, Johnny!"

As Jason reached out toward her Blueboy snorted and went back to his oats.

THE END.

Phantom of the Air

By Hapsburg Liebe

(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERY IN THE AIR.

THE two sat on a wooden bench under a coconut palm in Fort Benton's little Central Park. Warm Florida sunshine filtered through the green fronds above and fell around them in a shower of golden flecks. There was the chattering of a pet macaw from somewhere across the street back of them; a savage barracuda flushed a school of mullet in the edge of the bay that shimmered like a Brobdingnagian jewel in front of them.

Stalwart young Buckner McClellan looked toward the bearded and angular old Tennessee backwoodsman who was his companion, and smiled. "You're not saying much, 'Vin.' Are you homesick?"

"Homesick as all damnation," replied "Vinegar Bill" Cooley inelegantly. "I hate to own it, but it undoubtably air jest that way. 'Buck,' it was shore good o' you to gi' me this here trip to Floridy, and I appreciates it a heap, but I got enough now. The dawgwoods and apple trees'll soon be all white with bloom back on the upper Little Tennessee River, and—— Say, Buck, the time to hold a runaway hoss is the minute afore he starts, and mebbe you better crate me up with a jug o' water and a soup bone and throw me on a train headed no'th."

Cooley was ordinarily a sourish man—it was this that had given him his nickname—but there was much of simple humor and crude philosophy in his make-up. He was a native of the great, blue mountains that lay range upon range behind the big foothills farm of the McClellans, and for years he had been a convenient and willing hunting and fishing pal both to old John McClellan and his son Buckner.

Since his companion made no reply, Cooley ran garrulously on: "The climate air fine undoubtably, but I'm tired o' even that. All you can hear is real estate, real estate, real estate. Grown men a-wearin' knee-britches and rattlesnake stockin's, a-talkin' millions and a-borryin' money to live on. Wimmen in bathin' suits that ain't big enough to wad a shotgun, or a-motherin' poodle dawgs. Somebody up at the hotel was a-talkin' about swift wimmen and deenatured alcohol; I told him he had it back'ard; that it was swift alcohol and deenatured wimmen—because, Buck, they thinks more o' them dam' pet dawgs 'an they thinks o' children. Ain't I right?"

Young McClellan laughed. "You're right, Vin," said he, "and you're wrong, too. You're a yesterday's man, Vin. The world changes, moves ahead. You have lived almost sixty years within ten miles of a railroad, and you never saw a dozen trains until we started to Florida a month ago."

"Yeuh?" beatenly asked Vinegar Bill. "Well, Buck, m'boy, le's change the subjeck. Say, afore I fo'git it, what does the word 'Rodriguez' mean?"

Buckner McClellan, aristocrat of his kind, had the advantage of fair schooling. "It's a name," he answered, "a Spanish name, I think. Why do you ask?"

"You know that feller who's got a room next to ourn at the hotel? That heavy, reddish feller who dresses so fine and spends half his time a-dashin' over the bay in his speed boat—the same jasper who kicked on me a-singin' 'Way-worn Traveler' on the hotel po'ch that night when I was so lonesome—Buck, I'd die ef I couldn't sing when I'm lonesome—it's him I mean."

McClellan nodded. "Surely, Vin; you mean Grimshaw Holly, the would-be sport. But you sing in such a loud voice, Vin! I've heard you coming over a mountain two miles away. Up home, it's fine; down here, it's—it's different. What were you going to say about Holly?"

"Well," old Cooley pursued, "I listened to Holly and a strange man a-talkin', in some kind o' furrin' langwidge, appearently, and about every third word they said was 'Rodriguez.' And then the stranger, he 'peared to git sawt o' miffed, and he busts out in plain English:

"'I'm tellin' you, Grim, you'd better lay off fo' a few weeks,' he says, 'or else change the course. The public around here is as curious as the devil now,' says he, 'and curiosity ain't no power to be despised. As fo' me, I'm goin' back to New York, and it's no funeral o' mine,' he says, 'but I'd jest hate to see you in trouble,' says he.

"'Oh,' says Grimshaw Holly, 'you're a old woman! We've got to keep the present course,' he says, 'on account o' the light.'

"'All right,' says the stranger; 'go ahead with it, but don't say you didn't have a friend to warn you.'

"They ketched me a-eavesdrappin' 'em," Cooley finished, "but they didn't seem to mind. I reckon I don't look very smart. What do you make of it, Buck?"

The younger man's eyes were sparkling with interest now. "What do I make of it? What's everybody in Fort Benton dying with curiosity about, I ask you? That 'phantom airship' thing, of course! The light they mentioned, Vin, is the Shark Reef light, just across the bay from here; they use it as a beacon for the phantom; don't you see? Well, I think it's our duty as citizens to tell the authorities of that talk between Grimshaw Holly and the stranger. Come—let's look up the sheriff, Vin."

Fort Benton called it a "phantom airship" for lack of a better term, and to them it was indeed a phantom. For months it had been flying over the little coast city, always at night, apparently straight in from the sea, disappearing on a course that lay toward the wild and almost uninhabited, low pine country just north of the trackless Everglades; and always it went back to the sea before dawn. One deer hunter had reported that he had seen it flying low in the moonlight, miles inland; it was a very large machine, and it was painted a color that rendered it almost invisible, he said.

At first, it had attracted little attention, because in this section for-hire seaplanes—aircraft that take from and land on the water—are almost as common as automobiles. But gradually it had become a mystery of mysteries to the populace of Fort Benton as well as to the wintering visitors. A seaplane that

had elected to follow the phantom inland had been shot at, and the people had begun to harry the Fort Benton sheriff. Grimshaw Holly's friend was correct in his statement that curiosity is no power to be despised.

"It's only flying over my county," the officer would say. "Let that thing 'light here once, and I'll see what there is to it. I'm no bird, y'know."

When Buckner McClellan and old Bill Cooley reached the office of the high sheriff, they found a lone deputy in linen knickers poring over a new real-estate map that lay open on the desk before him.

"Sheriff Trimble went down the coast," the deputy said absent-mindedly, in answer to McClellan's question, "and he didn't say whether he'd be back today or not. Brother, these lots are the best buy in the State of Florida; only three hundred dollars down and a whole year for the balance. Sure to double within thirty days, maybe sooner; you can't beat this for a money-maker, brother. This town has drove Trimble half crazy about that mystery-airplane business; maybe that's where he went—you know, to do a little secret work or something. Title absolutely guaranteed; only five miles back on Blackwater River, with full riparian rights. Sign here. How many, brother?"

McClellan frowned at Vinegar Bill to keep him silent. "No question as to full riparian rights, I guess," he said meaningly to the deputy. "Do you happen to know a man or a place named Rodriguez?"

The deputy was an irrepressible salesman. "Why not put a binder on a round dozen of these lots and sell them at a big profit before the first payment is due? I don't know a man or a place named Rodriguez. Only a little money required; everybody's making money that way, brother. Rodriguez—Rodriguez; let me see now; the only thing of that name I know of was a ship, and it disappeared off the sea some time ago, and it was supposed to have went down in a hurricane. The price will pos-i-tively advance a fourth, promptly at midnight on the fifteenth of the month, and——"

CHAPTER II.

LEFT BY THE WAVES.

BUT the two Tennesseeans had left the scene.

"Riparian rights!" Vinegar Bill fairly snarled it out. "I'll bet them lots air four feet under water. I wisht to goshness I could talk to somebody who ain't gone hawg-wild over real estate."

"We did what we could," McClellan said; "now let's forget it. What do you say to our hiring a motor boat and going up Blackwater River to-morrow for some fishing, Vin?"

Cooley answered gloomily that he supposed there was nothing better that they could be doing. "But these here Floridy bass," he found it necessary to add, "ain't got the fight in 'em that the Little Tennessee River bass has got. They lay down too soon."

He was still homesick. So homesick was he, in fact, that he refused supper that evening at nightfall, and McClellan thought seriously of giving in to the old mountaineer's wish and going back home with him at once.

McClellan did not find Cooley in their hotel quarters when he went up from the dining room after supper, and he wondered just what had become of him. McClellan then walked over to a window that opened upon the moonlit and shimmering bay and stood there, looking thoughtfully over the water. Dogwoods and apple trees in bloom; an old log spring house under a weeping willow; a lark singing to the rising sun from the purple top of an ironweed. He himself didn't so much mind going home.

A mile out from shore the Shark Reef light winked at him tantalizingly, because it brought back to his mind the

so-called phantom airplane that, he had no doubt, used it as a guiding star. Then from the white-sand beach, a hundred yards or so eastward, there came a mighty voice, one that Buckner McClellan had often heard reaching over hill-tops in the dead of mountain nights; it carried a song so old as to be well-nigh forgotten, "The Wayworn Traveler," Cooley's prime favorite:

" . . . His back was heavy laden,
His stren'th was almost gone;
But he shouted as he journeyed:
'Deliverance will come!

" 'Then pa'ms of vic-to-ree,
Crowns of glo-o-ory,
Pa'ms of vic-to-ree,
I sha-a-all wear!' "

The old Tennesseean's voice held all the loneliness in the world, it seemed to Buck McClellan. A mist came to McClellan's eyes as he stood there at his bedroom window and listened to it. Bareheaded, he went downstairs. When he reached the hotel's broad veranda he noted that the guests lounging there, who were usually chattering like so many magpies, now seemed spellbound by Bill Cooley's song. As he went down the steps, he saw out of the tail of his eye that a gaudily attired young woman, with a toy Pomeranian dog in her lap, was as white as marble under her rouge, and it struck him as being rather odd. Certain things there are, often inexplainable, that force the high and the low and the good and the bad into kinship.

Vinegar Bill stood alone on the white beach in the light of the moon, the soft night wind playing in his iron-gray beard, his unseeing eyes on the point of flame which winked at him across the brine that separated Shark Reef from the mainland. In one of his horny hands he held a clear-glass quart bottle by the neck. Buck McClellan saw it and laughed, like a hysterical woman, at the ludicrousness of the spectacle. Cooley wheeled, with a belligerent air.

"I'll sing ef I want to," he began. "Oh, it's you, Buck! Say, this here bottle, I picked it up where the waves had left it, and it's got somethin' white in it; I think it's a piece o' paper, and appearently it's been all corked up tight. I couldn't git the stopper out, Buck."

McClellan took the bottle and broke it against a jutting edge of coral rock. "Here's a message, Vin," he said. "Maybe it's from somebody that's been shipwrecked."

He held the little sheet of paper, a flyleaf that had been torn from an old book, up to the moonlight. The words had been written in ink, in a characteristic feminine hand:

To the officers of the law:
In the name of God come quick to Rodriguez.

McClellan read it aloud and then gave an exclamation of chagrin. Rodriguez—again! Dame Fate, with her spheres and her wheels and her dice, must laugh sometimes at the queer things she does for the human race.

"There were a few drops of water in the bottle evidently, Vin," said McClellan disappointedly, "for the rest of the message is blurred out. What does it mean, anyway? If the writer hadn't called on the law in particular, I could believe it came from a sinking ship. Rodriguez—that's a striking word, Vin, somehow; it gives me a shudder, and it's sort of fascinating, too. Well, we'll hand this to the sheriff to-morrow if we can find him. Maybe he can get some sense out of the thing."

"Undoubtably," Cooley replied, his voice sour. "Listen, Buck!"

He had heard the steady humming of a powerful motor, somewhere in the sky to the eastward.

"The phantom," declared McClellan. "Over there toward the moon, Vin; see it? Coming like a streak. One thing funny about it, I've noticed, is that it usually flies two nights in succession and then misses three or four."

CHAPTER III.

HARD ON TRESPASSERS.

WHEN the two appeared at Sheriff Trimble's headquarters on the following morning, the officer was still more or less mysteriously absent. To discuss the matter with the real-estate-agent deputy seemed out of the question, and McClellan left the bottle's blurred message and an explanatory note in a sealed envelope addressed personally to George Trimble.

Then the Tennesseeans returned to their hotel, had a basket of sandwiches made up, got together their fishing tackle, and hastened down the beach to where Blackwater River poured its cypress-tinted volume into the bay's emerald-green waters.

The bewhiskered old beach-and-river rat who rented sundry small craft to winter visitors—he admitted openly that his lifework was skinning alligators during the summer and tourists during the winter months—noted that the wind was in the south and said that the bass should strike well. He dragged out a you-drive-it cockpit launch of light draft, that the pair had used many times before, and tossed a pair of emergency oars into it.

Vinegar Bill climbed into the cockpit. McClellan dropped their rods and tackle box to the seat beside Cooley and faced the beach-and-water man again.

"Ever hear of a place or anything else," he wanted to know, "called Rodriguez?"

"Fo' Heaven's sake!" exclaimed Vinegar Bill. "I wanted to fo'git it."

"Rodriguez?" The old Floridan caressed his bewhiskered chin reflectively. "Lemme see, now—why, yes; sho'ly, suh. A hundred years old it is, I reckon, or more. A Spaniard, name o' Rodriguez, built a 'mense big castle of a house back there, haulin' most o' the mateerial up the river, it seems. Tried to raise cattle, but it was a failure, 'count o' cattle fever and panthers stealin' off the calves, so the story goes. The place has been sold a dozen times, I've heard, nobody bein' able to stand the lonesomeness of it; prob'ly ain't half a dozen houses betwixt here and there, full sixty miles o' mostly prairie and swamp. Rancho Rodriguez, they used to call it, I believe."

"Who owns it now?"

"Lemme see—why, yes; the last feller to buy it was a No'therner with a purty young daughter—sinful purty, she was, Mr. McClellan. They used to come down to Fort Benton in a little motor boat for supplies, but I ain't been seein' 'em for a long time. The name, I reckollect, was Stanton."

McClellan turned to the now open-mouthed Cooley. "The bottle came down the river, Vin; don't you see?"

Vinegar Bill nodded. "Shore! It's as plain as daylight, Buck."

McClellan stepped into the cockpit. "If we had any shooting irons——" he began in a whisper, when old Cooley winked and cut in, also in a whisper: "I got a six-gun and a whole box o' ca'tridges right here in this tackle box."

Then Buck McClellan called to the man on the little wharf, as he bent over to start the motor: "If we're not back to-night, don't worry. Maybe we'll find it worth while to stay out until to-morrow."

Three more minutes, and the launch was valiantly breasting the rather stiff current of the Blackwater, with McClellan at the wheel and Bill Cooley getting out a trolling spoon.

"I'd bet a solid-gold mule ag'inst a brass field mouse," Cooley declared, "that knee-britches depity fo'gits to hand yore note and the bottle message to the sheriff, Buck."

"Very likely," McClellan answered. "Never mind the spoon, Vin; we're going too fast for trolling, and we'll not slacken speed this side of that Rancho Rodriguez place if we can avoid it."

"I figger," said Cooley, "that it was the Stanton gyurl that sent the message a-floatin' down the river, and that the whole thing is all tied up hard and fast with Grimshaw Holly and that there ghost airship."

"My guess, too," replied McClellan, "though I have no idea as to just what the business of the plane can be; but it's something unlawful, Vin, of course. We may find our hands full up there. Maybe there's a gang of them. I hope Sheriff Trimble gets our note, and I also hope that he knows what the name of Rodriguez means—not that I'm afraid, especially. It's rather a case for the law, you know."

They ran into a wide and sluggish spot in the dark stream, and the banks slipped by faster, banks lined with jagged sawgrass and gaunt cypress trees that flaunted festoons and streamers of funereal gray Spanish moss. Now and then they flushed a white heron or a blue one, and occasionally they saw a green one. A lone alligator tumbled off a floating log with scarcely a splash, and a great moccasin eyed them lazily from its sun parlor on a bed of blooming hyacinth. Overhead a flock of wood ibises sailed as lightly as so many wind-born units of thistledown.

Suddenly there came the fast-growing roar of a high-powered motor's exhaust from down the river, and soon a speed boat, resplendent in polished mahogany finish and shining brass fittings, whipped around a bend just behind the cockpit launch and then went past, riding on its tail. The one person in the flyer was a heavily built, reddish man, somewhat overdressed, with goggles protecting the keen eyes that peered strainedly through the wind-shield glass.

"Know that jasper?" Vinegar Bill quietly asked his companion.

"Grimshaw Holly," Buck McClellan said over his shoulder. "Maybe he didn't recognize us."

"And maybe he did," Cooley replied. "I sawt o' wisht he hadn't ketched me a-eavesdrappin' him that time."

Waves from the speed boat's foaming wake were still rocking the little launch crazily, when McClellan exclaimed: "Holly's turning around, Vin, and coming back!"

Cooley took his big, frontier-type revolver from the tackle box, put it conveniently on the seat beside him, and covered it with his hat. The shining speed boat came on toward them, moving slowly now; then it drifted with the current. Soon its pilot removed his goggles and bent over the side, quite evidently with the intention of hailing those aboard the other craft. McClellan threw out the clutch and cut the motor's speed to bare idling, as Holly's little vessel came drifting alongside.

"Hello!" said Holly, with a smile that he meant, doubtless, to seem very friendly. "Fishing?"

"That was our original plan, anyway," McClellan confessed.

Holly grunted. "Thought so. Well, perhaps I can save you running into some annoyance, since you're new to this country; all the territory beyond Big Cypress Bend, which is about six miles farther upstream, is posted, and they're certainly hard on trespassers. Naturally, you didn't know this."

"Thanks," said McClellan, his countenance deceptively bland.

"Don't mention it. So long!"

Once more Grimshaw Holly's motor roared like a rapid-firing gun. He ran a few rods down the stream, turned his boat quickly, and drove it past the launch at a rapidly increasing rate of speed.

Vinegar Bill fingered his iron-gray beard. "Well, what d'ye think o' that, Buck?"

"We'll let them arrest us for trespassing." McClellan threw in the clutch and gave the motor gas. "Sixty miles to Rancho Rodriguez; we ought to make it within five more hours—about three o'clock in the afternoon."

After a few minutes of silence, except for the steady *put-put-put* of the exhaust, Cooley spoke again: "Buck, you shore air the trouble-huntin'est feller I ever seed. I ain't afeared, y'onderstand. You know me, son. It's jest that I'm a-dyin' to git back home, that's all; the dawgwoods and apple trees'll soon be in bloom, and——"

The man at the wheel interrupted reprovingly: "According to that message, Vin, there's some folks in a desperate fix up here, and we've got to help them if we can. The law will probably be along soon."

Bill Cooley subsided a little shamefacedly.

On up the cypress-lined river they went, then through a shallow lake, then up the river again. An hour passed, two hours, three, four, and they ate a sandwich each from the lunch basket. The motor was still working perfectly.

The cypress trees had begun to stand thinner, on higher banks, and beyond them the heads of long-leaf pines began to rise scatteringly. Another half hour passed, and McClellan stood up in the cockpit in order that he might have a more comprehensive view of the surrounding country.

"There's a young orange grove," he reported, pointing northward; "acres upon acres of it. All grown over with weeds, though. And there's a cow—and an old-fashioned dominecker hen with one chick."

"Rancho Rodriguez," Vinegar Bill said sourly, as though he were parting with valuable information somewhat against his better judgment.

McClellan turned the launch into a short and very crooked bayou, that split the river's north bank, and cut the motor off. Soon he had made the little vessel fast to the body of a bay tree that grew almost in the water's edge. The launch could not now be seen readily from the river.

"We'd better not go too fast," he told Cooley. "Let's get ashore and peek around a little, Vin. Don't forget the gun."

Vinegar Bill rose with the old .45 revolver in his hand and followed his companion to dry ground and to the edge of the unkempt young grove.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE CHAPEL.

FROM where they stood McClellan and Cooley beheld, a full three eighths of a mile distant and seeming half smothered in a maze of gnarled live oaks and grotesquely twisted cabbage palms, the castlelike old house that had been the unhappy culmination of a too romantic Castilian's dream and folly. The huge pile was chiefly of native coral rock, which time had turned a mottled gray, and it was roofed with handmade tile that once had been brick-red and now was faded to the colorless hue of dust. That much the two could make out from their vantage point. There was no human being within the range of their vision.

"If the phantom plane comes here," half whispered McClellan, "it makes a landing somewhere beyond the house. A lot of open prairie lies over there evidently—or perhaps it's a lake; yes, it's a lake; I can see it now. Everything fits in, Vin; don't you see? The phantom is a seaplane, and it makes its landings on the lake. We'd better mark time until nightfall, since we don't know what we're up against here."

"I wisht I could sing," said Bill Cooley. "Buck, I shore am ongodly lonesome."

McClellan smiled. "We'll both go straight home to Tennessee," he promised, "when this is over with."

"Yeuh," old Cooley returned, "and mebbe we'll both be a-wearin' shiny pine boxes all trimmed out with the purtiest kind o' imitation-silver handles."

It wasn't such a bad guess, at that.

Again McClellan smiled. Vinegar Bill shrugged and then began to hum under his breath:

"Old Grimes is dead, that good old man;
We'll never see him more.
He used to wear a long-tailed coat
All buttoned down befo-o-ore!

"All buttoned down, all buttoned down,
All buttoned down befo-o-ore!"

They stole back to the cover of the stream's growth and then went up the bank. Not long afterward they came upon a half-crumbled old landing of coral-rock masonry, in which were set a small number of rusted iron rings. Chained and padlocked to one of these rings was a sunken motor boat that, without doubt, had belonged to the Stantons; chained and padlocked to another was Grimshaw Holly's speed boat.

McClellan turned to look toward the castlelike old building and noted that a grass-grown rock road ran to it from a point near the landing. Then he and Cooley stole back down the river's bank and to their launch hidden in the bayou. They ate a few sandwiches and sat down comfortably to await the cover of darkness.

It was not a long wait. Night fell like a curtain a short time after the sun went down, and with it came the weird and guttural cries of whippoorwills and night herons, the croaking of frogs, the far-off bellow of an alligator. McClellan rose and stepped to the shore, with Bill Cooley close behind him.

"You take the gun, Buck," said Cooley.

"Keep it," the other replied, "but be wise in the use of it, Vin."

Together they made their way cautiously across the young orange grove, straight toward the house. Lights had sprung up back of the downstairs windows, all of which were well fitted out with iron bars. Evidently old Rodriguez had built that house to withstand a siege.

The moon had risen when the pair reached the gray-rock wall that ran around the place. Soundlessly they crept over the line of masonry and soon had drawn up under a great tree. The grounds were not as thickly set with cabbage palms and live oaks as had appeared from a distance, they found. Out to their right now was to be seen a small gray building surmounted by a weatherworn cross; the old Spaniard had built it for a chapel, a place to worship. It, too, was of mottled-gray coral rock, with a roof of faded tile and barred windows. The front door, the newcomers saw, was standing open.

Buck McClellan signed for Cooley to follow him and stole toward the little building. At one side of it, inclosed by a low wall, was a tiny burial plot, and in it rose a few old headstones and a comparatively new wooden marker. McClellan bent over the wall and strained his gaze toward the epitaphs. In the light of the newly risen moon he saw that the surnames on the headstones were one and the same—Rodriguez. The name on the wooden marker was Elias Stanton.

Suddenly a peal of ribald laughter rose from the big house. A door banged heavily, and there was a clatter, as of a chair being turned over. McClellan and his companion slipped quickly through the open front door of the chapel and into the shadows of the single room. A shaft of moonlight that came through a window showed them a slender feminine figure that sat, half crumpled, on a raised dais of stone at the far end of the room.

Of course it was the Stanton girl, and she was apparently unaware of their entrance. They could see that her dress was faded and ragged, and that she was barefoot. Her face was white and desperate, but full of pride and quite determined, that of a thoroughbred. McClellan recalled the old beach-and-river man's telling him that she was very pretty. With her chestnut hair and

topaz-brown eyes, he saw that she was decidedly pretty.

Vinegar Bill inadvertently crushed a dry stick under his foot, and the girl looked around quickly, in fright.

"Don't be afraid," softly said McClellan. "We're friends."

He and old Cooley stepped silently toward her, as she rose to her feet.

"You're officers?" she asked hopefully.

In a few words, mostly whispered, McClellan told her who they were and how it had come about that they were there. As he finished, the sound of more ribald laughter came from the big house; it was followed by the tinkling of broken glassware.

"They're having a banquet to celebrate something, I think," the Stanton girl explained fearsomely. "Holly—he's the main one—came up to-day, and I'm so afraid of him. But I should begin at the beginning and tell you all about it."

She glanced through a side window toward the house, as a matter of precaution. McClellan thought they should be even then hastening toward the launch and safety for the girl, but he somehow couldn't force himself to interrupt her.

"Father and I," she said, "came here four years ago and bought Rancho Rodriguez and put out fruit groves. We first saw Holly in September; he wanted to lease the place for six months and offered a big sum for it. But dad loved it here, and he wouldn't agree to leave, though we needed money badly; you see, none of the groves have borne fruit as yet. Dad finally signed the lease, though, and there was in it a clause to the effect that neither he nor I was to leave the place, write any letters, or have any visitors. Holly was to transact all outside business for us, you see.

"A number of things seemed odd to us, but Holly gave very plausible reasons, and we believed him. He was inventing something, he said, and wasn't going to run the slightest risk of having any of his ideas carried off. Father became sick, and Holly wouldn't even allow us to have a doctor out here, and then he died. Oh—it was insufferable!"

She choked, gripped her feelings like a soldier, and went on with her story.

"When we had learned what Holly's business really was, we tried hard to escape, but they watched us pretty closely when they'd found out that we knew. A Seminole who had liked dad came here one day, and I got him to sneak a bottled message to the river's current for me; we did this half a dozen times, but the one you picked up is the only one, so far as I know, that ever got anywhere. Then the Seminole suggested that he go to the Fort Benton authorities for me, though it seems that there was a price on his head. But Holly had become suspicious of the Indian, and poor Tommy Jim simply disappeared. He was probably shot in the back. You'd think I'd run away, wouldn't you, if I can get out like this? Sixty miles of woods filled with diamond-back rattlers—that's the answer. The speed boat is always chained.

"I wouldn't have been safe here for a moment, Mr. McClellan," she continued hastily, "if there had been just one of them—any one of them; with regard to me, they watch one another like hawks. Philips, Raburn, Mudge, the big brute they call 'Honeybee,' and the new man—they're all hunted criminals, and Holly's no better. Bromlie, it was, who told me everything; he'd been drinking heavily; and then Bromlie—he was young and not all bad—disappeared in the same way that Tommy Jim had disappeared.

"Holly's seaplane comes sometimes from one place and sometimes from another, I've understood; Bimini, Cuba, Porto Rico, perhaps——"

"Sssh!" softly cut in Buck McClellan, although he was burning with eagerness to know the rest of it. "They're much

too quiet at the house now," he whispered, "and it may be that they've missed you. Let's get away toward Fort Benton—quick!"

But Betty Lou Stanton had seen something through a window. Hurriedly she indicated a dark corner for the two men, sprang to the stone dais, and again sat down there in the shaft of moonlight. McClellan and old Cooley stepped quickly into the thicker shadows of the corner.

Almost immediately Grimshaw Holly appeared at the front door of the chapel with the fugitive who called himself Philips; a side door opened, and the hulking Honeybee and Mudge stood on the threshold. Each of the four was armed well.

The girl became as motionless as a figure in stone, head bowed, seeming not to know that anybody was near her. Motionless, too, were Holly and his three companions; it was as if they scented danger. McClellan believed that there was a big chance that he and Vinegar Bill had not been discovered in their dark corner; fearing that Cooley would do something rash, he took the big revolver silently from his hand.

Grimshaw Holly's voice came gratingly: "What are you doing out here, Betty?"

The girl's acting was flawless, splendid. "I should think, Mr. Holly," she said disdainfully, "that I might at least be allowed to go to the chapel without interference."

"But you're not such a religious girl, Betty," Holly said sneeringly. "You don't say many prayers."

"Don't I?" She flared, rising. "You've very good reason to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Holly. Whether I say many prayers or not, there are times when I want to be by myself—when I feel that I'll die if I don't get away from you and your crowd!"

With that she whipped out of the little chapel, past Honeybee and Mudge, going toward the house. McClellan figured, as he knelt there in the blackness of the trap with Cooley's six-gun trained squarely at Grimshaw Holly, that the girl was trying to take the attention of the four from the interior of the chapel in the hope of saving him and Vinegar Bill.

It worked; the four men followed her promptly toward the house. The Tennesseeans watched them from a window.

CHAPTER V.

SHOTS IN THE SKY.

"IT'S a wonder you didn't make 'em all put up their hands," Cooley said presently, "whilst you had the chanst."

"That would have meant gun play, I'm pretty sure, and somebody might have shot the girl by accident," McClellan replied. "Four automatics, in all probabilities, against one old six-gun is not an even break, anyway, Vin, with us in a trap as we were. I did the best thing, I think."

"All right," replied Vinegar sourly; "we'll s'pose you done the best thing. What're we a-goin' to do now?"

"I don't know," McClellan admitted with reluctance. "I wish we'd taken the girl away the moment we found her. But she'll come back here just as soon as she can slip out again, and we'll hustle her straight to Fort Benton and send the law back here to round up those fellows."

"All right," Vinegar Bill said. "Then there ain't nothin' to do now but to jest wait fo' the gyurl to come back. Well, you keep the gun, Buck, and I'll sneak out and cut me a good, big cudgel."

He returned to the chapel five minutes later, carrying a generous length of club that he had cut from a strangling-fig sapling. It was almost as heavy as iron.

"Now," he jubilated, "bring 'em on, two by two, or four by four—suit yoreself about the numbers, Buck—because

you said that we'd go home when this was over with, and I shore am a-dyin' to be a-headin' no'th."

An hour they waited, and still Betty Lou Stanton had not come back to them. The big house was very quiet now; too quiet, McClellan feared. Cooley, leaning on his club like some primitive old denizen of the forests—he really was just that, perhaps—watched from a chapel window, so still that he seemed to be not even breathing, save for once when he scratched his nose lightly with the tip of a forefinger, and once when he caressed his iron-gray beard with a horny hand. McClellan paced the floor uneasily.

Then McClellan tiptoed over to the rear window of the chapel, and from there he could see that lights, at least two, had sprung up on the lake; they were, he was sure, to guide the landing of the phantom plane. Perhaps, he thought then, Holly and his associates were on the lake shore, awaiting the plane's arrival; and, in that case, it would be an opportune time for an investigation of the house.

Maybe Holly had taken the precaution of locking the girl in. If she got away and told all she knew, it would mean the end of things for Holly. McClellan walked soundlessly over to the sphinx-like Cooley and held a brief conversation in whispers with him.

"Undoubtably," said Vinegar Bill, at the end of their talk. "Well, le's be at it, Buck."

Holly, McClellan decided, would not have a sentinel posted in the grounds, since sixty miles of almost uninhabited wilderness stretched between his rendezvous and civilization; but the pair of visitors kept in the shadows as much as they could conveniently, as they made their way under the palms and live oaks toward the silent house. They drew up behind a clump of fragrant night-blooming jessamine and took the measure of things afresh, as far as was possible.

The lighted, barred windows of the lower floor were high, but they could see that nobody was moving around in any of the rooms facing them. McClellan nudged his companion.

"Let's see whether we can get in," he whispered. "The coming of the plane would naturally be something of an event to them, and I'm more than ever convinced that the entire gang is out on the lake shore to receive it. We won't be long in finding Miss Stanton, if they really have got her locked up, Vin, and it's up to us to get her safely away from here at any cost and at the earliest possible minute."

"Lead the way," Cooley replied in a whisper.

Swiftly but silently they went toward a heavy outer door that was well bound with rusted iron, riveted fast. Somewhat to McClellan's surprise, it was not locked. He pushed it inward slowly, fearing that a creak might give an alarm, but the hinges had evidently been recently oiled, since they made no sound whatever. The two stepped into a broad hallway that was dark save for two shafts of light that cut into it from doorways, one from the right and one from the left. It was electric light, McClellan noted. Rancho Rodriguez, thanks to the modern ideas of the late Elias Stanton, had its own little gasoline-driven power plant.

There was no person in the room to the right. The pair tiptoed on down the hallway and peered cautiously through the half-open doorway of the room on their left. That which they saw caused them to catch and hold their breath for the moment. McClellan brought the old six-gun up to a ready level, and Bill Cooley took a fresh hold on his recently acquired club.

It was a large room, fitted out for the most part with old furniture. A brass electrolier of half a dozen frosted light bulbs hung over the center of a heavily carved table of mahogany, on which was

a disorderly array of books and magazines, cigar boxes and ash trays. In one corner stood a thick-legged mahogany piano, the keys of which were as yellow as gold with age, and on the instrument lay a dust-covered, scarred violin, with all its strings broken except one. In another corner rose a broad, curved stairway, also of mahogany.

But none of these things claimed the attention of the newcomers in the slightest degree. They had eyes only for the men who sat in the immediate vicinity of the table—Holly, Philips, Raburn, Mudge, the fellow who was so incongruously nicknamed Honeybee, and another man. They pretended to be reading, but in reality they were covertly watching one another over the tops of the printed pages. The girl was nowhere in evidence.

"With regard to me," Buck McClellan recalled the Stanton girl's telling him, "they watch one another like hawks."

He understood that better now. Those men were all crazily in love with the girl. McClellan could not find it in him to blame them for thus losing their hearts to her, having felt the spell of her charm himself; but he did blame them for declaring themselves to her under the circumstances. As for Holly, there was no doubt of his being the high light of them all, but it was a situation in which Holly, however great the sword he might hold over the heads of the others, apparently had no real advantage.

A high tension reigned in that silent room. The two watchers in the hallway began to feel it. It mounted higher and higher, as the long, long seconds passed into the limbo of spent time. Of course, each man in there had a weapon ready to hand, and it was plain that a climax of wholesale bloodshed hovered very near.

Old Vinegar Bill gripped his strangling-fig club and gave Buck McClellan an impatient poke with his elbow; he was anxious to get into it and have it over with. In the semidarkness McClellan's lips formed the two words: "Not yet."

Then they saw Grimshaw Holly steal a glance toward the head of the curved stairway, and they felt reasonably certain that Betty Lou Stanton was somewhere on the second floor. Immediately following this, Holly put his magazine down on the table with an air of finality; he was through, it was quite evident, with pretense. This did not escape the eternally vigilant eyes of his associates. They, too, were done with sham, let the cost be what it might. The silence now was thick, deathlike; the atmosphere was charged; it was a time when something had to happen, and it did happen.

Dame Fate, sitting among her spheres and wheels and dice, found a trick that was simple and easy to play. At the very height of the tension in that great room, she moved a finger, so to speak, and the one remaining string on the old violin snapped; the noise it made was, in effect, thunderous. Each man of the six clapped a hand on the butt of a ready weapon, their faces hardened, and their eyes glittered like steel.

What it was that moved Buckner McClellan to act in that brace of seconds is a thing not easily determined. Perhaps he reasoned that it was for him a critical moment; perhaps he obeyed sheer impulse. There was a sharp click from the old revolver in his hand, and simultaneously his voice rang out:

"Don't move, you six—I've got you completely covered! Now put your hands up high!"

Ten empty hands promptly went up high, almost, one might say, with relief. The man who did not obey was the big brute, Honeybee, world-famous yegg. Honeybee flicked an automatic pistol to a quick aim and fired at Buck McClellan in the doorway. It happened with dazzling suddenness, and, also with dazzling

suddenness, McClellan pulled the trigger, and the six-gun roared out flame and lead and enough smoke for a more or less effective screen.

"Up high!" He fairly thundered the words.

The heavy bullet had cut away the yeggman's thumb and sent the stub-nosed pistol spinning from his hand. The desperate Honeybee, in the time of a wink, caught up his chair and dashed it at the electrolier, with such good aim that the room was plunged into thick blackness even before broken glass had begun to rattle down upon the table below. At the same time there came a half-piteous, half-hysterical feminine cry from the stairway head, the cry of a girl whose nerves were worn to the quick and ready to snap.

"Mr. McClellan!"

"Git that lady out o' here, Buck!" exclaimed Vinegar Bill Cooley.

But McClellan was already dashing through the blackness toward the girl on the stairs. Bullets would soon be flying in all directions, and she was in the gravest danger, to say nothing of the fright that held her in a grip of sheer torture. Vinegar Bill sprang into the room and began to swing his long and heavy club at everything and nothing, but with a verve that would have awakened the envy of any caveman the neolithic age ever produced; he was a good deal like an enraged, blind bull in a china shop.

"Lap that up!" said Vinegar Bill in triumph; his section of sapling had fallen upon human flesh and bone, and the blow drew a moan of pain. "Lap that up, dang you, you yaller hound! I want to go back home, and——"

A splinter of flame in the darkness and the sharp bark of an automatic interrupted his speech, but not his vigorous, far-swung blows at everything and nothing. Another splinter of flame, another spiteful report, and Buck McClellan, now almost to the head of the staircase, felt a streak, like a red-hot arrow, pass through his body. He reeled from the impact, fumbled the old revolver, and dropped it clattering down the steps behind him. Thinking first of the girl's safety, he dared not lose the time it would require to go back and find the weapon. He set his teeth against the wave of weakness and pain that swept over him and hastened on.

In another moment he had gathered up Betty Lou Stanton's raglike figure. Still another moment, and he found himself in an upper hallway that was all dark save for a moonlit, barred window at one end.

"Quick—is there any other way down?" he said almost mumblingly to the girl in his arms.

She did not answer. The pandemonium of Cooley's club below became suddenly far off and indistinct to him, and he staggered against a wall and a chair, barely saving himself from falling. He shook her slightly, grimly repeating his question. She stirred a little, opened her eyes, and caught her breath.

"No other way," she murmured, her voice dim; "those are the only stairs. That's why they didn't lock me in. I'd have gone back to the chapel if there'd been another way down."

McClellan steeled himself against the weakness and pain once more, overcoming it admirably, at least for the time being. Below, Vinegar Bill's club struck the old piano with a loud, banging noise. Then there was the sound of another pistol shot, followed by yet more of the club's merciless crashing.

"I saw a balcony, I think," McClellan said hastily. "We might let you down from it by means of bedclothes knotted together."

A chance look toward the moonlit window of the hallway had shown him a dark figure and then another and yet another, stealing up from the first floor. He put the girl down gently against the wall and caught up the chair he had

found with his knee not more than a minute past. His wound gave him twinges of pain so acute that he bit his lip until it bled. Then, with the chair upraised, he stepped forward to meet the three dark figures.

"Get back!" he exclaimed, and simultaneously the chair fell and sent one of the trio headlong down the near-by steps. "Get back!"

Again and again, amazingly swift, the chair fell with the strength of desperation and iron will behind it. If the remaining two had weapons, he had them between him and the moonlit window, and he could therefore see them, while the blackness behind him kept him invisible to his foes; it was a fair advantage. Yet again the chair swished and bit. Grimshaw Holly was one of the two; he cursed because his pistol had jammed. The voice of the homesick, but valiant, old Vinegar Bill Cooley came encouragingly up to McClellan.

"Give 'em hell, Buck!"

Crash! Again the strangling-fig club had struck the ancient piano's keyboard. Once more the shattering report of a pistol came from below the stairs. McClellan's chair broke against a blank wall; he had finished driving the trio back down the steps; that flail of death had been more than they could withstand.

Then McClellan dropped the wrecked piece of furniture that he had used for a weapon and hastened dizzily toward the girl. She was just climbing to her feet when he reached her.

"The balcony——" he began.

Betty Lou Stanton had her wits about her now. "This way," she said in a whisper, catching his sleeve.

"And a pair of coverlets," McClellan finished, turning to follow her down the black hallway.

Into her own bedroom she led him, and there she quickly snapped on a light and gave him a white blanket and an old-fashioned counterpane. While he was engaged in knotting corners securely together, Betty Lou Stanton was unlocking an iron-bound outer door, and another minute found the two on a high, weather-beaten old balcony that was fitted with a rusted iron railing.

McClellan lost no time in fastening one end of the crude rope about the girl's waist. He helped her to the top of the railing and then lowered her slowly to the ground below; now he knotted the loose end of the blanket to a corner post and himself went down, though the exertion of it all was very nearly too much for him. The girl quickly freed herself from the counterpane.

"Listen," he said, fighting bravely against the growing weakness that seemed determined to overcome him. "Go to our launch in the little bayou below the landing; you know where it is? The motor is easy to start; get to Fort Benton as quick as you can and send the sheriff and his deputies back here. I—I must go back in there by way of the front door and help old Bill Cooley, my friend——"

He staggered, then he leaned against a convenient little gumbo limbo tree, while the girl watched him dazedly. All was deathly still in the house now, McClellan noted with a sinking heart.

"Maybe poor Vin," he said thickly, half choking, "has already gone home."

The moonlit world was reeling drunkenly. The theatrically bright moon was bobbing around like a swamp jack-o'-lantern. The entire universe was topsy-turvy. All of the Stanton girl's faculties became suddenly alert in answer to the call of urgent need. She stepped to him and caught his arm to steady him.

"Oh, you were hurt!" she exclaimed anxiously. "I can't leave you like this, Mr. McClellan. Don't ask me to go, for I won't. Please, think of something for me to do to help you."

There was a steady, very distinct humming noise in McClellan's ears now. "Hurry," he urged, and his voice had an

unfamiliar ring to him, like the voice of a stranger. "The river—Fort Benton—hurry!"

It had become difficult even to talk. He slumped limply, helplessly, against the satin-smooth body of the little gumbo limbo tree. The girl caught him and sat down with his head in the hollow of her arm. At that instant there came the distant, keen thunder of a brief fusillade of shots—shots in the sky.

CHAPTER VI.

A GOOD PIECE OF WORK.

THE phantom!" said Buck McClellan in a low voice, and the humming noise was no longer a mystery.

By sheer chance his eyes had been turned toward the machine when the shots were fired. It was a great, sky-colored seaplane that the moon's bright flood fairly plated with silver; the flaming of the far-away weapon's muzzle had seemed much like tiny, leaping electric sparks.

"Holly's," Betty Lou Stanton said. "Oh, look!"

Following it swiftly there came another great seaplane, and the moonlight fairly plated it also with silver. A series of tiny sparks leaped from this machine, too, and then the staccato sounds of the firing drifted down to McClellan and his companion. The roaring of the motors became quite plain with a sudden change of the night wind.

"They're fighting," softly exclaimed the girl; "they're fighting up there! What can it mean?"

Certainly they were having a battle up there. It had begun miles away. The two planes were now over the lake and exchanging more shots. McClellan's waning consciousness strove to respond to the grim fascination of it and partially succeeded. The girl who held him now throbbed with excitement.

"One of them is taking fire," she said suddenly, "and I think it's Holly's."

A bullet from the other plane had pierced the gasoline tank of the phantom. It began to come down, all out of control, and half buried in livid flames and trailing red sparks behind it like a meteor. It struck the shimmering surface of the lake and the water snuffed out the blaze as a candle is snuffed out by a high wind. The pursuing plane followed slowly in a cautious spiral glide.

Betty Lou Stanton saw now that McClellan's eyes were closed, and that he was paler than before. She called to him, and he didn't answer.

Sheriff George Trimble's hired passenger-carrying seaplane was fortunate in picking up the wrecked machine's pilot, who, for a wonder, was neither badly burned nor badly injured, from the surface of the lake. Holly's man talked freely, knowing, as he did, that the jig was very much up, to put it in the vernacular that he himself used; therefore the sheriff and his assistants were fairly well informed when they reached the shore of the lake.

Since there were so many of Holly's associates, the senior officer pressed his own pilot into the place of a deputy and armed him. After the pilot of the phantom was manacled to a tree for safekeeping, Trimble and his men deployed into a thin line of skirmishers and began to move toward the huge, old tile-roofed house that marked the center of Rancho Rodriguez's thousand acres.

It was the high sheriff himself who found the Stanton girl sitting beside the gumbo limbo tree, almost under the balcony, with Buck McClellan's head in her lap. Almost as white as her patient, she watched the officer hopefully, as he approached.

"What's this?" asked Trimble, going to one knee before her and peering into McClellan's seemingly lifeless face. "I represent the law, little lady; talk fast!"

Brokenly Betty Lou made the sheriff acquainted with the prevailing circum-

stances, as she knew them, which was a sufficiently correct account of the affair. Trimble bent over and put an ear to McClellan's chest, listened for a moment, and then looked up.

"Only unconscious," he said. "Shot pretty badly, though, I guess. Just wait here and keep still."

In two more seconds he was disappearing around a corner of the house toward the iron-bound door that had given entrance to McClellan and Cooley earlier in the evening. His men met him there, and the four of them went on tiptoe into the almost dark hallway.

At the door of the big room to the left they came upon a lanky, bearded figure that held a club poised and ready. Vinegar Bill was not seriously hurt; no bullet had been able to find him in the darkness.

"Who're you?" Cooley asked, his voice belligerent.

"The law," Trimble answered quickly. "And you—oh, you're the old fellow the girl told me about. What're you doing now?"

"Me? Jest a-waitin' fo' some of 'em to come out," Bill Cooley answered, "and a-hopin' they tries it. Buck's got 'em cut off above, and the windows is all barred, and I got 'em cut off here. Rats in a trap, that's them; and rats is right undoubtably."

"Step aside," the officer ordered in a curt tone.

His three aids followed him silently into the big, dark room. Two flash lights illuminated the wreckage of Vinegar Bill's club. Holly, Philips, Raburn, Mudge, Honeybee, and the other man—they either lay limply or crouched here and there. A few of them were still in possession of their automatic pistols; all of them bore the mark or marks of either club or chair.

"Put 'em up!" commanded George Trimble, as the flash lights were snapped on.

All the hands of the six men went up, save for two that were attached to broken arms. The fight had been beaten out of them. Old Cooley laughed a ringing laugh of triumph.

"Good piece o' work, sheriff," he said jubilantly. "I reckon I'll git to go back home now."

" 'Good piece of work' is correct," replied Trimble, who now was busy with his supply of manacles, "but it was you and your friend who did most of it, I'm thinking. Your friend is in bad shape outside; maybe you'd better leave this job to us and go out there to him."

Cooley, sobering instantly, ran from the house.

CHAPTER VII.

SOLID GOLD.

NOT very long afterward they left the Rancho Rodriguez. The girl and Buck McClellan went to Fort Benton in the hired plane in order to get McClellan to surgical aid quickly. The sheriff and his assistants took their prisoners, handcuffed in two groups, down the river in the cockpit launch and in Grimshaw Holly's speed boat. Vinegar Bill, half weeping with anxiety, went with the sheriff's party.

"What'll old John McClellan think o' me?" Cooley kept asking disconsolately. "Me a-lettin' Buck git hurt that a way—pore boy! Why, it seems only yeste'day that I used to ride him on my knee and tell him Injun tales."

Hours later a lone settler on the south bank of the Blackwater was awakened from his slumbers by the sound of a heartbroken, far-reaching voice somewhere on the river, in an old church song that Tennessee hill folk had rearranged to fit their own ideas of right and propriety:

> "The sexton did not set me down
> Away back by the door;
> He seed that I was old and gray,
> And knowed that I was pore."

On one side of the clover-crimson

meadow stood the apple orchard, and all the trees were loaded with snowy, fragrant bloom; there was the steady humming of honey-gathering bees around it from sunrise to sunset. On the meadow's other side rose a woody foothill, and on it bloomed redbud and dogwood in alternating patches of pink and white. A pair of mating partridges ran unafraid along a path which the cows had worn in the shade cast by the woody foothill. A golden-throated lark sat on the purple head of an ironweed and sang joyously. From a thicket came the twitterings of thrush and cardinal and the lovelorn coo of a lonesome dove.

"See the old log spring house under the weeping-willow tree, there at the upper end of the meadow, just below the house?" asked Buckner McClellan. "That's where the meadow brook comes from. There are buttercups and violets along that brook, rafts and rafts of them."

"Yes," said Betty Lou Stanton.

"And foxglove, larkspur, and forget-me-nots. You like those?"

"Yes," Betty Lou said sweetly, "I like all flowers."

There was a silence that to McClellan seemed ages long. Then he spoke again: "I'm sure you will like dad. He's a real scout. Fond of good horses, and so'm I; we've got lots of 'em. Pals, dad and I, since I can remember. There he comes now to meet us."

The figure, that of a tall, serious-faced man of middle age, drew near rapidly.

"Buck," said John McClellan, with a great deal of feeling, "I thank God you're better. I sure burned up the roads and rails to get here quick when Vin wired me you were hurt. You know me now, son, don't you?"

McClellan, the younger, opened his eyes wider against the light of a day that was nearly gone, and he saw bending over him his father and a doctor; and sitting beside his bed, closer to him than either of the others, was the Stanton girl, who looked worn and tired.

"I dreamed I went back home," he said, "with you, Miss—Miss——" Her name escaped him for the moment. Then things began to clear up for him. "Certainly glad to see you, dad. Where—where are we? Where's Vin and Holly and the rest?"

It was the doctor who told him: "We're in my little hospital at Fort Benton, Mr. McClellan. Miss Stanton claimed she owed you everything, and she begged so hard to nurse you through that I gave in. Cooley is sleeping for the first time in a day and a night. Holly and his crowd are behind bars, where they belong. You must keep very quiet for some little time, my boy; we had to perform a second operation to repair the damage of the bullet, you see. You've lain here since Wednesday night, and it's now Monday, and you've been either delirious or under the effects of ether nearly all that time. I guess that's all you wanted to know."

But Betty Lou Stanton thought differently.

"Holly's business was hiding criminals; giving them luxuries and making them pay for them," she said. "Also, he did a little smuggling, rum running, and hijacking as a sort of side line. The phantom airship brought fine wines and whiskies for the gang, among other things; you see, they thought it safer than a speed boat. Sheriff Trimble found an ex-army airman, who carried passengers as a means of livelihood, and who was willing to risk following the phantom; he had a big, fast plane. And —but I guess you know the rest of it, don't you?"

A week later, when young McClellan's recovery was beyond any doubt, he said to his father: "I think you'd better take old Vin and go home. I can't find any other way out of it. Vin will die down here."

"And leave you to come home all by

yourself?" asked the elder McClellan, pretending that he was greatly astonished.

"All by myself!" his son repeated, laughing. "Not a bit of it, dad. I'm going to marry Betty Lou. I don't believe you'll object."

"Object—me?" Old John McClellan put out his hand. "Buck, she's sure solid gold. Shake!"

HIS PIPE-DREAM MISS

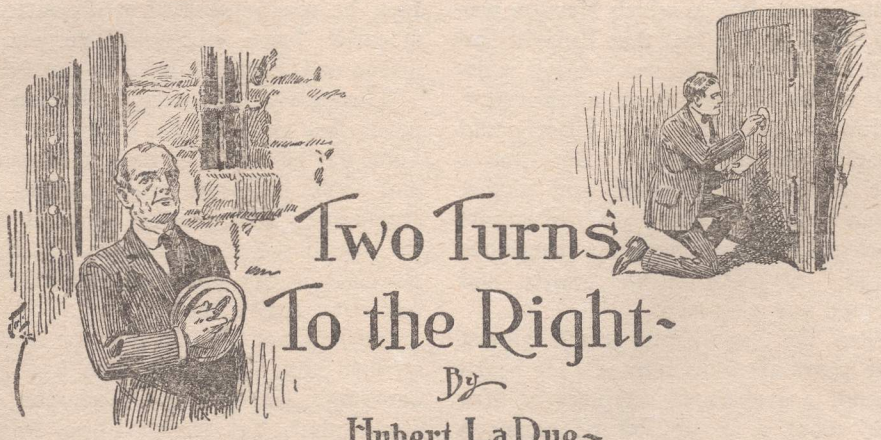
By Ronald Barrett Kirk

THERE'S a witching little maiden
Comes before me as I dream
In my armchair by the fireside
While the dying embers gleam;
Just an airy, fairy creature
With a head of golden curls,
And with eyes that dance in mischief,
When my memory unfurls,
From the smoke of my tobacco,
Such a vision of delight
Would enrapture any mortal
As it falls upon the sight.

For my vigil's well rewarded
When, on wreaths that twine and kiss,
Dancing down the clouds of fancy
Comes my
Pipe
Dream
Miss.

She's a magic, luring charmer
Formed of smoke and dream and air,
Trips to greet me in the firelight
As I sit in fancy there;
With a form of passing fairness
And a pair of dainty feet
That come twinkling through the smoke rings
In a silence low and sweet;
And there dances with her laughter
Such a dimple of desire,
I am wafted into heaven
On a flame of leaping fire,

Till the dream is lost forever
When my pipe goes out, and bliss
Fades away upon the night wind
With my
Pipe
Dream
Miss.



Two Turns To the Right-

By

Hubert LaDue-

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

HIS BIG GAME.

GLANCING at his watch, Newton saw that it was not quite ten o'clock. He had two hours to wait, one hundred and twenty dragging minutes, and he could not act before then. He had laid out his schedule, and he would follow it to the dot.

At midnight he would enter the home of Carter J. Enright. He had already selected his port of entrance, the broad bay window on the left side of the big residence. Hanging branches and a clambering vine at this point afforded excellent shadows, and shadows were in keeping with Newton's plans, at present. Later on—well, that all depended on what he might find in the banker's safe. If he discovered what he expected, his movements in the future would probably be more public than private. He would step into the limelight and invite the world to hear what he had to say.

Two hours are ordinarily not a long period of time; but Newton had waited and planned for twenty-three years, and his nerves were at the breaking point.

A light flashed on in an upper room. The ex-convict, as he stood on the walk outside, observed the portly form of a man silhouetted against the window shade. It was Enright, he decided. He wondered if Enright would be standing there so calmly if he knew that Ogden Newton, his former coworker, had returned to Hopeville.

He recalled a remark once dropped, half in jest, by the materialistic banker: "Give me the man who knows what he wants and takes it. Hope of reward governs this world; fear of punishment is the mark of fools."

And that had indeed been Enright's policy, and he had lived up to it, too. Put to the test, Enright had calmly allowed his young assistant at the bank to be led off to San Quentin to serve a twenty-year sentence for another man's embezzlement, when a word would have saved him. Enright had refused to speak that word.

Thinking it over, however, Newton was certain that he understood. Hope of reward had prompted Enright's silence. Apperson, then president of the bank, had been the actual crook. As assistant cashier, Enright knew it. But Apperson had money; he could do much for any one whom he favored. And, after they had placed Newton in a cell, the financier had done much for the one who had remained silent, possibly more than he had intended to do. The

palatial home beside which Newton was now standing, the fact that Enright had risen rapidly until he was himself president of the Traders' Bank, all proved it.

Newton, as he had often bitterly told himself, was the "goat." But even a goat, sickened, hardened, and almost driven insane by twenty years of unjust imprisonment, may become a dangerous animal. So Newton had waited and schemed and planned.

Then the opportunity came, almost three years after his release. He heard through a discharged secretary of Enright about a certain bit of paper, a memorandum that was proof positive of Apperson's guilt and of Enright's knowledge thereof. The ex-secretary had allowed Newton to buy him three more slugs of San Francisco's worst liquor, accepted a five-dollar loan, and staggered away. Newton did not drink anything himself. He wanted a clear head; he wanted to think.

His thoughts were not pleasant ones. Newton was no longer the idealistic youth he had been twenty-three years ago when he served as a bank teller in Hopeville. In prison his associates had been crooks, and most of them had been planning jobs to be done as soon as the iron door had closed behind them. After his release, following a more or less desultory attempt to live an honest life, Newton had turned to the one environment in which he seemed to be welcome. There he had learned much which he hoped to turn to account.

The name of "Five Ace" Newton, for instance, had not been given him for nothing. It was the result of his almost uncanny ability to manipulate a deck of cards. He had learned the tricks from a cell mate, an old gambler; and that he had been an apt pupil was proved by the fact that he had made many a dollar, following his release, by "playing for the house" in an outlaw gambling club. An occasional bit of high-class burglary had helped to eke out his income. In fact, he was as skillful at the latter as at cards; but a wholesome respect for prison cells caused him to be careful.

Throughout this period Newton had never lost sight of his main ambition. Some day he would go back to Hopeville and settle his score with Enright and Apperson. And a heavy score it was; the loss of youth, of ideals, of his rightful place in the world, and—well, there had been a girl, too.

He had not blamed her for turning against him. The evidence had been damning; Enright and Apperson had seen to that. Yet there had been dreams, and dreams are not easily forgotten.

All these things came back to Newton with numbing force, as he stood there contemplating the home of Carter J. Enright.

"You'll pay," he said, shaking his fist at the silhouetted figure in the upper room. "Apperson is a broken reed, an old man, and not worth the stalking. But I'll get you, Enright, and after I've got you I'll make you pay—and pay and pay! I'll bleed you of every cent you've got. Then I'll take my evidence to the district attorney and let you find out what prison is like."

He looked at his watch again, still trembling from the passion that had gripped him. Only ten minutes had elapsed since he had first glanced at the dial. He must find some means with which to kill time, or the suspense would drive him insane.

It was then that he thought of Harry Darr's establishment, a small-town "gambling joint," the infamy of which had spread even to bigger cities. A house man in San Francisco, learning that Newton was going to Hopeville, had given him a note to Darr. "But lay off his game," the friend had advised. "He's so crooked that he cheats himself when he plays solitaire. Crooked is his middle name."

Newton had laughed at this. "They don't make 'em too tough for me," had

been his comment. "But thanks, anyhow. I may look him up."

To-night he had no intention of gambling. He had come to Hopeville to play a bigger game than any ever dealt over a card table. Besides, what little money he had would be needed for expenses. It might be weeks before he could put his hands on Enright's fortune, even after he had secured the necessary evidence.

Darr's place, however, did give promise of relaxation for an hour or so. Accordingly he strolled down the main street, entered a pool room, and, having shown his note to a man lounging near a rear door, was directed to an evil-smelling apartment above.

CHAPTER II.

HOOKED HARD.

THE low-ceilinged room was heavy with smoke. Newton observed, as he entered, that an attendant in a far corner was hastily locking a cupboard. Illicit whisky, he guessed. In the center of the place, beneath a droplight, was a large circular table, and seated around it were several men so absorbed in a game of poker that they did not look up upon the arrival of the newcomer.

Newton curiously surveyed the players. "Two house men and four suckers," he mentally commented, as he watched.

Cynically he made an inventory of the "suckers." Two of them were undoubtedly business men, of the type who seek illegal amusement after hours and are willing to pay for it. They wouldn't lose much, he told himself; that kind never did. They had to be nursed along and allowed to win small sums occasionally; they were recognized as the sugar and grain of the gambling profession.

Of the other two recruits, one was a man of possibly seventy years, a man whose hand shook when he reached for his cards. Newton grunted. "About at the end of his string; due to go via the gun route before long," was his mental comment. "The old boys generally do when they've reached the bottom."

But it was the fourth member of the sucker list that interested Newton most. Here, he decided, was a youth just starting down the incline; a handsome chap, in whose face dissipation had only begun to make its marks, and whose eyes glittered with the hectic brilliancy of the young gambler who is losing and can't afford to lose.

"He's hooked—hooked hard," Newton commented. "And they're gunning for him every minute. Wonder who he is. Too bad. Must be big game, though, the way they're playing him. And green! A child ought to have seen that false cut just then."

The game went on. Newton, having refused to play, continued to watch and to smile inscrutably, the smile of a master who is observing the efforts of pupils. It was "rough stuff," all right, but they were getting away with it. And it was none of his business, anyhow; he had other things to worry over—more important things.

Pushing his entire stack into the center, the young man chuckled triumphantly and spread out his hand. "There you are," he told the player who had called him. "Kings—four of them—and one lonely but highly important ace!"

He reached for the chips, but a restraining hand was placed upon his arm. "Just a moment, lad." The house man slowly indicated his own five cards. "Trey, four, five, six, and seven," he said. "All square-cornered pink ones. Tough luck, youngster, but's that the way they fall—sometimes." He raked in the pot.

The young man passed his hand across his forehead bewilderedly and arose to his feet. "All right," he said, after again inspecting the straight flush, as if not believing his eyes, "all right, you win. But I'm coming back, and I'm go-

ing to beat this game. I'll make it pay back every cent I've lost. I—I'll——"

"Here, have a drink!" Harry Darr was at the boy's elbow with a tumbler of whisky. He was a diplomat, and he knew the psychology of a loser. "Better luck next time, kid," he murmured consolingly. "Of course you'll beat the game. Can't always be unlucky. Sure, come back again." The youth stumbled from the room and down the stairs.

Harry Darr, addressing no one in particular, stared after him and remarked: "I wonder—I wonder. Almost wish the kid would stay away. Dropped a pile lately, and there's liable to be trouble. I don't think he can afford it."

"You always get those twinges of conscience after somebody has gone out a loser," remarked the old man. "Too bad, ain't it? And as for that young sport not being able to afford it—ha, ha! That's good. His old man can buy the town out and not miss the money. I ought to know, I—I——"

"Aw, shut up, Apperson," said Darr.

Newton gave a start. So this doddering, trembly old wreck was Apperson! Good Lord, how he had drifted. Enright had broken him, and no mistake.

"You're always croaking and delaying the game," Darr went on. "Let's get busy; it's close to midnight."

This aroused Newton from his reverie. He confirmed the gambler's statement by a glance at his own watch. It was five minutes to twelve.

"Got to beat it," he informed Darr, holding out his hand. "See you again, maybe. Nice little game you've got here."

"Fine game," Darr replied. "Plenty of action for your money at all hours. Drop around some other time and sit in."

Newton nodded and left. A minute later he was out on the sidewalk, striding rapidly toward the residence of Carter Enright.

CHAPTER III.

ONTO THE ASHES.

NO light was discernible from the house, and, aside from the flickering rays of an arc lamp at the street corner some hundred yards away, the grounds also were cast in gloom. Newton hesitated only for an instant; then he stalked quickly across the lawn toward the bay window on the left side of the building.

His observations earlier in the evening had told him that it was the window of the library. He also knew, through careful quizzing of Enright's former secretary, that an ancient safe was concealed beneath a tapestry against the far wall of the room. Newton had learned more than a little during the past few years about opening safes. He felt that he would have little trouble with this one.

Having arrived at the window, Newton took from an inner pocket a small, collapsible jimmy and wedged it between the frame and the casing. To his surprise the window opened without resistance. Some one, he told himself, had forgotten to latch it. Well, so much the better. Matters were progressing more than satisfactorily.

Quietly he drew himself up and crawled through the opening. He found that there was a window seat just inside, and, having let himself down quietly, he sat there for a brief period. Then as he drew a small pocket flash light from his clothes and snapped it on, he discovered that the nook was separated from the rest of the room by heavy portières. Apparently these had not been drawn when he had peered into the library earlier in the evening.

Newton drew back the folds of the curtains cautiously and then halted. The library was not vacant. Silhouetted against the light cast by a dimmed reading lamp, a man was kneeling before a safe on the far side of the room. Some one had beaten Newton to his goal.

There came the faint creaking of the door of the strong box, as it was swung slowly outward. The person who had opened it turned his face to one side, so that his features were discernible in the light. Newton gasped. The intruder at the safe was the youth he had seen earlier that night at Harry Darr's establishment, the youth who had lost everything he had, but who had announced his intention of coming back to "beat the game."

"By all that's holy!" exclaimed Newton under his breath, as he took in the situation. "This must be Enright's own son. That secretary chap told me Enright had married, and that there'd been a baby, born while I was in stir. Yes, by Jove! And the kid takes after his father. He's a crook! This is sweet."

Meanwhile the youth was at work on the contents of the safe. His hands trembled slightly, as he drew out one of the inner drawers, took therefrom a packet of currency, and began to stuff it into his pocket. This done, he turned again, as if prepared to close the safe door. It was then that Newton acted.

"Thank you; but you might as well leave it open."

The young man, startled, turned abruptly toward the bay window, as the other, automatic in hand, stepped toward the center of the room.

"So this is how you get your gambling money?"

A minute passed before the youth could regain control of his speech. "Please," he begged, "please, don't arrest me."

"Arrest you——" Newton began, then halted. Heavens above! The kid thought he was a detective. Talk about luck! "Just why shouldn't I arrest you?" he asked severely, coming closer.

"I'll put it back; honest, I will." The lad had turned deathly pale. "I didn't mean to rob the safe, anyhow. I just intended to borrow a stake, run it up at Darr's, and return it. I—I might as well admit it, mister; they'll find it out day after to-morrow, anyway, when the bank examiner comes. I'm short on my books at the bank, and I had to have money. They took me for two thousand. If I could win it back——"

"Win it back!" Newton's tone was edged with mockery. "Do you know any more good jokes?"

"It seemed like the only way out," said the boy. "I guess it's all off with me now."

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps your father won't prosecute when he finds that he has been robbed by his own son."

The lad shuddered. "The devil he won't! He'll feel that I've disgraced him—Carter Enright, president of the bank, pillar of the church. The devil he won't prosecute me! He'll give me the whole works. He's merciless, I tell you—relentless. You don't know my father the way I do."

"Oh, yes, I do," said the older man, smiling bitterly. "I know him quite well indeed."

"Then you ought to realize what I have been up against. He's never given me a chance. I'd have left home long ago, if it hadn't been for my mother. She—well, they don't make 'em any finer than she is. If I had confessed at the start the hole I had got into, she'd have helped me out. But I couldn't—I simply couldn't, mister. It would have broken her heart."

"Your mother——" Newton began. Then he stopped abruptly. Some one was approaching the door of the room. He heard footsteps.

"Psst!" Newton quickly reached forward and drew the tapestry over the safe. "Pick up a magazine and sit down in that chair," he commanded the youth. Dazedly young Enright complied. Newton retreated to the bay-window alcove and slipped behind the portières, just as a woman entered.

"Oh, it's you, Jimmy!" she said in a voice that bore a tinge of anxiety. "And

you're alone? I was sure that I heard some one talking in here."

"I guess it was just your imagination, mother," said the boy. "You're nervous to-night. I didn't feel like going to bed when I came in, so I dropped in here to read for a while."

"You really should get more sleep," she protested gently. "You're out so much these nights. It worries me, and your father is quite angry."

"He's always angry," said young Enright.

"Yes, yes; I know it, son. But we both must try to please him. Good night, Jimmy." Stooping, she kissed him and then slipped from the room.

When the door had closed behind her, Newton stepped again through the portières. There was an odd light in his eyes, a light that had not been there for many years.

"Answer me one question," he demanded huskily. "Your mother—what was her name before she married?"

Puzzled, the boy told him. Then, noting the change that had come over the other man, he asked: "What's the idea of all this, anyhow? You're acting almighty funny for a detective. Do you know, I don't think you're a detective at all. You're a crook, and you came here to-night to rob my father. I've a good mind to call the police and let them take you in charge."

Newton laughed. "Now, that's one for the book, sonny. You're a fine bird to talk about calling the police."

"I beg your pardon," replied the lad after a moment's reflection. "It hardly would be sporting after what you just did for me. I forgot."

"We're all liable to forget at times," conceded Newton. "I don't hold it against you, and I might as well admit that I am a crook. I was going to rob your father, if you can call it robbery. There's a little memorandum in that safe which I've wanted for some time. I came here to-night to get it."

"You weren't after money?" asked the youth bewilderedly.

"Oh, yes; I'd probably have taken the money, too. Never thought of that, however. The memo was what I wanted most."

Neither spoke for a minute or two. Then it was the boy who broke the silence. "Well," he demanded, "why don't you take it? You've got a gun. I couldn't stop you if I wanted to."

"No, kid," replied Five Ace Newton; "I've changed my mind. I don't think I'll steal anything to-night, after all. However, with your kind permission——"

Suddenly he knelt before the safe, threw off the tapestry, and pulled back the unlocked door. After a moment's rummaging he drew forth a typewritten sheet of paper. "Here it is," he stated, after he had glanced through its contents and had studied the signature affixed at the bottom. "Here it is, kid—the record of a conspiracy that once damned a man's soul and plunged him into twenty years of living hell. Talk of money, will you? This scrap of paper would buy back for me almost everything that makes life worth while for a man."

"You mean that my father——" began the youth, endeavoring to comprehend.

"I don't mean anything that you should know, youngster," said Newton. "Forget it. And now, if you will pardon me——"

Abruptly he walked across the room to the fireplace. For a moment he hesitated, then drew a match from his pocket, struck it on the stone mantelpiece, and set fire to the paper. He watched it burn until the flame scorched his fingers before he tossed the blazing remnant onto the ashes and turned back to the boy.

"So much for that," he announced, as if relieved of a great burden. "It's gone for good, now. Didn't like to leave

it lying around. It was a dangerous document, and somebody might have read it; your mother, for instance," he said.

"You're the funniest duck I ever met," vouchsafed the youth. "You sure act darned queer."

"I feel darned queer," replied Five Ace Newton. "You would too, if you'd just set fire to your own heart and thrown it into a grate—just to make one woman happy. And the queerest part of it is that she'll never know. How the deuce can you explain a man's acting like that?"

Young Enright seemed lost in thought. "I think maybe I understand," he said at last and held out his hand impulsively. "I—I've got a girl myself. If anything should happen——"

"Don't let it," broke in Newton. "It's hell on earth. Get back into the straight-and-narrow; quit gambling, and straighten up. There are always two turns to the right; one is to put the past behind you, and the other is to face the future with a clean heart and a gallant purpose."

"How can I?" the boy asked bitterly. "The bank examiner is due inside of twenty-four hours or so. I can't raise a cent. There's only one way out, I tell you—a killing at Darr's. Otherwise——" He shuddered.

"If you got out of the hole would you quit?" asked the older man.

"Just try me and see;" said the boy.

Newton's eyes narrowed reflectively for a brief moment. "In that case," he announced, "I guess you'll have to try Darr's poker game. There doesn't seem to be any other way, does there? And the game didn't look so awfully tough to me, son. In fact, I've a powerful hunch you may have a lucky streak and clean up. Things go that way sometimes. So long, youngster! May see you later." Crossing the room, Newton let himself quietly out the window, dropped to the ground, and was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

STUPENDOUS STAKES.

THE "nice little game" was still in progress when Newton returned to the gambling house.

"Couldn't sleep," he informed Harry Darr casually. "Thought I'd drop in again to hold a few cards. Good for the nerves. I get that way every once in a while."

"Sure; glad to have you among those present," the gambler agreed, raising his voice slightly to make sure that he would be heard by one of his house men. "Table's filled up right now, but there'll be a chair pretty soon. Have a drink?"

Newton refused to drink with thanks and gave his attention to the players. It was not long before one of the men at the table, with a well-feigned yawn, announced that he had to retire and wished to cash in. Newton took the vacated seat and called for chips.

"Hundred-dollar stacks," he was told; "table stakes."

"Give me two stacks," said the man from San Francisco. "I always did like plenty of working capital when I go into the poker business. Poker business! Ha, ha! Good joke—what?" Two house men laughed obligingly. "And what are the house rules?" Newton asked.

"No dogs," said Darr. "Straights and flushes before and after, with a straight flush the high hand, of course. Good luck to you, friend."

"Thanks," responded Newton absently. He picked up the cards that had been dealt him and studied them with care.

Five minutes later young Enright entered the room. Another player had quit. Newton glanced up indifferently, as the youngster joined the game, but made no sign of recognition. It was evident that young Enright was glad of this. It is human nature to fear that which we do not understand, and plain-

ly Jimmy Enright did not understand Five Ace Newton.

There was a noticeable difference in the style of game that the young man now followed. He was playing them "tight against the chest" as the saying goes. Newton studied him closely from across the table. "Maybe I'm a fool," the older man told himself. "Perhaps —oh, well, there are lots of 'em. One more won't make any difference."

"New deck," demanded one of the house men at this juncture, bringing Newton's thoughts back to the game. "This time we'll try red backs, Harry."

The deck was brought. The player who had called for it took the cards, made a pretense of shuffling them, then set them out for the man at his right to cut. Newton watched the move closely. As he had expected, it was a false cut and not any too well done, either. He knew of any number of games where such crude tactics would have resulted in a hurried call for the coroner. However, as he observed, the others were apparently oblivious of what had taken place.

With a complacent smile the dealer picked up the cards and started to deal them. When the first round had been completed, Newton spoke: "Let me cut them for luck," he said, and reached for the deck.

There was nothing that the house man could do but yield gracefully. But Newton, from the corner of his eye, saw Darr, who was standing near by, scowl angrily. Not only had the scheme gone wrong, but, to avoid suspicion, the house had to contribute heavily to the pot. It was won by young Enright.

Three times Newton forestalled similar attempts to "run in" stacked decks; on each occasion his face was inscrutable. His status in the place became that of an idiotic player with a mania for cutting cards to bring him luck.

The fact that he wasn't having any luck was what puzzled Darr and his hired men. When an hour had gone by, and he had won practically nothing, they decided that he wasn't a bit clever, but very annoying. He was, however, playing havoc with their plans to rook Enright. Very well; they'd break Newton first and then attend to the banker's son.

Meanwhile Enright had been winning. Newton estimated that the youth was some four hundred to the good. Darr also observed it. When Newton suggested that the game was too slow and asked that the limit be taken off, Darr nodded.

"It's table stakes, but no limit to what you put on the table," the gambler said. He thought he knew what would happen to the youngster in such a game. One well-planted hand, and it would be over at once.

"Now, perhaps, I'll get some action," declared Newton. "I'll play three hundred behind my stack." He riffled the cards and laid them to his right side; then, the cut made, he started to deal.

All the fine points of that deal were lost on those present. Indeed, there were few men on the Pacific coast who could have detected anything wrong, and they didn't live in Hopeville. Newton had mastered the trick well in those weary days at San Quentin, and he had improved upon it since his release.

Three times the pot was raised before the draw. There was a peculiar glitter in the eyes of the house man next to Newton, as he drew one card. Newton smiled inscrutably and turned his attention to the next player, who announced that he was "playing these." Enright asked for one; Apperson called for two.

"Poison out somewhere," observed Newton, with a chuckle, and helped himself to three cards.

The play started with a healthy contribution from the man who had opened the pot. "Just to drive out the shorts," he stated. But his teammate, also one of Darr's hirelings, was not satisfied. He raised it fifty. Enright and Apper-

son, after slight hesitation, tossed in the required chips. The pot, Newton calculated, now totaled close to nine hundred dollars. Hardly enough.

"Well, that makes me dig, gentlemen," he declared. Producing his wallet he emptied it of all it contained. "Good thing I'm playing three hundred back of my stack. You'll have to pay to see this hand. There you are—one hundred, and two hundred better. Laugh that off!"

Darr, standing near by, coughed warningly. This was getting rather fast even for him and his house players. But there was no alternative now for his hired men to do anything but protect their original bets by meeting the raise. They did so grudgingly.

It was up to young Enright. With a hand that trembled slightly he contributed all he had. "That's the end for me," he said, with an almost defiant glance at Newton. "I've reached the bottom of my pile."

"We all seem to think highly of what we have," was Newton's dry comment. "It's going to be the end for somebody —and no mistake."

There was a brief moment of suspense, and then came the show-down. The man at Newton's left spoke first. "It gives me great pleasure, boys and girls, to announce two pairs of nines. Look at them!"

The words belied the worried expression on his face. Ordinarily four nines are not to be sneezed at, but that was what worried him; they seemed too good to be true.

Enright was slow in announcing his hand. While waiting for him, Apperson and the other house man threw their cards, face down, into the center. Apperson, in particular, was cursing his luck: "First full house in a week, and I get hooked on it!"

"Well, speak up, Enright," said Darr. The youth's delay was getting on his nerves; the house had too much at stake.

But young Enright could not speak up; something seemed to be wrong with his vocal cords. He spread his cards on the table before him and mutely pointed to them.

"Four tens—count 'em," said Newton, as he threw his own hand away. "Well, that's that. The kid wins!"

Harry Darr said nothing until young Enright, having abruptly cashed in, had left the room. Then he turned on Five Ace Newton, with a growl.

"A fine mess of cards you slipped that boy. Better than two thousand dollars he's taken out of the game in little more than an hour's play. There's something wrong somewhere. Jimmy Enright couldn't win that much playing straight poker in ten years."

"You're a poor loser, Darr," returned Newton, covering a yawn with his hand. "I dropped more than five hundred myself to-night, and you don't hear me hollering."

"No, I don't hear you hollering, and that's just what makes me wonder," retorted the gambler. "You and Enright——"

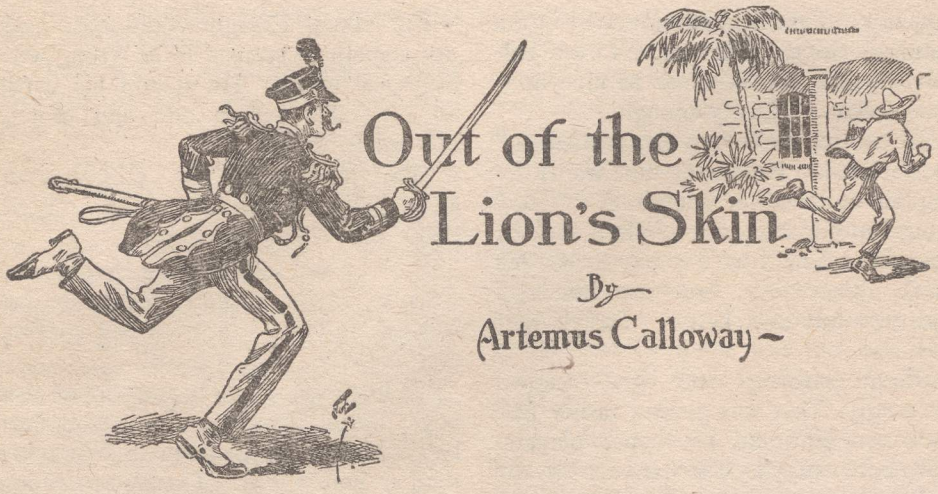
"Now that's good! Me and Enright! Good heavens, I never saw the boy before to-night." Then, rising slowly from his chair, he added: "By the way, will somebody let me have breakfast money? I'm going back to San Francisco on the early train, and I haven't a thing left except my return ticket and a reversed outlook on life."

Mixed Recipes

THE young husband had arrived home to find his wife in tears

He: "Whatever is the matter, darling?"

She: "Oh, dearest, I've worked hard all the afternoon making custards, because you are so fond of them, and they've turned out to be sponge cakes!"



Out of the Lion's Skin

By Artemus Calloway

HIS affairs, Manuel Garcia decided, were in a bad state. Rumor told him that Don Ricardo, sometime revolutionist, planter, and all the time bad man, was soon to return from Guatemala. Manuel had believed that the man he feared had departed from Puerto Arturo and the Republic of Yorando for good and all. Because of this belief he had ventured down from the mountains of the interior to be near the girl whom he wanted to make his wife.

Rosa Hernandez had smiled upon Manuel when he again made his appearance in the little coast town, and soon thereafter she uttered the words he longed to hear.

"*Si;* we will be married."

Then, planning for the future, Manuel had gone to a certain Señor Sanchez, who owned a small banana plantation, and asked for the position as foreman.

"But, no." Señor Sanchez smiled. "I have sold the plantation to Don Ricardo."

Manuel reeled. "But he—he has gone——"

"For a short time only. I have a message for you from him."

"For me?" Beads of perspiration stood on Manuel's brow. "From Don Ricardo?"

"*Si;* he has heard what you did while in the interior."

Manuel's world became more dark. He knew now that he would be slain. Never having amounted to much, a coward always, he had noticed how others feared Don Ricardo. Now he resolved to have some of the glory that belonged to the other man.

Saying nothing to any one, he purchased new raiment, a shiny gun, and traveled to the interior, where he proceeded to don the lion's skin by announcing himself as Don Ricardo. No one there, as Manuel knew, had ever laid eyes on Don Ricardo, but all knew him by reputation. Instantly all began to fawn upon Manuel, and he knew the life that had never before entered even his wildest dreams.

Then there had come trouble. A certain Don Antonio, who also had never seen Don Ricardo, heard that the bad man was in the village. Don Antonio, too, was bad—very bad. He was a brute; a man much feared. And not long before his sweetheart had gone to the coast, and word came back that she now looked with loving eyes upon Don Ricardo. Don Antonio, hearing that his rival was in the village, came to slay

him, and when he cornered Manuel in a room and commenced shooting, Manuel had commenced running around and around, never firing the gun in his hand, and at last the other man had accidentally shot and killed himself. When the villagers came in and found that Don Antonio was dead, killed, as they believed, by the hand of Manuel, known to them as Don Ricardo, the false lion became indeed a hero. Eventually, however, Manuel had wandered back home, and now Don Ricardo had learned what he had done, and Don Ricardo was returning to slay him. Manuel was now thoroughly out of the lion's skin, and he was much afraid.

"I go from here!" he exclaimed.

Señor Sanchez smiled. "I would not. What it is you did, I do not know; but Don Ricardo knows. Listen: I will read what he has written."

Señor Sanchez read:

"AMIGO: I return by the sailing schooner *Marie Dulce*, Saturday next, and will then take over the finca. I hear that Manuel Garcia has returned from the interior. I have also heard what he did while there. Also, have I learned that he is to wed Rosa, the girl who refused to marry me. Tell him I will see him immediately upon my return."

"He—he"—Manuel glared wildly about—"says he will see me?"

"Those," Señor Sanchez told him, "are his words."

"Don Ricardo," said Manuel softly, "has a great disappointment coming to him."

"Why?"

"I shall not be here."

Señor Sanchez arched his eyebrows. "It will do no good to flee. There is more that he has written. Listen!" Again Señor Sanchez read:

"I have requested certain friends to look after him until I return."

Manuel's eyes rolled. "Friends—to look after me! In what way?" he asked, evidently perturbed.

"I gather," Señor Sanchez told him, "that they are to see that you remain here until the *Marie Dulce* comes in."

"I gather," remarked Manuel, "that they are going to do what the gringo employees of the fruit company, that ships bananas to the *Estados Unidos*, would call—fall down on the job."

II.

FROM Señor Sanchez, Manuel hied himself to a cantina, where he downed many glasses of a drink that would have made a mouse spit in a tomcat's face. This had about as much effect on the miserable man as a pint of water would have on a bullfrog.

Presently he wandered along the narrow, dusty street, where homeless dogs fought over meatless bones, and where scantily clad children played until they were almost as dirty as even they desired. At last he passed the rambling barracks, where was housed the local army of thirty or forty barefooted soldiers, and after a little while he came to the beach.

There he stood, the water lapping at his feet, eying the sailing craft at anchor in the harbor, wishing that he might be on one of those boats, ready to sail for parts extremely distant and altogether unknown. A thin wisp of smoke, far to the north, caught and held his attention.

"A gringo fruit boat," he said, "to New Orleans or New York she goes. Would that I might be on her."

And then he felt a touch on the shoulder. He whirled to face a broken-nosed *soldado*. "*El commandante* desires that you wander not along the beach."

"But——" Manuel choked. "But, why not?"

The soldier shook his head and brandished his heavy rifle. "That I know not, but you will at once leave the beach."

Manuel wandered back to the barracks, and there he was stopped by the *commandante*.

"A word with you," that swarthy officer told him.

"*Si,* Señor Coronel."

"I have a letter from my friend, Don Ricardo. He asks that I see that you remain in Puerto Arturo until he arrives Saturday. I have instructed my brave *soldados.* It will be well for you if you make no attempt to leave. The cartridges that are in their guns are large, and——"

"But—but, Señor Coronel——"

"Hush, pig! Do not argue with me. Don Ricardo wishes you kept here. I do that which he wishes."

The *commandante* spoke the truth. Not for the entire republic would he have angered Don Ricardo. Don Ricardo was too dangerous. The sensible thing to do was keep him in a good humor. He had influence; a word from him to the proper person, and Puerto Arturo would have a new *commandante.* Besides, he was a killer. No; it would be much better to keep Manuel there or have him shot if he attempted to escape. Should the latter happen, it would be easy to explain that he had committed a crime and had been killed while resisting arrest.

Manuel knew this and realized that he was in a trap. He bowed. "I thank you, Señor Coronel, for your care——"

The coronel smiled. "That is good. I am anxious that nothing happens to you. You shall be well guarded. You should feel honored."

Manuel stumbled away. After an hour he reached the home of Rosa. Two soldiers were waiting near by to see that he did not make a break for the jungle back of town.

The moment he saw the girl Manuel burst into tears. "Why did you not tell me that Don Ricardo, the killer, desired to marry you?"

Rosa smiled. "It was not necessary."

"Then," declared Manuel, "you desire that I shall be shot—and die."

"But, no; it is my wish that you live and love me." She spoke in a cooing voice.

"Woman," he exclaimed, "you and your desire that I love you are bringing death upon me."

She stiffened. "It is that you do not love me?"

"No," he said; "but——" Then he told her all that had occurred. When he had finished, the girl was frightened, too.

"And he keeps you here? We must flee!"

"We?"

"Yes; I go with you."

"It would be better if I went alone. I can travel faster."

"Then"—there was ice in her tone—"you are a coward. You would desert the woman who would die with you."

"I don't want any one to die with me," he declared. "I want some one to live with me."

"I will be that one. You go now, and I will think. A good plan I will soon have, and then I will tell it to you. We will escape."

III.

HE stumbled away back toward the business section of the little town. Near the Hotel International he stopped for a moment to gaze out across the coconut-dotted plaza. After that he found his way farther along and stood before a cantina fully five minutes before he realized that he had come there for a drink. At last he wandered inside.

"To-day is Wednesday," he heard the bartender say. "Saturday Don Ricardo comes. I hope he arrives in a good humor. The last time he went to Guatemala he came back very angry."

"And," remarked a slender, white-eyed guzzler, "when he is angry, Don Ricardo is indeed bad."

"He is always bad," said another. "He is merely worse when he is angry, and he becomes angry very easy."

He jerked his head toward Manuel

and whispered loudly. "I have heard it talked that he comes to do something to Manuel. *Dios!*—I am glad I am not in his place."

Manuel drank no rum in that place, but he reeled out in a manner that made passers-by think he had consumed a barrel.

"Too bad," one muttered; "Manuel is young to be such a drinker. I am sorry for the girl he weds. She will receive many beatings."

And then, as Manuel glared, the prophet beat a hasty and undignified retreat.

It was Thursday when Manuel again saw Rosa.

"Have you a plan?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No; but I will have one in a few days."

"In a few days," Manuel told her sadly, "I will be in no position to use it."

For a moment she gazed silently at a great bank of clouds hanging over Point Bisipo, five miles down the coast. Presently she asked: "Are you a good shot with a pistol?"

"Don't ask foolish questions," replied Manuel. "If that is part of your crazy plan you may drop it now."

"Then you must practice."

"I," Manuel told her sincerely, "shall practice running."

But he did not practice running. The soldiers watched him too closely for that. At last Saturday came, and with it came a speck of sail far out across the tossing waters in the Caribbean. The *Marie Dulce* was coming in.

"Soon Don Ricardo will be here," Manuel heard. "An' he has something to settle with Manuel. I am glad he has nothing to settle with me." The man's voice made one tremble.

Manuel crept home, closed the door, buried his face in his hands, and proceeded to die at the rate of three hundred times per minute. His death agony was interrupted by a knock, and then a voice said: "The *Marie Dulce* is in. Don Ricardo is here."

IV.

THE back door left its hinges with a crash, and Manuel headed for the jungle back of his house. There he saw a soldier. Quickly he whirled and started for the street. A voice snapped out—the voice of Don Ricardo: "Wait!"

The command was wasted. Manuel was headed down the dusty thoroughfare almost as rapidly as his scrambled thoughts. And behind, running as fast as he could, came Don Ricardo.

Manuel reached the Hotel International and turned the corner. Should Don Ricardo start shooting, the hotel might catch some of the bullets. At the next corner he hesitated and glanced back. Don Ricardo was coming.

The race was on in earnest. Around and around the hotel they went. Don Ricardo was yelling for Manuel to halt, and Manuel was gaining speed with every second. The streets in that vicinity became deserted. People had no desire to be among those present when Don Ricardo started to slay his enemies.

Manuel dashed around a corner and crashed into a running body. He dropped to the ground, just as the other man whirled; and then he was gazing into the dreaded face of Don Ricardo. Dazedly Manuel realized that he had traveled so much faster than the other man that he had caught up with him.

Don Ricardo was speaking. "I have heard what you did in the interior. I forgive you for impersonating me, and I thank you for killing the man who would have killed me. Don Antonio was bad—very bad. I wish you and Rosa much happiness. Once I would have killed the man she loved, but I no longer care for her. As a reward for what you did in the interior, I am going to make you foreman of the finca I purchased from Señor Sanchez. It was for that I re-

quested that you be kept here. But"—he shook his head—"why did you run when I desired to reward you?"

Manuel understood little of what Don Ricardo had said, but he did understand that he was to live; that he was to have Rosa, and the job he desired. He knew he did not kill Don Antonio, but if Don Ricardo wanted to think so, that was all right. Manuel would start no argument.

"I ran," he said faintly, "because I knew you would reward me, and I wanted to make the joy of anticipation last as long as possible."

IF WE COULD REMEMBER!

By Olin Lyman

TO you who, with thought of mother,
Feel your manhood renewed to-day,
Whether your span is at morning,
Or is dwindling to twilight gray,
May your memories bring a glory
And a tenderness for aye!

May the spell of her dreams infold you,
The visions her dear eyes knew
When you were tiny and helpless,
Awaiting the joy and the rue,
While she dreamed a dream of your future
And prayed that her dream come true.

In the fever and stress of faring
Through the storms and the strife of earth,
What man, since the first son wandered,
Has met in full measure of worth
The dreams of the woman who travailed
In shadow to give him birth?

To you of the fond remembrance,
Pure link 'tween the now and the then,
May there steal the spell of the dawning
And the call of the might-have-been!
Ah, if always we could remember,
We would walk the earth as men!

Soup-Bone Salve-

By Harold de Polo-

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

BACK TO THE BUSHES.

UP there on the hill Charley Michaels — "Old Crab" Michaels — was giving the Herons everything he had. This is literal, too. He was calling on every ounce of strength in his pitching arm, on every cute trick in his wily brain, on every bit of courage in his seasoned heart. He had to, for his veteran salary whip felt numb, his head felt as if the ache of it would soon become insupportable, his heart felt as if defeat, although victory at last seemed within his grasp, would come to him eventually—would come to him for the eighth straight time.

Even with the many thousands of lusty-lunged lunatics of the enemy camp exhorting him to blow up, the veteran Grizzly was apparently as cool as an Eskimo in his igloo. It was the final half of the ninth, with the score three to one, in his favor, and one batter only stood between him and triumph. He had got the first two men—got them via the strike-out route—but no one realized, he mused bitterly, what it had cost him. His arm was dead; just dead. He wondered, as he stood there with his arms poised above his head, while he got his grip on the ball, if he could actually deliver it as far as the plate. Age—age! They were right about that. He was thirty—thirty last month. Yes, he was an old——

"Play ball, Michaels!"

Although he had trained himself not to hear the roar of the crowd, particularly when it was against him, the incisive words of the umpire came clearly to his ears. He nodded—nodded and frowned and gave a little shrug of annoyance. They didn't know how tired his arm was, hang 'em. Still, it was up to him to get to work. He had been delaying the game, he guessed, taking more time than he thought. It seemed to him as if he had gone over and over again in his mind what sort of ball to serve the batter. Looking back over the years behind him, he decided that Coombs liked least of all a low one on the outside corner, breaking away from him. Yes; that was it, all right.

Abruptly, with an outside swing of his right heel, he gave the sign to his battery mate, for he had insisted upon doing this to-day, and let the pellet loose, as he finished his rhythmic wind-up. He followed its flight with the intentness he would have used had it been the vital

delivery on which the fate of a World's Series hung; and Charley Michaels, incidentally, had pitched in three of them. It looked, he was certain, as if it had shaved the far corner of the pan, while Coombs stood there with his stick on his shoulder; but, as a sigh of relief started to escape him, the crisp voice of the arbiter cut painfully through his brain:

"Ball one!"

The spectators then were treated to a remarkable occurrence, to a veritable miracle. For the first time in the memory of any of them, they saw Charley Michaels—Michaels, the Old Crab—actually take a decision from an umpire without kicking. They could not know, as they saw that silent snarl turn his lips, that the veteran sharpshooter was telling himself that it was no use. With that dumb-bell up there in blue calling the good ones bad ones, he might as well walk off the field. They were all against him; they thought he was old and out of it, he supposed; they were trying to show him up.

"Play ball, Michaels, please! Quit stalling!"

Stalling, eh? So they doped it out that he was stalling, did they? Oh, well, he'd show them.

With that characteristic snap of his wrist, which many sports writers had labeled a poem in itself, he tried to take the foe by surprise. He had worked for that outside corner again, and once more he watched the apple surge up there and take the desired break perfectly, while the Heron stood rigid, with his bludgeon on his shoulder. He—he wasn't quite sure. Had it gone just inside, or had it curved out too far to his left? It looked, he concluded, as if it had passed exactly over that corner when it had broken down.

"Ball two!"

Once more came that astounding sight of Michaels accepting an adverse decision without a protest, and several of the fans cried raucously out to him:

"Ain't sick, Crab, are you?"

"Hey, Charley, didya hear that right? He said ball!"

The Crab, so called because of his notorious fighting for every point, his constantly harassing the opposition, also let these remarks pass unchallenged. His arm was limp, and his head was spinning with anger and bitterness, but he prided himself that no one knew it. No one knew it, not even John Macy, the Grizzly leader who was acknowledged to be the most astute in the business.

They might have him licked, all right; they might even frame him into defeat; but even if it wasn't any use he'd go down fighting to that eighth straight loss.

Briefly, he went down. To start the tragedy, he walked the present batter on the next two balls; he hit the following Heron on the first pitch; he laid one plumb over, for the third hitter, and endured the further agony of seeing the pill bombarded into the right bleachers for a trip around the circuit.

The old ball game was over. They'd licked him for the eighth straight time. They? Age had whipped him; the "age" that every one was always talking about; the age that he'd been fool enough to suppose, until this year, would never get him; the age that sent them all, no matter how mighty, back to the bushes. Back to the bushes—back to the bushes for old Charley Michaels.

CHAPTER II.

BACK TO FLY FISHING.

THE pilot of the Grizzlies, squat and stocky and square-jawed, was up in his room playing the inevitable game of rummy with Bill Conway, battle-scarred sports writer who had followed the fortunes of the Macy minions ever since the latter had taken over the reins, close to twenty years before. Every evening, on the road, these two old-timers had their battle at cards and fought over

the game of the day and swapped yarns about the pastime they loved so well.

In a desultory manner they had fondled the pasteboards to-night, and, when Conway had paid out the quarter he had lost, he had actually forgotten to tell John how his pockets had been filled with horseshoes, and what he'd do to him the next time. Both of them were too worried about Michaels, too absorbed with trying to diagnose the true ailment of the hurler and discover some remedy for it.

"Hang it, John," the scribe said, for what must have been the tenth time or more, "what right have I had for years to call you the best baseball brain in the world? Think of something. Man, man—think of something!"

"Tried most everything already, Bill, as you know. Not sure, but I think I've got another trick up the old sleeve, maybe. Tell better when I see him and find out his exact mood."

"Where is he, I wonder? Took it blame hard, when he didn't even show up for dinner."

"Sure he's taking it hard. Not being a boob who tries to drown his sorrows with bum hooch, he's probably out walking it off. Oh, he'll drop in before he hits the hay," confidently added the man who had the reputation of being the shrewdest psychologist on the diamond.

He was right, too, as a knock on the door about half an hour later told them.

"Come in, Charley," said Macy.

Michaels showed a drawn face and sagging shoulders, and he broke right in with a despairing spread of his big hands:

"Chief, you'd better sell me or trade me—or ship me right straight to the minors," he said, his voice tired and hopeless. "I'm through; I'm licked; the wing's gone. I'm too old for this game that's made for kids. Just age, chief; it gets every one at last."

"I'll admit you're not exactly a spring chicken any more, Crab," cut in the leader quietly.

Bill Conway cast a hasty glance at his old pal, for he and all the rest of the Grizzlies had been boisterously hounding it into Crab that he was still a kid, with good years ahead of him, and that he'd only been getting the tough breaks of the game.

"I know I'm not, all right," replied Michaels savagely. "I'm thirty—thirty-one my next birthday, and——"

"Yes; and those eleven months and some days certainly slip by in a hurry when a man leaves the twenties, I know," the pilot said seriously, letting loose an infinitesimal sigh, as he somewhat gloomily contemplated the floor. "Yes," he finished; "I've been doing a lot of thinking about you, Charley."

"Don't do it, boss; give it up," advised the pitcher despondently. "You've given me every chance, and I simply can't make good. I dunno. I won those first three games early in the season, and I guess that finished me. They were all I had left, it seems. I'd rather get this taking of the ax over with, so you'd better look around and find out the best thing to do. I—I don't much care where I go now. I've got enough jack soaked away and invested, as you know, but I'm finished with the big time. Maybe I've got a couple of years left for some Class A outfit; surely for some Class B. And I mean it when I say I'd like to get it over with. I—you know how I love the game, chief."

"Yep; and I know it's pretty hard to get out of—to get out of fast company, I mean."

Macy, as he spoke, miraculously made his own rugged face look a trifle wan, and he hunched farther forward, shoulders drooping, in his chair.

"I'm just too old; I'm just too old," the pitcher kept repeating, as his manager remained silent.

"I've been thinking maybe you're right, Charley, although I hope not,"

said Macy. "Just a minute." He paused and rubbed at his jaw. "Say, what's the name of that side-kick of yours from the old-home burg? You know, the bird that comes down to root for you in any tough series we have. Bert—Bert Secor, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Michaels. "But what has he——"

"Just a minute, I said."

The pilot, pulling out a fountain pen, hastily scribbled on a bit of paper and handed it to Charley Michaels.

"Here, send this telegram to your friend Secor. If you'll read it, you'll know that you're leaving in the morning for a vacation and some fishing. The last time Secor was down he told me that you were both nuts about trout, and this telegram asks him to get his tackle ready and be on hand to lug you right off to the brook for——"

"Sure, Bert and I love our fly fishin', but that don't say it's gonna make my arm young, does it?"

"I didn't say it was going to, either," reminded Macy. "You're still under contract, though, and therefore you're still under orders. It's my hunch, I'll finally admit, that you're booked for the minors, although that's not as bad as it sounds. Down there for a season, say, might let you get a rest, for I don't think you'll have to work the whip hard enough to hurt it to get by in slower company. How in the deuce am I going to get any club to try you out, though, looking the way you are? Thirty! Say, you look forty. No, Charley; you still happen to be under orders, and I'm telling you to shoot along that telegram and beat it up there to see if you can't get looking like a decent busher instead of an old has-been. Good luck, and I'll pick the softest spot I can for you in the sticks."

"Now what in the name——" began Bill Conway a few minutes later, when he and John were alone.

"Never mind! I'll give you the answer in a week or ten days, maybe. In the meantime, get out of this room and let a deserving man grab some sleep."

CHAPTER III.

MARCHING UP MAIN STREET.

TWO days later, as the train rounded its bend that led to his home town, Charley Michaels was a pretty tired young man, or a pretty tired old man, as he would have told himself. He had felt, at first, that it would be good to get back to the quiet little town and see some of his boyhood chums, for after the schedule had ended last season he had gone up to Alaska with Ben Hoffman, his battery mate, for a shot at a big horn, missing the annual trip back to Hillside for the only time in ten years; but now, when he knew that his car would pull in at the ramshackle station in less than five minutes, he wished that he hadn't come. As he knew that they followed his career in the big league, every one must have heard of his horrible slump. They would be kind about it, naturally, deeply sympathizing with him and saying a man couldn't go on under the main canvas forever.

Oh, yes; he knew how darn nice they would all try to be to him, particularly good old Bert Secor. Lord, but he wished he hadn't come; wished that he'd told Macy that he demanded to be sent to the minors right off, no matter how old he looked or seemed. It would only make him feel worse, this home-town sympathy stuff which they would want to show.

As the train slowed down to a wheezy halt beside the familiar red station, Charley Michaels gasped with astonishment and wondered what all the noise was about. A band was playing; a band, although not precisely in tune, which was making a brave and a mighty effort to blast out the air of "Here Comes Our Baby Now." And then, as

the hurler came out on the car platform with his grips, even the thunderous trombone was drowned out, as a vocal chorus took up that song, took it up with the changing of a single word and putting into that same single word a gladness and a pride that couldn't be hidden: "Here Comes Our Baby Now!"

Michaels stood there dazedly, with his jaws gaping; at last it percolated through his brain that they meant him—that they meant Old Charley Michaels!

Why—why—— There were a lot of gaudy banners out there, it seemed, and his eyes hadn't gone back on him, anyway. He could still read straight, he was sure: "Who Put Hillside on the Map? Charley Michaels!"

And this was Hillside, all right; and he was Charley Michaels, all right; and —and that other one, too—that big one, way in back, held aloft by four happily grinning fellows who'd played baseball with him on the high school team over at the county seat: "Charley Michaels. Ten Years With the Grizzlies, and Ten More to Go!"

Ten more to—— But he found himself pulled down onto the platform then, and Bert Secor and a few more of the boys were pommeling him and shaking his hands off.

"You tricky old war horse, you," Bert was saying. "What do you mean lookin' so young an' chipper? Gosh, here we are ready to celebrate your tenth year in the big time, ready to hand crutches to what they call a grizzled vet'ran, an' here you come lookin' so like a kid you make us feel like the ancient cripples. Boy, who said that baseball wasn't a soft life? Fountain of Youth was right!"

"We thought we'd have to bail you out of jail instead of welcomin' you home, Charley," another friend declared laughingly. "Wow, but we sure wouldn't have blamed you for murderin' an ump, the way they've been robbin' you of games, the bums. Say, Charley, how do they get away with it?"

The Crab's brain was whirling, whirling worse than it had been in that last session against the Herons. Made *them* feel old, did he? Looked like a kid, they said. Way back here, too, they'd noticed how those blind umpires had—yes, how they had robbed him. Why, why——

"What—what's this all mean, boys?" he found himself asking, as more and more citizens came up to greet him.

"Mean!" exclaimed Bert Secor. "Why, darn your hide, when I got your wire saying you were taking a vacation for a little troutin', we thought, that seein' it was the tenth year you've been with the Grizzlies, we might as well show you how we're fools enough to be right proud of you. We also thought it would be a good hunch to start you off on your second ten-year span with 'em. Yessir; Hillside's lookin' to you to ring up a record of twenty years with the same big-tent outfit. An' you're gonna do it—you're gonna do it, or we'll murder you. But come on; get up to the head of the procession with me."

Charley Michaels, his grips taken charge of by eager youngsters, found himself walking up Main Street, while the band blared out "The Conquering Hero Comes," and Main Street was more dressed up with flags and banners and pennants than it had even been for the most exciting Fourth of July. Oddly enough, too, his shoulders had instinctively gone back, his head was perked jauntily in the air, and there was a springiness in his legs.

CHAPTER IV.

CARRIED IN TRIUMPH.

FOR a man who was supposed to be all in and feeling the heavy hand of approaching old age, Charley Michaels certainly showed remarkable vigor during the next few days. The Chamber of Commerce gave him a banquet; the church had a supper and festival in his honor; the local branch of the Elks

gave a spread and entertainment for him; and, on top of numerous other things, a holiday was declared over at the county seat, and he was asked to pitch for the town team against an aggregation picked from the prize players of the surrounding villages. He was expected to pitch only a few innings, because he was in their midst for a rest and a holiday, but this plan would make it possible for anxious thousands, who hadn't been able to get to the big-league parks, to see the famous Crab in action.

"Gosh," Michaels told Bert, when he agreed to do some hurling, "but when do we get that fishin' in I came up for?"

"Oh, we'll get that to-morrow, sure," his old crony promised him. "I've kind of arranged to let you have a free day then."

Charley Michaels, however, The Old Crab of the world-famous Grizzlies, was not ordained to get in any of his beloved trouting on this trip; no, not even to wade a stream or whip it with a single fly.

When called upon to start the widely advertised game, he had not, oddly enough, felt the misgivings he thought would have visited him; at best, he told himself, it would be nothing better than a fairly mediocre bunch of bushers he would have to face, and against this type of player he believed he could still hold his own, for a few innings, anyway. Really, he had been feeling much younger since he had been back on the home-stamping grounds. He started off, at least, like a whirlwind, working along in his free-and-easy style, without a false motion.

When the first three innings had rolled by, in which he had not yielded a hit and had whiffed five men, he found himself somewhat eagerly agreeing to the pleas of his friends that he go right along and finish out the contest. Frankly, he was slightly puzzled. Why, his soup bone was in the pink, absolutely in the pink. He had captured again that sharp zip to his fast one, that downward dip as it neared the plate, which he hadn't been able to deliver during those last eight ghastly games. It had been with him, he knew, in those first three games that he had won, and then it had suddenly left him. This, at least, is what he now told himself; fervently assured himself, rather. Why, hang it all, the old apple was breaking better than ever.

"Come on, boys, break your spines on this one—break your spines and dislocate your shoulders biffing at the ozone!"

He got to spilling his chatter, beginning the fifth, and it was a widely accepted axiom in the big time that when Old Crab Charley Michaels got to doing this, he was in unbeatable trim. He looked it, too, for he went on mowing down these prize pickings of the surrounding towns with that deadly smoothness which had been so dreaded for years in the majors. Old, was he? So John Macy and Bill Conway and probably all the rest of the boys thought he was old, did they? He was thirty—thirty years young! Needed a rest, huh? Had to get himself in shape so's he could be sold to the minors, eh? Maybe he might come back after a season or more in the bushes, wasn't it? So the chief, the bird they called the shrewdest baby in the business, knew he was all in, did he? Well, he'd show him; he'd tell the cock-eyed world he'd show him! He'd show 'em all.

Charley surely did show the assembled multitude what they had come to see, and that was big league sharpshooting. He went on, canto after canto, sending them back, without giving the vestige of the puniest sort of a safe bingle. They still speak of that game in Hillside; still speak of it throughout the entire county, and, beyond a doubt they always will, for it is not often that a no-hit, no-run battle is witnessed.

When it was over, and Charley Michaels had been carried triumphantly

on the shoulders of his admirers out to Bert's car, he leaned over and whispered into his pal's ear:

"Say, does that seven fourteen still leave every night?"

"Sure," replied Secor.

"Think you could run me to your house and let me pack my bag in time to catch it?"

"Sure," repeated Bert coolly.

"I—I gotta beat it, ol' man I—— Say we'll hafta let that fishin' go till next season—troutin', anyways. Maybe we can get some pickerel and bass this fall when I come up for the huntin'."

"Sure; there'll be a nice tang in the air when you get up 'round the middle of October, after the Worl' Series, which I'll be comin' down to see."

"Sure," replied The Crab, and the word came out easily and confidently, as if it were the only natural thing to say.

CHAPTER V.

TAKE YOUR MEDICINE.

IT was a sizzling night in the hottest burg on the circuit, two days later, when Charley Michaels blew onto the field where the Grizzlies were having a tough tussle with the troublesome Cougars, always doubly dangerous on their own grounds during any hot spell. The Crab was still fussing to get his belt through the loops of his breeches, as he trotted across the outskirts toward the bench, and the scoreboard over center told him that it was still a two-two tie in the fourth inning. His acute eye, however, informed him that young Woodman, the rookie Grizzly pitcher, was decidedly feeling the temperature.

"Hey, Charley, aren't you supposed to be back in Hillside, followin' the purlin' brooks?" demanded John Macy sternly.

"Not by a jugful I'm not," replied Michaels blithely. "Say, what were you tryin' to do, chief, kid me? Honest, I never felt better in my life; I never had no grander zip to my fast one; I never was so sure before of hurlin' winnin' ball!"

"Yeah?" snapped the pilot, acting as if he had entirely forgotten The Crab's own despair of a short week or so back. "Well, Charley, that's just the approachin' weak-mindedness of old age, see? Why, man, didn't I send you away to recoup, so's you'd at least look good enough for the minors? And you broke orders by comin' back; get me?"

"I don't care if I did," said Michael hotly. "I'm as good as I ever was, I tell you, an' you had no right to——"

"Can it a minute!"

The Grizzly leader barked out his words, his head jutting forward, as he scrutinized his young recruit on the hill. Although he had got his first man, the boy had handed out two straight balls, and Macy's inherent baseball sense warned him that the lad would either walk the batter or else yield a hit. Grimly he waited and wondered if the situation would arise for which he now fervently hoped.

Another ball, and John Macy's shrewd eye saw that Woodman was going through a mighty struggle to regain his control. Regain it, too, he did; but, as the apple whizzed up to the pan, waist high and headed for the center, the Cougar lashed out with his bludgeon and stung a vicious single through short.

"Lemme in there—lemme in there, chief. He's wabblin'!"

Almost hungrily Charley Michaels made his plea, but the Grizzly mentor waved him aside:

"Can it, I said!"

The immature slab artist, knowing that he was sinking, glanced questioningly at his manager, but Macy nodded sharply that he was to go on. The youngster, obeying orders, again did his best to sneak a strike over by cutting the corners, yet once more he delivered two balls in succession. Then, being badly in a hole, he forced himself to

put one over, or halfway over, to be exact. For, just as it reached the core of the pan, the man with the mace whipped out with his weapon and sent one down the left-field foul line. Only good fielding kept the Cougar, already on, from reaching home; as it was, when the excitement was over, second and third were populated.

Then John Macy acted. Holding up his hand, he stopped the game, while he gestured Woodman to the showers, and then he turned on The Crab and spoke with a bite:

"So you think you're young again, do you, you fossilized old has-been? Well, Charley, I'm gonna prove to you, once and for all, that I was right when I said you were through. This game is gone, anyway—at least, I'm willing to count it gone—so go on out there and take your medicine. And listen: you stay out there for the rest of the innings, no matter how bad they're lacin' you. No beggin' off this time, ol'-timer."

"Is that so—is that so?" asked The Crab, grabbing his mitt and literally leaping out to the mound.

Old Charley Michaels, right from the start, showed that he was back in verbal trim, anyway. Glowering fiercely, as he always did when in the heat of battle, he started his chatter:

"Whaddaya mean, you guys, takin' leads offa the bags. Git back an' sit down an' don't waste energy, you poor boobs. Sit on them cushions an' wait easy an' serene, while I fan these two poor cripples that's comin' up. Cougars, hey? Ha, ha!—alley cats, alley cats, an' sick ones at that! Watch the zip on this one, boys!"

Obviously Mr. Michaels was in the pink again, more ways than conversationally. He got those first two men, statistics have it, on exactly seven pitched balls, and he got them on the strike-outs with which he had threatened them. After that, the records go on to say, he hurled some of the nicest ball he had ever exhibited in his lengthy career. He yielded precisely one hit, and the breaks came back to him in the form of having his own mates rise up in the eighth and knock the cover off the pill. The spell was over; the jinx of eight consecutive lost games was broken, and it is significant that when he whiffed the last man in the ninth stanza he was as fresh as the proverbial daisy; so fresh that the Hillside slogan of "Ten Years More to Go" did not seem to be such an impossible thing as it sounded. Stranger events, at least, have happened in this interesting universe.

CHAPTER VI.

UP HIS SLEEVE.

SOME hours later on that evening, John Macy and Bill Conway were up in the pilot's room for the inevitable game of rummy, but they had not begun to play.

"Yessir, John," the scribe was saying, "you sure did dope it out right. Greatest tonic in the world, that sending a man back to the old home burg; especially, too, when he hasn't been there for a year or more, I'll admit."

Macy, idly beginning to shuffle the cards, paused for a moment and looked thoughtful:

"Tell you, Bill: there's always a time in every man's life, particularly in baseball, when he feels that he's slipping. If you can catch him then, at exactly the proper psychological moment, you can frequently put him back on his feet. Yes," he added somewhat gravely, "I've got a hunch a lot of good ball tossers have gone to the sticks before their time because no one had come along to cure their mental ailment."

He riffled the pasteboards expertly, studied their backs, and spoke with a drawl and a smile:

"In Charley's case, you see, I figured that those eight straight losses, in which

all the breaks were against him, had got him to thinking he was getting old; the only way I could cure that, I thought, was to get him back home, where he's always been almighty popular. Still, I couldn't count on exactly how they were going to greet him, so I had to do a little telegraphing. It wasn't very expensive, though. Here's one I just got, telling me the damage:

"DEAR MR. MACY: I carried out your orders the best I could. It wasn't very hard, for all the boys are always glad to see Charley, although we wouldn't have thought of all you suggested. We rang in that how-young-he-looked stuff, and we believe it so much that we expect to come down and see him in the World's Series. The expense was mostly for bunting and an out-of-town band and a few other things you asked for. It came to three hundred and eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents. BERT SECOR."

"So you held that trick you'd put in the deck up your sleeve from me, you old seagull, did you?" Bill Conway smiled, and then he added admiringly: "Oh, well, maybe I haven't been wrong all these years, labeling you the best baseball brain in the world!"

"Sure, I always hold one up my sleeve," said Macy, "and I'll darn soon have you saying I'm the best rummy player in the world. Come on, Bill, get those quarters ready to pay me with."

Brown's Mistake

"WHAT'S the matter?" inquired Brown's friend. "You're looking pretty blue."

"Yes," replied Brown; "I was coming along High Street to-night when, without a moment's warning, something smashed into my back and knocked me down.

"When I gathered myself together I found that a boy and a bicycle were mixed up on the pavement. I just took hold of the youngster and gave him a clout. The bicycle I finished off so that it will never run again."

"Well, that ought to have relieved your feelings."

"In the ordinary course it might have done so," said Brown; "but I found that it was my boy and my bicycle!"

They Understood

THE little man who was the meek escort of the big woman in her ramble through the shopping establishment had fainted.

"Is he subject to this sort of thing?" asked a floorwalker, as he applied a piece of ice to the unfortunate man's head and motioned the crowd to stand back.

"Not exactly," replied the woman. "He's a little nervous sometimes. I tried to buy it without letting him see me, but he heard me give the order."

"Buy what?" asked the floorwalker somewhat suspiciously.

"A rolling-pin," said the woman.

Elizabeth Didn't Mind

"HERE," remarked the guide, who was showing a party over an old historic mansion, "we have the room in which Queen Elizabeth stayed, and that is the identical bed she slept in!"

"Pardon me," said a voice; "I fancy there's a mistake here. That bed is Jacobean, and a reproduction at that."

"But," protested the guide, "you'll allow me to contradict you, sir. I have been here for some time now, and I know what I'm talking about. Besides, the queen didn't mind what make of bed it was, either."

No Witnesses Needed

THE magistrate was dealing with a case in which two women were concerned.

"What is your complaint against the defendant?" he inquired of the plaintiff.

"Please, your worship," was the reply, "she called me a fool, and I have witnesses to prove it."

The Freedom of the C's

By C. S. Montanye

ON the bell-hops' bench at the Hotel Ritzbilt sat Oscar Doolittle, often considered the world's greatest monument to imbecility, and stared thoughtfully at Hazel, the blond telephone operator of the hostelry. He looked at the Cleopatra of the crossed wires, absently listened to the wrong numbers she cheerfully dealt out, and pensively pondered the problem of the two exiles from the land of light wines who resided on the ninth story of the Ritzbilt.

The first of the pair was one registered as Pietro Ganelli, and the other was Hopkins, his valet. From the first minute Ganelli had become a guest of the exclusive hotel, Doolittle had regarded him suspiciously. Ganelli had a couple of eyes as sharp as razors, a dangerously pointed mustache, and a fiery temper which he had wrecked more than once upon the mild and subservient valet. He appeared to have plenty of money, took his meals often in his suite, and dressed like a glass of fashion.

There was no good or bad reason why Doolittle should have doubted Ganelli or looked upon him with disfavor. The man tipped liberally and once had pinched his cheek affectionately, but yet the suspicion remained. There was something suave and sinister, something oily and crafty about the man, and Doolittle often brooded upon these characteristics in his spare moments.

He had spoken to Eddie Elton, one of his comrades in uniform, but Eddie had laughed him raucously off. As a matter of fact, Elton had told him that some day he ought to become a great wit, having the advantage of being a half-wit at the present moment. And Elton had scornfully refused to dwell upon the subject of Pietro Ganelli.

Doolittle shuffled his feet moodily. It was the hour when the cave dwellers at the Ritzbilt rushed into the dining room to put on their nose bags. Consequently the lobby was deserted save for Nick McBride, the handsome night clerk, and a well-dressed young man who had red hair and two of the finest teeth any one had ever seen. This person Doolittle, brightening up, recognized as being no less than Smith Jones, one of the star reporters on the *Evening Scream*.

The news sleuth had struck up an acquaintance with Doolittle, and once he had slipped him a couple of dollars because Doolittle had unconsciously betrayed the fact that a famous French

count had slipped into the Ritzbilt and locked himself in. Since that moment Doolittle's hunt for royalty had been untiring. He had unearthed a Russian grand duke with a name that only his mother could pronounce, but Smith Jones had shrugged it aside. It seemed that the nobles of Russia were as common along Broadway as the beggars who sell lead pencils.

The reporter on the *Evening Scream* wandered across the lobby. He gave the bell hop the sunshine of a smile which moonshine never changed.

"Hello, kid. Tough life you're leading. No wonder you wear your trousers out. How's tricks?"

Doolittle grinned. "I haven't learned to play bridge yet, Mr. Jones. The only bridge I know about is in my mouth, and the one they put over the East River. What do you mean—tricks?"

The reporter fumbled for a cigarette. "I was just mentioning your daily toil. News in this one-horse town is scarce. Outside of murders, robberies, and stick-ups, there's not a thing doing. Remember that two-buck slip I gave you a month ago? Keep your eyes and ears open.

"If you run across anything that's good for a human-interest story, click me on the chicory, and I won't forget you, financially speaking. You've got the card I gave you?"

"I wear it next to my heart," Doolittle replied. "You can never tell, Mr. Jones," he went on. "Right now I got some one in mind I might tell you about. I'm just waiting to get the low-down on him."

The reporter nodded. "Fine. Now," he added, "I think I'll step over and pass the time of evening with 'Revenge,' the gilt-roofed cutie of the Bell system."

He looked at Hazel, and Doolittle opened his mouth.

"Why do you call her Revenge?"

Jones smiled. "Because she's so sweet. Don't forget that card. Ring me when you get a lead, and I'll do the rest."

II.

FOR a week or seven days Doolittle pursued the even current of his ways. He smashed valises with cheerful abandon. His record for ruining steamer trunks was one point better than Eddie Elton's, but there was not much stirring in the line of gratuities. In fact, Doolittle decided that the guests of the Ritzbilt were either afflicted with paralyzed fingers or had chapped hands. The majority of them were so tight they wouldn't tip their own hats.

On Tuesday of the new week his lingering suspicions concerning Pietro Ganelli began to know a fulfillment. It was some few minutes after five o'clock. Doolittle, prowling down the corridor on the ninth floor, after throwing two satchels and a steamer shawl into somebody's room, was struck by a loud, excited voice that issued through a half-opened door just beyond him.

With quickening pulses he stopped, looked, and listened in. The room was the main chamber of Pietro Ganelli's suite, and the perfect English, tinctured with a foreign flavor, was delivered in Ganelli's excitable tones. Inching forward, Doolittle saw that the subject of the address was no other than the meek Hopkins, a bullet-headed young gentleman who had ears larger than was absolutely necessary, a chin which a detective with a search warrant couldn't discover, and a pair of Airedale-terrier eyes.

"To-night is the night!" Ganelli said in a voice of thunder, shaking a finger at the gaping valet. "To-night we shall see. I have endured long enough. You understand?"

Doolittle saw the valet nod weakly.

"Y-yes, sir," Hopkins stammered.

Ganelli wagged the finger at him again. "To-night, when the clock strikes

the midnight hour, my trusty dagger shall do its work. I am a man of no false promises. Back in sunny Italy I have fought the duello. Before breakfast I have killed one—two—three—four—five men. You understand?"

"Y-yes, sir," Hopkins repeated feebly.

"And so," Ganelli continued, "tonight I kill you! You know why——"

Petrified, frozen in his tracks, it was only with an effort that Doolittle was able to stumble toward the elevator.

"In sunny Italy," he told himself, "he killed five men before breakfast. And he hasn't had his dinner yet. I knew I was on the right track. You can't fool me."

When he alighted in the lobby, Doolittle dashed by the somnolent figure of Eddie Elton on the bench and shaped a course straight to the telephone switchboard. There, Hazel laid aside the hot-water bag she was embroidering and gave him a dreamy smile.

"Why, Oscar, you're as pale as a quart of milk! What's the trouble?"

Doolittle dragged out the card of Smith Jones, tore the number from it, and hurled it on the switchboard.

"Get me that set of figures and make it fast," he requested. "There's a genuine murder on the books for twelve o'clock midnight, and there's money in it for me if I handle it right!"

III.

AT a quarter to twelve o'clock that night the red-thatched representative of the *Evening Scream* presented himself at the Hotel Ritzbilt. Smith Jones was not alone. He had for company two plain-clothes detectives, a stenographer capable of taking down a signed confession, a staff camera man, and a flash-light expert, both from the newspaper.

Doolittle, waiting at an appointed place back of the elevators, stepped out of the lair at Jones' approach.

"The party I spoke to you about just went up to his rooms. He had his victim with him. This way, Mr. Jones."

The reporter and his assistants stepped into one of the elevators.

"I hope," Jones said significantly, "you've got the dope right, kid. If this is a phony I'm liable to be very vexed. In fact, I might even go so far to lose my temper and give you a spanking, second only to the one you received the day you were found in a jam at the jam-closet home."

"We didn't eat jam," Doolittle said. "We had jelly."

"It looks like banana oil to me," one of the detectives stated under his breath. "If the bim's life was threatened why didn't he squawk?"

"Mebbe," his partner said, "he's deaf and dumb."

On the ninth story Doolittle alighted first and led the way through a series of corridors long enough to make a tourist out of any guest. On tiptoes the entire company crept up to the door of Pietro Ganelli's suite. There was a light in the transom, but silence brooded within, broken only by a scraping, curious sound.

"He's sharpening his knife!" Doolittle exclaimed. "Can't you hear that, Mr. Jones?"

The reporter frowned. "Funny noise. Got your gats with you, boys?"

The two detectives nodded and more time elapsed. Presently, from somewhere outside, church bells heralded the midnight hour, and, in a room across the hall, a clock struck twelve.

Simultaneously Ganelli's voice boomed out: "Hopkins, come here! It must be sharp enough now!"

With a shiver of terror Doolittle thrust out his chest. "Forward, men!" he ordered. Then, handing to Jones the pass-key which he had taken from the desk, Doolittle stepped aside.

The reporter unlocked the door and led the way in. The detectives followed

with drawn guns. Doolittle staggered in last, to pull up short, blinking.

"Well, what is the meaning of this intrusion?"

Doolittle blinked harder. Clad in flamboyant silk pajamas, the flashing-eyed Ganelli sat in an easy-chair, a towel was over his shoulders, and one side of his face was covered with creamy lather. Hopkins, the valet, entering the room with a razor and a pitcher of hot water, gaped at the intruders from the doorway.

"Hot Fido!" Smith Jones exclaimed. "If it isn't Pete Ganelli, the famous tenor of the Napoli Opera Company! Hello, Pete. How's tricks?"

Doolittle felt something sinking within him that weighed the same amount as a ton of lead.

"I knew it was a phony," the first detective said, pocketing his gun.

"Looked that way all the time," the other averred, hiding his own cannon.

Doolittle tottered forward. "Wait a minute, Mr. Jones," he said witlessly. "This bozo might be an opera singer, and he might be a friend of yours, but that don't keep him from having framed it up to croak that poor dumb-bell over there with the hot water and the razor. I heard him with my own ears."

Ganelli's dark scowl turned to a smile. "You know," he explained, "this afternoon I was rehearsing some of my dialogue, using my valet for that purpose. This bell boy must have overheard me. No matter. I have decided that perhaps it is foolish for me to shun publicity when it might bring patrons to the opera house. I have been constricted, but now it will be changed. I will have more freedom——"

"The freedom of the C's," Smith Jones interrupted with a chuckle. "Say, there's a story in this after all. 'Shy tenor suspected of being desperate assassin.' By golly, I'll play it up for all it's worth. Oscar, here's ten iron men. Buy yourself a motor car and a country estate. You handed me a winner in spite of yourself."

Dazed, Doolittle pocketed the crisp bank note and felt Ganelli's hand on his shoulder.

"I shall not prove ungrateful. This publicity is worth money to me. Hopkins, get me my check book. This young man has saved your life! How much is that worth? Shall we say a hundred dollars?"

Twenty minutes later Doolittle, a ten-dollar bill in one pocket and a check for ten times the same amount in the other, met Hazel going off duty.

"Top of the morning, 'Bright Eyes,'" he chirped. "If you'll let me see you home I'll stake you to the price of a subway ride. Believe me, this is my big night, and I want to celebrate!"

A Superfluous Present

WIFE: "Oh, George, mother has sent us her photograph. Where do you think we'd better put it?"

Hubby: "I don't know that it matters, dear, provided you remember."

A Cruel Cure

BARBARA: "They're saying now that an onion a day keeps the doctor away."

Bella: "Yes; but what's the good of that if it keeps all the other men away, too?"

The Grateful Guest

A SCOTSMAN on a visit to a friend in London overstayed his welcome. His host thought a hint might have the desired result.

"Don't you think," he said, "that your wife and family will want you to be with them?"

"Man," replied the Aberdonian. "I believe you're richt. It's rale thochtfu' o' you. I'll just send for them."

White Fury

By J. Wendel Davis

OLD John McTavish, factor of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fontenac, opened the door when he heard the yapping of malemutes on the night air. McTavish was amazed to see his assistant, Brent Kars, who had gone to the Upper Slave district to investigate a fur robbery. The factor had recommended Kars as his successor, but the commissioner, Jeffrey Karmack, was sending his own son as the new factor. A mystery hung about the parentage of Kars.

Kars had arrived at the post with the dead body of Harvey McVeigh, the subfactor of Post Mackenzie, who had been murdered. Sergeant McBride of the Northwest Mounted at once announced his intention to go after the killer. In the dead man's clothes McBride found a notebook in which McVeigh said he had been warned to look out for his assistant, Hans Larsen, a big Swede, and for a white man called by the Indians "The White Wolf." The priest of the settlement, Père Junòt, told McBride that The White Wolf might be Homer Karmac, brother of the present commissioner.

No sooner had McBride left than Kars, with a dozen men, took the trail for Nicol MacCoy's post in the hills, from which a wounded Creel Indian arrived, bringing news of trouble there.

At the end of three hours McBride surprised three men in a lonely cabin. In the fight which followed one man was killed, but the sergeant had the shackles on the man whom he suspected of the murder of McVeigh. He left the third man to keep watch with his dead companion. Presently McBride saw this third man leave the cabin, harness a dog team, and streak into the wind. Now McBride, with his prisoner, left his hiding place to follow this fresh trail.

CHAPTER VI.

HANS LARSEN.

THE trail of the fleeing man circled out of the west after a bit and went north on the frozen shell of the Thousand Mile River, hard swept by the arctic gales.

For hours it followed the ice bed of the Mackenzie, like the twisting trail of a great serpent under the glitter of the stars. Then it suddenly left the river and cut across the broken, snow-covered tundra toward the rough country of McVeigh's old post, lying at the ragged edge of the world, under the grim barriers of the Canadian Rockies.

"Ah, just as I thought," said the sergeant. "My friend Hans Larsen is mixed up in the devilment."

Eventually reaching the post, now commanded by the Swede, McBride again secured his prisoner to the bole of a tree some distance back of the post in the timber. Next he tied his dogs near by, likewise to a tree, and then made a silent approach through the timber fringe on his webs and came up to the building from the rear. The fleeing man's team was lying down, panting in the snow at the front of the building.

"Straight as a homing pigeon to its

cote," the sergeant thought. "Now we'll see how Friend Larsen reacts to this coyote, and maybe I'll hear something worth while."

He would have preferred to walk boldly into the place, as spying was a method he seldom employed; but there were reasons why it was best for the present to keep himself under cover. In the murky dawning of the short arctic day he found it comparatively easy to attain his object by raising his sharp eyes to the level of the dirty glass in a side window of the log building. By removing the fur hood of his coat he picked up the tail end of an illuminating bit of talk.

Larsen, growling savagely, was standing over the late arrival who cringed before him. The Swede's yellow, catlike eyes, filled with rage, were shifting here and there with uneasy glances.

"What'd you com' here for, you dumb fool," he was saying, "wid de arctic cop maybe trailin' you and headed straight to de post? Get out o' here an' hole up somewhere in de hills till I make sure. I take no chances like dem, wid an overhead o' furs pilin' up here. Dat crazy fool maybe let slip de whole t'ing, if what you say is de truth. Go hit de hill trail an' find old Wau-bo-zoo. Tell him what you tell me about De White Wolf. Maybe he head off de Mountie before it's too late. Better had de 'Cub' knife dat crazy fool like I tell him, dan let dis happen. Go—get out of here now."

The half-frozen man growled out an oath, and the big Swede grabbed him by the throat and yanked him across the floor, throwing him out of the door into his own dogs; the brutes jumped him in a snarling fury and tore at his furs.

In the din that followed the sergeant slipped away from the window and trailed back through the timber toward the point where he had left his prisoner and dogs. He had heard enough to damn Hans Larsen, and he did not wish to put the Swede on his guard by risking discovery at this time. There were some mysteries to be solved before putting the irons on him.

"Ah, my slippery fox," he said, as he webbed his way back on the snow floor of the forest, "I've got you dead to rights this time. Your lips spilled a mouthful of mystery. White Wolf—Wau-bo-zoo—Cub—these names sound like the people of Père Junòt's Arabian Nights fairy tale of thirty years ago."

When he reached the place where he had left his outfit, Sergeant McBride stopped suddenly, shocked to the core—both prisoner and dogs were gone.

A clearly outlined trail in the snow, freshly broken, marked a course due west, explaining the disappearance. The prisoner had evidently snapped, with his tremendous brute strength, the iron links of his bonds and, stealing the team, had left his captor trail-stranded in the deep-snow country without equipment, food, or means of travel.

"This is a nice mess I'm in!" exclaimed McBride, with a sour grimace.

There was nothing to do now but to reveal his presence to Larsen, commandeer a company team and equipment, and trail out after his man, looming large now as a vital link in the chain of mystery.

Looking circumstances boldly in the eye, he tramped back to the trading post and, unannounced, entered the warm interior, reeking with the odor of pelts.

"Hello, Larsen," he said, grinning, as the Swede jumped and turned about like a trapped fox, his yellow, catlike eyes gleaming and streaked with fear. "I'm in a pickle, my friend," he continued, assuming no notice of the Swede's confusion. "Lost a prisoner down country—swiped my dogs and pack. That's one on the service, eh? He headed this way; I thought possibly you might have seen something of him. He was a big brute, and you couldn't fail to notice him."

Under this disarming manner, pur-

posely employed, a light of relief crept into the yellow eyes, and there was a lessening of physical tension for the moment.

"I seen no big brute—— Wait—maybe yes." The fear-shot eyes suddenly underwent a subtle transformation. In the place of fear was shifty-eyed cunning. The sergeant was instantly on guard, with an eye to an ugly breed, feigning sleep in a corner back of the stove.

"By Yiminy, dat might be your man, sergeant. He trail in here little bit ago, and I keek him out. He have dog team, an' he go—he go——" The Swede's brain did not work fast enough to form a quick lie.

The sergeant nonchalantly filled in the pause. "Into the hills," he said, watching the effect.

"No—no; he go direct north on Mackenzie Bay trail. Come, I show you."

The sergeant did not move; with smiling eyes McBride studied the face of the Swede, and he noted the chagrin that swept Larsen's face at his failure to coax an unwelcome visitor out of the post. Suddenly he threw another shot into the air. "So you did recognize this beast, after all—the big fish eater who strangled McVeigh to death here six weeks ago."

This was said with such startling suddenness and with such intensity of appraisal that it brought the lids down over the Swede's eyes, like a shielding curtain, hiding the swift leap of fear back into them and revealing a guilty knowledge of that event.

McBride followed this up with another shot as startlingly sudden. "But McVeigh was not killed with the seal line; he was shot to death—possibly by The White Wolf, or The White Wolf's Cub, or by some one else."

This jolted the lids up again, and something beside fear now showed in the man's eyes—blood lust. There was no mistaking the ugly shadow of it. Larsen, the Swede, had shot McVeigh.

The sergeant smiled wisely and shifted his pistol to the front of his belt. "Well, no matter," he said. "I've got to get my man, and I've no more time to lose. From the looks of things the snow is likely to blot the trail before many hours. Hustle me a team and equipment for fast travel. I'm trailing out in thirty minutes."

Only too eager to get the spying eyes of the law out of his post, Larsen had the sergeant equipped and ready to depart in the time specified. McBride left a parting shot.

"I see by the looks of your place, Larsen, that you're having a good season. I'll tell McTavish when I see him that he may expect a fine showing from the old post under the new management."

Without a word Larsen watched the Mountie trail out—not north, but into the hills. He reserved his cursing until the sergeant was gone, then, breaking into oaths and shedding his sluggish manner like a cloak, he issued orders swiftly and to deadly purpose. The breed awoke suddenly, and in ten minutes the vicious "killer" was slinking out into the trail of the oath-blasted Mountie.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WHITE WOLF'S LAIR.

ELATED with the luck that had played into his hands since he entered the little snow-piled cabin where Joe Dupre had met violent death, Sergeant McBride hit out on the trail of his escaped prisoner, which led away into the hills through an immensity of snow-shrouded shapes, silhouetted like great, gray dunes against the background of an indigo sky.

The wind was drifting out of the northwest, and he knew that a white scourge was brewing there with the certainty of blocking his trail when it came.

He hoped, since his fresh team were running against the wearied police huskies, and his own sinuous body tramped faster than the plodding bulk of the heavy, fleeing man, to overtake him before the storm smothered the trail and rendered the thing hopeless.

He made his own guess as to where the man was headed. Knowledge gained from McVeigh's diary and from the brief report of Corporal Donahue, made it pretty certain that the destination was The White Wolf's lair, hidden somewhere in the icy death traps of these hills. Was the mysterious White Wolf the slayer of his corporal? Donahue had seen the face of his slayer; that was the bit of vivid information in his brief report which McBride had kept to himself. He would know the man when he laid his eyes on him, and he would bring him to account with the swift justice of Canadian law which he had mocked. It was not Larsen—that he knew. Who, then?

Speculation flashed in and out of his mind, as he went deeper and deeper into the tragic hills, through cuts and up steep gorges, following always that freshly broken trail; then thought was swept away in the sudden failing of his luck. The storm broke swiftly in a white fury out of the north. Snow, like a heavy blanket, blotted out vision, and, before many moments had passed, the blizzard was raging, bringing with it a blast of stinging sleet.

It shortly became a blind game of chance to attempt to go farther in the teeth of it. Shortly before he had passed a great, overhanging boulder, and now he fought his way back to this and made camp in the lee of its projecting wall. The dogs he wired up close at hand on the trail, which ran under this natural shelter. Scraping the ground free of snow, he piled this as a windbreak to a fairly comfortable trail camp.

In short order he had a pot of tea boiling over a fire made from dry wood chopped from a dead tree, threw to his dogs a frozen fish apiece and arranged his camp to the best advantage for a much-needed rest during the siege of the storm.

It was while eating dried pemmican and sipping hot tea with tired satisfaction that furry figure stumbled out of the storm into his dogs wolfing their frozen food. The figure fell in a heap, with the huskies piling on it, and before the sergeant finally extricated it from the snarling beasts it was showing the visible wreckage of the sharp, ivory fangs slashing at its covering.

McBride recognized the man as the breed he had seen in Larsen's place and shrewdly guessed at his mission. "Ah, my friend, we meet again," he said. Then, smiling with satisfaction, he relieved the spent man of the knife at his belt and searched him for other weapons which he failed to find.

"I thought my luck had turned against me with the coming of this storm, but out of its teeth it sends me a scout who knows these hills. That's all to the good. This blinding blizzard has lost me a trail I was anxious to follow to the end, and now I've an idea you can break a fresh trail ahead of me to the place I'm looking for. I know the dirty business that skunk, Larsen, sent you on, my man, and you can save yourself from the law only by doing as I say."

"Umph! W'ut y'u mean?" the breed asked. "I don't know dese hills."

"Don't, eh?" McBride dangled a pair of steel shackles before the man's eyes. "Now listen! I had a prisoner get away from me, and he trailed into these hills; you know just where he went. Either you or that man is going back with me, see? Think it over and take your choice."

The breed dropped down before the fire in Indian fashion, sullen and obstinate. McBride reached down and snapped the irons on his wrists. "All right, then it's you."

Without another word he turned again to his interrupted meal, leaving the psychological effect of the thing to the slow operation of the half-breed's brain, and it was not until he had finished and was calmly smoking and looking into the blaze of burning wood with seeming indifference, that he got the response he waited for.

"W'ut y'u want wid me?"

"When this blizzard breaks, I want you to show me where this White Wolf holes up."

Fear leaped like flame into the breed's eyes at mention of the name. "He keel me, sur, if I go dare," he said. "He beeg, lak grizzly. He crush my bones wid hees han's."

"All of which is interesting," McBride answered coldly. "At any rate, we go. When you have led me to the place you are free. Understand? You can back-trail it like a scared rabbit, if you want; it is your only chance, my friend. Think on it while the storm lasts. I want him—not you. When I know his hiding place I unlock these irons—not before."

During the rest of the day and part of the long night the storm raged, and in the black dawn of the morning the sergeant and his new prisoner broke a fresh trail into the hills.

On the rim of a bleak cliff two days later, in the murky twilight, the two men stood looking down into a snow-shrouded valley, cupped like a bowl within granite walls. A frozen stream lay in its center, and on the shore of this, set in a spruce clearing, were two cabins—one small, the other large, built of huge, hewn logs. From the chimney of this larger cabin curled up a spiral of blue smoke, pungent on the air like incense.

"That it? That the White Wolf's lair?" queried the sergeant.

"Dat's heem." The breed shivered in the clutch of a dread like death.

"All right, I'm a man of my word." McBride loosed the manacled wrists. "You are free to hit the back trail! Here!" A fantastic idea had struck him. He deliberately cut a button off his service uniform. "Show that to Larsen, and it will be proof that you did his dirty work without a slip. Savvy? Now go."

Smiling at the double ruse which would serve the purpose of sealing the breed's lips and at the same time give Larsen a feeling of security, McBride watched the man streak back into the timber and vanish. He knew where to find Larsen when he was ready to go after the Swede.

Standing on the edge of the high cliff, he looked down through the arctic twilight into the dimming shadows of the little valley. He clicked his teeth in triumph that here, underneath his eye, was a solution of the mystery of The White Wolf of the hills.

Suddenly he recoiled and dropped to the snow. A dark shadow was moving down there across the vague space between the cabins; beast or human he could not distinguish.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH.

IN the meantime Brent Kars and his relief brigade fought the treacherous ice of the North for days, working ever toward Nicol MacCoy's post up under the ominous shadow of the hills. Beating up frozen rivers and crossing wind-swept tundras, they fought through ice draws in rough country and snowdrifts in buried coulees, shortening the trail by any hazard in order to reach the post as quickly as possible.

The cold tightened its grip upon the thinning forests as they approached nearer to the foothills, and the deep drifts, filling in the draws before the hard beat of the wind, made the going dangerous and slow. Except for the howl of wolves and the yapping of

foxes during the long night, it was a world of empty silences through which they struggled.

There were days when they fought the bright glare of the frosted snow and the diamond glint of ice crystals, threatening snow blindness; and there were days when the shrouding smother of driving blizzards piled over them in a white fury of raging blasts.

Kars, who knew the trail, took the lead and broke the going ahead of the teams, alone with his thoughts and the inward fight that still waged in his soul, despite his resolution; for, try as he might to beat out of his brain the dream vision of Helen McTavish, as he remembered her four years ago, he failed, and an invisible "something" out of the soul of her marched with him on this tragic trail of death and sang with the singing winds a joy song of hope into his listening ears.

Somehow, it was a hope that cast out the old devils of doubt, and Brent Kars felt a strange inward elation.

At the end of a short, arctic day, with the storm raging a little less severely, the foothills, for which their eyes had strained so long, slowly materialized on the distant rim of the white wastes. As they came nearer to these, darkness began to descend swiftly, and, uncertain as to what they might find at the little post which nestled under their shadow, they circled off the frozen river trail and approached it "up the wind," wondering if death and disaster waited them at Nicol MacCoy's place, or if he by a miracle had withstood the siege successfully.

Vain hope! The little trading post was a mass of tumbled, charred logs piled with snow. Undoubtedly it had been rifled and burned by the fiends. No evidence of life was anywhere. Their tragic trek across the snows had been in vain. Mounds of snow here and there were significant of the cold, stark forms that lay beneath them.

The wind howled out of the hills, as Kars and his men made a forlorn camp in the lee of the charred walls of the post, and in sinister silence cooked and ate their supper, as the twilight changed to the Stygian blackness of an arctic, starless night.

Kars left his ten husky Northmen seated about the fire, smoking and grumbling. He had seen something out of the tail of his eye that startled him. Over beyond the clearing about the post, a spark had danced up into the wind and vanished.

Silently, without a reference to what he had seen, he left the group and went cautiously out into the dark. Presently he got a distinct odor of wood smoke on the air, and, as the wolf hunts, he went slowly, softly forward up the wind, sniffing that pungent odor to its source. There was no trail; even if darkness had not destroyed vision, the blizzard had buried everything beneath the concealing drifts. Stygian blackness now obscured sight like a wall. Then again he saw it, a spark that flared in the black void and snapped out on the wind. He had not been mistaken; there was some other camp on the edge of the timber.

Locating the spot by the telltale spark, he went forward more swiftly and all but bumped into a shack. On the lake side of the cabin was a small window covered with an oiled skin in lieu of glass, through which candle light filtered in opaque vagueness, but permitted no glimpse of what lay behind it. Kars had made his approach without being seen.

A mumble of voices now reached him above the wail of the wind. He listened with a swift leap of the heart, as a voice he recognized rose strident within. It was Nicol MacCoy's.

Kars uplifted the old river call of the brigades, a cry no Hudson's Bay man could fail to know even at ends of the world. A moment later he and Nicol MacCoy stood in the candle glow of

the interior, as their hands met and they looked with understanding eyes into each other's faces. Three men besides MacCoy were all that were left of the defenders of the post.

"My soul, Kars," said MacCoy, "you have come in the nick o' time. We are at the end of our resources—no dogs and no food—stranded here and hopeless."

The tragic story came out bit by bit; how they had withstood the siege for days against Ojibwas armed with rifles, outnumbering them ten to one. The majority of MacCoy's crew had been white-livered half-breeds, who had mutinied in the end, threatening to turn on the only three whites among the defenders of the post. The breeds had demanded surrender to save their skins, as they thought, and MacCoy had finally been forced to let them go forth from the doomed place, fluttering a white rag, as they went, in token of submission. They had been shot down like dogs, and their bodies even now lay under the snow out there where they had fallen.

The whites had held the place till night and had then crept out by the rear way in the darkness, fleeing into the hills with what food they could carry in that hurried, frantic flight for life. The wretches had plundered the post of its furs and supplies and had then burned it to the ground.

When all was over, and the fiends had gone, the four white men had crawled back out of the hills. The only shelter left them was this shack, which at some previous day had been built for a trapper, segregated by the smallpox. To the frozen men it had been a gift of Providence.

"Corporal Donahue—God rest his soul!"—finished MacCoy, "brought the news of the attack to us, and we were not caught napping. The man reached us by a miracle, Kars, with a knife wound in his body that would have done for a less hardy man, crawling as he did on his hands and his knees through unbroken snow and ice to get his message to us in time. His body now lies under the charred ruins of the post, but the weird story which he brought with him out of the hills he told me before he died, and, my friend, that story sounds like a fairy tale."

Kars was silent for a moment, but a gleam of interest shot into his eyes. "MacCoy, I have brought you ten good men to assist you to rebuild this post and to help you 'carry on' in the face of this calamity. For myself, I am on a trail of Fate, which I mean to follow to the end! Tell me what Corporal Donahue found up there in the hills."

MacCoy fixed Brent Kars with a look of astonishment. That Kars would follow this "trail of Fate," as he called it, alone, in the light of what MacCoy knew his friend must face in those tragic hills, was unthinkable.

"Not alone, Kars," he insisted. "Man, you would be making a rendezvous with death. Donahue discovered the lair of the white fiend up there, whose voice is law to the red devils who have left a trail of blood throughout this country. The Ojibwas call this fiend The White Wolf. They ought to call him 'Black,' for his soul is as black as hell. He comes out of his lair like the wolf, in pack with his red fiends, and he returns with his fangs dripping red with the kill. He is undoubtedly a madman."

Kars maintained a keen silence now, his eyes boring into the face of MacCoy, his body poised, waiting in tight-lipped tensity for the rest of the story.

"In the ragged heart of the hills," MacCoy continued, "north of this post some fifty miles, is a little, blind valley walled in by granite like a rock-bound bowl. That valley is the hidden lair of this madman, and it is impregnable."

"And yet Donahue found it and must have entered it," Kars said. "Did he give you any idea as to how he got into it?"

"Up one of the five fingers of Chippewa Creek you will find an entrance to it, marked on a crude map which Donahue had made," answered MacCoy, as he took from his pocket a folded bit of dirty paper and handed it to Kars.

Examining this closely, with a burning interest, Kars arrived at a swift decision: "Ought to be easy to get into that valley with this."

"Ah, but no," MacCoy declared. "The entrance is a steep-walled, rocky pass, guarded by Ojibwas quartered there. It would be fatal to try without an armed force and by the time one fought a way through the werewolf himself would have vanished through some secret exit into the hills."

"Donahue made it," persisted Kars.

"And lost his life," returned the other.

"But he made it; that is the point; he made it. And so shall I—alone." Kars folded the map and put it in his own pocket. "With the dark dawn of the morrow, Friend MacCoy, I go. Call it a 'rendezvous with death' if you will; I have reasons dearer than life itself to face The Wolf in his lair."

CHAPTER IX.

FACING THE WOLF.

WITH his pack on his back, having decided against dogs, Brent Kars webbed it across the smooth ice of the lake in the early dawn and marched into the country of The Wolf.

Following the crooked trail of the Little Fox, he reached eventually the confluence of Chippewa Creek with the larger stream; here he turned west into this narrow, twisting ice trail, with its five fingers reaching out of the hills across the rolling tundra.

This was a country of desolation, seldom trod by the foot of man and called by the Indians "Windego Land"—Spirit Land. Into this country Kars followed the winding trail of the creek during the first long day of his journey, alert and watchful as a lynx stalking the food scent on the wind.

He passed two of the creek's little tributaries which, to follow the simile of the hand, would be the thumb and index finger, as outlined on the corporal's map; as the twilight fell and waned, he came to the third, indicated by a cross as the trail to The White Wolf's valley, hidden away in the intricate maze of hills. Here Kars paused with the leisurely deliberation of a man who understands a dangerous game and plays it cautiously. There were spitting snow flurries in the air, and darkness had settled with a maddening gloom. It was impossible for a man to see farther than a few feet ahead of him.

Kars decided to camp until daylight, rather than attempt to follow in the dark a blind trail of which he knew nothing, and with this end in view, he was digging into a bank of snow at the side of the frozen stream, when there came to him "on the wind" the unmistakable sound of steel runners on the ice and the strain of laboring huskies tugging at their collars against the drag of a weighted sledge.

As Kars crouched and waited, presently a shadowy, moving object materialized on the main artery of the creek and turned into this narrow finger pointing toward the hills. It moved past him and was swallowed up almost at once in the vague shadows beyond.

Swift to see the possibilities here, Kars reversed his plans and was quickly following the freshly broken trail on the heels of the unknown. If the unknown trailer was making for the hidden valley, he was evidently an acceptable visitor and would undoubtedly possess the key to pass through the Ojibwas guarding the entrance of the valley. Here was at least an opportunity for Kars to get by the Indians and into the valley under cover of this strange trailer's movements.

At any rate it was worth the try, and

with taut nerves he followed noiselessly the moving shadow ahead of him. Time and again the man urged on his laboring dogs, and the accent was unmistakably that of a white man. It was a voice vaguely familiar, yet Kars was unable to place it. Muffled by furs, the strident words, followed by the sharp crack of the caribou whip about the ears of the struggling team, fighting the drifts of the previous night's blizzard, baffled him.

Just how far they went on that narrow, drifted trail, Kars did not know; but eventually a pungent smoke smell came to his nostrils, and he guessed they were nearing the goal. Yapping dogs, challenging the approach, quickly verified his assumption.

Presently Kars heard a call like the wild cry of a beast, and the trailer ahead answered it in kind. Words passed which Kars did not get, and then a silence fell in which he waited a breathless moment, crouched low in the snow, then pushed on in the wake of the sledge which had mushed on into the black void of the night.

The ruse had worked more easily than he had anticipated, and presently he realized that he was entering a deep cut in the hills. Here, impenetrable, was Stygian blackness, and almost at once he began to experience a difficulty in keeping to the trail of the other. The bed of the creek was split up with boulders rearing unexpectedly like ragged teeth in the jaws of a trap, and, unfamiliar with the going, he quickly lost all sound of the guiding team and realized the futility of attempting to go farther in this maze of rocks. Having accomplished his main purpose, which was to get past the Indian guard, he dug into a snow bank under what appeared to be a perpendicular wall of the gorge and rolled up in his furs for the night.

Kars slept soundly after his wearing trek all day on snowshoes, but he was awake with the nebulous dawn. In the first dim light he ate a cold breakfast, rolled his pack, and stood up to look about him. At first he merely swept the hazy depths of the granite passage with his eyes, and then he began to study carefully the strange country in which he had awakened. The trail he had missed was over there under the opposite wall, easy enough to trail if one were familiar with it. The creek bed evidently represented white water in soft weather, but now it was a ragged, broken pathway of ice-covered, jagged stones, winding through a narrow cañon-like entrance to a cupped-in valley, surrounded by granite walls on every side.

Kars smiled grimly, as he worked his way slowly toward the valley, watchful not to lose his advantage by revealing himself to possible spying eyes from either end of the rugged passage. He had but just won beyond the passage when he beheld the trailer of the night before returning at a fast clip out of the heart of the valley.

As Kars hid behind a boulder, the outfit passed within ten feet of him. The sledge was now laden with fur packs; possibly some of the plunder of MacCoy's post, and the driver was no less a person than the suspected Hans Larsen. The Swede was evidently in an evil temper. The cracking of his long lash about the ears of his dogs had first warned Kars of his approach. No doubt some kind of stormy scene with The White Wolf had put him in an evil temper, and he was leaving the valley with hate in his soul.

Now Kars' action was swift. He advanced into the valley, following the winding trail of the little creek, his mind dwelling on his significant discovery. The Swede was a "go-between," as Kars had thought, a receiver of stolen pelts, and he had brought into the valley a sledge loaded with the illicit spirits. The thieves used the liquor to pay the half-breed trappers for the stolen pelts. Swiftly Kars followed the creek trail, with an eye now and again behind him

and a careful investigation of each winding curve which restricted the view. It was thus that he came suddenly upon a clearing, in the center of which was a large cabin, with a smaller one on the rim. His blood ran a trifle faster, as he beheld these evidences of human habitation. Beyond a doubt, here was the heart of the mystery of the hills, the den of The White Wolf, who, feeling the security of his guarded lair, was at home and unsuspicious.

Like a shadow Kars passed around the edge of the timber, circling the clearing, until he brought up behind the smaller cabin on the fringe of the timber. Kars at first supposed this was an empty storehouse. But suddenly there was a whine within it, and a sniffing of nostrils at the loose chinks between the logs announced the presence of dogs confined there. Kars thought it strange that they did not snarl at the scent of a stranger, as huskies do, but later he was to discover why.

Now his interest was centered on the larger cabin with the smoke curling from its chimney. Step by step he approached it warily, gaining its rear, where a lean-to kitchen snuggled close to the heavy wall. Moving softly around this he gained a dirty, glassed window set in the rough, hewn logs.

Immobile as an Indian, Kars paused here, and slowly he lifted his eyes to the level of the glass and peered within. What he saw in the murky, yellow light of a candle made a shiver creep up his spine, and his muscles began to tighten over his frame.

A beastly, hairy bulk slouched at a table in the center of the cabin, upon which were the remnants of coarse food left from a slovenly meal. The place was thick with filth and cluttered with gruesome trophies hanging from the walls. There were grinning skulls, bones, and parts of once living things; but the human beast at the table drew and held Kars' eyes to the exclusion of all else. This giant caricature of a human being was mumbling to himself in a seething rage and fumbling with a bottle of raw spirits, from which it gulped great drafts of the fiery vitriol.

For a full moment Kars studied the outlaw's purple face, the swelling cords at the bloated neck, and the wild insanity of the flaming, wolflike eyes. Each brutal and repulsive feature burned its image on his brain, and the words of little Père Junòt came to him in a flash —"the white madman of the hills." Into Kars' own eyes flared now a gleam and a purpose as mad, perhaps, as the madness that swept the soul of the beast before him.

Slowly Kars dropped off his heavy, wolfskin coat and laid his weapons on top of it, lest he be tempted to use them. He meant to tackle this giant with his bare hands, and he knew that he would need every ounce of his sinuous body to conquer this brute without killing him. That the madman would gloat in his cruel power to crush out life was stamped in every line of his brutalized, ugly face.

As Kars looked in on him again, the lips uncovered yellow fangs in a snarl, and with a deep growl he sucked out the remainder of the fiery liquor, adding fury to the already curdled brain. He arose and flung the empty bottle with a crash into a corner and staggered unsteadily across the floor and out of the door into the snow to stand cursing, in the half light of the early dawn, at something, or some one unseen in the timber edge across the frozen trail of the creek.

Kars stepped at once into the open, determined to force the issue and have it done without a fight, if possible; talk was what he wanted with the man if he could get it. Standing poised on his toes, ready to meet whatever came, he made his overture.

"Stand where you are and listen!" he said.

The shock of surprise partly sobered

the outlaw. He turned with gleaming eyes, and for a brief second's flash he seemed to hesitate. Then the immense shoulders crouched, the great bearlike paws spread open, and with a bellow like a mad bull he made the charge.

There was no avoiding it. Kars was glad he had laid aside his gun, or he would have used it, he knew, as he looked into the murderous desire of those wolf eyes. He met the avalanche of flesh with his fist, putting all the weight of his poised body back of the blow He struck through the flailing arms and landed a blow on the hairy chest over the heart that would have felled an ox. The big giant merely grunted and tried to sweep his antagonist into the crushing fold of his great, hairy arms.

"Oh, no, my friend," Kars said, sidestepping the clutching menace. Then with swift judgment he decided to play on the whisky-sapped strength of the brute. "We'll play this game different from that, and the best wind will stand up for the count."

This drew a grunt and a flame of rage from the vicious eyes, and a sledgehammer blow of the knotted fist that would have broken Kars' bones had it gone home; but, sinuous as a serpent, he darted away and then in and out of a succession of flaillike blows directed at him with insensate rage. He smiled and prodded the beast with taunts in order to keep that rage boiling and wearing at the strength of the monster.

The madman was too heavy, his body too unwieldy in the soft snow to follow the movements of the younger and more agile man, and not for a second did Kars give him an opportunity to rest or to catch his breath.

With well-directed punches, iron-sinewed blows they were that knocked grunts out of the beast, like the death grunts of an old grizzly, Kars wore down his antagonist slowly. Presently the venom died in his eyes, and fear crept into them instead. He slowed up, as Kars, taking his advantage, rushed the fight, and then suddenly the madman staggered backward and slumped slowly to the crusted snow, gasping with asthmatic sobs—done!

Kars stood over the man, and he himself was breathing hard. He had accomplished his purpose without killing the beast, and he now waited for the talk he meant to have. This came suddenly and with the shock of a blow.

The panting brute struggled to a sitting posture and gasped out a sentence that was edged with venom.

"You put up a good fight, Brent Kars, for a young buck with tainted blood."

Kars was dumfounded both at the sudden calling of his name and at the subtle, stinging implication. "Who in the name of kingdom come are you?" he asked.

For a full moment the gasping continued unabated, and then the beastly form crawled slowly to its feet, the leering eyes turning on Kars with a squint of hateful triumph. "I am Homer Kars, your father."

The blow fell crushingly. Like the back lash of a steel cable, breaking with the force of a strain too long borne, something in the brain of Brent Kars snapped. For years he had lived under the strain of the red shadow; he had fought it, cursed it, and denied it. His manhood had risen above the curse of it, but never beyond its tragic, blighting power to crush. And now this creature, grinning in his face, told him that he was his father. It was a black lie.

The repulsive beast drew back before Kars could smash his fist into the flabby jowls—drew back and pointed in grinning triumph over Kars' shoulder. "Behold Nokomis, my squaw!" he said.

A hideous, snag-toothed creature, wrinkled with age and dirty with filth, came wabbling slowly out of the timber from beyond the creek, a bundle of faggots on her bent, witchlike shoulders.

The leering man-wolf snapped out his venom. "That is your mother," he said.

CHAPTER X.

THE RED BIRTHMARK.

TO be imbued with a desire to kill is a sad overthrow of a man's sane balance, and yet Brent Kars struck the blow he had delayed with a frenzied desire for the life of the beast. With an ungoverned rage he struck again and again, until the big body crumbled and slid to the snow.

As the old squaw turned and fled back into the brush, Brent Kars staggered blindly away, his mind in a mist. "Squaw blood!" And he had dared dream of Helen McTavish. How fatally and swiftly had this big brute demolished his house of dreams. That ugly, human bulk, lying huddled on the white snow, was all he needed to banish hope from his heart forever; that huddled hunk of senseless flesh pointed to a more deadly, crushing blow than he had received.

White and trembling, Kars turned at last and surveyed the wreck of his passion. It looked as if he had broken the brute's neck. He had not meant to loose his rage like this, but it had swept him like the white fury of an arctic gale, and it had smothered his soul in hate. He stooped and examined the body, feeling a revulsion at the touch of the flesh.

The man was not dead, and Brent Kars dragged the body into the cabin and placed it on a bunk, grimly giving it what aid he could to resuscitate the life within it. He had something to say to Homer Kars when he was able to sit up and listen to straight, human talk; something to glean out of the man's dark past touching his own sullied birth. He wanted that straight this time—absolutely straight.

He bathed the bruised and crimson-stained face with cold water and a dirty rag; there was nothing clean in this hovel; the place reeked with neglect. This done, he went outdoors to get a breath of fresh air into his lungs, and he saw the old squaw sitting at the edge of the timber, her black eyes glittering at him with fear. He drove her, muttering and cursing, into the cabin with her bundle of faggots and set her to cleaning the place of its accumulation of filth.

Cases of poor liquor, piled at the side of the room, verified his guess as to what Larsen had brought on his sledge. The outlaw and his raiding Ojibwas used this liquor to undermine the morale of the trappers in the district, and it was undoubtedly brought in by the Swede from traders of the north coast for this vile purpose.

Kars destroyed the liquor, and, while the outlaw was still in a coma of unconsciousness, he made a thorough search of the cabin. He found a cache of gold in a cavity under the cabin floor; his attention had first been drawn to a loose board worn smooth by much handling, and this loose board gave him his clew. Gold, then, and whisky were the medium of barter Larsen used to secure the stolen pelts from the outlaw. Evidently the madman was a shrewd bargainer, and the Swede took away only the pelts he was able to pay for. This probably explained the quarrel during the Swede's recent visit which sent him away cursing and left the outlaw raging in his cups.

Taking the lighted candle and ascending a ladder, Kars lifted a trap in the ceiling and thrust his head and shoulders through the opening. The loft was packed with thousands of dollars' worth of stolen furs. It was reasonable to suppose that the quarrel between the thieves had to do with this rich cache of pelts.

Kars dropped the trap and descended to the room; a problem was growing in his mind. How could he, single-handed, recover these furs for the Hudson's Bay Company? It was doubtful if he could get himself out of the valley alive,

to say nothing of his find. The old squaw seemed to sense something of his dilemma, and she began a soft chuckling, as she shuffled about the floor, in her crude attempt to clean up the place.

In the smaller cabin Kars found another surprise that left a still keener worry in his mind. He found a team of starved huskies there and a sledge outside the door which had a familiar look. The huskies had met him at the opened door with strange, friendly whines of welcome. The dogs knew him, and that was to him an enigma under the circumstances until he recognized the great lead dog of the police team, Omri. They were Sergeant McBride's dogs.

Kars was horror-struck. Had McBride been murdered on the trail, and his outfit taken? Kars examined the sledge again. It was the sergeant's, all right. His pack and equipment, untampered with as yet, were strapped to the sledge, as McBride had left them. His rifle was in its case, and his grub and outfit were intact! This was strange. The outlaw must have trailed in with them in the night, confined the dogs in the cabin, and left the outfit for daylight robbery. In that case, he must have trailed in by some other way than the guarded pass.

With this thought stored away in his mind, Kars dragged the sledge into the cabin, fed the dogs from the pack, and piled what remained of the food on the beams, out of their reach. He placed some snow on the floor for the quenching of their thirst, fastened the door, and returned to the larger cabin to think over his growing problems with something more of hopefulness. Here was a sturdy team and equipment for him when he was ready to use them, and there was another exit from the valley.

Night fell, and the mad outlaw was still unconscious. Kars realized that his knock-out had been more serious than he had at first supposed, and that it would be some time yet before he could force those hideous lips, with their labored breathing, to unfold the dark mystery of the hills. The old squaw was seated in a corner crunching some coarse food with her almost toothless gums, and still she chuckled like a crazy old witch, as he set about preparing his own supper. She watched him in the process, following his every move with her beady, black eyes.

After supper Kars sat down to smoke and to think. He had successfully invaded the lair of The White Wolf, but would he get out of it again with a whole skin and with the secret? On the morrow he would set about finding that secret exit and then lay his plans.

The night was cold and a heavy wind came out of the north. He had built a great fire, and it was roaring in the Yukon stove. Outside, the somber forests moaned with the wind in the spruce, and the wail of the night cried under the cabin's eaves. Kars' brooding thoughts drifted with the winds into wild channels, with the singing spruce an obbligato to the song of hate gathering in his soul.

Dear God! was this very cabin possibly his own birthplace? Was that beast of man his father? Could this old witch be his—— He held the sacred word back with a cry on his lips. It was unthinkable. "Mother" meant all that was finest in womanhood. Then suddenly, above the rage of wind and passion, flashed a thought like a blinding light. What would Helen McTavish think of his parents?

The heavy heart of him went dead, like a bit of flotsam beaten by a rolling sea. He returned to his nightmare of bitter dreaming and was——

"Heap big man; heap big fool."

The sudden voice startled Kars out of his dreaming. He turned his attention slowly to the corner and the croaking sound.

"Meaning me or your mate?" he asked, after the words had percolated to his storm-swept brain.

"Him!" The old squaw pointed a bony finger to the bunk where lay her unconscious mate. "Hom' Karmack," she said croakingly.

Kars stared for a moment in puzzled wonderment, as he did not at first catch the full significance of the words. "Homer Kars—you mean," he said.

"Hom' Kars—Hom' Karmack—all same—heap big fool."

Swift as light the truth went home to his understanding. Why hadn't he thought of it before? "Kars—Karmack." Of course it was the same. The simple prefix, Kars, was the natural sequence in the Indian country. This man was old Jeffrey Karmack's mad brother. The old priest's story flashed into Kars' mind again. What of that "other boy" who had come "out of the black heart of the night" with a "doubtful lineage?" Where was he, and who? What if——

Kars' mind swung back to earth, with a jolt. This old squaw knew. He must make her talk if he could. He proffered his tobacco as a conciliatory first step.

She grabbed at the tobacco greedily and tamped the weed into a vile, short-stemmed pipe, her eyes gleaming in anticipated pleasure at the evidently denied luxury. *"Me-quach,"* she said, which means, "Thank you."

Kars waited the soothing effect of the weed before he spoke again. "Nokomis is no fool," he began.

"Umph," she replied.

"Nokomis is wise with the wisdom of years," continued Kars.

Again the brief "Umph," a silence, and then Kars asked a leading question: "Long time Nokomis has lived with this white man?"

In her own good time, puffing at the pipe in contented bliss, the old Indian woman answered: "Heap long time."

Kars asked his next question with feigned unconcern, but the deep interest he had in the answer might have been seen in the tense gripping of his hands.

"Nokomis had a son—long time ago by this white man?"

A dreamy film fell over the old squaw's eyes. "Heap big son—fine white son," was the reply.

Kars was prepared for it, yet the words were like a blow. "Where is that son?" he asked breathlessly.

She did not answer this directly. Her eyes closed, as if to shut out the present from her consciousness, while her mind drifted back into the past of years gone by.

"Bimeby come two sons to Nokomis' cabin," she answered. "This one full-blood white—not Nokomis' own son. Him son of great white chief—brought to Nokomis' cabin when the post was burned, that Nokomis might care for him as her own."

Kars sat with his eyes strained upon the old woman, scarcely breathing lest he break the spell of her dreaming.

"Nokomis raise her now two sons together; one, two, five big snows, and then the black sickness came." Five years, thought Kars, is what the little priest had said. Now the droning voice was continuing: "Then they took Nokomis' two sons away, and she see them no more."

"Where?" demanded Kars. "Where did they take them?"

"One they take back to great white chief; one they take to Indian wigwam where was no sickness. When Nokomis get well she was no longer beautiful, and Hom' Karmack treat Nokomis very bad. No son; no love of white man. Nokomis' heart wither like autumn leaves and is dead within her breast."

"Forgive me, old woman," Kars now said, touched to the soul by the stoic misery in the old squaw's tone. "Forgive me for raking up the dead ashes of memory like this, but I must know, for you see—I am one of those two sons."

The old hag quickly came out of her

trance. She opened her eyes wide, and fierce lights leaped from them through the haze of smoke to the face of the man, making such a strange claim. Fixed there, they gleamed for a moment oddly; then she slowly arose and came toward him, her withered hands like reaching talons, opening and closing, as she advanced. Within a foot of his face the flame died.

"No—no," she said slowly; "you not Nokomis' son."

"How do you know?" Kars asked, his blood beating blows against his eardrums. If he was not Nokomis' son, then he was not the son of this man. He hung upon the answer.

"Nokomis' son have birthmark, red like blood on the snows—there."

She tapped Kars' left temple with her claws and waddled back to her corner, mumbling. Kars could scarcely catch the vital words for the pounding surge flooding his veins like liquid fire.

"Wau-bo-zoo, he knows, and The White Wolf, he knows, but Nokomis knows not which they took to the great white chief and which the little white Father took out of the Indian wigwam."

For Brent Kars at the moment it was enough to know that he was "not Nokomis' son," that he did not bear this red birthmark on his brow. He felt that he wanted to go out into the night and shout to the singing winds those magic words. Now he forgot everything else. He did not see the evil eyes of Homer Karmack open and glitter at him with hate; he did not hear the old squaw's muttered warning. He fled from the stiffling, hot air out into the open and uplifted a stentorian call to the cliffs that startled the ears of Sergeant McBride, camping up there on the high rim of them.

Unfortunately that exultant cry was carried on the wings of the wind down the valley to other ears than McBride's. But Kars knew naught of either circumstance, nor cared just then; his soul was seeking an outlet. He rushed to the little cabin, unconsciously longing for contact with life. Leaving the door wide, he threw his arms about the neck of the great dog, Omri, and sobbed there like a baby.

It was with the rebound of emotion, as he rose to his feet, that he received a stunning blow on the head. He reeled and fell on his face. Before he could recover, a great weight was on him, pinning him to the floor. Weakened by the blow, he fought in vain to throw it off. Reason told him who the attacker was, and he knew that the big brute would show no mercy. This was a fight for life. Suddenly he felt himself strangling, as he gasped for breath that would not come. He weakened swiftly, and darting flames shot into his brain, and then he knew; he was being strangled to death with a seal line. Pinned down and helpless, he fought the fatal clutch futilely.

CHAPTER XI.

M'BRIDE MAKES A MOVE.

WHEN Sergeant McBride saw the moving shadow in the valley below him and had himself dropped out of sight, he little dreamed that it was Brent Kars feeding his own stolen dog team a supper of frozen moose meat.

The relentless man hunter lay there motionless, making a mental map of the position of things in the valley before waning daylight changed into the black gloom of night; and his thoughts were on the criminal of the hills, holed in here plotting atrocities with his poisoned brain. He was thinking also of the strategy by which he was to descend into this rock-bound valley that lay in its impregnable, icy solitude like a sunken fortress, guarded by granite walls. Single-handed, he had to effect a capture of the guarded Wolf.

Of one thing he was positive. The man would never be taken at the point of a gun, with the usual formula of the

traditional words of the service: "Surrender in the name of the king."

Strategy alone would serve, and the first step, in any strategic plan he might evolve, was to find a descent into the valley. According to the frightened breed, there was a descent near, and he set about looking for it before complete darkness fell.

The shadow below had by now been swallowed up in the dark; and he began beating along the rim of the cliff, feeling himself secure from observation. He worked in feverish haste to find his objective while it was yet light enough to see the short distances immediately in front of him. He found it shortly, a narrow trail cut in the side of a gorge that descended gradually to a fissure in the rocks, down which it went, steep and slippery, straight to the valley floor.

He did not attempt the descend now, but fixed its every crook and turn in his mind, so that in case he wished to, he could make it unerringly in the dark. With a smile of satisfaction he returned to his team and prepared his camp safely off the trail and deep in the timber, where he could enjoy a fire and comfort without fear of disclosing his presence. But Fate called him into the thick of excitement sooner than he had anticipated.

It was shortly after he had prepared and eaten his supper that he laid his definite plans. He decided to remain in hiding all the following day and to make a close observation of the valley from his high point of vantage. He would do nothing hurriedly. If it took a day or a week or a month to "get" his man, he would get him. It was a Mountie's inexorable way; time meant nothing; success, everything.

To-night he must rest; this would be the first good rest, free from nerve strain, which he had won for days. He lay on his furs, toes to the fire, smoking his pipe and at last drifting off into dreams of the white, lonely trails that make up the life of a hard service. He was a pathfinder to a frozen world, and a representative of the law in the wilderness.

The wind, which had died down with the arctic twilight, now rose out of the north again, and wailed through the treetops. The wolf pack howled from far back in the timber. The fire crackled merrily, and Sergeant McBride smiled happily.

Suddenly that smile froze on his lips. A shout had risen on the wind out of the valley and shattered his dreaming as quickly as a shot. He was on his feet instantly; then he went quickly to the high rim of the valley looking down into utter blackness. Minutes passed as he stood there, bracing himself against the blast of the wind. The shout was not repeated. Nothing was to be seen in the black void. He returned to camp and got hurriedly into his trail trappings; then he pushed back to the cliff, and his trail-wise feet quickly picked out the path he had himself broken to descend into the gorge. Foot by foot he worked his way forward, and foot by foot he went down that dangerous, slippery passage to the valley floor.

This attained, with nothing definite in mind except to investigate what was taking place here, he worked his way to the edge of the spruce clearing he had marked on his mental map. Here, viewing the larger cabin from a different angle from that above, he saw the light from its window and a broad band of light streaming from the open door.

Craftily he circled from shadow to shadow, approaching the cabin; when he was within thirty feet of it he paused and watched. Suddenly a slinking form materialized in that band of light; then, another, and another; five, he counted. They were Indians, Ojibwas, swarthy-faced, and treacherous.

The stealthy movements of the Indians made that odd shout all the more mysterious. McBride was puzzled. He

moved back warily, deeming it safer to do his spying from the timber fringe, and unconsciously he bumped into the wall of the smaller cabin. The sudden impact startled him, and he held himself perfectly still and listened. Within a few feet of him, beyond that log wall, Brent Kars was at that moment being strangled to death, and not a sound of the tragedy reached him.

He stood motionless, watching the larger cabin; then suddenly an unearthly snarl and a guttural cry broke on the stillness. He heard the thrashing of heavy bodies fighting, and a ghastly scream mingled with the snarl of a beast.

McBride located the terrible sounds behind him. They came from the interior of the smaller cabin. He could only stand still in a horror of uncertainty; for soon the Indians must hear the din and rush the scene.

Thus he waited, watching and listening, gripped in that horror of blind inactivity.

CHAPTER XII.

OMRI!

WITH the desperation of despair Brent Kars made one last effort to throw that terrible weight from his body, but the gripping form clung to him, and the hairy hands tightened the horrible clutch of the seal line at his throat. Into his brain shot streaking flames like dancing devils, and he felt himself slipping off into oblivion.

Then something happened which he sensed but dimly in the dragging, black seconds. And but little better did Homer Karmack, astride Brent Kars, at first understand. A whine, a snarl, and now a flying, furry body swished like a thrown javelin through the stifling air. A slashing of inch-long fangs in human flesh followed the onrushing, unseen, savage force. The man on Kars tumbled over like a blasted oak, with a horrible, guttural cry, clutching vainly at a snarling mass of fighting fury.

Presently the seal line released its hold of death on Kars' throat, and gasping intakes of air into the lungs brought him back to consciousness swiftly. He tore the cord from his throat and struggled up, sucking in the air in gulps. He heard the noise of the fight in dull wonder at the strange and timely deliverance. Thrashing bodies—oaths and cries and beastly snarls—a guttural rattle at length in a human throat, and stillness.

The unnerving, horrible significance of the stillness brought Kars to his feet, seeking a match. He gazed dumbly on the frightful scene the dim light revealed.

It was to Omri that he owed his life! Omri, the great lead dog of the police team, had inflicted a terrible vengeance on an old enemy. He had flown into a rage at the scent of the brute who had clubbed him on the trail. The heavy muscled malemute had sunk his teeth like ivory knives in the throat of the strangler. The brute had paid in his own coin; his wild, dilating eyes were staring wide in horror, glazing; he was dead by strangulation.

"Omri! Steady, boy! Come!" As Kars spoke, the light flashed out, and darkness closed in on the frightful sight.

Kars' voice and the brief, revealing light brought Sergeant McBride leaping through the door at a bound. "My God! Kars, is it you? Quick, man, there is no time to lose."

He swung the heavy bar down across the door, as a hideous yell broke on the night, and a spatter of rifle shots told Kars the meaning of it without the need of words.

"Ojibwas!" McBride said succinctly. "They heard this fight in here and saw your light. Here are only five of them, but that's enough to give us plenty of trouble in short order."

"There will be more, and quickly," Kars answered, wasting no time in futile speculation at the unexpected arrival of

Sergeant McBride on the scene. "Those shots will bring the red devils in full pack through the cañon from their village There is a rear door here, if we can force it and make for the shelter of the timber."

As they relieved the door of a clutter of trappings and forced it open, flame streaked before their eyes, and a thudding, leaden missile tore into the casement. They closed the door and refastened it. Rifle shots on every side of the cabin left no doubt that they had been quickly surrounded, and they knew they were in for a siege against hopeless odds.

Kars was glad now that he had dragged McBride's sledge into the cabin. The sergeant's rifle would furnish him with a weapon, and there was sufficient food for the time being. He knew they were in desperate straits, and that their only hope was to hold the red devils at bay until opportunity offered McBride and himself a chance to dash for the timber.

Both men arrived at this understanding quickly, and few words passed between them. They tore holes into the loose material between the logs and made chips through which they could watch events and shoot in the darkness at flame flashes leaping out of the night.

Soon it was evident that the besieging force was augmented heavily, and that no opportunity was to be permitted for a break to safety. Haphazard shooting, Indian fashion, kept up through the night, and bullets thudded into the log from every side of the cabin. The defenders, lying on their stomachs, answered from first one side and then the other. No rush was attempted. With the coming of dawn they would attack in force.

Through the night into the gray dawn Brent Kars and Sergeant McBride, wearied and exhausted with the ceaseless vigil, held the redskins at bay. The dogs howled intermittently, adding horror to the night, and Kars knew that they howled because of that dead bulk over there in the corner. Dawn revealed the gruesome sight, and Kars threw a blanket over it. His mind was filled with heavy thoughts. Now those dead lips could never prove anything. Oh, well, perhaps the next few hours would bring his own death, and then there would be no occasion for proving anything.

Dawn, with its murky shadows stealing out of the forest rim, brought phantom shapes moving here and there. Swiftly these collected and merged into the moving substance of the real; the human wolf pack was gathering in mass and breaking cover in a fiendish charge. The Indians, yelling as they came, rushed the cabin from the front.

Those in the front ranks carried the heavy butt of a tree with which to ram the door. Kars and the sergeant centered their fire on these and felled one after another; but the gaps were instantly filled. The battering ram came steadily on and eventually crashed with a jarring thud, into the heavy timber, shattering the rough-hewn boards like glass. Another ram would shatter the door to splinters.

The Indians paid a heavy toll from the fire of Brent Kars and his dauntless companion, but the odds were too great. They knew, before the final blow fell, that defeat had come on the wings of the morning, and that it was only a matter of seconds now before the end came. Another pounding blow crashed in the door.

Then on the air arose a cry that sent the echoes leaping—the ringing cry of the Hudson's Bay men. The staccato bark of rapidly fired rifles added to the bedlam of the breaking day. As the fleeing redskins ran toward the timber, Kars and McBride beheld a rush of fur-clad figures with flaming rifles.

Grim-faced and grimy, streaked with crimson and blear-eyed from the long

vigil with death, Brent Kars and Sergeant McBride, stalked out of the cabin into the arms of friends.

Nicol MacCoy stood there, with the hardy men Kars had brought with him on the long trail from Fontenac. They had mutinied when MacCoy told them that Kars had gone seeking The White Wolf's lair alone, and MacCoy, unable to hold them, had taken the trail with them. They had come into the valley like avenging angels, and here they were, with their hot rifles in their knotted hands, and they were grinning like hyenas.

"And it looks like a bit of Providence was in it, too, my lad," Nicol MacCoy said when all was over.

A few Indians had escaped that sudden, deadly fire, and they had fled back into the protection of the timber and returned to their camp with the news. Apparently they represented all the men that were left of The White Wolf's guard, for the rescuers had encountered only squaws in the tepees when they had rushed the outer pass.

Into Kars' mind now swept thought of old Nokomis. She was his sole hope now of proving anything out of the black past of the dead outlaw. Without her he had nothing to support his strange story of that tragic interchange of babes in the wilderness thirty years ago. He searched the main cabin; it was empty.

Gone was Nokomis; gone also was the Indian tepee village at the mouth of the cañon. All had vanished like a dream that had never been. Kars pondered this and arrived at a swift decision which he confided only to Sergeant McBride.

"It is a wild scheme, my friend," said the sergeant. "Far to the north of the Great Bear, under the arctic circle, you will find many Ojibwa villages, but it is a killing trail up there. Luck to you."

When the party of white men mushed out of the valley some time later, their sledges laden with the furs redeemed from the mad outlaw's cache, Brent Kars surprised all but McBride by bidding them good-by and turning toward the north alone.

Traveling light with a single-dog team made up of the great dog, Omri, he left them with the mystery unsolved, and they wondered at the set of his jaw and the dogged purpose in his eye.

When the ice and the snow went out of the rivers and the lakes in the spring, Nicol MacCoy's brigade came down to Fontenac with a grand showing of furs and a strange tale that set the post by the ears.

Brent Kars had himself turned madman, for he had gone alone on a mystery hunt up into the arctic circle. This was the whispered gossip that trickled like icy water into hearts that pounded under heaving chests.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out December 1st.

Innocence Abroad

THERE was a man who said he longed to meet a simple girl; he was tired of girls who knew everything. One evening at a supper this happened:

He: "Do you play golf?"

She: "No, I don't even know how to hold the caddie."

Incredulity

PAT was helping the gardener on a large estate and, noticing a shallow basin containing water, inquired what it was for.

"That," said the gardener, "is a bird bath."

"Don't ye be foolin' me," said Pat and grinned. "What is it?"

"A bird bath, I tell you. Why do you doubt it?"

"Because I don't belave there's a burrd alive that can tell Saturday night from any other."

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the Editor and Readers

NOVEMBER 15, 1926.

The Top-Notch Menu

AT the restaurant where we lunch daily, we hear reiterated complaints that the menu never varies. The same dishes are served in the same way, day after day. There are no happy surprises, no novel concoctions. The desire for food is one of the basic instincts of man, and the art of eating adds a distinct and wholesome pleasure to the natural joys of man. An intelligent man brings his intelligence to bear on his food and demands variety as well as excellence. The art of cooking is a progressive art, and new acquisitions to the table are constantly growing.

The stable foods remain meat, vegetables, eggs, and milk, but a good cook is able to surprise you with a potato in a new dress, or do you a goulash which has as many surprises as election day.

The mind demands its food as insistently as the body, only the mind is more exacting in its demands for variety. A man can live on the monotonous table d'hôte dinner which is fixed in advance for every day in the week, but the mind eats à la carte. It selects and chooses its diet, and its one insistent and never-varying order is for variety and spice.

The outstanding merit of the TOP-NOTCH menu is its variety. We are not specialists in one type of story but specialists in all types of stories. We don't give you fifty-seven varieties of Western stories or twenty types of detective tales, but our bill of fare is engagingly mixed. No type of story is foreign to our pages, and in each issue of the magazine we aim to give you such a wide assortment of stories that your appetite is never cloyed with sameness, but stimulated to fresh interest and curiosity. We march with the times; and as new discoveries of science and travel unfold new interests for the human mind, these fresh acquisitions to human knowledge find their way into our pages. Variety is the characteristic note of the TOP-NOTCH fiction menu.

In the Next Issue

IN the next issue, which you will get on December 1st, the complete novel is called "The Wonder Workers." Ralph Boston, the author of this captivating story of mining in the West, brings to his work the touch of a dramatic imagination and the knowledge of Western mining conditions. The title may give you a hint of its many surprises, and we assure you that the story lives up to its title.

The novelette will be "The Kicking Fool," by H. R. Marshall, a football story which is sure to please the general reader as well as the fans of the gridiron.

Nell Martin, whose middle name is Popularity with TOP-NOTCH readers, contributes another of her inimitable "Mazie" tales which she calls "Off On the Wrong Foot," and E. B. Crosswhite has written an unusually strong and baffling murder-mystery story, "The Sacred Cow."

Among the other short stories will be: "Opportunity Number Three," by George F. Peabody, a baseball story in which the human interest predominates; "The Death's Head Ring," by Haps-

burg Liebe, a story of the Kentucky mountains; "King of the Beach," by Dysart McMullen, a good dog story; "Dotted Evidence," by Leslie Skinner, a Western tale punctuated with drama; and "Trail of the Hawk," by Charles Haven, a dramatic incident of the Florida Dog-keys.

"The Coast of Intrigue," by Whitman Chambers, a serial in six parts, opens in the next issue. This is an unusually fine serial novel, the scene of which is laid on the west coast of South America; and we have only to draw your attention to the author, Whitman Chambers, to get your indorsement.

The poems will be: "Your Golden Chance," by Louis E. Thayer; "His Endless Quest," by S. Omar Barker; "Songs of the Crafts—The Hard-rock Man," by Ted Olson; "Under the Mississippi Moon," by Pat Costello; "Roads to Nowhere," by Mazie V. Caruthers; and "Magic Land," by James Edward Hungerford.

Kingsley Moses First

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I am not a subscriber to TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, but I buy it at the news stands. I like the stories about "Speed Dash, the Human Fly," by Erle Stanley Gardner, best, and wish you would publish some more of them in TOP-NOTCH. I also like the stories by Frank Richardson Pierce, and those about "Jimmie Lavender," by Vincent Starrett. The best short story I have ever read in TOP-NOTCH is "Brack, U. S. A.," by Kingsley Moses.

Wishing you every success with TOP-NOTCH and hoping Mr. Gardner and Mr. Moses will favor us with some more of their interesting stories, I remain,

Very sincerely yours,

WAYNE SEARCH.

Pekin, Ill.

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.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1926.

State of New York, County of New York (*ss.*)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of the Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Arthur E. Scott, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,
Of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 24th day of September, 1926. Francis S. Duff, Notary Public No. 173, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1927.)

T9B