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Top-Notch Magazine

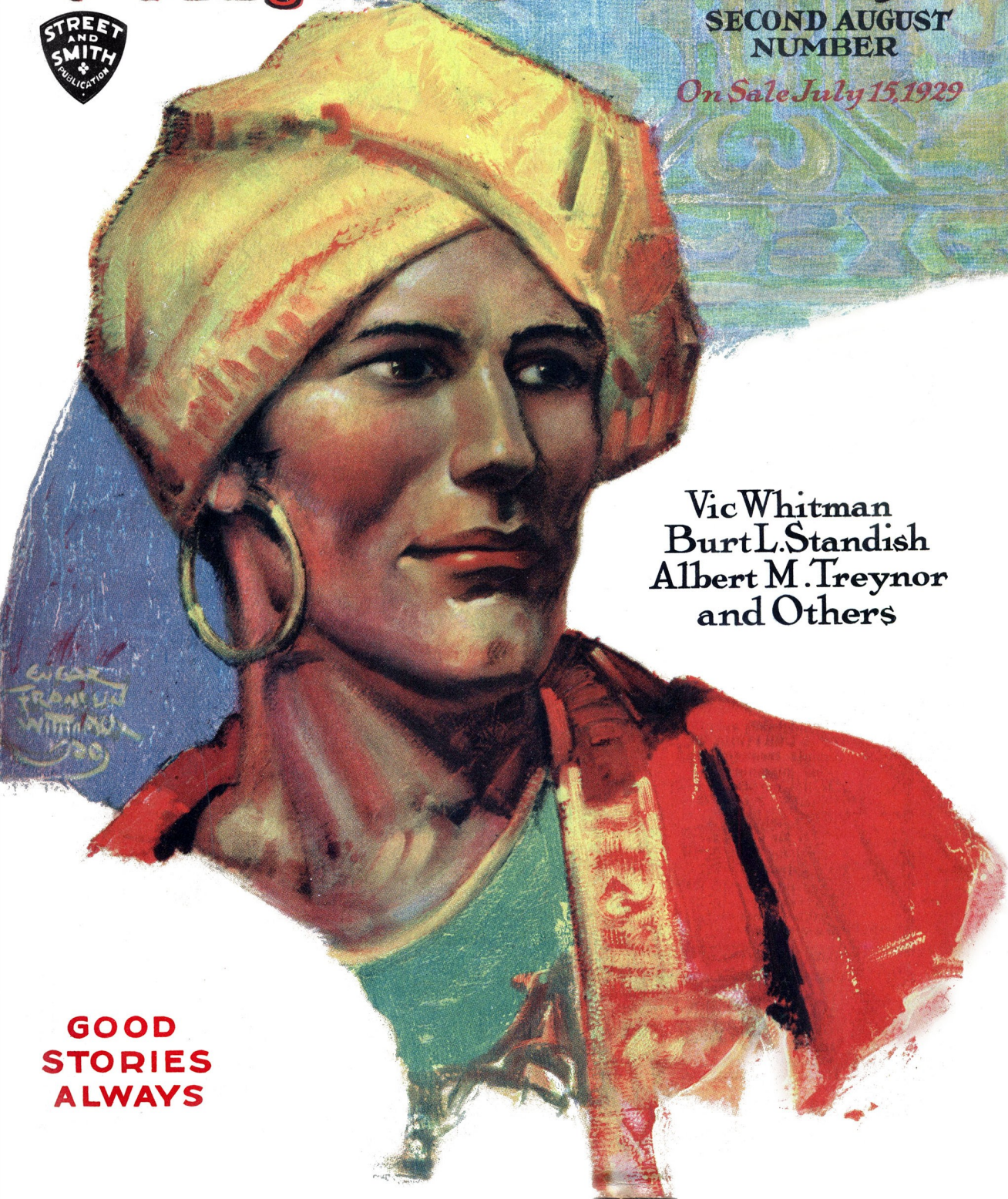


SECOND AUGUST
NUMBER

On Sale July 15, 1929

Vic Whitman
Burt L. Standish
Albert M. Treynor
and Others

GOOD
STORIES
ALWAYS



COOLIDGE TO BUY USED WHITE HOUSE LIMOUSINE FROM U. S.

Northampton, Mass., March 11.—(AP)—Calvin Coolidge has decided to purchase the government limousine he used during his last year in the presidency. This was learned today when the former President met newspaper men in his law office here. Neither he nor the car will be sold.

Don't let false pride keep you from enjoying a better car

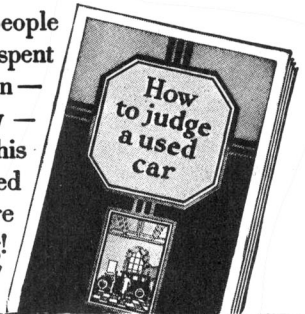
EVERYONE rides in a "used" car for every car on the street is "used"! The newest model is a "used" car after you drive it around the block. A high quality six or eight, reconditioned and guaranteed by a Studebaker dealer, is a better buy and a better car

than any cheaply built new one near its price.

Regardless of where you buy your car, or what make you prefer, send today for this valuable free book—"How to Judge a Used Car." It tells you frankly what to look for and what to avoid. Pictures and plain statements never before made public show you how experts buy cars for resale.

Send for Free Book

More than 145,000 people have been glad they spent 2c mailing a coupon—like the one below—to learn facts from this free book that saved them \$200 or more on their motoring! Mail the coupon now!



Pledge to the Public on Used Car Sales

- 1 Every used car is conspicuously marked with its lowest price in plain figures, and that price, just as the price of our new cars, is rigidly maintained.
- 2 All Studebaker automobiles which are sold as CERTIFIED CARS have been properly reconditioned, and carry a 30-day guarantee for replacement of defective parts and free service on adjustments.
- 3 Every purchaser of a used car may drive it for five days, and then, if not satisfied for any reason, turn it back and apply the money paid as a credit on the purchase of any other car in stock—new or used. (It is assumed that the car has not been damaged in the meantime.)

© 1928 The Studebaker Corporation of America

THE STUDEBAKER CORPORATION OF AMERICA
Dept. 297, South Bend, Indiana

Please send me copy of "How to Judge a Used Car"

Name

Street

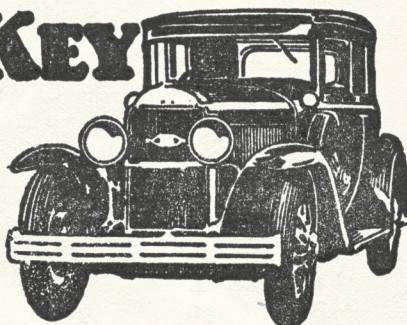
City State

STUDEBAKER

Builder of Champions

REWARD

FIND THE KEY to this Free Auto



There are 21 Auto keys pictured here. To be sure, they all look alike, but, examine them closely. 20 of them are exactly alike but "One" and only one is different from all the others. It's the key to a FREE Buick Sedan. See if you can find it.

10 BIG NEW AUTOS GIVEN

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Buick Sedan | 6. Whippet Coupe |
| 2. Chevrolet Sedan | 7. Chevrolet Coupe |
| 3. Ford Sedan | 8. Ford Coupe |
| 4. Whippet Sedan | 9. Whippet Coach |
| 5. Chevrolet Coach | 10. Ford Coach |

CLUES: The difference may be in the size, shape, or even in the notches. So **STUDY EACH KEY CAREFULLY** and if you can find the "ONE" key that is different from all the others, **SEND THE NUMBER** of it **AT ONCE**. You, may become the winner of this Beautiful Buick Sedan or \$1825.00 cash,—or—one of the other 9 new autos to be given free.

or WIN \$1825.00 CASH

Free choice of this beautiful New Buick Sedan or \$1825.00 cash. The Buick and 9 other new autos will be **DELIVERED FREE** anywhere in the U. S. A. with delivery charges paid by us. This is an amazing opportunity. **ACT QUICK** and here is why—

\$505.00 Cash — Extra for Promptness

I will pay \$505.00 cash extra **JUST FOR PROMPTNESS**. In the event a tie for any of the prizes offered, the full amount of the prize tied for will be awarded to each tying contestant. You can win the Buick Sedan or—\$1825.00 Cash, or one of the 9 other new autos to be given free. Answer quick.

YOU CANNOT LOSE

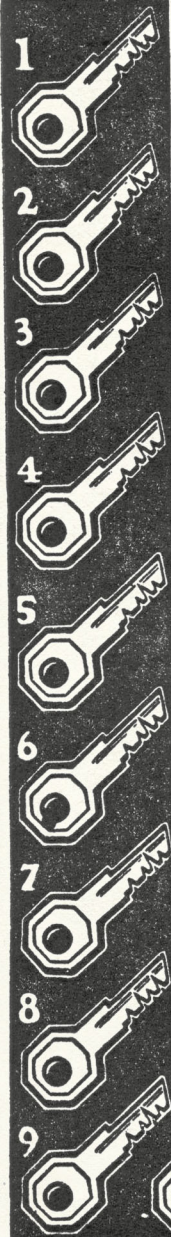
Absolutely everyone who takes full advantage of of this opportunity will be rewarded. Find the "ONE" key that is different from all the others and rush your name and address to me **TODAY** on a postal card or letter. And, just say—"Key No. ... is different from all the others. Please tell me how I can get this beautiful New Buick Sedan—or—\$1825.00 cash without obligation or one cent of cost to me.

C. A. LIST, CHICAGO, ILL.

537 South Dearborn Street

Dept. 19

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VTN-1B

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

On sale the 1st and 15th of each month

TOP - NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH

MAGAZINE

Volume LXXVIII

Number 6

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CONTENTS FOR SECOND AUGUST NUMBER

Complete Novel

- CODE OF THE SCARLET J. Wendel Davis 1
Pursuing a murderous phantom that leaves no trail on the snow-crueted barrens of the Northland, the Mounted are led into the crashing ice floes of the arctic seas.

Novelette

- BEFORE THE DEAD LINE M. I. H. Rogers 94
Larry Baldwin had to bring a special edition, that exposed the money interests, through on the eve of Election Day. A fast-moving story of the irrigation fights in California.

Shorter Stories

- BLACK REBEL John Talbot Lynch 39
A story of stout-hearted dogs in combats and in races which control the destinies of their masters.
- THE RADIO COP Vic Whitman 51
Officer Dave Cates, broadcaster for the police department, got mash notes and threats. Somehow the senders and the officer got tied up when a gang leader went into action.
- FIVE HUNDRED GRAND Howard D. Stewart 66
A clever story about a taxi driver and his girl, and the underworld of New York.
- THE RANGER TRUMPS A TRICK Peter Cartwright 110
A short, short story of dangerous action in a raging blizzard.
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A department of interviews with successful men and information and advice for ambitious men.

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In Five Parts—Part V
The best baseball story this famous author has ever written.
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Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, January 8, 1915, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$3.70. Foreign, \$4.40. This issue dated August 15, 1929.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

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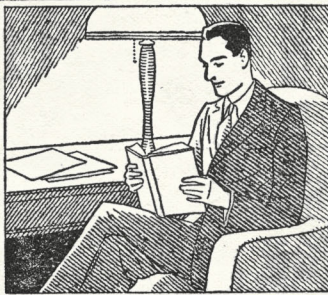
SINGLE COPIES, 15 CENTS

Only 28 years old and earning \$15,000 a year



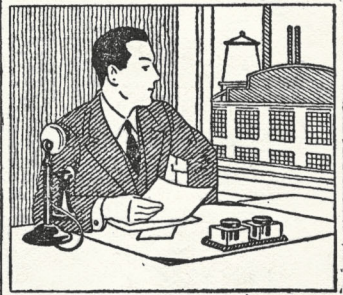
Works in Shoe Factory

W. T. Carson was forced to leave school at an early age. His help was needed at home. He took a "job" in a shoe factory in Huntington, W. Va., at \$12 a week.



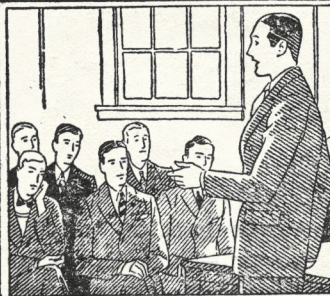
Starts Studying at Home

Carson determined to make something of himself before it was too late, so he took up a course with the International Correspondence Schools and studied in spare time.



Now Owns Big Business

Today W. T. Carson is the owner of one of the largest battery service stations in West Virginia, with an income of \$15,000 a year. And he is only 28 years old!



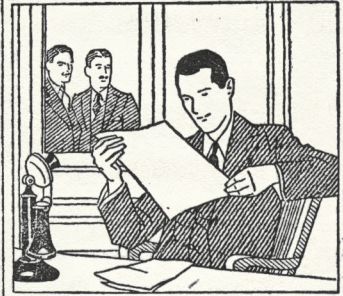
Lectures at College

Just a few months ago a large college asked Carson to lecture before a class in electricity. That shows the practical value of his I. C. S. course.



How to Earn More Money

If the I. C. S. can smooth the path to success for men like W. T. Carson it can help you. If it can help other men to earn more money it can help you too.



The Boss is Watching You

Show him you are ambitious and are really trying to get ahead. Decide today that you are at least going to find out all about the I. C. S. and what it can do for you.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS, Box 4914, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course before which I have marked X in the list below:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail Carrier |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Show Card and Sign Lettering | <input type="checkbox"/> Common School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> English | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting and C. P. A. Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk | <input type="checkbox"/> Lumber Dealer |

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

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|--|--|---|---|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumber and Steam Fitter | <input type="checkbox"/> Mining Engineer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing Inspector | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Builder | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreman Plumber | <input type="checkbox"/> Assayer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder | <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice | <input type="checkbox"/> Heating and Ventilation | <input type="checkbox"/> Iron and Steel Worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaker | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet-Metal Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Overseer or Supt. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaker | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Contractor | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Wiring | <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Positions | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engine Operating | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming |
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City.....State.....

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deposit for each tire wanted—balance C. O. D. State whether clipper or straight side. No risk in buying from us. If not satisfactory upon delivery, return them to us for refund. **ORDER NOW.**

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1329 S. Michigan Boulevard
Dept. 889-K, Chicago

SIZE	TIRES	TUBES
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32x4	3.00	1.15
33x4	3.00	1.15
32x4 1/2	3.25	1.45
33x4 1/2	3.25	1.45
34x4 1/2	3.50	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.75
33x5	3.65	1.75
29x4.40	2.35	1.10
30x5.25	3.00	1.35
30x5.77	3.25	1.40
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33x6.00	3.25	1.45
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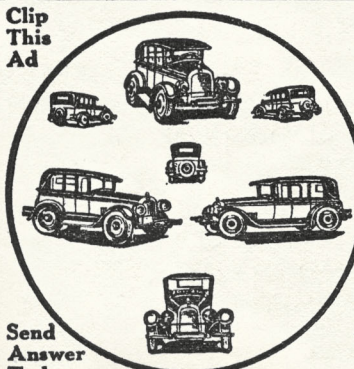
SIMPLE, but amazing, new drugless hygiene for prostate trouble and bladder weakness, recently discovered by an American Scientist, usually stops frequent smarting urination almost over-night. No drugs, no medicine, no application of electricity—absolutely safe and unconditionally guaranteed. Test it for six days FREE. Get results. Already indorsed by physicians. Write at once for FREE illustrated, copyrighted booklet, "Why Many Men Are Old at 40." No obligation. Address **W. J. Kirk, 7619 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.**

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No human being can escape the harmful effects of tobacco. Don't try to quit without assistance. Let our simple inexpensive remedy help you. A complete treatments costs but \$2.00. Every penny promptly refunded if you do not get desired results. Ours is a harmless preparation, carefully compounded to overcome the condition, that will make quitting of tobacco pleasant, and easy. It comes with a money back guarantee.

Anti-Tobacco League P. O. Box B,
OMAHA, NEBR.

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This
Ad



Send
Answer
Today

Win Nash Sedan Or \$2,750.00 in Cash

Someone who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a fully equipped 7-Passenger, Advanced Six Nash Sedan, or its full value in cash (\$2,000.00). We are also giving away a Dodge Sedan, a Brunswick Phonograph and many other valuable prizes—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash. This offer is open to anyone living in the U. S. A. outside of Chicago.

Solve This Puzzle

There are 7 cars in the circle. By drawing 3 straight lines you can put each one in a space by itself. When you do this send me your answer right away.

\$750.00 Extra for Promptness

In addition to the many valuable prizes and Hundreds of Dollars in Cash, we are also giving a Special Prize of \$750.00 in Cash for Promptness. First prize winner will receive \$2,750.00 in cash, or the Nash Sedan and \$750.00 in cash. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded each one tying. Solve the puzzle right away and send me your answer together with your name and address plainly written. \$4,500.00 in prizes—EVERYBODY REWARDED.
John T. Adams, Mgr. Dept. B 142 323 S. Peoria St., Chicago, Ill.

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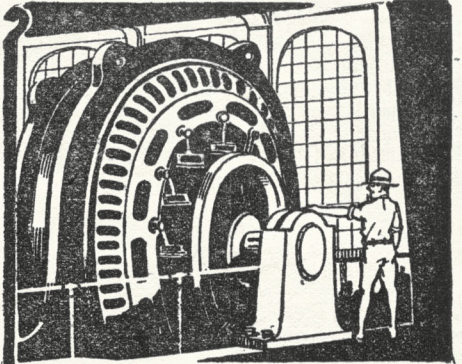
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Get into



WHY earn \$15 or \$20 or \$30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert, you can make \$70 to \$200 — and do it easier — not work half so hard. Why, then, remain in a small-pay, no-future job that offers no chance for big promotion — no chance for big income? Fit yourself for a real job. **Get into Electricity.** That's where the big money is being made, and always will be made.

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To learn Electricity my way you don't have to be a College man, or even a High School graduate. You can read. You can write. That's enough. With me, you get experience as you go along and make good money while learning. I'll show you how, — and I'll give you, without extra cost tools and apparatus to work with — 6 Big Outfits in all.

Money Back If Not Satisfied

That's what I agree to do. And back of me in this agreement stands the Chicago Engineering Works, a \$2,000,000 Illinois Corporation. There's nothing like "Cooke" Training, anywhere. It's the Training that big Electrical men are praising; it's the Training that employers recommend; it's the Training that one of our greatest Engineering societies, has endorsed 100 percent. It's the Training for you.

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Don't wait a minute! Find out today why "The Cooke Trained Man is the Big-Pay Man", everywhere! Find out how "Cooke" Training will help you boost your pay! Mail coupon right now for my Big FREE Book of Facts. See the Six Big Working-Outfits I give you without extra charge. See the hundreds of pictures, the proofs, the Big-Pay letters of other "Cooke" Trained Men. Get this great free Book. Send for it today. Clip, sign, and mail coupon RIGHT NOW!

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A WEEK**

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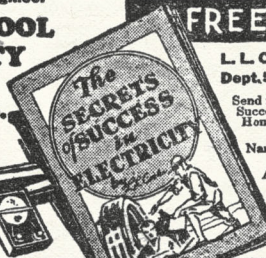
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Name _____

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New Ford Tudor Sedan FREE

This wonderful soap is just one of the 350 fast-selling, profitable items in the ZANOL Line. Send no money—just your name. We'll give you the most amazing offer ever made, and show you how to get a New Ford Tudor Sedan FREE of cost. Write today SURE.



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Send name quick for Free outfit and Free hat offer for yourself. Most wonderful money making opportunity of your life. No obligation. Write today J. W. Taylor, Pres. Taylor HAT & CAP Mfgs., Dept. K-240, Cincinnati, O.

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RED PEARLS	Merlin Moore Taylor
NICE GIRL	Vivian Grey
SQUATTERS' RIGHTS	George M. Johnson
BLACK SKIN AND BROWN	Don Waters
THE ROAD TO BROADWAY	Ellen Hogue and Jack Bechdolt
JUDY THE TORCH	Arthur P. Hankins
WHITE WOLF'S LAW	Hal Dunning
LOST LOOT	Joseph Montague
HIS STUDIO WIFE	Violet Gordon
THE WELL-WISHER	Robert J. Horton
THE POISON EYE	Madeleine Sharps Buchanan
LOOT OF THE LAVA BEDS	John H. Hamlin
FORTUNE UNAWARES	Joseph Montague
THE RANGE WAR ON VV	Emart Kinsburn
MR. CHANGE'S CRIME RAY	A. E. Apple
BUCKING WITH BAR C	George Gilbert
POUNDING THE RAILS	Don Waters
OUTLAWS OF BADGER HOLLOW	G. W. Barrington
HUNTED DOWN	Robert H. Rohde
THE WHISTLING WADDY	Donald Bayne Hobart
THE ISLE OF DREAMS	Joseph Montague
RANGE RIVALS	John H. Hamlin
THE CRIMSON CLOWN	Johnston McCulley
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THE ISLAND WOMAN	Captain A. E. Dingle

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~but when I started to play the laugh was on them!

"WELL, folks, I guess we'll have to lock up the piano and make faces at ourselves."

Helen Parker's party was starting out more like a funeral than a good time.

"Isn't Betty Knowles coming?" an anxious voice sang out.

"Unfortunately, Betty is quite ill tonight and Chet Nichols is late as usual," replied Helen gloomily.

"I know some brand new card tricks," volunteered Harry Walsh.

"Great!" said Helen. "I'll go and find some cards."

While she was gone I quietly stepped up to the piano bench, sat down, and started to fumble with the pedals underneath. Someone spotted me. Then the wisecracks began.

They Poke Fun at Me

"Ha! Ha! Ted thinks that's a player-piano," chuckled one of the boys.

"This is going to be a real musical comedy," added one of the fair sex.

I was glad I gave them that impression. So I kept fiddling around the pedals—making believe that I was hunting for the foot pumps.

"Come over to my house some night," said Harry. "I've got an electric player and you can play it to your heart's content. And I just bought a couple

of new rolls. One is a medley of Victor Herbert's compositions—the other: . . ."

Before he had a chance to finish I swung into the strains of the sentimental "Gypsy Love Song." The joking suddenly ceased. It was evident that I had taken them by surprise. What a treat it was to have people listening to me perform. I continued with "Kiss Me Again" and other popular selections of Victor Herbert. Soon I had the crowd singing and dancing, and finally they started to bombard me with questions . . .

"How? . . . When? . . . Where? . . . did you ever learn to play?" came from all sides.

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Naturally, they didn't believe me when I told them I had learned to play at home and without a teacher. But I laughed myself when I first read about the U. S. School of Music and their unique method for learning music.

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"None at all," I replied. "For the very first thing I did was to send for a Free Demonstration Lesson. When it came and I saw how easy it was to learn without a teacher I sent for the complete Course. What pleased me so was the fact that I was playing simple tunes by note from the very start. For I found it easy as ABC to follow the clear print and picture instructions that came with each lesson. Now I play several classics by note and most all of the popular music. Be-

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Code of the Scarlet

By J. Wendel Davis

A COMPLETE NOVEL

CHAPTER I.

CHASING A PHANTOM.

THE old fur post at Fort Savoy was smothered under a week-old blizzard that had raged for days, piling thick festoons of white crystals over the shrouding spruce forest, and burying the low log cabins of the little settlement to the eaves. Then the blizzard died away in a dismal whine that cut like a knife to the very marrow of a man's bones.

The trails were blocked. The deep wilderness was locked up tight under mountainous drifts that shut the post off from communication with the outside world as securely as if it were sealed in the heart of an icy tomb.

The factor sat at his desk in the dark

dusk of the storm-swept day, studying an object that glowed with a dull, yellow sheen in the dim light of the oil lamp that swung from the beams.

The old factor's heart thumped with a labored strain within the hollow shell of his ribs. His aged eyes looked on that which blanched his brow to a deadly white.

It was an old-fashioned gold-cased watch, with an odd sort of chain fashioned with painstaking care from the red-gold strands of a woman's hair!

In the back of the heavily hinged case was a small, tinted picture of unusual feminine loveliness. It was evident from a glimpse that the soft, silken, red-gold strands of hair, woven into the chain, had come from the head of her whose image looked out of the old gold case.

A silence lay on the post like the weight of a heavy hand. The factor sat gripped in a tense study of the pictured face. Back of the factor's chair stood equally tense and silent, the little mission priest, Father Bolarde, who looked very fragile and worn until one caught the unquenchable flame in the little man's piercing, jet-black eyes and the character etched in his face.

"*Mon Dieu!*"

It was the priest who thus gave audible voice to the shock that gripped both men.

"You see it, too, *mon père?*" Factor Folette whispered. "It is the very image of—of Fançhon!"

"A perfect duplicate of the girl!" muttered the priest. "It would be a strange anomaly of fate, friend Folette, if this old watch, dropped in a murdered trapper's cabin, should prove a clew to the mystery of——"

The priest's low voice trailed off into silence.

The factor closed the watch with a snap and indicated with a trembling finger a name cut in the dull worn gold. "Captain Johan Kars!" he faltered. "It's clear it belonged to——"

"The skipper of the old *Harpoon*, murdered in Loyd Scadman's trading post up on the tundra coast fifteen years ago!" completed the priest in a cold, tense voice.

Who knew better than he, what there was to know of the ancient mystery of the old blubber ship, *Harpoon*, that had lain for that winter of tragic memory, sealed in the ice pack off Franklin Bay?

That pirate tramp ship of the Arctic seas had come down on its yearly trip to trade for oil and pelts. Just why her skipper, Johan Kars, let himself get jammed in the floebergs that particular trip, especially since he had his pretty, young wife with him, and two of his children—a little girl, and a boy of fourteen—was never known.

That winter was a blank on the map. What took place on the old ship's decks during the cold, dragging months of the long Arctic winter was a mystery as yet unsolved.

Captain Kars was murdered the following spring, when the icefloes first began to move and the schooner rode free of her frozen berth. But it was never known whether it was the trader, Loyd Scadman, who killed him in a squabble over pelts, or his French mate, "Black Bart" Boulain, with an eye to stealing his ship.

Who could tell what madness the long Arctic night might have put into the big mate's evil brain, or what aftermath of tragedy had followed that long winter in the pack? Who, but young John Kars, the skipper's fourteen-year-old boy, who was with him in the trader's post when the deed was done, and who was old enough to know what happened there?

But John Kars, left alone up there on the tundra coast with his dead father, when Black Bart Boulain carried his mother and sister away on the old *Harpoon*, which vanished at once into the gray mists of the Arctic Sea, had kept sealed lips through the long years—waiting!

Grimly waiting for those years to change the slender lad into the hard-sinewed thing of fate he was to become—the avenger of his father, and his mother, and his sister!

Where he kept himself during those years, no one knew. Nor did any one know at first, the grim young giant with the red-bronze mop of hair on his head, who later began to haunt the tundra coast with the coming of each trading season, his bleak, gray eyes always turned toward the polar sea, searching the dim, gray mists.

But Black Bart Boulain knew him on that fateful day, twelve years after the murder of Captain Johan Kars, when he sailed the old *Harpoon* down out of

the Arctic Sea, and once again dropped her anchor into Franklin Bay.

They met in Loyd Scadman's trading post—John Kars and Black Bart Boulain! There were no words. The big Frenchman merely grinned vindictively back of his thick black beard, and set his massive form to meet the dynamic body, hurled at him like a thunderbolt.

"*Mon Dieu!*"

Father Bolarde would never forget that fight as long as he lived, for he chanced to be there to witness it. It was a savage fight—primal—raw!

John Kars avoided the big Frenchman's crushing clinches. Black Bart's great arms, like massive flails, more often than not beat into the empty air. Kars fast fists took the Frenchman's wind with blows that thudded into his vitals like steel pistons, power driven.

The end was swift and gruesomely effective. It came in a quick savage clinch, designed by Boulain as a bone-crushing finale to the affair. The little priest had gasped in wordless horror, and then—it happened!

Kars met that clinch with the old strangle-hold trick of the Kogmollocks—the *sasaki-wechikun*—the jujutsu of the little brown Eskimos among whom he had lived during those years of maturing manhood.

The rasping, triumphant laugh that rolled out of Black Bart's purpling throat, ended suddenly in a deep gurgle of gasping sound. His massive body was bent slowly backward—inexorably. The purple spread from the throat to the face. The crushing arms fell away from their viselike clutch on Kars' body, like broken cables, thrashing the air futilely. Then came that gruesome, ghastly sound that marked the end of the fight.

It was the snapping crack of the big giant's backbone, breaking like a brittle sapling felled by the wind—John Kars had avenged his father's death!

There was a suppressed gasp of sus-

pense in the trader's post. A stark stillness had gripped the few beholders, and held them immobile in a grim horror. Sergeant Rand McShane came suddenly through the door, saw the prone body lying on the floor, knelt beside it, and pronounced it—dead!

When the sergeant rose and looked about him, John Kars was gone—and they never found him!

But Canadian law holds as its own right, the dealing out of justice. From that moment John Kars became a hunted man—himself a murderer in the eyes of the law, and a refugee from the Scarlet code of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

NOW, on the cabin floor of a dead trapper but recently murdered and his fur stolen, had been found the old gold watch of Captain Johan Kars, holding another startling mystery within the lids of its heavily hinged case.

Who dropped the watch in the half-breed's cabin? Undoubtedly the thief and the murderer, who had spread terror throughout the Fort Savoy wilderness, for it was the second looting and killing within the week. In both cases the killer had uncannily left no trail in the snow crust, coming and going like the drifting specter of a *windigo*!

"It is an incomprehensible riddle, *mon père*," the old factor muttered, "and this old watch but adds to the mystery of it."

The little father's face was grave as he picked up the ancient timepiece and studied it thoughtfully.

"Like a specter, stepping out of the tragic past, my friend," said he, "yet this at least is of tangible substance—a clew for our resident sergeant of police to think on when he returns to the post."

Neither of the old men heard the soft entrance of a fur-shrouded figure through the door of the post, and were

aware of it only when a cold voice ripped the silence apart like a shot.

"What clew?"

It was Sergeant Rand McShane himself. The red-headed sergeant—known throughout the white wilderness wastes of the tundra coast country as "Red Rand" of the Royal Mounted—threw back the ice-crusting hood of a parka, disclosing a face that was grim with purpose, thin-lipped and determined.

"I'm thankful you're back, McShane!" the factor cried, rising from his chair, white and shaken. "We feared you were shut off from the post by the storm."

How the doughty sergeant had broken through the white barriers piled up by the blizzard, he did not explain. It was characteristic of him that he sensed tragedy in the air, and jumped to the crux of the situation at once.

"I hear one of your trappers got a knife stuck into the small of his back, Folette, and had his fur stolen," he barked.

"You have not heard the worst of it, man," the old factor replied. "It is the second killing in a week. The killer strikes, then vanishes with his loot as if dissolved into the thin substance of the air."

"Loup-garou stuff, eh?" McShane growled. "Well, this is not the only post visited by your will-o'-the-wisp, friend factor, if that is any consolation to you."

"I have been chasing this phantom for a week up in the Chippewaian Lakes country, where he has been pulling this same mysterious stunt. I'll admit I've not been able to solve the riddle. Likewise, it's got the Mounty outpost on Franklin Bay buffaloed."

The sergeant's brow clouded. He was evidently baffled by the bold, uncanny challenge to the Scarlet code. Suddenly he shot his bleak gray eyes at the little priest with a surprising query.

"Do you believe in ghosts, *mon père?*" he asked.

Father Bolarde smiled a wintry, withered smile before he answered the query.

"Our superstitious half breed trappers have solved your riddle, sergeant—at least to their own satisfaction," he said. "They are calling it a visitation of *le chasse-galère*—the evil spirit of one who has sold his soul to the devil for the power of transporting himself through the air."

The sergeant also smiled—with his lips. It was noticeable that Red Rand McShane never smiled with his cold gray eyes, except for Fançon Folette, the factor's daughter.

"And up on the tundra coast," he said with a pause to mark the effect of his words, "they say—it is the ghost of the old *Harpoon!*"

That startling statement dropped into a dead silence.

"But you were saying something about a clew," the Mounty continued, with his searching eyes on the old watch still clutched in the priest's hand. "What is it?"

"This, sergeant!" the little father said, passing the ancient timepiece over to the Mounty, and in his own turn watching the effect.

McShane took the old watch. He stared curiously at the shimmer glint of red flame on the woven-hair chain. He barely suppressed an ejaculation of surprise as he read the name cut in the heavy case.

When he opened it and saw the tinted picture, his eyes flared wide with shock, and the miracle of emotion swept the cold, official calm of him to flame, like the touch of fire to tinder.

"Good heavens, Factor Folette," he cried, "that is a picture of your daughter, Fançon!"

"So it would seem!" Father Bolarde offered; "but look at the date inscribed in small lettering on that pic-

ture, sergeant. You will see that it was made before Fançhon was born."

"I don't understand it!" the Mounty said.

"No more do we!" replied the factor.

The sergeant was speechless with amazement. It was no secret at the post that Red Rand McShane loved the old factor's daughter, and was in turn no less loved by little Fançhon herself.

Factor Folette now laid a trembling hand on the Mounty's arm. "Listen, my friend, and hold a close grip on yourself," he said. "I have never told you this that I am going to tell you now, but you have a right to know. Fançhon is not my daughter!"

"Not—your—daughter! Then whose daughter is she?"

"I—do—not—know."

CHAPTER II.

STRANGE DEVELOPMENTS.

POLEON BREAUT'S cabin sat back in the timber below the post, in a small open clearing near the lake. In front of its door ran the snow-blocked trail out of the North.

The big Canuck was seated before his glowing fire of pitch-pine knots, puzzling his woods-wise brain over the mysterious happenings in Fort Savoy wilderness, and getting nowhere with the problem.

It was Poleon Breault who had found the dead trapper in his looted shack and the old gold watch on the floor, which might be a clew to the strangely vanishing killer, and—might not.

"By gar, I don't compre'nd dees t'ing. Me, I'm bes' trailer in de Nor'd, but dat t'ief, she com' an' she go—pouf, lak de wind—an' she leave no trail in de snow. Mebbeso eet's loup-garou for sure!"

Suddenly Poleon's candle flame swayed, flickered, and went out, as

from a puff of wind, leaving the shack in darkness.

"By gar!" he muttered.

The big Canuck's flesh began to creep in chilly pricklings up and down his spine. Then he heard the soft closing of his door, and knew that some one had opened it and entered while he was engrossed in thought, admitting the draft that had left him in darkness alone with—

Then a voice: "Hist, Poleon Breault!"

The Northman released the tension in his big body and grinned; for he recognized the voice of one who had visited his cabin—surreptitiously—before.

"By gar, eet ees John Kars!" he cried, scratching a match to relight the candle, but a hand reached out and snuffed the flame.

"We'll leave it dark, my friend, as your sergeant of police is at the post," John Kars said.

"*Mais oui, m'sieur*, dat's mebbeso bes'; but ef you know dat, for why you tak de beeg chance to get arrest?"

"For reasons, Poleon Breault," Kars replied, "one of which is to warn you that you have not kept your eyes wide open as I told you to do. Unseen danger stalks the wilderness."

"By gar, m'sieur, dere ees one tam hell to pay in dees wilderness. How you 'spec' I watch a t'ief w'at com' an' go lak will-o'-de-wisp, eh?"

"Come with me, my watchful friend, and let me show you where your will-o'-the-wisp is, at this very moment!" Kars said, moving toward the door.

The Canuck followed Kars through the timber, where there was but little snow, down to the edge of the lake; wondering what this silent man of the out trails, whose gray eyes in the light were even bleaker than Sergeant McShane's, had to show him.

The frozen lake lay under a soft silver haze of starlight. On the far

northern shore across from the post, he saw a tiny glimmer, twinkling in the dark gloom of distance.

"By gar, m'sieur!" he cried. "Dat's old Mukluk Pete's cabin, an' dat old Indian, he hav' been dead for five year!"

"Nevertheless that light has shown there for three nights, my friend, and you didn't know it," Kars replied. "That old deserted shack holds under its rotting roof no less a slippery wolf than your will-o'-the-wisp, who leaves no trail in the crust!"

Poleon gasped with bewilderment. "Den I 'spec', m'sieur, I bes' tell de sergeant 'bout dat, *oui*!"

"And have McShane run that wolf out of his hole before I discover the evil purpose that brings him to Fort Savoy?" Kars snapped. "No, Poleon, my friend—it takes a wolf to trap a wolf!"

On the way back to the cabin, the Canuck told John Kars all there was to know about the recent thievings, including a description of the old watch, to which Kars listened in a tense silence. But the Northman never knew when Kars left him. At the door of his cabin he turned to address his companion, and discovered that John Kars was gone!

WHEN Sergeant McShane left the post he made direct for the barracks. His brain was in a whirl of tumultuous thought, or he might have noticed that the snow was disturbed on his doorstep, which he had not crossed since arriving at the post.

He entered, lighted the candle on his desk, and peeled out of his furs. These he hung, with his belt and holstered guns, in an alcove, where other clothing hung, neatly arranged on pegs.

If the little Fançon and that strange picture in the watch had not filled his mind so completely at the moment he might have observed the odd bulge of

an old capote of his hanging there; but the sergeant was not quite himself to-night.

He built up a fire, and cooked his supper in a preoccupied manner, unaware that a hand had softly reached from beneath the old capote, and noiselessly lifted both service guns out of their holsters.

The Mounty scarcely touched the meal he had prepared. His eyes seemed constantly drawn to a picture tacked on the wall of the barracks. Out of the picture looked the lovely face of Fançon Folette.

The Mounty's troubled gazing, brought another pair of eyes, that matched his own for bleakness, to a focus on the picture after a bit. Very nearly did the man concealed behind the capote betray his presence by a quick gasp of sound that escaped his lips—to him the picture of Fançon Folette was the picture of some one else!

Sergeant McShane rose slowly from the table and moved mechanically to his desk, on which he laid the old watch. He studied intently the portraiture therein.

The eyes of the watching man could not see from his cramped position that it was an almost perfect duplicate of the other, though they recognized the old gold watch with its queerly fashioned chain of gleaming hair.

The capote moved very slowly as the man crept forth as soundlessly as a sphinx. Yet as noiseless as the movement was, it telegraphed a message to McShane that he was not entirely alone. The Mounty was instantly tense—on edge—ready to meet any eventuality.

He turned like a shot, and then froze, moveless, staring into eyes as coldly callous as his own, set in the face of one who easily might have been his brother.

The red gleam of hair was similar,

as were the long, straight, sinuous body and muscular limbs. They were oddly alike, those two—except the intruder's face was concealed back of a red tangle of beard, while Red Rand McShane's lean jaw was smooth shaven.

Whether the sergeant recognized John Kars back of that flaming beard, he never disclosed by so much as the bat of a lash. Ignoring the fact that he was covered by his own guns, the red-headed sergeant slowly closed the old watch, placed it in a small drawer of the desk, locked the drawer, and dropped the key into his pocket. Then he faced Kars squarely. His first words revealed that he had known from the jump, who it was that stood before him.

"Well, what do you want, John Kars?" he rasped in a tone that had not a trace of fear.

Kars smiled coldly. "I'll give you credit, McShane, for measuring up to expectations. We could work out this mystery business fine together, you and I, if——"

"If you were not wanted for murder!" McShane barked.

"That is one of the things I want to talk to you about," Kars replied. "It so happens that I am not a murderer, even by your code—*Black Bart Boulain is not dead!*"

"You expect me to believe that?" the sergeant snapped.

"N-o, McShane," Kars returned slowly. "That is why I've got you covered with your own guns; but it's too bad you won't—it might save you from making a big mistake while following the clew of that old watch dropped in the murdered trapper's cabin."

"Did you drop it there?"

Again Kars smiled. "No, sergeant—but I know who did!"

"Who?"

"I might tell you if—I was not wanted for murder."

"Perhaps you know also, how he makes his strange get-away, eh?"

"No; but I mean to know!" Kars' eyes flashed suddenly to the photograph on the wall, and his face went grave. "Whose is that picture?" he asked.

"Why?" the Mounty countered.

"The face haunts my memory like a ghost!" Kars said. Then he changed again with the suddenness of a shifting wind to a cold implacableness of purpose. "You will not trust me, then?"

"No, Kars!" the Mounty rapped. "The unchanging code of the Scarlet is, 'Get your man,' and—I'll get you yet!"

"I'm sorry, McShane!" A wistful something came into John Kars' eyes, which he instantly smothered and suppressed.

Without further words he broke the sergeant's guns, extracted the cartridges, and tossed them into a far corner. Reversing the gun butts, he offered the weapons to the Mounty.

"May you never fire first, sergeant—that's according to the code too, is it not? On the other hand, may you never fire—too late!"

With a swift, unexpected move, Kars swept the candle from the desk, plunging the place into blackness. A cold draft of air swept the sergeant's face, as the door opened and closed with a snap.

McShane was on his feet like an uncoiled spring, his swift fingers finding an extra case of cartridges on a shelf by the door, and ramming them into the guns.

John Kars could not have made more than a dozen paces from the barracks before the Mounty leaped into the open, primed for action!

But John Kars had not even left the barracks, and he likewise was working fast, so that when Sergeant McShane discovered the trick played on him and reëntered the place, it was to find the small drawer where he had

placed the mysterious old watch broken open, and the ancient timepiece gone!

Sorely in need of rest, the sergeant slept till dawn. Then he hit into John Kars' trail, which led straight north toward the Grayling—a stream that loses itself in the icy death traps of the mighty barrens.

AND on that very day Poleon Breault discovered that the strange occupant of the old shack across the lake had vanished too—like a myth, leaving no trail in the deep snow to mark his going.

"By gar!" muttered the Canuck.

But because it was John Kars' secret, he said no words concerning the mystery at the post.

Poleon kept a faithful watch on the old shack, however, and on the trail that led out of the North past his cabin door. A week later, he saw a lone musher dragging a trail-weary body out of the deep snowdrifts, down the trail toward his cabin.

The musher was an Indian, on whose swarthy, death-gray face, the Canuck read tragedy, even before the breed staggered up to him and crumpled down on the snow, with the fateful words of his message falling haltingly from half-frozen lips.

"M'sieur Sergeant of Police—he has been shot!"

Poleon, stunned by the startling announcement, stood for a moment inactive. Then he gathered the body up into his arms and carried it slumped across his great shoulders into his warm cabin. There he did what he could to revive the frozen man, and get the whole of his tragic story out of him.

"By tam," he muttered, "dat's bad beezness. Dat leetle Fanchon, she's goin' be all bust op wit' grief w'en she hear 'bout dis."

Eventually the Indian opened his eyes, but when he tried to speak, the words were choked off in his throat by

a violent fit of coughing. The frost had bitten into the lungs with its deadly sting.

Poleon, in a frenzy, worked over him frantically. It was essential to know the worst before carrying the news to the post. The man quieted down, lifted a shaking hand and pointed to his ragged, ice-crustured fur, heaped on the floor where the Canuck had piled it in his haste.

The Northman searched the fur but found nothing. "*Mais non*," he cried, rising, "dere ees not'ing dere to tell de story. Ees dat Red Rand dead?"

"Look—parka hood!"

The words were scarce heard, but Poleon got them, and pounced on the fur again, tore open the ice-stiffened hood of the parka. Pinned in its depths, he found a soiled piece of paper—a leaf torn from a Mounty's trail journal.

He opened this with trembling fingers, and then stared at it with popping eyes. It told nothing of the Mounty's fate, but it held a strange message that sent cold chills chasing up and down Poleon Breault's spine.

He stuffed it into the pocket of his mackinaw, then turned and ran from the cabin, making for the post as fast as he could maneuver his big body over the snow.

Dark dusk had fallen. The old post sat in shadow-steeped gloom in the center of its wide clearing, a dark plume of smoke lifting from its chimney against the white background of the snow-draped spruce.

In passing, Poleon shot his eyes out toward the dark expanse of the frozen lake and gave a quick gasp of surprise. The tiny light was again twinkling in old Mukluk Pete's cabin—the mysterious occupant had returned!

The Northman stampeded through the door of the post, pouring his tragic news without warning into the startled ears of the old factor and the old priest,

who were smoking in silence by the big stove.

"De sergeant, he has been shot on de trail, m'sieurs!" he cried.

"In the name of Heaven, who shot him?" the factor exploded, panic-stricken.

The priest, schooled to a greater calmness, asked quietly: "Is Sergeant McShane dead?"

"By gar, I don' know, m'sieur, but he send to de post a ver' strange message!"

Digging into his pocket, Poleon produced the fateful bit of paper that had set his eyes to popping. He handed it to the priest, who read it with a grave expression, and in turn passed it to the factor, whose face it blanched to a deadly white.

Six startling words—written by a hand perhaps stiffening in death—straggled across the small white sheet.

BLACK BART BOULAIN IS NOT DEAD!

That is what the sergeant—dying it might be—had written, and sent to the post.

"*Mon Dieu!*" murmured the little *père*.

"How in Heaven's name could Black Bart Boulain be alive?" the factor cried.

A terrible silence fell within the post. It was suddenly shattered by a voice—a voice harsh and gritty like the rasp of splitting ice, that came out of the shadow near the door.

"Stranger things have happened, m'sieurs!"

The factor, the priest, and the Canuck turned as one with the shock of it. They beheld the huge bulk of a man, whose massive shoulders hung gruesomely forward from a bent and twisted spine, like a monstrous ape's; and whose dark, vindictive eyes burned like an evil fate in a brutish, black-bearded face.

"*Bon soir, m'sieurs!*" this apparition suavely said. "I am back from the dead, as you see!"

Framed in the wide door of the old fur post at Fort Savoy, stood Black Bart Boulain—alive!

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERIOUS NIGHT SOUNDS.

JOHN KARS brought his speeding team of huskies to a full stop under the cold star gleam, which filtered softly through the snow-dusted branches of a spruce thicket that bordered a scrub-tangled muskeg swamp. He listened intently to a distant will-o'-the-wisp of sound lifting far back on the trail behind him.

He had heard the strange whisper of sound once before since the short arctic day ended in abrupt twilight, but had been unable to identify it and had passed on, making for his hidden cabin in the barrens.

Now in the white night with a gleaming mantel of silver draped over the tundra wastes, and no movement of living thing visible as far as vision could penetrate the luminous haze, he heard it again, like a pur of invisible wings. Even as he listened, it again faded into silence, like the passing of a specter.

Kars knew that Sergeant McShane would likely be following the trail he had broken in the hardening crust. But this mysterious sound was not the shrilling of a musher's sledge runners on the ice, nor the far mournful baying of malemutes on the night.

Neither was it the weird wolf voicing of the hunting pack—the avid hunger howl of the arctic killer, that makes a man's flesh creep and his heart stand still. It was something entirely different from either—intangibile—haunting—baffling!

Kars gave up trying to solve the riddle, and pushed on through the spruce thicket into a wide muskeg, beyond

which a ragged line of gaunt aspens and skeleton-bare willows marked the meandering course of the Grayling. This stream found its source in the Chippewaian Lakes and lost itself in the icy death traps of the barren lands.

Sending his team down a drifted bank, Kars swung the dogs north on the frozen stream, and pointed his "going" toward the pale constellation of stars that hung over the Arctic pole.

For hours he held his huskies to a steady, tireless pace—due north—the dogs padding softly over the icy trail with hot breaths puffing white, vaporous fog banks into the frigid air. Kars followed grim and silent, in the wake of the sledge.

The outfit was approaching a small trading post, set on the lonely river shore in the heart of a snow-white desolation of tundra wastes. Again John Kars heard that weird, will-o'-the-wisp of sound on the night!

He did not stop, but turned in toward the little post. As he neared it, he saw it was dark. A dead chimney indicated that it was fireless. The door was also standing wide, giving it the appearance of desertion.

Kars knew the white trader and his half-breed helper. He felt an instinctive uneasiness that all was not well here. This uneasiness was quickly observable in the dogs. When he drew to a halt in front of the post his team was quivering, ruffs bristling, while the big lead lifted a mournful lay on the night.

Death was in the place—stark death and mystery!

Across the threshold of the door lay the half-breed, riddled with bullets. On the floor of the post huddled the white trader. The little trading post had been looted. Its beams were empty and bare of the winter accumulation of fur.

But beyond a beaten trail to the river, there was not a break in the crust—as far as Kars could determine in the waning starlight—to mark the coming

or the going of the strange fur thief and killer!

Kars unhooked his dogs and fed them, deciding to wait for daylight to carefully study the signs, if any, left by the mysterious raider. True, it might have been done by a roving band of thieving Kogmollocks, but an Eskimo inevitably leaves a broad, flat-footed trail in the snow. Kars was certain he could name the killer, if not the mysterious method of his trailless movements.

An examination of the dead bodies by the light of an old seal-oil lamp disclosed the fact that the half-breed had been killed with rifle shots from a distance, while the trader had been shot in the back at close range by an old-fashioned pistol of mammoth bore.

This Kars established by probing for the bullet—a huge leaden slug of peculiar shape, just such a slug as was used in a big gun he had seen as a boy on the old *Harpoon*—his own father's gun!

AT the first light of dawn, John Kars, with but an hour's sleep after two hard days of constant mushing since leaving the old fur post at Fort Savoy, was at work on the problem. Inside the dead trader's post he found nothing to help solve it. Circling the post he found no tracks, save those that led to the river, and the white blanket of snow on the river ice was undisturbed, except immediately in front of the post. Here there was a break, as if fur packs had been dragged over it—otherwise the river disclosed no trail, up or down, save his own.

Kars studied the tracks from the post to the river with his bleak eyes growing bleaker with the surging thoughts back of them. He quickly discovered that there was more than one set of webs impressed in the snow—one heavy, the other light, a large man and a small!

Neither impression had been made by Eskimo *usamuks* with the broad, narrow strip. Each had been made by a white man's snowshoes with the finer mesh of babiche.

John Kars, with his lips thin pressed, and his jaw set hard with determined purpose, made even a closer study of the deeper impress. He measured the stride of the maker by his own stride, and discovered that as large as he, himself, was, he could not easily cover the tracks.

The man who had made them had taken a longer snowshoe stride than his own by at least six inches—he was, therefore, a giant in stature, and in bulk as his weight on the snow confirmed, along with his massive stride!

Kars returned to the post, convinced that he knew the man, even if his bulk added to the greater mystery of his vanishing trail. That riddle, too, he would eventually solve.

He covered the dead bodies, and departing, closed the door, leaving them where the Mounted Police up at Franklin Bay could find them, when he had gotten word to them.

In silence, he hooked his team to the sledge. He headed for his hidden cabin back in the barrens, puzzling his brain in an effort to connect the strange will-o'-the-wisp of sound he had heard on the brittle night with this mysterious killer, who left nothing behind him but death and mystery.

Only one possible solution occurred to him, which seemed so far-fetched in this remote frozen latitude that he put it away in the back of his head for future consideration.

Night found John Kars in his own warm cabin, which was concealed from the open sweep of the barren in a drifted coulee.

He had a good supper of fresh caribou meat. He was seated before the red warmth of his stove, thinking deeply as he gazed at the small tinted

picture in the case of the old gold watch he had taken from Sergeant McShane's desk.

He knew now why that other picture he had seen on the sergeant's wall, haunted his memory like a ghost. It was as like this one in his father's old watch, as one red moose flower is like another, and—this was a picture of his mother!

Whose, then, was the picture on the wall?

John Kars was trail weary and should have been early between his blankets, but his brain was so busy threading the maze of accumulating mysteries that the small hours still found him sitting there, striving to unravel the tangled web.

There was the puzzle of the two pictures—his father's watch found in a murdered trapper's cabin—the bullet from his father's old ship pistol, fired into the back of the dead trader—and in the red background of it all, like a dark, sinister specter that had come stalking back from the dead, there was—Black Bart Boulain!

It was on the heels of this last thought that Kars' huskies, kenneled in the little compound back of his cabin, lifted a startling, long-drawn baying on the night—a challenge to some unknown stalker of the snowy arctic barrens.

The sudden shock of it rocked John Kars back to the present, like a shot. Never before had an unwelcome visitor found this hidden cabin of his. He reached out and snuffed his candle into darkness.

His eyes shot to the small window in the shack, thrown into clear outline against the white gleam of the night, but he saw nothing except the icy glitter that lay over the bleak, barren void before his cabin door.

He slid softly out of his chair and moved on soundless moccasined feet to the door. This he swung wide, and

stood in the dark opening, searching the starlit night—in vain.

The great barren was bathed in a soft translucence, and its misty distances smothered in shadows as vague as polar fate, but there was no slightest movement of living thing—only the dead, white wastes, with the glittering curtain of the Northern sky hanging over them in a remote loneliness.

Either his dogs had played a trick on him, or the scent they had picked out of the still night had come down the wind out of the impenetrable mists of distance.

Then came, suddenly once again, that weird will-o'-the-wisp of sound, and on the heels of it, the dismal distant wail of a malemute lifting off the shadow-steeped barren like a tocsin of fate!

CHAPTER IV.

A TRAGEDY OF THE BARRENS.

A MUSER and his dogs, thought Kars—friend or foe?

He stepped softly back into the cabin, slipped into a warm fur capote and cap, grimly lifted a rifle from its pegs on the wall, and returned to his watch in the open door.

The strange sound on the night did not come again, but the mournful wail of the malemutes broke once more—closer. John Kars waited, motionless. A full moment—two—five; then appeared a dim, moving dot, etched against the glittering white of the snow where it slowly materialized out of the cobalt shadows of distance.

It was undoubtedly a musher and his dogs, following Kars' own trail across the barren to his hidden cabin—though earlier, shifting winds during the day had covered it—as unerringly as though it were fresh-broken in the crust!

Kars waited in grim silence until he could clearly hear the shrill whistle of sledge runner on the ice. Then, leaving his door wide, with little thought to

the frigid air driving out the cabin's warmth, he moved swiftly off down the sloping trail to the scrub-tangled edge of the coulee.

There he crawled in behind an icy hummock, capped with a crust of snow. In this crust he tunneled a deep furrow with the blue-steel barrel of the rifle. Through this opening he grimly watched the slow approach of the unknown outfit, in a tensed, cold-eyed, moveless silence.

On came the phantom team, twisting in and out through the drifted snow dunes, with no slightest hesitation in picking the way straight toward the cabin, the dogs following the covered man scent. The unknown musher was satisfied perhaps that he was nearing his goal by the pungent smoke smell of Kars' pitch-pine fire on the frosty air.

John Kars smiled grimly and drew a sharp bead over the rifle sights on the dark moving outfit. It might be merely a lost trapper, run short on supplies and making for the tundra coast to reprovision. It might be a MOUNTY, and Kars just now particularly, didn't want a MOUNTY mixing into his affairs.

He shucked out of his right-hand glove. His finger slipped into the trigger guard. He had no intention of deliberately shooting the man, his purpose being only to scare him into a shifting of his trail. He waited a full moment longer, and when the oncoming sledge was within a hundred rods, he sent a challenging shot across the trail.

Other than a momentary pause, occasioned by a brief tangle of the straining malemutes in their traces, there was but slight interruption to the steady, onward progress of the outfit—no hail from the driver, and not a single answering shot.

Kars fired a second and a third time, with the same mystifying result. An unresponsive silence greeted both shots. The huskies came on, straight at the flame flashes, with—as Kars could

judge by now—a strangely dragging gait that was vaguely puzzling.

Wondering, Kars ceased his effort to stop the dogs and studied the approaching outfit carefully. There was something infinitely mysterious about it that he could not at first fathom. He saw now that the dogs were famine weary, and the strangely silent driver——

Suddenly John Kars drew erect with a gasp, and with the shock of a startling discovery prickling through his body.

There was no driver!

The gaunt lead dog was in full command of the ghostly caravan. The still, rigid "thing" under the fur on the sledge was evidently all that was left of the ill-fated driver.

"Great Heavens!" Kars muttered. "That musher is dead!"

As if in answer to him, the gaunt lead lifted again that dismal death wail of distress on the night. It sent a shiver through Kars as he thought of what a queer trickster fate is, to thus bring a death's visitor to his cabin door, while the living had long sought this hidden cabin of his in vain.

The death sledge passed his hummock. Kars grimly stepped down from his place of concealment and followed in its wake, wondering vaguely as to the identity of the unknown.

The dogs dropped on their bellies in front of his shack. John Kars, with a none-too-steady hand, reached under the fur to make certain that they had brought a dead man home to him.

His feeling fingers touched icy flesh—the ill-fated unknown had mushed to the end of his last trail.

THE condition of the famine-ridden team indicated that the man, whoever he was, had been out of the game for some time; for the dogs had clearly suffered a long lapse since their last supper of frozen fish. They had evidently been kept at the mushing, in the first stages of it, by the will of the man,

dying on the sledge. Then they kept on by the will of the big lead, following the scent on the wind.

The task ahead of John Kars was a somewhat gruesome business. He gave his attention, however, first to the faithful dogs, their master being beyond the need of human aid.

"Steady—steady, now!" he calmed the huskies, as he unhooked them from the sledge. "You've been faithful—faithful as hell, sticking to a job like this on starved and empty bellies—this musher, whoever he is, knew dogs, and how to train them!"

He kenneled them in an extra pen back of his own kennels, and fed them amid the din of his own dogs' savage challenge to the stranger's team.

After that, John Kars grimly set about the task of solving the riddle of this drifting derelict of the arctic barrens. He lifted the heavy, lifeless weight in its furs and carried it into his cabin, with a sort of nameless dread tugging at his nerves—an uncomfortable premonition that the dead stranger would not be a stranger to him at all.

He laid the fur-covered form on a bunk, closed the door to shut out the frigid cold, lighted a sliver at the stove, and touched the dead candle into flame.

With the flare of yellow light, relieving the oppressive darkness, John Kars felt more at ease in the presence of the strangely haunting spirit of the dead man. He could not have told for the life of him why some uncanny sixth sense warned him that, when he stripped the concealing parka hood off the dead face, he was going to receive a very bad shock.

He hung up his capote and cap, and replaced his rifle, each on their respective pegs on the wall. Then he turned and stood for some time staring down at the moveless figure on the bunk. A dreadful possibility had suddenly occurred to him.

Could it be——

Savagely he beat the thought from his mind, refusing to give it verbal expression, even mentally. Then John Kars strode to the bunk, determined to know the worst and have it over.

He jerked back the fur parka from the body of the dead man. Though he was partially prepared for a shock, he recoiled as the flame-red flash of a scarlet tunic leaped at him like the dart of a serpent's tongue.

Kars forced his wide, startled eyes slowly up that traditional garb of scarlet to the dead face of its wearer, and found himself looking on the cold, marble-white features of Red Rand McShane of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

CHAPTER V.

FATE GARBED IN SCARLET.

THIS tragedy that had befallen Sergeant McShane, awakened in John Kars a cold, insensate rage. He quickly discovered that it had not been a mere accident of the trail. The sergeant had been shot in the back by a ruthless killer, even as had that white trader over on the Grayling!

By whom, perhaps no one would ever know, since the Mounty's lips were forever sealed—but were they?

Kars' heart leaped to that futile thought. He made a careful study of the wound, having stripped off the Mounty's garb. The bullet had torn a passage diagonally through McShane's body, entering under the right shoulder blade, but missing the lung by a narrow margin. It had passed entirely through—a clean wound—and had then lodged in the fleshy part of the arm.

It was not necessarily fatal. Unless neglect had already resulted fatally, there might yet be a tiny spark left in the apparently lifeless body of Red Rand McShane.

For the sake of the girl in that puzzling picture on the sergeant's wall,

John Kars hoped that this might be so. He had seen a something in the Mounty's eyes that spoke of a tender affection for that girl—whoever she was, and whatever the mystery of her.

Kars felt carefully for the faintest flicker of life at the pulseless wrists—at the hollow in the throat. Finding none, he did not give up. While a kettle of water heated on the stove, he probed for the bullet in the arm.

When he had found this, he stared at it grimly. Laying it on the table in the candlelight, he placed beside it the heavy slug he had probed from the trader's body.

They were identical!

Kars' eyes went icy. It narrowed both deeds to a single source, for his father's old ship's pistol had fired both leaden missiles of death.

Black Bart Boulain! and by what miracle Black Bart still lived was as great a riddle as his mysterious movements over the arctic snows!

Kars carefully cleansed the sergeant's wounds, and disinfected and bandaged it to the best of his ability with the facilities at hand. Testing again the pulse, he still found it unresponsive. He tucked the cold body between blankets and fur, prepared a hot broth, and intermittently allowed a spoonful at a time to trickle down the constricted throat.

He kept up his watch, with unceasing effort, for hours. In the end, Kars rose with a grim smile on his lips. His sensitive finger tips had felt a faint throb of life at last.

Red Rand McShane was alive!

The cold arctic stars were smothered by the dark pre-dawn before John Kars sank into a chair by the stove—not merely to rest, even then, but to give himself to a deep brooding on the problems that confronted him.

With the sergeant—granting that he lived—out of the game for days to come the old fur post at Fort Savoy, down

in the lonely heart of the snow-buried wilderness, was at the mercy of these strange fur thieves and killers. At Fort Savoy was that girl whose image haunted his memory like a ghost. What if that girl with his mother's face should prove to be his own, long-lost sister? It was a nerve-gripping thought!

John Kars suddenly remembered that little twinkling light in old Mukluk Pete's cabin across the lake from Fort Savoy, and his own vague thought that some one—possibly Black Bart himself—was spying on the post from that deserted shack, with some treacherous purpose in contemplation.

There was little doubt in his mind that the black-hearted Frenchman was back of all this mysterious frightfulness. But where did Black Bart hole up—where was his operating base?

The old *Harpoon*!

Like a revealing light, that solution flashed into John Kars' brain. The old *Harpoon* that had sailed away into the gray mists of the arctic sea, with his mother and his sister, and Black Bart Boulain!

KARS rose and began a restless pacing of the floor, thoughts leaping one over the other, as he mentally outlined his plan of immediate action. The candle sputtered—died—leaving the cabin in gloom, still he plodded to and fro.

Not until gray dawn, lifting like a creeping vapor, gave way to gray arctic day, did he pause in his stride with his decisions reached. He smiled grimly now at the subterfuge he meant to employ, remembering what he had told Poleon Breault.

"It takes a wolf to trap a wolf!"

Kars prepared and ate his breakfast with callous eyes, softening now and again as they shot swift glances at the sergeant on the bunk.

McShane was not conscious, but his

short, irregular breathing was a most hopeful sign. What the sergeant required now was immediate medical attention. As the little mission priest at Fort Savoy, Father Bolarde, was the best available medico, Kars meant to take the MOUNTY to Fort Savoy as quickly as possible.

Kars' own ultimate destination, however, was Franklin Bay up on the tundra coast, where, if his guess was right, he might expect to find his father's old blubber ship, *Harpoon*, lying off there sealed in the pack like a gray ghost of the sea.

Just now he would get some strengthening broth into the sergeant, sleep an hour or so, and then hit the trail.

Three hours later John Kars was swiftly and carefully making his preparations for a long journey. These preparations included an ample grub pack, extra furs for the MOUNTY, and for very definite reasons of Kars, the sergeant's equipment and sledge.

Since he could not leave either dog team penned up to starve, his or McShane's, he rigged up a double harness for both teams, assuring himself a swifter *marche* in the wind.

The day, unlike the star-bright night, was heavy with the threat of storm, but the northern sky was no bleaker than John Kars' eyes, when, having made the sledge ready for travel, he returned to the cabin for his final preparation.

Kars carefully shaved off his red tangle of beard. He smiled a bit grimly as he surveyed the metamorphosis in his small mirror. The smile vanished, however, leaving the changed face somber and grave, when he crossed to the bunk and stood for some potent moments looking down on the stricken-and-unconscious MOUNTY.

"Forgive me, old chap," he murmured, "for putting this over on you in your present condition; but I'm taking up the job where you left off!"

Kars then quickly donned the sergeant's outfit, from boots to scarlet tunic. In the red coat, with the belted holsters and service guns—bleak eyes as cold and callous as the sergeant's ever were, and red hair topping the general effect—John Kars, former outlaw exile to the Scarlet code, was an almost perfect counterpart of Sergeant Red Rand McShane of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police!

A little lighter, perhaps, and a trifle younger; but with these defects to the deception offset by a harsher set to the stern, grim jaw of him, he was like enough to fool the unsuspecting.

"Yes, like enough!" Kars snapped. "It may be a bit illegal, but necessary—Fate garbed in Scarlet to trap a wolf!"

John Kars lifted the unconscious Mounty and carried him, carefully wrapped in furs, out to the waiting sledge.

"Anyhow, old chap," he murmured, as he tucked the sergeant in, "your Scarlet is carrying on!"

Swinging the big lead down the trail with his nose pointed toward the barren wastes, Kars cracked his caribou lash and gave the magic trail word of the North.

"*Marche!*"

CHAPTER VI.

GHOST OF A MOUNTY.

FORT SAVOY was wrapped in the gloom of a deep oppression, having given up all hope for the missing Mounty. Added to this was the fear of the specter that had stepped out of the darkness on that terrible night a week ago—Black Bart Boulain!

The Frenchman had not told his purpose in so startlingly revealing himself. He had asked a single, strange question, received an answer to it, and had then pushed back into the darkness and was gone.

"Where is the Indian, Mukluk Pete?" was the question.

"He is dead!" Father Bolarde had answered.

And that had been all, yet across the lake, for several nights, still had gleamed that yellow twinkle of light; then it had vanished and had not been seen again.

Poleon Breault, keeping watch as John Kars had commanded him, had visited the old shack when he was sure Boulain was gone, and had made a strange discovery.

The Frenchman had torn away the bunk and the crude home-built cubboards, and had dug up the earth-packed floor—searching for *something*, which he evidently had not found.

Since then the little settlement had settled into a gloom of fearful waiting for news of Sergeant McShane. It had waited in vain.

It was into this oppressive state of gloom that John Kars slipped into Fort Savoy under cover of the dark dusk, driving his fast team down the trail that led past Poleon's cabin. The big Canuck, standing in the brush by the side of the trail, saw him as he crossed the path of light that streamed from his open cabin door.

The big Northman got a flashing glimpse of the face under the parka hood. His thumping heart fairly pounded when he thought he recognized Sergeant Red Rand McShane, and also the sergeant's voice, speaking a swift command to the running huskies.

Poleon bellowed a hearty hail, then stood in a deep perplexity when the musher, without response, sped on like the wind.

The Canuck lost sight of the swiftly fading outfit. He followed on foot over the beaten trail, straining his ears to hear the demonstration he fully expected to hear lift in a wild tumult of joy over the lonely settlement.

But there was no demonstration.

Poleon stopped when he reached the clearing, in wide-eyed mystification. The old post was somber and quiet in the shadowy gloom, with but a single pale light showing at its window. The snow-peaked cabins with their dim lights blanketed, looked ghostly in the dusk.

There was not a sound, nor a living soul stirring, yet the Canuck was certain that Red Rand McShane had come back to Fort Savoy, and that it was a time for rejoicing.

His great lungs boomed the news on the night!

Then came the swift opening of cabin doors—the flashing of lights—the swift exodus of moving forms—the excited chatter of voices.

From the big log house where the factor lived, came running a flushed-faced girl with a wild, expectant joy shining in her dark, luminous eyes. In the door of the old post, the factor appeared, and by his side, the mission priest, each searching the excited scene inquiringly.

Presently all were gathered in a vague wonder before the old post's door. The jabber of excited voices ceased only when Poleon Breault pushed his big body through the throng, and cried: "By gar, where ees he?"

"Where's who—what hoax is this?" the factor queried.

When the Canuck merely stared about him with a dazed look on his puzzled face, Factor Folette added with impatient insistence:

"Quick, man, what is the meaning of this?"

"I don' know, m'sieur," Poleon replied; "but I see heem, sure t'ing! I see heem, an' I hear hees voice!"

"Whose voice?" Father Bolarde wanted to know.

"Dat Red Rand's, m'sieur! He driv' lak de wind. He driv' fas' team w'at burn op de trail lak streak, pas' my cabin door!"

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"Man, you are either crazy, or dreaming," the little priest persisted, his sharp, old eyes sweeping the dark edges of the fringing timber hopefully, nevertheless.

"*Mais non!*" the big Northman disclaimed. "Eet was heem—or hees ghost!"

A hush fell on them all. Fançhon Folette, standing on the steps in the center of the circle, facing the bringer of this strange news, lifted into the pent stillness, a low sweet voice, filled with emotional strain.

"If you saw him—where did he go?"

In great distress, Poleon answered: "I don't know, *ma chère*; but eet's lak I say—I see heem, an' I hear heem, den—pouf! he ees gone, an' de dark, she swallow heem op lak loup-garou!"

The thronging trappers edged a bit closer in superstitious fright. The Canuck's words suggested a terrible possibility—it might be a visitation to Fort Savoy of that frightful fantasy of the North, the loup-garou, or worse still, of that evil specter—*le chasse-galère!*

THEN came a sudden sound that sent them fleeing in full rout back to their cabins, crossing themselves as they ran. A harsh, throaty laugh it was, with more of threat in it than mirth, and it had rolled out of the gloomy shadows.

Only the girl, the old factor, and the little wizened priest, with Poleon Breault, were left to face the threatening menace of it.

The Northman moved his big body protectingly in front of the girl. Each silently watched the massive bulk of Black Bart Boulain push ponderously out of the dark shadows, and slowly approach.

The big Frenchman's long powerful arms hung oddly from his stooped shoulders, giving him the gruesome aspect of a huge gorilla. His wolfish eyes

snapped in his evil black-bearded face like a lash, as he snarled into the stillness:

"Fools, the Mountry is dead!"

The girl turned ghostly white at the vindictive utterance, shrank backward from the man, and fled with a wild cry.

The factor was speechless, words failing him at the shock of the "French Wolf's" return. The little priest held his peace, though his black eyes snapped. Both turned and reentered the post in silence.

Poleon Breault alone made answer. "M'sieur, how you know so moch 'bout dat?" he asked.

Boulain met the query with a shrug of his huge shoulders. Then, with a contemptuous grunt, he passed by the Canuck and plodded up the steps of the post. At the top he turned and smiled darkly down on the big Northman beneath him.

"Find out, my meddlesome friend!" he snarled.

"You bet you my life!" Poleon's big voice boomed. "Som' day you goin' answer me dat question!"

The Frenchman glared, his thick fingers seeking the old-fashioned pistol stuck in the heavy belt that was strapped about his ponderous middle. For ten throbbing seconds the hand poised dangerously over the butt of the gun. Then it gripped into a huge fist and lowered slowly.

"And some day, you fool, you're going to die—sudden!" he snarled, passing on into the post, and disappearing.

With some misgivings, Poleon watched the broad, twisted back vanish into the post. Then, feeling a vague fear for the old factor, he made quickly for a side window where he could watch events without himself being seen.

"Dat John Kars mek one beeg mees-tak," he muttered; "w'en he don' break dat wolf's neck, instead hees back!"

"Hist, Poleon Breault!"

Poleon froze instantly. Then he recognized the well-known tones of that voice.

John Kars stepped out of the gloomy shadows beneath the log wall of the post. Poleon immediately suffered another severe shock.

He was certain it was John Kars' voice that had spoken out of the dark, but in the light that streamed from the old post's window, it was the face and trail garb of Sergeant Red Rand McShane that he saw.

The puzzlement was in the Canuck's eyes, and was about to burst forth in surprised speech from his lips, when Kars disillusioned him quickly, lest the man who had just entered the post receive warning by the unguarded sound.

"Softly, Breault—it is I, John Kars."

"By gar, m'sieur, for why you mek soch mystery in de night lak slippery wolf, eh?"

"It takes a wolf, my friend, to trap a wolf!" was John Kars' significant reply.

CHAPTER VII.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

AN ominous silence lay on the post. Kars whispered a word to the Canuck, then disappeared toward the dark rear of the building, where he silently effected an entrance through a back door.

The factor and the little priest were standing in the center of the big trading room, each with a fascinated gaze fixed on the huge Frenchman, who had advanced well within the post and was leaning with his massive body sagging against a counter.

Black Bart Boulain's evil eyes burned with a wolfish cunning beneath the otter-rimmed hood of his heavy parka. His thick fingers mechanically drummed with a dull monotony on the counter. He appeared in no great haste to announce his purpose.

The only light in the place came from

a single oil lamp, hanging from the center beam of the post. Both ends of the old log building were steeped in gloom.

John Kars took the situation in at a glance. He softly slipped out of his furs and stood in the dark rear of the post, calmly waiting events, garbed in the official scarlet. With grim satisfaction, he saw the front door slowly open, and Poleon Breault noiselessly enter and pass into the dark shadows there.

For John Kars, the stage was now set!

Black Bart broke the tenseness with a contemptuous grunt, lifted his great, ponderous weight onto his heavy legs, and came slowly forward to stand threateningly before the factor with a sinister gleam in his evil eyes.

"Well, Folette," he grated into the silence, "I've come to tell you what I'm after here. Maybe you know already, and if you do you also know that the safety of your post depends on you!"

Giving that pronouncement a full moment to register, he indulged in a throaty chuckle.

"It's strange sometimes, my friend, how things work out," he resumed, with an evil light in his dark eyes. "Black Bart Boulain, the French mate of the old *Harpoon*, might be dead—but he's not! Ha, no! he is not dead by any means!

"And that old blubber ship might have long since sailed away for good and all out of the arctic seas with Captain Johan Kars' hoarded fortune snug in her copper lockers, but the captain's gold is still where he hid it away fifteen years ago!

"That gold is what I'm after, Folette, and I've got an idea *you* have the little map old Kars made of his secret cache!"

Boulain's brow went dark with a scowl. His eyes bored into the factor's with sudden threat, further emphasized by a rasping, blasphemous oath.

"In the name of Heaven, man," Factor Folette cried, "I know nothing of any hoarded fortune of Captain Johan Kars, hidden or otherwise. What then, would I know of a map?"

"Listen, my friend," Black Bart snarled, "and I'll tell you why Johan Kars stayed over that winter in the frozen pack, fifteen years ago!

"It was fear—yes, fear of his mate, Black Bart Boulain! The reason for that fear is easily understood when you know that the captain kept his accumulations of a lifetime on his ship—every penny that his long fur trading had brought him!

"Foolish, eh? Aye, as foolish as to risk his pretty young wife on that old ship in the lonely isolation of the polar sea. That was the most foolish of all, though at first, the skipper thought only of his gold!"

The big Frenchman laughed coarsely.

John Kars, watching from the dark rear of the post, went cold at the utter brutality of that laugh. It was by a great effort that he held himself in leash, waiting the further revealing of things unknown to him—possibly the fate of his mother, and of his sister—a fate of which he knew absolutely nothing.

"You see," the Frenchman rasped, "I had Johan Kars in my power. The crew of the old *Harpoon*—every man of them—jumped to my bidding at the snap of my thumb, and Kars knew it. How he found out that I meant to take his ship and his hidden gold, I don't know.

"I'll give him credit for thinking up the clever scheme that fooled me; for as I said, he purposely let himself get locked in the ice pack, and some time during the long, gloomy arctic night, he got his gold to shore and hid it!

"This I didn't know until after Kars' *strange* death. I had sailed away with his ship and his pretty wife into the gray murk of the sea. He had out-

witted me—the old ship's lockers were empty!

"That's part of the story, Folette," Black Bart rasped. "Now I'll tell you the rest. I put back to Franklin Bay a week later, but dropped anchor far offshore, for fear the Mounted Police were in the game by this time, investigatin' Kars' death. I landed at night in a small ship's boat and made Scadman's trading post under cover of the dark.

"It was then I learned from an old Indian, called Mukluk Pete, that Kars, using the Indian's dogs and sledge, had made some mysterious trips back into the tundra coast country during the winter, carrying something which he hid in a secret cache. What that *something* was, old Mukluk did not know, but I know—it was his gold!

"I know also, Folette," the Frenchman snarled, "that he made a drawing on a piece of old parchment of the location of his secret cache, and that that old parchment later found its way here to Fort Savoy. It's the map I want, Folette, and the map I mean to have by fair means or foul! The quicker you understand that the better."

Black Bart's eyes glittered with up-leaping menace. The huge bulk of his great, massive body loomed over the factor threateningly.

A MOMENTARY silence fell in the dimly lighted post, that fairly reeked with pent suspense. It was broken by the Frenchman's snarling voice, grating into it harshly.

"I'll tell you why I know that old parchment came eventually to Fort Savoy, Folette. The woman had it at the time Kars met his sudden death. He had made the map in old Mukluk's shack up there on the coast, just before he took his last journey to his hidden cache. He sent it back to his wife by the Indian.

"Mukluk Pete told me all this to save his withered hide," the Frenchman con-

cluded; "but when I went back to the ship to get the map from the woman, I got a surprise instead. A boat was missing. Kars' wife and his five-year-old girl were gone.

"I pulled back to shore again, only to find that Mukluk with his mangy dog team had lit out south across the tundras. With the Indian, went the woman and the girl. I could not trail them in the wind-drifted, tundra snow. Never since could I find where old Mukluk Pete took them, until two weeks back, when a half-breed trapper told me of the old cabin across the lake from your post.

"To that cabin, Folette, he took them, fifteen years ago. The woman died from pneumonia she contracted on the trail, but the girl—ha, that little five-year-old waif was brought by the Indian, Mukluk Pete, to Fort Savoy."

Black Bart once more gave vent to that mirthless laugh. He shifted the blaze of his eyes suddenly to the little priest. "You, *mon père*, ought to remember that, right well, eh?" he said.

A deathly whiteness had crept over the factor's face. Father Bolarde, equally white, gasped out two words that fell from his withered lips like a prayer.

"*Mon Dieu!*"

Both factor and priest knew that the man spoke true in this respect at least. It was to the old priest's mission that the Indian, Mukluk Pete, had brought a little, unknown waif fifteen years ago, and left it unidentified, stoic lips sealed in unbroken silence concerning the child.

"What I do not comprehend, Boulain," the little father said, "is, how *you* know so much about a matter that has been smothered in the secrecy of the years, remaining for so long unsolved."

"Ha!" the Frenchman grunted, "that's easy, *mon père*! Old Mukluk is not dead, as you have been thinking.

I have the tag end of the story from the lips of the Indian, himself—the death of the woman and the fate of the child, together with the information about Johan Kars' parchment map.

"Folette"—he swung suddenly back to the factor—"do I get that map without compulsion, or must I strike at your heart through the girl you call—Fançhon?"

"Merciful heavens, man!" the factor cried. "I told you I know nothing of any map. As for my daughter——"

"Daughter—faugh!" the Frenchman snarled. "You have no daughter. She whom you call Fançhon, is that little waif grown up. Her right name is not——"

He paused in evil triumph, and then exploded his startling bombshell in the post.

"She is Betty Jane Kars!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCARLET CARRIES ON.

JOHAN KARS all but betrayed his presence back in the dark shadows, with the terrific shock of that startling announcement pounding like a trip-hammer in his brain.

The old post swam dizzily before his vision. The light danced fantastically, shedding its pale, yellow glow in a quivering circle where the factor and the little priest stood, threatened by the towering bulk of Black Bart Boulain.

The evil, black-bearded face of the Frenchman with its sinister vindictive menace brought Kars quickly back to normalcy, as perhaps nothing else could have done in that stultifying moment.

He felt a great desire to leap forward and smash his fist into the leering face. There suddenly surged through him once again, the impelling, insensate rage that had before driven him to the cold fury of killing Black Bart Boulain, as he had thought he had in Loyd Scadman's trading post.

Perhaps it was the scarlet in which he was garbed that stayed him—a swift realization that Sergeant McShane was definitely out of the game, and that he had, himself, assumed the rôle of an avenger to carry the Mounty's sacred Scarlet code to the end of this red trail of mystery, as yet by no means cleared up.

At any rate John Kars got a grip on himself in time to check a premature disclosure of his presence to the Frenchman, and held himself in a tense, moveless silence.

Poleon Breault crept softly forward on noiseless, moccasined feet out of the dark front of the long trading room, even as Black Bart snarled into the strained quiet that had settled over the scene.

"Well, I'm waiting, Folette, and I'm not a man one may safely keep waiting for long."

The old factor, grim and gray, calmly faced the man, meeting fearlessly the hard menace in the blazing eyes.

"You are not a man at all, Boulain," he said; "you are just plain wolf! If what you have told me is true, you are twice a murderer—first of Captain Johan Kars, and then his wife, for you are as guilty of that woman's tragic death as if you slew her with your own brute hands. Perhaps you are the slayer of Sergeant Rand McShane as well!"

The big Frenchman merely laughed his utter contempt as the accusations fell from the factor's lips, one by one. He fixed the old man with a vindictive look, and replied with cold venom:

"Have a care, Folette, or I may add the factor of Fort Savoy to the list!"

In the potent ten seconds' pause that followed the words, John Kars' eyes shot to the fore of the post and froze there, while his heart leaped into his throat.

The door had softly opened. Framed in its black aperture was the girl whose

lovely image was so uncannily like the tinted picture of his own mother!

John Kars all but gasped aloud with the shock of that first vision he had of the little Fançon in the flesh. She stood poised against the dark background of the night, like a flaming specter. Her red-gold hair gleamed in soft, caressing folds about her ivory temples and white throat. Her luminous eyes were filled with fear, straining wide on the scene in the center of the room.

Betty Jane Kars!

Was it possible, John Kars thought, that he was at last looking on the little sister lost to him fifteen years ago? But even as the thought was drumming in his brain, the old factor was making ready answer to Black Bart Boulain.

"Yes, Boulain," he was saying, "you would be capable of even that—thief and murderer that you are!"

It was like the touch of flame to powder. Black Bart seemed to expand with menace there in the dull lamp glow. He spat out a horrible oath. He would have smashed into the old man with a blow of his brute fist had not the priest sought to interfere.

Instead, purple with rage, Black Bart swung on the little man and sent him spinning with a backward blow, even as the apparition in the door of the post sped forward like a vivid streak of light.

The girl threw her frail young body between the factor and Black Bart Boulain.

"Oh, you brute!" she cried, facing the Frenchman with flaming eyes. "You cowardly brute!"

The sudden, startling action brought both John Kars and Poleon Breault to a pause. Black Bart jerked back with a loud snort of surprise. The factor uttered a low cry of alarm—not for himself, but for the girl.

The little father lifted himself from

the floor where he had fallen, and fumbled helplessly at his crucifix.

THEN Black Bart laughed that harsh, mirthless laugh that curdled the blood in one's veins to hear it. He fixed on the girl the burning blaze of his evil eyes, aflame with sudden triumph.

"Ha!" he gloated, "this is better than I expected. The factor's *daughter* flies like a moth to the flame!"

"You black-hearted wolf!" the factor cried. "Have done with your melodramatics, and get out of my post!"

"Tush, Folette!" the Frenchman triumphed. "Can't you see that this clearly leaves the issue—the *map* or the *girl*—up to you?"

"I see nothing but an avid brute, gone mad with the greed of gold!" the factor returned, swinging the girl back of his own body.

"Nevertheless, you fool, the situation leaves you at Black Bart's mercy!"

"Don' be too sure 'bout dat, m'sieur!" boomed a totally unexpected voice.

Boulain wheeled to the sound, with uncanny swiftness for so large a man. His eyes saw Poleon Breault catapulting toward him, ten paces distant. His hand dropped swiftly toward the old pistol in his belt. The weapon seemed fairly to leap into his grip.

The little Fançon screamed. The factor and the priest each gasped in quick dismay, as the black-bored weapon flashed up and out toward the advancing Canuck's broad, heaving chest.

But it never leveled to its deadly work. A puff of white smoke, stabbed by a red streak of flame, spat from the rear of the post. It was accompanied by the sharp *crack* of a gun, and the dull *smack* of lead on steel.

The old pistol leaped out of Black Bart's grasp as if snatched from it by unseen fingers. John Kars stepped out

of the shadows, wreathed in the smoke haze of his spitting weapon!

Black Bart recoiled with a snarl, his eyes straining on the scarlet-coated figure back of the smoke screen; which, to his guilty soul, was the ghostly materialization of Sergeant Red Rand McShane.

The Frenchman slowly backed up. Then he made an unexpected move, too suddenly swift for Poleon Breault to intercept. He turned like a shot and plunged down the post, through the door, and out into the concealing shadows of the night.

The factor and the priest paid the incident no heed. They also, were staring, wide-eyed, at the startling apparition garbed in scarlet which had so opportunely appeared, and which could have but one interpretation and that most satisfying—Sergeant McShane was not dead after all.

"*Le bon Dieu* be praised!" the little father cried. "It is indeed our sergeant back again!"

"Thank heavens, yes!" echoed the factor. "And most urgent is the need of him."

"*Mais non*——" Poleon began with decision.

His attempted explanation was cut short by a wild cry from the little Fançon, who at sight of John Kars flew straight toward him.

Kars stood like a man in a dream, seeing nothing but the girl. It was as if his mother came thus wistfully to him in the glory of her youthful beauty. The resemblance was startling. It must undoubtedly be the little Betty Jane!

About the girl's white throat was a long string of red squawberries, that matched the flaming glory of her hair and the bright crimson of her lips. Her glorious eyes were on his face, as she came impulsively forward.

When very near him, with her white hand reached forth to touch the scar-

let coat he wore, she stopped dead still, in a frozen uncertainty.

"N-o—no!" she cried. "You are *not*—Red Rand!"

"No," Kars said softly, "I am not Red Rand."

"But"—she was vaguely puzzled—"you are wearing his scarlet tunic!"

"Yes," he replied with a smile.

"Why?" She was insistent, eager to comprehend.

"It is because he cannot, himself, come to you, that I am wearing the sergeant's scarlet—Betty Jane!"

He watched her closely as he pronounced with clear distinctness that name, but she drew quickly back from him.

"Why do you call me that?" she queried.

The name meant nothing to her, and yet he was convinced it was her very own.

"Some day, you will know," he said.

"You are very strange," she returned; "but very kind, too. Tell me—oh, tell me, is—is Red Rand dead?"

John Kars smiled, and moving toward her, laid his hand softly on her red-gold head, experiencing a great joy when she did not shrink from his touch.

"You love the sergeant very much?" he asked.

"Y-e-s!" came in the faintest whisper from her.

"That makes it all the more important that his scarlet must carry on until—but come," he urged, taking her hand reverently into his own and leading her back down the post.

Pausing before the priest, he added: "And you, Father Bolarde, you too, are badly needed just now at the mission house, which a desperate urge caused me to enter in your absence."

The old factor suddenly interposed with: "If you are not Red Rand, who, may I ask, is it that has stepped into the sergeant's shoes?"

There was unmistakable suspicion in the old man's tones. Kars suddenly remembered that only Poleon Breault knew who he really was.

"I am John Kars!" he explained.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the worried old factor.

Kars then led the wondering girl and the mystified little priest forth into the night, bidding Poleon Breault remain with the factor until his return.

He stepped across the threshold of Father Bolarde's quarters. All was as he had left it. He pointed silently to a still form, lying covered with furs on a couch.

"There, father," he said, "is a patient who needs your immediate attention."

To the girl's wide eyes, brimming with tearful interrogation, he nodded a smiling affirmation. "Yes, it is he, Red Rand—and he will live to make you happy!"

And with that John Kars stepped back into the night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WOLF STRIKES.

KARS faced the night and its vague problems with throbbing nerves. Those problems were still shrouded in a mystery as nebulous as the misty shadows that shrouded the wilderness of Fort Savoy.

A faint crescent moon, set in a pale patch of wintry sky over the frozen lake, failed to penetrate the gloom of the encroaching forest. The night was still, and void of movement.

Black Bart Boulain had been swallowed up in its shadows, still a potent factor to be reckoned with!

Kars returned to the post for a word with Factor Folette before definitely taking up the French Wolf's trail—if trail he had left to follow.

He found the factor pacing the floor with nervous restlessness. Poleon Bre-

ault was standing under the light of the swinging lamp, curiously studying the old pistol which Black Bart had left in his hasty departure.

Here was possibly a vital clew for John Kars, acting in behalf of the wounded Mounty. He strode grimly toward the Canuck, who passed the old weapon to him with a comment.

"By gar, m'sieur, dat's fonny old cannon, sure t'ing," Poleon said.

It was beyond any doubt Johan Kars' old ship's pistol. Neither was there any doubt left in John Kars' mind but that it had been used to fire the leaden missiles of death that had killed the white trader on the Grayling, and later had all but ended the sergeant's career.

The huge slugs fitted the large bore of the old pistol perfectly! This was evidence that Black Bart Boulain was the dark specter back of all the mysterious killings and thievings; but it solved nothing of the man's strange movements over the deep snow country—nor of that second pair of web imprints before the trader's post on the Grayling, which had also vanished into thin air!

That was the inexplicable mystery which neither John Kars, nor the old factor, nor the wilderness-wise Canuck could solve.

The only thing clear was, that the lure of Captain Johan Kars' gold had brought Black Bart back to the tundra coast country. Unable to locate the hidden cache he, with his mysterious confederate, had undertaken a systematic looting of trappers' cabins and even outposts. Black Bart had covered a wide range of territory with incredible swiftness, and left death behind him with ruthless disregard for life and an utter contempt for the Mounted Police.

And Black Bart would undoubtedly strike back at the post in retaliation for the balking of his present plans. The fact that he had been momentarily startled into rout by the sudden materializa-

tion—as he had thought—of Red Rand McShane, when he was certain the Mounty was safely dead and out of his way, would not stay him for long.

He might even strike back swiftly at the old factor, as he had threatened, through the girl!

The sudden thought of that sent a cold stab of fear into John Kars' heart. With the firm conviction—though he had no proof of it as yet—that the girl was his own sister, Black Bart had once more become a personal equation in his life.

When he remembered the tragic fate of his father, and of his mother, at that black wolf's hands, he trembled for the safety of her whom the post called Fançhon.

He had left her alone at the little mission with the aged priest and the wounded Mounty, an easy prey at the mercy of the roving French Wolf, who even now might be——

JOHN KARS was on his feet like a shot—so suddenly as to startle the factor. He explained his fears with a quick word as he made for the door of the post. This he had barely thrown open to the inrush of cold and darkness, when a woman's terrified scream shrilled wildly on the night.

The shock of the scream left Kars numbed, the more so as it came from the direction of the mission. A fateful silence followed it, in which was no sound at all but the haunting whisper of the wind in the spruce!

With a frozen heart, Kars sent his vital body into swift, dynamic action. Even so, it seemed to him that the lagging seconds ran into long, dragging moments before he could reach the mission house.

In a cold sweat of anguish, Kars saw the door standing wide even before he flung up the steps and across the threshold, to range his bleak gray eyes over the stultifying scene within.

Confusion was there—utter confusion! There had been a terrific struggle. The little *père* was crumpled in a heap on the floor, a crimson streak staining his withered brow. The wounded sergeant, fever flushed and in a half-crazed frenzy, was trying to drag his helpless body up and off the couch.

The girl was gone!

That staggering fact rocked John Kars back into a deadly, implacable calm. He went at once to the Mounty. McShane did not know him, minus his red whiskers and garbed in scarlet. He clearly mistook him for a brother Mounty, down from the coast.

"Thank heavens—for a sight—of the—Scarlet, corporal!" McShane cried in a husky whisper, still fighting to rise.

Kars pushed the sergeant back into his furs, forcing him to lie still, and then urged with tense insistence——

"Now, McShane, tell me—if you can—all that has happened!"

"Fançhon," dribbled in a frenzy from the Mounty's lips, "carried away—Black Bart Boulain!"

That much the sergeant managed, then slumped into unconsciousness. But the fateful message was enough to release John Kars' steel-tensioned nerves into precipitate action. He wheeled to the door, even as Factor Folette and Poleon Breault rushed into the room.

"Look to the little *père*, Folette, and keep McShane quiet," Kars barked at the factor in passing.

He flung a command to the Canuck. "Get a pitch-pine torch, Breault, and follow me!"

Five minutes later, with the aid of a sputtering flare the big Canadian had produced, he was searching the snow crust about the mission house.

The heavy tracks of the Frenchman were quickly picked up. They circled toward the timber, and followed its

edge toward the lake. Kars suddenly dropped to his knees and examined what appeared to be blood drops on the snow. He arose with a smothered exclamation, and with one of the crimson drops in his hand.

It was a blood-red squawberry!

Kars remembered the long string of these berries, circling the girl's white throat. The string had broken and dropped a telltale, crimson trail, pointing unerringly the course Black Bart had taken with her.

It led out onto the frozen surface of the lake. The Wolf had clearly made for old Mukluk Pete's shack on the far shore, where undoubtedly was his dog team, or whatever means of locomotion he used.

Kars pondered the situation with a fear-filled heart. He then sent the Canuck back to pack his sledge, light for fast travel, and to hook up his dogs—left in the mission kennels—pending what he should find in the old shack across the lake.

With grave misgivings, Kars took the torch and plunged on ahead. He quickly lost the trail of the man on the wind-swept ice of the lake. But the crimson berries went on like a red trail of fate, straight ahead into the dark gloom beyond the pale circle of his flare.

He followed these, covering the trail fast, for he knew where it pointed. When nearing the lake's far shore, caution bade him extinguish the torch. He plunged it into a drift of snow. Darkness settled about him like a shroud.

It was a full moment before his eyes accustomed themselves to the nebulous gloom, which was but faintly penetrated by the thin sliver of moon, riding the cold night sky. In another moment, he had stopped dead in his tracks, listening!

His ears had not deceived him. He was suddenly hearing again that throbbing pur of nameless sound he had

heard as he mushed northward on the Grayling. There was no mistaking it, even as there was no naming it—it drummed on the still night like the wailing whine of an invisible specter!

Kars could not place the specific direction of it; yet, he now heard it clearly—a will-o'-the-wisp, as intangible as space, without form or substance—for he searched the wide rim of the dark circling forest to find absolutely nothing!

Then John Kars lifted his gray puzzled eyes to the dim arc of the bleak night sky. His heart stood suddenly still with the shock of a startling discovery. The *thing* he searched for was up there, threading the pale path of the crescent moon; and it was moving swiftly northward—a vague, shadowy shape, like a mammoth bird on wing!

Kars stood with bated breath, and watched the phenomenon until it vanished away in silence, swallowed up in the indigo gloom of distance. Then he went on to the old shack, though he was certain, now, it would be void of occupants.

Its door sagged wide on a broken hinge. Black Bart was gone, and the girl had vanished with him!

Where, and to what fate, John Kars could not possibly know; but the method of that vanishing had been made clear to him. With the knowledge, also was solved the tantalizing mystery of Fort Savoy wilderness.

The black specter which trailed the night sky was an airplane!

CHAPTER X.

KARS GOES NORTH.

JOHN KARS' thoughts leaped at once northward to the frozen tundra coast. There was no doubt in his mind that he had solved the arctic riddle. A plane could easily land on the smooth ice of either lake or river. This accounted for the trailless coming and go-

ing that had puzzled them all. He only wondered why he had not thought of the airship solution before.

It was simple enough, after all, since aircraft had before this invaded the frozen pole. A fueling base would easily be solved in the old *Harpoon*, which he was sure he would find, lying somewhere snug in the ice pack off the bleak tundra coast.

Without further speculation, Kars returned to the post and made quick preparations for immediate departure. Much depended upon haste, with the fate of the girl uncertain. Within an hour, loaded light for fast travel, Kars was pointing a course straight toward the pale constellation of stars that hung over the polar sea.

His only doubt was his ability to cope with the unusual situation. Of what avail were his dogs, pitted against a modern demon of the air that traveled the frigid altitudes and was independent of the ice-blocked trails of the Canadian wilderness?

Fear ate into John Kars' heart as he mushed doggedly into the gray dawn—fear for the helpless girl, whose lovely self he could think of only as his little, lost sister, Betty Jane Kars.

And to make matters worse, the day dawned with a brooding threat in the air—the threat of storm that leaps so quickly out of the Northern sky to clog the “going” for a musher and his dogs, chained as was John Kars to the frozen terrain of the North.

There was no wind as yet. The dark threat continued to hang still and ominous, like a suspended curtain of gloom draped over the wilderness.

Toward noon the trail broke through the thinning timber edge into the open. It stretched out over the bleak tundra wastes in an endless sameness, which became a dull, dragging monotony to John Kars' restless spirit before the short day merged into the darkening gloom of dusk.

Before the gloom settled, Kars checked his course with the ghostly dunelike hills, ranging the distant coast like bulwarks set against the raging polar winds.

He would need to fix that course unerringly in his mind and to follow it by instinct, for already a heavy thickening of the murky air told its own fateful story—snow.

Even now dusky flakes began to sift down softly, which John Kars knew to be the silent messengers of fate, marshaling the North's grim tragedy of storm.

Kars gritted his teeth, cracked his caribou lash about his huskies' ears, and sent the faithful brutes on at full trail speed into the murk, which soon must become the fathomless void of storm-swept night.

Within a short time came the wind, and the roar of a blizzard that shot stinging ice pellets into his face like fine steel filings. An hour of this rasping, raw fury, caused John Kars to change his course from due north into the teeth of the wind, more to the west.

He headed for an old trapper's cabin, abandoned long since to the wailing *windegos* of the haunting barrens. Here he could wait out the storm, or at least find shelter for the night.

He hit the lake's ice-piled shore within the hour, and worked slowly up the frozen lake in the direction he knew the shack to be. Nearing it, he met with a surprise. The opaque skin that covered the one small window in the cabin stood out against the blackness of the howling night like a smoldering eye.

The place was tenanted!

By whom, it was impossible to say. As Kars pushed on toward the dull glow, he stumbled upon another surprise that stabbed at him out of the dark with the suddenness of a blow.

It was a long dark shape resting on the ice within a hundred rods of the

old cabin. John Kars recognized the unfamiliar object for what it was.

The bulk of a black airplane, which had undoubtedly been forced to seek a landing by the storm!

Kars brought up short with a hard tenseness gripping his body. Leaving his sledge and dogs, he moved cautiously through the driving murk toward the dark mass. The pilot had fastened a tarpaulin over the propeller, engine cowl, and cockpits, to protect them from the blizzard, and had then left the ship unguarded.

John Kars smiled grimly in the dark. He had caught the mysterious air raider napping sooner than he expected.

John Kars unfastened the tarpaulin and set his feeling fingers to work in the dark. He had but a vague idea of the mechanism of an airship, but he knew it possessed a fuel tank that furnished its sole power of locomotion. To drain that vital storage of energy was his purpose now.

He located the tank and broke off the fuel lead at its connection. A gush of icy liquid met his hand. Grimly satisfied that he had put the ship out of the running, he returned to his sledge and dogs, with a warming confidence tingling in his blood.

KARS secured his dogs in a clump of brush. He made for the shack's lighted window, which sifted a crystal spray out into the storm.

With a tightening at his nerves, John Kars slit the opaque skin covering and popped his eye to the opening. At first the unshielded light inside—though it was but the yellow flame of a candle—set on a rough table—stabbed into his pupil blindly. Then the room cleared and lay before him in detail.

He met still another surprise—the first object his spying eye picked out of the dim interior was the wrinkled face of the old Indian, Mukluk Pete; and old Pete was bound to a chair.

The Indian was all Kars saw at first. Then he made out the dim figure of a man, stooping over the glowing embers in the crude fireplace—a white man!

What this one was doing was not clear, until he rose with a red-hot iron in his hand and an evil purpose in his hard, slate-gray eyes. Those eyes looked out of a crafty face, which John Kars had not seen since his tragic fight with Black Bart Boulain in Scadman's trading post on the coast.

The man was Loyd Scadman himself!

Where the strange pilot of the airship was, Kars failed to discover. Unless he was asleep on the bunk along the cabin's wall beyond range of the window, he was not in the shack.

Kars' eyes roved once over the room in a futile search, then shot back to the free trader, whose gruesome purpose was clear—torture of old Mukluk Pete!

With a lurid oath, Scadman approached the old Indian, whose black eyes watched him with a stoic fatalism. Flourishing the glowing iron, Scadman snarled:

"Now you shriveled mummy talk, or I'll roast off your two ears, one after the other. Where's the map old Johan Kars' wife took south with her fifteen years ago, when you skipped with her and the kid?"

The Indian's reply came in a low guttural which John Kars heard with difficulty above the roar of the storm.

"Big white chief's squaw, she die many moons ago!" old Pete croaked.

"Yeah, I know she died," Scadman rasped. "So did Kars, but not at the Frenchman's hands, as John Kars thought. I killed old Johan Kars with a shot in the back, when I thought he had the map on him.

"If I'd murder the white skipper to get that map, I wouldn't stop at a dirty Indian like you. Talk, and talk fast!"

John Kars went cold to his toes at this cold-blooded bit of information.

Old Mukluk croaked on, heedless of the interruption. "Many moons ago she die—she tell old Pete take papoose to white man's post. She write on map, words for young white chief's eyes to see—she tell Pete find young chief—give him map. Huh!—no find—no give. Pete hide map!"

The croaking voice droned into silence. A subtle cunning swept across the Indian's swart face. His lips closed in straight, thin lines.

John Kars knew he would suffer the torments of the damned before he would open them again.

Scadman went livid with rage. Kars moved swiftly from the window to the door; opened it and stepped over the threshold, making no sound.

Scadman was too busy with his diabolical business to note the entrance. The sickening odor of burning flesh wafted through the room. Kars moved forward and crept toward the fiend with his torturing instrument.

He had forgotten the unseen pilot, until a lithe form leaped at his back from the bunk behind him, and the grip of sinuous arms fastened about him like the steel jaws of a trap!

With a swift, catlike movement, Scadman swung at the noise. The candle toppled—guttered—died—even as a gun leaped to his hand and leveled at John Kars' body.

Came the sound of a struggle, hushed by the gun's roar—blackness, stabbed by a red streak—the thud of a falling body—silence, smothered by the wail of the storm!

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCARLET CODE.

THE blizzard whined a dismal requiem under the cabin's eaves. The stillness inside the shack endured for moments, throbbing with the uncertainty of the unknown. Blackness, like a death's cap, shrouded the place.

Eventually Scadman's nerve-racked voice lifted a deep, growling inquiry: "Did I get him, Von Strom?"

Another silence, then came a muffled voice in reply with a rasping German accent: "Yah, you got heem! You will make now a light, yes?"

"Who in the fiend's name was it?" Scadman snarled, fumbling at the table in search of the candle. "Looked like that blasted Mountry, McShane!"

No answer came to that. Scadman found the candle, lit a match and nervously stabbed the flame at the charred wick, laying his gun on the table edge, under his eyes, during the operation. The match flickered out; but a second, applied with an oath, was more successful. The light flared forth into the oppressive gloom, lighting the place with a yellowish glare.

Loyd Scadman reached for his gun, but it was gone!

He wheeled with a startled cry that choked off in his throat. A dead man lay on the floor in a crumpled, huddled heap, a dark pool spreading gruesomely beneath the body. But it was a man with a Germanic cast to his death-gray features—the man who had supposedly answered him out of the dark—the man he had called Von Strom!

Beyond the dead man stood the intended victim, grim, and coldly smiling, furs cast aside, and garbed in the dread Scarlet of Canadian law!

The moment's tableau was one of rigid amazement for the evil trader, who had been so sure his shot had found its intended mark. His straining, slate-gray eyes dropped from the face—to him the cold, implacable face of Red Rand McShane—and stared into the black bore of the deadly service gun that covered him, his own weapon reposing in the apparition's belt.

John Kars, who, with incredible swiftness, had swung the clinging pilot between himself and the sudden death which had accompanied the red flame

streak, rasped out savagely the traditional formula of the Scarlet code.

"Warn you, Scadman, that I'm arresting you for the murder—fifteen years ago—of Captain Johan Kars! and that I'm taking you along according to the code—alive or dead. Which way, is up to you—take your choice!"

Scadman flared out: "What you mean, McShane—arresting me for murder? Black Bart is the man you are——"

Cold, imminent death in the gray eyes back of the leveled gun, brought the quick stop and a change of front.

"How do you figure, I'm the—murderer?"

"By your own admission a moment ago that you killed my father in cold blood!" Kars rasped. "And let me disillusion you—I am John Kars!"

The name affected Scadman like a plunge into icy water. He gasped a stifled repetition of it, and swept a horny hand across a sweat-wet brow.

In the off-guarded second, Kars leaped in. A brief struggle followed. When it ended, Loyd Scadman's two wrists were adorned with the iron shackles of the law.

Kars shoved the man back and down onto the bunk, recently vacated by the dead pilot.

"Stay there," he barked. "I am musing north at dawn. If you behave and answer the things I want to know, you'll go with me—alive!"

KARS next cut old Mukluk Pete's bonds, and received a grunt of thanks in a low guttural. No great damage had been done the old Indian, owing to Kars' quick action. He arose stiffly and shuffled about the cabin to ease the cramp in his old legs. Then he stopped suddenly before his rescuer, and searched long into John Kars' face with his inscrutable eyes.

"Huh!" he grunted.

Lifting Kars' left hand with his

gnarled, bony fingers, he rolled back the sleeve from the forearm. The coal-black eyes gleamed between the slitted, wrinkled lids. On the white flesh they saw a small tattooed K.

Old Pete straightened, and muttered three low words like a medicine man chanting an incantation.

"Young white chief!"

Paying no attention to the dead man on the floor, nor to the shackled trader on the bunk, though the latter watched him with avid eyes, the old Indian shuffled across the cabin, and began removing an oblong section of bark from a large lateral log in the wall.

Kars also watched him with tense, silent interest. The bark removed, old Mukluk slowly pried out, with the thin point of a skinning knife, a square block of wood set in the log, exposing a dark cavity behind it.

From the cavity he slowly and carefully took a crumpled, age-stained sheet of old parchment. He shuffled back to John Kars and laid the parchment with ceremonious solemnity in his hand.

"For young chief's eyes alone!" he said.

Faithful old Indian, thought John Kars, true as fate itself to a dead woman's trust. Kars sealed the bond between them—white man and red—with a long handclasp, received and returned by old Pete in solemn silence.

Kars spread the parchment out on the table, and studied it in the yellow candlelight. It was undoubtedly his father's old location map, for on the back of it was written the message from his mother!

As John Kars read that message, his eyes filmed over, softened, glowed—then they went suddenly cold as arctic starlight on winter ice.

In it was revealed the whole plot of villainy. In it, also, was all the proof he needed for Betty Jane Kars, when he found her!

Kars stowed the parchment in his

pocket, and turned on Scadman the steely hardness of his eyes.

"And now, you—murderer! It depends on straight answers to my questions whether you mush out of here on your feet at dawn, or ride on a death sledge like your friend, Von Strom!" he said.

Then came the first question, barked like the crack of a gun.

"Who was Von Strom?"

Scadman, white of face, scowled, but there was but slight hesitancy in his nervous reply.

"Boulain's new mate on the old *Harpoon*!" he said. "A former German air pilot, who came into this country as a spy during the war. He became a clever fur thief, and was the brains back of Black Bart's present plot!"

"Go on with the story—all of it!" Kars demanded grimly. "Where did they get hold of the airplane?"

"They stole it from an engineering party the government sent out last fall to map from the air the uncharted northwest territories. They murdered a government pilot to get it, if you want the whole story," Scadman growled.

"Then they converted the old whaler's deck into a landing platform, stocked her up with petrol for the stolen plane, and sailed down the coast to Franklin Bay," he continued. "They operated at night under the very noses of the coast patrol. I guess you know the success of the scheme without being told—the hull of the old blubber ship is rich with easily garnered pelts."

"And red with blood!" was Kars' cold comment. "Go on!" Kars demanded. "Where did you fit into the scheme, and what were you doing here with Von Strom?"

Scadman moved uneasily under the hard, searching gaze of John Kars' steely eyes.

"Knowing the fur country like I do," he answered, "it was my job to map out

the best fur caches for them—near open ice where they could land and make a quick get-away. For this I got a percentage of the skins they brought back each trip. Then Black Bart tipped his hand about old Pete and the map. Von Strom and I cooked up a private deal together."

John Kars' eyes lowered with contempt of the man. "I like to see even a crook play a crooked game square to the end," he said. "And the end of a crooked game always comes, Scadman. You and the German thought to beat Boulain to a fortune in gold, eh?"

Kars smiled bleakly.

"Well, Von Strom is dead by your own hands and you are shackled in steel! You two would have tortured an old Indian's secret from him; but you failed to reckon with the Scarlet, that sooner or later—but always in the end—gets its man! The game is up."

A gleam of subtle triumph stole softly into Scadman's slate-gray eyes.

"Is it?" he asked with a vicious snarl. "What about Black Bart Boulain, and—the girl he holds captive on the old *Harpoon*?"

Kars jerked erect at the unexpected retort. "I told you I was trailing at dawn," he said. "When I reach the tundra coast, I'll get Black Bart Boulain!"

"Betty Jane Kars will be beyond your help," came from the man. "For when you reach the tundra coast—you will not find her there!"

The totally unlooked-for use of the name that filled John Kars' mind just now to the exclusion of everything else, together with Scadman's sure confidence, turned Kars suddenly cold with an uneasy doubt.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

The answer was a triumphant rasp of hate, that made a perfect harmony with the savage blast of the storm outside.

"I mean," Scadman cried, "that the polar ice was on the move three days

ago up there—breaking up fast! and that this wind that sounds so harsh tonight is as warm as a chinook's breath, and is blowing straight offshore!"

"Yes—and what of that?"

The slaty eyes gleamed.

"By the time you reach the tundra coast, John Kars, you will be too late—the old *Harpoon* will be riding free and sailing out to sea!"

CHAPTER XII.

FLIGHT OF THE "HARPOON."

JOHN KARS never waited for the dawn to gray the wide tundra wastes that lay between him and the polar sea. When daylight stole slowly over the dark rim of the world, he was mushing north as fast as the soft slush of a southwest blizzard made it possible for him to drive his laden team.

On the sledge was the dead body of Von Strom. Breaking the trail ahead, Scadman plodded, cursing the fate that had overtaken him, but driven onward by the fear of death.

The bleak-eyed Nemesis, steadying the gruesome load by the gee pole and crowding the pace to the total limit of endurance, was John Kars!

Back at the shack, old Mukluk Pete kept a watchful eye on the stranded plane. This, Kars had commandeered, having conceived a sudden hunch that the airship was yet to prove a vital factor in this uncertain game of fate.

The storm had ceased, but a gray murk still hung in the air. John Kars pushed relentlessly on through the short gray day, into the gloom of another dusk.

The wind shifted, the gray threat lifted, and the arctic stars came back to life, one by one—glittering pin points of white flame in a cobalt sky.

Filled with fear, Kars' brain throbbed with unanswerable questions—if indeed he would be too late to save the little Betty Jane—if the ice had really broken

up this early in the year—if Black Bart would take immediate flight with open water—if it all was a cocked-up delusion, and lies of Loyd Scadman?

John Kars still kept at the heart-breaking pace, until the dunelike hills rose close before him like brooding ghost guardians of the desolate white wastes.

Beyond these was the tundra coast and the sea—he would soon know the answer to his questions!

Up the long slope of the grim barrier, Kars drove himself, his dogs, and the shackled trader—hearts pounding, nerves ragged, before they covered the long, twisting trail to the top.

The wind-whipped summit of the rise looked down on the coast and the sea. Grimly Kars called a halt.

The dogs dropped to their bellies. Scadman sank to the snow. Kars pushed back the hood of his parka and bared his red head to the stars.

He listened with his ears inclined against the wind, even while he searched with his eyes the dark wall of the sea. The dull roar of the surf, and the boom of the pounding floes, told him that the ice ran free!

He saw the white combers of the rolling main break on the icebound shore; but nowhere on the dark expanse of tumbling seas could he find the old *Harpoon*!

A hollow laugh from Scadman stabbed into his heart like the thrust of a knife. The situation was hopeless, he knew. One chance only, there might have been to overtake Black Bart Boulain—the airplane.

But the pilot, Von Strom, was dead!

John Kars got a grip on his shaken nerves and brought the dogs to their haunches. A savage lash of the whip drove Scadman to his feet. The tragic *marche* was resumed.

With his prisoners—the dead and the living—Kars made for the Mounty outpost down on the dark coast.

THE little police post, piled under drifts of ice and snow, might have been passed up for an Eskimo igloo, but for the well-known scarlet ensign whipping the breeze from its staff.

The post sat on the unprotected headlands. It was a stanch structure of logs built to withstand the raging gales that poured down from the arctic pole.

Its window was etched in frosty whiteness against the night. Its squat chimney, poking up through the ice, belched smoke flecked with sparks, which shot up into the wind and died.

It was the outflung frontier home of a dauntless service. It housed two Mounties, whose job it was to patrol the lonely desolation of a frozen world.

Even as John Kars drove his fagged team and cursing prisoner toward it, Corporal Jimmie Burns sat staring at the red stove, puffing at his pipe in a frowning reverie.

Constable Dickie Paine stood at the frosty window, searching the tumbling floes. "She's gone for a fact," he said to his companion. "Went with the dusk, before the stars came out, and—the woman with her!"

The constable referred to the old *Harpoon*, which had lain out there in the ice all winter with the wind wailing through her taut stays; silent as a sealed tomb, and never a light riding at her masthead.

The old ship had been a riddle of unsolved mystery, with a new puzzle added to it within the last twenty-four hours—the woman!

It was Constable Dickie Paine who caught a fleeting glimpse of the woman on the forward deck. She had vanished like a myth before he could focus his glass on her, but the constable swore by all that was holy, that she had been trying to signal the shore!

"We had oughter boarded that blubber ship, somehow, and found out her business, before the ice broke up," he now growled.

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"U-m-m!" the corporal grunted in reply. "She was too far out, Dickie—jammed in the shifting floes. Sure death to tackle the job. Nothing short of an airplane could have done it and even a plane couldn't land out there. If she's gone, good riddance to her. As for the woman—put her out of your mind."

But youthful Dickie Paine couldn't forget the woman. Young, pretty, and in distress—he was sure she was from the fleeting, blurred glimpse he had of her through the glasses; and she hadn't been on the old ship before!

How, then, did she get there?

"Airplane!" he suddenly blurted. "That's it!"

"What you mean—airplane?" Burns growled.

"I mean, it's like we thought all along and couldn't figure out. That old ship has been back of all this winter's devilment, and she's done it with an airplane!"

"Airplane me eye!" the corporal snorted. "Have you gone plumb dippy?"

"I know the possibilities of a ship. By Godfrey, I've always said that they oughter supply outposts with a ship instead of a dinky power boat."

"Yeah, instead of a Mounty, you had oughter enlisted as a flyer!" Corporal Burns grunted in disgust.

The constable grinned. He had won his decoration "over there" in the Royal Flying Corps.

"I'd give my hopes of a corporal's stripes for the feel of a ship beneath me right now," he said, "and the pur of a motor in my ears. I'd give chase to that renegade, and I'd pretty quick—By Godfrey, what is that?"

It was a pounding on the door. Paine jumped to open it. John Kars pushed Loyd Scadman across the threshold.

"What's this?" Corporal Jimmie Burns demanded, recognizing the coast

trader and surprised to see him in shackles.

"Lock him up," Kars rasped. "I brought him in for the murder of Captain Johan Kars!"

"Thought the big French mate, Boulain, did that job!" the corporal snapped.

"So did I," Kars returned, "but it happened to be this wolf!"

"It's a lie," Scadman snarled. "Don't let him fool you. This man is John Kars, himself!"

Kars smiled grimly, and peeled his furs down to the scarlet uniform. Both the corporal and the constable jerked erect to attention, saluting a superior officer—to them the scarlet apparition was Sergeant Red Rand McShane.

"And you'll also find a dead one out there on the sledge," Kars said.

Constable Paine dragged the dead body into the post.

"Who's this?" Corporal Burns wanted to know.

"A German, named Von Strom."

"Von Strom!" the corporal rasped. "He's wanted for murder up coast, dead or alive!"

"Well, you've got him, corporal—dead! He's the murderous pilot of the stolen plane, which he and Black Bart Boulain used in their plunder of this coast."

Corporal Jimmie Burns looked up sharply, suspicion growing in his eyes. "Black Bart Boulain is dead long since at the hand of—John Kars!" he snapped with an emphasis on the last two words.

Kars answered coldly: "Black Bart Boulain is even now sailing the old *Harpoon* away with a helpless girl—Fanchon Folette."

Almost he said: "With Betty Jane Kars!"

"By Godfrey, where's that airship?" Constable Dickie Paine barked. "We'll quick enough overtake Black Bart Boulain."

Kars wheeled with a quick, upleaping hope, and faced the constable, *eager-eyed*.

"Can you fly it?"

The constable grinned. "Yes!" he cried.

A brief hour later, driving a fresh team from the police kennels, and with a drum of petrol strapped to the sledge, John Kars, with Constable Dickie Paine of the Royal Flying Corps, was beating it back across the tundras to old Mukluk's shack.

CHAPTER XIII.

CRASHING FLOEBERGS.

FLYING was an entirely new experience to John Kars. The dizzy sensation of being lifted bodily off the white tundras, and of gliding out and upward into infinite space, might have, for the first few moments, shaken his iron nerve, had he not been in a state of physical insensibility, owing to the grilling experiences of the past forty-eight hours.

As young Dickie Paine sent the airship spiraling into a steady climb that dropped old Mukluk's cabin swiftly out of the picture, Kars felt but one impelling sensation—the consciousness of power back of the motor's mighty roar, which was to be such a vital factor in the life-and-death race to the rescue of Betty Jane Kars.

Constable Dickie Paine had proved his knowledge of the craft from the start, manipulating its delicate mechanism like the expert flyer he was. The plane, put in commission again with a full tank of gas, responded promptly in the warming-up process, taxied easily on the ice to a clean take-off, and swiftly pushed her nose up into the cold, gray altitudes like a bird on the wing.

The young constable was grimly keen for the chase. His dark eyes watched the instrument board closely. His sharp

ears listened to the thunderous pur of the exhaust for fault, but found none.

The ship was in perfect flying trim. The constable leveled her off at a thousand feet altitude. He headed due north into the wind and shoved open the control lever. With a savage grip on the stick he sent her roaring on the grim, uncertain mission.

It had taken a full ten hours to cover the distance from the little Mounty outpost on the coast to old Pete's shack, with the sturdy police dogs. The return was made in one incredible hour of time.

At least to John Kars, it seemed incredible. He could scarcely believe the verdict of his eyes when he found himself suddenly looking down on the tundra coast and Franklin Bay. He saw the Mounty outpost with its fluttering flag below him.

Beyond was the dark murk of the tumbling seas. Somewhere, lost in those dim, gray mists, was the old *Harpoon*, and—Betty Jane Kars.

John Kars sat in the rear cockpit of the plane, grim as polar ice, thinking on the long years since the beginning of these things, and forevisioning the end in a final meeting with Black Bart—this time, he hoped, on the deck of his father's old ship.

The airship was now swiftly pushing out over the dark, tumultuous waters, its roar drowning the noise of the big floebergs, which crashed together in thunderous, grinding thuds.

How could the old blubber ship live in such angry seas? This question arose in John Kars' mind as he leaned over the fuselage and looked down into the yawning maw of the angry waters. Constable Paine, thinking much the same way, looked back bleakly and passed his observation glasses to Kars.

At any rate, the *Harpoon* could not have made any great headway in the boiling caldron of ice and spindrift. She might be hard to locate in the thick

drift of wind-blown spray from the altitude at which they were traveling.

Kars searched the ice-clogged waters with the glasses in a sweeping arc to the dark horizon of the arctic world. He tried to shout instructions for a lessening of the ship's altitude, but the propeller wash drove the hoarse words back into his throat.

The Mounty, as if divining Kars' thoughts, suddenly threw the plane into a dive, and dropped five hundred feet. Then he leveled the plane off. The flyer knew that she had only so many hours of flight in her, and that their scouting must be done before the gas level reached the danger mark.

The minutes sped onward with the swift flight of the ship. One hour passed—then two of fruitless search. One thing became evident. The ice pack was being driven back in a jam toward the tundra coast.

The drift had changed with the shift of the wind. It began to look hopeless. After a time Constable Paine glanced back, his face a white mask of uneasiness.

Knowing that words were useless, he pointed to the gas gauge, then held up a hand, indicating with his fingers how much longer they could remain in the air.

John Kars knew that every minute of it was needed to make a safe return to the Mounty outpost. He nodded grimly, even as his face went grave and hopeless. As Constable Dickie Paine, equally grave, was swinging the ship into a bank, Kars swept the field of moving ice to the northwest for a last eager observation.

He suddenly tensed, half rising from his seat in the cockpit. Paine caught the movement and the expression on Kars' face from the tail of his eye. He shoved stick and rudder into a reverse bank and laid the ship on her original course, even as Kars handed the glasses to him and pointed.

The constable's level eyes probed the ice field to the northwest. He twisted his head at Kars, grinned, gave the ship the gun, and shot forward like a flash toward a dim dot of black, far out in the drifting pack.

The old *Harpoon* was out there in the center of the jam, stuck fast in the ice and drifting with the pack.

BETTY JANE KARS faced Black Bart Boulain across the teakwood table in the little chart room.

The face of the girl, standing there facing the black-bearded Frenchman with dread tragedy in her dark eyes, would have given Captain Johan Kars something of a shock, even as it did Black Bart Boulain at the present moment—she was so fatefully like that other!

The big Frenchman leaned half across the table from his chair in ponderous tenseness, studying her through speculative lids.

It was the first time he had had the girl brought to him from the little state-room that had been the sacred refuge of Captain Johan Kars' young wife. It was as if the years had been turned back and that other woman stood again before him!

Suddenly, shrinking backward from him, the girl spoke. "What do you want?" she asked in a whisper. "Why did you bring me here—to this old ship?"

"With that face, you ask me that?" he rasped out hoarsely. "You are the image of your—mother!"

"I demand that you take me back to my father!" she cried, striving to stifle the throbbing fear in her heart.

"And who, think you, is your father?" he snarled.

"The factor at Fort Savoy is my father," she returned.

"Ha!" he gloated. "The dead skipper of this old hell ship was your father—Captain Johan Kars!"

With a catch in her throat, she stared at him.

"Don't believe it, eh?"

Opening the instrument drawer in the chart table, Black Bart took therefrom a gold-framed picture, wrapped in silk, and laid it out before her.

"Aside from the skipper's gold, she who is pictured there was his most treasured possession—while he lived," the Frenchman exulted, watching the girl's eyes go wide with shock and surprise.

"Ha, looks like your own pretty self, eh? Well, why not? It is a picture of your mother—aye—of the woman Black Bart Boulain once loved!"

Followed then a pause.

"And you are that woman's daughter—Betty Jane Kars!" he rasped with a hiss of hate.

Like blows, the words struck her. She flung a hand up across her eyes. One other had called her that—one who had come to her in the uniform of the man she loved, and who had said to the factor at Fort Savoy:

"I am John Kars!"

If these things were true, then John Kars was her brother.

Black Bart laughed hollowly and sank back with a self-satisfied leer.

"And that is why I brought you here to this ship," he said. "It is vengeance, long waited. Spurned by the mother, Black Bart Boulain takes the daughter to wife! How does that sound in your pretty ears?"

With a wild cry, she shrank backward from him to the wall, even as the staccato crack of gunshots brought the Frenchman ponderously to his feet, with a snarling oath.

Through a porthole, she saw the flash of scarlet coats on the old ship's deck. Leading the charge against Black Bart's drunken crew, was one whose name leaped to her lips, like the answer to a prayer.

It was John Kars, himself!

CHAPTER XIV.

LIKE A CHARGING MOOSE.

JOHN KARS and the Mounty had dropped silently out of the gray clouds to the landing deck in a noiseless glide. They had then gone into swift action like scarlet specters, having purposely slipped out of their furs.

Taken by surprise, and more or less in a sodden state from overindulgence in rum, due to the old ship's enforced inactivity, Black Bart's crew, with a few exceptions, proved easy. Those few wilted when they saw the two red-coated figures leap to the deck, with deadly service guns spitting flame.

All were backed into the fore-castle, and securely fastened in by the time Black Bart made a lurid entrance upon the scene, bellowing like a bull.

He threw his massive weight like an avalanche at John Kars. Kars tossed his gun to Dickie Paine, and met the charge with a swinging jolt to the jaw.

The big Frenchman stopped dead, blinking with the shock.

"That's one for my father!" John Kars said.

The Frenchman crouched, roared his fury, and came head-on like a charging moose. Kars side-stepped the rush and swung a blow to the juggler beneath the big brute's ear, which dropped him like an ox.

"That's for my mother!" Kars grated, stooping and closing the grip of his sinewed fingers on Black Bart's throat. "And this for my sister!"

Black Bart, gasping for his wind, was lifted bodily in that grip of steel, and flung like a heavy pack sack toward the grinning constable.

"You tell him the rest, Paine," Kars said, "for I have no authority to arrest him."

Constable Dickie Paine looked in bewilderment at the man he had thought was Sergeant Red Rand McShane. Then, still puzzled, he stooped and

snapped the iron bracelets on Black Bart's wrists.

"I'm arresting you in the name of the King, Boulain!" he barked. "It's for piracy, plunder, and murder!"

Then the girl came straight to John Kars, even as she had come to him in the old fur post down at Fort Savoy.

Kars' bleak, gray eyes smiled into her own warmly. He opened his arms wide, and she melted into them, whispering words that made his heart sing.

"I know now, you are John Kars, my—my brother!" she said.

The constable jerked erect.

"By Godfrey, are *you* John Kars?" he cried.

"Yes, I am John Kars!"

"And the girl——"

"Is my little sister, Betty Jane!"

EVEN as Kars replied, the throb of motors broke in upon the scene. They looked up into the gray sky. Two white-winged planes were circling over the old, icebound ship, where they maneuvered for a moment, then spiraled down to a dangerous landing on the rough ice field.

The planes were from the government survey party, originally sent out to map the great Northwest. Old Inspector McDonald of the Fort McPherson division of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was a passenger in one of them, along with a sergeant and a corporal from divisional headquarters.

The inspector shortly had the whole story from John Kars. The twinkle that crept into his sharp eyes, as he listened to Kars tell why he had illegally donned the Scarlet, turned flinty hard as they came to rest upon Black Bart Boulain.

He snapped his decisions with crisp finality.

"Sergeant McFarland, you and Pilot Gray will fly back to Fort McPherson at once, and you'll take that wolf with you to stand trial for his life!" he

barked, and swung on Constable Dickie Paine.

"Since you are a flyer, Paine, you'll take Corporal Wiley to your outpost in the ship you flew Kars down here in. You two will pick up that slippery fox, Loyd Scadman, and your destination is—the same!

"This old blubber ship," he concluded, "will undoubtedly stay in the grip of the ice for some time yet, and we'll attend to the scum that's on her later. I shall, myself, use Pilot Barney and the remaining plane for an immediate trip into the south."

He then turned to John Kars.

"As for you, Kars," he said, "you are my prisoner for masquerading in the Scarlet, but"—the twinkle crept back into the hard, old eyes—"I'm inclined to be lenient. I will, myself, take you and your sister, Betty Jane, back to Fort Savoy. You've made a fine record as a Mounty. You've worn the Scarlet with honor. I'd like to have you remain in the service!"

John Kars was speechless. It was the little Betty Jane who decided the matter for him. Her small hand resting on his arm, softly caressed the scarlet sleeve.

"And I shall always love you in the Scarlet, John!" she said.

The old inspector smiled, and so did John Kars—understanding smiles both, which sealed the pact between them. A little later, the old *Harpoon* was left behind locked in her icy tomb.

THE old factor at Fort Savoy, and the little priest were sitting by the bedside of Sergeant McShane, whose recovery was now reasonably certain if worry could be eliminated—worry for the girl, whose abduction by Black Bart Boulain had thrown the post into a state of horror.

All three were gripped by a fear they scarce dared give expression to, and had fallen into a strained silence, when suddenly a wailing chorus lifted on the outside air. It rose in a deep guttural of sound from the fear-frozen lips of frightened half-breeds.

"Le chasse-galère! Le chasse-galère!"

The old men tensed to startled stillness. The sergeant's shaking hands gripped the covers spasmodically.

Then came a booming voice that shattered the stillness and broke the spell of sudden fright. It was the resonant voice of big Poleon Breault that rang like a booming bell in the silence.

"Non—non! dat's not le chasse-galère! Mais non, you crazy fools!" the Canuck cried. "Dat's—what-you-call-heem-airsheep, by gar! *Mais oui*, eet ees John Kars, an' he bring back to de pos' dat leetle Fançhon, sure t'ing!

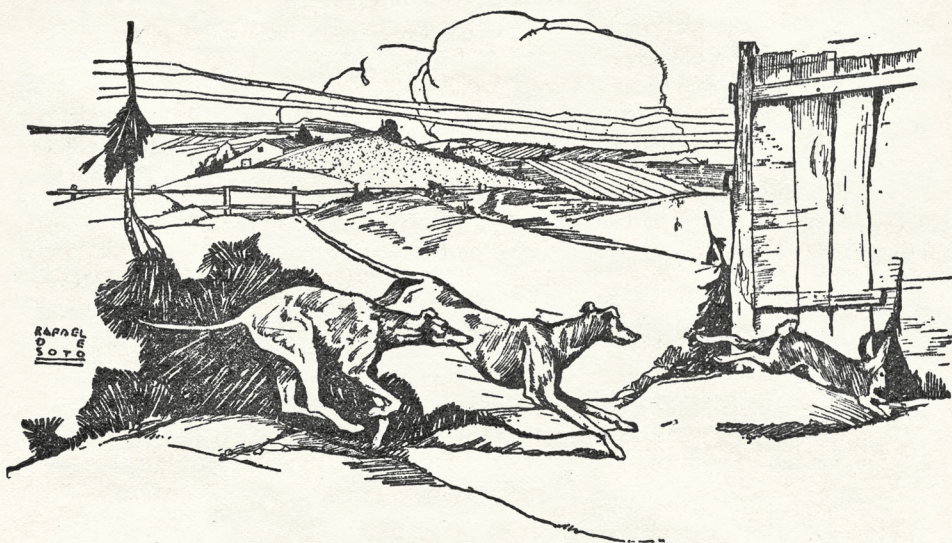
"Bon jour, John Kars!" the big voice boomed on with the gladsome news. "Me, I knew you bring back dat girl, you bet you my life!"

The old factor and the priest rose to the renewed hope, and the sergeant smiled wanly, but happily, even as the little Betty Jane rushed through the mission house door, and flew into the factor's arms.

John Kars entered behind the girl and went direct to the bedside of Sergeant McShane. Silently he grasped the wounded Mounty's white trembling hand. No words passed between them—there was no need—understanding had come to both.

The sergeant's eyes shot to the girl. Kars smiled and turned. She came to him, eyes swimming, lips quivering. He took her tiny hand and placed it in Red Rand McShane's, leaving her to whisper into the Mounty's eager ears the story of Betty Jane Kars.

Did you enjoy this story? Write to the editor and give your opinion.



Black Rebel

By John Talbot Lynch

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

FLASHING FANGS.

TO the clamorous accompaniment of growls and snarls, a duel of gleaming fangs was taking place on the concrete sidewalk. "Chick" Muldoon—tall, dark-eyed, rangy of build—was one of the few spectators who had witnessed its beginning. It looked to him like a struggle to the death, if allowed to continue.

The yellow-haired dog had started it. He was a sturdy, battle-scarred mongrel, tricky as a fox, and as brave and stubborn as a wild boar. His opponent was a greyhound—a jet-black, fierce-eyed animal, slender, supple, and powerful of body.

Like the mongrel, the greyhound appeared to be a veteran of many scrim-

mages. His forehead bore the marks of previous battles, and there were long scars on his lean ribs. But though he had scored heavily in the present engagement, he had not yet received a scratch.

Rolling, tumbling, weaving, they swirled about like a whirlwind. Fang clashed against fang; body met body with crushing force. Now the greyhound was down. Now he was up again, and the stout-hearted mongrel was on the flat of his back. Both were speedy. Of the two, the greyhound was the more nimble of foot and the more clever in seizing his openings.

Suddenly a gaunt, worried-looking man pushed his way through the circle of spectators. He had in his hand a hefty shillalah.

"Rebel," he shouted, "get back outa that!" He was speaking to the grey-

hound. "Get back, I say! Gol darn yer hide!"

He raised the shillalah, with the evident intention of bringing it down on the greyhound's back.

Realizing this, Chick Muldoon swept up to his side; caught the stick as it descended.

"Have a heart, mister. Don't strike that one."

"He's my dog, the devil," spluttered the would-be clubber. "Can't a man discipline his own dog, if he wants to do so?"

"I suppose he can," Muldoon agreed. "But why club him? The other started the fight."

"The which did?"

"The yellow one. I can swear to it."

"I don't believe it. I know that devil too well," protested the owner of Rebel. "Do something, son, for Pete's sake," he added, looking panic-stricken. "Stop him quick! He'll tear the cur to bits."

But there was no stopping that lean, fierce greyhound. Nor for that matter, the sturdy, lion-hearted half-caste. Multiplying themselves—or so it seemed—they went a-whirling from pavement to curb, thence to the middle of the road, and returned again to the sidewalk.

Timid onlookers scurried out of their way, for limb and raiment were in danger. Automobilists and trolley-men stopped to watch the battle. Thrill-hungry passengers deserted their comfortable seats, and joined the mob on the pavement.

Once again the worried-looking man begged Chick Muldoon to "do something."

"Pull him off him, sonny; pull him off. Do an old man a favor."

"Do you want me to get my hands mangled?"

"No danger, boy. He never snipped a human being yet, bad as he is. And

besides, you're young and strong and speedy."

"Safety first," Muldoon ruled, rushing off to his old Ford which was parked near by. He returned with a rope, one end of which was looped.

The battle was now raging at white heat. And the combatants, as if desirous of giving the fans an unforgettable thrill, were tearing into each other like a pair of tigers.

With a vicious drive, the swiftly moving greyhound ripped open his antagonist's shoulder. Splotches of crimson claret splattered on the pavement. Once again Rebel scored. And this time his deadly fangs left a souvenir of battle in the mongrel's forehead.

Came now from several directions a warlike host of canines—small, frail dogs, whose yelps were shrill, querulous; and powerful, gigantic dogs, whose deep throats were bellowing like thunder.

The crowd scattered. They had to. The rush of the newcomers broke up the "private" fight, and the battlers were separated.

Then Chick Muldoon cast his lasso over the greyhound's narrow head, frustrating his evident ambition to join the howling free-for-all.

"Good boy, sonny," commended the old man, heaving a vast sigh of relief. "You've saved the hides of the whole pack. And like as not, you've saved me some money."

"Come on," he pursued. "We got to evacuate while the going's good. There's a couple of cops rushing up from the crossing down there."

They swept into a side street, turned into an alleyway on the left; down another street again, then leftwise once more, into another alleyway. There a battered old touring car was standing. And, reaching the vehicle, the old man slumped down on the running board, whipped off his black hat, and proceeded to mop his lean, harried visage.

"I guess I'm safe now, son. For the present, anyhow."

"I don't see where you were ever in any danger."

"Wasn't I?" snorted the old man. "My boy, that yellow cur belongs to my worst enemy. A man's who's trying his darnedest to ruin me."

"Whose was he?"

"Martin Pender's. You know Pender, maybe?"

"I guess I know of him. He owns the Broadbrook Kennels, doesn't he? And he's supposed to have a lot of little politicians under his thumb?"

"That's the man—bad luck to him! He's out to do for me. Shouldn't be a bit surprised if he set the cur onto my dog on purpose."

Muldoon's brow wrinkled. His thoughts were on the incidents that led up to the fight.

"What does Pender look like?"

"He's a big angular man, with a big angular nose on him. Wears a kind of a cowboy hat——"

"And a black mustache?"

"Right."

"I've seen him, then," Muldoon said. "And I'm sure he did set the mongrel onto your hound."

"You'd swear to that if I should be haled into court?"

"I will swear to it, if need be," promised Muldoon. "I happened to be fidling round my old boat at the time the fight started. I saw and heard all there was to be seen and heard."

"Your dog came along with a bone in his mouth, and stopped a few yards away from me, gnawing it. First thing I knew, the mongrel was galloping up the street, and some one was hissing 'At him, Sanco! Eat him up! At him, at him!'"

"I looked down. The only one I saw was the man you've described as Pender, and he was just about to jump into a doorway. What's he after you for?"

CHAPTER II.

THE LOW-DOWN.

"I'LL tell you that," the old one responded. "My name is Colby, Bob Colby. I've got a strip of land out in Pine Hills, and Martin Pender's got a mortgage on it. The land in itself isn't much. But there's a trap-rock quarry in it, right alongside the highway. That, I've been given to understand, is worth quite a bit, because of the extra fine quality of the stone."

"A couple of months back, I had a chance to sell the quarrying rights to this city, and I had begun to think my old age was heading for clover. Pender killed the deal. I know that for a fact. As you say, he's got the city councilmen under his thumb. And the idea is: He wants to grab my quarry for himself."

"But the greyhound?" Muldoon said. "What's all that got to do with him?"

"Gol darn the greyhound!" bristled Bob Colby, shaking his fist at Rebel. "I'd ought to do away with that dog. He's caused me a heap of trouble ever since I got him from a brother of mine who lives in Frisco. Once he killed a dog. That is, the dog died a month after the fight."

"To give him his due, Rebel fought that battle in self-defence. But I couldn't prove it, so it cost me three hundred bucks—which I had to borrow. Another time he ripped the ears of a fine beagle, and I was out one more hundred."

"And now, you see, Pender wants a chance to sue me, so's to kill whatever chances I have for raising money. I owe him fifteen hundred, and the old grabber is trying to buy out two other mortgages that are on me. If I fail to meet the next payment—well, it's good-by to my fine quarry."

Chick Muldoon offered no sympathy. But in the heart of him, in the big generous Irish heart of him, there

was a word of silent sympathy, and he was wishing he could help the worried old man out of his difficulties.

He appraised the greyhound, appraised him with critical, comprehending eyes. He thought well of him. He liked the depth and the breadth of his great chest, and the arching sweep of his loins, tight and tidy as the waist of an athlete.

Even better than the physical part of him did Muldoon like the fierce, conquering spirit that shone in the dog's eyes.

"How much is he worth, Mr. Colby."

"All the cussing in the world," Colby said.

Muldoon smiled. The old man's humorous vehemence amused him.

"Say," Muldoon queried. "Can he run as well as he can fight?"

"I don't know. I never tried him."

"He's a thoroughbred?"

"His pedigree says he is. But I think myself he's a thoroughbred wolf. Why do you ask that?"

"Because I was just thinking that he might be of some use to you, after all," Muldoon stated. "There's big money in greyhound racing. A good dog could clear off your mortgage in a short time. I think this fellow must have some speed."

"If I were you, I'd hand him over to a good trainer, and get him into shape for that two-thousand-dollar purse that Grover O'Day, the New York millionaire sportsman, is putting up this year."

Bob Colby pulled himself to his feet. He looked very serious for a moment.

"By gosh," he said, "I never thought of anything like that before. Two thousand dollars, you say? For one race?"

"Not exactly for one race. He'd have to win two others before he could enter for the big-money one," Muldoon revealed.

"But how could I foot the expense of training? I'm almost dead broke."

"You might try to get some one to buy a half interest in him," Muldoon suggested. "I was thinking of that when I asked you how much he was worth."

"Know anything about the game yourself? How to train a dog?"

"I sure do. I spent a year in New Orleans some time ago, and got a lot of pointers from a chum of mine whose father runs a big greyhound stable down there. If you'd like me to, I'll get in touch with this fellow. He's a good sport. Got lots of money, too. And I know he'd agree to foot all——"

"Wait a minute," Colby interrupted. "I'll tell you what I will do. I'll give you a half interest in him, and let you train him."

"Sure you can trust me?"

"I'd trust you with anything, lad," Colby asserted. "Fate threw us together to-day. Maybe fate will be good to us both. Take Rebel home with you, and do what you darn please with him. I'll foot half the training expenses—or try to, anyway."

"You can pay me that half interest whenever you like. And you can name the price yourself. If we win the two thousand, we'll split fifty-fifty, and plan a big campaign for Rebel."

Muldoon extended his hand. The other gripped it heartily.

"Partners!" the old man smiled. "I'll come to your place to-morrow, and we'll sign up."

"By the way," he added; "I'd advise you to look out for that low-down grabber, Martin Pender."

"I'd advise him," grinned Muldoon, "not to pull any high-and-mighty stuff on me."

NOTHING of importance ever happened in the city of Abercrombie unknown to Martin Pender. Consequently, he very soon got wind of the fact that Rebel was being whipped into

shape for the Grover O'Day handi-cap. He had himself a covetous eye on that prize, and on the honor that went hand in hand with its capture. He had entered for it three of his best dogs, one of which was Thistledown—a hound that had never been beaten.

Accompanied by Sanco—an incongruous pal, one would think, for a man who raised thoroughbreds—Pender strolled one afternoon into Chick Muldoon's backyard garage.

This was an open-air shop. Several machines which the young mechanic was overhauling and painting were strewn about the place, some of them canopied by improvised roofs of canvas.

In a far corner Rebel was lying on all fours, enjoying to his heart's content the golden summer sunshine. The moment he laid eyes on Pender's mongrel, he shot forward like a black spear. But his charge was checked by a tether which was attached to a wheel.

Sanco, too, showed an inclination to resume hostilities, and his master had difficulty in restraining him. He tugged, lunged, and howled like a wolf. Pender, acting upon Muldoon's wise request, dragged him back to his car, and locked him in.

"Bad blood, eh?" Pender commented, after introducing himself. "What's liable to happen if they ever come together again?"

"I've got good reason to believe that one of them will wind up a cripple," Muldoon said, "and that one won't be Rebel."

"Think you can make a racer out of him?"

"I don't need to try. Nature has taken care of that," Muldoon answered dryly. "But see here, Pender; I'm very busy to-day. What are you here for?"

"I dropped in to tell you that you can save time and money by withdrawing Rebel from the tournament."

"How in blazes do you get that

way?" Muldoon bristled. "Why should I withdraw him?"

"Because he can't run. Because he wouldn't have a donkey's chance against real racing dogs."

"Supposing you'd prove that? Or try to prove it?"

"I was just about to suggest that," Pender said. "Would you agree to a test?"

"Why not?"

"Well, then, bring him out to my training field this evening, and we'll try him out against one of my dogs. The field's on the Abercrombie road."

CHAPTER III.

TRICKY GAME.

MULDOON was on the spot, shortly after the sun had set. A few minutes later, Rebel and a likely looking, dun-colored hound, named Poison Ivy, were in the slips.

One of two shifty eyed men whom Pender had brought with him took charge of the dogs. The other, in whose arms was a huge jack rabbit, stationed himself fifteen yards from the starting point.

"Now, Pender," Muldoon warned, "if you are minus one good rabbit after this exhibition, don't blame my dog."

"Oh, no fear of him," Pender laughed. "There's an escape in that clay fence back there, and he'll go for it as straight as an arrow. With the lead he's got, he'll have no trouble in making it in jig time."

The rabbit and dogs were released. Poison Ivy yelped raspingly, viciously, and flung herself into a length lead. Silhouetelike, Rebel, bellowing like a Great Dane, proceeded to give an exhibition of speed and concentration that thrilled the heart of Chick Muldoon.

Like a bounding arc, the long-eared quarry made for the little tunnel in the western fence. Behind that tunnel was a wire-net inclosure.

The rabbit knew from experience that to reach it meant the saving of his skin. He had remarkable speed. But he was not as swift as the booming black dog, whose flying feet had now wrested the lead from Poison Ivy.

Rebel was gaining on the rabbit, who knew the dogs were perilously near. And when he was within thirty yards of the escape, the rabbit decided that it was time for head work—time to try a ruse.

He swerved suddenly; struck out like a rolling baseball in a northerly direction. Poison Ivy continued the pursuit. She had checked herself skillfully, and lost less than ten yards.

But not so the black dog, to whom rabbit chasing was a new experience. He swept straight ahead, carried onward by his own velocity. On toward the fence he went. On toward what looked like the abrupt termination of his young, vigorous life. He crashed against it, just as he succeeded in making a whirlwind turn. Then he dropped on his side and lay still.

"He's done for," Pender observed. "He must have broken his neck."

So it appeared. So it must have been. Muldoon's resolute face turned ashen, and the heart in his breast jumped out of its regular course, and started pounding like a hammer. He had grown to love that half-wild greyhound.

"Run up, boys," Pender ordered, "and see if he's still alive. He may need a bullet to put him out of his misery."

The men moved. Muldoon moved. But before they had taken three steps, Rebel staggered to his feet, shook himself, as if to straighten out his dislocated joints, and went tearing down the twilight-shrouded green.

"Thank heavens he didn't cash in that way!" Muldoon breathed. "A great fighter like him should die in a fight, not in an accident!"

Pender cursed the black dog's luck, silently. He was tremendously disappointed.

The jack rabbit swerved again, veered eastward for a bit, then switched into a southerly course. In doing so—even though it was necessary—he made a bad move. For it proved advantageous to Rebel, in as much as it enabled him to step into line with Poison Ivy.

Rebel took the lead once more, increased it with every swinging stride. His concentration was perfect. His bulldog tenacity was strongly in evidence. He had realized at the very outset that he had a game, crafty competitor in Poison Ivy. He was determined to prove his superiority over her.

"Your rabbit is done for, Pender," Muldoon commented. "He'll never get away from Rebel."

"Bet you ten dollars he escapes!" Pender challenged.

"Bet you twenty-five against twenty he doesn't!" retorted Muldoon.

And Martin Pender took him up.

The rabbit changed his course again. Now he was aiming for the tunnel, with Rebel a jump and a half behind him. Once more he realized that the escape was unreachable. And this time, instead of turning to right or left, he wrenched backward, right-about-face fashion.

But Rebel was not to be fooled again. Quick as a flash, the deadly fangs closed on his neck, shook him fiercely, tossed him all of twenty feet in the air.

It was the end of the trail for the jack. For battle-scarred Rebel, it was the dawn of a new and promising career.

After Muldoon and Rebel and Pender's twenty dollars disappeared in the gathering dusk, Pender turned to his men. His greenish eyes, peering catlike under the brim of his hat, were harsh, menacing. Under his black mustache his jaw was protruding like a thug's.

"Do you know why I got up this exhibition, boys?"

"We been wonderin'."

"Well, it's this: I wanted to find out if that half wolf really had the stuff. He fooled me. I never thought he could have such speed, such endurance and determination."

"And now that you know, boss?"

"Now that I know," Pender said, "I'm afraid it will be necessary for us to prevent him from entering the big race. He's dangerous. He's not to be taken lightly. I don't think, of course, that he could beat Thistledown. But it's a pretty safe bet that any dog that can whip Poison Ivy had a fair chance to win that O'Day Cup."

PENDER did not relish, the prospect of his own great hound, Thistledown, being whipped by a home-town dog. Not that he had any cause for undue anxiety; for Thistledown according to advance reports, would win the preliminary matches with ease.

Pender did not need the cash, but his grabbing soul craved that as well as the honor. Furthermore, Thistledown was regarded as an unbeatable greyhound. And because he was thinking of selling him, Pender realized that his price would slump heavily, in the event of defeat by a dog new to the game.

Then again—and this was of supreme importance—old Bob Colby must not be allowed to pay off the mortgage on that valuable quarry land.

"Whatcha wan' us to do, boss? Fix him?"

"Not yet," Pender answered. "Not just yet. We'll let him go ahead with the prelim's. Won't do no harm, as Thistledown won't be in any of the packs running against him. If he loses out, we won't have anything to worry about. But if he comes through—Well, no matter for now. You'll get your instructions when the time's ripe."

That evening Muldoon rode out to

Pine Hills, where Bob Colby lived. He was presented to the old man's daughter, a gray-eyed, attentive girl of eighteen or so, whose name was Rita Kay. And Rita Kay listened wonderingly while he eulogized Rebel's merits as a racer.

"By the way," Muldoon added, "I'd like to give him a more warlike monicker. The one he's got is a bit too tame—for him."

"But it's appropriate, ain't it?" Colby protested.

"I know it is," Muldoon acceded. "But it can easily be strengthened by simply adding to it."

"What would you suggest?"

"I'd have him rechristened the Black Rebel. How's that?"

"Excellent," smiled Rita Kay. "That fits him to a T."

CHAPTER IV.

STREAKS OF MOTION.

WITH that little matter settled, Muldoon set about the conditioning of the Black Rebel with enthusiasm. Early morning and late evening found them both hiking over the shadowy deer trails of the Abercrombie hills; running occasionally, and sometimes walking briskly.

Rebel grew leaner in the ribs, and more vicious of temper. His great chest deepened, and the muscles of him, elastic, live things, leaped into greater prominence.

Then came the sweepstakes battles. Rebel was listed for the eighth of the first eight races, and he came through to victory with flying colors. Next evening he was boxed with the winners of the seven other contests. Chick Muldoon, although he did not show it, was the most excited individual in the field.

As the race was taking place in Celtic Park, Long Island, only oral betting was permitted, in addition to the picture-card enterprise which the racing

association operated. Pictures were selling like straw hats in summer. Substantial oral wagers were being offered and taken by hundreds.

Now the contest was on. Rebel swept from the starting box like a springing cat, and jumped into third place, two yards or so in the rear of the second-place courser, Radical Red. Big Bugle, a powerful, fawn-colored hound had taken the lead. He was three yards ahead of Rebel.

Radical Red looked good to Muldoon. He wondered why her name was on nobody's lips.

"What's wrong with Radical Red?" he asked a man who was standing near him. "Why isn't anybody betting on her?"

"Oh," he was informed, "nobody bets on that one any more. She pulls a bloomer every once in a while and loses the heats she ought to win in a trot."

"Sort of inconsistent, eh?"

"Not exactly. Trouble is, she's all fed up on dummy hares, and knows as well as you and I that she can't catch 'em."

The informant was correct. At the halfway mark, Radical Red shied sideways, barricading the course of Black Rebel who was about to whip past her. Rebel collided with her, and lost considerable ground, as a consequence. Muldoon, who was fully cognizant of the fact that no hound could afford to lose an inch to the fast-stepping Big Bugle, let out an audible groan.

But the incident failed to dishearten the Black Rebel. Recovering himself quickly, he galloped on with greater velocity than he had yet shown, winging his way through the backsliders, as a hawk might sweep through a flock of birds.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, Black Rebel reduced the lead of Big Bugle. To Muldoon's receptive ears came the deafening applause of the appreciative fans.

Now they were on the home stretch, racing neck and neck. For five, ten, twenty yards, they were as close together as Siamese twins the one straining every muscle in an effort to whip the other. Rebel's nose finally took the fore. He flashed over the winning line with what reporters would describe next day as an eyelash lead!

For several minutes Muldoon's head was in a whirl. He had scarce regained his equilibrium, when a substantial-looking gentleman slapped him on the shoulder, and reached for his hand. O'Brien the gentleman's name was—Dennis Patrick O'Brien.

"How much for the Black Rebel, Mr. Muldoon?"

"He's not for sale, Mr. O'Brien."

"Not at any price?"

"Well, I don't know at that," Muldoon reconsidered, his thoughts centering suddenly on old Colby, and on that plaguy old mortgage. "What's your offer?"

"Two thousand dollars—cold cash."

Muldoon gulped. "Wait a minute," he said. "I've got to call up my partner."

He sought a phone booth. After a wait much longer than the usual period, he had Colby on the wire.

"It's a lot of money," Colby articulated. "What do you think I ought to do?"

"Considering your circumstances," Muldoon told him, "I'd expect you to jump at it. Rebel mightn't win the big sweep, you know. Then again, Pender might find a way to keep him out of the race."

Colbly all but set the wire on fire with a burst of profanity. "Say!" he demanded. "You don't mean to tell me you're losing faith in Rebel now, after the way he won that race 'n everything?"

"Of course, I'm not," Muldoon defended. "I'm only giving consideration to your position, and——"

"Shut up, will you! I'll have none of that. What are you afraid of? Martin Pender?"

"Not me. Why should I fear him?"

"Well, then," finished old Colby. "hang up that receiver and go tell Dennis Patrick O'Brien the dog is not for sale."

Staying in New York a few days, Muldoon saw Pender's Thistledown dispose of his rivals in spectacular fashion. He found out that Dennis O'Brien was a wealthy contractor. Because Muldoon had old Colby's interests at heart, he hunted up O'Brien and wound up a conversation on greyhounds with an enthusiastic sales chat on the Colby quarry.

TWO weeks slipped by. The eliminations were still going on in New York. Nothing out of the ordinary was occurring in Abercrombie, save a noticeable bustle in the vicinity of Broadbrook Kennels, where Thistledown was being conditioned as carefully as a champion boxer.

Colby was worrying. His days were being haunted by fears of a court summons that failed to materialize. Meanwhile, Muldoon was getting better acquainted with Rita Kay Colby. He was in such a happy frame of mind that he had completely forgotten the menace that was Martin Pender.

One evening, only a few days preceding the big race, Muldoon was taking his customary hike over a hillside trail east of the town, with the Black Rebel—alert, hostile, on edge for a fight—walking a few yards in front of him. From the covert on his right there emanated a hissing snarl. The next moment, a yellow form came bounding and growling through the undergrowth.

It was Sanco, Pender's fighting mongrel. He swept toward his old enemy. Rebel stepped back—drew first blood with a slash across the ribs.

A voice from the thicket ordered Muldoon to stand still. He recognized it as the voice of one of Pender's shifty-eyed trainers.

Muldoon realized now that they had been laying for him here; and that Sanco's animosity toward Rebel was being capitalized for the purpose of causing an injury that would prevent the greyhound from running in the race. He stood still as directed, indescribable emotions tearing at his heart.

Sanco had evidently been well trained for this encounter, for he was fighting better than he had previously fought. Rebel, too, was more impressive than formerly. He was pronouncedly more speedy. His viciousness—the result of weeks of stiff training—was a herald of death.

Through the purple dusk, Muldoon saw the big greyhound open the old scar which he had engraved in Sanco's forehead. His eyes blazing like balls of radium, the Black Rebel whirled around in circles and semicircles, and dazzling pirouettes—snapping, slashing with his fangs—thumping, heaving with his powerful chest.

Rebel knew that this was a duel to the death, not an ordinary battle in which one antagonist would eventually take to his heels, whining as he went. For the moment, he was an undomesticated, ferocious brute. For the time being, he was living the fierce life of the primordial world—abiding by the ancient law of kill or be vanquished.

Once he caught Sanco in mid-air—seized him by the windpipe. Sanco pawed helplessly. Rebel swung him around, tossed him across to where Muldoon was standing. Once again Sanco bored in, his lips snarling. He missed a drive at Rebel's eye—for which miss Muldoon thanked the gods of battle. And Rebel scored with a pass that finished the duel—a razorlike slash that ripped open Sanco's windpipe.

He was a great battler, that yellow-haired Sanco. Or rather, he had been. He had met his match. He had met more than his match. His heart was the heart of a thoroughbred, even though he was only a mongrel. He had given his life—his unprincipled, undisciplined life—for a heartless, grabbing master.

From the covert where Pender's men hid, there now emerged another dog—a gigantic Airedale. It came forth like a demon, leaping high over shrub and boulder, and frothing at the mouth like a hard-driven horse. Muldoon went white. He saw at a glance that this dog was mad.

CHAPTER V.

WAR CRY.

THE animal came directly toward him and leaped like a cat for his throat. Muldoon side-stepped—not a moment too soon. He reached for the limb of a tree, and swung himself upward. The limb was decayed. It snapped, as brittle things snap, with a metallic crash.

Muldoon hit the ground on the flat of his back, and his lungs gave out a short, screeching sound, as the air was forced from every corner of them. As he fell, a shot boomed through the dusk.

The Airedale collapsed, lay still suddenly, with a round orifice in his head. Muldoon remained on the ground, relaxing his tense limbs, his jarred lungs. The Black Rebel came up to him, and pushed his cold nose in his cheek.

Pender's men were running away. They had erred, Muldoon thought, in thinking that the mad brute would engage the greyhound. Then, seeing the folly of their work, and the danger an innocent man was in, one of them had aimed at the Airedale.

Two girls came through the thicket. One of them was Rita Kay. She had in her hand a rifle, and her gentle face

was pale, anxious, eloquently expressive of fright. When Muldoon sat up and showed his white teeth in a smile, Rita Kay kneeled down beside him, threw her arms about his neck, and very unashamedly stamped a warm kiss on his countenance.

"Oh, my gosh, Chick! I thought—I thought for a minute I had shot you!"

"You what?" he half roared. "You fired that shot?"

"I did. I'm—I'm supposed to be a sharpshooter."

"How did you happen to be here? And with a gun?"

"I rushed here from Pine Hills to shoot that dog," Rita Kay revealed. "My friend here, Miss Devers, called to see me this evening, and happened to mention that Pender was planning to let a mad dog loose on a greyhound."

"You see, she works for a general insurance agent who's got desk space in Pender's real-estate office. That's how she came to hear Pender talking it over with two of his trainers. She didn't know what greyhound they were after. But I guessed it was Rebel, and that they'd wait for you here to-night. So we lost no time in cranking up dad's old car."

"And Rebel?" she added. "He's not hurt?"

"Not a scratch on him. He finished Sanco."

"He what?"—horrified.

"Did away with him," Muldoon said, unfeelingly, running his hand along Rebel's back. "But don't feel bad over it, Rita. He fought in self-defence. It was either his life or Sanco's."

"But come; let's get out of here. I'm leaving for New York to-night. Rebel won't be safe here now."

THE race for the Grover O'Day stakes was the biggest ever held in Celtic Park. Twenty-one hounds were entered, and the course had been widened. There were not traps enough to

accommodate the pack. This necessitated their being slipped by handlers. Muldoon did not wish it otherwise. He believed that Rebel would start better from a slip leash than from a trap.

The traveling distance was six hundred yards "on the flat." And the wise money, as indicated weeks previously, was backing Thistledown, who was an eight-to-five favorite. People were offering ten to one against the Black Rebel. And judging from the way the bets were being covered, his rooters were legion.

Dennis Patrick O'Brien, a gentleman with whom Muldoon had kept in touch, offered to loan Muldoon fifty dollars.

Muldoon did not refuse. He needed it. He placed every cent of it on Rebel, while the wealthy New Yorker bet likewise, going sky-high with other New Yorkers of great affluence and very little sagacity.

Came the crack of the starter's gun. The greyhounds leaped from the slips like a flock of wild geese. A thunderous roar filled the night air. All of three thousand throats were booming in unison.

The Black Rebel started well. He stepped bravely into the front rank, neck and neck with six or seven rivals whose fame was international. His deep war cry was easily distinguishable from the shrill chorus of his fellows. He was the only dog in the pack whose voice resembled a bellow.

"By my soul, Muldoon, we're going to clean up on this contest!" whooped O'Brien. "Look at the way he's stretching those great legs of his! And note the ferocity of his war song!"

"Think his yowling will have any effect on the others?"

"It won't scare them, anyway; that's certain," returned the millionaire contractor. "But you can tell from the tenor of it that he has the will to win and the qualities of a leader."

Rebel was still in the front line, as

the pack veered around the curve. And Thistledown, the wise-money favorite, was leading him by half a length. The field had thinned out. Eight or ten had fallen away to the rear. No less than six were in the fore, each and every one of them a formidable contender of Thistledown's position.

Now came swift changes. Thistledown wavered for a moment. The Black Rebel came into line with him on a single bound; hurtled past him within the ensuing second; then showed the pack his flying paws.

A few seconds later the tide of battle turned again. The gallant Thistledown captured his former position. The fans roared tumultuously. The voices of Thistledown's rooters drowned out the encouragements of the Rebelites.

"He's got to step on it now," Dennis O'Brien observed. "There's only about two hundred yards to go, and Thistledown looks mighty good."

"Don't worry about him," Muldoon articulated. "He'll step on it, all right. He'll never be content to play second fiddle to any of them."

The Black Rebel took the lead once more—and quickly. This time he was determined to maintain it. Bellowing deeply, he whirled onward like a silhouette on wings, his battle-scarred body looming gigantic above the pack, his white fangs bared. Like the others, he believed that the decoy hare was real. Like them, he was imbued with an overwhelming desire to plunge his daggers of ivory into the hare.

"I fear for him, Muldoon," O'Brien cried. "Dublin Yet is creeping up."

"What of it? He can afford to lose half a length, can't he?"

"No, sir; he can't! Not to Dublin Yet!" asserted the millionaire. "That lassie's got great stuff. She'll beat him if she takes the lead. She's never yet lost a race in which she took the lead on the home stretch."

Born leader, born fighter—that was the Black Rebel. He knew well that he was pitted against the greatest of his kind—against a host of champions that were worthy of his steel. He was jealous of his prowess, as great greyhounds usually are.

In his mind now was the single purpose of demonstrating his supremacy over his rivals, just as he had proven it to Poison Ivy. He held his lead to the finish. He refused to surrender his position till the electrically driven hare swung into the switch.

Thistledown got third place. Dublin Yet came in second. The black victor received a tremendous ovation—and he had earned it.

Chick Muldoon rushed immediately to a telephone and transmitted the good news to his old partner.

"Also," Muldoon supplemented. "I've convinced Dennis Patrick O'Brien that your quarry's a gold mine. He's going to send a representative out to talk business with you. Don't for the life of you tell him to go Hades this time. Is Rita Kay there?"

"She's on the porch."

"Tell her to come to the phone, will you?"

"Want to talk to her?"

"Of course."

"That all you want her for?"

"No, you old question box. I want to toss her a long-distance kiss!"

More greyhound-racing stories by

JOHN TALBOT LYNCH

will appear in this publication.

JULY, 1918

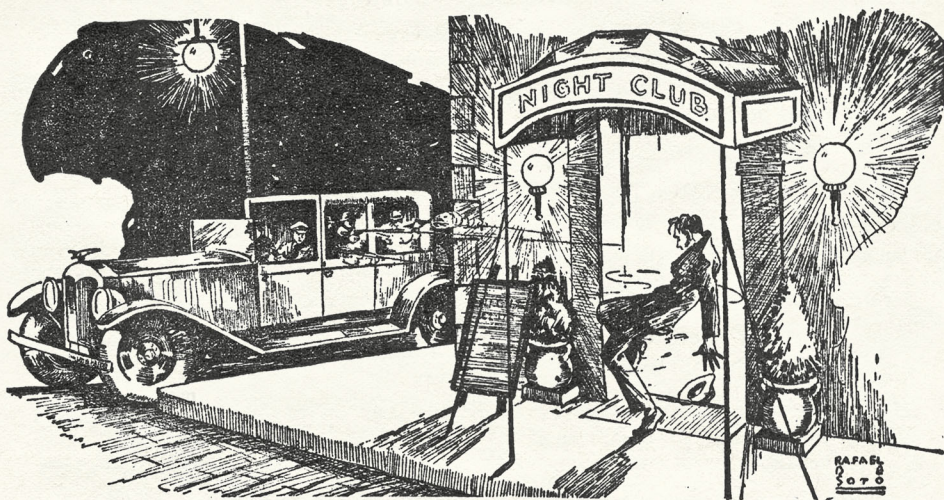
(A Memory)

By A. LESLIE

A WEB of threads in blood and gold
Wove in a jangling loom:
Passion's fire and death's raw cold
Where war's red roses bloom.

The hearts of men and the souls of men
Stripped to the shivering core
Where the bleak woods answer back again
To the G. I.'s rattling roar.

Shivering night and a whimpering rain,
The white flares soaring high;
And the growl of a he-man's harsh refrain:
"D'yuh wanna live forever, huh?
C'mon—it's time t' die!"



The Radio Cop

By Vic Whitman

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

GANGDOM CHALLENGES.

PATROLMAN TOM JENNINGS, who claimed he had a flair for poetry, described him thus:

A talking fool with a voice like a dove
And a face that only a mother could love,
Small and ready to fight at a nod
Was Officer Cates of the wave-length squad.

Which, after all, wasn't so far out of the way. For certainly young Dave Cates, official announcer for the police division of radio station KYK, was far from being an Adonis. He had a measure of pugnacity, and he had a splendid voice.

Cates was talking now before the microphone in the police room over the studio of KYK. Smoothly his voice went out to the world:

"The rush order on the new uniforms for the men of the Dolliver Street detail has been filled and the uniforms have been sent out. Orders are that they be put on as soon as received."

Not particularly interesting to thousands of the idly curious who chanced to be tuned in, but decidedly interesting to listening police details all over the great city. To them the code dispatch meant this:

"Big Ed" Margolo is free, having been acquitted of the murder charge against him. Dolliver Street detail must guard against resumption of gang war between Margolo and "Red" McGuirk.

As the announcer was about to go on talking his alert ears caught the buzzing of the muffled telephone bell in the adjoining room.

"Please stand by for one moment," he said, and stepped into the phone room.

"What is it, Henry?" he inquired. "More dope from headquarters?"

The telephone operator grinned. "Headquarters—my neck!" he grunted. "Just another dame callin' up to rave about that voice of yours. Wants to know if you'll send her an autographed picture of yourself."

Dave Cates shrugged. It almost seemed that nature atoned for her lavishness in giving him a golden voice by crediting him with a bulldog jaw, a wide mouth, and a pug nose that sported five freckles. His eyes, level and blue, were his only redeeming feature.

It had been his eyes as well as his voice that had induced Captain Henessey to recommend that he be put on the pay roll as the first radio officer the department ever had.

But there it ended. Cates longed for the life of the cop on the beat, but his physical qualifications were below standard. In his heart he kept locked away an ideal of romance, but it hardly seemed likely that the ideal would ever materialize. They all liked his voice, but they turned away from his face.

"Tell 'em to go jump a fence," said Officer Cates. "This is no picture gallery we're running here, nor is it a lonely hearts department. If those babies think they're kidding me, they're tuning in on the wrong station."

He turned on his heel to go back to the broadcasting room, but paused as the phone rang again. Henry plugged in and took the message, then spun around in his chair and jerked off his "ear muffs."

"Some guy just called in to say if you didn't lay off broadcastin' you'd get bumped," he said excitedly. "He——"

"You're kidding!"

"The hell I am! He meant business, too, by the way he sounded."

Young Officer Cates wasn't particularly surprised. The code warnings had proved very successful in produc-

ing quick action on the part of the police and checking activities on the part of the criminals. It was only natural to suppose that, sooner or later, the warning would come.

"The son of a gun!" he said slowly.

But he was not afraid. The sudden tenseness of his stocky body was merely the tenseness of a fighter before the gong. Some excitement might even develop out of this warning. An anticipatory glint appeared in the blue eyes.

"The son of a gun!" Cates repeated. "Tell him to go jump two fences, Henry."

CASUALLY Cates sauntered back to the microphone.

"Police division of station KYK still going strong," he said lightly. "It gives me great pleasure at this moment to acknowledge a phone call. This call just came in from an unknown gentleman who suggested that we stop broadcasting, while the stopping was good. I don't like to disappoint the gentleman, but this division will continue to be on the air at the same time every night."

And so was the challenge of organized gangdom caught up and hurled back by a stocky, freckle-faced officer who was more than willing to prove himself.

Calmly he continued with the various messages. That he was no longer broadcasting in code, the police knew by his utterance of the word, "classified."

These items were numerous. A lady had lost a tan-and-white collie dog somewhere between 13th Street and Southland Road, and would pay a substantial reward to any one returning the dog.

A young man in a gray suit was now at headquarters awaiting identification. The young man was a victim of amnesia—didn't know his own name or anything about himself.

Finally, some heartless crook had

stolen the pocketbook of an old man who was on his way from Maine to California to see his dying daughter. Any small contributions that would help to put the old man on his journey would be welcomed.

Then Dave Cates glanced at the electric clock on the wall, above the green light.

"And so this brings to an end our broadcast for this evening," he concluded. "This is the police division of station KYK signing off at exactly eight thirty. Good night."

Cates stuffed the sheets of paper into his pocket, lighted a cigarette, and went out to the elevator.

The elevator boy grinned admiringly. "Evenin', Mr. Cates," he said. "I heard you broadcast three nights ago. Gee, it must be swell to be an announcer, and have nothin' to do but talk."

Officer Cates grinned. "It might be worse, Billy," he admitted. "Yes, it might be a whole lot worse." To himself he added, "And it might be a heck of a lot better."

Cates emerged from the elevator at the ground floor and went into the street, moving with the brisk step that characterized him. At once, a nattily dressed young man detached himself from the passing throng and stepped up to Cates. The young man's right hand was casually thrust into his topcoat pocket.

"Don't make any funny moves or you'll get drilled," he cautioned, low voiced. "See that car at the curb? Well, hop into it."

The little announcer stiffened with the chill that went over him. Evidently they were losing no time in making good their threats. Cates knew it would do no good to make a break, for the young man would shoot instantly and melt away in the crowd. His eyes, dark and menacing, gave that warning.

Cates eyed him steadily. "What car?" he asked, trying to gain time.

"You know what car!" snarled the gunman. "This green limousine here. Get goin'."

Officer Cates shrugged. He stepped toward the car. Then a miraculous thing happened.

CHAPTER II.

PRACTICING FOR DEATH.

A GIRL who had been anxiously studying the face of every man coming out of the building hurried to Dave Cates. All in a second he saw the radiant smile on her face, caught a glimpse of her lovely, hazel eyes and the infinite grace of her step. She hesitated not a second but came directly to him, a charming little figure, a bit shorter than himself. To his utter stupefaction she threw both arms around his neck and kissed him on the lips. Then quickly she took his arm and led him into the crowd.

So astounded was Cates that he didn't notice the way she kept between him and the gunman, who had recognized the girl and was scowling, baffled. Cates didn't even stop to wonder why the gunman didn't shoot.

"Well, for the love of Mother Machree!" he stammered, completely at sea. "Are you an angel or have you got the wrong guy?"

She glanced up at him, but made no answer. White of face from the strain of the ordeal through which she had just passed, she piloted him toward headquarters, four blocks distant.

Gradually the radio cop recovered his wits. "Sister, I don't mean to be too curious," he apologized, "but there's a little too much static in the old dome for me to get this thing right. How'd you happen to step in there when you did? Were you wise to them? And why didn't that guy shoot?"

Still no answer, only a pleading look from the hazel eyes. Then swiftly she turned and hurried away.

"Hold on," called Cates, concerned. "I haven't learned a thing yet. Here, wait a minute, sister!"

But she did not heed. For a moment he was tempted to overtake her and demand an explanation, then decided against it. Whoever she was, she had known there would be an attempt on his life.

But why should she run a risk in saving him? The question fairly shouted for an answer, but gratitude would not allow him to ask what she very evidently did not want to answer.

There were other things, too. Officer Cates became aware that his heart was beating at twice its usual tempo. Faint perfume still trailed about him, and there was a cool fragrance on his lips that had never been there before.

"Right on the old pan, she kissed me," Cates murmured in awed tones. "Right on the old pan, and I let her get away without even finding out her name. Well, what do you know?"

For such was the make-up of the stocky announcer that the kiss of an unknown girl could concern him more than the threat of a gunman. Sighing profoundly, his alert eyes dreamy, he proceeded on to headquarters.

Captain Henessey, granite-jawed, shrewd-eyed veteran, looked up interestedly.

"Hello, Dave," he said, and leaned back in his chair. "What's all this you broadcast about being pegged?"

Cates nodded.

"That's right, captain," he confirmed. "They almost got me, too. They would have if it hadn't been for the cutest little jane I ever saw in my life. Honest, she was about so high, and she was all dolled up like a million with a fur around her neck and sort of a satin dress and little high-heel shoes. And say, captain, you'd ought to see her eyes. The way——"

"That's enough," interrupted Captain Henessey, recognizing the symptoms.

"You're giving no public address now, lad. Confine yourself to the facts."

So, as briefly as he could, the radio cop told his superior of the incident.

Captain Henessey rubbed at his ear and pondered. "H'm," he said. "I'd like to talk with that girl, Dave. Maybe she knows something about this gang situation."

"How does it stand now?"

The captain's mouth was grim. "Bad enough. Here we go and drag Margolo into court on a murder charge and a lily-livered jury throw the case out because they say the evidence isn't conclusive enough." His big fist banged down on the desk. "Evidence—hell! They would have had enough evidence if they hadn't been scared of the gang's power."

"Now Big Ed'll be giving us the horse laugh, and he'll pull more stuff than ever. The first thing he'll probably do is to go after McGuirk, and we'll have a gang war on our hands."

"But I don't mind McGuirk so much. He could be worse. It's Margolo I want to get, and I'd give a lot for a man who would see him in a shooting and then have the nerve to go into court and testify."

Dave Cates gazed ruefully at the bulletin board. Now more than ever he wished he could qualify for active service.

"Margolo is sore because McGuirk's cutting into his business, isn't he?" he asked.

Captain Henessey nodded. "Yes, and that means there'll be more shooting."

"Where does Margolo usually hang out?"

"Well, he spends a lot of his time at the Salon Quintesse, that road house out by Syndicate Park. He's got an apartment in the new Donahue block, too, but I don't think either of those places is his official headquarters."

"Margolo's a cagy cuss and he keeps

more than passing interest. "Humph. Wonder who that guy is? He's givin' me the once-over like he wanted to know my family history."

CHAPTER III.

STRATEGY.

AT Syndicate Park, the end of the line, Cates swung off the car. The park glittered with hundreds of colored lights, people sauntered about laughing and talking, and through the trees sounded a male voice singing nasally to the tempo of a dance band:

"I wanna be loved by you, by you and nobody else but you,
I wanna be kissed by you alone."

It was coming from the Salon Quintesse. Perhaps to-night Big Ed would be here celebrating his release from "stir." Cates walked to a spot near some chauffeurs who were watching the gay crowd inside the hall. He had no especial plan of action, save to trail Big Ed constantly.

Sooner or later, Cates reflected, the gangster would pull a fast one. Cates wanted to be at hand when that happened.

Now and then hard-faced men strolled through the grounds, but they gave not a second glance to the small, inoffensive young man who stood looking through the big windows.

Young men like that were common outside the Salon Quintesse, drawn there by a wistful desire to listen to the smashing jazz and enviously to watch the dancers.

The music stopped. Cates could see the dancers going to their tables.* A hum of conversation sounded. A woman's silvery laugh rose above the tuning of a soprano saxophone. No one seemed to know that the life of a radio cop had been threatened. Had they known they would not have cared.

Things are that way in places like the Salon Quintesse.

The music started up again with a preliminary tinkle of a piano. Now some one had appeared from the entertainer's room and was dancing. It was a girl, small and exquisite.

Dave Cates edged nearer the window, and started violently as he saw her face. Smiling radiantly, dipping, whirling, gliding, the dancer was none other than the girl who had kissed him.

"Well, I'll be a seagoing brook trout!" murmured Cates.

His first thought was that she was connected with Big Ed Margolo's gang. Paid entertainers and gangsters frequently run together. Then he dismissed the thought as unworthy. Had she been connected in any way with Margolo she would not have risked her life to save some one she didn't know.

On the other hand, how had she known about the "ride"? And why hadn't Fiske shot? Doubts beset the radio cop; doubts that increased when he realized it was not a certainty that Margolo had ordered his death.

Frowning, Cates watched the girl float about the room as effortlessly as a bit of down caught up by a vagrant breeze. Lovely, fascinating!

Dave Cates sighed, and his mouth twisted into a sad little grin. No sense in letting the ideal blossom over her. It would only fade and die if he did. She was a little princess of terpsichore and he was just a police radio announcer with a face that only a mother could love.

Some one was standing by his side. He glanced indifferently around and beheld the youth of the street car.

"Say, d'you know Mr. Margolo when you see him?" the boy inquired.

Dave Cates was on his guard instantly. "Suppose I do?" he demanded.

"Well, it's this way." Plainly the boy was flustered. "I—I—say, you work for him, don't you?"

Cates took a moment before replying. "Maybe."

"I thought so. Knew I'd seen you with Slim Fiske." The boy sighed, relieved. "I'm to start drivin' for Mr. Margolo next week," he announced importantly.

"Yeh?"

"That's right. One of his men hired me. Me, I ain't never seen him, and I thought if you'd point him out I'd see if he'd come through with a little advance pay. I'm broke flatter'n a flounder."

The nimble brain of Officer Cates digested this. So Margolo had made the mistake of hiring a driver who liked to give information about himself. This information was valuable.

Cates smiled. "I see, kid," he said. "Now if I were you I'd let Ed alone tonight. He's in there all right, but I wouldn't bother him."

"But I gotta eat," said the boy desperately. "I used my last nickel for car fare out here."

The radio cop chewed at his lower lip. "That's tough, kid," he sympathized. "I've been that way myself. Tell you what I'll do. I got ten bucks I can spare till you get your first pay from Ed. But don't say anything to Ed about it because he don't like to be bothered with such things. You get me, don't you?"

Cates drew a ten-dollar bill from his pocket and handed it over.

"Say, there ain't nothing wrong with you!" declared the youth warmly. "Don't worry, I won't say nothin' to Ed."

Alone, Cates grinned, confident that no one of the men from the Bureau of Criminal Investigation could have handled the matter any better. At least he had provided an entering wedge to the Margolo gang, even if he didn't know just how he could use it.

His alert eyes sparkled. There was a real kick in this kind of business, en-

tirely different from standing before a microphone and relaying messages.

Still there was pity mingled with his satisfaction. That boy had no business driving for Big Ed Margolo. But perhaps he had been compelled to take the first job offered.

Dave Cates determined to keep an eye on him. "The kid looked hungry," was his thought, "and hunger has made many a crook. Maybe if I can nab Margolo in time, the kid won't have any record against him."

He cast a glance at the Salon Quin-tesse, turned and walked to the car line.

THOSE who expected to see Margolo make immediate war upon Red McGuirk were disappointed. Never had the gangster been so quiet. With his inactivity, the percentage of crime in the city dropped until a pedestrian could stroll the streets with comparative safety. The general public reached the conclusion that Margolo's recent trial had shaken his nerve. Not so the police.

"It's only the calm before the storm," observed Captain Hennessey. "When Margolo gets under way he'll raise more hell than ever. I've seen these birds before and I *know*."

Nightly, Dave Cates stood before the microphone, talking to the world. No more attempts were made upon his life, but he wasn't fooled by that. Eventually the gunmen would seek him out again. He'd have to get them before they got him.

Each night after the broadcast he went in search of Big Ed Margolo. Everywhere the gangster went, he was followed by a little man with pulled-down cap and turned-up coat collar.

Cate's size alone probably saved him. The torpedoes who "covered" Margolo never paid any attention to him. It is doubtful if they noticed him.

One evening, Margolo came out of his apartment and summoned a taxi.

Dave Cates, lurking in the shadows half a block away, took the next taxi along. Margolo drove to an old house out on River Street, far from the business district. When he came out of the house, he tried a key in the door. Apparently satisfied, he rejoined his companions and the taxi drove off.

Dave Cates had a sudden hunch. He took the number of the house, and ordered his driver back to the city. Two blocks from police headquarters he alighted. Not even a taxi driver should know that he was in any way connected with the police.

With all the enthusiasm of a terrier puppy he burst in upon Captain Henessey.

"Margolo has just rented a house out on River Street," Cates said rapidly. "Don't know what he's going to do, but it's a cinch he didn't rent the place to live in. Now listen, captain. There's an old vacant garage out back of the place. Can't I have a microphone put up in there?"

Captain Henessey studied the eager face. "What do you want to do—commit suicide?" he asked finally.

"Nobody'll get wise," the radio cop declared. "Honest they won't. There's a back entrance to the garage where I can go in and out, and I can have the lights dimmed so nobody'll notice. It's the chance of a lifetime to keep an eye on this guy, and maybe something good will break."

Cates' eyes gleamed as he warmed to his theme. "Suppose Margolo should pull something funny while I happened to be at the mike? It wouldn't be so tough, would it? Sure, and I can broadcast there just as well as anywhere. Furthermore——"

Captain Henessey raised both hands. "Shut up!" he roared. "Do you think I've nothing to do but listen to you talk? Get out of here, and I'll see what can be done about it with the commissioners."

CHAPTER IV.

DRAGNET.

THE following night the gangsters gave proof they had not forgotten the radio announcer of the police division. Dave Cates, his work finished, came through the street door, and stopped to light a cigarette. His lighter slipped through his fingers and dropped. As he bent to retrieve it, a fusillade of shots came rattling from a passing car. The bullets chipped the stone masonry above his head. Had he been standing he would have been riddled.

"Baby boy!" he gasped, drawing to shelter. "That was too darn close!"

People crowded around, staring at him with curious eyes, but he didn't wait to be questioned. As quickly as possible, he got to headquarters.

Such news travels like lightning. Captain Henessey was raging.

"Damn their hides!" he roared. "I'll teach 'em to take pot shots at the men of this station! So help me, I'll put out a dragnet and bring in every crook in town. They'll find out before I'm through with 'em just how healthy it is to get cocky."

No doubt but that the sturdy captain would keep his word. The opening gun of the crime war had been fired and heard around the town. Use of the dragnet would result in the apprehension of a certain number of criminals, but would it be drawn tight enough to hold that super-criminal, Big Ed Margolo?

Dave Cates shook his head doubtfully. "Go to it, captain," he said, "and may good luck go with you."

At that moment a small boy came into the room. "I gotta note here for Mr. Cates," he said hesitantly.

"Right here, sonny," said the radio cop. He took the note and glanced through it.

The note consisted of just three words: "Please be careful."

moving from place to place. No telling where he's located now."

The captain looked suddenly at the small figure of his radio announcer. "What does this chap look like who pegged you?" he asked.

Cates described the man at some length.

"Sounds like 'Slim' Fiske of Margolo's crew," commented the captain. "By the way, Dave, what are you going to do about this threat? Take a little lay-off?"

The radio cop drew himself to his full height of five feet seven.

"Cut it out, captain," he said.

Captain Henessey hid a grin. It was Cates' first test, and the lad had met it as the captain expected.

"Just as you say," he answered. "But for a while I'll assign a man to cover you when you come out after each night's broadcast. Now run along. I'm busy."

AS Dave Cates walked up the stairs to the top floor barracks where he slept, he considered things. Not a doubt that he was in for trouble if he continued to announce. Even with an officer covering his exits, they'd get him sooner or later. This was not a pleasant prospect—particularly since he had looked into a pair of hazel eyes and had received the soft touch of red lips. Not at all a pleasant prospect to contemplate.

No, he intended both to live and to stay on his job, and the only way to combine the two things was to get the gangsters before they got him. Dave Cates stopped short, rubbing at his bulldog jaw.

He'd considered this idea before, of course—for what young man connected in any way with a police department hasn't dreamed of putting a stop to the most flagrant lawlessness in his vicinity?—but hitherto he had never considered it seriously. Now, under the

menace to his life, the thought was no longer audacious.

Turning the matter over in his mind Cates went to his locker and took from it his shoulder holster and the big police gun. He adjusted the holster under his left arm, cast a casual glance at the sleeping forms of men who were to go on duty with the midnight shift, and went into the shower room.

A long mirror was there. Dave Cates stood before it. From a lounging position he yanked out the gun and leveled it. A dozen times he did this, and then practiced drawing from all sorts of positions, reclining, walking, bending almost double.

"Getting faster at it, anyway," he told himself.

This was his nightly habit and had been since he became radio officer. He was still young enough to thrill to this secret practice; and yet old enough to realize that some day the acquired deftness and speed might stand him in good stead.

Every afternoon he practiced assiduously at the short-range targets down in the basement of the building. Officer Cates of the wave-length squad was not only very quick on the draw, but very adept at knocking the neck off a bottle fifty paces distant.

Twenty minutes later he put on an old topcoat, drew a cap well down over his eyes, and went out into the street to catch a southbound car.

Everybody seemed to think that Big Ed Margolo would go after McGuirk at once.

Dave Cates thought differently. "Margolo's no dumb-bell," he mused, glancing at a youth of about his own size and general appearance who sat across the car. "He'll figure they're watching him close and lay off for a time. In that case I'll watch him closer than ever."

Cates observed that the other occupant of the car was regarding him with

"Mash note, Dave?" inquired Patrolman Tom Jennings, who was brushing the lint from his blue trousers.

"Be yourself!" retorted the radio cop. He looked intently at the boy. "Who gave you this?" he demanded.

"Miss Talbot on North Street," said the youngster promptly.

Cates wrinkled his pug nose in the endeavor to spur his memory. "Talbot? Talbot? Can't seem to place the name."

"Anabelle Talbot," put in Patrolman Jennings. "Sure. North Street is on my beat and I see her brother about every night. He tells me she always listens in to your broadcasts. Pretty soft for you, havin' all these classy dames——"

"I'll slam you one in the nose! What does she look like?"

"Well, now," reflected Officer Jennings, "it seems to me she's cross-eyed, knock-kneed, and——"

"Aw, go jump a fence!" Dave Cates turned disgustedly away, handed the boy a quarter, and watched him scurry away.

"I guess she's all right, Dave," said Jennings. "Honest, I've never seen her. I've only been on the beat for two weeks."

They were talking as though Cates' narrow escape was a thing far in the past. So it must be, in the big stations where an officer's life is a thing of uncertainty. Once past, a thing is forgotten, or, at most, but lightly spoken of.

Casually the small radio cop fingered his tie and ran a hand over his sandy hair.

"Better go easy, lad," warned Captain Henessey. "This may be just a come-on note."

"I know," nodded Cates. Beneath his armpit he could feel the bulge of the big police gun. "I'll watch my step, captain."

STANDING before the old brick apartment house on North Street, Dave Cates debated with himself. Should he go in, or shouldn't he? It wasn't the thought of a possible frame-up that deterred him; it was the possibility that the girl of the Salon Quin-tesse might not care to see him. But what the deuce? Might as well see it through.

He drew a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and went into the hallway. His heart leaped as a girl came to the door and stood framed there, the light from within making a silken, wavy web of her hair.

"Pard-don me, miss," stammered the radio cop, removing his cap. "I—I just thought I'd drop around and thank you for what you did for me."

Then she recognized him, gave him once more that flashing smile. Gee, she was a knock-out!

With a gracious little nod the girl motioned for him to come in. Highly embarrassed, he entered.

"You're Miss Talbot, aren't you?" Again she nodded.

Officer Cates wondered as he saw her pick up a small tablet of paper and write upon it. Then he read the words:

"I'm sorry but this is the only way I can talk to you. When I was six years old an attack of scarlet fever paralyzed my vocal chords."

So that was it! Shades of Patrick Henry, what a situation! Miss Anabelle Talbot was unable to utter a word. Yet she was as dainty as a breath of spring, as lovely as a rose that opens its petals to the early morning sunlight. Dave Cates had a voice of gold, but it hid behind a face that only a mother could love. Each of them was conscious of their own drawbacks and wistfully aware of the other's best assets.

Quick compassion flooded Dave Cates, but he was far too tactful to show it. He merely nodded and said very cheerfully:

"I understand you're interested in radio broadcasting, Miss Talbot. I wonder if you'd care to go up to the studio with me, say Friday night, and watch how it's done?"

Promptly she wrote: "I'd love to."

"Fine," said the radio cop. "That's settled then."

What a smile that girl had! What delectable curving of red lips, and provocative little crinkles at the corners of dancing eyes!

It was an effort for Gates to force his mind to other matters. "Mind telling me how you knew these gangsters were planning to take me for a ride that night?"

A look of concern replaced the smile as Miss Anabelle lowered her eyes to the tablet.

"Every night at eleven I dance out at the Salon Quintesse," she wrote. "Out there I frequently hear snatches of gangster talk not intended for my ears. When you broadcast the threat you received, I just seemed to know they would attempt something that night. So I hurried to the broadcasting building."

"I thought if I went up to you as if I were your sister they might not shoot for fear of killing me. Fortunately it was Slim Fiske. Others might have shot regardless, but I—I think he is an admirer of mine, for he has frequently danced with me at the Salon Quintesse. I hope you don't think I was forward."

"Forward!" exclaimed the radio cop. "Forward! I'll tell the world I don't! I think you were an angel. So that explains why Fiske didn't shoot. But how did you know me?"

Blushing prettily Miss Anabelle went and got a picture clipped from a newspaper. When Cates had first got the job the picture had appeared under the caption: "Police Radio Announcer."

"Gee!" he said, reddening.

As if to break the spell of embarrassment that hovered over them, the

girl wrote swiftly: "Won't you tell me something of yourself and your work?"

It is said that opposites attract. Surely this must be the true explanation of the brightness in Anabelle Talbot's hazel eyes as she sat listening to the radio cop, and of his willingness to talk. Talking was the thing he did best and he set himself to break all records.

For an hour his voice flowed on, as he told her of the police department, of the woman who had called out the homicide squad when she mistook the scratchings of a stray cat in her cellar for the supernatural activities of her long-deceased husband, of the trials and tribulations of a radio announcer, of the joys and fears and hopes of a little officer who never made an arrest.

It almost seemed that the ideal was trying to blossom into being. At any rate, friendship came swiftly, so swiftly that when Dave Cates rose to leave he asked hesitantly: "Is there any chance of us having another talk before Friday night?"

Her answer was: "I'll be here every evening until it's time to go out to the hall."

Cates wanted to accompany her out to the Salon Quintesse, but she wouldn't permit it. Margolo's men might become curious, and that would be bad.

Naturally the word spread, started by the grinning Tom Jennings who had learned things. Busy as they were at headquarters with the operation of the dragnet, all had time for a glance at the affair of the radio cop and Anabelle Talbot.

"If that don't beat the devil!" observed Captain Henessey. "A talking fool and a girl who can't say a word. Still, that may have its advantages. If the girl could talk, neither one of 'em would be able to get a word in edgewise."

Of course Dave Cates came in for a share of kidding. No class of men en-

joys their jokes more than that which preserves the peace.

Cates took their kidding in good part. "Have a good time, you guys!" he retorted. "My chance will come next and when it does—zowie!"

CHAPTER V.

GUNMEN'S METHODS.

CATES was looking forward with considerable eagerness to Friday night. Any man likes to have *the* girl see him at his best work, and certainly the radio cop excelled as an announcer. Carefully he planned his broadcast so that there would not be the least hesitation on his part. Everything must go like clockwork.

There is a saying about the best-laid plans. Friday afternoon Cates complained bitterly to Miss Anabelle: "Can you beat those commissioners? Never for a moment did I think they'd get around so quickly to switching the microphone to the new location. I'm not going to take you out there because the place is too dangerous, so we'll have to call off the exhibition."

Apprehension showed in the hazel eyes at the mention of danger. She wrote: "Where is the place?" Informed, she wrote again: "I understand. There will be other times, so don't feel bad about it."

When Cates had gone, Miss Anabelle gazed very thoughtfully down at her tablet, then made a memorandum of the address.

All things seemed to break that evening. The radio cop went out to the old garage early, to get things ready for the first evening's broadcast.

Glancing out the window, he saw a big man come out of the house Margolo had rented, and go across the street to a drug store. A second glance told Cates that it was none other than Big Ed himself.

Immediately the cop announcer left

things as they were and hurried after the gangster.

At the store Cates bought a package of cigarettes while Big Ed was telephoning. Distinctly he heard the gangster say:

"Bring my car out and make it snappy."

The nimble brain of Officer Cates began to click. Something was up or Margolo wouldn't call for his car in such a hurry. Cates moved to the magazine stand as Margolo emerged from the booth and hurried out of the store.

Suddenly a plan occurred to Cates. It was daring in conception, but the more he thought of it the more plausible it seemed. Anyway, he'd take a chance. Quickly he went into the street, and strode along in the direction from which Margolo's car must come.

There was a sharp corner there by the fruit store. Necessarily the car must come around that corner. Cates cautiously drew back into a doorway and waited.

Presently headlights gleamed. The big car slowed for the corner. Cates caught a glimpse of the driver. Yes, the chauffeur was the youth to whom Cates had lent ten dollars.

The car was the green limousine that had nearly taken Cates on his death ride. This evidence made it pretty definite to Cates that Margolo was the man who had ordered his death.

Dave Cates slid out of the shadow. In a bound he was on the running board, had yanked open the door, and was pressing his gun into the side of the startled driver.

"Drive to the Warren Avenue station," he ordered.

"What the hell!" exclaimed the youth. "Say, ain't you—"

"I am," Cates nodded, "but we won't talk about that now. Drive to the station, kid, and make it fast."

At the Warren Avenue station Cates

turned the youth over to the desk sergeant.

"I'm Dave Cates, radio announcer," he explained. "No charges against this kid, but hold him till I notify you."

To the open-mouthed youth Cates said: "Don't get worried, kid. We'll talk this over later. Now peel off that livery, because I'm going to need it."

As he dressed rapidly in the chauffeur's uniform, Cates thanked the gods of luck that Margolo always made his drivers wear livery. In this rig, that was a very fair fit, the chances were good that he could escape detection. Cates had a suspicion that Margolo didn't talk much with his drivers.

OUT to the car, Cates ran, and started back to Margolo's house.

The gangster was waiting impatiently with three of his men. "Long enough gettin' here!" he snapped. "What the hell was the matter?"

"Traffic," muttered Cates, hoping that he imitated the voice of the former driver.

Margolo didn't appear to notice. With two of his men he got in the back seat. The third man got in front and leaned over the seat to join the low-toned conversation.

"Out by Jimmy's," ordered Margolo.

Cates nodded and started the car. For a moment he wondered where Jimmy's was, then remembered it was a café out in the west end of the town, a meeting place for underworld leaders.

The radio cop suppressed a sigh. It wasn't pleasant to contemplate what would happen if Margolo discovered his identity.

As the car neared Jimmy's, the men became silent. Cates could watch Margolo in the rear-vision mirror. The gangster's swarthy face was grim; his thin lips were twisted in an ugly snarl.

"Slow," he commanded.

Cates throttled the car to about ten miles an hour. Thoughtfully he stared

at the lights in front of the café. Something was going to happen, but—

Cates soon found out. A man strolled from the café and called laughingly to another man inside. A second figure appeared in the doorway.

"Now!" gritted Margolo.

Four guns barked. The man in the doorway pitched forward, rolled to the sidewalk, and lay still.

Horror and rage stirred Dave Cates. All in a second he realized that he must carry this thing through until Margolo dismissed him—that if he made the slightest suspicious move the four guns would bark again.

Cates stepped upon the accelerator and the big car leaped away.

"Back to the house," ordered Margolo, his voice as calm as if he had not killed a man. Then with a hard laugh: "McGuirk won't do no more braggin' now."

Cate's face was very grim as he bent over the wheel. The low-lived murderer! Strike with deadly precision and then run from the law! Well, he wouldn't strike much more—not if Dave Cates had anything to say about it.

At the house Margolo got out and fastened his glittering gaze upon his driver. Cates was thankful for the shadow cast by the visor of his chauffeur's cap.

"Take this car back to the garage," ordered the gangster, "and remember—it wasn't out to-night. If the cops ask you, you didn't see nothin' nor hear nothin'. See?"

Again Cates nodded, not daring to trust his voice. As he drew away from the curb he glanced at his watch. Almost eight—time to be getting up to the microphone. That thought came to him mechanically. It is the unforgivable sin for a radio announcer to be late. What should he do?

The capture of the gunmen was of first importance. Should he go directly

to the Warren Avenue station and notify the police there? No, because that was a small detail, with only one or two reserve men. It would take too long for the desk sergeant to summon the men on the street. Too, it would take too long to telephone the other details.

It was three minutes to eight. Deciding, Dave Cates pulled to the curb, leaped out, and raced back toward the old garage, careful to go by a back way so that Margolo's men would not see him.

At the doorway a small figure rose out of the gloom. Dave Cates' hand flashed to his armpit. Then, "How'd you get here?" he gasped.

Already she had anticipated his surprise, and had written her message. Barely Cates made it out:

"I wanted to see you broadcast, no matter how dangerous the locality might be. Please don't be angry."

Angry! How could he be angry with her for anything? Even now a warm glow suffused him at the thought that she was willing to share danger with him. Still, because the ideal in his heart was a precious and fragile thing, he dared not hope too much.

"All right," he cautioned, "but be sure not to make any noise."

He just made the room as the faint green light flashed, telling him that station KYK had switched its power to him. He placed a chair for Miss Anabelle to one side, where she could watch, then quickly stepped to the microphone.

"Good evening, folks," he said somewhat breathlessly. "This is the police division of station KYK to which you are now listening."

He paused, and the department listeners understood that he was going into code.

Slowly, distinctly, the radio cop continued: "Bed isn't the worst place in the world after a man has worked hard all day. A sale of springs and mattresses

is now taking place at 47 River Street. Wonderful bargains if bought *now*."

CHAPTER VI.

VAST FORCE.

ALL over the great city, desk sergeants and captains took their feet from their desks as they interpreted that message. Big Ed Margolo at 47 River Street with his assistants! Definite proof that they had shot and killed some one, presumably McGuirk! Act at once! Orders went ringing through big rooms, and reserve men rushed to obey. In five seconds, police cars were racing to River Street.

Having thrown this verbal bomb, Officer Cates went on talking, calmly outlining the sub-station reports that had come in to headquarters that day. Before he had finished, blue uniforms began creeping up on the house at 47 River Street to surround it, before closing in.

As he talked, the radio cop stared out of the little window that gave him a view of proceedings. Cates became tense as he saw a squad of men go to a side door and pound for admittance. There was no response, so Officer Jake Schmaltz kicked in the panels.

At the rear of the house, another squad smashed two windows. A gun cracked sharply—another—and the battle was on. All in a second the quiet of River Street was broken by yells, shots, and the smashing of furniture.

Then Dave Cates attained greatness. After a quick word of reassurance to the frightened girl, he rolled up his mental shirt sleeves and cut loose. Now he was not only a police announcer, but a news reporter, and the biggest story of the year was breaking right under his nose. As he described the scene, there was a ring in his voice that brought his listeners up wide-eyed.

"There's a little squabble going on out here, folks, that you might be in-

terested in. The police are making a raid on a River Street house, occupied by Big Ed Margolo, the gangster, and a number of his gunmen. Definite proof has been established that Margolo and three of his men just shot and killed Red McGuirk, chief of the opposing gang.

"Now they are shooting down there, and there's plenty of noise—*plenty!* Those gun flashes in the dark are like lightning flashes. They're pretty, but they're bad. Oh, there comes a gunman running out of the house. He breaks through three officers who are covering the door and starts on the run for cover.

"Now the officers are chasing him, shooting as they go. He turns and fires back at them. There he goes down! One of the bullets got him—in the leg, I think. The officers had every right to shoot to kill, but they didn't. Now they're putting the cuffs on him.

"People are around here, but about all you can see of 'em is an occasional head showing from behind a tree or from around the corner of a building. They're still shooting in the house, but not quite so much. Ah, there's a siren—it must be the wagon coming up. Yes, and it's coming fast, too, by the sound of it. Oh, boy, there's plenty of action in this row, all right!"

He paused for breath. "Please stand by, folks. I'll be with you in a minute."

He grinned at Anabelle Talbot, then went to the window to seek more details. Gee, if he could only be out in that scrap himself!

ABSORBED as he was in the arrival of the patrol wagon, he failed to notice the man who crept around the corner of the house and paused, noting instantly the figure in the garage window.

Big Ed knew he had been framed by somebody, but he wasn't sure by whom.

That dim green glow that shaded the figure gave him suspicion. Big Ed knew something about radio. His teeth bared, and he moved toward the garage.

The radio cop was still standing at the window when Big Ed Margolo, automatic in hand, pushed the door noiselessly open. But Anabelle Talbot saw—saw the set, deadly expression on Margolo's swarthy face, saw the glint of blue steel in his hand.

Horror made her motionless. Sudden danger sometimes will reveal many things. In the fractional part of a second Anabelle saw into her own heart and read correctly what was written there. Must she sit and see Dave killed because there was no way of warning him? She swallowed hard and lifted her white face to the heavens in agonized appeal, her lips moving.

Paralyzed vocal chords fought with the chains that bound them. Quick tears marked the terrific effort. Then the miracle happened, perhaps brought about by the working of the vast, beautiful force in a girl's heart.

In the silence Miss Anabelle's voice broke hysterically: "Dave! Oh, *Dave!*"

The radio cop whirled instantly and saw Margolo. Long practice before the mirror at headquarters brought its reward. Dave Cates dropped flat, his hand whipping to his left shoulder.

Crack!

Margolo's automatic spat flame, but the bullet passed harmlessly over Cates' head and thudded into the wall.

Boom!

Cates' big police gun roared. Margolo spun around as the heavy slug ripped into his shoulder.

Like a flash Cates was upon the gangster. He knocked the automatic from his hand, and applied the cuffs. Adroitly he kicked Margolo's feet from under him, and lowered the gangster to the floor.

"Oh, Dave!" faltered Miss Anabelle, one hand fluttering to her throat.

In a stride the little radio cop was beside her. He blinked, then caught up her hands and looked intently into her face.

"Holy pup!" he breathed, awed. "How'd you do it, honey? What happened?"

Now she was laughing and crying on his shoulder. "I—I don't know, Dave. I just had to s-say something when I knew he was going to shoot."

Officer Cates of the wave-length squad didn't understand, but he was grateful, so grateful that he was inarticulate. The marvel of it was that the

glow of reverence upon his freckled face made him almost handsome.

"Gee!" he said softly. "Gee!"

He didn't quite know what to do. But the green light was still on, and from force of habit he moved nearer the microphone, holding Anabelle Talbot tightly in his arms. Deliriously happy, he knew not what words he spoke.

Consequently, for the next half hour, the cops in a dozen different sub-stations tore their hair and raved over a message they couldn't fathom:

"Aw, say, honey! Don't take on like that or I'll be bawling, too! Honest, now, I love you like the dickens."

Another story of Officer Dave Cates, of the wave-length squad,

by

VIC WHITMAN

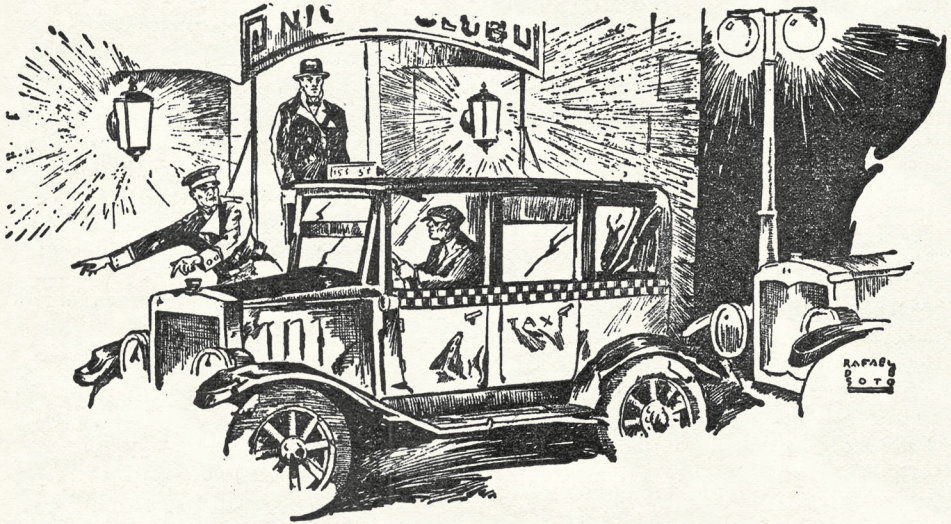
will appear in our next issue.

MEN OF THE WEST

By FLOYD T. WOOD

THOSE early lads weren't strong on style,
 But they had nerve instead;
 Fought desert plain, and held their gain;
 And counted not their dead.
 On foot or horseback, slow oxcarts,
 Their goal the Western sea;
 No turning back; the bull whips crack;
 Sheer madness—so it be!

What odds rough clothes and rougher words?
 Well, quibble if you dare;
 But gentle men were gentler when
 The Indians took their hair.
 So hail, I say, the pioneers,
 By dreams of empire led;
 Of culture short—may I retort
 They wore backbones instead!



Five Hundred Grand

By Howard D. Stewart

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

QUEER BUSINESS.

SLIM" pulled his taxi to a snappy stop in front of the night club cutting in brazenly on the licensed stand. When a fellow is hacking on his own and drives an antiquated cab, he becomes proficient at this sort of thing. A bit of nerve, a good sense of timing and sharp eyes, and it can be done. In each and all of these qualifications Slim was decidedly on the long side.

Slim had glimpsed a man as he stepped out of the club accompanied by two dizzy-looking girls. They'd want a taxi.

Slim swooped up so suddenly that the starter had no alternative but to open the door of Slim's waiting taxi and bang it shut after the passengers

had climbed inside. Leaning toward Slim the starter "called" him.

"Say, guy," he threatened in a low voice, "don't ever cut in here again with that kitchen stove, or there'll be trouble. Get me?"

Slim grinned. "Closed corporation?" he asked innocently.

"You said it! And don't forget!"

Pointing north, Slim headed for the address given. The incident meant nothing in his young life. He was that hard-boiled. But he did wish he could buy one of these ritzy new cabs that were taking the town. No use talking, they got the business. Pickings with an old rattletrap were pretty lean. Well, some day—maybe!

It was a short haul. As the two girls got out and hustled into the apartment building, the man leaned over and ordered Slim to wait. He had evidently

been drinking and his tongue was a bit thick, but that meant nothing.

"All right, boss," Slim answered, "but don't forget the meter's running."

Lighting a cigarette, Slim settled back comfortably in his seat to wait. Twenty-nine hundred dollars those new taxicabs costs! A lot of money.

But something had to be done if he was ever going to get ahead and marry Mae. A fellow could not expect a peach of a girl like her to keep waiting forever. Now if he had one of those new cabs—

The man was back, this time alone. Snapping out an address on One Hundred and Twenty-sixth Street, he got into the cab and again they were off. The old cab rattled and creaked, but buzzed cheerfully along.

In a way, Slim felt an affection for the old car. The motor still had pep even if it did make something of a racket. But people preferred to ride in those shiny, spick-and-span new cabs. It was nothing unusual for Slim to be haughtily turned down by prospective fares. They would rather wait until they could get one of the showy new taxis.

Reaching One Hundred and Twenty-sixth Street, he turned east. Peering out into the darkness he searched for the number.

"Right here," suddenly commanded his passenger. "Turn in there on that garage driveway and blow your horn three times. When they open the door drive in and wait. I'll be wanting you to take me downtown again in a few minutes."

IT was queer, but hacking is frequently a queer business. Slim obeyed instructions. When the door was opened, he ran his cab within the building. It appeared to be a garage, although the place was in total darkness except for the feeble rays from Slim's headlights. A man came up to them.

"It's me," Slim's passenger said, opening the door and getting out. "I want to see that car. Where's Ben?" A single dim light was switched on above. The two men walked away toward what looked like the office of the place.

After about ten minutes, Slim's passenger reappeared in the garage proper accompanied by a man who, Slim guessed, must be Ben. More lights were switched on and the two went over to another section of the garage where they stood looking at a large green, armored car, but talking together in tones too low for Slim to follow.

The car was to one side, amid some fifteen or twenty miscellaneous passenger cars and trucks. It was one of those huge, bullet-proof traveling motor vaults such as are used in New York for transporting large sums of money from one bank to another, and for delivering large pay rolls. Curiously, Slim noticed the number—E 573.

Again switching off the lights, the men returned slowly to Slim's taxi, still talking in undertones. As they came alongside the taxi, Ben peered up at Slim distrustfully.

"Who's this guy, Al?" he asked suspiciously, jerking his finger in Slim's direction.

"Oh, he's O. K.—one of the boys from Dorcher's stand." This, apparently, was all that need be said.

But before getting in the car again, Al launched into further mysterious conference with the man, Ben.

"All right, Ben," Al said finally, stepping on the running board and permitting his voice to rise more naturally. "Then everything's jake. To-morrow morning at Forty-four Maiden Lane at nine thirty. So long!"

The garage door rumbled open. A voice called from behind, "All right, taxi."

Slim stepped on the starter and, with the motor running, slipped his gear to

reverse and let out the clutch. Nothing happened.

Grabbing the lever again Slim repeated the action, this time snapping the lever back more determinedly. The car started to back up. A tremendous relief went over him. That damned gear shift had acted funny two or three times of late. For the moment he had visions of being broken down.

"I want to go back to where we first stopped," Al ordered.

Slim obeyed. Arriving at the address, Al tossed him a ten-dollar bill and disappeared within the building.

CHAPTER II.

SHREWD DECEPTION.

ON the way downtown Slim found himself strangely curious about the man, Al, the armored car and the date at Forty-four Maiden Lane at nine thirty the next morning.

Something was going to be pulled off—and if he was to believe his hunch, something crooked. The more Slim thought about it, the more he was possessed with the desire to get up early and be on hand to find out what it was all about. Adventurously inclined, Slim was not the sort of young man who wanted to pass up anything that promised excitement.

As a result of this curiosity, therefore, at precisely twenty minutes past nine the following morning, Slim turned the corner of Maiden Lane and, after locating the address, 44, drove past to the next block and parked his car.

Leaving the cab there, he crossed the street and sauntered back leisurely on the opposite side, finally taking an inconspicuous position within the doorway to an office building.

He did not have long to wait. Shortly after nine thirty Slim saw the armored car coming down the street. It jerked to a stop in front of 44, the

driver sitting tight. But his three armed mates hopped to the street and walked rapidly into the imposing building.

Slim noticed the number on the car—D 69. Evidently it was not the car he had seen in the mysterious uptown garage the previous night. Apart from the difference in numbers, however, the two cars were exactly alike.

Slim kept his eyes fixed upon the scene expectantly. A man in uniform came out of the building, probably one of the bank's private guards, and, pointing around the corner, said something to the driver of the armored car. The driver, nodding his head, slipped into gear and pulled the big car around the corner, drawing up at a side entrance where he waited.

Slim's pulse quickened. Something was coming off, all right. Another armored car had mysteriously slipped into the place vacated by the first car. Slim noticed the number excitedly. This was the car he had seen uptown in the garage—number E 573.

All around was the early morning stir of the financial district, canyons echoing to the footsteps of thousands hastening to their work. The policeman at the corner was kidding with a pretty girl on the way to her office. A minute passed.

Then the three armed huskies came out of the building, two of them carrying a heavy chest and one following at the rear with a .45 automatic in his right hand. They were in the car without delay.

The car swung sharply around and disappeared down the street in the direction from which it had come.

HOW simple it had all been. Five hundred thousand dollars in cash gone! The afternoon newspapers were filled with the most daring daylight robbery in the history of New York. Slim read every word of the accounts. And

as he did so, the whole affair crystalized.

The bandits had stolen the armored car, number E 573, two nights before from the garage of the trucking corporation. The rest of the job had been easy. The bank guard who had come out on the street to instruct the original truck driver to move around the corner—supposedly a messenger from his mates—had been a plant. He had disappeared.

The driver of D 69 had suspected nothing. Once the original car was around the corner and out of sight, the bandits' car was promptly slipped into its place.

The two cars, as pointed out before, looked exactly alike. Unsuspectingly, the men bringing out the money had shoved in the chest and piled into the inclosure, to be neatly blackjacked and gagged by crookdom's cleverest experts.

No one could see. Nobody even guessed what was going on behind the steel walls of the armored truck. So many such trucks were about and the sight of them attracted such scant attention, the police were unable even to trace its movements on the street after the robbery.

"Well, that's pretty slick, I'd say," Slim admitted after reading the newspapers. "Think of it—five hundred grand! And here I can't raise enough to get a new car! And——"

Slim stopped suddenly and expressed himself with a low whistle of dawning comprehension. Catching up the newspaper, he searched out and read again one of the paragraphs which he had glossed over before. Yes, there it was—"ten thousand dollars' reward for information leading to arrest and conviction."

Well, that's something else again. Carefully cutting out the statement about the reward, he folded the clipping elaborately and placed it in his

pocket. Three thirty. Better get a bite to eat.

MAE, Slim's girl, worked at Jenson's beanery on West Fortieth. Seating himself at the counter, Slim gave her his order—blowing himself to ham and eggs and French-fried potatoes. The small place was comparatively deserted.

Full of the robbery and his great idea, he told her the complete story. "How's that for a break of luck, kid? Now we can blow ourselves to that new cab and get married," he concluded in high spirits.

Mae had listened quietly. She was a wise girl. She knew something about the kind of gangsters who pull off a job like this. Her father had been a cop in Hell's Kitchen. They had bumped him off five years before.

"Listen, Slim," she began when he had finished, "I want to give you some good advice. Keep your mouth shut and go hacking in Brooklyn for a couple of weeks.

"These guys will be checking up on you. When they find you weren't one of the regulars from that night club, they'll be looking for you. And as for that reward, Slim, you forget it. It isn't worth the risk."

"Aw, Mae, I'm not afraid of any crooks. I couldn't let a chance like this get by. It means everything to me. Just think, Mae, how much ten thousand dollars is! Believe me, it's a bucket of money!"

"Oh, I know. But you're worth a whole lot more to me alive, Slim, than under the ground. If you squeal, somebody'll be taking you for a ride, and some fine morning the kids on their way to school will find your lifeless body in a vacant lot, shot full of lead. Don't I know what I'm talking about!"

Slim laughed. "Say, kid, I stood up to the Boches. You don't think I'm going to run from those dopy rats, do

you? I can handle a gun myself. I'm no slouch."

"I know, Slim, but these guys are different. They wouldn't give you a Chinaman's chance. Please, Slim, for my sake—don't!"

Slim could not see it that way. If anybody wanted to start any trouble, he liked a scrap as well as the next. Hadn't he always been able to take care of himself?

"Don't you worry, Mae. Just you leave this to me."

As he left the restaurant, it was drizzling outside. Good enough. Rain was always fine for the hacking business. He fully intended to drive directly to the police station and "spill the beans."

Mae's apprehension had failed to disturb him. In fact, he was rather proud of his part. A fellow usually wants his girl to realize he's something of a he-man.

CHAPTER III.

WOLFISH LEADER.

STARTING his motor, Slim slipped the gear shift into first. Again that sinking sensation. He tried it a second time. The car did not move an inch. Desperately he tried the other gears. The lever was useless. He swore under his breath. The old bus had broken down at last. And just as it was beginning to rain!

Returning to the restaurant Slim phoned his friend, Jake. "I'm busted down," he explained, "something's wrong with the gear shift. Bring over your tools and see if you can fix me up. I've got to get rolling."

Jake arrived shortly and within a few minutes knew exactly what was the trouble. "Your shifting fork's gone," he explained. "I'll have to set the gears in second with my fingers and drive it back to the shop."

Taking up the floor boards and opening the gear case, he finally got the gears in mesh. Then, running in sec-

ond, they slowly drove the cab to Jake's dilapidated little repair shop.

"Will it take long?" Slim inquired unhappily.

"I can have it ready to-morrow."

"Holy mackerel!" Slim exclaimed. "That won't do, Jake. You've got to fix it now. I can't afford a lay-off."

"The trouble is," Jake went on scratching his head, "I don't know where I can get a new fork. You see, this car isn't made any more and maybe I'll have to search all over town to pick up the part. That's what we're really up against."

"Say," Slim answered, "you get busy on the works and write out what you want. I'll chase up the part while you're busy. We've got to get rolling!"

Slim searched high and low among the parts houses—from Fifty-ninth Street to Brooklyn. When the stores finally closed, he returned empty-handed.

"Well," suggested Jake, "I can try to make one. I can't guarantee it'll be as good as it was, but it ought to last a while."

"Then go to it, Jake," Slim entreated. At ten o'clock the job was finished.

"Now go easy on that gear shift," Jake called as Slim began to back out of the shop.

With a wave of his hand, Slim was out again and rattling down the street.

At almost the first corner he was hailed. A seventy-cent haul. A second fare followed immediately on top of the first. It was raining hard by that time. The broken gear shift had set him back twelve dollars and seventy-five cents.

Slim was not feeling any too cheerful about it, either. But business was good and he felt that while the money was coming in so easily he should grab up all the change he could. The police could wait until later—or, if need be, to-morrow.

Slim's mind, at the time, was more occupied in recovering his lost ground,

or, to put it more precisely, his twelve dollars and seventy-five cents.

With one eye on the clock he worked over toward Broadway so as to get in on the after-theater crowds. While none of his hauls was a long one, he was getting all he could take care of and the money in his pocket was growing heavy.

At the subway exit on Forth-third Street, he picked up a girl in evening clothes. As she jumped into the cab she gave her destination:

"Dorcher's and hurry, please."

Slim hesitated. The very night club he wanted to avoid. Pshaw! what was there to be afraid of? First, second and third gear, all very carefully, and he headed for the unsavory night club.

Nevertheless, as he approached Dorcher's, Slim took the precaution to pull his driver's cap lower, and he raised the collar of his coat. Sliding into place and breaking to a stop, he held his head away diffidently as the starter advanced and opened the door.

As luck would have it, Slim had to make change, the starter looking on from one side and holding a huge umbrella. Slim did not look up. The change made, Slim reached for his gear shift. A heavy hand clasped over his.

"Say, guy, pull up ahead here. The boss wants to see you." It was the starter.

"Sorry. Haven't the time," Slim answered.

"Then take the time—get me?"

Slim pulled forward a short distance, where he would be out of the way, and stopped.

A huge surly-faced negro porter appeared besides the cab from out of the rain and motioned imperatively. "Come with me."

Slim followed through a side door, and into a strangely quiet hallway. The negro started up the stairway without comment and Slim followed to the third floor, where, turning down a long hall,

the negro opened a door and switched on a light.

The room was a private office. There were a desk, some files, and a couple of chairs. A second door was on the opposite side of the office.

"Wait. The boss'll be here in a minute." The negro left the room and closed the door behind him.

Slim sat down in one of the chairs. It was a coldly forbidding room. His heart was beating in a puzzling manner. Surely a little three-story climb ought not to set him off like that.

From the distance came the sound of the girl show. He could dimly hear the music and the muffled exuberance of the audience. It contrasted weirdly with the deathlike silence of the room in which he waited.

SLIM looked at his watch. He had been there ten minutes. They were long minutes. He mopped his brow with his handkerchief. There was no reason to get nervous—A terrific clap of thunder roared outside—Slim started violently.

The door before him opened. A dapperly dressed man in a dinner jacket entered softly, with quick, mincing steps.

Glancing at Slim briefly, he sidled into his chair at the desk and took up the telephone receiver, calling for one of the house extensions.

During this interval Slim caught the odor of perfume. The man smelled like a chorus girl. Curiously, Slim studied him. A long, sharp nose; a small mouth and chin; sleek black hair plastered back over a low brow—the features were not reassuring. Slim had seen the type before—the human edition of the wolf.

"All right, Nick? Start out there now. I'll be along soon. Call up Ben first and tell him to keep the boys there until I stop in on the way back." He hung up.

"Are you the fellow they call the boss?" Slim asked.

Dorcher looked up. Never until that moment had Slim realized how coldly unfathomable human eyes could be.

"The starter downstairs said the boss wanted to see me," Slim added.

"Yeah, that's me. Come on. We're going to take a little ride." Dorcher got to his feet and reached for his hat.

Slim's face went white. He got the idea. Mae was right. The man, Nick, with whom the boss had just talked over the telephone, was taking out the get-away car.

"Listen, boss," Slim blurted out, "I'm busy to-night. I've—I've got a call and have to hurry uptown. What do you want to pick on me for?"

Dorcher looked at him curiously. "All I want you to do is to drive me to Eleventh Avenue and Sixty-fourth."

The picture clicked in Slim's imagination. That terrifying drive out there with this man in the cab behind him. The lonely and deserted corner with nothing about but gaunt, silent warehouse buildings.

Dorcher smiled at his protestations—a twisted smile with fishy, unlit eyes. "Come on, kid. And wipe your chin. You're blubbing. I've got a date and don't want to be late. You go first."

Slim looked at the man beseechingly.

"Go on," Dorcher snapped. And there was something in the tone that demanded obedience. As if in a daze, Slim opened the door and started down the hall, Dorcher followed, his right hand thrust deep in his coat pocket. Another deafening crash of thunder outside. Even the elements had conspired against him.

As hopeless as a rat in a sprung trap. Just as Mae had predicted, they were not going to give him a chance. The incomprehensible unfairness of it—the unbelievable cruelty!

Suddenly a frenzy of desperation

consumed Slim. It was the hysterical fury of a man struggling for life. It was one of those accelerated moments when a man thinks fast.

CHAPTER IV.

CRASHING CARS.

SLOWLY, step by step, Slim began descending the stairs. He was in no hurry. Pretending to be almost on the point of collapse from fright, he let his knees wobble exaggeratedly.

At first Dorcher kept his position some distance behind, but soon, in his impatience at Slim's delay, he pressed forward and ordered Slim to "get a move on."

At the second floor Slim stopped and leaned for the moment against the wall as if unable to proceed. Dorcher swore at him and shoved him forward roughly. It was what Slim had hoped for. He would try it again.

At the top of the stairs leading to the first floor Slim stopped. Again the man behind shoved against him. Figuring cunningly that at the moment the man would be off guard and doubtlessly off balance as well, Slim suddenly reached back over his head and camped his arms like a vise around the neck of the man behind him.

A quick duck, with the aid of a wrestler's leverage, and Slim sent Dorcher hurling over his head and half-way down the stairs.

The man lit headfirst with a sickening crash. He screamed just before he hit. His revolver clattered down the uncarpeted stairs.

For the moment Slim stared blankly at the results. The completeness and overwhelming success of his desperate effort was astonishing. Dorcher was "out." There was no question about that. Now what?

That piercing scream must have been heard. Starting down the stairs, Slim stopped to pick up the gun.

Voices were heard from the floor above. Doors opened. A bell began ringing angrily somewhere in the hall. The warning was out.

Reaching the ground floor, Slim stepped over the groaning inert figure of the boss. The front door was but a matter of a few paces. A single electric bulb burned faintly on the ceiling, but strongly enough to make him a target from above. He turned the handle of the door and pulled. The door was locked.

As Slim fumbled around to find the key or the bolt or whatever it was that held, a shot rang out from the top of the stairway behind him. The bullet splintered the door a few inches to his right.

Slim deftly shot out the hall light. In the ensuing darkness there rang out three, four, five rapid shots from above. Smiling grimly, Slim had already turned back from the door and dashed to the other end of the hall, deciding to take his chances there. As he groped about, they were still shooting blindly at the front door from the landing on the second floor. That was all right with Slim. He hoped they would keep it up.

Slim found a door. It was unlocked and opened on the stairway to the basement. Reaching the cement floor below, Slim lit a match. In the brief flare of light he could see that the place was piled high with wooden cases. Bootleg!

There must be some way out of the basement at the farther end. He must hurry. They would come charging down the stairs after him at any moment. Suppose there was no other way out? Suppose they had him cornered? Grimly Slim pressed forward as best he could in the dark.

Evidently he was under the main part of the night club. High carnival was in progress above.

But even above the noise of the per-

formance Slim could hear stealthy footsteps on the cellar stairway. They were already following him into the basement.

As he felt his way to the rear an odor of cooking food grew stronger. At first, this had meant nothing to him. Of a sudden, the fact that there must be kitchens in the basement somewhere ahead of him took on significance. They promised a hopeful avenue of escape.

Pressing on, depending largely on his sense of smell, Slim experienced little difficulty in reaching the kitchen partitions. He searched for a door. There must be a door. Finally, he came upon the telltale cracks of light outlining what he sought. Yes, and there was the door knob.

Trying the knob gently, and finding the door unlocked, Slim hesitated for an instant to gather his composure. Whatever further dangers lurked beyond this door, they must be faced boldly. He decided that he would bluff his way through.

Then, unhurriedly and with the exact nuance of a person having every right and reason in the world for stalking through the long room. Slim opened the door and calmly started for the other end.

It was a busy place. Indifferently Slim passed among calling chefs and helpers. But how far away the door at the end of the room seemed—how strangely distant. Three or four scowling helpers looked up at him as he passed, but went about their business. Slim's bold front had worked. He made the other end of the kitchen unchallenged. But it had been an ordeal—a test of nerve.

SLIM next found himself in a hallway. Here, evidently, were the dressing rooms for the show girls. He hastened on. At the farther end he came to the stage door, opening out to

the alley, to the right of which was a spiral stairway leading above.

A hard-looking individual was sitting on a chair beside the door reading a tabloid. As Slim came up, the man eyed him suspiciously.

"Who are you?" he demanded, getting to his feet.

"I'm the boss' new chauffeur," Slim answered readily, recalling happily that he still wore his driver's cap.

"What are you doing back here?"

"He told me to go out this way, if you must know," Slim replied with assumed flippancy. As the guard stood aside uncertainly, Slim opened the door and went out.

As the door closed after him Slim heard angry voices from the rear, as his pursuers came piling out from the kitchens. Slim wasted no time. Springing up the steps to the street level, he turned and ran for the street.

His car was where he had left it. It was raining hard and nobody was standing around. With a prayer in his heart for his gear shift, he stepped on the starter and started off down the street. His fighting blood was up. He'd show them that they couldn't get away with that sort of stuff with him. He headed directly for the nearest police station.

The officer in charge listened with narrowed eyes as Slim told his story. Two minutes later, Slim was rattling north as fast as he dared go on the slippery pavements, leading a patrol wagon filled with police and detectives.

As they drew up at the garage on One Hundred and Twenty-sixth Street, the bulls surrounded the place with drawn guns. They knew what sort of gang they were dealing with.

The garage door was locked and bolted. All seemed to be silent and dark within. The police wasted no time. They started in on the big door with their axes, and had tear bombs ready. Slim sat in his car out on the

street, his motor running, watching eagerly. This was his inning.

THEN the huge garage door swung suddenly open and a blinding light played full upon the police grouped about the outside of the entrance in the drenching rain. A machine gun began to *rat-tat-tat* wickedly from within. The police scampered for cover and returned the fire. It was like a small battle turned loose.

Then with a mighty roar of its motor, the big, green armored car came lumbering out of the doorway. Slim watched, suddenly cold with apprehension at the turn of affairs.

They were going to get away! Nothing could stop them in that car! The police were getting the worst in this unequal encounter. What chance had they against the armored car and bandit machine guns?

It was a flash—an inspiration! Slim took no time to think it out. With a cry of fury he slipped his car into first and gave it full throttle. The armored car had already reached the street. It was turning to the east when Slim hit its side with all the force at his command.

There was a mighty crash—a sound of splintering glass. For one terrifying instant Slim feared his cab did not pack the necessary weight. But the armored truck went over awkwardly—like some huge wounded animal. Immediately both cars were a blaze of fire. Only the most determined action enabled the police to extricate the unconscious Slim before it was too late. He was badly crushed.

ONE week later Slim lay staring at the ceiling from his cot in the hospital, a pile of newspapers on the floor beside him. He was a great hero now. The newspapers all acclaimed the fact. Pretty soft!

Things could not suit him better.

The police had gone back to Dorcher's after cleaning up the gang at the garage, and had taken in the whole staff—including, to Slim's satisfaction, the starter. Slim had it in for that guy.

Then there had been a pompous gentleman from the trucking company. He had been very eloquent and, Slim thought, silly. But there was nothing funny about the check for ten thousand dollars which he left. The stolen money had been fully recovered. It was in the armored car when the bandits made that last dash for freedom.

"After all, this old world's a pretty decent place," Slim decided.

"Miss O'Hanlon to see you," the nurse presently announced.

"Well, Mae," Slim remarked finally—after their talk had spent itself on the details of his adventure and rather personal plans for their future—"it looks like you can quit your job in the beanery as soon as I'm out of this. And by the way, the salesman for those swell new hacks was here this morning to see me and I gave him my order. Not so bad, eh?"

"Ace" Dallas, of the air-intelligence service, sweeps the sky as he trails a mystery in

THE HEADLESS MONARCH

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BEATING THE GAME

THOUSANDS of men and women each year try to get into the movies, and fail. Legitimate actors go to Hollywood, and return without succeeding. Well-known writers have been turned down by underlings, unaware of the author's reputation and ability.

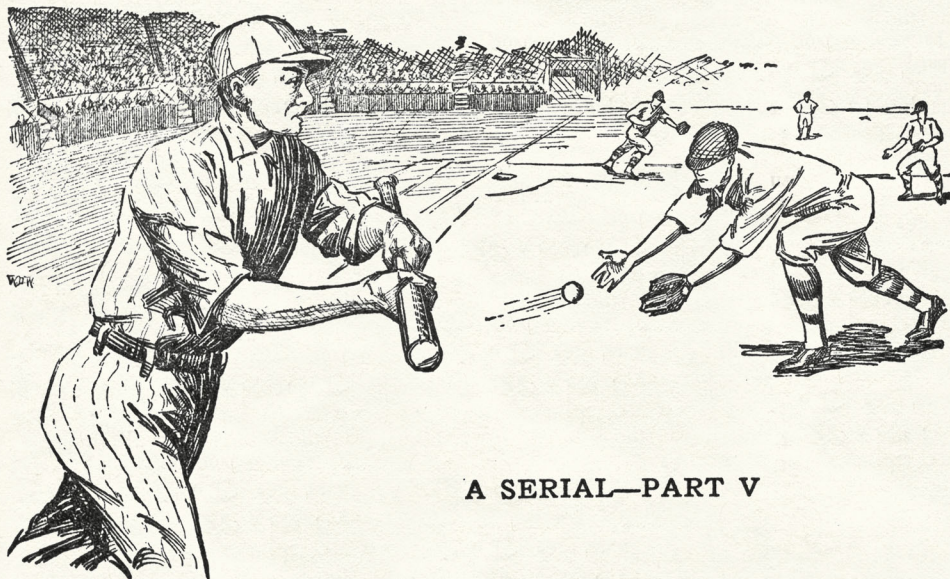
Recently a well-known free-lance author thought of a novel scheme. He had a story that he believed would make a really good moving picture. He condensed that story into two hundred and fifty words. Then he divided it into five sections.

To sixty moving-picture executives, he sent section one of this story by night letter, signing it: "To be continued to-morrow." He arranged with the telegraph company to have this message delivered at about eleven o'clock, after the morning's mail had been read and cleared away.

On the following day, section two was sent out. The author's name was signed to the fifth and final section. On the day that section was delivered, the writer received seven telephone calls, with as many movie executives saying that they would like to discuss purchasing the story.

One telegram was received from a large producing company, saying that there was a job awaiting the writer—and that telegrams would bombard him until he accepted that job. In less than a week, the author was occupying a desk in a studio office, a signed contract in his pocket.

And all the time, people were trying to break into the movies, and other, and equally well-known, writers were becoming discouraged because they could not secure interviews with moving-picture executives.



A SERIAL—PART V

Slugger McCoy

By Burt L. Standish

CHAPTER XXIX.

BAD NEWS.

AFTER the doctor left, Harrigan sat staring at the floor in a grim way, the hard muscles tight over his set jaws. Slugger McCoy, his arm dressed and incased in a sleeve cut from an old jersey, came to the manager and put his left hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Bill," said the pitcher in a low voice.

"Oh, hell!" exploded Harrigan. "Don't talk to me about being sorry! I'm the one!"

"I know it." McCoy nodded. "I know how much you wanted to beat the Buddies out in this finish, and win the championship. I know what it would mean to you to do that. That's why I wanted to help all I could.

"You've been white and square with me, Bill Harrigan. I don't believe any other young player ever had such a chance as you've given me. I've tried to show that I appreciated it. Now it makes me kind of sick to think I won't be able to help at this time when you need me the most, and——"

"Shut up!" howled old Bill, jumping to his feet. "You make me mad, talking to me that way! What have I done for you? I've took you and let ya knock hell out of the finest and toughest arm since the best days of 'Iron Joe' McGinnity!"

"Just trying to do a stunt and maybe get the glory of winning a championship I hadn't any right to win this season anyhow, I've put you on the bum. And you talk like you're grateful to me! Hell's bells! Boy, you ought to be cussing me, black in the face!"

McCoy shook his head. "It wasn't your fault, Bill. I coaxed you to let me do it."

"And I was just fool enough to be coaxed! You talk about the chance I've given you! Why, you've got a bum deal—a rotten deal! And I'm to blame!"

"No, no——"

"Shut up!" Harrigan roared again. "I guess I know whether I'm to blame or not! Don't contradict me! You ain't got sense enough to know! You're only a kid, after all. You're just a big, fine, honest kid, ready to work your head off for anybody you think is treating you right, and I've been the sort of a greedy bum to let you do it. I oughta be shot!"

The manager started to walk the floor. He stumbled against the chair he'd been sitting on, and kicked it out of his way, cursing.

McCoy was a little dazed. He'd never dreamed the steady, calm-appearing, self-sufficient old manager could be upset and lose control of himself like this. He didn't know what to say, and so he stood still, watching Harrigan walk to the window and stare out at a blank wall.

Bill kept his back toward the young pitcher, standing like a statue at the window. When he turned again, his face was set and calm.

"Well, this settles it," he said quietly. "The Buddies and Bears can fight it out between them, same as they ought to anyhow. It hurt to lose Faraday. The big bonehead, taking to booze over a skirt! The idea of him imagining he stood anywheres with that sort of a gal!"

"Maybe we'd pulled through and turned the trick without him, if I hadn't let you crack your arm. It serves me right! No, it don't! Everybody'll know I worked you to death, but even what they say about me won't be what I deserve. Look here, boy! Don't you

ever talk to me again about being sorry on my account."

"Maybe you can turn the trick yet, Bill," encouraged Slugger. "You're only just a little behind the Buddies, and——"

"I wouldn't deserve it if I was to cop it now. But there ain't a chance without you, Slugger—not a chance. Your batting's been a big asset, to say nothing of the finest pitching a youngster ever done in his first big-league season. Without Faraday and without either your pitching or batting, the Bluebirds'll have just as good chance to grab the flag as the devil would to get past Saint Pete.

"When the team finds out you can't pitch again this year——"

"Let's not let them find it out, Bill!" said McCoy eagerly. "Will that doctor tell?"

"No, but——"

"Then why do we? Nobody else knows, not even my roommate. I didn't tell Dunn. He growled some because I was restless last night and kept him awake, but I didn't explain I was restless because my arm was aching."

After gazing steadily at the pitcher a moment or two, Harrigan shook his head. "You ain't the kind that whines about your troubles, Slugger. Most men do. But you're an exception. You're an exception in lots of ways, lad. I want you to know it'll be quite a while before I get through being disgusted with myself over the bum deal I've handed you."

"Now I think you'd better shut up," said Slugger, laughing. His laughter was a mask to cover a surge of sentiment, an emotional reaction, a great liking for Bill Harrigan which had to be hidden because it seemed almost unmanly.

McCoy went on. "I don't believe there's any need of letting it out that my arm's hurt, if nobody knows it, the team won't lose its fighting ability at

all. The fellows are all jazzed up to get into the world's series money if they can. If you had another good pitcher now——"

"Had a wire from Joe Maroney, two days ago, that he'd found a youngster up in a Michigan bush league who looks right to him, and that old tar don't make many mistakes in sizing 'em. You know I gave him a job scouting for me."

"Have Maroney send that lad on, Bill. You can afford to take a chance on him if you have to."

"I guess I'll do that," said Harrigan. "I don't count any more on grabbing the old pennant this year, but it'll be something if we can finish no lower than third. Nobody ever reckoned we'd do that much."

Slugger frowned. "Don't quit, Bill!" he implored. "Why, you're the last one I ever dreamed would quit!"

"Who said anything about quitting?" growled the manager resentfully. "Nobody's thinking of it! How d'ya get that way?"

"Now I didn't mean to be offensive, Bill, but I was thinking of something—of myself. I quit once when I thought I was licked—thought there wasn't a chance to win. It lost me something, something I wanted, something I'll always be ashamed of myself for losing."

"I wasn't licked, Bill. Anyhow, I don't believe I was—now. I just didn't keep going after what I wanted. Keep on going after the pennant, Bill! Don't give up till you're down—down and out, with not another chance on earth. You can't tell what may happen."

"That's so," agreed Harrigan; "nobody ever can tell. I guess you got plenty bulldog in you now, even if you did quit once, old lad."

"Maybe it taught me a lesson. I don't believe I'll forget it. I'd be a fool to."

"Well, divorce yourself from the

notion that I'm going to lay down, son. Maybe it'll be best to keep still about your arm. We needn't 'a' had that doc come here. I'll fix it so that you'll go see him in his office after this. And I hope none of the boys saw him come into this room."

But one had. A few minutes after Harrigan departed, Roger Carey knocked on McCoy's door, and entered. He looked haggard and dejected.

"Are you all right, Slugger?" he asked.

"All right! Sure I am. What makes you ask that?"

Slugger was glad he had put on his coat, which covered the black jersey sleeve he was wearing on his injured arm.

"Well, I didn't know," said Carey. "I saw that doctor come here with Harrigan, and I thought maybe something was the matter with you. That's why I dropped in."

He sat down, uninvited, but jumped up again at once. "I guess I need a doctor myself," he confessed, walking about. "I'm all jumpy. That was the matter with me when Bill sent me in to pitch. I didn't sleep a wink night before last."

Slugger was watching him speculatively. "What kept you awake, Roger?" he asked casually.

"A son of a gun in the next room. He did it deliberately, maliciously—kept pounding on my wall."

"What was his idea?"

"Oh, just plain cussedness, I guess."

"Why didn't you do something about it?"

"I did. I called for him to keep still. That stopped him for a few minutes, but he started in again just as I was getting to sleep. Then I damned him good and plenty, and woke a woman up on the opposite side, who said I ought to be ashamed of myself for using such language. Oh, it was a great night!"

"Did the man stop pounding then?"

"I'll say he didn't! But I drove him out of there. I phoned down to the office, and complained. The night clerk lied. He said the room on that side of me wasn't occupied. I knew better, and I told him so."

"Well, what followed?"

"Oh, they sent a boy up with a pass-key, but they took their time about it. He unlocked the room for me, and let me look through it. There wasn't anybody there then."

McCoy's eyebrows went up. "That was strange. Where was the man who'd pounded on the wall?"

"I suppose he heard me complaining to the office, and got out. Either that or they sent up and had him moved into another room while I was waiting."

"Um! How about the bed? Had it been used?"

"No, but that hasn't anything to do with it. That man didn't go to bed. He just sat up and hammered on the wall to annoy me." Carey stopped speaking while he gave McCoy a resentful stare.

"What's the matter with you?" he exclaimed. "Don't you believe me? I know what I'm talking about! I guess I know whether there was a man in that room or not! Maybe you're going to tell me it was empty all the time, same as the night clerk did! Don't do it!"

"Sure I won't, Roger," said Slugger soothingly. "You ought to know."

"And I couldn't sleep last night again, either. Kept thinking how I blew up in that first inning yesterday. That was my finish, Slugger! I know it! You've come through and made a big success, but I'm all done—all done!"

"Don't be ridiculous, old man! What you need is a rest, or something like that."

Carey laughed queerly. "I can't rest, that's the matter with me. I sat at my

open window quite a while last night, but at last I had to close the window, and that made the room so stuffy I couldn't breathe."

"What made you shut the window?"

"So I wouldn't jump out of it. I felt like jumping—had to hold on to myself to keep from doing it. It scared me, Slugger. I know what it comes from. My nerves. I've come to the end of my rope, I'm all through!"

He dropped down on the chair again and held his head, shivers running over him. His words and the sight of him in such a shaken condition stirred Slugger to strong sympathy. He went to Roger and put a hand on his bowed shoulders.

"Now, now!" he said. "Buck up, old chap. I never saw any signs of this trouble while we were in college together. You'll get the best of it."

"I didn't have much bother with it then; it didn't bother me for a long time. But last winter I was sick, and it came on to me again. I had to doctor for it. Nancy knew I wasn't just right when I went down to Margalo to join the team. That's why she went along with me. She's a great girl, Nancy is! A nuisance sometimes, just the same. Why didn't you stick to her and make her marry you, Slugger? You could have made her do it if you'd stuck—if you'd only——"

"Let's not talk about that, Roger," interrupted McCoy quickly. "I don't want to."

"Oh, all right! Now she's going to marry Boyd, but I know she isn't very happy over it. She told me she wouldn't marry him on a bet, but she's changed her mind. And she'd change her mind again after she broke her engagement to you if you'd kept on trying to win her."

"Now she hates you—hates you like poison. She couldn't bear to see you being so successful as a pitcher, and that's what drove her to go home so

suddenly. She's that way—when she likes, she likes; and when she hates, she hates. I guess she'd smile now to see you in your coffin."

Slugger's face was ashen, and his eyes were full of pain. "Stop it, Carey!" he cried hoarsely. "You don't know what you're doing! I love your sister as much as I ever did, and—and that's more than I'll ever love any other girl! She knifed me hard by her unfair suspicion. She believed my denial was a lie, and that was too much! My father called me a liar when I denied that I had robbed his bank, and I was done with him for the moment the word passed his lips."

Roger was looking at Slugger again. "Well, maybe it's just as well you two didn't get married, you and Nancy," he said. "You're both like that, and you would have been miserable. The only thing that could have prevented your being miserable would have been for you to master her, subdue her, bring her right down to your feet—and you never could have done that. She wouldn't let you."

"Bah!" said McCoy. "Cave-man stuff! It's the bunk!"

"Is it? That's what you think, and maybe it is sometimes, but not with a girl like Nancy. You're not built that way. We're just a pair of easy saps, I guess. You've got a kind of strength, but what have I got? Nothing—just nothing. I'm a total loss!"

He stood up, wringing his hands. His chin quivered, and sobs choked him. He had risen in the attempt to get control of himself, but again he sank down weakly. He covered his face with his hands and wept like a woman, tears gushing between his fingers.

McCoy was astounded and embarrassed. He hadn't suspected the fellow was in such a bad way. Nancy's guardian care of her brother was explained now, Slugger thought. He

bent to put his uninjured left arm round the sob-shaken youth.

"Get hold of yourself, Carey!" he begged. "It's silly, old fellow. You've just let your grip on yourself slip, that's all."

"There's no more hope for me now than there is for you with Nancy," Carey moaned. "You haven't a chance with her, and I haven't a chance to beat the thing that's trapped me."

"But, as much as I care for Nancy, I'm not going to let my mistake with her lick me, Roger," said McCoy. "I'm going to forget her, in time."

Carey lowered his hands from his tear-wet cheeks and gazed up at McCoy. He saw a face that was set and strong, fixed with grim determination.

"You'll do it, Slugger!" he whispered. "There's a kind of weakness in you, but there's more strength than weakness—much more. You can take the worst kind of a licking, and then get up and fight again; but when I'm licked I can't seem to get up. Slugger, I believe you're the best pitcher alive, right now! I really do! And I know there are others who think so. You've done it for yourself, and I congratulate you!"

He had risen again, and, unexpectedly, he seized McCoy's right hand and wrung it almost fiercely. A momentary flash of pain crossed Slugger's face, but he controlled his features almost instantly. He was forced to use his left hand to release Carey's grip upon his right. His freed hand dropped at his side.

Roger looked surprised, his eyes widening. He gazed into McCoy's face again, and then down at his right arm.

"You've hurt your arm!" he whispered.

"Oh, no!" denied Slugger.

"You have! I can tell. You hurt it in that second game yesterday. That was why the doctor came here."

"I've got an iron arm that nothing

can hurt, old man. Don't get such a ridiculous notion."

"It's too bad!" said Carey. "Harrigan's been working you too much. He's been a slave-driver. He's a——"

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed McCoy. "You're off your base, Roger. Don't make such silly talk. If you go round telling——"

"I won't tell. I get you, Slugger. You're going to keep still about it. I get the idea. Well, don't worry about me. I'll be mum, old fellow. I won't spill a thing—not even to Faraday."

"You don't know a thing to spill," said Slugger stiffly.

He was disturbed and regretful when Carey left, a little later. No one with will power weakened as Roger's was could be sure of his own words and actions.

CHAPTER XXX.

UP AGAINST A BIG JOB.

McCoy's failure to warm up before the game that afternoon caused no speculation or comment. It was natural for him to refrain from exertion after pitching almost nineteen full innings the day before. So he sat in the dugout and watched the others.

Nor did Carey get out upon the field. He likewise sat upon the bench as a spectator. There was an unnatural yellowish-ashen tinge in his face. His eyes were dull and heavy. His jaws were tightly set. Slugger believed Roger was guarding himself against betraying nervousness.

Faraday took part in practice, but again Landreth was the man Harrigan sent into right field to play in the game. Red-eyed and sullen, Colt went to the bench, swearing under his breath. Hearing him growling, Harrigan turned to him.

"Take the afternoon off, Faraday," said the manager, "and you better go to a Turkish bath. It's your move."

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Old Bill had refrained from suspending the man because of a faint hope that he might come to his senses and quit drinking in time to be of some help in the final games of the season.

Houck, the dependable, pitched for his team that day, and won the game. But as both the Buddies and the Bears were also winners, the positions of the three leaders remained unchanged.

McCoy went to see the doctor about his arm that evening. "It's feeling a little better, doc," he said. "Maybe it isn't as bad as you imagined. Maybe I'll be able to use it sooner."

"It's feeling better because of the treatment," was the reply, "but it hasn't begun to be any better—yet. You won't do any pitching with it, unless you are set on ending your career in baseball in about one inning. You wouldn't last longer than that."

He hesitated a little before adding: "To be absolutely truthful with you, I have a doubt about your ever pitching again. That's a pretty hard thing to tell you, but I see you're the sort of person who may do something foolish unless you're completely convinced there's no way to escape the consequences. Your only chance to stay in baseball will come through refraining to pitch again until some time next spring. That's straight."

Slugger was in a gloomy state of mind as he walked back to his hotel. He had tried to think the doctor had been too pessimistic in his first diagnosis, but that hope was gone now. Resignation was difficult. At last, he took a long breath, and lifted his eyes from the pavement. He saw a familiar figure.

Roger Carey, walking close to the inside limits of the sidewalk, was peering into doorways as though looking for something or somebody. McCoy saw him pause a moment before one of those doorways, putting his hand out into the shadowy recess of it.

His hand came back and went to his pocket as if carrying something there. Then he hastened onward again, eagerly, looking into no more doorways. Slugger fell back a little, stepped into another doorway, and waited.

Pretty soon a figure slipped out of the doorway before which Roger had paused. With a tingle of excitement, the watching pitcher recognized that small, furtive form. The fellow was "Pasty Face," the cat-footed slinker Slugger had seen Carey meet on a previous occasion, the fellow Slugger had attempted to follow, only to be black-jacked and robbed.

Again McCoy followed the slippery, dangerous individual. He took the opposite side of the street and kept near the curbing. He was looking for a policeman when Pasty Face ran into trouble.

Two burly-looking men in plain clothes appeared abruptly, as though they had stepped from ambush, and collared the skulker. He fought like a cornered beast, but the men who had seized him whipped forth nightsticks and clubbed him into submission.

"That's tough medicine to hand a little fellow, officers," said Slugger, who had approached.

"G'wan, you!" retorted one of the captors. "Shuffle your dogs or you'll get a chance to talk to the desk sergeant."

The other plain-clothes man was frisking the "pinch," and his hands found an automatic pistol. "That's what he was going after when we fanned him quiet," he observed.

"But what'll be the charge against him?" persisted McCoy. "I have a reason for wanting to know."

"Is that so?"

"I'm a ball player. Slugger McCoy's my name, and I——"

"Why, so it is the Slugger!" exclaimed the taller of the two officers. "Well, I've seen you toss 'em a couple

times, lad, and you're the cat's regalia. I've got some money down that you win the rag for Bill Harrigan this year."

"I hope you don't lose it," said McCoy affably. "Now maybe you'll tell me——"

"What we've hopped this guy for? Sure. He's a dope peddler, he'll get a good long vacation where he won't be able to carry on his trade."

"Thanks," acknowledged Slugger. "That's all I want to know about him. I hope he gets the limit."

He had suspected it. He believed that Roger Carey was a victim of the drug habit, and now the suspicion was confirmed. Nancy knew this, which explained her solicitous concern for her brother. Slugger was deeply sorry for Roger.

Carey was the first person Slugger saw when he walked into the hotel again. Roger was sauntering up and down the lobby, and his appearance was greatly altered. A flush had driven the ashen sallowness from his face, and the dullness had vanished from his eyes.

"I've been looking for you, Slugger," he said cheerfully. "They said you'd gone out somewhere. How is the old lad to-night?"

"First rate, Roge," Slugger answered, marveling at the quick and complete change in the fellow.

"Look here, old chap!" requested Carey, taking McCoy's left arm and leading him aside. "I know I made a big fool of myself, talking the way I did this afternoon. I was just a blithering ass, that's all. I get blue spells sometimes—that's what's the matter—and imagine things."

With a sensation of pitying sickness within him, Slugger forced a smile. "You certainly are in a different frame of mind," he agreed. "You've calmed down. Your nerves seem to be steady."

"You bet!" laughed Carey. "And don't you worry that I'll say anything about your hard luck either, old man,"

he added, lowering his voice. "Nobody is going to hear anything from me. How is the old wing to-night?"

"Oh, you're all wet, Roger! My wing's all right."

Carey winked wisely. "Stick to it!" he chuckled. "I'm mum. Not a whisper out of me to anybody."

McCoy got away from Roger, and went to his room. Dunn wasn't in, and he was glad of that; for it gave him a chance to do some thinking. But a long period of meditation left him uncertain concerning the course he ought to follow. What could he do? He was tempted to write a letter to Nancy, urging her to look after her brother again, but he knew quite well that she would resent it, and she might believe he had written for selfish reasons—might imagine he was trying to decoy her back within reach.

The Bluebirds entrained for their last short trip away from home. When they returned, they would have five games to play with the Buddies, and those games would wind the season up. On their return, Harrigan found the job ahead of him was a big one.

To land on the top perch, he had to win four out of the five games his team would play with Budlong's bunch. He could drop one and still take the championship, but to lose two would be fatal.

"If Faraday and McCoy were right, I'd come damned near winning 'em all," old Bill told himself.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE.

HAGGARD and dull-eyed, his nerves on edge, Roger Carey walked the floor of his hotel room. He was alone, as he wished to be. Long ago he had told Harrigan he wouldn't share a room with anybody, but he could have spared himself the trouble; for not a man on the team, with the possible exception

of Faraday, would have accepted him as a buddie. He was desperate.

Somebody knocked on his door, giving him a start.

"Who's that?" he called shrilly.

"Let me in!" demanded a familiar voice that startled him still more.

When he had turned the key and flung the door open, his sister walked into the room.

"Wh-what are you doing here, Nancy Carey?" he gulped.

"I've run away," she answered coolly.

"You've—you've run away. From what? From—from Boyd?"

"From the pater and mater. I couldn't stand their looks of silent reproach after I broke my engagement to Boyd. Why, they acted just as if I'd gone to the devil!"

Roger grabbed the back of a chair to steady himself, staring wildly at her. Smartly dressed, she was as stunning as ever; but there was a settled expression of rebellion and defiance in her face, and her manner was that of grim and fixed determination.

"Broke your engagement to Boyd!" exclaimed her brother weakly. "It's getting to be a habit with you! What'll you do now?"

"I haven't decided, but it'll probably be anything I want to do."

He sat down, slowly and weakly, upon the chair. "Don't—don't you ever say another word to me about a sanitarium!" he jabbered. "If either of us ought to be shut up in one, you're it! Threw Howard Boyd over! Of all the insane things you ever did, that's the most insane! Howard Boyd, who could give you everything you want—everything!"

"He couldn't give me anything I want—not one single thing."

"What *do* you want?"

"Not money or jewels or yachts or mansions, I know that. Just what it is, I don't know—but I guess it's life. I

want to live, and being smothered in luxury and strangled to death by vapid social silliness is what I've made up my mind to escape from. I've got to feel the winds and the storms, and heat and cold and hunger—and pain as well as pleasure!"

"You're mad as a March hare!" said Roger.

She laughed. She had thrown her coat on the bed, and was now pulling off her gloves, moving about the room. A fine, lissome, lithe, perfectly molded figure full of leopardish energy. Spots of color glowed in her cheeks, and her lips were reddened by the flow of her hot blood.

"What of it?" she answered him. "I'd rather be mad and alive than to be a common dull creature that's not even half alive, like most human beings. How I despise them. I won't be a human worm, Roger! I'm going to fly if I fall and break my neck!"

"Anybody who gets like that is going to fall, all right. They all take a tumble that smashes them."

She laughed again. "But they have the fun of falling, and that's a sensation never known to the worms who don't get up anywhere to fall from."

"I can't talk to you!" he cried helplessly. "It's a waste of breath!"

"Well, all my talking to you hasn't seemed to do you much good, Roger. You said you'd master your weakness or go into a sanitarium of your own accord, and take a cure. You haven't done either."

"Oh, I'm all right," he protested, rising again. "It isn't what you think, that ails me. It's the kind of a deal I've been getting from Harrigan. Damn Harrigan! He isn't giving me a show."

She shook her head. "Don't blame it all on Harrigan. I warned you he would find out he couldn't depend on you. You were a fine pitcher once, Roger, but you've let this thing beat

you. Don't blame anybody but yourself."

"That's like you!" he half whispered. "A lot of sympathy I get from you! But Harrigan can't win the pennant, and I'm glad of it!"

"Why can't he? He's got a chance."

"Not a chance! Faraday's drinking, and McCoy's out of it. Bill Harrigan hasn't got a chance, with neither one of them to help him. If McCoy hadn't hurt his arm——" He checked himself.

She caught at that eagerly. "Hurt his arm!" she exclaimed. "How did he do that? How much has he hurt it?"

"That was a slip of the tongue," said Roger. "Maybe it's ruined for good. I'm afraid it is. I don't believe he'll ever pitch again."

She laughed. Her laughter gave him little chills, it seemed so heartless and exultant.

"So he's through!" she cried. "That's the end of him! He thought he was so big and mighty! Well, the mighty fall! Now he's down—down in the dirt—down to stay!"

"Haven't you got any sense of fairness, Nancy? He never hurt you."

"Never hurt me!" Her voice was low and hoarse. "You don't know—don't understand. Never mind!"

She turned her back to him and stared out of the window, her shoulders drooping for a moment or two.

"The Bluebirds must win without him," she said.

"They can't," said Roger. "With neither Slugger nor Faraday, they can't win."

"Faraday hasn't hurt himself?"

"Oh, the big dumb-bell's been boozing till he's worse than useless. You're to blame for that, too. He started drinking after he heard of your engagement to Boyd, and he keeps himself loaded to the gills all the time. Nobody can do anything with him."

Nancy's eyes shone. "Well, if I'm to blame, it's my business to do something about it. I guess I'll have to get him on his feet again."

"Keep away from him!" Roger almost shouted. "Don't you mix up with that man any more! I don't want you even to see him unless you have to."

"I've seen him already," stated Nancy, smiling serenely.

She was cool now—cool as the snow that caps the peak of a high mountain all the year round.

"Seen him—so soon!" stammered her dismayed brother. "Well, I'll say you didn't lose any time about it!"

"Not much," she admitted. "Why should I? I had to see a man again!"

"And you saw a drunken fool!"

"I saw a man who cared—who cared so much that he didn't take disappointment casually and go on his selfish way as though nothing had happened to concern him."

Exasperated, Roger advanced on her and seized her by the shoulders.

"I thought you had some sense!" he cried. "Your head is full of froth! You're just like all the others! You've gone and made an idol out of a bum! What a fool you are. You say you want to be mastered by force, and then you say you'd kill anybody who tried it."

"Oh, keep still, Roger!" she began to laugh. "What if I am a fool? Isn't everybody—men and women both?"

"I guess so," he agreed. "In your right mind, you can size Colt Faraday up to a T. I'll shoulder my share of blame for your previous friendliness with him, but you've got to make him understand that that's all over. You've got to cut him out entirely, Nancy."

She shook her head. "I can't do that, Roger. Honestly, he attracts me. I'm going to have dinner with him to-night. He asked me to, and I said I would.

I've given Colt my word, and I shall keep the promise."

That night Slugger saw Colt Faraday, dressed in his glad rags, escort Nancy through the hotel lobby and hand her into a summoned taxi. Serene, radiantly beautiful, she seemed to have eyes for no one but the big man she was with.

The music of her voice was delightful, and her soft laughter was like the laughter that bubbles from a heart completely happy. Sickness, a sense of utter futility, the feeling that life was scrambled nonsense, grasped McCoy and benumbed him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BATTERING THROUGH.

ONCE again the stadium was packed to capacity. Every loyal rooter for the Bluebirds who could get there was there. They were there to roar mad homage, to let magnificent old Bill and his splendid warriors know they were for them through the final inning, win or lose.

With the spirit of true sportsmen, the spectators applauded Budlong and his men. The sight of Harrigan and his Bluebirds made them howl with admiration.

Old Bill was calm, businesslike on the job. Looking at him, one might have imagined no worry over the outcome lay in his mind.

Faraday practiced with his teammates, and for the first time in weeks, he appeared right. Bill watched him without seeming to give him special attention. The team was ready to take the field. Then, in the presence of Landreth, he said: "You play your field to-day, Colt."

In the seventh inning, with two runners on in advance, Faraday crashed the sphere into the outfield bleachers. The big man swelled with triumph as he jogged round the course with the thun-

dering of the crowd rolling in a billow of sound across the field.

Up in the stand, Nancy Carey was watching him, and he looked in that direction, grinning, though he couldn't see her in the packed and agitated mass of humanity. He knew his feat had thrilled her. She couldn't escape from him again!

How much those three runs were needed by the Bluebirds was denoted by the final score which was 7 to 6, with the disappointed Buddies on the short end.

The newspapers hailed Faraday's return to the game with praise. They said that with the clouting right fielder in his position once more the prospect for the Bluebirds had brightened again. There was a greater possibility that the Miracle Man might pull off the great miracle after all.

Faraday had dinner again with Nancy that night, and Nancy's brother was with them. Slugger McCoy didn't eat at all. Food! Why, a mouthful of food would have choked him!

Dodo Dunn was waiting in their room when McCoy returned to it. He looked at Slugger's set face, and refrained from saying anything about Faraday. But he did speak of Roger Carey.

"That lad's a sick boy," Dodo declared. "He's all to pieces or I don't know my oats. What's the matter with him, Slugger?"

"How should I know?" said Slugger.

When the Bluebirds won again, the next day, the fever of the fans rose several degrees. There were now but three more games to be played, and Harrigan had to capture two of them. Before the final series had opened, wagers of three to one and even four to one had been laid that the Buddies would win. The wind had changed quite a lot.

A double-header was scheduled for

the third day. The Buddies, fighting mad and desperate, made a savage bid for the first contest. Harrigan's lads would not have been ahead at the end of the ninth, only for another lusty and timely clout by Faraday.

"That big bird's batting is winning this series for his team!" grumbled a man whose sympathy and money lay with the Buddies.

Of course Faraday was in his glory. The world was now his melon. He felt that nothing could keep him from getting anything he wanted. Whenever he responded to the cheering by touching his cap, he looked toward the spot where Nancy Carey sat.

She was the prize of prizes that no scruple would prevent him from seizing through any process or procedure. Not quite was he sure of her yet, but he'd find a way to make sure—and that very soon, too.

Roger wasn't on the bench. McCoy had looked for him there, and failed to find him.

The second struggle, arranged to go seven innings, began. From the start the Buddies went after it. They knocked two hurlers out of the box.

The third Bluebird pitcher, Jack Ward, went onto the mound in the first half of that wild opening inning. When Ward pulled out of the hole, the Buddies had five tallies. The crowd was stunned, and Budlong's men, sure that luck had cracked in their favor at last, were jubilant.

McCoy looked on, suffering. Harrigan's face was a mask, but Slugger wore no mask. Once, as Bayne was beginning to reel, he had started up and turned to old Bill in silent appeal, but the manager had ignored him. Now it was too late! Something told Slugger that the five runs garnered by the Buddies were all they needed.

In the following six rounds, the Buddies added five more to the five they had obtained in the first. The Blue-

birds made but two in the entire struggle. That left the league championship to be decided the following day in the final game of the season. Harrigan would have to try "Long Tom" Coffin, the Michigan bush-leaguer, against the aroused Buddies.

McCoy hurried away to the hotel as soon as he could get into his street clothes. He didn't want to talk to anybody, but, after a while, Dunn came to him in their room.

"You don't happen to know where Roger Carey can be found, do you, Slugger?" asked the shortstop.

"No," answered Slugger shortly.

"His sister's looking for him," explained Dodo. "Seems he's sort of missing, and she acts worried."

McCoy made no reply to that.

Slugger's appetite was reasonably normal that night, but a great restlessness was upon him, and he went out for a walk. He walked far. Headed for the hotel at last, he made a sudden decision to try for relaxation at a movie. It was past eleven when he re-entered the hotel lobby.

A small, dark-haired, pale-faced, sleek young man rose from a chair from which he had been watching the door. He came straight to Slugger.

"I don't suppose you remember me, Mr. McCoy?" he said.

"I don't believe I do," admitted the pitcher, "though your face has a familiar look."

"My name is Alfred Moore, and I saw you a number of times at the Magnolia Hotel, in Margalo, this spring."

"Oh!" exclaimed Slugger, recalling the affair of the crooked poker game in that hotel and Faraday's fight with the card sharps in Room 318. "So you're—Moore!"

"I am. I've been around here quite a while, but I haven't stopped in this hotel, though I have some friends here. My friends have wised me up on some things. Don't think me fresh if I tell

you that I know quite a lot about you and your affairs.

"You don't like that big thug Faraday any more than I do," he went on. "I swore I'd get him some time for that business in the Magnolia. I haven't had a chance yet. I understand you take some interest in Carey's sister and——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Slugger, flushing. "Don't talk to me——"

"You better listen!" Moore cut in. "She's in danger, I believe. Her brother has disappeared, and Faraday's lied to her. He told her he knew where to find Roger Carey, and she's gone with him to the place."

"Well, I can't help that."

"You'd better do something about it if you care a rap for her. Ever hear of the Panama Club?"

"Why—yes. It's an underworld hang-out, isn't it?"

"That's it. I know just what it is, for I've been there more than once. It's no place for Roger Carey's sister—especially in company with Faraday."

"You don't mean he——"

"He told her he'd found out where her brother was—said he'd gone to the Panama Club. Faraday's taken her to that place. What are you going to do about it?"

All the color had left Slugger's face. He gripped Moore's arm, his fingers sinking into the flesh.

"Can you get me into that place?" he asked hoarsely.

"I can and will—on one condition. That is that you'll knock Faraday's head off."

"Take me there! If you've told the truth, Faraday'll get his!"

Moore tipped the taxi driver enough in advance to lead him to take chances of being arrested for speeding. They were whirled northward through street after street, and then eastward.

The taxi stopped in a dark street, before a row of dark and silent high-

stooped houses. Scarcely a place where one would expect to gain admission to a night club.

"This is one way to get in," said Moore in a low voice. "There's another way to get out that's used sometimes."

He pushed a button beneath one of the stoops. Presently a door opened in the darkness down there, and Slugger was conscious of a pair of whitish eyes peering at them through the grille-work of an iron gate. Moore said something, and then the gate swung open on greased hinges, without even a click of its latch.

They went through, turned to the right, passing in by another door that was closed noiselessly behind them. Still another door opened to admit them from darkness into the dimness of a lower hallway.

"This is my friend, Mr. Curtis, Waldo," said Moore to the man who had let them in. "Anything doing to-night?"

"Well, you're a little early, gentlemen," answered Waldo affably, "but there's a few people on hand. The show's started now."

Moore tipped Waldo. The guardian of the secret portal then turned them over to an escort who led them down a long flight of stairs into an underground passage that was weakly lighted by dingy bulbs.

Slugger got the impression that the passage led beneath the back yards to the buildings facing on the next street north of the one of approach. The thought of Nancy Carey being taken into this place by Faraday gave him chills and fever.

Another long flight of narrow stairs led them up into the lower hall of another house, from where they mounted into a carpeted main hall, and climbed still another flight, the stair treads being padded to silence beneath their feet.

A faint odor or perfumery or burn-

ing incense was in McCoy's nostrils, and a faint sound of music, growing more and more distinct as they proceeded, came to his ears. No sound of music or revelry escaped to the street from this house, every shuttered window of which was dark. The place was supposed to be tenantless and unsalable on account of some litigation over the title.

When they were admitted to an upper room, the sound of music was still more distinct. Sliding doors that moved noiselessly let them into the main room of the Panama Club. From ceiling to floor, on every side of that room, hung heavy draperies which were intended to smother sounds. So effective were those draperies that the sudden loudness of a strumming, pulsing orchestra of banjos, violins, reed instruments, and drums startled McCoy somewhat.

The large room was at that moment in almost total darkness, save for one silver-bright oval spot on the smooth and shining central dancing floor, made by an intense white ray that beat downward from a long angle. In the dazzling glare of that light, a girl was dancing furiously. To the frenzy of the music was added furor by the clapping of many invisible hands, beating time.

A hand seemed to fasten upon Slugger's windpipe, and choke him. Was it possible that Nancy was in here?

"Just a moment, gentlemen," said the voice of the head waiter, who was beside them. "I'll seat you directly."

The spotlight winked out. The music stopped. The dance was over, and the ensuing applause brought no encore. All around the room, a subdued glow flowed again from tinsel-covered bulbs.

The central dancing floor was surrounded by tables for patrons, at which a few couples were sitting. Outside of the tables were booths of lattice-

work, over which ran imitation grapevines. A few more couples and parties occupied some of the booths.

Slugger's eyes searched the tables in the open. Not there! He would have discovered her instantly.

"Give us a table at the other end of the room, near the music," he said.

That enabled him, as he walked down the room, to look into the booths. He didn't go far. Midway, he stopped at the entrance to a booth. Nancy Carey was lifting a glass to her lips.

Slugger took the glass from her so abruptly that it was crushed like an eggshell in his fingers. She gasped, startled. Faraday, rising suddenly from the opposite side of the table, sent Slugger reeling with a blow.

Having ducked as the big right-fielder swung, McCoy escaped the full force of the blow. Recovering immediately, he saw Faraday coming out of the booth to follow up, his face flushed, his huge body tensed with the eagerness of a beast possessed by killing fury.

The sight sent a burning glow of great joy through Slugger. For this hour, this moment, he had waited days and weeks and months, held in restraint by his promise to Bill Harrigan. Now nothing could hold him a second longer! The time for which his hot spirit had chafed in chains had come! He met Faraday, rushing.

Something bright and searing seemed to explode in Faraday's right eye, blinding it. The floor rocked beneath his feet; the walls around him careened queerly. He clutched at the lattice-work of the booth, against which he had recoiled, and pulled it down on Nancy Carey, snapping and splintering it.

Startled women screamed. Cursing men rushed between McCoy and the tottering giant. McCoy, lunging forward to hammer Faraday again, saw those baffling forms in his path. He saw hands reaching to clutch him—saw

red and went berserk. Right and left he smashed and hurled them. He scattered them as chaff is swirled and scattered by the wind. None stood before him.

Faraday, recovering in the moment or two of respite given him by those who had sought to intervene, saw McCoy come bursting through reeling human bodies which were smashed out of his path as tenpins on an alley are smashed and hurled from the path of a strike ball. He crouched to meet the charge.

Pulling herself out of the debris of the wrecked booth, Nancy Carey beheld them face to face, their arms working like pistons. She was amazed. She was bewildered, appalled, and greatly thrilled.

Faraday, the mighty, was on the defensive. McCoy was a superman with the face of a gloriously savage demon. It was a face terrible and fascinating, in the midst of which his white teeth gleamed and his eyes blazed.

He was relentlessly punishing the quivering, recoiling, reeling behemoth. It was a spectacle transcending Nancy's wildest dreams of force and destructive skill in operation. It was a sight she would never forget. It terrified her as she had never before been terrified.

Colt Faraday's fighting power was swiftly broken. With both eyes blinded, he held his hands up feebly. His brain functioned only to lead him to try to protect himself from two smashing fists which seemed like a hundred fists. There must be a hundred fists! They were hammering him to a pulp! The lights! They had turned out the lights! Darkness!

His brain had ceased to function for a while, for his hands had been swept down, and a sledge-hammer fist had crashed upon his jaw. The darkness was on him before his big body struck the floor.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HE FALLS FROM THE CLOUDS.

SHARP as the warning of a rattlesnake, a buzzer was shrilling through the room. From somewhere in the lower distance came the sound of pounding, blow upon blow. Men and women, patrons, performers, musicians, and waiters, startled by the buzzer and the dull thudding of distant blows stood stone still or began to scurry about like chicken partridges seeking hiding places.

"A raid!" they cried. "The police! They're breaking in!"

Moore, who had stood back and gloatingly watched McCoy batter Faraday unconscious, now touched Slugger on the arm.

"We better get out of here," he said. "I told you there was another way out. Come on!"

McCoy snatched Nancy Carey up in his arms as if she were no heavier than a child. Carrying her, he followed Moore.

Behind the heavy draperies, where there seemed to be a solid paneled wall, a broad panel had been thrust aside, leaving a doorlike opening that led into darkness. Already those in the secret of that emergency exit were streaming through the opening into the darkness, the proprietor of the club and his chief assistant having gone first.

"Stick to me, McCoy," said Moore over his shoulder. "I'm right ahead of you. If they shut that panel again before the cops break in, we may dodge a ride in the wagon."

Slugger knew they had passed through into another house, which adjoined the one that sheltered the Panama Club. They went through doors, and turned right and left until they came into a pitch-dark room where they stumbled and crowded against unseen fugitives like themselves, who were in a condition of excitement or panic.

"Wait here, everybody," commanded a voice in the darkness. "Find chairs or sit on the floor. Nobody can get out till the police are gone."

McCoy found a chair, on which he placed Nancy. He sat on the floor beside her, keeping a grip on her wrist. She made no attempt to free herself. He could feel her pulse beating fast and furiously, but she said not a word. Moore also sat on the floor, close beside Slugger. He began to laugh silently.

"I knew you could do it," he whispered into McCoy's ear, "but I didn't know you could do such a good job. I've looked up your record as a fighter. Man, you're a one-round killer! You've got a punch. Give you the handling, you can win the belt in your class. You can make more sugar at it than you can in baseball, too."

Around them, people were whispering. One slightly hysterical woman began to laugh and cry. Men swore.

"Shut up, the whole of you!" came the voice that had told them to sit down. "Keep still, and take it easy. You've got a good long time to wait, so don't get fidgety."

Minutes dragged by—an hour or more. The sounds of breathing came from all parts of the room. A man stretched on the floor, began to snore. Now and then, taxis honked outside in the street. Suddenly a woman uttered a choking cry.

"I can't stand it any longer! I'll scream if I have to stand it any longer!"

"Somebody gag her or choke her before she screams," urged the voice that had given them previous commands. "If you squawk, lady, you'll be telling it to the judge in the morning."

A man who seemed to be with the nervous woman succeeded in calming and restraining her.

Not before the end of another full hour did a man arrive from somewhere

and tell them the coast was clear. After that, they were taken downstairs, two and three of them at a time, and let out of the house.

Nancy resisted Slugger's attempt to carry her down. Still with her wrist in his grasp, she walked at his side. Moore was with them when they were let out by the basement door. At the nearest corner, they found an empty taxi waiting. There Moore bade them good night.

The return to the hotel was made without conversation, without a word between McCoy and Nancy. The taxi stopped at the side entrance. Slugger stepped out and turned to help Nancy descend. She was getting out already. Thrusting his hand aside, she struck him on the cheek with her fist, and then fled past him into the hotel. Blood flowed from a small cut on his cheekbone, made by a ring that she wore.

He slept well through the later hours of that night, and in the morning he rose astonishingly rested and astonishingly satisfied and at peace.

"Well, you're a pip!" growled Dodo Dunn, staring at him from the bed. "Look at the bright little lark, popping up, all ready to burst into song after being out till the cocks were crowing! Where did you go, Slugger, old bat? Why the excess cheerfulness this morning?"

"You'd know if I told you, wouldn't you?" returned Slugger.

"Oh, hide your shame, hide your shame!" barked the shortstop. "But you can't hide the mark of it on your face. Somebody gave you a good dig on the cheek. Don't you hate the cats with long claws?"

He did not notice McCoy's knuckles, which were badly marked and swollen. Later, after a hearty breakfast, which he devoured with gusto, Slugger went to the doctor who was treating his arm, and had him attend to his hands.

"Oh, just got into a little scrap, that's

all," he explained. "Fix up the mits so they'll be noticed as little as possible, please. I'm not going to talk about it anyhow, but I don't like to have 'em asking me too many questions."

He kept away from his teammates as far as he could, but he couldn't avoid them entirely. They found him strangely cheerful, and that annoyed them; for they were under the strain of the imminent conflict that would settle the championship. Bammer Burke reproached him harshly.

"Oh, what's the use to be so agitated?" returned Slugger. "I've got a hunch we're going to win to-day."

"We are!" mocked the center fielder. "What are you going to do toward it? Oh, everybody knows you can't pitch again this year. It's got out. Of course if we had you in there—but what's the use to talk about it?"

Nothing was seen of Faraday. When it was learned that he had been out all night and hadn't yet returned to the hotel, the players were still more disturbed. They began to talk about finding him. At last Harrigan had to let them know what he had learned.

"Faraday is in a hospital, beat up, and he won't play to-day," said old Bill. "I was notified, and I've been to see him. He was caught in the raid on the Panama Club that's reported in the newspapers. Somebody beat him up bad, but he wouldn't tell me who did it.

"I guess he ain't clear yet in his mind about what happened. He didn't seem to be. The big fool! Going to that place the night before this game! He's through with this outfit!"

"He ought to go to the chair!" muttered Nibs Meadows. "He's licked us sure! Without his batting, we're down and out before we begin."

The great crowd that again welcomed the Bluebirds when they came onto the field had no knowledge of the hopeless feeling that filled the hearts of Harri-

gan's men. Faraday was soon missed, however. The spectators began to ask what it meant. Then, when the Bluebirds went out to practice, the crowd saw something that surprised it. Slugger McCoy, not Landreth, took right field!

Slugger had begged Bill to let him go into that field. "My arm's fine, I tell you!" he had insisted. "Maybe it wouldn't hold out if I tried to pitch, but it's all right for this job. You've got to let me go in there because—because—well, Bill, I'll tell you after the game. You'll get my batting to-day, if you put me in—if I bat. You've got to do it, Bill! You've got to, I tell you!"

Harrigan had agreed only after McCoy had given his word of honor that he wouldn't attempt to throw the ball from the field into the diamond, not even if such a throw would save the game. "I'll have MacGowan or Tomlin, one or the other, go out for it if it's batted to you," said the manager, "and you just toss it to 'em, Slugger—toss it you understand!"

So McCoy went into that last game, a game that was a seesaw fight from the opening inning to the finish. Twice, before the ninth inning, Slugger came to bat with his team behind and cleaned the bases with a clout that put the Bluebirds out in front again. The crowd went completely insane over him. "Babe" Ruth had never inspired a thundering mob to greater frenzy.

Nancy Carey was there. Stonily she watched, an almost unbearable aching emptiness in her heart. It seemed to her that Slugger, enthroned, was being exalted into the very clouds, far beyond all reaching him by human hands.

After McCoy's second sack-cleaner in that game, the pitcher pitched out every time he threw the sphere with Slugger waiting to smash it.

McCoy walked to the plate in the ninth inning with his team one run be-

hind, two men out, a runner on second, and the wrathful fans booing the pitcher, daring him to put one over. The pitcher had no intention of putting one over.

It was his plan to walk McCoy, and go after MacGowan, who hit next. Twice he threw beyond the batter's reach, then Slugger lunged far across the plate and socked the third one.

The ball went out of the lot. The crowd began to cascade down into the arena to get a close-up of the man who had won the championship for Harrigan with that crash.

IN his room, changing into a dark suit for dinner, Slugger left the door open a little for Dodo Dunn. Dodo had stopped downstairs with many of the others, to receive the congratulations of admirers who filled the hotel lobby. They were cheering down there in the lobby. Slugger smiled as the sound of their cheering came up to him faintly.

Somebody came into the room, and, turning to speak to Dunn, he saw Nancy Carey. She had put on an evening gown. Never had she looked more beautiful; never so gentle and sad and flowerlike. Her long silken lashes drooped over her abashed eyes after one swift glance at him.

"I've come to tell you about my brother," she said in a voice so low that he could only just hear what she was saying. "I thought you'd want to know. I've had word from him. He has gone, of his own accord, into a sanitarium to take a cure for the drug habit. You know they have a cure now, but it is painful, and one has to have a lot of courage to take it."

"I'm glad," said McCoy quietly, "that he has the courage."

Oh, he was far, far away! A distance which she could never, never span lay between them. He would not advance a single inch to meet

her. She wondered if she had the strength to speak again. All her strength was gone. How could she control her voice?

"I want to say something else before I go," she managed to utter, though it seemed that she heard her own voice coming faintly from an abyss into which she had fallen. "It's hard for me to say—very hard; but I've got to say it. Now I know I was all in the wrong about you, Slugger McCoy."

"Now I know you've always been what you are now, big and strong and truthful. I hope——" Her voice, coming from the abyss, was growing very weak and faltering. "I hope you will remember that I said this. I'm asking no more. I haven't a right to ask anything more."

"Thank you," he returned. "I'll remember it. I'm glad you realize at last that you were wrong, though the realization has come to you very late."

Too late! She knew it! There was no yielding in him now, and she couldn't blame him. She even rejoiced in his stony hardness which hurt her so much. For it was justice!

She deserved it. She would have flung herself on her knees at his feet, but she could see by his unmoved attitude that that would do no good. She smiled a little twisted, painful, pitiful smile.

"We may never see each other again," she added, using the last of her strength to speak with all the steadiness she could. "I know—I know I have no right to ask it, but I—I'd like to—to

part—friends. Won't you—won't you shake hands, Slugger—and try to forget—my blunder?"

Falteringly, fearful that he would refuse and his refusal would break her nerve completely, she moved toward him, putting out a hand she could not keep steady. He looked at it, and made no move to take it. Instead, he took her into his arms and crushed her to his heart.

Dodo Dunn, bursting in a few moments later, saw them thus, Slugger's arms holding her tight, her arms clasping him as if they would never unlock, their mouths clinging together.

"He's fell!" Dodo gasped. "Excuse the interruption."

The two turned, smiled. Slugger McCoy took Nancy's hand and led her away. A touring car, with a liveried chauffeur at the wheel, had just discharged passengers in front of the hotel.

Slugger McCoy assisted Nancy into the machine. Dazed, happy, their faces brimming with delight, the two got into the back seat.

"Hey!" said the chauffeur. "This is a private car!"

Slugger McCoy came to himself. "Oh, I thought this was a taxi. I've—Nancy, we'll have to——"

"That's all right," said the chauffeur. "You're Slugger McCoy, the ball player. Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere," Nancy replied.

"Yes," Slugger agreed. "Drive anywhere, just so you keep going."

The car moved off.

THE END.

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By M. I. H. Rogers

A NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I.

THE HOODOO.

THEY'VE got us scotched, kid," Mart Hardin said without preliminary as the cell door clanged behind his young visitor, and the sympathetic sheriff left them alone to talk.

"Not yet," Larry Baldwin answered, and grinned. "Things don't look so good for you, locked up here, but while I'm free, there's hope."

In spite of Larry's height and his twenty-six years, there was an appealing boyishness about him, a something at once wistful and arresting in his ready smile. Men liked him, and women trusted him on sight.

"Kid, listen! I've got hold of something pretty putrid," Mart Hardin's face was grim, his brown eyes snapped

wrathfully. The fiery little editor of the *Empire Valley Bugle* was a red-headed torch of a man, upon whom the dash of opposition was but fresh oil for his burning.

His young foreman sobered instantly. "Let's hear it," he said.

"Do you know why Judge Updyke had me locked up?"

"Easy. He called it contempt of court, but the whole valley knows that was a blind. He wanted to keep you quiet during the irrigation-district election."

"Partly, kid. The real reason was so Updyke could work on Warren and Frost."

Larry raised startled, incredulous eyes. "But—they're square, boss—pledged to the ranchers and Rocky Gorge Dam."

"Square like a pig's eye!" Mart Har-

din snorted. His red hair, rumped and uncombed, stood on end pugnaciously. "They've sold out to Updyke. That means they have been bought body and vote by Channing, Incorporated."

Larry whistled tunelessly between his teeth. "Are you sure?"

"Got it straight. That's why I sent for you. We've got to keep Empire Valley from voting for Warren and Frost under the delusion they are loyal."

"But, boss, the only way we can do it is through the *Bugle*, and Updyke's injunction blocks that. To-morrow is election day, and it's ten a. m. right now."

"That's the dope," Hardin said, his eyes snapping angrily. "Figure it out."

Larry continued slowly, as though puzzling out the way. "That injunction Updyke granted keeps the *Bugle* from going to press at its own plant, and there isn't a shop in Empire Valley would dare help us. They've all been bought into, or subsidized by Channing."

"That is where you come in, kid," Hardin interrupted impatiently. "You and Nora are driving to El Diego this morning to get a special front page on the papers the *El Diego Meteor* will ship to the valley to-morrow."

"You're going to convince Editor McGurty that he owes this help to Empire in her back-to-the-wall fight against wealth and greed. You're going to ride that paper truck back here with the papers and see that nothing happens to them."

"Kayo, boss," Larry said slowly. "I'm ready, but I wish Nora wasn't going. There might be fighting before we get back." Nora was Mart Hardin's daughter and right-hand man.

Hardin smiled grimly. "Nora isn't afraid. She's a fighting Hardin like her dad, and she'll help you work on McGurty. He always liked her. She has a winning way, my boy." The fiery eyes of the little editor softened and glowed with pride.

Larry nodded. He knew all about Nora's winning ways; but he wished just the same that she wasn't going. Channing, Incorporated, had millions of dollars to draw upon. They were in the fight against a power dam at Rocky Gorge. If news of this contemplated special edition got to their tool, Judge Updyke, he would stop at nothing to prevent it reaching Empire voters before the election.

"You and Nora drift out of here as quietly as possible, kid. Tell Bill and Devner to stand by at the shop; Bill to organize the distribution for the outlying districts—there are plenty of ranchers anxious to help us—and Devner to arrange for the carrier boys for to-morrow morning. Caution both men against working too soon. We've got to keep this a secret."

"Kayo, Mart."

"And Larry, tell them to stay away from here. We don't want it to look like I'm organizing anything. The sheriff is with us, but Updyke has a snoop on every corner in town."

Larry nodded again. "See you in the morning. I'm off."

Young Larry Baldwin swung up the street, tall and slim, his head bent thoughtfully, eyes troubled. "I'll go," he muttered, "of course, and the little old jinx will go, too."

"Chances are the hoodoo wins and I don't get the papers into Empire in time; but there's this—I'll give it a run for its money this time." The muscles rippled along his lean boyish jaw, and the corners of his mouth whitened ominously.

Bad luck shadowed Larry like the faithful dog of fiction shadows its master. But it was something Larry didn't talk about. He hadn't been in Empire six months before every one was calling him "Luckless." He often saw a queer light in the deep-set eyes of Mart Hardin when a particularly unnecessary bit of misfortune singled him out to drop

upon, but Larry refused to discuss it, and Hardin also kept still.

Nora Hardin used to tease him about it at times with the frank freedom of a sister, but never unkindly. There were many times when Larry longed to dynamite that sisterly pose and discover if the emotion underneath matched his own ardent one.

He was always restrained by the thought of his rendezvous with misfortune and the fear that it might affect her life. He hurried in search of her, anxious to be off on his mission.

CHAPTER II.

POLITICAL TNT.

SOME fourteen hours later Larry Baldwin got up from his borrowed desk at the *El Diego Meteor* and stretched his lean length enormously. He gave vent to a prodigious yawn, and rubbed his burning eyes with ink-stained fingers.

"Gosh, but I'm tired," he said to a thick-set, sandy-haired man standing beside him. "Must be crowding twenty-four hours since I been to bed." He could hear the presses clattering and rumbling over the special edition.

He grinned boyishly. "Old Updyke's going to get his come-uppance this time, Mr. McGurty. Just wait until we spread this paper over Empire Valley. Pinch my boss, will he? Get an injunction against the *Bugle*? He just forgot there were other presses in southern California. Empire Valley is going to read about his dirty work without candidates, before election to-morrow, or I'm a sand flea."

McGurty's level blue eyes held a humorous twinkle as he looked at his watch. "One thirty, young fellow," he said.

"One thirty? Why, it's Thursday right now!" Larry ejaculated. "Election day in Empire Valley, and the ranchers will be hitting the polls in five

and a half hours. One hundred and thirty miles to go and the paper still on the press."

"Coming off this minute," McGurty said, cocking his head as though to listen. "The boys are loading it right now. Better get your face washed, young fellow, and have a cup of coffee."

The editor of the *El Diego Meteor* had not been difficult. He listened to Larry and Nora soberly, and immediately assumed responsibility for the special front page. Larry's gratitude was sincere. "Never mind the coffee, let's get started. Guess I had better wash my face, though." Larry beamed upon the editor. "Empire Valley is going to appreciate your courage in backing us up with this special, Mr. McGurty. Now wish me luck getting the papers safely into the valley before breakfast."

"Aren't you borrowing alarm?" McGurty queried.

"Say, you don't know Updyke! If news of this edition has leaked through to his big ears, he'd see me burning before he'd let me bring it into Empire Valley on election morning. He represents Channing, Incorporated, and with millions in future revenues at stake, they can't afford to lose one single move in their game. If we expose their candidates to-morrow in time for the ranchers to vote against them, Channing's will get a blow that'll shake their foundations."

"I'll give oath no tip has leaked out from this end, young fellow," McGurty answered. "We're running it off before the regular paper. The copy was distributed to the linotype operators in such small takes that no one of them has any comprehension of what's coming. The make-up was done by the shop foreman himself. When your copies have been run off, the plates will be jerked and the regular front page put on the presses."

"You've been a brick, Mr. McGurty. Empire Valley could bear with a few more friends like the *El Diego Meteor*."

Larry grinned again in his warm, boyish way.

"We've always stood with the ranchers on the Rocky Gorge Dam," McGurty said in the cool crisp voice that matched his cool eyes. "You just gave us a chance to prove it. Better be moving, young fellow. I'll speak to Jack about you. He's the truck driver, and a square shooter."

Larry followed the editor from the pressroom into the dark alley where the paper truck stood at the curb with throbbing motor.

"All set, Jack?" McGurty seemed to be addressing a glowing cigarette stub on the driver's seat.

"Loaded and waiting, boss," came a low answer.

"Good! This is Baldwin of the *Empire Valley Bugle*. He came over with Nora Hardin, the editor's daughter, and he's going with you to take this edition back. It isn't the regular paper you're carrying to-night, my boy.

"It's a political tnt, and when it explodes in the valley to-morrow, the report will be heard in Washington, D. C. Certain interests may try to prevent your landing it in Empire, but I'm counting on you to go through. Got your gun?"

"Sure, boss. Is it a shooting matter?"

"I'm only asking that you defend yourself and your load. Larry here, thinks they'll stop at nothing to prevent the delivery of this special, if they're wise to it."

The driver leaned from his seat, a darker blur in the black night, and peered at the tall slim shadow beside McGurty. "Larry, you say? Larry Baldwin? Not 'Luckless Larry'—"

Larry jumped onto the step and grabbed at the driver. "Why, Jack Norton! You old snake! Well, I'll be —" For a moment they chuckled and scuffled and swore delightedly at each other. Then Larry called softly down to McGurty.

TN-7B

"Isn't a man in the world I'd rather have with me than Jack. We were buddies 'over there.' A couple of scared kids hiding behind a smoke screen of bluff."

"More like a gas attack," Jack amended.

McGurty struck a match and looked at his watch. "It's just two now, boys. Half an hour late. With a hundred and thirty-odd miles to go, you better be on your way. Good luck to you, and to Empire. Tell Hardin for me, Larry, that they can't keep a fire-eating editor like him in jail very long."

He chuckled. "I'll bet he's making it hot for them. Oh, I say, Larry, wasn't Nora going back with you? What shall I say when she shows up?"

"Tell her I couldn't let her take the risk. Better stand ready to jump clear when you tell her. The old man isn't the only fire eater in that family." Larry leaned down. "We won't forget this, McGurty," he said simply. "So long."

THE powerful high-speed truck rolled through the alley and across the sleeping city. Once away from the street lights the night was as black as the devil's heart. The two friends spoke together of old times for a bit.

Then Jack Norton asked casually, "What's all this gun, murder, and tnt talk, Luckless?"

"It's a political mess, Jack. You've heard of the Kling-Thomson bill now in committee at Washington? There's a big fight on over power rights on the Rocky Gorge Dam. If the government builds a high dam, Empire Valley gets flood protection, cheap power, and cheap water. If it builds a low dam, we get only flood protection, and perhaps cheaper water.

"But here's the rub." Larry paused impressively. "The Channing corporation yearns to control power rights, or prevent our getting a high dam. Backed

up by big American land owners in Mexico, they bought out Judge Updyke and some other county officials. Then they issued underground orders to harass our irrigation directors sent to Washington to lobby for the bill."

"How'd that put Hardin behind the bars?" Jack asked.

"The old man and the *Empire Valley Bugle* are with the ranchers, and Hardin as editor doesn't care how hard or often he hits. Things were pretty bitter when we got out a recall for Updyke with two thousand more signatures than required. Channing sneaked in an outside judge who issued a restraining order.

"Hardin then sat up half the night writing a hot editorial attacking the decision. Called it 'judicial bolshevism.' He made a slip, however. The decision wasn't final and they arrested him for contempt. Rushed the trial through and gave him five days and stiff fine. They're going to keep him on ice until election day. Then it will be too late for him to start anything."

"Gimme a light," Jack drawled. "Well, what's five days in jail? That won't hurt no editor."

"You don't know the half of it. Those crooks got out an injunction against the *Bugle* and we can't go to press until the case is settled. But we slipped one over on them this time."

"The dope we got back there?" Jack indicated the papers.

"You said it, big boy, and how!" Larry chuckled. "The old man has an inspired nose for news. He pursued one lead to its lair and discovered that two nominees for the Board of Irrigation Directors in to-morrow's election have sold out to Updyke's crowd."

"Things is beginning to get hot," Jack interrupted, his quickened tones showing an increasing interest.

"Hotter than that, Jack. Nora Hardin and I came over to see if we could get an extra front page on the *El Diego Meteor*, just for the Empire copies, and

it's going to split Empire wide open in the morning. We ran it off on the q. t. I can only hope there's not been a leak."

"That's what's worrying McGurty? He's sure expecting trouble."

"Well, he knows we had to tell Devner. Devner runs the circulation. He was to see that the carriers show up this morning, and with Bill, the pressman, round up enough ranchers to rush the bundles to the outlying voters. Once we land the papers in Empire, we don't care who knows it. Bill is kayo, but Devner drinks too much."

"So it's a crooked judge and his gang we're up against? Bring 'em on!" Jack Norton declared. "I'm spoiling for a good ruckus. This paper run gets plumb monotonous. Now tell me, how you been, Luckless."

CHAPTER III.

OLD STUFF!

LARRY was silent for a bit. It seemed to him that now was his chance to unburden his heart a little.

Perhaps if he voiced his perplexities, put into words this deep, gnawing conviction that fate had set him apart for misfortune, the dark fog which fuddled and bewildered him might be dispelled. Hiding behind a grin was good protective coloring, but it was lonesome living.

Larry cleared his throat. "Thanks to Mart Hardin and Nora I'm able to eat three a day. They can have my heart for stew any time. Drifted into Empire last year with bad lungs. When I showed up at the *Bugle* for a job, the old man gave me one look, took me home and put me to bed. Then he called in the prettiest little lady you ever saw. For months they fed me, and jollied me, and—I—I got well." Larry's voice was husky.

"Have a cig'?" Jack offered gruffly.

"No thanks, Jack, not allowed. That was the first home I've known, since the Children's Home. The old man's a

prince, and no one is going to down him if I can stop it. He's one hundred per cent white. He's a prince!"

"You said that before. Let's hear some more about that little princess." Jack grinned in the dark.

"Oh, Nora? She wouldn't look at me." Larry's voice was betrayingly casual. "Thinks I'm the big brother she never had. But I'm telling you, she's the sweetest, pluckiest, little Scotch-Irish darling that ever lived. She can sub on every job at the *Bugle*. Knows that paper inside out, front office and shop.

"I'm supposed to be foreman, but she's the real boss. She's got red hair and the clearest, whitest skin you just ever saw.

"She reminds me somehow of a little white Shetland pony with a red mane—small, and sturdy, and loyal; full of nervous energy and her own sweet will. I'm a fool, but I'm absolutely goofy about her."

Jack looked disgustedly into the dark. "No wonder she thinks you're her brother. Don't you know better'n to tell a girl she looks like a horse? For gosh sakes change your techniek! Tell her she's a movie queen's double. Go after her. You're not so hard to look at, yourself, Luckless."

It was a full moment before Larry answered, and his voice sounded flat and strained. "That's just it. I'm still wearing the moniker the boys gave me back in the trenches, and Nora Hardin is the pet daughter of the Great God Luck, himself. She's not for me unless—" He shook himself a little.

"Nora's going to be sore at me because I didn't call her to drive back with the truck. You see—I look for trouble, and thought if I took the papers through there might be a chance for me to unbuckle this bad-luck hoodoo. Been counting on it.

"If we don't make it through, I'm going to pull out of Empire. Made this

a sort of coin flip. No use hanging around there if I can't drop my jinx."

"Aw, forget that luckless stuff. You just been getting bad breaks. That's all. It started as a joke and you took it serious. No hoodoo can work unless you *let* it." Jack was positive.

"Say, Jack," Larry said grimly, "this hoodoo goes under its own power. It's not satisfied to ruin me; but everything I tackle and every one I care for, gets smeared. Hardin's had nothing but bad luck since I joined up with him.

"Why it's as real to me as a personal enemy. As merciless as a vindictive detective hounding an ex-convict. I can almost see it at times. You can't realize what success in delivering these papers means to me."

"You're crazy."

"Maybe, Jack, but what's a man to think? Perhaps I did give it birth, and sustenance through morbid wonderings in the trenches, and through those long years when my mind and body were both sick; but there it is. Somewhere I read a story about a damnable thing that wrestled and tore and murdered men, and yet remained invisible to the human eye. My jinx is like that. I'm always sore some place from its blows."

"Aw, why don't you grow up," Jack muttered. "Nothing to it unless you, yourself, let it. Get rid of that idea. It ain't healthy." Jack's inarticulate sympathy hid behind the gruff words.

"Don't I know that? Haven't I tried?" There was the taut fierceness of desperation in Larry's voice. "Well, it will be settled to-night. I've taken this on as a final test. If I get these papers through in time, I'll admit it's hooley; but if I fail—the jinx wins and it's out of the valley for mine."

"Thought you said you loved this girl?" Jack demanded.

Larry groaned. "That's why I'm moving on if the hoodoo wins."

"It ain't like you, Luckless, to knuckle down and let a bum joke spoil your

life," Jack reproached him. "I feel some responsible for this, but it was all started in fun. We were such kids, grabbing at anything to take our minds off the blasted war."

"Don't get the idea I'm quitting, Jack. I'm staying to the finish this time. Either Battler Jinx puts over a knockout, or I do."

For a little way they drove without speaking, each thinking of those nerve-racked days in the trenches when a devil of misfortune hounded Larry up to the very day his gas mask was torn by barbed wire during an attack.

Larry's thoughts were mingled shame at having bared his soul struggles, and pleasure in the relief attendant upon the unloading of the bottled-up bitterness.

THE truck was now climbing the gentle winding hill at Grossmont. As it pulled around one of the bends, a big shining town car slid out of a crossroad and stalled across the curve ahead.

"Whah-oooooooo!" A blast from the truck siren tore a hole in the quiet night. "Whah-oooooooo!"

Jack Norton's voice rose in an angry bellow mingled with some potent war-time words. "What you doing? Trying to commit suicide? Get off the road, blast it!"

With screeching brakes and burning rubber, Jack stopped the truck close to the bank, and not more than three feet from the rear door of the big car. He turned the spotlight on the driver and swore again in disgust. A bare-headed, flushed man in tousled evening garb blinked in the glare, and made fatuous faces at them.

"Sure scared me," Jack grumbled. "Going home from some hooch party and doesn't know how close he came to landing in hell." He leaned out and called: "Hey, Johnny, get that show case off the road and see that you do it quickly."

The driver grinned foolishly.

"Whatsh hurr——. Come 'ere. Gotta good shtory."

Jack climbed down and went to the car. "Will you start this car or do you want me to shove it over the bank?" he demanded.

Larry was uneasy. He leaned forward. Everything had happened so quickly. The stalled-car stunt was old stuff. Suppose this—— He saw a dark figure emerge suddenly from the darker night and flit stealthily in front of the truck lights.

As Larry's lips opened on a warning cry, the stalker struck Jack over the head. A dull, cruel blow! The stricken man turned blindly toward the truck, made a futile clutch at the radiator, and slid to the ground under the front bumper.

Dropping his mask of drunkenness, the man in the big car called a sharp order.

Larry snapped off his lights and slid to the step near the bank. Why hadn't he used his head? He might've known.

"Drive up that dirt road, young fellow," a gruff voice commanded from the other side of the truck, "unless you want some of the bean soup your pal has——"

Larry's bullet interrupted the threat. A grunt of pain, a dull thud, and a shuffling sound, told him his shot had landed and the wounded man was trying to roll clear. Close upon the report of the revolver, lights in the other car faded out, and blackness again submerged them.

Larry ducked low as a bullet whined past and struck the bank with a thick thud. It was pitch dark. He felt his way silently around to Jack. He must get him onto the truck. Lifting the quiet figure, Larry felt for the heart. It was beating! His exploring fingers found a great hot lump rising under the thick mat of hair on Jack's head.

All about, Larry seemed to hear vague whisperings and movements.

Suppose they disabled the truck! He slung Jack to his shoulder and turned to worm his way back, trying desperately to be both quick and silent.

It was not an easy stunt in that narrow alley between bank and truck, burdened with the weight of an unconscious man. Larry had decided. He would start the truck and, risking their shots in the dark, butt the big car off the road with his heavier vehicle.

CHAPTER IV.

MORE SPUNK THAN SENSE.

SUDDENLY the road leaped into light. There was the vicious scream of a horn, the squealing of brakes. A car rushed by, striking the stalled auto with an appalling crash. At the impact the big car rolled over and over down the bank, bounding and crashing into a grove of eucalyptus trees. The car which had struck it, halted somewhat by the collision, slewed about frantically for a second and then turned sullenly over on its side.

Larry heard sliding feet on the bank and knew his assailants had hurried to their leader's rescue. He hoisted Jack onto the papers in the back of the truck, hesitated at the step, and then turned and ran to the overturned car. It wouldn't do to leave without investigating it. Whoever was in it would receive scant help from these gangsters.

"Any one hurt?" Larry called softly. In the light of the cowl, he caught a glimpse of a little white face with great brown eyes and wind-tossed red hair. "Nora! Nora Hardin!" he cried in panic. "Nora, are you hurt?"

"No-o-o," a small unsteady voice answered. "I d-don't think so. I'm almost sure I'm not."

"What on earth were you thinking of?" Fright relieved, turned to anger. "What're you here for? I can't see how you escaped being killed."

"Well, I did. Get me out of here,

Larry Baldwin, and I'll tell you what I'm doing here. What was the idea leaving me behind?"

Then Larry came back to his dangerous position. He turned off her cowl light—the headlights had been shattered in the smash-up—helped Nora untangle herself from the gears and brakes, and pulled her to the road beside him.

"We've run into trouble already, Nora, and they've put Jack out. Why couldn't you have kept out of this? I shot one man, but there must have been at least four. Let's get out of here quickly."

The girl was shivering and trembling, and Larry had to lift her to the truck seat.

"We'll have to leave your car. Be room to pass when we move on." In a moment more they were roaring up the road, a few scattered shots popping after them from the little hollow.

"Is the driver badly hurt?" Nora asked.

"I don't think so. He got a nasty crack on the head. He's an old friend of mine, Nora. We'll leave him with a doctor in El Cajon, if he doesn't come around. Nora, that was mighty plucky—knocking their car off the road. It probably saved the papers, for the present."

"No credit due me. I couldn't stop. When McGurty told me you'd left, I was furious. Been burning up the road behind you, getting madder and madder every mile. Larry Baldwin, I'll never speak to you again."

"Well, you're here now," Larry answered shortly. "I'm not sorry that I tried to keep you out of it. You see for yourself it's no place for a girl."

"I don't see! I had a right to be in on this. Dad would want me to be."

Larry smiled grimly. "There are times, Nora, when your dad has more spunk than sense. Do you think for one minute we're through with Updyke's gang?"

"Don't be foolish; they won't stop that easy. But I'm glad I didn't miss this. Let's be friends, Larry." She snuggled confidently against his arm. "I'll stop being cross if you will."

"You're hardly ever cross when you get your own way," Larry answered.

Nora was a dear whether in a flashing spark of temper, or in the invariable subsequent mood of melting sweetness. Larry wished he was free to kiss her and discover how much of sincerity there was in her sisterly pose.

He sensed, now and then, a hint of something different, and this observation was the foundation upon which he built his hope that some day she might care for him as he did for her.

He dropped an arm about her shoulders now, and felt that if it had been any other night, or any other mission, her dear nearness would be heaven enough. If this ride panned out, he would have something not at all brotherly to say to her.

As the truck turned into the long tunnel of trees on the outskirts of El Cajon, Jack began to mutter thickly to himself.

"Feeling better, Jack?" Larry asked.

"What happened to me?"

"One of those thugs back there put you to sleep with a blackjack. Nora Hardin came along and bounced their bus into the canyon. She's here with me now. Meet the boss' daughter. Jack was my buddy 'over there,' Nora. They don't make them better."

"Pleased to meecha, princess," Jack murmured.

The words puzzled Nora, but she attributed them to the blow he had received, and answered gently.

"Are you badly hurt? We'll find you a doctor in El Cajon."

"No, you don't! Ouch! Excuse me, princess, but I ain't going to be left in no doctor's office to-night. This head twisting won't last. Ever since I stopped that shrapnel, a good bump

makes me dizzy. It'll wear off and I'm going through with you."

After more futile arguing they had to let him have his way, and passed through El Cajon without stopping.

The night was as thick as the fur of a black kitten, and heavy with the spicy acid-sweet scent of lemon blossoms. Huge boulders seemed to spring from the hillsides as the lights picked them out on the curves.

The speedometer held fifty-five steadily until they started up the Viejas grade, whose brown dirt walls were streaked with red clay and mottled with grotesque granite shapes. Skeleton fingers of burned trees pointed and clutched at them as they ground upward, past Descanso, up and up. How sinister the road looked to-night. Old familiar landmarks assumed ugly proportions when revealed for an instant by the glare of headlights. Beyond that white path lurked the blackness of the pit.

"Guess I'm out, big boy," Jack said. "Can't raise my head without getting seasick. That was some wallop. Now listen, Luckless. You won't have to stop at Guatay. The immigration men stationed there know me and they never flag the paper truck. If you can hold this speed clear through, we'll get in early."

"Kayo, Jack," Larry answered, but with private reservations. Hope and fear tramped across his heart. Hope that he might roar along through the darkness, Nora beside him, clear to Empire and lay his load of vindication and triumph at the feet of the old man. Fear that harm might come to the girl at his side.

If luck would only ride with him! Just this once. He knew Updyke was too shrewd to be caught with only one string to his bow; that was the very reason Channing, Incorporated, had chosen him to do its work. Yes, luck and lots of it, was needed now.

CHAPTER V.

SIGNALS OF DANGER.

CLIMBING in long sweeping curves the truck approached Guatay, near the Mexican border. Larry spoke over his shoulder. "They're out in the road with flash lights, Jack. Shall I stop?"

"Well, we are a bit later than usual. Better slow down. They're watching for gun runners these nights. Keep her in gear. If they stop you after they recognize the truck, there's something fishy.

"When we get up close let the princess work the spotlight and I'll have a look at these fireflies. Get your gun handy." Painfully, Jack edged over and peered up the road at the approaching lights.

"Stop! United States immigration officers!" A hoarse voice ordered.

"Now, princess, let's see them," Jack whispered. The truck was barely moving and the sudden light glared full into the faces of the men beside the road.

With a curse one of them jumped up beside Larry just as Jack called sharply, "Step on it! A holdup!"

Larry struck at the man on the step, knocking him clear, and stepping on the gas.

As the truck leaped forward, Jack rose to his feet, yelling and shooting wildly back at the lights. "Whadja do to them officers?" he raged, and then dropped down on the papers with a deadly thud.

"Duck down, Nora!" Larry cried as she began to whine about the cab. "We'll be around the curve in a second."

Nora, sliding down onto the floor, failed to notice his left hand drop from the wheel, or to hear his low gasp of pain.

When the night was again black and peaceful, Larry brought the truck to a stop.

"Luckless, as always," he said bitterly. "Fool to expect anything else. And I'd

give ten years for just an even break to-night."

"Larry! What is it? Are you hurt? Did they get you?"

"They got me in the arm, Nora. Broke the bone, I guess. Think you can tie it up? I'm going to take this bus in, if they shoot me full of holes."

A little of his pain, and the despair in his heart, seeped into his voice and brought quick tears to Nora's eyes as she gently helped him out of his coat. Pressing a clean handkerchief into the wound, she bandaged it with his ripped-up shirt sleeve, and using the woolen scarf from her neck, bound his arm tightly to his body.

Larry then slipped his right arm back into the sleeve of his short leather coat. Nora fastened the empty sleeve across his body to keep the wind from the injured arm. Through all her ministrations she raged indignantly at the audacity of their assailants.

"Thanks, Nora. That's absolutely fine. But I sure wish you were safe in El Diego," Larry said.

"Oh, Larry, let me drive," she pleaded. "You know I can run anything."

Larry shook his head stubbornly. "I've got to take the papers in myself. Can you give Jack a look?" Clumsily he started again, and once under way managed more easily.

Nora faced about on her knees and straightened Jack out more comfortably. "He's fainted. We'll have to find a doctor."

"Ma Neely at Boulevard. Good as a doctor. Open all night," Larry replied sententiously.

THERE were not so many curves now, though the truck continued to climb steadily into the hills. It crossed Pine Valley and went on, up and up. Laguna Junction, lightless and silent, slipped by, and then the long down grade to Buckling Springs. Past the

Springs it roared, and began climbing again up to Hi-Pass.

It was no ride for a driver with a broken arm. Constantly, Nora's watchful eyes were on the white-faced, silent boy bending over the wheel. The dim light from the cowl revealed his face indistinctly—lips set in hard bitter lines, stern thin cheeks, eyes straining ahead, asking no quarter of his enemy. It was the fighting face of a man at bay, stripped clean of youthful weakness.

Larry drew the truck to a stop before the all-night café at Boulevard, and climbed stiffly down.

"Let's get some coffee," he muttered, "and see about leaving Jack." He swayed slightly, and was glad to drop into a chair at an inconspicuous corner. Nora ordered hot coffee and superintended the removal of Jack into the warm kitchen, despite his vehement protests, for he was again conscious.

As Larry drank the steaming liquid, some of the color returned to his cheeks. The pain in his arm was severe, but the grin he turned on Nora when she rejoined him would have fooled a less-sensitive person.

"Jack is on a couch in the kitchen being fed hot milk by Ma Neely, and trying to curse us between spoonfuls, for leaving him. He's not badly hurt." Nora spoke with brisk deliberate casualness.

"You're a brick, Nora," Larry answered. "Let's get started again." He rose and walked steadily back to the truck.

When he would have climbed into the driver's seat, Nora put her hand on his arm:

"Larry, maybe we could get a driver here. Won't you try—please? You're all in."

His jaw set grimly. "This is my job, Nora. I *have* to take the papers in, myself. Some day I'll tell you why, but don't oppose me now. I must do it, myself," he repeated.

He climbed into the seat with the thought that Nora had an approving glint in her eyes, in spite of his obstinacy.

Larry knew it sounded stubborn, but how could he explain to the girl he loved, this grim struggle between an invisible enemy and his endurance? She'd think him delirious or unbalanced. His mind had never been clearer. It was a fight to the death.

Even his loyalty to the old man and Empire Valley paled before the significance of this inner battle. Defeat meant *finis* for him; but this brave girl stood as a bright symbol of the reward he might attain should he succeed in freeing his soul from the spell that gripped it.

"Let's go," Nora said, as she swung into the seat beside him.

With renewed strength and determination, Larry felt equal to anything his enemy might devise. They had won through so far. The few scattered lights at Jacumba slipped past and his thoughts sped to the Mountain Springs grade, now but a few miles ahead.

It was a long, narrow, winding dirt road, dropping steeply down from the mountains to the floor of the great desert garden that was Empire.

It had innumerable tricky turns, and in one of these the next trap might be laid for them. There were dozens of places where they could be blocked, or sent hurtling down the bare sides of the stone mountains to the boulders below.

The darkness clung thickly about them and a cold wind blew from the mountains. Nora sat close to Larry. He felt a warm joy from her nearness that eased his pain and helped him forget his weariness.

At the last curve above the dangerous grade, their truck lights picked out a great boulder. Many a timid driver had become alarmed at the legend painted by some wandering fanatic in huge white letters on its surface: "Pre-

pare to meet thy God." Used as Larry was to seeing it, to-night it sent a little shiver down his spine, and Nora drew closer.

"If the devil himself stays home, I'll not care what else we meet," Larry muttered, and wished again that Nora was safe in Empire.

ROUNDING the curve, Larry saw a red lantern swinging back and forth jerkily. Nora turned the spotlight on it, as Larry slowed down. He was determined not to stop unless he recognized the carrier. There, by himself, stood "S'matter," the little ten-year-old devil of the *Bugle*. He looked frightened and lonely.

"Road's blocked!" he cried, running after the slowing truck. "That you, Larry?"

"Yes, kid. What's up?" S'matter climbed to the step, his face beaming with relief and news.

"Hello, Miss Nora! Somebody dynamited the road to-night down at that sharp turn near the bridge. When the news got back to town, Bill came out to see how bad it was. He couldn't get the car through, so he helped me climb over it to head you off.

"Larry, there's a boulder big as the county jail, right on the road. I been helping Bill, and we ain't been to bed yet," he finished proudly.

"Good boy, S'matter," Larry said, and turned to Nora. "Do you know anything of the condition of the Devil's Canyon road?"

That road was the only other western auto entrance through the mountains into Empire Valley—once a great inland lake—and it had been abandoned since the opening of the Mountain Springs' grade.

"It must be pretty bad," Nora answered thoughtfully. "No work has been done there for months. It's full of washes and ruts."

Larry sat silent, humped over the wheel, his eyes narrowed in thought.

Waves of pain and weariness beat against the rock that was his will. His bad luck had caught up with him again. It was now largely a question of endurance. Could he force this tired, sleep-craving flesh that housed him to perform the remaining miles?

"We might make it," Nora offered doubtfully, "with luck."

Larry winced. "We will make it. It's the only way." He set his jaw stubbornly. "It's getting late, Nora. Hold everything. We'll take it on the run."

"Wait a minute, Larry," S'matter pleaded. He jumped down and hurried to a stick already planted in the center of the road, and hung his lantern on it.

"I want to be in at the finish," he said, climbing up beside Nora as Larry painfully started the truck again.

"Gee, Larry, what's the matter with your arm?"

"I got potted back there, kid. Now tell us what has been happening at the *Bugle*."

"Devner got soused and spilled the beans to that road runner of Updyke's. When old 'Dev' sobered up he told me, and I told Bill. Bill's going to phone the farmers not to vote until they see the *El Diego Meteor*. Gee, Larry, who shot you?"

"So that's how they got wise!" Larry exclaimed. "I guess we can thank Devner for our excitement."

"Poor old man. He'll be crying his eyes out by now, if he isn't drowning his grief in redeye." Nora's voice was full of exasperated compassion. "He'd give his right arm for dad, but he just can't refuse a drink."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BARRIER.

THE sky was beginning to lighten as they approached the top of the old grade through Devil's Pass. Yucca stalks and distorted cacti emerged faintly from the blue-gray hillsides.

Larry's nerves felt like they had been drawn across cactus. His bound arm throbbed with pain and the other arm and shoulder ached from the double strain imposed on them.

His head felt queer and light—something disassociated from his tired body. He had reached the mountaintop, but the road had been beset with traps; and he saw darkly as through a mist.

The rough down grade took on a personal malignance in every ugly rut and jagged crease. As each jolt and crash found echo in his wounded arm he seemed to hear a grating voice, "Take that! You're beaten! Beaten! Get wise and quit. Bad Luck. Bad Luck. Beaten! Beaten!"

What had Jack said to him? Something—a hoodoo not being able to hurt you unless you let it. Had he been coddling this jinx as old Devner nursed redeye? Was he weakly letting it cheat him out of being a whole man? Was he a mental coward?

The thought fired him. He knew he wasn't a coward. And he wasn't beaten! He'd never quit under fire. He'd run this curse ragged. If they got to Empire in time? They *would* get there in time.

"Talk to me, Nora," he said as he gripped the jerking wheel.

"Do you think they are through with us now?"

"Who knows?" His voice was harsh and weary. "Talk to me."

Nora talked as the truck slithered and jolted down over the old Butterfield Trail, where years before six-horse stages had plodded along, with bullion for the East, and pulled their weary way back through dust and wind bringing gossip and luxuries for the newest frontier.

It was hardly more than a wagon road, in places not quite that. Larry gripped the wheel with his one good hand, cheered by the quiet courage of the girl beside him.

Her eyes blazed in her stern little face, and he heard her repeating a sentence over and over, as though it were a litany. "Those crooks are not going to beat dad and Empire." Her square little hands hovered over the wheel again and again, but drew back without touching it as Larry conquered some particularly nasty spot, or slid them safely around a crazy curve.

"This night's work will queer Updyke for good and all," she said with conviction.

"How?" Larry asked through pale lips, as they emerged onto the concrete highway again, near Coyote Wells, shaken and racked, but still going. "Do you think we could prove anything on him for what has happened to us tonight? Fat chance! Old Updyke is planted in his office getting reports on us, but if we ever make it through, we won't have anything on that fat old spider. He's too smart to leave any proofs lying round loose."

A MAXFIELD PARRISH dawn bloomed in the sky toward Yuma, reflecting purple and rose on the Chocolate Mountains to their left. They were only about thirty miles from Empire City.

Half of that distance, over a stretch of concrete on the floor of the desert, would bring them to Dixieland, outpost of the Valley towns. Once past Dixieland they would probably be safe from interference.

Larry's spirits rose, and he let his tired body relax just a little as he bore down on the gas. Nearly four thirty, but they would make it in time, if—

The speedometer climbed. Fifty-five! Sixty! Sixty-one-two-three! Dixieland appeared, drew near, and slid past. He would make it!

Far ahead down the white road where it merged into a dot, they began to see active little figures running about, and they watched with straining eyes.

"Do you think they're going to have another try at us?" Nora asked.

"Not likely. We're almost to Seeley." Larry felt like a conqueror. A little the worse for battle, but with thoughts as bright as the dawn. The weariness and pain of the night were forgotten in the flush of success.

"You're about to witness the death of a hoodoo, Nora, my girl," he said, and his eyes sparkled like blue stars above the smoky shadows on his cheeks. "It means more to me than I can ever tell you. But I'll have a try when we get in—if you'll let me."

Nora's understanding eyes glowed up at him, filled with pride and something more. She nodded. Satisfied with what he read in them, Larry turned back to the wheel.

On they sped toward the growing figures. Even if they should be disabled now, Larry thought, other cars would be coming along soon, and some one would help them get in with their precious load. But no matter what might await them, there could be no turning aside.

The highway was the only auto road into Empire, and Seeley must be passed. It was near Seeley that the big canal came through, cutting the desert like a lost river with high dyked walls, and passed under the highway through an inverted siphon.

The figures were quite plain now, rapidly drawing closer—Mexican and Hindu laborers working frantically. A cry of dismay burst from Nora, and Larry, and S'matter. The highway was vanishing under a wave of yellow water, which rolled toward them as Larry brought the truck to a grinding stop. The road made a slight dip there, and the depression was filling rapidly.

"They've cut the canal," Larry groaned.

S'matter added miserably, "That sure cooks us."

Nora looked at the ugly spreading

flood with tears in her eyes—wordless. It was too much.

As these valley dwellers knew, there is no mixture in the world more difficult to traverse than desert silt mixed with water. A man afoot finds himself growing taller as the slippery clay clings and hardens on his shoes, until he is built up on the clumps of mud inches high. When a motor vehicle gets into it the wheels spin and the engine roars, but the car remains as it is. The only progress is downward.

Larry leaned on his arm on the wheel, his body slumped forward dejectedly, his face white with exhaustion. He sat without speaking, eyes fixed on the water with a brooding fatalism. Gone was the exultation, the pride of achievement and endurance. The jinx of bad luck perched once more on his shoulder.

The muddy Colorado was again king of the desert, of the highway, and of the puny truck marooned by its yellow waters. It was not deep water, only hub high. That didn't matter. Just one little slip from the hidden ribbon of concrete into the mud, and the truck would be mired in the sticky mass, clutched in its relentless grip until the water had dried out, leaving the silt cracking into myriad curling cakes under the hot sun.

Nora broke the silence. "Couldn't we get across?"

"It can't be done!" S'matter declared. "I seen cars what tried it, and they slid into the mud and stayed there."

"We could try," she insisted.

"The truck would be off the road inside fifty feet, and then we'd be stuck for good."

Larry raised up and straightened his shoulders. His face was drawn and weary, but his jaw protruded stubbornly.

"I'm going through," he said slowly. "Jinx or no jinx, I won't sit here and let Updyke beat us. Your dad would go on."

"We'll show them, Larry," the girl replied steadily.

For a moment their glances met and clung. Larry's eyes were stern with renewed purpose. He was putting his luck to a last test, and with no abiding faith in its support. Just the determination to hang on, and fight on, until he was licked utterly.

CHAPTER VII.

WHINING BULLETS.

LARRY threw the car into gear and slid toward the muddy lake. The brown men on the other side, their purpose accomplished, had climbed into the flivver and were watching intently, incredulously, their dark faces plainly visible in the morning light. The boss, a slight fellow with flaming red hair, laughed maliciously, a hand at his bulging hip.

As the truck slid into the stream, a sheet of brown water rose and flattened out against the wind shield, like a yellowish opaque curtain.

Larry couldn't see an inch beyond the glass. The water splashed in the truck through every crack and opening. Larry leaned out of the cab in an endeavor to guide the truck, but was blinded and drenched by the flying drops. He slowed down, almost to a stop.

"On top the truck, Nora. Can you get up there and direct me?"

With energy born of their desperate plight, Nora scrambled back onto the papers and with S'matter's help climbed onto the truck top, where she clung prostrate.

"Pull to the right, Larry. Not too far." Her voice was steady and clear. "There. Hold it. Too much. Left, quick! Give her more gas. She holds the road better. Right a little! Steady!"

Thus guided, thanking his stars that Nora was what she was, Larry blindly strained to obey the orders, the wheel gripped so tightly that his one hand was bloodless and his mind oblivious to all

the pain and weariness saturating his body. They were halfway across, wabbling back and forth in the center of the highway, when his heart was frozen by an ominous sound—the vicious whine of bullets—and Nora exposed on top of the cab!

"Come down, Nora!" Larry shouted hoarsely. "They'll kill you. Get down, quick! By heaven, I'll not stop now for the crack of doom!"

"No! No! They're shooting low at the wheels. Right! Quick! I'm all right. Oh, they wouldn't dare! Hold it now! We're almost across, Larry. We're going through. We're going through!"

Larry drove on, lips set, a look of cold ferocity on his face. Damn them! Shooting with Nora exposed like that. He pulled on the wheel in answer to her warning cry. Just let him get across. They'd find out when to start shooting.

Nora's voice again, steady and clear. "Careful! To the right, quick! She keeps working to the left. Let S'matter help you, Larry."

The excited youngster slid into the seat expectantly.

Larry shook his head. "I'll take her in," he said, and repeated it again and again, "I'll take her in."

Then the yellow curtain dropped away, and he could see through the dripping wind shield. The little man was standing in the road shooting at their tires.

Larry stopped the truck and drew his own gun. His hand was stiff and slow and he heard a bang as one of the front tires went.

Larry's first shot went wild, but his second dropped the other. The brown men in the flivver started off in a panic, leaving their leader lying in the road.

Larry got heavily down from the seat and started toward him, keeping him covered. The other man slid his gun forward with his foot and stuck his hands up.

"You hound! I'd like to finish you right now," Larry said savagely, as he kicked the gun into the mud.

The red-headed man cringed before the blazing eyes in that lined white face.

"Here, S'matter. Help this dog onto the papers and sit on him. Hurry, we haven't any time to waste. He's going to be useful evidence when we get to Empire."

With Nora beside him, S'matter and the wounded man in the rear, Larry was off, this time bumping on three tires like a limping race horse, gallant, but handi-capped.

Larry rallied his strength and clung to the wheel, shaking the exhaustion from his eyes. He was so tired, so wet, so cold. His thoughts took hold of those words and repeated them over and over. "Tired! Wet! Cold! Cold!"

SUDDENLY there was Empire before him. They were driving through town—at the *Bugle* office. But why all the crowd? Why were they shouting?

"We did it," he said to Nora, his eyes glazed with collapse. "I beat the jinx."

With the last tug on the brake, he slumped over the wheel, held from falling by Nora's quick young arms.

First among the men and boys to swarm over the truck was Martin Hardin, freed that very hour.

"Oh, dad!" Nora cried. "Do you think he's—dead?"

"No, child," Hardin said, making a quick examination. "He's fainted.

Lend a hand here, boys, and we'll get him across to the emergency."

Nora climbed down after them, chattering between short, hysterical sobs. "Dad, you should h-have seen him. S-sitting up there so white and stern, and d-driving with one broken arm. It bled awfully at first. He wouldn't give up. Maybe he is short on l-luck, but he's got enough p-pluck for a dozen men."

Behind them, eager hands reached for the bundles of papers. The red-headed man was pulled down and taken after Larry. Men and boys scattered like sand before the wind, shouting, "Extra-a-a-a! All about t'crooked election! Extra-a-a-a! *El Diego Meteor!* Extra-a-a-a!"

"Three cheers for Larry Baldwin!" A big rancher shouted from the running board of his car, and the street rocked with the response.

"Three cheers for Nora Hardin!" another cried. But Nora didn't hear them.

She was standing beside Larry looking down into his eyes, the clear sober eyes of a man. Searching their depths, she knew he was free.

"Nora," Larry whispered. "Will you marry a man who has been a misguided fool for eight years?"

Nora's lips against his ear whispered the answer.

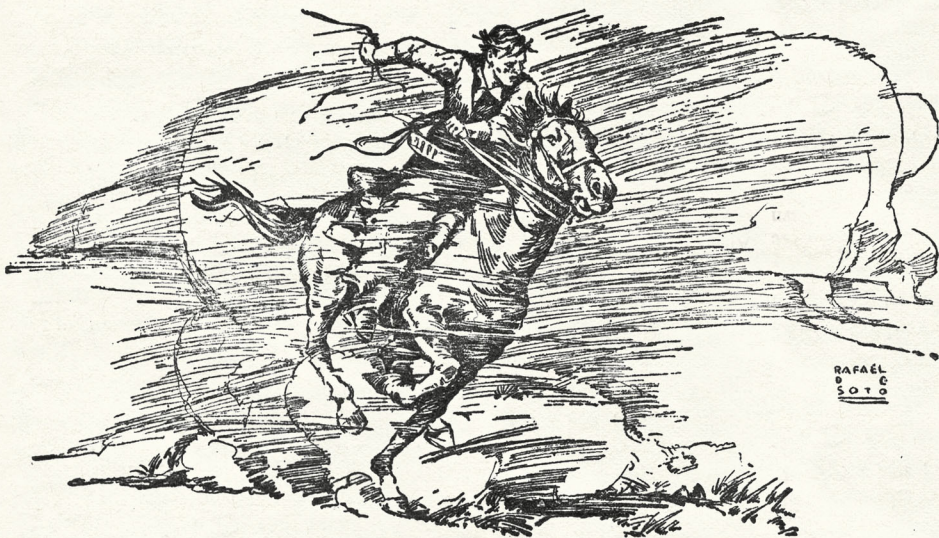
And Larry Baldwin closed his eyes contentedly to sleep—the luckiest young man in Empire Valley.

Big-city Racketeers Spring a New Trick in

JINX HOUSE

By Earl and Marion Scott

A Story of the Show Business, Complete in Our Next Issue



The Ranger Trumps

By Peter Cartwright a Trick

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CURT MORGAN lifted Bob Kinsley from the saddle of his horse, to which he had crawled after his wounding. Morgan carried his friend and co-worker inside the ranger cabin, and bent above him affectionately and ministeringly for the meager moments it took to get Kinsley's statement about the pair of deer poachers he'd surprised with a fresh kill. Then Morgan laid his friend back and covered his dead body.

Freshly mounted, Curt Morgan rode forth not ten minutes later into a blinding storm that swept across Cochetopa Pass, where the snow already lay knee-deep on the level and shoulder-high in drifts. Morgan had a cold fixity of purpose not to return until he had captured the murderer.

And luck, in the shape of a loss of direction in the minds of the confused

two who fled, brought Morgan after a gale-driven two hours' ride, squarely around a short turn and upon the men as they searched with their gaze ahead a long drifted slope which lay downwind. To recover their bearings they had made their way to the highway.

For a raging instant, gun out and poised for action, the ranger stared at the backs of the two taut figures which swayed before the force of the blast at their rear. Then Morgan yelled the command that turned the pair around, hands plunging swiftly aloft and rifles dropped into the snow at their feet.

But as Morgan, a moment later, crowded past the two, alert and ready, but fighting with his horse an instant to get him to turn and face the storm, one of the men, hands still raised as he backed swiftly away, leaped into the thick clump of aspen at his right and disappeared.

The way he ran was upwind, and his high-pitched mocking laugh floated back a moment later in it a note of triumph, outriding for an instant the increasing roar of the gale.

INTO Morgan's mind leaped two thoughts which competed a vital second for supremacy: Bob Kinsley's statement, "Only one of them, Curt, is guilty of *this*, the other chided him for doing it"—and the knowledge that there was no chance of forcing a horse through the thick growth of trees in pursuit of the one man he wanted and had sworn to bring back.

The poacher who ran, dodging, through the snow-bound quakers, glanced back before he had gone fifty yards and caught sight of the figure, now afoot, which plunged through the maelstrom of wind and snow after him, plainly gaining.

The poacher redoubled his efforts, held his own for a long hundred yards, then, badly winded, gave up as a bullet chipped bark from a tree before him on a level with his head.

A moment later the ranger's hand was at his collar and a gun was in his side.

"Ought to kill you," Morgan screamed, his lips a foot from the other's ears to make himself heard, "as you did my friend, Kinsley! But I'm going to save you for a worse fate."

The man yelled hoarsely back. "Where did you find him—the ranger? So soon——"

Morgan glared at him through the thick veil of the storm, an almost uncontrollable spasm of anger in his veins. "He rode in to the cabin," he shouted after a long moment of deliberate hesitation during which he fought another battle against shooting the fellow down, "and died in my arms right after he got there!"

"Say anything about who got him?" The poacher's voice lifted tauntingly.

"He did!" the ranger said.

"What did he say?" shrieked the other.

"That the one of you," Morgan shouted back, "without a thumb on his right hand shot him, while the other chided him for doing it! Though your running away just now was evidence enough you were the killer!"

A laugh swept the other's ice-encrusted lips and was gone as swiftly as the hard-driven snow which roared by like machine-gun fire.

With Morgan's gun pressing his ribs, the poacher cupped his hands to his lips and flaunted Morgan's pursuit of him:

"My pal's the one with the thumb gone," he screamed, and pulled the glove from a sound right hand. "And he's the one that did it!"

"Pretty good trick, eh, ranger?" he continued. "He's got your horse and gone, and you'll never catch him in a storm like this. And your pal's already cleared me——"

FIVE minutes later, harshly silent as he drove the poacher before him, Morgan, with his man, rounded the clump of aspen. A look of triumph blazed from the ranger's hot eyes as he pointed to his faithful horse still standing downwind, and to a form which, seen through the veil of the storm, seemingly was trying to uphold one of the wind-bent quakers.

"It was a good trick," Morgan shouted in the other's ear, "to get the only witness to the killing to escape! But I trumped it by handcuffing your friend to a tree before I started after you!" Then he added grimly:

"You probably won't confess. But your pal will be glad to give me the rest of the evidence I need when he learns you tried to lay the blame on him! It was you that Kinsley said shot him—while your partner with the crippled hand objected!"



Flaming Sands

By Albert M. Treynor

A SERIAL—PART IV

RAINY CAVERLY, an American held a slave by Ras Tagar Kreddache, a marauding sheik of the Sahara Desert, escaped to a near-by cavern.

There Rainy Caverly found a girl, Boadecea Treves, and Carl Lontzen, the man who, by cowardice, had been responsible for Caverly's capture by the tribesmen. Lontzen had with him the son of Ras Tagar, who had been in Europe since childhood.

Ras Tagar and his men raided and destroyed Lontzen's caravan and unknowingly killed Tagar's son. Lontzen escaped on a fast camel.

Caverly and the girl, Bo Treves, escaped capture by hiding. They were in the desert, miles from an oasis. Caverly decided their only hope was to join Tagar's forces in disguise. He donned the garments of Tagar's dead son and the girl dressed as a boy slave.

Ras Tagar accepted Caverly as Sidi Sassi, his princely son, and the girl as his son's slave. Caverly reentered the walled town, ruled by Tagar, where he had been formerly a slave. He found that Lontzen had escaped to Tagar's hereditary enemy, Zaad. Tagar declared

war on Zaad because he thought Lontzen to be his former slave, Caverly.

Nakhla, Tagar's favorite beauty, penetrated Caverly's disguise. She promised silence if Caverly would kill Tagar. Then Caverly, Tagar, and Ali Mabib rode out to attack Zaad, hoping to draw his forces into an ambush Caverly had devised.

Just as the battle was about to begin, Mansor, Tagar's slave driver, became infuriated with Bo Treves, whom he thought to be Caverly's boy slave, and started to kill her with his loaded slave whip.

CHAPTER XXV.

RESCUE.

BY a fraction of an inch, by the split end of a second, Caverly saved Bo Treves' life. It was too late to grab Mansor's arm. Caverly was nearer to Bo.

He barged into her and knocked her off her feet. His shoulder took the blow which would have crushed her skull—took it at a slanting angle so that

muscles only were bruised, and no bones fractured.

The slaver had gone crazy. He tried again to get at the girl with his leaded whipstock. Caverly had to hit him. He let go with everything in one spontaneous wallop, feeling as though the cravings of months had been suddenly gratified.

Mansor's legs were of no more use than if they'd been sawed off at the hips. He was flat on his back, a gout of red spurting from an eyebrow that had been peeled down like a flap over his eye.

Bo crouched on one leg and one hand, tugging her *jerd* back about her shoulders. Caverly didn't want to look at her, shrank from her glance. Everything had gone off so badly. He was trembling, felt sickish all over.

They had been too close to frightful tragedy. He'd made a whooping fool of himself. Imagining for an instant that he could bluff Bo Treves! She'd have let herself be killed before she gave in. He knew that much now. He ought to have foreseen it. She wasn't to be coerced by threats.

Mansor stirred and crawled drunkenly to his feet. A reddening hand held one eye, while the other looked at Caverly as baleful as a smoldering pit. "Tagar shall hear!" he panted. "There are things even the sidi may not do."

"Go back to the fighting line," Caverly commanded.

Caverly shook his head moodily as the man unsnarled his legs from his whiplash and stumbled away. There'd be trouble over this.

Caverly watched while Mansor dropped in the sand where he had left his musket at the top of the embankment. The other men at his right and left had not looked around. Everybody else was too busy scanning the desert to notice anything happening down in the wadi below.

TN-8B

Sighing, Caverly rubbed his knuckles and stretched open his fingers. Then he stooped and picked up his rifle. Still he did not look at Bo Treves.

He picked a niche for himself farther along the rampart, removed from Mansor by a dozen men. If Caverly put temptation in the slave driver's way, he was as likely as not to find a slug in his back before the evening was ended.

Caverly was moving to the position he had chosen when the long anticipated storm broke loose up and down the wadi. Somebody fired, and everybody else joined in with a senseless outburst of shooting. Flame spouted and smoke rolled out from the rampart. Twenty different calibers of rifles and muskets cracked and barked and roared.

Caverly hastened to the top of the embankment. It was as he had suspected. The headstrong Gazimites couldn't wait to see the whites of their enemies' eyes. If they had held off thirty seconds longer, they might have smashed Zaad's charging *harka* in one fell smash.

As it was, three fourths of their firearms wouldn't carry the distance. They were yelling as triumphantly as though they were making great slaughter. These Gazimites were not quiet fighters, nor tidy.

Looking over the top of his breastwork, Caverly could not help laughing. The enemy had plowed up to a dead line a couple of hundred yards away. They had been taken by surprise all right.

He heard the frantic "*adaryayas*" of the cameleers trying to throw their camels. The silly, panicky, stilt-legged shapes were streaking for cover, every direction except to the front.

Two of the beasts were down. One man had been evicted from his saddle by a chancey, long-range shot. The rest were taking to the ground, like disturbed ants.

The ground out in front of the wadi rolled back in ridges and hollows. It was a perfect terrain for digging in. The warriors of the mid-deserts always fight best on their stomachs.

For a minute the *igidi* was a dusty confusion of scuttering things. Then the dust settled. There was nothing to be seen except a cautious patch of color here and there, barely showing above the ridges of sand. The men were sprawled out in skirmish order and had thrown the camels and pegged down their heads.

In another moment the answering fire began to sing above the wadi. It sounded like a chorus of frogs, big ones and little ones. Caverly had never heard so many different kinds and sizes of missiles in the air.

It is always well for a marksman to get on confidential terms with an untried rifle. This was Caverly's first chance to target the Martini-Henry. He made himself comfortable, cuddled up the butt, and cut in.

He was particular not to see the heads or arms or shoulders which Zaad's sharpshooters would expose now and then in order to shoot. There were other marks to test the skill.

Many of the men carried their canteens on their backs like humps. A number of these were visible, even while their owners hugged the ground. Caverly picked one such smallish object, sighted, fired, and missed.

He saw the distant spurt of his bullet. His second shot was a ringer. The far-off *plink* of a bullet puncturing tin told him.

He was greatly cheered when the canteen's wearer leaped halfway erect, pawing at his back, and tumbled down again. The thump of the hit and the lukewarm water splashing over him must have persuaded the man for a moment that he had been frightfully drenched in his own gore.

Caverly began looking for more can-

teens. To shed water was more diverting than to shed blood.

While he was amusing himself, he saw the flashing of a mirror. A moment or two later a column of dense smoke puffed up behind one of the dunes and ascended darkly toward the sky. This was the expected signal for reinforcements.

Sentinels at Khadrim undoubtedly would see the signal. The garrison would be mounted before long, hurrying out for the fighting.

If the Khadrimites started at once, they could not arrive ahead of darkness. This had been allowed for.

Caverly felt a general's satisfaction in finding that his strategy clicked. He could thank Ali Mabib. A nice bit of synchronizing, it had worked out like the ticking of a clock. Ali Mabib would have been a good man anywhere.

CAVERLY was enjoying himself picking off canteens, when a shadow fell beside him. A dingy little figure crawled up and flattened out against his shoulder.

"Being shot over is not very frightening," said a self-contained voice.

It was Bo. He smiled lopsidedly, conscience stricken by the recollection of recent events, pleased at the same time to have her come to him. Somehow he had feared that she would never speak to him again. The friendliness of her tone astonished him.

"If you've got a neighbor on either side and a rampart in front, it's never very frightening," he remarked.

"I think it's horrid of you to shoot at them," she said.

He told her what he was doing. She was interested immediately.

"Want to try the rifle?"

"No, I guess not," she answered dubiously. "I—I hate to think of Carl over on that side and me on this. Cousin against cousin! Have you seen him? Is he all right?"

"I haven't seen him." Caverly was about to add that they'd probably have to dig deep if they wanted to find Carl Lontzen, and then decided not to say it. Relations between Bo and himself were strained enough.

She was silent for a moment, close beside him, peering intently, her long eyelashes shielding her eyes against the slanting sunlight. Suddenly she said: "You would not have let that man beat me."

"No." He drew a long breath. "No, I wouldn't have let him."

"You were only scaring me."

"You don't scare."

"Yes, I do. I was scared. He didn't scare me, but you did, when I saw your look."

His mouth twisted ruefully. "I thought I could bully you into something. I won't try it again. You win, Bo."

Her sidewise glance searched his gaunt features for a second, then fluttered away.

"It gave me cold chills when you clawed him," Caverly declared. "All right. You go ahead and be yourself in the future. I'll make the best of it. I'll never try to make you promise anything."

"I never would," she declared. "About to-day," she added after a moment, "I shouldn't have set that fire. I might have got you killed. You were right about that."

"You didn't realize," he told her.

"I did—or I ought to have realized. But at that minute I didn't care what happened to any of us. I've got a beastly temper."

"Over it now?"

She nodded. "For the present. Only it'll come back if somebody tries to boss me."

Bo was lying flat on the sunny side of the embankment, her elbows propped in the sand and her chin in her hands. Bullets were snapping overhead or

dusting the ground at the right and left or out in front. But Bo's long, grave eyes were studying distant landscapes, as though her consciousness of present things had gone off to the rim of the horizon.

"Listen!" she said. "The next time I deserve to be beaten, don't have anybody else do it."

Caverly put down his rifle and rolled over on one shoulder to look quizzically into her face. At that moment it was a fine-drawn, earnest-looking face made almost severe by the turban bound tightly above it. This meekness was a new mood for her. It struck him as being even more potential of danger than the others.

"You're a funny child," he said.

"In the sense you mean, I am funny. But I'm not a child for much longer." She turned her head a trifle, allowing him a glimpse of her eyes, which were vaguely disturbed by some inward reflection. "Desert women mature too fast—find out too much too soon."

"You're a desert woman, I take it?"

"I'm beginning to feel that I am."

"Too old to be beaten?"

"No, never that. If you need a beating, you need it. Only don't ever let another man do it. Please! It would end up in murder. If it must be done, you do it."

Caverly started to laugh, and then caught himself with a sobered look.

She wasn't joking.

Her troubled glance reached him from under the dark tips of half-masted eyelashes. "I've said things to you several times, and you shrugged them off because you knew they weren't true. I've called you a coward. If a man who I thought was a coward ever put a hand on me, I'd kill him."

She gave a queer, smothered, husky little laugh. "I'd fight you like seven devils. But you're big enough and have nerve enough to go through with it, if you ever started to beat me. So

you be the one, if it ever has to be done—and nobody else.”

Bo turned her head away brusquely, while he was staring at her, trying to puzzle out what it was all about. Girls get queer streaks in their heads. Probably don't understand themselves half the time, he was thinking.

“Here's something else,” said Bo steadily. “It's none of my business what you do. Go ahead and kiss her if you like.”

Caverly tried hard to see the face that was turned rigidly in the other direction. “Kiss whom?” he gasped.

“Nakhla.”

“Oh.” He picked up his rifle again and whistled a tune into the breech as he pulled back the firing bolt. “I'm glad nobody minds.”

“Not in the least.” She turned back to him, the frank and impish Bo Treves suddenly coming alive again to mock him with a grin. “Maybe Tagar Kredache would mind. But no one else. No slave boy——”

She broke off to look behind her. Caverly craned his head, and half the men on the firing line likewise turned, staring across the dunes to their rear, in the direction of Khadrim.

Two camel riders were tearing down upon the wadi as fast as they could come, signaling with their arms and yelling at the top of their lungs.

Caverly identified the green headcloth of the foremost of the hard-traveling pair. It was Hamd, one of the covering pickets who had been sent off into the dunes at the south to watch Khadrim.

In the next few moments the firing from the entrenchment almost ceased. Everybody was gaping at the newcomers, who were all but killing their *hajins* in their excess of haste. The pair arrived abreast and came over the side of the wadi.

When camels go down a steep slope, they forget that they have knee joints

in front. These two slid down in a stream of sand and struck bottom hard enough to loosen the teeth of the camelmen.

Tagar and Ali Mabib and a dozen others dropped from the opposite embankment to crowd around the blowing beasts. Without dismounting Hamd stabbed a significant finger in the direction of Khadrim.

“The garrison is arriving!” he cried, coughing and spitting sand. “Fifty or sixty! They are upon us now. Brothers, we are caught!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

FLEEING CAMELEERS.

INSTEAD of behaving like disciplined warriors, Tagar's fighting horde suddenly became as disorganized as a gang of street urchins scrambling in the dust for coppers. Human life is small coin in this deadly country of sand and sun. Yet here, as elsewhere, a man will forfeit all of honor and dignity and pride rather than lose that precious penny which Allah has loaned him for a little while.

Nobody waited for commands. No command was given. Blind panic swept through the wadi, and washed the fighters of Gazim out at the other end. They rushed to vacate the trap before the jaws closed.

They quitted the hollow ground and crossed the open with robes flying. Everybody was crowding and swearing, trying to be the first to reach the camels. Tagar's tent was left standing. Tagar himself was among the foremost of those who ran.

Off above the dunes to the left a thunderhead of dust had come up and was moving across the *igidi*, like a tornado funnel. On the other side, Zaad's entrenched line was up, dropping long shots among the fugitives.

Caverly's lanky legs might have outstripped all the others, but Bo was held

back by the heavy sand and her flopping, oversized sandals. They were among the last to leave the gully. The very last man was Ali Mabib, bringing the banner of the five asps' heads.

The tornado cloud was bearing down upon them as fast as camels can run. To be caught afoot between Zaad's raiders and the charging garrison from Khadrim would mean annihilation. The camels were *barraked* in a hidden crater a thousand paces in the rear of the point which, a minute ago, had been Tagar's left flank. It had been the intention to mount stealthily that night before the moon was up, and to ride around Zaad's rescuing force in a surprise attack upon Khadrim. Now, darkness was nearly three hours away. The garrison had come out much too soon. Something had gone wrong with the plan. Only Caverly knew who was to blame.

"The geese cackle and Rome is saved," he remarked as he trotted along beside Bo Treves. "A goose builds a fire, and the day is lost."

"What?" the girl demanded.

"Zaad sent up his signal only a few minutes ago, but his reinforcements are here. It's several hours' ride from Khadrim, so they started several hours ago.

"When you set fire to the brush, they saw the smoke on the sky, and thought Zaad was sending up an alarm. The little girl loses her temper. You brought 'em, my dear!"

Bo gave him a startled look. "Why, I never thought——"

"No. You just got mad." He flashed her his most genial smile. "That," he said, "is why they keep women out of the army."

The Gazimites were streaming across the exposed plateau, followed by the fire of Zaad's dismounted force on the opposite side of the wadi. Two thirds of the blazing guns failed to reach the distance, but a few were armed with

modern-caliber rifles. Bullets *zipped* here and there.

One of the men in the crowd ahead dropped, and got up again; a second crumpled and stayed down. The laws of chance work out, even for poor marksmen at impossible ranges.

Limping Zuwalla, who had been left back among the rearmost, suddenly howled and clutched at his good leg. The bullet that caught him above the knee had matched him up on both sides. He kept on running, as fast as he had ever run, and more symmetrically.

The dust funnel, sweeping across the desert, was growing in width and changing in substance. The toss and glint of metal began to catch the low-slanting rays of the sun. Underneath the rolling cloud trotting shapes were taking form.

It was a nip-and-tuck race for the crater. The Gazimites won by a few seconds.

There was no time to saddle the camels or to think of saving baggage. The beasts were on their feet, scenting the fear in their men, ready to stampede.

Every man grabbed the first *hajn* that came to hand, regardless of ownership. Ropes were cut. The riders pulled themselves up over the saddleless humps, without stopping to couch their mounts. When Caverly and Bo and Ali Mabib arrived with the last half dozen stragglers, the majority of their comrades were clearing out of the crater.

Caverly caught a small *naga*, the pick of the camels that were left, and almost flung Bo up astride of the animal's shaggy shoulders. He vaulted to the back of a ruffianly dromedary and padded out of the crater after the fleeing horde.

Zaad's men had broken off the firing and were taking to their camels. Distant shouts might be heard, as they welcomed their friends who had ridden out

from Khadrim. The freshly arrived *harka* was pounding across the slopes. The men in the advance files had begun firing haphazard as they came.

Caverly heard the screech of bullets from the left rear. He gripped his hand into the wool of his camel and looked behind. It was a sight to be remembered—the fluted ridges of sand, turned crimson beneath the dying sun; the two lines of wild riders converging across the mountainous dunes; brilliant hues of cloaks and plumes and rippling banners; the glitter of steel.

He heard the crashing shout as the two columns flowed together. He then ducked above his camel's neck and went on after his routed comrades.

Bo's camel had taken her well ahead. Caverly and Ali Mabib were riding knee to knee. At intervals one or the other would swing to send a bullet back into the ruck of the chase.

They found time to grin encouragement to each other between shots. These two, who might have led the retreat, stayed together—the stingers left in the tail of Kreddache's flight.

The rearmost pair took the crest of the hill side by side, and dipped into the valley beyond. The licked Gazimites were strung out a dozen furlongs ahead of them; a ragged, disordered parade, streaking it for home. The camels were freshly rested, and ran without the hampering weight of saddles and water bags.

All the beasts were of racing stock, and they were filled with the multitude of terrors that prey upon camels. By the time the head of Zaad's line topped the rise, even Caverly and Mabib had drawn out of rifle range.

SO the opening campaign of the brilliant Sidi Sassi was ended. It was a fiasco, but not a disaster. Property was lost, but booty is easily regained. The day was lost, but the sun of the desert brings other days.

One was killed and three or four were wounded, but the Khadrimites could count two dead, and the great Zaad himself was more or less of a casualty. And Ali Mabib was fetching back the ancient banner.

The pursuit lasted while the shadows lengthened and grew dim. Darkness should have brought reassurance, but a rout once begun is not easily checked. The *harka* traveled all that night.

Dawn discovered a rabble still hurrying across the *igidi*, dusty and dragged, yearning for nothing on earth except a swig of water and a glimpse of Gazim. The brightening sky line behind them showed not so much as a dust swirl to reveal the whereabouts of Zaad.

During the morning they sighted the smiling, green oasis under the battlements of red cliffs. At noon Tagar's fighting band reentered the gates of Gazim.

They fell off their camels in the outer courtyard, mumbled the tale to their comrades who had been left behind, drank, and stumbled off to bed.

Caverly was aroused late that afternoon by the dreaded summons from Tagar. He was invited to pay his respects to the ras at once, and to bring his slave with him. The last half of the command was disquieting, but he could do no less than obey.

Bo came promptly from her closet, when he knocked. She had bathed and slept and donned a clean *jerd* and turban. Blue shadows of fatigue darkened her eyes, giving her sunburned face a quality of wistful appeal. She moved with stiff and painful steps, as though she were some war-worn ancient.

Caverly started to laugh, and suddenly found that he couldn't. Instead he dropped his arm about her shoulders and gave her a friendly hug.

"Good girl!" he said.

Bo shivered and started to draw away, then suddenly slumped into his

arms. Her hands tightly clutched his cloak. She began to cry, quietly and softly, her face against him.

During the last few days the blistering sun had burned through the inadequate fabric of her *jerd*. The flesh of her back felt hot under his hand. He checked his impulse to pat the quivering shoulder. It would have hurt. So he held her with an infinite gentleness until her fingers loosened and she was ready to be released.

As quickly and undramatically as it had begun, the sobbing ceased. Bo stepped back and blinked, and then looked up at him with overbright eyes.

"Better now. Thank you."

He was understanding enough to know that the incident was closed. She had weakened for a moment, after the strain of the last few days. Then her resilient spirit suddenly revived and she was herself again.

"We've got to go down now and have it out with Tagar," he told her quietly. "Don't forget to kick off your sandals at the door. You go barefooted before the presence."

"All right," she said. The glance that was lifted to him for an instant was warm with gratitude.

"The sidi has a nice way about him—sometimes," she told him, with a lightness that did not quite cover the breathlessness of her voice. "If you're ready to go now, so am I."

A sick fear clutched at Caverly's ribs when he and Bo were ushered into Tagar Kreddache's presence. The ras was seated cross-legged on his judgment dais, sucking grimly at a long-stemmed water pipe. At his right hand stood Ali Mabib, silent and expressionless. Mansor, the slaver, stood doirly at the left.

Caverly had not seen Mansor since he had slugged him on the preceding day. The man was wearing a patch on a bunged-up eye. The other eye followed Bo Treves as she came into the

room, glowing under the smoking lamps with a black malignity.

Caverly swaggered across the room, his sword clanking at his knee. He bowed, and straightened with an audacious lift of his head. If this matter were to be carried off at all, it was not to be done by humbleness.

"I am glad that you sent for me, my father. And I am pleased to see that Mansor is here. I wish to lay a complaint before you. This Mansor tried to kill my slave."

Tagar dropped the stem of his pipe, and stared in astonishment. "*You* wish to complain?"

"I do, indeed. Am I to have valuable slaves destroyed at the whim of a foul slaver?"

"The slave struck Mansor," said Tagar, ominously quiet. "He had the right to kill him. It is his right now to demand this boy's life."

"Who said the boy struck him?" asked Caverly with a strained politeness.

"I say so," said Mansor.

"It was I who struck you," declared Caverly, and confronted the man with a disagreeable smile. "Is the complaint brought against me, then?"

"I have heard of this, also," put in the ras. "You stabbed him with a knife. That was wrong, sidi."

"I *stabbed* him? I?" Caverly glanced reminiscently at his skinned knuckles. "No. I struck him with my hand."

"You struck with a knife," insisted Tagar. "You could not have cut him so with only the hand."

"A knife, then," assented Caverly. "What difference the weapon? The cut over the eye is the evidence of the blow. That is enough."

He folded his arms calmly. "Am I not permitted to protect my property? Am I to be executed because of a knife slash?"

"The accusation," said Tagar, "is not

against the sidi, but the sidi's slave. He has violated the law. There is but one punishment."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BY THE FULL MOON.

CAVERLY felt a numbing horror at the flat finality of the pronouncement. From the ras' judgment there was no appeal. Bo was standing barefooted before the dais.

She could not know what was being said, but her instincts were too sensitive to miss the portents of danger that had grown about her. Yet her large, wondering eyes were, fixed upon Caverly's face with a strangely trusting look, as though she were sure that he was competent to see them safely through.

His troubled glance swept from Bo back to Mansor. Then he strode forward and for a moment seemed to tower above the short-legged slave master.

"Why did you attempt to beat my slave?" he demanded.

"Because you sent for me. You gave the command——"

"I?" exploded Caverly. "I commanded you to flog this boy? Have you lost your senses?"

"It matters not who gave the command," cut in Tagar impatiently. "There is but one thing to be considered—did the boy strike Mansor?"

"I have told you, my lord. He struck me——"

"You lie!"

"My lord!" Mansor gasped out his appeal.

He started to prostrate himself before the ras, but Caverly gripped his shoulder and held him forcibly upon his feet. He kept the man at arm's length, looking straight into the one, glaring eye.

"I have said that you lie!" Caverly asserted, his bearded mouth crooked

and sneering. "I am waiting to hear that word returned."

Mansor was breathing thickly, his jaw hanging, the veins of his forehead and temples clotted darkly with blood. He started to answer, and stopped with a sound of strangling.

It was a perilous matter to bandy the question of falsehood with a prince of the blood. Mansor, wronged and outraged, nearly bursting with resentment, nevertheless was a man of small daring.

Caverly suddenly flung the slave master away from him, and turned back contemptuously to Tagar.

"And you, my father, have listened to the complaints of this—this fool! You have seen that he bears witness falsely. And you do not even know the worst of him. Who do you think is to blame for yesterday's calamity?"

Tagar's raven eyebrows twitched and his glance darted at Mansor, who was just regaining his feet, after being hurled halfway across the room.

"It was the will of Allah," said Tagar Kreddache, breaking a sharp moment of tension.

"Allah!" derided Caverly. "Did Allah send Zaad's reinforcements before Zaad even knew they were needed? Do you believe that? Then you are too gullible, my lord."

Caverly fixed Mansor with the menace of his gaze. "This is the one who brought them!"

"What do you say!" Tagar's arms stiffened to the sides of his dais, half lifting him from his crossed legs.

"By igniting a smoke," said Caverly, "at the moment when I might have taken the head of your *Rumi* slave that——"

"*Wallahi!*" The gloomy Ali Mabib ended his long silence with the furious cry. "Thus the answer! I had not thought! But now I know why the plans miscarried! The smoke betrayed us—Mansor, thy smoke—thou nameless son of——"

Tagar's water pipe went rolling across the rug as he flung himself to his feet. His *flissa* came from its sheath.

"Traitor!" he yelled. In one of his sudden, half-drunken rages, he lurched toward the cowering slaver.

"Mercy! My lord! It was not I who——"

Caverly's interceding was his capping act of daring. His hand closed over the stringy muscles of Tagar's arm.

"No! My father! Mansor is no traitor. A fool, yes—but no more foolish than all of you have been—excepting Ali Mabib."

Tagar stopped dead. His blazing eyes turned upon the man who had so recklessly touched the sacred person.

"A fool?" he panted. "I—I, a fool?"

"Every warrior who rode at your back was that, and more. Those who scampered away like rabbits have the brains of rabbits. Always excepting Ali Mabib, who was the foremost to attack and the last to run."

Caverly released his grip on Tagar's wrist and stepped back. He had dealt fraudulently and shamelessly with Mansor. To save Bo he had cheated and falsified, but there were lengths to which injustice must not be allowed to go. He owed something to the unhappy scapegoat.

For the moment, he had drawn Tagar's wrath upon himself.

Caverly met the hazard with a supercilious smile.

"We need not have run away," he said loftily, "just because one little thing went wrong."

"No?" Tagar was so choked he could barely articulate. "You hear—Mabib? The *sidi* would have waited—to be crushed!"

Caverly shook his head. "Had your men been trained as I might have trained them, Tagar Kreddache, to-day, would be master of the middle desert."

"Pardon, my lord," interposed Ali

Mabib pacifically, before Tagar could vent the poisons that were welling within him. He looked intently at Caverly.

"You knew a way to have turned our fortunes even after Zaad's rescuers had swooped upon us?"

"So I have said."

Caverly drew a long breath. The talk at last was diverted into channels that might be controlled. He thanked Ali Mabib with his eyes.

"I should have taught the men to answer the blast of a bugle," he hastened to say. "When Zaad's outriding garrison was first sighted, we should not have fled to the camels, but blown the call that would bring the camels to us. The guards would have brought them up running. Running, our full *harka* would have mounted. Still running, we would have poured out of the wadi.

"With lances couched, we would have caught Zaad's dismounted line in the right flank, and swept its length. Men afoot cannot face the lances. We would have rushed them into the grave.

"Then we would have swerved, still running, and met the second detail, the garrison—seventy of us to fifty—lance and sword and the weight of camels in the mass."

He dropped his hands on his hips and laughed lightly and wickedly. "So it might have been."

WHILE the hush lasted Caverly stood at ease, grimly watching Tagar's face.

Ali Mabib first found speech. The veteran scout bowed soberly before the ras. "Tagar Kreddache," he said, "this is your son, your flesh, your bone, your brain. You have sent him to be taught and he has been taught. Let Ali Mabib learn warfare at his feet. If an old man is permitted to speak, then I say to you, let us all learn. My lord—give him the men!"

The saturnine Tagar was breathing

audibly through pinched-in nostrils. It was not easy for him to control himself when his rages shook him, or to confess himself in error, or to listen to soothing talk. His hot eyes turned from Caverly to Ali Mabib, who had served him honestly and ably for thirty years. Then he shifted his scorching gaze to the crouching slaver.

"Out!" he shrieked.

The *flissa* dropped from his trembling hand. In its place he seized the butt of Mansor's whip and tore the uncoiling lash from the man's body.

"You, who light fires! Drolling idiot! Back to your dog pens!"

The forked rawhide slashed across the man's back, tearing the skin beneath his clothing.

Mansor did not dare cry out. He was cowering on his feet, his arms hugged before his face, backing for the door.

"Out!" The forked tongues were cracking around the slaver's legs and body and shoulders.

He reached the door and found the heavy bar and labored with it blindly, squirming and gasping. Somehow he contrived to tumble across the threshold.

Tagar hurled the whip after him. "You have ridden your last time with the warriors of the *harka*. Back to your cattle and dwell with them!"

Calmly the ras shut the door and came back into the room. His rage had passed. His crafty eyes sought Caverly.

"You did not bring me the head you promised," he complained.

"That was not my fault, my father."

"If I give you the men to teach, will you hunt down this *Rumi* runaway of mine?"

"It is a promise."

"When shall I expect this head?"

Caverly considered for a moment, and recalled his oath to Nakhla. He saw no reason to deal less generously with Tagar.

"By the next full moon you shall have it," he declared.

"Good!" Tagar's eyes narrowed cruelly. "Your slave shall be staked against mine. I have already condemned yours to death. But I reprieve him until the next full moon. If you bring me the head of my slave before that time, you buy back your slave's life. Otherwise, the sentence must be fulfilled. Meanwhile, I give you the men."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THUNDERING HORDE.

SO Caverly became the drillmaster and commander by brevet of Tagar Kreddache's fighting *harka*. He started the next morning by assembling the force and culling out the incompetents.

The test was simple. Those who could mount on the run were recruited for the camel corps. Those who failed were turned into garrison guards.

By the end of the first day he had picked his squadron, a compact, mobile force of eighty men, who needed only training and tempering to make them formidable.

His conscience pricked him a bit during the next few days, while they were practicing with sword and lance and musket. He taught them the value of obedience and tight and rapid maneuvering. They were a hard and sinister lot.

To shape them for warfare was as dangerous as giving irresponsible children a bomb to play with. The next time they rode out they would be a scourge turned loose upon the desert.

Caverly could not afford to be scrupulous. His one hope of escaping from Gazim was to take a detachment of these men off somewhere on an independent foray. A sweep, directed toward the rear of Khadrin, might one day serve his ends.

He would conduct the encircling movement so far to the rear that he and Bo would gain their chance to desert the *harka* and make a final dash for safety.

This plan, of course, was tentative and only half formed. Circumstances would decide for him when the time came. Meanwhile, to win the right of leadership he must prove to his flying squadron that he was competent to lead.

So he threw himself energetically into the work he had undertaken, hammering and bullying his recruits into some semblance of soldiers.

The drill ground was a long, comparatively level stretch behind Tagar's palace. At the left, the terrain rolled up to the bare rough cliffs. On the other side lay the head of the smiling little lake and the groves of olives and lemons and palms.

Bo Treves spent the greater part of her time sitting on a green knoll under the olive trees, watching Caverly while he trotted up and down, and yelled and waved his sword and sweated his camelmen.

The men grew accustomed to seeing the white-robed figure crouching cross-legged in the shade. They paid no more attention to her than if she had been their commander's little dog, patiently waiting at his heels.

There were other spectators. Tagar often came out to see the things that were going on behind his dar. Caverly always was conscious of brighter, more inquisitive eyes peering at him from the parapet on the women's side of the palace.

He kept his own glances strictly to the front, but at times he could not fail to notice that there was one with a bright-crimson head covering who peeked more boldly and more frequently than any of the others. This one was Nakhla.

She spent three fourths of her hours

watching him. An uneasy self-consciousness told him that he was never far from her thoughts. What these thoughts were, he did not know.

He might have found out if he had cared to take the risk. Twice he was visited by Nakhla's ghostly messenger, who told him that the mistress of Gazim would talk with him again if he dared meet her at the old shrine. Caverly evaded the invitations. Each time he sent back the reply:

"Be discreet. Be patient. Wait until the waking moon."

FOR a few nights the desert slept in darkness. Then, all too soon, the new moon appeared. A sliver at first, crooked and sharp and bright as a yata-ghan blade. Each night that thin slice of moon grew a trifle in breadth and stayed a while longer in the sky.

Caverly and Bo went out evenings and sat on the hillside, where camels and sheep were browsing, and stared at the young moon and the stars and the velvety indigo sky.

At times they were held speechless and awed by the spectacle of the constellations, which blaze and sparkle over the desert with such neighborliness that the watcher is always listening for the crackling of their flames.

Or again, the man and girl would shake off the spell woven by the stars, and would talk.

They were mutually astonished to discover what a multitude of things both were interested in. The earth had been Caverly's playground. Bo's curiosity and understanding were as wide as the world. He had the magic gift of words, and she had the more than magic ability to see and feel and appreciate the singular quirks and patterns and colors that make up the sum of daily affairs.

They talked about Zaad, who probably had retired to Khadrim to recruit his forces for decisive warfare; of the

two varieties of wickedness, as exemplified by Tagar and Ali Mabib; of camels and irrigation and lemon-tree culture, and the spooks that hang around drinking wells; of lost, silent cities, and newly founded, bustling cities.

Anything that neither of them thought about was spoken of straight out—excepting Nakhla. Neither spoke of her.

Bo's humility these nights was a source of growing wonderment to Caverly. Of course any one who waits in the lurking shadow of doom is apt to be subdued. Yet it was not fear that he saw in her half-veiled eyes, but a singular, sweet contentment.

Her moods of gentleness came with the evenings, when the scented breeze whispered across the slopes and the desert was calm and peaceful. During the mornings and afternoons Caverly was busy and Bo was bored. The girl's incorrigible spirit was likely to get the better of her again and crop out in some new form of mischief.

CAVERLY was putting his camelmen through their paces late one afternoon, trying to make the rear squadrons close up in time to complete a rapid movement. Everybody was tired and dusty and hot, and night was at hand. He sat astride his own *hajin*, a short distance in front of the olive grove.

For the twentieth time he formed the ranks in front of him, staring at the men's backs with scowling, saturnine eyes. They were an exasperating lot at times. He was about to shout the command that would start them off once more on their flying maneuver, when something struck him a sharp, hard blow in the small of the back.

He stopped the sound in his throat and turned to look behind him. There was nobody in sight, except Bo Treves. The girl was sitting behind him on the hillside, as quiet as a sphinx. He meas-

ured her with a quizzical glance. She gazed off innocently at the distant hills.

Curtly he turned back to his *harka*.

Another small missile hit him between the shoulder blades. This time he saw a ripe olive bounce away and drop in the turf at his camel's feet.

He turned again in a flash. Bo was still lolling in the grass, demurely watching a buzzard that wheeled above her in the sky.

He knew that Bo had flung the olive. A slave throwing things at the dignified commander of Tagar's horde—it probably was the most outrageous impudence that ever had been committed in Gazim.

Caverly looked around hastily, to make sure that nobody had seen. Dusk was falling. The garden and courtyards appeared to be deserted. For once, there was no sign of spectators peering above the parapet of the palace. He squinted at Bo again, and then swung with a brusque command, to his camelmen.

They would stand when he told them to stand, and keep their eyes to the front. That much, at least, he had drilled into them. He threw his leg over the saddle peak and dropped off his camel.

Bo saw him coming. She jumped up. In the twilight he caught the white flash of an impious grin. Then she turned back through the olive grove and started to run. Caverly pulled his belt around, so his yataghan wouldn't trip him, and went after her.

The girl's slim brown legs gleamed among the trees. She had drawn up the hem of her *jerd* and was fleeing in childish panic. She turned left first, then right, and dodged toward the shore of the lake. Among the rushes at the water's edge, Caverly captured her.

She was in his arms for a moment, struggling and panting and laughing convulsively. "You—hollering at 'em

in barrack-room French—and every one of you preening an idiotic set of whiskers, like a lot of goats. It's time somebody gave you the bird. It should have been eggs."

Caverly's hands slipped from her shoulders to grip her bare forearms. "Say 'Uncle'!" he commanded.

"'Thundering horde!'" she scoffed. "Ho! Ho! Ho!"

He shook her fiercely by the wrists. "Say it."

"I never would!" she told him. "Never!"

"Oh, yes, you would!" He picked her up suddenly, one arm closing behind her knees, the other crooked tightly about her waist.

Holding her in writhing helplessness he marched her into the pond up to his boot tops. He dropped her and pushed her down until she disappeared.

With a knee and both hands he kept her submerged until bubbles came to the top. Then he released her and stepped back upon the bank.

Bo's turban and one of her sandals were floating in the roil of mud. She emerged like a disheveled water nymph, her *jerd* plastered to her body, her streaming hair adorned with wet mud.

He inspected her coolly. "You might better have said it in the first place."

"I didn't!" she raged. She tried to wipe off the mud, and only smeared the dirty streaks across her face.

"But you did," he insisted. "I saw by the bubbles. It was perfectly evident what you were saying."

"Why, you——" Bo's heated rejoinder was lost in a sudden stoppage of breath. Her eyes flickered with dismay as she stared across the shore of the lake in the direction of the lower garden wall.

Caverly saw her change of expression and felt a starchiness, wilting sensation in the region of his backbone. He turned his head in the acute prescience of disaster looming. And the

span between his eyelids narrowed as he looked.

Nakhla was standing in a thicket at the edge of the lake, watching him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHOW-DOWN.

THE Bedouin girl was clad in a green-and-yellow barracan, caught up by a jeweled girdle at the sinuous curve of her waist. The hard glitter of emerald rings and bracelets was no more brilliant in the dying daylight than the jadelike glint of her painted eyes.

She was veiled to the top of her nose, but when she saw Caverly looking at her, she brushed the veil away. Bare-faced, she came toward him, her hands lightly touching her hips, her walk an airy swaying.

Bo she ignored.

"You have not thought favorably of my invitations for us to meet together at night," Nakhla pouted.

"I have been very much occupied," he said steadily. "Perhaps you have heard. We are making troopers for Tagar."

"So? I had not heard. I thought it might be that you were making—what do you say in our own language?" She stumbled over the English word: "Navee, to fight upon the water. You are busy, then, teaching on the water? You also teach slaves about these matters?"

It was a vicious little dig. She had seen him ducking Bo in the pond, and was vindictive about it. Nakhla didn't understand in the least. He couldn't blame her for that. Neither did he.

He didn't know why he had acted so ridiculously, excepting that he was apt at any time to give way to some crack-brained impulse.

Bo really had needed a lesson, and he gave it to her on the spot. Of course it would be his luck to have Nakhla happen along at just that moment. He

smiled at her warily. There was no explanation he could give.

Bo was standing close to Caverly, her bare toes digging uneasily into the mud. Her turban was gone, and her tumbled, brown hair fell awry about her bold young forehead. Frankly, and most alluringly, she was no boy. But Nakhla had known the truth about that for some time. She did not even deign to look at the other girl.

"I am telling you, Raine," she said very quietly: "if you and I are to be anything to each other, you will first be rid of this slave." The melting look was gone and the black-lashed eyes lifted squarely to his. "You have said things that you have not done."

"You are mistaken, Nakhla. I did not say that I would put aside my slave."

"You have made promises," the Bedouin girl insisted. "And they still are only promises."

"Promises, I keep!" declared Caverly stiffly. "When the time comes."

"Time is no longer young. Time is aging. Time will soon be dead." The corners of Nakhla's curving mouth dimpled prettily, and cruelly. "I have been told," she said, "that your slave is condemned to the sword."

When Nakhla stirred or rustled her silks, a faint, subtle fragrance perfumed the air. To Caverly there was something horrible and sickening in that sweetness of distilled flowers which once had been alive and lovely.

Nakhla had turned with a lithe indolence. For the first time she looked directly at Bo. It was a glance of maddening aloofness that women sometimes reserve for each other.

"It would be a pity," Nakhla said, "for one so exquisite to die." About her lips hovered the impalpable mockery of Gioconda's smile. "But perhaps it need not be. You think so much of your slave, Raine. And I know a nicer way than death. So

much the better for everybody. I will speak about it to Tagar Kreddache. Whatever I say to Tagar, that he will do."

She turned away softly, her anklets tinkling. For an instant she looked back with her lingering, mystifying smile. "Good night, Raine," she said in a small and dulcet voice. Then she passed among the shrubbery into the gathering dusk.

Bo stared at the quaking foliage, her underlip thrust forward pugnaciously. "Chic and sleek and so damn superior!"

She spread out her hands and looked down at her own dripping rags. "And she saw me like this. The little snake! It's—it's ghastly!"

"It's ghastly, all right!" Caverly cast a grim glance at the silent, windowless walls of Tagar's dar. "It looks like the show-down at last. Well, it had to come some time. Now or later. It might as well be to-night."

"Now, listen!" His fingers clenched over Bo's wrist, and tightened. "You go to your room, and change your clothes, and wait for me. No more funny business! Don't stick your nose outside. Stay there until I come for you."

"All right." For once Bo nodded in quiet obedience. "I'll be there when you come."

Caverly left her and went back to his camelmen. The *harka* was still drawn up at attention in a long rank fronting the open country. He had kept them standing thus on other occasions to impress upon them the meaning of absolute discipline. They probably thought that this was just another test of their soldierly endurance.

He mounted his camel, and his high ringing shout broke through the evening stillness. "*Escadrons! A droit! Marchez!*"

The squadrons of camelmen started

forward, wheeled into column, and trotted off to the picket lines.

Caverly followed, got rid of his own mount, and hurried back afoot to the dar. He went directly to his own quarters, taking care to close the door after him.

"Bo!" he called.

There was no reply. Frowning, he knocked on the door of the girl's sleeping closet, and then pushed it ajar.

"Bo?"

It was pitch dark in the alcove, quiet as death. He pulled down a wall sconce and lighted a candle. On the floor he saw a sodden, muddy *jerd* and a wet sandal. The girl had been there ahead of him and, evidently, had changed her clothes.

He ran back into the outer chamber, holding the candle high, his eyes searching the flickering shadows. He peered into the dressing room at the rear. No sign of Bo! The black shades of fear were beginning to assemble. Something was seriously amiss. Bo had promised. She would be here, unless something was frightfully wrong.

Caverly dropped his candle and went out into the arched corridor. Along the dark, cryptlike passage he groped his way, down the stone stairs to the ground-floor landing. A ceiling lamp burned here, and in a niche of the wall crouched an ebony-skinned slave.

This man Caverly knew by sight. He was Tagar's confidential messenger. His tongue had been taken out and his eardrums punctured—so that he could not listen to secrets, nor betray them. It would be wasted time to try to question him.

Farther along, at the entrance of the *selamlık*, Caverly ran into a second sheeted figure—one of the soldier slaves of the inner *sahns*.

"Have you seen the boy who attends the sidi?" Caverly asked sharply.

The man touched his forehead and bowed. "My lord has sent for him,"

he replied. "I have but now taken him into the presence of my lord."

"I am also expected," said Caverly grimly.

It was possible that this guard had been instructed to refuse him admittance. Caverly brushed on past, as though it were his right to go where he pleased. The heavy door of Tagar's dais chamber confronted him. He lifted the massive latch, swung the door open, and closed it softly behind him.

EVERY lamp in the place was alight. They hung from walls and vaulted ceiling in a multicolored array. Under the largest dome light in the middle of the room swaggered Tagar Kreddache, an arrogant figure in yellow satins and gold.

Backed against the wall, her short ruddy hair a tangled confusion upon her turbanless head, her cheeks flushed and her eyes aflame, Bo Treves stood facing Tagar with the fury and cowering hatred of a tortured wild creature in a trap.

She saw Caverly. The piteous appeal and the bravery of the look she gave him went straight to his heart.

The ras turned, and scowled. "You were not summoned," he said.

"No?" drawled Caverly with excessive politeness.

"It does not matter," said Tagar after a trenchant interval. "I should have sent for you."

Tagar looked around at Bo again. Clad in an inadequate blue *jerd*, her disfiguring headcloth missing, all pretense had been stripped away. She was as pretty a woman as this jaded connoisseur probably had ever seen in Gazim. For Bo the gallant masquerade was ended.

Nakhla could be thanked for the unmasking.

"I do not wonder that the sidi has guarded his slave boy so particularly." Kreddache leered across his shoulder.

Caverly said nothing. He felt a cold tingling in his blood that reached to his finger tips.

"I have never owned a *Rumi* slave woman," remarked Tagar in his silkiest tones. "This one is beautiful. You will give her to me?"

"No," said Caverly.

Tagar still could smile. "If not a gift, what is the price then? Three hundred *mejidies*? That is generous. I will give you the gold."

"I do not sell," said Caverly.

Tagar's eyebrows were beginning to twitch. It was a direful warning for those who knew Kreddache.

Yet he kept himself in hand for a moment or two longer. "This slave," he said suavely, "is condemned to death. It is for me—and for me only—to rescue her from that death, if I choose. That which I rescue is mine. You understand? Without any price."

Caverly's answering smile might have seemed almost genial if the observer had missed the look of his eyes. He glanced slowly about the dungeon-like chamber—massive, windowless walls and a heavy, hewn-timber door that fitted like a tight gasket in masonry. Sounds rising within probably would not be heard outside.

He backed to the door. There was a thick, wrought-iron draw bar, which might be bolted into deep stone sockets. He reached behind him and shoved it into place. Nobody could come at his back.

Caverly and Bo and Tagar—three locked in a room. A velvet bell cord dangled from the flagged ceiling. There were no other means of calling the men in the entryway. Caverly's yataghan came suddenly from its sheath. He slashed above his head, and the cut strand of velvet dropped in a coil at his feet.

It was over with—the farcical nonsense of the last few days. He knew that this was to be the ugliest hour of

his life. But it had to come some time. Better to-night. He faced it in sneering, deadly calmness.

"The slave is mine," he said. "I keep her. Nobody can take her from me. Not you—nor all the fiends who call you 'master.'"

CHAPTER XXX.

FORGOTTEN OF ALLAH!

TAGAR looked as though he had suffered a physical stroke. His eyes, suddenly gorged with red, appeared ready to burst in their sockets. Nobody ever before had defied the despotism of the Kreddache. Never had anything of this sort happened to him. He was like a man in a shaking fever. It was as much as he could do to manage his tongue.

"The curse of Allah be upon you!" he said in thick and suffocating speech. "The curse of your father and your fathers' fathers be upon you—you, who no longer are kindred to me!"

Bo started toward Caverly, but his eyes warned her to stand back.

He wanted nobody in the way. He had to kill this man.

From the first moment that he had come into the room Caverly knew what he must do. He was given no choice. It had been settled for him very simply. And when he had finished, his own fate was foredoomed. Even the sidi may not lay a hand upon the sacred overlord and live beyond that day. The tribesmen would exact the full vengeance. Nor could that be helped. What happened to him would happen afterward. But first—Tagar!

"Your curses are to me as though they had never been uttered." Caverly's tone was an insolent and deliberate affront. To-night, he was remorseless. An unclean business is more quickly and decently ended if there is no squeamishness to hinder.

"Son of mine, or not," Tagar

snarled, "you have sealed your fate this night."

"And what is that fate?" inquired Caverly, with his maddening, crooked smile.

"You know well enough—ingrate—traitor!"

"And who is to carry out this decree? Your men have been locked outside. You and I are shut here alone. You have never yet faced a man—have you, Tagar—alone?"

Caverly was quietly calculating every word and move, goading his man, watching the queer, unnatural glint of insanity that had begun to show in the staring eyes.

"My fine decapitator of mice!" he laughed.

Tagar's yataghan came ripping out of its sheath. The keen, crooked blade was capable of taking off an arm or a shoulder or the side of a man's face. It was Tagar's favorite weapon.

There were pistols and daggers and beautifully slim duelling foils ranged in the racks around the walls. Any one of these he might have snatched from the clips.

But it was with the bent-in edge that he had practiced his whole life long. Caverly had known from the first that it would be the yataghan.

"You—you dog!" panted Tagar, his mouth gone slack beyond control. "Now you shall see!"

"Let us see, then! Instead of mice, let us see you decapitate a man!"

In the deathly stillness of the room the crisp rustle of brocaded satins was a sound more terrible even than the whistle of Tagar's blade. He advanced, and slashed. Caverly glided backward just the few inches to give clearance to the point.

Bo Treves had stumbled to one of the arms' racks, and her trembling hands were trying to detach a revolver from its fastenings. "Rainy!" she sobbed. "Oh——"

Caverly caught a fleeting glimpse of her with the gun in her hand.

"No!" he commanded. "No! Save it for yourself, if need be. You—keep out of this. Don't watch! Stay back. I'll handle this."

Tagar was in the throes of homicidal frenzy. He had cut wildly, with such violence that the spent blow nearly swung him off his feet. Caverly might have killed him three times while he was recovering.

But that finishing stroke spelled death, certain and painful, for the man who delivered it. Tagar's wounded body could not be hidden, and Caverly could not hope to escape from Gazim. He stood between the devil and the deadly desert.

It was to be, of course. He had resigned himself to the inevitable. Meanwhile he temporized with fate. Why, he scarcely knew, except that it was human instinct to put off the dreaded moment. But in the end he would kill Tagar, or be killed.

He had not lifted the point of his own weapon from the rug. He stood alert on shifty feet, keen and cool and adequate.

"I had never expected to see a father strike a death blow at his own son," he said witheringly. "Now that I have seen it, I'm going to tell you something, Kreddache. At least, I can spare you that shame when you strike again.

"I am not your son!" he stated, and leaned forward slightly, watching the man's eyes.

Tagar had planted himself for another rush. For an instant he held motionless, his features set in hideous staring. "You lie!" he frothed. "Pariah! Renegade! Forgotten of Allah!"

"I do not lie," said Caverly softly. "I am not the one you think. That one was with a caravan which you and your brave assassins massacred not many nights ago. The Sidi Sassi Kred-

dache—the boy who was coming home to his own people after a long absence. He looked like you, Tagar—your eyes, your beak of a nose, your foolish, lofty manner—you in the flesh—and he's dead——”

“Liar! Vileness! You are—you were my son—Allah forgive me——”

“No! Allah be praised! That shame is not mine!” Caverly was like a picador, placing little stinging darts. He'd torment his man into a staggering, blind fury—in a minute.

“Listen to me, Tagar. The Sidi Sassi was killed that night by almost the first volley that you fired. I stood beside him when he fell. I dug the grave and buried him in the dunes. I borrowed his robes, and the amulet of the Kreddaches, and the ruby ring, and the name. I came to your camp—duped and cheated you.”

Tagar's reply was an inarticulate, throaty screech—as he launched his attack.

The ruddy light from the lamp overhead rippled along the blade that whispered through the arc in the terrible cut. But Caverly had stooped, and stiffened his sword arm.

The rush was broken off just in time to save Tagar from impaling himself on the point. He pulled his body in at the midriff, and breathed with constricted, jerky sounds.

By the sobered, sickened look of his face it was manifest that for the moment he had regained his sanity. He could not help but know that another such unguarded attack would be the finish. So he struggled to win back caution and self-control.

Caverly's sly taunting was as wicked as sword play. He'd have his man gibbering, if he pleased.

“You do not know who I am?” Caverly grinned as he shuffled back on guard.

“Look you, Tagar. I have trimmed and pointed the beard, and changed

from nakedness to magnificent clothes. I have never appeared before you, except with the headcloth shadowing the face. But look——”

Caverly stepped backward. With a swift movement of his hand he stripped off the silk *kufiya* that was draped above his shoulders.

“Look closely, Kreddache!” He lifted his bare head under the bright light of the ceiling lamp. “Think back. You have seen me often. The naked man with the whip scars on his back. The slave—who became a prince.”

Tagar glared like a man caught in a horrible dream. “You—you——” He choked, and could say nothing further.

“The runaway slave, Tagar! The *Rumi* who grew tired of you and walked out of your camp. I swore that I would bring you his head. I have kept my oath. That head that you wanted for your crossroads gibbet. Here it is, Tagar! I have brought it to you. Come and take it!”

“Fiend!” The cry was the senseless, loose-lipped howl of a maniac. “I'll feed you to the buzzards—bit by bit——”

CHAPTER XXXI.

RINGING SWORDS.

CAVERLY was prepared for the attack, yet his own blade barely deflected the slicing blow that came at him almost too swiftly for the eyes to follow. He caught a second blow on the narrow hilt guard. The third, a backhanded swipe, he just managed to meet in “high prime” before his face.

Tagar had suddenly given way to a paroxysm of violence. Right slash and left and the splitting stroke for the skull. All thought of caution had left him. He was hammering at his man from every side and angle, reckless of everything excepting the maddened desire to sink his blade. He grunted heavily with each wasted stroke, but re-

covered with a lightning swiftness; striking and striking again, pressing in.

For those few seconds, Caverly was like a man caught out defenseless in a hailstorm. The swishing of sharp edges, the clash and ring of steel were sounds in a tumult which swirled around him. He was no great *sabreur*, and Kreddache had spent years perfecting his skill with the broad blade.

How Caverly continued to ward away that flashing ring of death, he could not have said—unless it was that Tagar defeated his own purpose by the overwrought frenzy and wildness of his attack.

In the first flurry Caverly had been driven back to the wall. There he had to stand. He was parrying now with an intent focusing of eye and hand and brain. His moment of desperation had brought him a curiously cool synchronization of thought and action, a reflexive quickness such as he had never before known.

Tagar was slashing away now with a murderous determination. But his blows did not follow one another quite so rapidly, nor with such terrific force. He still was formidable, as dangerous as a rabid beast, and yet—the frantic exertions of bone and muscle may not be carried beyond the human limitation.

For the first time Caverly thought he saw an opening, and attempted a grazing riposte, point first. But his antagonist was not as blind defensively as Caverly had imagined.

Tagar met the thrust and made a savage recovery stroke. By the measure of a heart throb Caverly's guard was up in time to save his head. He countered again with a flashing downward thrust. It should have been the end. But Tagar, an instinctive swordsman, had disengaged, and was away.

It was a momentary respite, at any rate. Caverly glided away from the wall, crouching.

He caught sight of Bo, holding

limply to a table. The suffusion of light from a studded lamp gave her face a ghastly look. She was no longer crying. She was watching with fervid, sensitized eyes that would remember every move and turn and incident of this direful scene forever.

Caverly sent her a heartening smile, then his antagonist was upon him again.

He met the onslaught, circling. Blades grazed, scraped, clanged, steel biting into steel. The beautifully complex play of padded practice gives way to a deadly simplicity in sharp-edged combat.

Tagar was sending in his sweeping cuts, battering in ferociously for the fatal opening. Time and time again Caverly's blade met the stroke and sent it slithering.

Once a downward slash got through, and Caverly heard a slight ripping sound as the loose stuff of his coat gaped suddenly from shoulder to waist. He didn't know whether he was hit. He didn't think so. There was no sensation of pain.

He shuffled away. Tagar came again, snorting and blowing. They engaged in a shifting half circle. A vase was knocked off its stand, and a second later the phonograph went crashing.

Caverly side-stepped all at once, left foot behind right. Then he thrust. Tagar leaped backward, and broke off for a moment, trying to regain his breath.

"I know who told you that my slave was a girl," said Caverly, facing the other man, squinting and saturnine. "It was Nakhla."

Something seemed to catch in Tagar's throat. "You—you dare——"

"Nakhla said she was going to tell you," remarked Caverly quietly, "because she was jealous——"

"Nakhla——" Kreddache contrived to get out the one word, but the rest was smothered by the convulsed mus-

cles of the windpipe. He looked as though he might have a fit. His mouth was hanging open, flabby and distorted. The veins of his forehead and temples were swelling back. If he weren't careful he was apt to burst open a blood vessel.

The thought was like a spark flaring up in Caverly's brain—a devilish inspiration. A wild exultance was sweeping through him. The thing was so easy, so frightfully simple: to kill, and leave no trace of any wound. It meant Bo's salvation—his own—

"Bo!" he said suddenly across his shoulder. "One of the rapiers in the rack!"

He did not look around, but continued to watch Tagar. He saw his way clearly now.

The girl made some reply, but Caverly had no sense of what she was saying. His narrow, pitiless gaze was still holding Tagar.

"A rapier!" Caverly shot at Bo. "Have it ready for me. I'll work around to you, and take it. Don't be afraid. This is our night. We're all right—all right, now!"

In the same restrained voice, he shifted once more from English to Arabic.

"You wonder if I know Nakhla? Yes, I know her, Kreddache. We have met. Nights while you were sleeping. The soft moonlit nights—she came to me unveiled."

His kid boots were lightly planted as he waited for the onset, which probably would be the wildest rush he had faced—and the last.

"Nakhla and your slave—meeting in the old stone shrine on the hill. And I made her a promise. Two oaths I have sworn. One to you, and one to the beautiful Nakhla. Of both I am to be acquitted this night. Nakhla and I have agreed that you shall not live beyond the next full moon—"

Tagar came in—bestial, raving.

Foam on his beard, the poisons of the soul clotting his eyes—he was a man lost in a delirious passion to kill and destroy.

Caverly was nearly staggered off his feet by the smashing assault. For a minute or two it seemed as though he were engaged in a dozen directions at once.

Tagar's blade, for a little while, became as a living thing suddenly seized by a demoniac passion. Cutting, chopping, hacking, Caverly was enveloped by the menace of sharpened steel.

The rush drove him back on his heels—back to the wall. There was no chance to fight, even if he wished to deliver his stroke so soon. There was nothing to do but defend himself, blade flung to ringing blade.

To save himself Caverly dodged forward, underneath the hilt, and closed with his man. For a moment he clung to his antagonist's heaving body, gripping Tagar's sword wrist with one hand, his elbow jamming the throat. Locked together they held and strained, until Caverly hurled the man backward, and sprang away.

Bo had a rapier down from the wall. She was circling the table, coming to Caverly. He had a fleeting glimpse of her dazed, stricken face as he fell back to meet her.

Tagar recovered and whirled up his sword, lurching forward again. Those few seconds sufficed for Caverly. His yataghan dropped noiselessly upon the rug, and the corded grip of the rapier was in his hand.

A long and slender blade, clean and cool and delicate. This the tool, if the wrist had the dexterity to use it.

Tagar was upon him, sword uplifted in a hissing, flickering edge of light. The man's eyes were glaring, his panting mouth sagged wide open.

It was the crucial instant. Caverly shifted sidewise. The full-lipped, gaping mouth with its red, arched roof was

his target! To pink his man with a surgical deftness—and leave no visible wound of betrayal.

Along the shining, tapering sliver of steel, Caverly glanced. Then he lunged.

He felt a slight, grating shock running up through wrist and elbow bone. That was all.

Tagar's yataghan finished its stroke, flying end over end across the room to

fall softly upon the cushions of the judgment dais.

Tagar stopped in half stride. No more anger. No more hatred. Nothing more. Only a heap of yellow satins and gold tumbled upon the arabesques of the ancient Kalin rug.

The next section of this Sahara Desert serial will appear in the next issue of **TOP-NOTCH**, on the news stands August 1st.

**Rogues of the Tropics Hunt for Treasure in
PIRATE CAY**

By Lester Dent

The Complete Novel in Our Next Issue

AN ELECTRICAL SWITCHMAN

HIGH in the sky, driving through the black night, an airplane raced above an Eastern airport. Below the plane, the landing field was without lights, shrouded in blackness, impossible to see on this cloudy night.

The pilot's hand gripped the handle of a siren, fastened in the cockpit beside him. The siren sounded, a low moan that grew into a penetrating shriek that could be heard on the ground above the roar of the plane's motor.

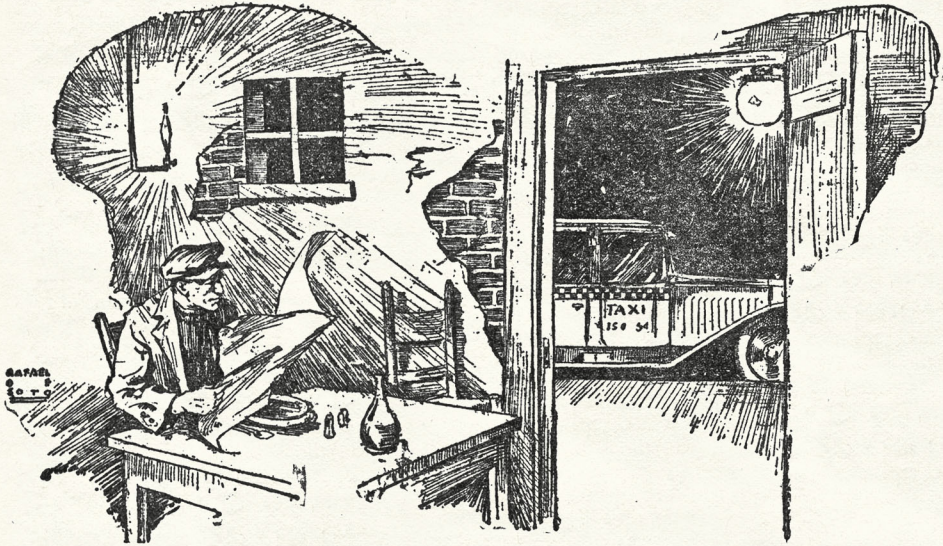
The landing field was suddenly illuminated, though no human hand touched a switch. The wide runways, the whole flat surface of the field, was visible to the pilot. He landed, thanks to an electric contrivance that switched on the lights mechanically.

The receiving horn of the device is similar to the kind found on old-fashioned phonographs. As the siren's note rises from a moan to a shriek, the horn receives a note which is carried to a very delicate glow-tube, known as the Knowles grid glow-tube.

The energy necessary to actuate this tube is about equaled by the amount expended by a fly's crawling one inch up a wall. The impulse received is amplified over a million times, and this impulse instantly sets in motion electric currents which throw switches that light the landing field.

More experiments will be made to test and retest this contrivance until it is found entirely trustworthy. Night flying will be robbed of some of its peril. Machinery, kept in order, never goes to sleep, always responds to signal, and performs its duty. It draws no pay check.

It does not turn on the lights when they are not needed, and the result is a decreased bill for electricity. The apparatus is so sensitive that it picked up a signal from a plane, which could not be heard by listeners on the ground.



Blue Loot

By Albert Chenicek

IT was well after midnight when Clint Gifford parked his cab in front of the all-night restaurant at Twenty-second Street and Michigan Avenue, and went inside for a bite to eat.

A few minutes later, with a cup of coffee and a couple of sweet buns on the broad arm of his chair, he thrust out his legs in a luxurious stretch and swore at the life of a taxi driver.

He was sick of the job, he told himself—absolutely fed up. And, by golly, he was going to quit, no matter what anybody said!

Well, maybe not right away. He'd stick it out to the end of the week, but after Saturday he'd be washed up. That was final! No more cab driving for him—not if he could help it!

The decision brightened him and eased the numerous aches in his body.

A bit more cheerfully, now that he'd promised himself freedom, he glanced about the brilliantly lighted lunch room.

An early edition of a morning newspaper, discarded by a recent diner, was on a near-by chair. Clint Gifford reached over and picked it up. While he munched a bun he looked over the headlines.

One item near the bottom of the front page held his attention:

ANOTHER ORANGE CAB DRIVER ROBBED.

Thief Shoots Victim and Gets Thirty-seven Dollars.

Elmer Wimston, 2683 Western Avenue, a driver for the Orange Cab Company, was shot and robbed of thirty-seven dollars last night by a well-dressed passenger, who turned out to be a thief.

Wimston picked up the man in the Loop, and was told to drive to an address on the

far South Side. The address proved to be a vacant lot. When the cab stopped the passenger ordered Wimston to put up his hands. When Wimston did not obey quickly enough, the thief fired a shot that caught Wimston in the shoulder. Then, in unhurried fashion, the bandit took the money and departed afoot.

Wimston, who will recover, is the sixth Orange Cab driver to be robbed in the last two weeks.

CLINT GIFFORD let the paper drop and stared at the toes of his outstretched feet. H'm! Wimston this time. Kind of tough on him to be laid up—had a wife and two kids. Nice fellow, too. Clint had known the man only a week, but he liked him.

That shot probably went through the glass partition. Clint grinned suddenly. Well, no thief was going to pot *him* that way! His cab had bullet-proof glass. If the other drivers knew he'd been fixed up like that, they'd all probably set up a howl for the same thing!

Clint returned to his cab about a half hour later. After a moment of indecision, he started north along Michigan Avenue.

He got a hail at Sixteenth Street and pulled to the curb. The man who climbed aboard was a sleepy-eyed, tired-looking individual. He named a street intersection on the West Side.

Traveling along Jackson Boulevard, Clint once more slid into the dumps. How he hated the monotonous drone of the motor! No use—he wasn't cut out for a taxi driver!

He reached the designated corner, stopped, opened the rear door, and then noted that his passenger was not moving.

Suddenly alert, Clint got out. The street was rather dark, but enough light came from a lamp to show that the man was sprawled, relaxed, in one corner.

"I say!" said Clint. "Here we are!"

No answer, no movement. Clint reached in with one arm and shook the man. Still no response. He felt along

the side of the interior, found the mechanism controlling the window, and lowered the glass. Through the aperture he peered into the man's face.

"Fainted!" Clint said aloud. "Hell of a note! But a little water ought to fix you up, mister! And"—he looked about—"lucky thing there's a fountain over there."

As Clint made for the fountain, he slipped a pair of gloves on his hands. Then from his pocket he brought out a handkerchief and a bottle. His back was toward the cab as he held the white square over the fountain bowl and poured the liquid from the bottle upon it.

He returned to the machine. Through the open window, he placed the wet cloth upon the passenger's face, patting it down gently but firmly.

"That ought to fix you up!" he said.

Five minutes—and still no movement.

"Man," Clint exclaimed, "you must have been drinking poisonous stuff! Hospital for you, I guess!"

Leaving the handkerchief in place, Clint got behind the wheel and drove off furiously. St. Anthony's was the nearest hospital.

Shortly Clint had the cab under its portico. Several jumps took him up the front steps. Inside, he stopped abruptly, turned to look back through the door—and waited.

He saw the passenger hastily emerge from the taxi. The man gave one glance at the hospital doors and started running.

Clint, grinning broadly, stepped out.

"So long, Mr. Bandit!" he called after the fleeing figure. "To-morrow you'll feel as blue as you look!"

The man stopped, pawed at his face. Clint ran down the steps and leaped for the front seat of the cab. He caught the sudden movement of one arm. He had the machine going when the first shot came.

YEAH," Clint said into a drug-store telephone, some ten minutes later, "he figured I'd get into the car and bend over to see what was wrong, but I fooled him. I'd sort of expected that old trick—that was why I had that chemist fella fix up the bottle of nice permanent blue dye for me. The poor simp thought the handkerchief I put on his face was wet with water, but he knows better now!

"What? Oh, I was sure, all right! I noticed his hands were too ready for

action, and when I looked through the window I saw his eyelids move! Then I gave him a chance to convict himself.

"Yeah, sure, chief! It ought to be easy for the police to nab him—all they got to do is locate a bird with the blues! It's stuff he won't be able to wash off!

"And listen, chief! Next case has got to be something that isn't connected with taxicabs, or the Peerless Agency is going to lose its best sleuth, by resignation, and I ain't fooling!"

LADY FLASH

By Gene D. Robinson

The race-track crowd goes wild as thoroughbreds run neck and neck.

In the next issue of TOP-NOTCH.

A GLAMOROUS CHIEFTAIN

LIKE a page out of some old manuscript, telling of the exploits of long dead heroes, are the stories about Bacha Sakao, formerly a water boy, then a rebel chief, who gained the throne of Afghanistan recently. Equally unreal to us of to-day is that interesting country.

In Afghanistan, the women want to stay veiled. The parliament members refused to wear trousers, preferring native costume. Amanullah, the king of Afghanistan, tried to initiate reforms, to modernize the country's customs.

A rebellion was the result, Bacha Sakao, at the head of three thousand outlaws, led his men from the mountains.

Amanullah, the king, tried diplomacy. He sent Rais Baladia, one of his ministers, dressed like an up-to-date American, and offered the outlaw chieftain big pay and a colonelcy in the royal army, if he would not lead the rebellion. Bacha Sakao refused the offer, detained the minister, and telephoned to the royal palace.

"Rais Baladia speaking," said the outlaw chief, imitating the minister's voice. "I have captured that insolent water boy. What is your majesty's wish concerning him?"

Amanullah, the king, replied: "Execute him!"

Bacha Sakao imprisoned the minister, called his outlaws about him, and led them to the capital, proclaiming himself king.

It is said this rebel chieftain guides his horse with his knees, dispensing with a bridle, which leaves both hands free to use the two modern rifles and three revolvers with which he is armed.

You—and Your Career

By John Hampton

A Department of Interviews with Successful Men, and Information and Advice for Ambitious Men.

GEORGE W. LOFT, Candy Manufacturer.

DURING your vacation this year, take a whole day and calmly consider the year just finished. Look at that year as if it were twelve months in the life of some one else.

You'll find you've made mistakes during that year. The man isn't alive who is flawless, who doesn't make some errors, who is always right. Analyze those mistakes and find out why you made them.

It's natural and human for a man to make excuses for his errors, to have an alibi when he's wrong. The trouble with most excuses and alibis is that they're not convincing—all the time. Sometimes the only man who believes an alibi is the fellow who's trying to put it over. The rest of the world is unconvinced.

During your vacation, check up on your alibis. Look over your excuses. If they're good ones, don't use 'em much during the year to come. Save 'em until you need 'em bad! And even then don't use 'em.

If your alibis and excuses are not particularly good, discard them. Don't get others—the world is full of men who can explain anything away.

"I hadn't the time." "It was not worth while." "I wasn't told." "I forgot." "I didn't really want to." These are very popular with inefficient men, with failures, with fellows who "never seem to get ahead." Such men are

often astonished at what other people are doing. They can't understand why!

"What, you work on that at *night!*" they say in astonishment. "That's cuckoo! Nobody asked you to! Why try to remember that stuff? You take life too seriously."

During this day of your vacation, think about the people you know and estimate where they'll be in a year. Figure out why! Then estimate where *you* will be. And figure out why!

Why do some people succeed? What is the secret? Here's an interview with a man whose name is familiar to you.

That success and hard work are inseparable is the conclusion of George W. Loft. At the time this article was written, he was head of the factory and forty candy stores of the Loft chain, and a director in nearly two dozen other concerns. He is a busy man, a hard-working man, in spite of his millions.

"Some men may succeed with less effort than others," he remarked. "But they are either extremely fortunate, or higher-gearred mentally than the average man."

Mr. Loft is a big man, big and lean and alert. His ruddy skin and clear blue eyes indicate good health. He gives the impression of boundless energy, carefully controlled.

"Hard work was my method," he remarked, "often eighteen hours a day, and day after day. And I was economical, thrifty. You see, my father

operated a small store in Jersey City Heights, when I was a youngster."

The ten-year-old boy, interested in candy, found that what was sold for a "penny a piece" cost wholesale forty-five cents for a hundred pieces. So he started saving his pennies. With less than a dollar as capital, he started in business.

He canvassed the small shops in the neighborhood. He sold them candy at twenty pieces for twelve cents, a net profit of fifteen cents on each forty-five cents invested.

Every morning, he got up early, carrying a pack of candy over his shoulder. He called on customers before reaching school. When lessons were over, he took up his pack and canvassed again.

He continued until he listed every small store within walking distance as a customer of his. Often he was out soliciting and delivering until after eight thirty p. m.

When a boy of ten sticks to his job that way, he'll develop into a successful business man. George Loft is now sixty-four years of age, but not sixty-four years old. He is a live wire, alert and keen and always on the job.

When asked why he was so ambitious at ten years of age, Mr. Loft shrugged his shoulders.

"I saw everybody else making money. I decided that if grown men could, there was nothing to prevent me."

He canvassed his trade daily. His business grew. His territory developed and widened. For a year George Loft went on his rounds, then his father moved his business to Barclay Street, New York, and the Jersey Heights store was vacant. The youngster persuaded his father to let him use the vacant premises.

George used the shop as a warehouse to store the stock of candies that he bought from the wholesalers. From this center he distributed candy as

needed in the territory that he had developed. Every day he went to business just as a grown man did. His business grew and kept on growing. The making of deliveries began to absorb too much of his time.

So George Loft got an assistant. He hired one of his "buddies" for five cents a day to help out. The helper stayed in the store and sold over the counter to the retail trade, but this was only before and after school hours. Both young merchants were still schoolboys.

When he was fourteen years old, George Loft gave up his retail store. He came to New York to learn the candy business. He went to work for a confectioner named Steiner. Young Loft was paid two dollars a week.

His employer made old-fashioned peppermint candies. There was lost motion in the man's old-time methods. George believed that an improvement could be effected. After the third day he suggested to the boss that by working harder and putting in longer hours the two of them could double the output.

The candy maker agreed. They started to work an hour earlier every day. In the evenings they put in two additional hours. All day long they hustled. Just as George Loft had foreseen, the output was doubled. His wages were raised to four dollars a week.

He learned everything that Steiner knew about making candy. After a year, George Loft was considered a practical confectioner by all who knew him.

Loft senior, was operating a little candy shop and making candy for out-of-town customers. His traveling salesman left the job suddenly. George was anxious to get back at selling.

He asked for the job and offered to work for a quarter of what the salesman had been getting. His father hesitated. At last George convinced him

by guaranteeing to turn in more orders than his predecessor.

"All right," said his father. "Tomorrow you leave for Providence, Pawtucket and Boston and near-by towns. Take three days for the trial. If you make good, the job is yours. If you don't—back you come."

George Loft was full of enthusiasm. He tackled a man's job. In three days he turned in as many orders as the previous salesman had secured in three weeks.

As he told of his experiences Mr. Loft's mobile face mirrored the variety of emotions he had gone through. He smiled when he spoke of his enthusiasm. A worried look shadowed his cheerful face for a moment when he mentioned his actual beginning on a man's job.

"I knew economy then, too." He smiled. "I was allowed a dollar for carfare and another dollar for a bed."

"Nearly always I managed to get a bed for fifty cents, and whenever I could possibly do so, I walked and saved carfare." He saved on his meals, too, for he realized that dollars were born of nickels. "Instead of paying ten cents for rolls and coffee every morning," he said, "I'd go into a bakery and buy six rolls for five cents and take them to a lunch cart and eat them with my five-cent cup of coffee. Six rolls lasted two days—five cents saved."

Fifteen or sixteen years he stuck to the traveling salesman's job. It wasn't all roses, Mr. Loft admitted ruefully. He had his ups and downs, good weeks and bad weeks.

During his years as a salesman he mastered every detail of the art of selling candy. He learned the wholesale and the retail viewpoints.

He came in off the road and went into his father's store. He brought his same firm determination with him. He brought the same principles of economy and that capacity for hard work. In

three years he was ready to branch out into business for himself.

He rented a store at 54 Barclay Street, New York. It was an uphill pull for a long time. His capital was limited. He needed all the knowledge that he had gained about the candy business, both manufacturing and marketing. His tireless nervous energy never failed him. He could not afford a clerk, a porter or a helper of any kind.

He got to his shop shortly after five o'clock every morning. He accomplished a day's work before more people got down to their jobs. In the early mornings he went into the basement and made his candy. Batch after batch was turned out before business hours.

When the store doors were opened, he had to stay in the shop to wait on customers, but off and on he slipped into the basement to watch the candy that he kept making all day. In the evenings after he closed the store, his work wasn't over. He swept up, put things in order, decorated the windows and got everything ready for the next day. He was handling about four jobs.

"Often," he said, "I had to go downstairs in the evening without supper and get busy on the candy for the next day. Those early days in Barclay Street were not easy ones. Often I spent fully eighteen hours in that place."

Besides all this manual labor, he had the responsibility of his investment. Always he was devising some plan to draw more business. Many schemes were tried out, but he found the practice of distributing free samples to be the most successful. As soon as he decided this was the best method, he hired a porter.

The man was sent out every day at noon. He carried a large basketful of samples marked "Candy sold by Loft, 54 Barclay Street, for ten cents a pound."

This system proved to be ninety per

cent efficient, or for every five hundred samples distributed, he could count on about four hundred and fifty sales. Another scheme was to hire a boy and set him turning a confectioner's revolving pan in the cellar, in full view of the sidewalk.

The pan appeared to be filled with candy in the making, but actually, it contained coal, which rattled and made more noise than candy would have. Great crowds used to stop and look in. A large percentage of them also bought sweets of one kind or another.

The volume of his first year's turnover was seventy thousand dollars, which is very remarkable for a one-man business.

Out of the big volume of the first year his personal profit was ten thousand dollars. A nice year's business, especially at that time when ten thousand dollars represented almost a fortune. George Loft kept hustling. He took one thousand dollars for living expenses and put the remaining nine thousand dollars right back into the business.

Two years later he opened his second store, in Cortlandt Street. His retail business was growing by leaps and bounds, but it still required his constant attention.

The panic of 1907 came, and his father's business failed. Young Loft, though he had no connection with his father's concern and was under no obligation to do so, paid off the outside stockholders in the business and assumed the debts of the venture. It was a courageous step to take at that time.

In those days of unremitting hard work and ceaseless mental effort, he coined the slogan that is as famous as his candies, "A Penny a Pound Profit." He reasoned that this slogan would appeal to many people.

He saw its special grip upon the women. He realized that most candy is

bought for women. The "Penny a Pound Profit" caught the feminine imagination. Mr. Loft believes that to this slogan should go the credit for much of the success of Loft, Inc.

"I decided," declared Mr. Loft, "to let the other fellows sell higher-priced candy to young men for their year of eighteen months of courtship, and that I'd sell candy to husbands for the family for fifteen or twenty years."

The Loft concern has developed into one of the biggest candy-store chains in America. The Loft products are nationally known. To-day the forty stores do an annual business in excess of ten million dollars.

George Loft is not a man to be held down to one business, regardless of its proportions. His interests broadened. He became interested in politics and served as congressman from the Two Hundred and Thirteenth New York District from 1913 to 1917.

Besides owning a large per cent of the stock in his own company, Mr. Loft is a director in a number of corporations, including the office of chairman of the board of a New York bank which he organized. He owns a number of sugar plantations in Cuba and has large holdings in many industries around New York.

Hard work, economy, intelligence, brought success to George Loft. The same qualities will bring success to-day. He found a business that interested him, and he devoted many hours of work to it. Are you equally interested in the business you're in?

Unless your heart is in your job, you'll not work hard. Unless you want to save money, you won't be economical. Unless your business interests you, you won't function intelligently in it.

There are many men slaving for a living wage in uncongenial occupations who might be splendid successes in another field. According to an authority,

three out of four men aged forty have not yet found their proper business environment. Are you sure that you are in the right field? Are you a salesman who should be an office executive? Are you a merchant when you should be a musician?

Study yourself, and find out the sort of work for which you're best fitted. Write down the qualities you possess. There are many fair bookkeepers who would be happier, healthier, and more prosperous if they were mechanics. Analyze yourself thoroughly.

Just writing down your ambitions will enable you to find out much about yourself. Jotting down your hopes and ideals helps tremendously. Your problems will be crystallized, clarified, if you get them into words.

In this department, men who are ambitious can talk over their problems. You are invited to ask questions, comment upon the letters that appear here, discuss the replies that are made to these questions. Address all letters to John Hampton, care of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. A reply will be mailed to all letters sent in, and questions of general interest will be answered in these columns.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I've a fear of being penniless in my old age. I've seen these homeless derelicts who sleep on park benches in the summer, and I don't want to be without a shelter for my weary bones when I'm sixty.

What's the best way to make sure that I'll have enough to keep me in comfort when I'm old? I'm thirty years old, make fifty dollars a week, no dependents.

T. M. L.

New York.

There's no reason why you should fear old age, provided you are willing to economize. A number of different ways of securing financial independence are open to you.

You might take out an endowment insurance policy, maturing at age fifty or sixty. You can invest your savings

in building and loan association shares. You can buy bonds on the installment plan. You can purchase real estate, if your judgment of values is sound. You can deposit your spare cash in a savings bank, where the payment of interest is sure.

You say you want enough to keep you "in comfort" when you're old. Different men have different ideas about what constitutes "comfort." If your requirements are modest, your ambition probably can be gratified.

Lack of space prevents my going thoroughly into this question of how to secure financial independence. Additional information is being sent to you direct.

H. A. D., Montana. If you can give half an hour a day to the study of a foreign language, by all means take it up. Better still, endeavor to devote an hour a day to this study.

Not only will fluency in another tongue bring you in contact with people who speak that language, it will improve your command of English. Also, by reading in the acquired language, you will learn about literature, customs, habits of thought, philosophy—in fact, a new world will be open to you. The cultural advantage of knowing another language is considerable.

S. T., New Hampshire. As manufacturers long ago discovered, the appearance of an article affects its price and sale. A man is more likely to buy and to pay a better price for an article that is attractive to his eye.

This is equally true of employers when they are in the market for men. Don't be a dude or a fop in dress, but dress carefully and well. Be conservative in the colors of your socks, neckties, shirts and linen, keep your shoes shined, your nails filed and clean. Look neat.

Buy well-cut clothes of good quality. Wait until the stores advertise sales, then stock up, rather than invest in

cheap suits that will not wear satisfactorily or keep their shape.

Remember, your employer may never see your home. But he will see you at least once—when he hires you—and you may come to his attention later. Let his eyes be pleased by the sight of a self-respecting, carefully attired, and well-groomed employee.

H. W., Arkansas. From the woes and worries mentioned in your letter, one thing stands clearly evident. Most of your troubles are imaginary.

You're inclined to attach too much import to minor matters, forgetting that you have most of the really valuable things in life—a home, a sympathetic, understanding wife, two children, health, a position that gives you a respectable income, and money in the bank.

Enjoy what you have, while you have it. Don't anticipate calamities and disasters. Prepare for the future, but remember that you're living in the present.

Forget what may happen. Get into the habit of thinking cheerful thoughts, instead of gloomy ones. Stop reading realistic literature and try humorists for a change. A list of books is being sent to you.

W. Q. L., Mississippi. You've answered your own question, settled your own problem, as you knew when you finished your letter. Many business men go around feeling soggy and stupid, not knowing what is the matter, when what they need is exercise.

Golf would be better for you than

tennis. Tennis is too strenuous for a man of your age and weight, if played sincerely and earnestly. You can play golf casually, without strain or fierce exertion, as few holes as you like. Better not do more than eighteen holes at a time for the first month or so. Better still, consult your family doctor and abide by his advice as to the number of holes you should play.

How about a few exercises in the morning before going to work? They'll wake you up. Be conservative; don't overdo 'em. The U. S. army setting-up exercises are very good, as any A. E. F. vet will testify.

A. S. M., Kansas. Instead of discussing your constructive ideas with your immediate superior, take them up with a higher authority. Make no mention of the fact that your ideas have, in the past, been submitted by this man as if they were his own.

Be sure that your animosity toward him does not appear, is not suspected. Tactfully give him credit for originality, if his name comes into the conversation. Make no accusations against him. Do not try to climb up in the estimation of the "higher-up" by pulling down your enemy.

The thief, the crook, the double-crosser—these all meet their just deserts in the end. Before that end arrives, they suffer it in anticipation, fear many times that the moment has arrived.

Address all letters to John Hampton, care of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

Write it to

JOHN HAMPTON, care of *Top-Notch Magazine*

79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

A Talk With You

News and Views by the
Editor and Readers

JULY 15, 1929

Take a look at the line-up of stories in our next issue! You'll find it on the next page, for your convenience and information. And—by the way!—is your news dealer putting aside a copy of this magazine for you? Ask him to do so.

WHEN it comes to new ideas and novelties, we've got to hand out praise to the authors who contribute to this magazine. You'll find their stories are up-to-the-minute, peppy yarns of to-day. We're equally proud of the readers of this publication, for they appreciate modern stories, written about people of to-day.

Glance over the pages of this issue, and you'll see stories as new and fresh and vital as to-morrow's newspaper. Up-to-date, live-wire, human beings, users and owners of automobiles and radio sets, the kind who are living in 1929, want to read 1929-model fiction.

In our next issue, you'll find just as fresh, entertaining and vital fiction as you found in this number, with improvements.

There's a fast-moving action-adventure story in our next number, called "Pirate Cay," which will fascinate you to the last word. Its author, Lester Dent, is a newcomer to our pages, but he writes like a veteran story-teller.

Earl and Marion Scott, whose stage experiences are many, though they are young in years, have written a behind-the-scenes story of the theatrical world containing a new idea. It's called "Jinx House," and is about a theater that—

but we'll let you read it, complete in our next issue.

Another radio-cop story, by Vic Whitman, called "Hot Music," is in our next issue, together with "The Headless Monarch," by F. N. Litten. Litten's yarn is another adventure of "Ace" Dallas, of the army intelligence service, the roving flyer who is called in, to solve another perplexing border mystery.

For sport-story enthusiasts, we've secured "Lady Flash," a horse-racing story by Gene D. Robinson, which will give a tremendous "kick" to every one who has ever thrilled to the sight of thoroughbreds thundering down the home stretch in a hotly contested horse race.

John Hampton's series of articles, "You—And Your Career," will be continued. These articles are printed exclusively in this magazine, and are intended for every ambitious man among our readers. You are invited to use this department.

Here's a note from Albert M. Treynor, author of the serial "Flaming Sands," the serial that has aroused so much enthusiasm. A picture of Mr. Treynor, and one of his snow-white police dogs, is printed herewith.

Albert M. Treynor speaking:

Yes, that's a white police dog. Not albino, but a black-nosed, dark-eyed youngster, of a rare and royal strain of snowy shepherds out of Prussia.

The story of the mother of these pups has the pathos and the triumph of the ugly ducklings and the Cinderella myths. She arrived in New York in a crate, three years ago—a broken, frightened, wild, little four-month-old puppy. What had happened to her during her travels, I do not know. But no soldier ever came out of the trenches with a more hopeless case of shell shock.

For days and weeks and months she lived like a thing in the throes of dreadful nightmares. Seeing things—shadows, ghosts,

demons. Not slinking or cowering, but more like a wilderness creature hemmed in by enemies, frantically vigilant, sleepless almost, trying and trying for the way of escape.

I learned to love her for what she was, for what she might have been. It was nearly a year before I could get close enough to her to touch her with my hand. Then one night, while I was lying by the fire reading, she came uninvited and put her nose under my chin, and stayed there. If it had been the Witch of Endor I would have been less surprised and much less thrilled. On that night she became my dog.

Then somebody suggested that motherhood might be good for her. We found a prize-winning sire, a fine-bred, sweet-natured dog. There were puppies. Four snows, a sable, a fawn, and one black-and-silver-tipped, like the gorgeous, lustrous furs you see around the necks of expensively dressed women.

So Mrs. Wild-dog came into her own. She realized what remarkable things these puppies were. She came out into the daylight. She turned into a flock of nursemaids. She loved to receive visitors. She adored having people come and coo over the offspring. Excepting one bird who snuck into the kennel one night and attempted to kidnap a white one. Him she pinned to the wall, and held him so, until I rushed to his help and stood in the breach while he made his get-away.

There is not an ounce of fear in any one of those seven pups. They're almost grown

to doghood now. The old lady and the two white ones maul one another around in the sunlight, and sleep nights, like honest, civilized people. And don't let anybody or anything get fresh with these pampered youngsters, or that timid, shy mamma of theirs simply will wade in with everything she's got.

ALBERT M. TREYNOR.



ALBERT M. TREYNOR

Buy the next TOP-NOTCH, out August 1st

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A long, complete, rapid-action story of mystery and romance in the tropics.

JINX HOUSE, by Earl and Marion Scott

Something new and different in the way of stories—a jinx theater and how the jinx was broken.

HOT MUSIC, by Vic Whitman

Another radio-cop story by a well-known writer—nuff said!

LADY FLASH, by Gene D. Robinson

Sleek thoroughbreds thunder down the track as the crowds roar encouragement.

YOU—AND YOUR CAREER, by John Hampton

An interesting department, found exclusively in TOP-NOTCH.

Other good stories by other good authors.

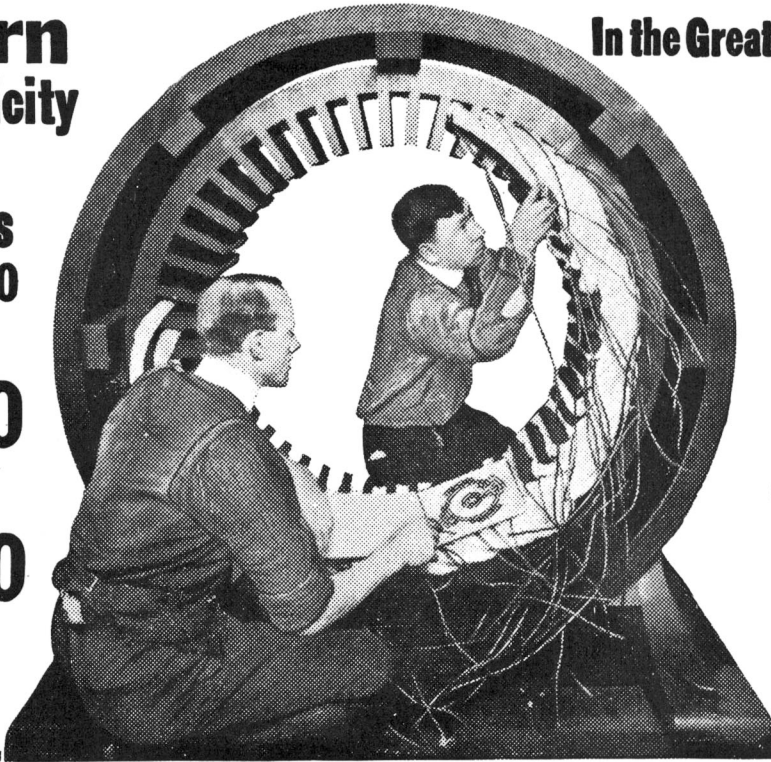
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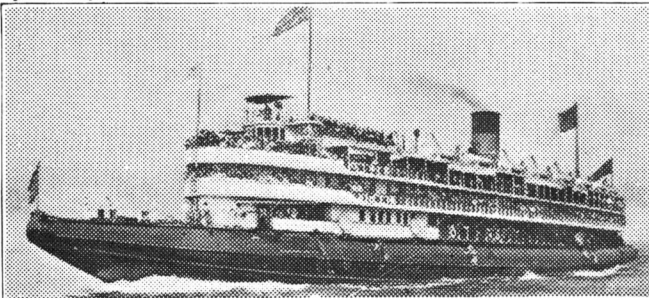
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