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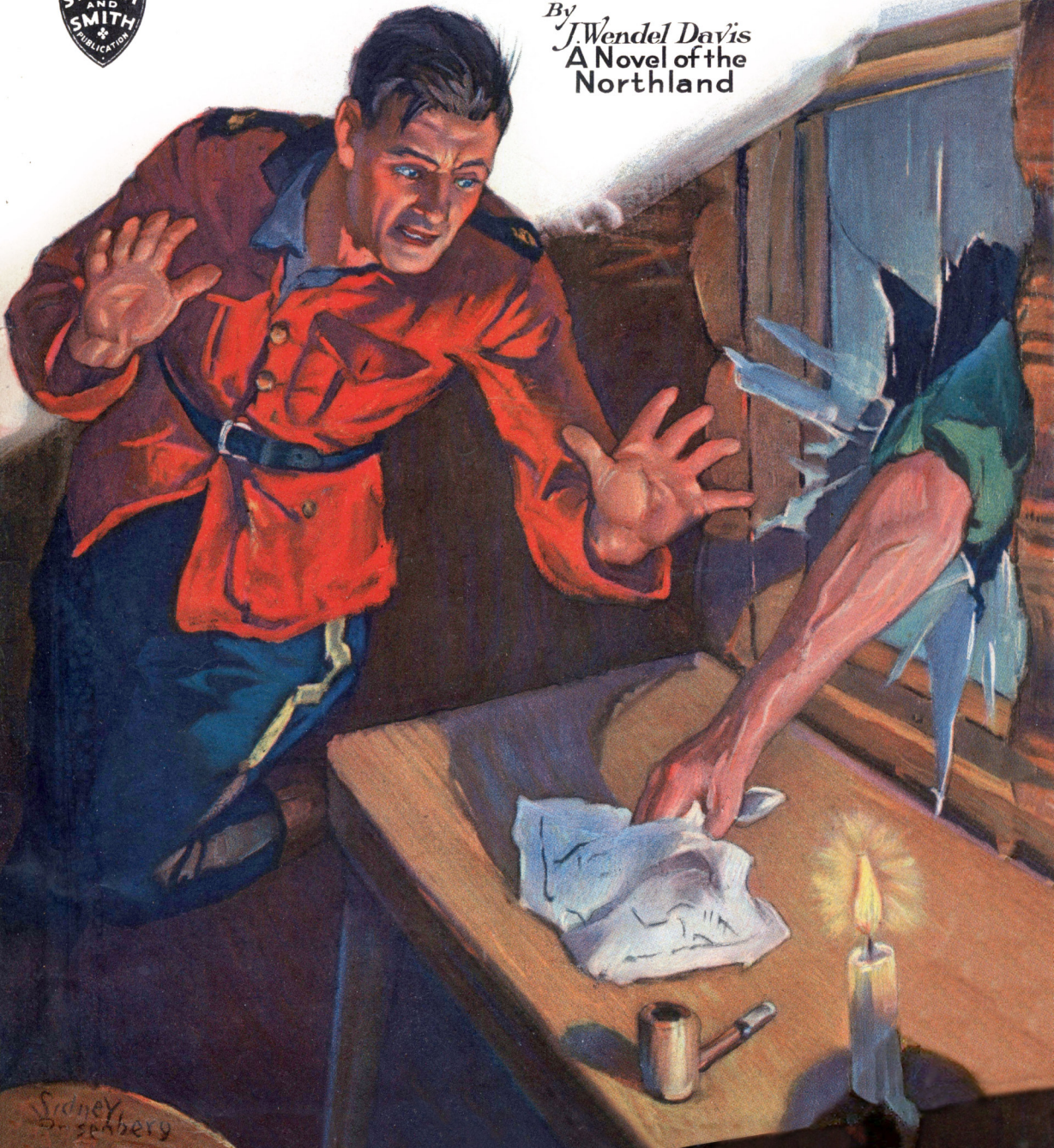
Magazine



THE GREAT WHITE BARRIER

SECOND MAR. NUMBER
ON SALE FEB. 15, 1930

By
J. Wendel Davis
A Novel of the
Northland



Sidney
S. Seabery

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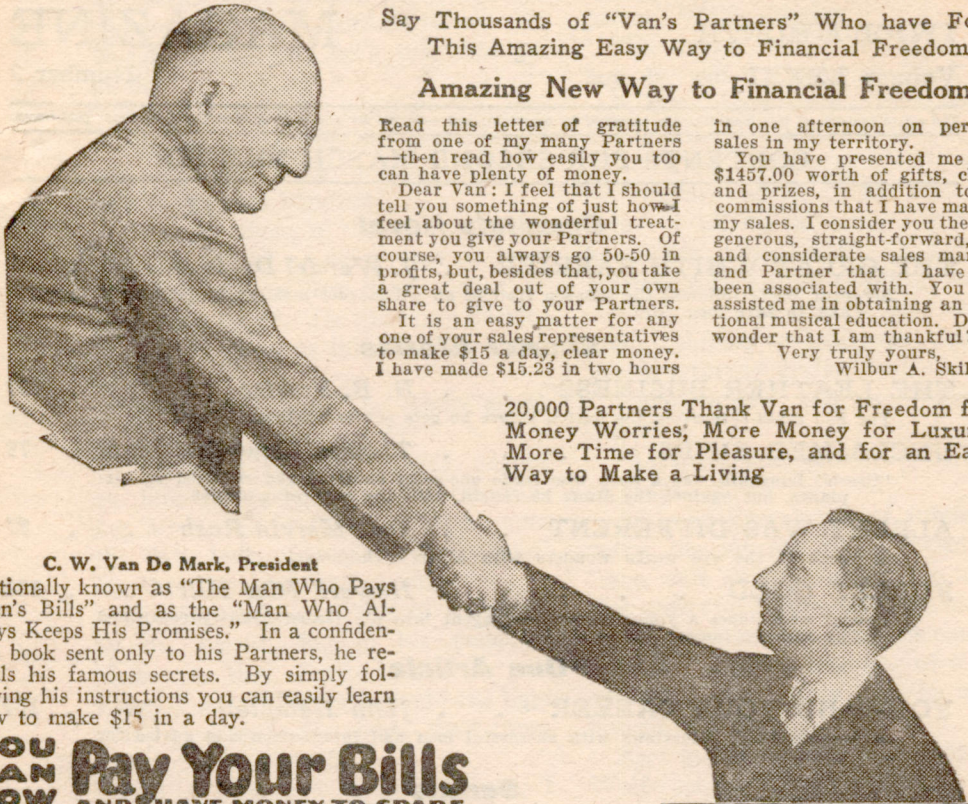
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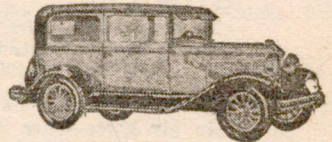
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TWICE-A-MONTH

MAGAZINE

Volume LXXXI

Number 2

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Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 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, 1930, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1930, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 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 March 15, 1930.

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They gave me the "ha-ha" when I offered to play ... but I was the life of the party after that



THE first day of Dorothy's house party at the shore had been a huge success. After swimming, boating and golfing all were ready for the wonderful dinner that followed.

"Well, folks," said Bill as we left the table, "I'm all set for a good dance."

"Fine!" cried Dorothy, "Dick can make the banjo hum. Who'll play the piano?"

All looked at one another foolishly.

"Jim, you play, don't you?" asked Dot.

"Yes, I'll play 'Far, Far Away,'" laughed Jim.

"Well, then, Mabel, will you help us out?"

"Honestly, Dot, I hate to admit it, but I can't play a note," she answered.

It certainly looked as if the party were going flat.

Then I Offered to Play
"If you folks can stand it," I offered shyly, "I'll play for you."

The crowd instantly burst out into laughter.

"You may be able to play football, Jack, but you can't tackle a piano."

"I've never heard you play a note and I've known you all your life," cut in another.

As I strode to the piano I chuckled to myself; I had a surprise in store for them.

No one knew what to expect. They thought I was about to make a fool of myself.

Then—I struck the first snappy chords of that foot-loosing fox-trot, "St. Louis Blues." Dick, dumfounded, almost dropped his banjo. But in a flash he had picked up the rhythm and was strum-

ming away like mad.

The crowd was all dancing in a jiffy. Fox-trots and waltzes—with rests few and far between.

After a good round of dancing I decided to give them some real music and began a beautiful Indian love lyric.

The couples were now seated quietly about the room, entranced by that plaintive melody.

No sooner had the last soft notes died away than I was surrounded by my astonished friends.

"How wonderful, Jack! Why haven't you played for us before?"

"How long have you been studying?"

"Why have you kept it a secret all these years when you might have been playing for us?"

"Who gave you lessons? He must be wonderful!"

I Reveal My Secret
Then I explained how I had made up my mind to go in for something besides sports.

I wanted to entertain others—to be popular. But when I thought of the great expense and long study and practice required, I hesitated.

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I was a little skeptical at first, but I sent for the free booklet and free demonstration lesson. The moment I saw it I was convinced and sent for the complete course.

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Realizing that many ambitious men cannot afford to go to college, this famous school, noted for its plain, practical, easily-mastered instruction, has worked out a plan whereby everyone can get actual College Drafting Training at home. As a result the top-notch jobs of this profitable profession are now within your easy reach. Think of it! The same fine drawing outfits, the same simple lessons and the same practical training as prepared and taught at the college!

Fascinating—Simple As A. B. C.

It's just like playing a fascinating game. No hard textbooks—no involved problems to solve. This astonishing new course is so different from ordinary "schooling" and so easy to master that you will be surprised and delighted with your progress.

Drawing Outfits FREE of Extra Cost

A full set of fine drawing instruments in handsome pocket case, special drawing table and valuable drawing outfit are included without extra cost. You are furnished with everything necessary to big-pay training.

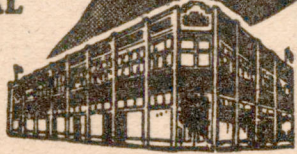
Don't Delay—Act Now!

If you are sincere in your desire to get out of the rut and step into a high-salaried drafting position, investigate this new home-study method at once. The coupon brings free trial lesson and full details that will prove to you that here is just the certified training you want. Mail it now—no obligation.

CHICAGO TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Dept. B-248, Home Study Division
118 E. 26th St. Chicago, Ill.

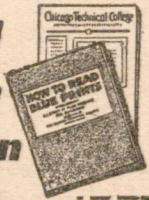
If you live nearby, visit the College. See how we train Draftsmen for Big Pay Jobs. More than 1000 attend every year.



**NOW
FREE
Sample Lesson
and Book**

If the news of this wonderful home study College Training In Drafting sounds too good to be true, mail the coupon below for free trial lesson and interesting literature. Convince yourself of the merits of this approved training that will prepare you for a top-notch drafting job in a short time. No obligation—so act at once.

**Mail
The
Coupon**



**CHICAGO TECHNICAL COLLEGE,
Dept. B-248, Home Study Division,
118 E. 26th St., Chicago, Ill.**

Please send me at once the sample lesson and complete facts about your new system that enables men to master College Drafting Training at home just as you teach it at College in Chicago. This does not obligate me in any way.

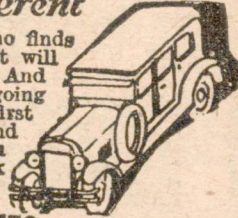
Name.....
Address.....
Town..... State.....
Age..... Occupation.....

() Check here only if you prefer to come to Chicago for our short course in Drafting at Chicago Tech. Opportunities to earn while learning.

**\$ 3100⁰⁰ IN PRIZES!! HUDSON 6
1ST PRIZE**

Find the Dollar Sign that is different

Because it will mean money to you. Every person who finds the different Dollar Sign (\$) and takes an active part will absolutely receive a handsome reward. You can't lose. And besides, some one who mails in this announcement is going to receive a LATEST MODEL HUDSON COACH, first prize. One of the Dollar Signs is different. Mark it and send this ad to me at once. If your eyes are sharp you may be the first to solve the puzzle correctly. Look closely—examine each \$—they are all alike but one. Rush your answer with your name and address.



217 OTHER WONDERFUL PRIZES

Besides this luxurious Hudson we are going to give Absolutely Free 217 other prizes! Don't delay a minute. **THIS IS NOT A MAGAZINE CONTEST!** \$675.00 Extra for Promptness

Everyone answering this advertisement will receive a valuable award. Win the Hudson and I will give you \$675.00 Cash Extra if you're prompt. Every prize guaranteed and will be paid promptly. Think what it means if you win!

Name

Address..... Town.....

BEAUVILLE CO., Dept. A 49700 East Sixth Ave., Des Moines, Iowa

**10 Inches Off
Waistline In
35 Days**

"I reduced from 48 inches to 38 inches in 35 days," says R. E. Johnson, of Akron, O., "just by wearing a Director Belt. Stomach now firm, doesn't sag and I feel fine."

The Director Belt gets at the cause of fat and quickly removes it by its gentle, kneading, massaging action on the abdomen, which causes the fat to be dissolved and absorbed. Thousands have proved it and doctors recommend it as the natural way to reduce. Stop drugs, exercises and dieting. Try this easy way.

Sent on Trial

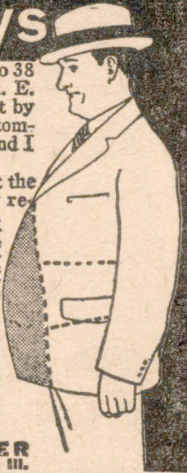
Let us prove our claims. We'll send a Director for trial. If you don't get results you owe nothing. You don't risk a penny. Write for trial offer, doctors' endorsements and letters from users. Mail the coupon NOW!

LONDON & WARNER
332 S. La Salle St., Chicago, Ill.

Landon & Warner, Dept. C-33, 332 S. La Salle, Chicago
Gentlemen: Without cost or obligation on my part please send me details of your trial offer.

Name.....

Address.....



**TOBACCO
Habit Overcome Or No Pay**

Over 500,000 men and women used Superba Remedy to help stop Cigarettes, Cigars, Pipe, Chewing or Snuff. Write for full treatment on trial. Contains no dope or habit forming drugs. Costs \$2.00 if successful, nothing if not. SUPERBA CO A-10, Baltimore, Md.

**AUTO RUNS 59 MILES
ON GALLON OF GAS**

Automobile engineers who worked for years in an effort to reduce gasoline consumption have found the solution in a marvelous invention that fits all cars. An actual test made by one of the engineers showed 59 miles on a gallon of gas. Thousands of car owners have already installed this new invention. They not only report amazing gas savings but are also surprised to find quicker pick-up, instant starting, smoother running motors and disappearance of carbon. E. Oliver, 999-104A Third St., Milwaukee, Wisc., for a limited time is offering a free device to those who will help introduce it. He also needs men everywhere to make over \$100 weekly in their own territory taking care of local business. Write him at once for free sample and big money making offer.—Adv.

R. T. I. R. T. I. QUALIFIES YOU TO MAKE MONEY AND ITS SERVICE KEEPS YOU UP-TO-THE-MINUTE ON THE R. T. I. NEWEST DEVELOPMENTS IN RADIO, TELEVISION AND TALKING PICTURES

RADIO TELEVISION-TALKING PICTURES

TUNE IN ON R.T.I.

BIG MONEY NOW!

More to Come

Radio now offers ambitious men the greatest Money-Making Opportunity the world has ever seen! Hundreds of trained service men are needed by radio dealers, jobbers, and manufacturers!

GOOD JOBS are open in all branches of Radio, where qualified men easily earn \$60 to \$100 per week and even \$10,000 a year jobs are plentiful.

BIG MONEY for spare-time Radio Work is easily made in every city and village. You can now qualify for this Big-Pay work quickly through R. T. I. Get the Big Money Now and go up and up in this Big Pay field. The Radio industry calls for More Men, and R. T. I. supplies what the industry wants you to know.

Supervised by Radio Leaders

R. T. I. training is prepared and supervised by prominent men in radio, television and talking picture engineering; distributing; sales; manufacturing; broadcasting, etc. These men know what you must know to make money in Radio. You learn easily in spare time at home with the R. T. I. wonderful combination Testing Outfits, Parts, Work Sheets, Job Tickets. It is easy, quick and practical—covers everything in Radio—includes Talking Pictures and the latest in Television.

\$60—\$70—\$80—PER WEEK AND UP. That's what R. T. I. training leads to. Send for the R. T. I. Book.

No Experience Needed

ALL YOU NEED is the ambition and the ability to read and write. The Radio industry needs practical trained men. Remember, R. T. I. makes it easy to earn spare time money while you learn at home.

More to come

THE MEN who get into this Big-Money field now will have an unlimited future. Why? Because this billion dollar Radio industry is only a few years old and is growing by leaps and bounds. Get in and grow with it. \$10 to \$25 per week and more is easily made in spare hours while you are preparing for Big Money. TELEVISION, too, will soon be on the market, so the leaders say. Be ready for this amazing new money-making field. Remember, R. T. I. "3 in 1" home-training gives you all the developments in Television and Talking Picture Equipment, together with the complete Radio training.

Warning

Do not start R. T. I. training if you are going to be satisfied to make \$15 or \$20 per week more than you are now. Most R. T. I. men will make that much increase after a few weeks. There is no reason to stop short of the Big Money Jobs or the Big Profits in a spare time or full time business of your own. No capital needed. Get started with R. T. I. now. Make money while you learn at home.

R. T. I. Book Now FREE

The thrilling story of Radio, Television and Talking Pictures is told with hundreds of pictures and facts—its hundreds of big money jobs and spare time money-making opportunities everywhere. Send for your copy now. **USE THE COUPON.**



Let F. H. SCHNELL and the R. T. I. Advisory Board Help You

Twenty years Radio experience. First to establish two-way amateur communication with Europe. Former Traf. Mgr. of American Radio Relay League. Lieut. Com. U.S.N.R. Inventor, designer, consulting Radio engineer.

Assisting him is the R. T. I. Advisory Board, composed of men prominent in the Radio Industry. These men know Radio and will help you succeed in their field.

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Send me Free and prepaid your **BIG BOOK** "Tune In On Big Pay" and full details of your three-in-one Home Training (without obligating me in any way).

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____

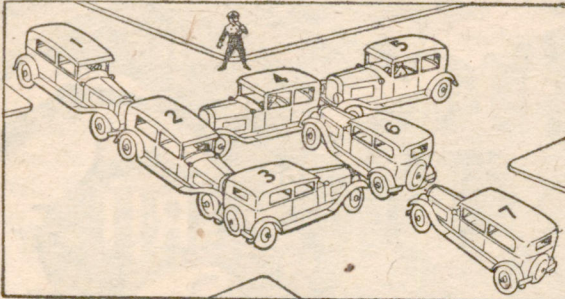
THE R. T. I. ADVISORY BOARD. These men are executives with important concerns in the radio industry—manufacturing, sales, service, broadcasting, engineering, etc., etc. They supervise R. T. I. Work Sheets, Job Tickets, and other training methods.

R. T. I. R. T. I. TRAINS YOU AT HOME FOR A GOOD JOB OR A PROFITABLE PART TIME OR FULL TIME BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN

Win Nash and \$500 or \$1,845 Cash

Seven Brand New 6-Cylinder Cars Given

For advertising purposes I am going to give absolutely free a brand new six-cylinder "Special Six" Nash four-door Sedan, an Oldsmobile two-door Sedan, a De Soto two-door Sedan, a Pontiac two-door Sedan, an Essex two-door Sedan, a Whippet two-door Sedan, and a Chevrolet two-door Sedan, all six-cylinder latest model Sedans; also 4 splendid new console type radios, a Victor Orthophonic Victrola and other valuable prizes. Any person living in the United States outside of Chicago, may enter an answer to this puzzle except employees of the



Solve This Traffic Puzzle

W. D. Boyce Company or members of their families, or winners of automobiles or first prizes in any of our previous offers, or members of their families.

In the picture there are 7 cars in a bad traffic jam. None of them can move forward, for each car is blocked by the one in front of it. One of these cars will have to be backed out. Which one? The traffic policeman seems to be stumped. Can you straighten up this tangle for him? Only one car may be moved backward, and if you pick out the right one, you will see that it is not necessary to back up any of the others. Send the number of the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tie-up, and if your answer is correct you will be qualified for this opportunity.

\$500.00 for Promptness

We are not only giving the Sedans, radios and so forth in our big prize list amounting to over \$8,800.00, but are also giving an additional \$500.00 in cash for promptness to the winner of first prize if he or she has been prompt. Thus, the first prize winner will receive the Nash Sedan and \$500.00 in cash, or \$1,845.00. Find the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tangle and send the number of it in a letter or on a post card, or you can mark the car on the picture and send it to me. Be sure to write or print your name and address plainly. All who answer correctly can share in the prizes or cash. Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties. ANSWER TODAY. G. W. ALDERTON, Dept. 286, 510 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.



AGENTS! Sell Shirts

Many salesmen making Big Profits each week selling Bostonian nationally known high-grade, broadcloth shirts, 3 for \$6.95

Wonderful Selling Outfit FREE

POSTAGE PAID, \$1.50 cash commission for you. \$9.00 value. Quick sales. Write today for free sample outfit. BOSTONIAN MFG. CO., Dept. B-243, 89 Bickford St., Boston, Mass.



WANT A STEADY GOVERNMENT JOB?



\$1260 to \$3400 YEAR

Men—Women—18 Up
STEADY WORK
 NO "LAYOFFS"
 Paid Vacations
 Common Education usually sufficient

Franklin Institute
 Dept. F-192, Rochester, N. Y.
 Gentlemen: Rush to me FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay positions now obtainable. Send me FREE 32-page book describing salaries, hours, work, vacation and giving full particulars on how to get a U. S. Government position.

Mail Coupon today—**SURE**

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Have You Ever Read

Picture Play

Bubbling Over With Screen News

Price, 25 cents per copy



Follow This Man

Secret Service Operator No. 38 is on the Job!

FOLLOW him through all the excitement of his chase of the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Tell-tale finger prints on the lamp stand in the murdered girl's room! The detective's cigarette case is handled by the unsuspecting gangster, and a great mystery is solved. Better than fiction. It's true, every word of it. No obligation.

FREE The Confidential Reports No. 38 Made to His Chief

And the best part of it all is this. It may open your eyes to the great future for YOU as a highly paid Finger Print Expert. More men are needed right now. This school has taken men just like you and trained them for high official positions. This is the kind of work you would like. Days full of excitement. Big salaries. Rewards.

WRITE and I'll send the Free Reports—also a wonderful illustrated book telling of the future awaiting you as a Finger Print Expert.

Institute of Applied Science
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LET US HELP YOU Quit Tobacco

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 treatment 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-2, OMAHA, NEBR.

ASTHMA CAUSE DISCOVERED

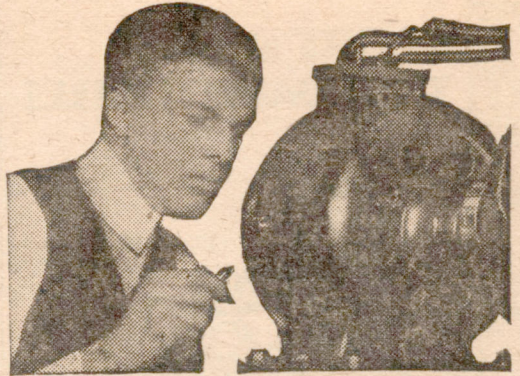
Free Booklet Mailed on Request

Indianapolis—Those who suffer from bronchial asthma and hay fever will be gratified to learn that at last science has succeeded in discovering the basic cause of these two stubborn maladies.

This discovery disproves the old theory that asthma is due solely to climatic conditions and hay fever entirely to pollen. The discovery of the real cause of these diseases has proved that these are merely aggravating factors and that the basic cause lies in the individual himself.

Fortunately for all who suffer from these diseases a way has also been found to overcome this basic cause in the individual instead of merely treating the surface symptoms, as has been done in the past.

For full information write for important booklet on the discovery of the cause of bronchial asthma and hay fever. It will be sent free to readers of this magazine who will write to Department 5368, Fugate Company, 126 S. Meridian St., Indianapolis, Ind.



Amazingly Easy Way to Get Into ELECTRICITY

Don't spend your life waiting for \$5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Now ... and forever ... say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me teach you how to prepare for positions that lead to \$50, \$60, and on up to \$200 a week in Electricity — NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach right here in the great Coyne Shops that makes you a practical expert in 90 days! Getting into electricity is far easier than you imagine!

LEARN WITHOUT BOOKS — In 90 Days
By Actual Work—in the Great Coyne Shops

I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake — I don't expect you to! It makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have. That's why I have worked out my astonishing offers.

Earn While Learning

If you need part-time work to help pay your living expenses I'll help you get it and when you graduate I'll give you lifetime employment service. And, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained ... on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled ... real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations ... everything from door bells to farm power and lighting ... full sized ... in full operation every day!

No Books — No Lessons

No dull books, no baffling charts, no classes, you get individual training ... all real actual work ... building real batteries ... winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc.

GET THE FACTS Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 30 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large electrical concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs ... facts ... jobs ... salaries ... opportunities. Tells you how many earn expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

BIG BOOK FREE!

Send for my big book containing 150 photographs telling complete story—absolutely FREE

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 20-45, Chicago, Ill.

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, H. C. Lewis, Pres.
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 20-45, Chicago, Illinois

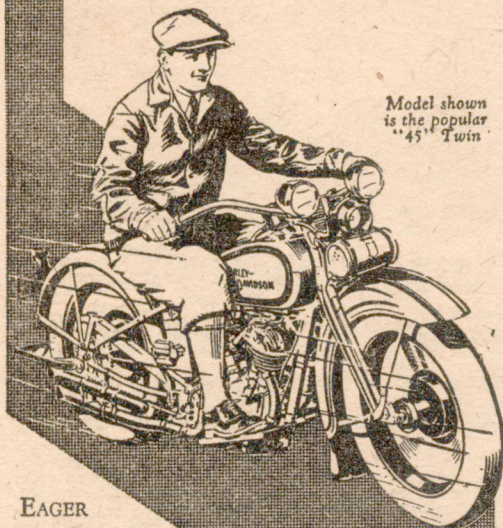
Dear Mr. Lewis: Without obligation send me your big, free catalog and all details of Free Employment Service, Radio, Airplane, and Automotive Electrical Courses, and how I may "earn while learning."

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SPORT OF A THOUSAND THRILLS



Model shown is the popular "45" Twin

EAGER power under instant control—speed that leaves the car-parades behind—lightning response to throttle and brakes

—these are just a few of the thousand thrills of motorcycling. Ask any Harley-Davidson rider — he'll tell you of dozens more. And they are all yours at low cost, in a Harley-Davidson "45"—the wonderful Twin at a popular price.

Let your dealer show you the 1930 features of this motorcycle — try the comfortable, low-swung saddle — get the "feel" of this wonder Twin. Ask about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

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for literature showing our full line of Singles, Twins, and Sidecars. Motorcycle prices range from \$235 f. o. b. factory.

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HARLEY-DAVIDSON

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY
Dept. S. S., Milwaukee, Wis.
Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name.....

Address.....

My age is 16-19 years, 20-30 years, 31 years and up, under 16 years. Check your age group.

CHELSEA HOUSE

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Good Books

IMPULSIVE YOUTH

By Vivian Grey

She was rich. And he was poor. She gave him up because she didn't want to break his mother's heart, the heart of the woman who had saved and scrimped so that he might go to college and get away from the manual labor that seemed destined for him.

It was an impulsive act, the sort of thing she was always doing, for at the start she had acted on impulse when she left her luxurious home to cast in her lot with the humble folk on the other side of the creek. It was impulse that sent her out at midnight to make her own way in the world, alone, with no money in her purse. And when Phil Rhoades found her and would bring her back, she refused, for she was determined that she would not stand in the way of the career of the man she loved.

In a way, it is true that most of us act on impulse at one time or another, trusting somehow to the hidden voices within us that our actions may be for the best. The author of this absorbing story tells what may happen when we make impulse the guide to life. It is a story of youth in the grip of a great love that is here before us, a book that we do not lay aside until the last page is read, and one that we take up again, for it is well worth the rereading.

75c

75c



79-89 SEVENTH AVE.
NEW YORK CITY

\$3750.00 REWARD

CAN YOU FIND THE KEY TO THIS PRIZE BAG OF GOLD?

There are 20 keys pictured below. To be sure, they all look alike BUT, examine them closely. 19 of them are exactly alike but "ONE" and only one is DIFFERENT FROM ALL THE OTHERS. It is the key to OPEN THE PADLOCK on this \$3750.00 prize bag of gold. SEE IF YOU CAN FIND IT. Hurry! Win this \$3750.00. A number of new 6-cylinder 4-door sedans and cash prizes too will be given. This offer is open to all and it costs nothing to try!



THESE CLUES WILL HELP YOU TO FIND THE DIFFERENT KEY!

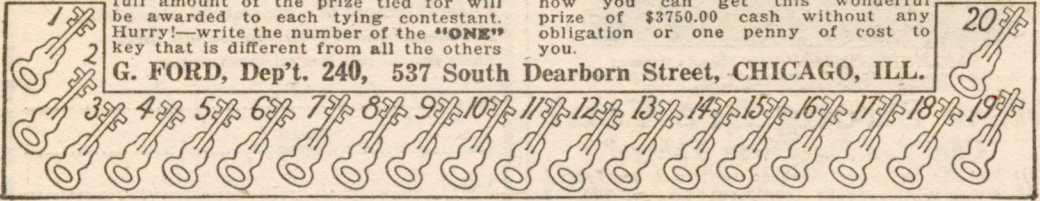
The difference may be in the size, the shape, or even in the notches. So, STUDY EACH KEY CAREFULLY and if you find the "ONE" key that is different from all the others, SEND THE NUMBER OF IT with your name and address TO ME AT ONCE on a post card or in a letter. You may become the winner of a \$2,000.00 Special Buick Sedan and \$1750.00 cash extra, or \$3750.00 all in cash—without one cent of cost to you.

\$1750.00 CASH—EXTRA FOR PROMPTNESS!

Absolutely, I will pay \$1750.00 cash extra to the first prize winner just for promptness. In the event of a tie for any of the prizes offered, the full amount of the prize tied for will be awarded to each tying contestant. Hurry!—write the number of the "ONE" key that is different from all the others

and your name and address on a post card or in a letter and MAIL IT TODAY—sure. Win that \$3750.00! As soon as I get your reply, I'll tell you how you can get this wonderful prize of \$3750.00 cash without any obligation or one penny of cost to you.

G. FORD, Dep't. 240, 537 South Dearborn Street, CHICAGO, ILL.



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Lack of Power or Energy, Weakness or excessive drains on the Nervous System. The Specific Pill, and Winchester's Hypophosphites. \$1.00 per box or bottle, postpaid, literature free.

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Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Not a substitute, not habit forming. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and dependable, easy way to relieve the craving many men have.
FREE BOOK
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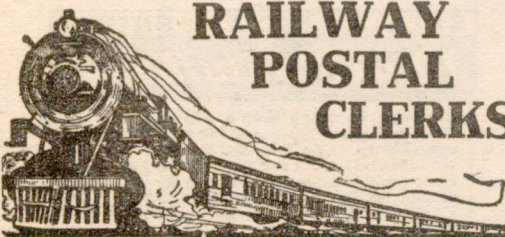
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says: "Complete Equipment of Conn Instruments enhances musical value of any band at least 50%."
More than 50 years of experience, and exclusive patented processes make Conn instruments superior. FREE Trial, Easy payments if desired. Write for FREE book. Mention Instrument.
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Common Education Usually Sufficient

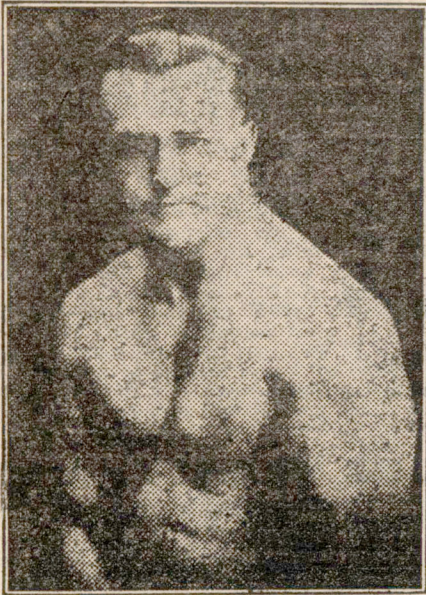
FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. F-196, Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge copy of 32-page book, "How to get U. S. Government Jobs," list of positions now obtainable and full particulars telling me how to get them.

Name

Address

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



EARLE LIEDERMAN—The Muscle-BUILDER
 Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Health," "Endurance," etc.

How Strong Are You? Can You Do These Things?

Lift 200 lbs. or more overhead with one arm? bend and break a horseshoe? tear two decks of playing cards? bend spiked chin yourself with one hand?

CAN you do any of them? I can and many of my pupils can. It is remarkable the things a man really can do if he will make up his mind to be strong. I have taken men who were ridiculed because of their frail make-up and developed them into the strongest men of their locality.

I WANT YOU FOR 90 DAYS

These are the days that call for speed. In olden days it took years to develop a strong, healthy body. I can completely transform you in 90 days. Yes, make a complete change in your entire physical make-up. In 30 days I guarantee to increase your biceps one full inch. I also guarantee to increase your chest two inches. But I don't quit there. I don't stop till you're a finished athlete—a real strong man. I will broaden your shoulders, deepen your chest, strengthen your neck. I will give you the arms and legs of a Hercules. I will put an armor plate of muscle over your entire body. But with it come the strong, powerful lungs which enrich the blood, putting new life into your entire being. You will be bubbling over with strength, pep and vitality.

A DOCTOR WHO TAKES HIS OWN MEDICINE

Many say that any form of exercise is good, but this is not true. I have seen men working in the factories and mills who literally killed themselves with exercise. They ruined their hearts or other vital organs, ruptured themselves or killed off what little vitality they possessed. I was a frail weakling myself in search of health and strength. I spent years in study and research, analyzing my own defects to find what I needed. After many tests and experiments, I discovered a secret of progressive exercising. I increased my own arms over six and a half inches, my neck three inches and other parts of my body in proportion. I decided to become a public benefactor and impart this knowledge to others. Physicians and the highest authorities on physical culture have tested my system and pronounced it to be the surest means of acquiring perfect manhood. Do you crave a strong, well-proportioned body and the abundance of health that goes with it? Are you true to yourself? If so, spend a pleasant half-hour in learning how to attain it. The knowledge is yours for the asking.

Send for My New 64-page Book

"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

IT IS FREE—Don't Send One Penny—Your name and address on a postal will do

It contains forty-eight full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over and marvel. This book will prove a real inspiration to you. For the sake of your future health and happiness do not put it off. Send today—right now before you turn this page.
EARLE LIEDERMAN, 305 Broadway, Dept. 3002, New York City

Earle Liederman, Dept. 3002, 305 Broadway, New York City
 Dear Sir: Please send me, absolutely FREE and without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name Age

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(Please write or print plainly)

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IF you like to draw, test your natural sense of design, proportion, color, perspective, etc., with our Art Ability Questionnaire. Learn if your talent is worth developing. You will be frankly told what your score is. Many Federal Students are making \$2,000, \$4,000, \$5,000 and \$6,000 yearly—some even more. Students and graduates of the Federal Course are recognized everywhere by art employers and buyers of commercial art. Learn at home in spare time, without previous training. Personal, individual criticisms on your work. Get this art questionnaire.

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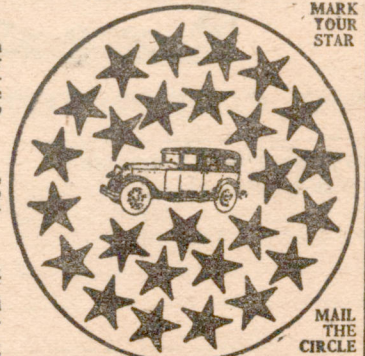
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The Great White Barrier

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A COMPLETE NOVEL

CHAPTER I.

WHO KILLED ARMOND DUBARRY?

OLD Inspector Brinklow shot a cold, quizzical glance toward the door of divisional headquarters, his gray brows slowly pinching together in a bristling scowl.

Constable Barkley had just reported the arrival of a strange messenger from the North, who had drifted into the Fort McMurray barracks out of the shadow-steeped gloom of the vague arctic twilight.

The old divisional commander of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was

pondering the possibilities here, while he waited Barkley's return with the messenger—described as an unknown Indian with the smoke smell of his distant tepee on his tattered garments, and who would speak his message into no ears but those of the commanding officer.

The thing that caused a tightening of the grim lines about the commander's stern lips while he waited, was the fact that the red man had come down the long traverse, out of the specter-haunted wilderness of the Upper Slave, where the crimson trail of an old murder that had baffled the Mounted Police for five long years was once again showing the

baffling marks of fresh mystery in the shadowy depths of that slumbering wilderness.

Old Brinklow eased back into his chair, his fingers drumming the top of his desk thoughtfully, grim eyes staring speculatively into space.

It was to the north of old Angus Mackenzie's trading post up on the treacherous headwaters of the Upper Slave that the trouble brewed. Windigo country that, shunned by white and red trappers alike, since the murder of Armond Dubarry at Dead Man's Portage.

And it was Dubarry who started the wheels of destiny turning up there—Dubarry and his fateful secret that had set the deep wilderness aflame like smoldering fire in deadwood!

Dubarry himself had been a mystery from the jump. Whatever his purpose on the Upper Slave, aside from bucking the old Mackenzie in the fur game, he was a picturesque spectacle on the open waterways when he brought his fur brigade down at the season's end.

Always he flew at the bow of his head bateau, a flashing white pennant with the crimson crest of the old Dubarry's flaming red on the snowy background. His happy-go-lucky crew of gaudily toqued and chanson-singing Northmen—sturdy, hard-fisted Frenchmen with the romantic fire of Old Quebec in their red-blooded bodies—made of his outfit an unforgettable and powerful entity in the big fur game.

Old Angus became his deadly enemy in the fight for fur back in the ice-locked regions of the Upper Slave, which had for forty years past been his own exclusive fur domain, over which he had ruled like a czar.

When Dubarry began to cut seriously into his trade, the old man's greedy, Scotch blood began to boil.

Then Dubarry was mysteriously murdered, and old Angus' blood cooled under the brittle ice of suspicion!

But the Mounties could pin nothing

on him, and their attention was quickly shifted in another direction. It became known that Dubarry possessed a secret that involved him in queer, periodical journeys that had naught to do with fur.

These journeys took him into the headwaters of the Mackenzie River country, where he met a strange, black-bearded Northman. There, *something* would pass from Dubarry to this unknown, and each would then return from whence he came, Dubarry back to the Upper Slave, the black-bearded enigma into the North's enveloping solitudes.

This strange business had puzzled the police for a solution, and still puzzled them. The whole affair of Armond Dubarry's death quickly became a tangled riddle of conflicting mysteries, which old Brinklow's red-coated troopers had never been able to solve.

Brooding on it now, the inspector scowled darkly. Failure after failure had been written into the records of that strange case. He reached out and selected from the drawer of a filing cabinet, a large envelope, filled with report slips, and labeled:

Case of Armond Dubarry, murdered at Dead Man's Portage on the Upper Slave. Mystery unsolved.

It was a detailed history of the case, so far as any of its grim details were known. Armond Dubarry had been shot in the back—a clear case of murder without a single clew. Mystery had piled on top of mystery from the very first.

The body was found by a trapper and taken to old Angus Mackenzie's post. It had been laid out in that harsh old Northman's office in the rear of the big trading room, under guard, pending communication with the nearest Mounty outpost.

The very same night, between the uncertain hours of dusk and the misty

dawn, it had disappeared as mysteriously and completely as if spirited away by some unseen, ghostly medium!

The body had never been found, nor heard of since. Armond Dubarry was blotted out as completely as his big brigade of singing Frenchmen, which also vanished with his tragic death off the waterways of the North.

Another strange disappearance was an age-stained parchment that old Angus had taken from the pocket of Dubarry's red-stained coat. It was promptly stolen from his desk, where he had placed it under lock and key.

What that old parchment revealed, or did not reveal of Armond Dubarry's strange secret, was never known. Old Angus had closed his stubborn Scotch lips on its mystery, and no threat of the Red Coats could open them.

The Mounties marked time for months with an eye on the Upper Slave wilderness, and then of a sudden two vital bits of news trickled down the long traverse out of the whispering solitudes to the north.

One was the sudden appearance of a big brigade, operating in open rivalry to old Mackenzie once more, and adding flame to the fire already burning in that old Northman's soul.

It was the brigade of one Brule Le Noir—a big, black-bearded Northman—who might be, and might not be, identical with the black-bearded enigma of Dubarry's strange journeyings!

The other news was that fur was once more coming out of that specter-haunted wilderness north of Angus Mackenzie's trading post—fur that bore on the flank of each seasoned pelt the unmistakable mark of the dead Dubarry!

Corporal Kenyon was up there now following a lone trail, working on both mysteries. He had mushed grimly away in the early part of the past winter, and not a single word had come down from him, hence what he might have

discovered was as yet unwritten on the doubtful records of fate.

OLD Brinklow gripped his gnarled fist and brought it down with a thud on the long envelope of recorded failures.

"Well," he gritted. "If Kenyon fails, there's Wolfe!"

"Icy-eyed" Wolfe never failed! The cold-eyed sergeant had just got back from a "still hunt" up the Mackenzie River country. He had returned with a grim hunch, and was itching to try it out.

Windigos meant nothing to Wolfe. He was a silent, cold-blooded trail sleuth with nerves of iron, and his bleak eyes would miss nothing on that Upper Slave danger trail—a trail that threaded its precarious way into the death traps of Hollow Mountain, where the dark Slave wilderness was blocked by the cataclysmic spectacle of grim nature at its worst—the Great White Barrier!

Even the grim barrier would not stop Icy-eyed Wolfe, if he found it necessary to go beyond it into that vast, unexplored windigo country of the vague unknown, untouched by the foot of a white man, until Armond Dubarry went into it on the tragic quest of his fateful secret.

Where Armond Dubarry had gone, Wolfe could go!

The door suddenly opened and Constable Barkley reëntered, pushing ahead of him a tall, somber-faced Indian.

The inspector jerked at once into motionless attention. The Indian's hawk-like features announced him a Chippewyan—tricky! His coal-black, piercing eyes looked straight and unblinking into old Brinklow's gaze, keen as flashing flame jets!

"You—Brink?" came guttural interrogatory.

"Yes, I'm Brink!" agreed the inspector, smiling coldly.

The Chippewyan stalked up to the

desk, loosened his tattered mackinaw, and slowly unstrapped a long, flat object fastened about his waist beneath it. This he laid with fatalistic deliberation upon the desk under the inspector's nose.

Old Brinklow stared at it with a puzzled frown. Whatever it contained was securely wrapped from sight.

The inspector opened it with none too steady fingers, remembering that this Indian had come out of the Great Slave wilderness, where Corporal Kenyon was pursuing a trail of fate.

With a savage jerk, Brinklow laid the startling contents bare, at which both he and Constable Barkley stared in tense and rigid shock.

It was a Mountry's tunic, and the vivid scarlet flamed in the dull lamplight like a crimson of fate!

CHAPTER II.

ICY-EYED WOLFE.

WORDLESS, the old inspector unfolded the scarlet coat, and found on the sleeves of it—a corporal's stripes!

"Corporal Kenyon's!" muttered Barkley in a strained, low voice. "Does it mean that Ken has——"

The constable suddenly choked up and stopped.

"Met with foul play up in that cursed wilderness?" Brinklow growled a drab conclusion to the pause. "Heaven knows!"

The tunic showed neither bloodstains nor violence of any kind. It had been carefully folded, and was spotlessly clean. In a pocket was the corporal's trail diary, identifying it beyond question as Corporal Kenyon's!

Inside the diary was a folded paper, addressed to Inspector Brinklow himself. The writing was in a smooth, easy-flowing hand, that had nothing in common with Kenyon's bold chirography.

Brinklow scowled at it suspiciously. He slowly opened it, and read it with hard, frosty eyes, that went wide with increasing alarm, as they came to the startling end:

M'SIEUR INSPECTOR DE POLICE: Your very brave Corporal Kenyon has fallen into the evil hands of one whose venom destroyed Armond Dubarry, and whose cunning has outwitted the Scarlet Police from the first.

He was clever, and found out important things as this, his diary, reveals, but he was not quite clever enough to escape the fangs of a wolf.

Send Icy-eyed Wolfe north in all haste before it is too late, and let him seek Père André.

That was all of the message, and it left the inspector grimly gripped in the cold clutch of a vague uneasiness. There was no signature, nor identification of the writer. It might be a sincere effort to coöperate with the police, or it might be a trap.

The reference to Kenyon's diary caused the old official to turn its pages swiftly to the final written record of Kenyon's findings in that brooding wilderness of the Upper Slave.

He read the final entries, cold-eyed. Kenyon had found Angus Mackenzie, a specter-haunted, grim old man, antagonistic to all comers, especially to the Scarlet Police.

The corporal had wasted little time at the post. He had pushed on north into the Upper Slave wilderness, "and had"—but the page, telling what he had done, was missing—deliberately cut out with the sharp blade of a knife!

Coldly disappointed, the inspector read the single entry on the next page with snapping eyes. It began with a broken sentence carried over from the missing sheets:

so, having established the identity of the black-bearded stranger of the Mackenzie River, and the motive for the murder as the secret of the great white barrier, I now know that Armond Dubarry was shot by——

Here again, the knife had left a dead, disappointing blank. The name the Mounted Police had sought in five long years of tireless effort had been cleanly cut out of the page.

Following the blank, the writer of the strange message had written again in that smooth, easy-flowing hand:

The name, m'sieur, may be learned from the lips of Corporal Kenyon, alone—haste.

"So," old Brinklow growled, "our newest mystery withholds that name to force quick action. Well, he'll get it, prompt!" He turned his now merciless eyes on the silent Indian and barked: "Who was it that sent you to me with this?"

There was not the slightest indication in the Chippewyan's black inscrutable eyes, that he either heard or understood. His stolid gaze held unblinking to the inspector's steady stare through tense silence.

Inspector Brinklow shrugged resignedly, knowing the utter futility of attempting to force a Chippewyan out of his native fatalism.

He turned grimly to the constable.

"Give this Indian food, and hold him for further investigation," he snapped. "Maybe a full stomach will loosen up his tongue a bit, but I doubt it."

As Constable Barkley and the Chippewyan passed through the door of the headquarter's office, Brinklow shot at the former's back a crisp command,

"Send Sergeant Wolfe in to me!"

SO, thought the non-com, as he proceeded with his mission, the O. C. had picked Wolfe to follow Kenyon—silent Icy-eyed Wolfe!

A queer trooper was Wolfe, almost unfriendly in his cold aloofness. He was a man who would mush a team of huskies into the ice-locked "back of beyond," alone without a quiver, and follow a trail to its end if it took him a month or a year.

Well, pretty soon Wolfe would be hearing the old formula barked into his ears: "Don't come back, sergeant, until you've got your man—dead or alive!"

Powerful words, those—words that had made stirring history in the Canadian North, because they were lived up to with fidelity by the rank and file of the Royal Mounted.

And no doubt Wolfe would get his man!

The constable found Sergeant Rodney Wolfe in fatigue dress, resting up in barracks. Yet that intrepid Mounty, who had been ice locked in the Mackenzie River country all winter, and had but the week before driven a dog team to the end of a thousand-mile mush with some sort of hunch in his head—two-hundred miles over rotting ice that had since gone out—was pacing silently up and down, strangely restless to be off again.

He was that kind, was Wolfe; and strangely enough, at the moment of Barkley's entrance, he was studying a map of that mystery-steeped wilderness of the Upper Slave—where one Mounty had perhaps already lost his life.

Sergeant Wolfe's eyes went icy, as he listened to Constable Barkley's news; but he showed no other manifestation of emotion.

Two words only fell from his smileless lips, as he pondered the possible meaning of that scarlet tunic and the strange message that came with it out of the fathomless North.

"Looks bad!" was all he said.

Barkley wondered if anything could strike fire from the hard flint in the strange make-up of this man.

"The O. C. wants you," he informed, adding: "I think he means to pick you to find out—how bad!"

There was no reply from Wolfe. He merely rose, and swiftly changed from fatigue dress to trail uniform. Then, still wordless, he began to pack his scant belongings into his duffel bag, includ-

ing in it the map he had been studying on Barkley's entrance.

"It's a tough break," the constable sympathized, remembering the Mackenzie River trail, and thinking also of Kenyon's possible fate.

A grim smile—if one could call it a smile—drifted for a brief second over Sergeant Wolfe's emotionless face, having the chilling effect of causing his bleak eyes to look all the more icy.

"It's a lucky break—for me!" he amended quickly, no doubt also thinking of Corporal Kenyon's probable fate—Kenyon, who had trailed with him in the silent places of the North, and was perhaps closer to him than any other man.

"Anyhow," Barkley urged, "watch your step. That's a bad country, up there. It's—windigo!"

Icy-eyed Wolfe turned slowly and looked at Constable Barkley in a way that made the latter's flesh creep up and down his spine. It was as though those bleak, far-seeing eyes were looking straight through him, instead of at him.

"I dare say," he commented absently, "that—I'll get acquainted with the windigo!"

With which cryptic speech, he picked up his dunnage bag and stalked grimly out of the barracks' door, like a silent Nemesis stalking the trail of Fate.

And Barkley watched him go in a studied thoughtfulness.

Yes, Icy-eyed Wolfe was a queer trooper, but it was a ten-to-one shot, that he'd come back with the goods!

CHAPTER III.

WOLFE TRAILS NORTH.

SERGEANT WOLFE quietly dropped his duffel bag to the floor with a muffled thud, and came to a silent salute before the desk of the divisional commander.

Old Brinklow shot his eyes down to

the small, compact bag, then ranged them slowly up and down the powerful form of the scarlet-garbed figure before him with keen satisfaction.

"All ready to go, eh?" he queried, as if there had been a previous understanding between Icy-eyed Wolfe and himself.

"I was ready when the ice went out, three days ago!" came the crisp reply.

"Sit down, sergeant."

Sergeant Wolfe dropped into a chair, but he did not relax.

"There's the deuce to pay—up yonder," Brinklow growled. "Corporal Kenyon may have met his death!"

Wolfe's eyes froze into a bleak stare. He nodded.

"You know, then?" the old commander asked sharply.

"Yes!"

The single word fell from Wolfe's lips like the cold crack of a whiplash.

"Well, it's up to you, sergeant!" Brinklow snapped back. "I'm going to let you play that Mackenzie River hunch!"

Wolfe now smiled grimly, but said nothing. These two understood each other, and as usual, few words passed between them, and those few were terse, sharp, and to the point.

The hunch, which had been the result of his "still hunt" in that tragic country of snow-blinding wastes, was a secret between the two of them. It had to do with Armond Dubarry's past. They did not discuss it now.

"Keep your eye on old Angus Mackenzie," Brinklow growled. "That old Scot has something on his mind—he's hiding something!"

"Looks like it!" Wolfe commented.

"I wonder"—the inspector paused, drumming the desk-top—"if this Le Noir is your man?"

"The description fits," Wolfe said. "I'll get a better line on him from the factor at Fort Chippewyan, before I hit into that country."

"You may hit into some surprises, sergeant!"

"Expect to!"

Old Brinklow thought into a long, strained silence before speaking again, and when he broke it, his voice was low, tense.

"And there's this uncertainty about Kenyon," he muttered, dropping his hand on the tunic still lying on the desk.

"I'm thinking of—Kenyon!" Wolfe snapped. "I'll find him!"

"You think he is—alive?"

"I'd gamble on it! Kenyon's not the kind who dies easy!"

"Luck to you, sergeant."

The headquarters' clock boomed. Wolfe rose—picked up his duffel bag. The inspector also rose. They faced each other.

"You might wait till morning," Brinklow suggested doubtfully.

"I'm hitting the trail to-night!"

"Expected you would. Bon voyage, sergeant!"

For a full moment stern official eyes looked deep into the bleak, icy orbs of the man of the open trails. Wolfe's gaze held in a cold, steady grip.

That was the sergeant's "good-by." His hand swept to a swift salute, he turned on his heel, and Icy-eyed Wolfe passed silently through the door, facing the arctic night and fate!

Almost on the heels of his going, Constable Barkley reported the disappearance of the Chippewyan who had brought the fateful news to the barracks.

The Indian had been given a hearty meal, placed on parole on the promise of good behavior, assigned a bunk for the night, and had then vanished through a window, and could not be found.

Barkley caught up with Wolfe and warned him of treachery. The sergeant merely smiled his cold, unconcerned smile. Barkley shrugged.

WOLFE dropped his cangie into the dark waters of the Athabasca. The bow pointed north. He stowed his dunnage and light camp equipment in it, and stood for a moment on the pebbly bank, a dark silhouette against the white star glitter on the water.

Back of him, a pair of lynxlike eyes peered cautiously from the gloom of the spruce—unblinking eyes that bored steadily into his back like twin pinpoints of flame.

A stealthy hand parted the brush. A dark form crept into the open. The movement was as silent as the drift of a shadow. When within a bare two feet of the MOUNTY, the hand reached out and touched his arm.

Wolfe turned slowly without a tremor of his taut sinews. The hand fell from his arm. He found himself looking at an Indian.

"Well, my friend, what is it?" he asked in a low, emotionless voice. "Friend I take you to be, since you didn't stick a knife into my back."

"Me Charlie Whitewater—me know where Red Coat trails—me paddle canoe!"

Inspector Brinklow or Constable Barkley would have recognized "Charlie Whitewater" as the tall Chippewyan who had come down out of the Slave wilderness, but Sergeant Wolfe could only make a clever guess that such was the case from the facts in hand.

"So you want to paddle my canoe, eh?" the MOUNTY snapped. "Jumped your parole, didn't you? Couldn't find a birch to steal, and want to get back north—that it?"

Well, thought Wolfe, maybe Charlie Whitewater would make a valuable guide into a country he had never probed the depths of. Maybe, on the other hand, this was part of a cut-and-dried trap.

He decided quickly to risk it.

"Take the bow, Charlie, then I can keep my eyes on you. How do you

know where I trail?" Wolfe barked suddenly.

"Huh!" was all Charlie Whitewater answered.

"You know what the white man calls the Great White Barrier?" Wolfe asked.

"*Nepec Matchi manitou!*" Waters of the Evil Spirit—was the Indian's reply in a harsh guttural, and Wolfe pondered the ominous sound of it as he dug in his blade. It held a flesh-creeping omen!

DAWN found Icy-eyed Wolfe and his silent companion pushing relentlessly on down the dark river trail, threading its twisting way into the ever-deepening forest.

The all-night trek had put them many canoe miles closer to old Fort Chipewyan, the first contact ahead of them with a white man's post. Another dusk would reveal the glimmering lights of that ancient fur center of the Hudson Bay, where the North Country above sixty degrees latitude traded its furs and bought its supplies.

Here, where the hardy bateau crews swapped the gossip of the slumbering wilderness for old Factor Molière's news of a distant civilization, Wolfe hoped to pick up a bit of information before pushing on down the Slave River and into the blue-green, icy waters of Great Slave Lake.

Up the long, north arm of Great Slave Lake at the treacherous headwaters of the Upper Slave, was old Angus Mackenzie's trading post. Above that stretched that grim, old Northman's domain—the specter-haunted wilderness of the Slave.

The sergeant expected no trouble until he entered its mystery-steeped depths; but it was as well to be informed of the latest gossip that had come out of it, if Molière had anything to tell.

They went into a brief camp for tea

and bannock on a whitewater portage. The Indian never once opened his lips, meeting all Wolfe's efforts to make him talk with silence. He had manifested no sign of treachery. His sole purpose was evidently to get north, but Wolfe watched his every move. He hoped to use Charlie Whitewater later in attempting to locate Kenyon.

So, thus preoccupied with his inward thoughts, and with the Indian maintaining a stolid silence, the hours dragged by in a dull monotony as they continued the journey into the North.

Noon came and went. The short day drew to a close. Dusk sifted its misty curtain over the forest. The chilling breath of coming twilight swept down the river trail.

A brooding stillness was settling over all.

Crack! A shot from the shadowy shore got Charlie Whitewater squarely between the eyes. A second perforated the canoe bottom. A third knocked Wolfe's hat awry. And a fourth bit into the water where he had quickly disappeared, having plunged over the side of the birch and beneath the surface just in time.

Wolfe kept his body under water unseen, paddling under surface toward the shore. His head popped up again beneath the overhanging brush, close to the hidden marksman's cover.

So far, so good, thought the sergeant grimly. His service guns were still safe in the buttoned holsters. They were wet, but potent still. He arose slowly from the water with a service Colt gripped in his fist, and his icy eyes searching vainly into the dark shore shadows.

"Don't like the Scarlet in this country, eh?" he muttered. "Thought you wouldn't, but the fireworks began sooner than I expected."

His long, silent search revealed nothing; neither could he detect any sound of movement back in the bush. He

waited cautiously another full moment, then he waded slowly up the shore, and circled silently through the woods.

The gunman had disappeared!

He found four ejected rifle shells back in the bush. They were fired from a Ross 303, and might help to identify the user later. Wolfe stuffed one of the brass empties into a soaked pocket.

His own rifle, dunnage, and trail equipment, plus all his supplies, had gone with the capsized canoe, and the birch had drifted hopelessly, and beyond recovery, down with the swift current.

Wolfe was foodless and canoeless—trail stranded proper!

But he was lucky to be alive, thought the sergeant with his usual optimistic philosophy. Charlie Whitewater had been snuffed out like a candle. The murderer had gone scot-free, but—well, to-morrow was to-morrow!

Wolfe's bleak, gray eyes went icy in the twilight gloom. He had counted on the Indian's help. Now—but to-morrow was to-morrow, he repeated grimly to himself.

Upshore on a sandy stretch of beach, he built and lighted a deadwood fire, using a match from his waterproof case. Hanging his clothes up to dry out, he waited back in shadow, beyond the circle of light, lest the gunman return and finish a bad job.

Smiling grimly with his back to the bole of a big spruce, Wolfe thought out his plans, which were simple enough. The mail *pacquet* for the North was due in a day or two, and he would merely hail the packeteer, and ride down with him to Fort Chippewyan, purchase new equipment and supplies, and borrow a post canoe.

The sergeant kept an all-night vigil, occasionally replenishing the fire—this at the risk of a shot from the bush, although he doubted if the would-be murderer was within miles of the place by now, thinking his last shot had hit.

By dawn the uniform was thoroughly dry, and Wolfe donned it again—not, however, until he had turned it wrong side out. Few men of the outtrails knew the secret of that uniform which had more than once proven useful to Icy-eyed Wolfe when duty took him into the lonely "back of beyond."

It was a trick uniform and he had worked some startling surprises with it. Worn ordinarily, it was the regulation service outfit. Turned inside out, it transformed the grim-eyed sergeant into a mere common trail musher of the Northern wilds.

Thus he donned it now. The Scarlet was due to draw fire much sooner than he had any reason to think it would, and one error of judgment was enough. After the transformation, a stranger looking into the cold, calculating gray orbs, would have pronounced him an ordinary *voyageur*, but one it might be wise to let severely alone.

For two days Wolfe calmly and patiently waited for the mail *pacquet* to show on the river. He knew that Fort Chippewyan was no great distance from where he had been marooned, if one had a canoe; but on foot through the tangled underbrush of the wilderness, it would take him a week to make it.

Wolfe made one important discovery while he waited. A daylight search for the trail of the gunman revealed it in the soft sand downstream where a birch had been drawn up on the shore. A careful study of the trail gave him one important clew.

A white man's boots had made it!

CHAPTER IV.

MORE SURPRISES.

TWO days later, when the mail *pacquet*, with Pierre Brecht at the blade, rode the swift current on its way to the post, Sergeant Wolfe rode with it, seated nonchalantly in the bow.

The sergeant was filling an empty

stomach with food, breaking an enforced two-day fast, and the Canuck, plying a skillful stern paddle that kept the laden craft square with the "going," indulged a soft chuckle now and then at memory of the sergeant's tale.

"So, m'sieu', you tumble out dat canoe, an' don' com' op som' more for long tam—lak scar'd loon w'at duck queek onder de water, eh?" he chortled. "Ma foi, I lak see dat!"

But before they reached the post, Pierre Brecht's pock-marked face was somber and thoughtful.

"What's on your mind now?" Wolfe suddenly asked.

"I'm t'ink m'sieu' ees lucky to be alive to tell de story!" the packeteer responded, gloomily evasive.

"I always play my luck to win!" Wolfe snapped. "But—what's back of your present thought, my friend? What else do you think?"

Pierre Brecht carried the mail to the remotest northern outpost. He had its gossip firsthand, and better than gossip—actual knowledge of it, as far as any man knew it. He also knew the sergeant, despite his present disguise.

"I t'ink m'sieu' bes' keep hees eyes open for one dey call on de Upper Slave—'Black' Brule!" he suggested, his voice lowered.

"And who is Black Brule?" Wolfe asked with uplifted brows.

"One who hates de Scarlet Police lak poison, m'sieu'. Eet ees Brule Le Noir!"

WHEN the mail *pacquet* reached Fort Chippewyan, it interrupted a somewhat hectic scene—the loading of a big, black-bearded trader's supplies on bateaus strung out along the post landing.

Strangely enough the sergeant had run into Brule Le Noir first off the bat!

"Dat, m'sieu', ees Black Brule!" the packeteer informed in a low voice, even

before they had turned into the landing.

The big *pacquet* was greeted at the post with a long, resounding hail, as was usual with the coming of the mail.

"*Voyez, voyez, le pacquet!*"

Even Black Brule's evil-faced crew of French quarter-breeds joined in the excitement, while the big, black Northman himself stood in silence, scowling at the unknown passenger Pierre Brecht was bringing to the post.

The noise, vibrating through the soundless forest, brought Factor Molière to the door of the post, shading his old eyes against the sun glare in the west.

The packeteer brought the six-fathom canoe skillfully to a safe landing, close to the loading bateaus.

"*Bo-jo, m'sieu'!*" he greeted the old French factor, who stared at Brecht's passenger with as great an interest, if not with the scowling concentration of Brule Le Noir.

Wolfe, observing the big Northman from the tail of his eye, and catching with his sharp ears the muttered oath that hissed through his lips as he passed him by, ignored the man seemingly, pushed through the throng, and made for the post.

"Well, whom have we here?" the factor queried, appraising him with a quizzical squint, and making nothing of the square-jawed face, and cold, level eyes.

"Who is the big, black-bearded frog-eater who swears at strangers beneath his beard?" Wolfe asked without answering the question. "It's a French outfit, I see!" he added, seeking to verify Brecht.

Factor Molière resented the slur on the French.

"You, m'sieu', I perceive are *not* French," he flared. "Why, may I ask again, are—you?"

"I might be any number of persons, friend factor," Wolfe returned with a subtle purpose in his mind. "For in-

stance, old Angus Mackenzie—who is not French.”

“Scotch, m’sieu!” the factor offered haughtily.

“And hates the French,” Wolfe returned quickly; “especially the dead Dubarry—even his memory!”

Molière frowned thoughtfully. “A pretty live memory just now, is the dead Dubarry, m’sieur!” he said in a suppressed voice.

“What mean you by that?” Wolfe snapped.

“You forget, m’sieur, that I do not know you!” the other reminded.

Wolfe swiftly drew back his coat. The movement revealed the vivid scarlet beneath, and his official standing.

The old factor stared in amazement.

“Ah, that makes of it quite a different matter, sergeant,” he said in low tones. “If M’sieur de Police will wait in the post until I have looked to the mail, and—got Brule Le Noir off my hands—we will have a quiet smoke on it!”

WOLFE elected, however, to do his smoking outside. He sat silently on the broad stoop, and speculatively watched Black Brule finish the loading of his supply bateaus. There throbbed in the sergeant’s brain a subconscious feeling that the big black Northman was destined to play an important part in the desperate game ahead of him—a hunch, and Wolfe followed his hunches!

Le Noir was now rushing his loading to a swift conclusion, swearing as he bellowed orders. Even so, he did not get the job done and tarped down until the sun had set back of the tall spruce, leaving the pointed spires drenched in crimson, and standing out in dark silhouette against the flaming afterglow.

Dusk was swiftly dropping down over the forest, sifting misty shadows over the river. Suddenly Wolfe’s eyes picked up strange movements across the stream.

Eyes less keen might have called it a half-submerged log drifting with the current—but the drift was upstream, and the object that moved with such subtle slowness was a birch canoe, containing some one keeping the post under surveillance!

Truly this was a country of startling surprises, thought the sergeant, unable even to guess at the identity of the spy, nor upon whom he was spying.

Wolfe’s eyes dropped back on Brule Le Noir. The loading was done, and Black Brule was giving low orders to his quarter-breed crew, which slowly departed to their sleeping quarters.

Le Noir tested the moorings of his bateaus, carefully measured the balance of each load, then turned and thumped up, heavy-footed, to the post.

As he crossed the veranda, his brooding eyes flashed out at the sergeant, sitting there seemingly lost in a deep reverie, gazing at the river; but, who, in fact, was watching the Northman out of the tail of one eye, and the specter bitch across the river with the other.

Black Brule stopped dead in his tracks for the beat of three seconds, his burning black orbs wide. Wolfe had neglected to rebutton his coat, and a stray light from the post had set red flame to a bit of revealing scarlet!

Le Noir jerked his eyes away and entered the post. His preoccupation as he paid his slips set Factor Molière to guessing. The murderous gleam in the black eyes sent a chill up the factor’s spine. Black Brule was so seething with inward thoughts that he failed to observe a small fold of dirty parchment fall out of his money wallet with a soft, silent flutter to the floor.

The factor did not discover it until too late to recall the man. Black Brule had taken his receipt and vanished with precipitate haste through a rear exit from the post. The night had swallowed him up when Molière reached the door.

Returning, he picked up the dirty piece of paper, and curiously examined it. When he slowly opened it under the yellow light, he at first stared superficially at its contents, and then received the shock of dawning knowledge of what it was, like a backhanded blow in the face!

The thing that had fallen out of Brule Le Noir's leather wallet was nothing less than the—— But this was matter for the Mounted, and Factor Molière began to thank a lucky fate that a trooper was present.

He rushed to the front of the post, under a terrific strain, to find the sergeant, the old paper gripped tight in his hand, his eyes popping with his discovery.

But Wolfe was no longer there!

CHAPTER V.

SPYING EYES.

THAT elusive trooper, unaware that his own Scarlet had betrayed him, yet conscious that something had stung Black Brule into dynamic action, had quietly slipped out of his seat.

From a dark pool of starlit gloom he saw the big Northman emerge from the rear of the post, and watched his obscure bulk fade into the timber and disappear.

He had no difficulty in following Le Noir's heavy tread through the undergrowth. Black Brule circled through the dark timber back toward the river, coming out again under the starlit night near an old log building, used by visiting brigade crews for quarters during their brief stay at the post.

Le Noir's crew had cooked and wolfed their evening meal, and were lounging about, smoking foul-smelling pipes, when he entered scowling.

The big Northman glared about him, and a noisy guttural of talk snapped into silence.

"Up and out with you," he rasped.

"Every man to his bateau! We hit the river trail to-night. Vamose, and—no noise!"

The grim ruffians followed the orders without question. Moccasined feet at once began an almost soundless movement toward the landing. Black Brule's heavily laden bateaus, one by one, slowly drifted out into the opalescent star gleam, swung into the current, and vanished in the night!

Wolfe had witnessed the whole thing, and wondered at it, deeply puzzled. Had he known that Brule Le Noir had discovered him through that telltale bit of scarlet a moment ago, he would still have wondered why a mere sight of the scarlet should have caused the hurried flight.

He had nothing on Black Brule yet but a hunch, and it began to look as if his hunch was working.

Before returning to the post, Wolfe searched once again carefully into the deep shadows on the river's far shore, where the suspicious birch had lurked earlier in the evening.

There was nothing but soundless, impenetrable gloom!

Arrived back at the post, Factor Molière greeted his strange news with, "My friend, your mission in the North must be a great one indeed, that the very sight of you—even minus your scarlet uniform—puts a man like Brule Le Noir into confusion and rout!"

"My first mission," Wolfe replied, "is to uncover the fate of Corporal Kenyon. He, no doubt, passed your post during the winter, did he not?"

"*Oui, m'sieur*, but I have not seen nor heard of him since. I hope you may find the corporal." A bit of excitement now crept into Molière's tone. "Your implied second mission, *m'sieur*—that is——"

"To find and arrest the murderer of Armond Dubarry!" Wolfe replied, taking note of the undercurrent of anticipation in the factor's manner, and

recalling his words in reference to the murdered Dubarry's memory: "A pretty live memory, just now, m'sieur!"

He requested an explanation of those strange words.

"First look at *this*, m'sieur!" the factor said, placing suddenly in Wolfe's hands the old pieces of parchment that Brule Le Noir had dropped on the floor of his post.

Wolfe looked critically at the strange find, and finally frowned doubtfully at it.

"What is this?" he asked, and listened grimly to a most startling answer.

"That, m'sieur, is the identical old parchment that Angus Mackenzie took from the dead Dubarry's pocket five years ago, and which was then stolen from his post up there in the Slave wilderness!"

"Where did you get it?"

Wolfe's cold eyes held hard to the factor's gaze as he waited the answer to that.

"Le Noir accidentally dropped it in my post, m'sieur!"

That brought an icy smile drifting over the sergeant's thoughtful face. Most truly the hunch that had traveled with him from the Mackenzie River country was working out in somewhat startling fashion.

"So, Le Noir dropped it, eh?" he snapped, studying the old parchment more closely, and then carefully folding it and placing it in his pocket.

"Aye, m'sieur—he dropped it!" Molière affirmed. "And that brings us to this other, and even stranger matter—the matter of the dead Dubarry!"

The old man paused in reflection. Wolfe waited, cold eyed.

"This post, m'sieur," the factor resumed, "is a melting pot for the gossip that comes out of the wilderness. A week ago a most strange bit of news trickled down from old Angus Mackenzie's trading post on the Upper Slave.

I will tell it to you, as it was told to me. Make of it what you can!

"An unknown brigade, which is neither old Mackenzie's nor Brule Le Noir's, is once more operating out of that wilderness of frightful memories. Old Angus both saw and heard it. It passed his post in the night, under the full flood of a bright moon—passed singing in a sort of weird chant, the old river song of 'dead and forgotten voy-agers' and those who sang, m'sieur, were rugged, hard-fisted Frenchmen of Old Quebec!

"It was Dubarry's brigade back again, m'sieur," the old factor cried breathlessly, "for it flew at the bow of the head bateau a white pennant with a red crest on it, like a crimson blotch of blood—the crest of the dead Dubarry!"

"That is not all," Molière went on, "that specter brigade comes out of the ghost-haunted wilderness of the Upper Slave, and as surely as fate, m'sieur, it comes from beyond the Great White Barrier, through which there is no known passage for barge, bateau, or birch!

"And listen, m'sieur," the factor concluded in a hushed voice. "The leader of that ghost brigade wears the same scarlet cloak that Armond Dubarry used to wear. He rides, poised on the head bateau, back of that pennant. He is as slenderly frail as a willow, and his face, m'sieur—his face is always hidden back of a purple mask!"

Wolfe had sat listening, slumped in his chair. He suddenly jerked alive and rose to pace the floor.

"So, that's the story, eh?" he demanded in a harsh voice.

"As I say—make what you can of it," the factor said. "It sounds like the creation of a distorted brain, but—it's got old Angus Mackenzie barring the door of his post o' nights."

"Where does Brule Le Noir fit into the picture?"

Wolfe was thinking aloud, but the

factor accepted the query as directed to himself. He shrugged.

"Brule Le Noir is an enigma, who fits—nowhere!" he said.

The sergeant smiled grimly.

"He fits like the glove on a hand—into it!" Wolfe barked.

Molière looked up sharply, but Wolfe was pacing the floor again and did not explain his strange statement. He suddenly paused, however, before the factor.

"There is more to this murder mystery of Armond Dubarry than appears on the surface, friend factor," he suddenly said.

"It will never be solved," Molière returned moodily.

"It has already been solved—by Kenyon!" Wolfe snapped. "The one important thing now is—go out and find Kenyon!"

"But how, m'sieur, will you find him?" the factor asked.

Wolfe's eyes became as flint-hard as winter ice.

"By chasing down your mysterious phantom, Molière—the purple mask!" he said. "There is the crux to the situation!"

The old factor was sitting, staring at him, when Wolfe suddenly stiffened. Molière felt the shock of a swift change in him. A bleak grayness had spread over his face. He was suddenly the grim man hunter—the wolf, whose name he bore, scenting the unseen prey!

Wolfe had heard with his uncanny ears, what the factor had not heard—an all but soundless noise at the window—the soft, inhalation of a deep-drawn breath!

Now he saw—without moving a muscle—a face pressed against the pane, the glitter of dark, spying eyes!

Before Factor Molière knew what it was all about, Wolfe leaped like a cat, and sent the full force of his body smashing through the glass!

CHAPTER VI.

JEAN ST. PIERRE BATEESE.

AS he plunged out, headfirst, into the night, the sergeant's clutching fingers grasped the coarse fabric of a man's jacket. The steellike grip held, but the cloth tore away, and the man vanished into the dark.

Wolfe landed on his shoulders, but he was up in a second, gathering himself for a spring. He could see nothing but the trail that was swallowed up in the dark forest of spruce.

It was the same trail he had followed in pursuit of Black Brule earlier in the evening, and Wolfe followed it now to the river.

He paused at the edge of the timber. The dark forest was behind him and the river in front of him, glimmering softly with the dancing spectrums of the mirrored stars, but nowhere did he see his man.

Between the forest and the stream was a narrow strip of sandy shore on which, drawn half out of the water, gently rocked a birch canoe. The canoe held a keen significance for Sergeant Wolfe, but aside from its presence there, a search up and down the shadowy shore revealed nothing further.

Unless the unknown prowler had slipped back into the timber somewhere, he had not come out of it at all.

Wolfe heard a faint noise. It might have been the gentle sifting down of pine needles, or the soft patter of wild life on the forest floor, but he was taking no chances. He moved backward into deeper shadow behind a clump of birch, and was instantly seized by a pair of viselike, hairy arms that circled his body with a giant's clutch!

Wolfe's hard fight to break the crushing embrace was useless. He was as powerless in those muscular arms as a babe, and he ceased his efforts, waiting for a chance to slip a hand down to the butt of a service Colt.

A voice boomed in his ear. "Par-don, m'sieu', dees leetle coup d'état!" The tones were neither harsh nor villainous. "But I got orders to tak' you Nor'd, an' by gar, dat's w'at I'm go-in' do!"

Before he could extricate himself, Wolfe found his arms and hands bound securely to his sides by stout strips of *babiche* knotted together.

Even so, thought the sergeant, this was not as bad as being shot at from ambush, with a first-class chance of stopping a bullet. He therefore decided to play the game as fate dealt the cards to him.

"Well, what next?" he calmly asked. "Into de canoe, m'sieu'!"

Without a murmur, Wolfe stepped out into the starlight and into the waiting birch. Over him loomed at once the dark bulk of a giant form, pushing the canoe into the water.

The big fellow, a French Canadian by his accent, dug in his powerful blade. As they silently passed the post where Factor Molière waited—his light dimly glowing in the night—the Canuck growled a low warning.

"Ef m'sieu' mek de trouble, me, I use on heem de paddle in my han'—blam—lak dat! Do I mek de meanin' clear, so m'sieu' compren'?"

"I get you, my friend," Wolfe gritted grimly. "The trouble will come—later!"

The big Frenchman laughed softly and paddled on into the misty, starlit night, due north!

WOLFE leaned back against the dun-
nage in the craft, and gave him-
self up to a puzzling study of the
strange situation he found himself in.

It was the first time in his eventful career as a wearer of the Scarlet that he had ever experienced a reversal of the usual order of things. As a rule, the shackles were on the other fellow.

Then, as if his thoughts had been

promptly read, the Canuck offered a suggestion with a good-humored chuckle. At any rate he was a jovial person, Wolfe decided.

"Ef m'sieu' behav' lak good leetle boy, he will not come to grief, *non!*"

"Little boys are irresponsible!" Wolfe snapped back.

"*Mais oui*, dat's w'at I 'spec, m'sieu'. So"—with a shrug of the huge shoulders—"I tie op de leetle boy to keep heem out meeschief!" The Canuck laughed with a deep rumbling sound.

"But you can't keep the little boy from thinking mischievous thoughts," Wolfe returned dryly.

"*Non, m'sieu'*, das fac!" the other chuckled.

"So, my friend—beware!" barked the sergeant.

After an interchange of subtle pleasantry, the journey was pursued in silence, and swiftly—under the urge of that powerful blade—on to its unknown destination, with the sergeant entirely in the dark as to the meaning of it or the end of it, but feeling sure he was not known as a Mounty.

And in that silence and uncertainty, Wolfe set his thoughts to work. First to get free of his bonds. Well, given a little spray over the bow of the birch to soften the *babiche* thongs, and it might be accomplished.

That settled, Wolfe waited for the first white-water rapids to furnish the spray. Meanwhile he set about trying to figure out the reason why he was being held a captive. This naturally led first to a study of the man before him.

He could easily visualize in the starlight, now enhanced by the thin silver of a crescent moon creeping up over the spruce, a deeply bronzed face, strong and purposeful, but neither savage nor vicious.

The head was covered with a Hudson Bay kerchief, bound pirate fashion about it, and the mammoth shoulders

and powerful torso were solid sinew, knit into a compact and massive whole.

A veritable deep-woods buccaneer, thought Wolfe, and with the thought flashed a mental picture of those Old Quebec French *voyageurs* of the dead Dubarry's vanished brigade.

But that brigade had not remained in exile. It was vitally active again under a strange leader who wore a purple mask!

Who was it running the outfit, and masquerading in the scarlet cloak of the murdered Dubarry? Then a sudden thought etched itself like acid in Wolfe's brain.

Was Armond Dubarry dead!

THE night wore on with no let-up to the steady, rhythmic swing of that powerful blade. The man was tireless, or else there was some tragic urge back of this night's comedy of errors!

Wolfe thought of Kenyon with a sudden catch at his breath. The corporal's safety depended on Wolfe's ability to get rid of the bonds which held him helpless, for the end of this journey was doubtful.

The canoe's swift, sudden leap into a ragged stretch of white water, shut off Wolfe's vain speculations. They were evidently running into a rapids, and he had a very definite task to attempt—to-night, before dawn—or there might not be a journey's end for him, nor even a faint hope for the corporal.

He pushed slowly back into the V of the bow. The paddler's eyes were strained on the white trail ahead. He did not observe the sergeant's crafty move.

The frail birch plunged down a white, starlit stairway of frothing fury, studded with sharp fangs of granite. It meant death for the bound man if the thin shell but touched one hidden fang in its wild, mad race!

But those powerful arms, with the rippling muscles corded into hard knots

of steel, guided the bark's destiny with a skill Wolfe had never seen equaled by any man.

Nevertheless, when it was over, the sergeant heaved a sigh of relief, to which was added a keen satisfaction. He had achieved his purpose—he was wet to the skin. Time alone would tell the success or failure of his ruse.

"By gar, m'sieu'," the big Frenchman cried ecstatically, "how you lak dat, eh? She was g-r-rand ride—*bien!*" At Wolfe's lack of enthusiasm, he added: "You tire? Pret' soon we mek leetle camp for breakfast. Rest mebbeso ten—twent' minutes, den we push on."

The sergeant, elated at the feel of the loosening *babiche*, scarcely heard. He would have a little surprise of his own in that breakfast camp, or he was off in his guess. To occupy the Canuck's thought, he asked:

"Suppose you had ripped this birch open in those rapids?"

The big Frenchman laughed uproariously.

"*Pouf, m'sieu!* you call dat rapids?" he scoffed. "Wait till you ride wit' me de Upper Slave!"

So, thought Wolfe, that was the predestined end of their journey, was it? It was the big Canuck's first slip!

Wolfe said not a word. For the moment the other seemed a bit garrulous, and it was often wise to let the other fellow do the talking, especially in a game where it appeared to be a matter of playing the cards as fate dealt them.

"M'sieu', he mus' pardon ef I keep hees han's tied," the Frenchman continued with a deep chuckle. "Mebbeso, me, I'm scare de leetle boy w'at t'ink meeschievous t'oughts, eh?"

Then came a change in him. The humor vanished, and he drew his great body up until his chest swelled like the mighty bole of a tree.

"As for dos rapids, m'sieu'," he now said, "you don't need worry. You rode

dos rapids wit' de bes' white-water man w'at ees in all de Nord Country!

"Me, I am Jean St. Pierre Bateese!"

It was not mere braggadocio—Wolfe comprehended that—it was said with a certainty of assurance, as though the mere announcement was enough to settle all doubts in the matter.

Wolfe wondered. The name meant nothing to him. Smiling, he queried: "And who, may I ask, is Jean St. Pierre Bateese?"

The big fellow drew back in a great surprise, letting his paddle rest idle across the thwarts. There was in his eyes a shocked astonishment that was either assumed or real—the sergeant could not decide which.

"You don' know who Jean St. Pierre Bateese ees, m'sieu'?" Then the big Canuck surprised Wolfe. "An' yet, I have known you all tam, M'sieu' Sergeant de Police!"

Wolfe fairly winced. Knowing him for a wearer of the Scarlet, yet the big Frenchman had dared to lay hands on him! The thought riled the sergeant.

But that was not all that Jean St. Pierre Bateese dared to do. His next statement was startling.

The big Canuck looked Wolfe squarely in the eye and said: "Eet was Jean St. Pierre Bateese—dat, me, m'sieu'—who keel Armond Dubarry!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE PURPLE MASK.

SERGEANT WOLFE was too wise a reader of the human eye to accept that strange confession at its face value. He sat silently thinking about it for some time. It did not ring true. Why should Jean St. Pierre Bateese deliberately pick out a Mountry to boast about killing a man? Unless—

He was doing it to shield somebody else!

The big Canuck was also grimly silent now. He dug his paddle deep into

the water with long, powerful strokes that sent the birch speeding down the river, cutting the crest of the turbulent waters like a dart.

The voice of the waters deepened, and the channel narrowed, as they plunged silently on into the depths of the brooding wilderness. The strained silence endured into the dark predawn when the Canuck suddenly shot in toward the dark, balsam-shrouded shore.

Wolfe, wary and alert, felt the birch grate softly on a pebbly beach. Before them was an opening in the forest, black as indigo!

"M'sieu', we eat here, leetle bite breakfast—den we push on!" the Canadian growled almost savagely.

Thus Jean St. Pierre Bateese broke the thick silence in a voice that rumbled like thunder.

Wolfe said nothing, but stepped out of the canoe bow onto a sandy shore, smothered in darkness. Presumably he was a securely bound prisoner.

Jean St. Pierre Bateese pulled the canoe up to safety, got out his cooking outfit, and immediately began to gather deadwood for the making of a fire.

Wolfe watched him from the gloom of the balsam, a cold smile playing on his lips. The self-confessed murderer of Armond Dubarry paid him no heed, having no fear for the menace of the law—as long as the law was shackled.

The sergeant studied the face of the man which the camp-fire light threw into bold relief. There was a solemn, deep melancholia stamped on Jean St. Pierre Bateese's bronzed features—a determined purpose to the set of the jaw, a dark brooding in his eyes.

With the Frenchman's broad back toward him, and his thoughts entirely preoccupied and unsuspecting, it would have been easy, thought Wolfe, to have at that moment snapped the iron bracelets on his hairy wrists.

But the sergeant did not believe that Jean St. Pierre Bateese had murdered

Armond Dubarry, besides he had plans more subtle just now than the taking into custody of a self-confessed murderer.

There was much this Canuck knew, which he did not know. He was the key to the mystery of the purple mask, and Wolfe was satisfied that he was headed straight for that hidden riddle's lair.

Then there was the warm trail of another mystery to be considered right now—Brule Le Noir—and the whole tangle of the North to be solved, and—the fate of Kenyon!

Playing the game as he now intended to play it, the wily sergeant stepped forward with a low, taunting laugh, having wrenched free of his bonds.

Jean St. Pierre Bateese was up and on his feet, facing the Mounty, with surprising agility. He jerked to an abrupt stop when he beheld Wolfe, arms folded, smiling grimly at him. Even the sergeant's service guns dangled in their holsters, where he had left them without considering the matter of removing them.

"By gar!" the big Frenchman muttered, a worried frown passing over his bronzed face. He was plainly distressed over this turn of affairs.

"I gave you fair warning to beware, my friend!" Wolfe snapped, icy eyes watching every move of the man, his body tensed and ready.

But the big Canuck merely indulged in a half-hearted smile that showed the white of his teeth in a grimace.

"*Oui, m'sieu'* geeve Jean St. Pierre Bateese fair warning, *das fac'*. De leetle boy's t'oughts got busy for sure—but still ees he foolish leetle boy. Me, I could crush hees bones wit' one han'." He closed his mighty fist. "*Pouf!* lak dat, *M'sieu'* Sergeant de Police!"

"No, my friend," Wolfe returned, "you'd never get near enough for that. I could drill you between the eyes before you could bat a lash." With a

lightning-swift draw, he had the Canuck covered with a service gun. "Like that! Thanks for leaving me my guns."

"*M'sieu'* ees ver' clever, *das fac'*," the Canuck said. "But Jean St. Pierre Bateese will outwit heem yet!"

A deadly silence bit into the little camp-fire drama, and the grim smile faded from the face of each. For a long time eye met eye with subtle challenge.

"I could take you in as a prisoner, my friend," Wolfe said pointedly, "for the self-confessed murder of Armond Dubarry, but——"

He paused on the word. Jean St. Pierre Bateese shrugged his great shoulders.

"Eet ees too bad, *m'sieu'*—dees leetle checkmate—eet was import' dat I tak' you nord!"

"Why?" Wolfe queried crisply.

A shrug was all he got to that. The sergeant watched the effect of his next words closely.

"I said I could arrest you for murder, Bateese!" he rasped. "But you did not kill Armond Dubarry!"

The Canuck's eyes flared wide.

"*Mais oui*, I keel heem—sure t'ing I keel heem! I stick my knife in hees back—so!" Suiting the action to the word, he gripped his skinning knife in his fist, and showed the manner of it.

Wolfe's smile returned.

"Until I'm sure of that, Jean St. Pierre Bateese, you are still a free man. You see Dubarry was shot in the back—not stabbed! So"—Wolfe laughed lightly—"that gives you a clean alibi!"

The big Frenchman looked crestfallen.

"Why are you so anxious to be a—murderer?" Wolfe asked.

"I keel heem!" was the persistent reply.

It was the sergeant's turn to shrug. "All right," he said, "you killed him! Now I have a proposition to make you—we'll play out this game together, you

and I. I'll go with you into the North of my own accord!"

"*Bien!*"

"I want to see the man who gives orders to lay violent hands on a wearer of the King's Scarlet!"

A frown swept the Canuck's brow. He pondered those last words thoughtfully for a second, then a faint smile touched his lips.

"An' who does m'sieu' t'ink geeve to Jean St. Pierre Bateese dos orders?" he asked.

"It might be Brule Le Noir," Wolfe suggested, "but——"

The word was snapped out of his lips.

"Eet ees not from such as Brule Le Noir dat Jean St. Pierre Bateese tak' hees orders," the Frenchman growled. "Som' day I meet me op wit' dat Black Brule, an' on dat day, m'sieu', he will pay de price of hees treachery!"

Wolfe's chance shot had drawn fire. So the treachery of Brule Le Noir did figure in the mystery! He tried another chance shot, and a more likely one to make a bull's-eye with.

"It is—the wearer of the purple mask!" he said.

A fire lighted the Canadian's eyes.

"M'sieu', I lay down my life for de wearer of dat purple mask!"

"Care to tell me who he is?"

The other smiled oddly.

"Eet ees not for Jean St. Pierre Bateese to tear de mask from dat face, m'sieu'!"

Wolfe persisted. "Why does your strange leader—fear the Scarlet Law?"

"He does not fear the Scarlet, m'sieu'."

"Then why was it thought necessary to drag a wearer of the Scarlet into the North—bound?"

"Would m'sieu' hav' gone wit' me odderwise?"

"Yes!" barked the sergeant. "There is no one I so wish to meet face to face as this leader of yours who wears

a dead man's clothes, and hides his face behind a purple mask!"

"By gar, m'sieu' shall hav' hees weesh!" the Canadian cried. "Face to face, M'sieu' Sergeant de Police, you shall meet heem!"

A strange light flamed in the big fellow's eyes as he gave that last word its peculiar inflection.

"When?" Wolfe barked.

"*Now*—ef m'sieu' will but look behind heem!"

Wolfe turned slowly, bleak eyes cold and hard, and stared.

In the edge of the dark balsam, stood a slender, scarlet-garbed figure, wearing a purple mask!

CHAPTER VIII

A JOURNEY IN THE DARK.

ICY-EYED WOLFE was for once shaken out of his usual calm. He stared in vague bewilderment. It was as if the grinning Canuck had rubbed a magic Aladdin's lamp, and conjured up a startling genie out of the depths of the slumbering wilderness.

The red specter stood there motionless. A small, gauntleted hand leveled a pistol at him that gleamed in the firelight with a steady, deadly menace.

Wolfe smiled grimly into the impelling eyes—eyes as luminous dark and deep as arctic midnight under the cold, misty glow of polar stars.

They appraised him through the slits in the purple mask with a cold intensity.

"Well!" he said, tiring of the unspoken drama.

Whether the specter of the purple mask was to give him the satisfaction of speech, he was not destined to know in the swift tragedy of that climactic moment.

A blinding flash of flame raked out of the predawn gloom. The crash of a gun echoed in the waiting stillness!

Wolfe felt the red-hot, burning sting of lead sear his forehead, heard the

whine of the bullet as it ricocheted beyond him. It staggered him, blinded him, left his brain groping in a dizzy whirl.

Whence the shot came, he could not have told. He was vaguely conscious of but one startling thing—the strange cry of consternation that fell from the scarlet apparition's lips, the shrill cry of a voice, frozen with horror.

The peculiar quality of the cry—the high treble of the voice—presented a mystery that fought for solution in his befogged brain. He was too dazed to grasp it.

Then it came in a quick flash of comprehension, just as everything else went suddenly black for the sergeant, and he pitched forward on his face.

The person in the purple mask was a woman.

WHEN he regained consciousness, Wolfe knew that it was broad daylight, and that his tired body was resting comfortably on blankets in the bottom of a canoe that moved swiftly to the urge of paddles flashing in the sun.

He did not know where he was, nor how far and to what purpose the game had played while he was unconscious.

He remembered the startling specter in scarlet with its purple mask, staring at him with eyes he would not forget! He remembered the shot, the strange cry that had puzzled him—after that, nothing! Whether it was the early dawn of the present day, or a week ago, he could not decide. It seemed æons remote.

Squinting his eyes to accustom them to the blinding sunlight, he slowly opened them to an investigation of his present status.

It was Jean St. Pierre Bateese paddling the canoe—a grim Bateese, from the bronzed face of whom the good-natured grin had vanished.

There was no one else!

The present stream they were trav-

eling was not the Slave River where the little drama took place. It was narrow, boisterous, swifter—threading a deep dark wilderness that crowded close to ragged, rocky shores.

Where was the woman who masqueraded in a dead man's scarlet cloak, and covered her face with a purple mask?

Wolfe felt a little weak, but his brain was operative once again—a trifle foggy, but back on the job. His task now was to find that mystery woman of the Upper Slave!

The wily sergeant's eyes were closed when Jean St. Pierre Bateese suddenly dropped his gaze to them. It was as well to let the big Canuck think he still journeyed in the dark.

Presently the canoe rounded a twist in the stream, and a clutter of low log buildings burst into view.

It was Angus Mackenzie's trading post.

They were on the Upper Slave—a two-day journey from that fateful camp. Wolfe had been dead to the world for two whole days!

The sergeant did not realize that he had been desperately ill, until, seeing the canoe was passing the post which he had originally chosen as his destination, he tried to rise in order to stop it.

He slumped back from sheer weakness even before Jean St. Pierre Bateese reached out a hand to stay him, with a low warning.

"M'sieu' ees ver' seeck. He ees to keep still! Me, I tak' heem queek to one who feex heem op in no tam, ef he be good leetle boy."

Wolfe lay still, but it was by compulsion of the moment. The old dizziness was pushing him back again into mental darkness. He was barely aware of it, when the canoe sped by Angus Mackenzie's post, and entered a small offshoot from the larger stream that crawled like a serpent into the black depths of the forest

As the trees swallowed it up, he had lost consciousness completely—for the second time embarking on a dark journey!

WHEN the sergeant next opened his eyes, it was to the touch of a soft hand on his brow, and to the gentle urge of a voice. It was the voice that brought him to alert wakefulness.

He heard a woman speaking.

"M'sieu' 'Scarlet Coat,'" the person was saying, "drink this, and you will feel better!"

Wolfe made not the slightest move. From beneath seemingly closed lids, he studied the owner of the voice. He found himself looking on a face, and into eyes he knew he could never possibly forget.

The face was as lovely as a rose. It was very young, but it was the face of a matured woman. Was it sadness or fear or some engrossing purpose that looked out of the eyes?

Wolfe stopped at the eyes. They glowed, dark and luminous. He would know those eyes among a million eyes.

The last time he looked into them, they had gazed back at him through the slits in a purple mask!

Now neither mask nor scarlet cloak were in evidence. The woman was arrayed in close-fitting buckskin. Her head was uncovered, disclosing one more marvel—her hair. It was a glittering mass of jet, shot with fire from the candlelight that flared from the head of his couch.

She was standing over him, holding a cup of broth in her hand, and was smiling down at him as he had never seen a woman smile before.

Wolfe opened his eyes slowly.

"That is very much better, m'sieur," she said, much to his chagrin. "It is not nice to stare at a woman from beneath one's lowered lids!"

"Neither is it nice," barked the sergeant in something like his old style,

"to stare at a man from behind a purple mask!"

It was a quick, chance shot, but it failed to strike fire. She replied casually, without the flicker of an eyelash.

"Did m'sieur really see a—purple mask? Or was it an hallucination of his recent delirium!"

Puzzlement must have shone in Wolfe's face.

"M'sieur has been very ill for—nearly a week!" she hastened to explain; "but our good, little doctor-priest has corrected that. In a day or so M'sieur Scarlet Coat will be—as he put it in his fever—'back on the job.'"

Doctor-priest! He wondered if that would be the mysterious Père André mentioned in the note found in Kenyon's diary by the inspector?

The thought caused Wolfe to take a first close survey of his surroundings. He was tucked into a snowy couch in a low, log room that was clean as a pin, and smelly with antiseptics.

"Mind telling me where I am?" he asked.

"First, m'sieur will drink the broth," she said.

The sergeant complied. It put renewed strength into him. He lifted himself to a sitting posture. She now gratified his curiosity.

"This is the little Indian mission, m'sieu'. It is close to Angus Mackenzie's trading post; and so, it is into the Upper Slave wilderness that fate—and a woman—has brought M'sieur Rodney Wolfe of the Scarlet Police!"

How pat she had his name and connection with the service!

"You, I take it, are the woman!" Wolfe commented dryly. "And just where did you figure in the bringing?"

"It was I, m'sieur, who wrote the message that brought you, and sent Corporal Kenyon's tunic down to your headquarters, urging that you come with haste."

That surprising announcement put the

old calculating bleakness back into Wolfe's eyes.

"Where did you get the tunic—where's Kenyon?" he snapped.

"If I had known that, I would not have sent for—Icy-eyed Wolfe!" she returned.

"Nor have set that big chimpanzee, Jean St. Pierre Bateese, to waylay and kidnap me, eh?"

"That was to insure your safety, m'sieur," she returned with a smile. "The Scarlet is not liked in this country!"

Wolfe tried another chance shot, with as little success as the other: "And yet you, yourself, wear a dead man's scarlet cloak!"

"That is as it may be, m'sieur!" she countered.

"In the name of Heaven—who are you?" he queried irritably.

"I, m'sieur?" She met his gaze squarely. "Ask the little doctor-priest—Père André!"

At that moment the door opened and a blast of wind blew out the candle. When it was relighted, she was gone, and where she had stood, now stood a grizzled, little man with sharp gray eyes and a wrinkled smile.

"I am Father André of the Indian mission here," said he.

CHAPTER IX.

ANGUS MACKENZIE.

WOLFE stared long at the priest, face flushed, eyes fever-bright. Here was the mission priest he had come north seeking, as that strange message had suggested: "Let him seek Père André!"

"You are the one I want to see and talk with!" he barked.

The old man put his hand on Wolfe's throbbing brow.

"You have already talked too much, m'sieur," the priest denied. "To-morrow—we shall see!"

For two days more, Wolfe remained patient. Not a word could he get out of Père André that touched upon the matter that had brought him north.

On the morning of the second day he was allowed his clothes, and the liberty of the sun-bright clearing around the mission, on a strict promise that he would not go beyond the timber fringe. Père André was away all day, so there was no talk. He did not show up till supper, which an Indian served in the little refectory. Even then, the talk was desultory. Wolfe could not pin the little father down to an answer of any of the things he wanted to know. The sharp old eyes twinkled out of a nest of crowfoot wrinkles, and the thin lips chattered freely about everything else.

It was after the supper, and over the pipes that Père André suddenly went grave. He startled the sergeant by saying: "To-night, m'sieur, I will show you the supposed murderer of Armond Dubarry!"

"Who——" Wolfe began, but the wizened little man's hand waved him to silence.

"To-morrow," he went on as if there had been no interruption, "I will take m'sieur to a small cabin, which will furnish him safe quarters while he is pursuing his mission in the North. That little cabin——"

Père André's sharp eyes—now minus the twinkle—met the sergeant's.

"That cabin, m'sieur, will tell you something—if your eyes are keen!" he said. "And then, you will have to work out your own salvation—with fear and trembling!"

It was quickly evident to Wolfe that he would get little direct information from Père André. The mission clock ticked solemnly into a dragging silence. It was at a late hour that the priest arose, and, covering his head with the cowl of a long black cloak, spoke a single word softly.

"Come!"

OLD Angus Mackenzie's trading post sat in a clearing, before which ran the snarling waters of the Upper Slave. Though the night was bright with the sifted silver of the moon and the glitter of arctic stars, the post was steeped in the gloom of the encroaching forest.

A single light burned in the rear, where the factor's living quarters were located. The priest led the MOUNTY toward this, and his movement was like the noiseless drift of a shadow.

Père André looked first through the grimed window from whence the light streamed forth, and peered intently into the room beyond.

He turned softly back to Wolfe's side and whispered: "You will find the factor, and a visitor. One of the two is supposed to have murdered Armond Dubarry! I shall let M'sieur Wolfe decide—which!"

It was the second time the little father had placed a significant emphasis on the word "supposed." Wolfe, puzzling on it, moved closer to the grimy glass, and looked over the scene within.

Angus Mackenzie was standing to view, full length, in the candlelight. A grim old Northman he was, seething with inward rage, that was not un-mixed with something akin to fear.

His face was harshly seamed by the brooding years that had passed over his head, and his burning, bleary eyes were smoldering with hatred under his heavy, bristling brows—hatred for the other man!

Seated, legs sprawled before him, and smiling evilly back of his thick black beard, was Brule Le Noir!

One of them was supposed to have murdered Armond Dubarry, and Wolfe had been left to decide—which! By what necromancy was he to decide that important question, he wondered?

"Listen!" Père André whispered in his ear.

Black Brule was lifting his rasping voice in speech. Like a mad old timber wolf at bay, Angus Mackenzie stood and listened, held by the spell of the big man's evil eyes.

"I am giving you one more chance to concede to my plan," Le Noir snarled. "Do you think I've waited all this time to be balked in my game, here at the finish, by an old fool like you?"

"Game!" old Angus growled. "Do you call treachery, aye, murder, a game?"

"If you don't get caught at it!" Le Noir laughed harshly. "Armond Dubarry played a desperate game and won. Why not? I knew Dubarry and what he was after, before he lit out of the Mackenzie River country ahead of the Red Coats. He killed a man to get hold of the man's secret!"

"The man was a trapper named Dorset—Henry Dorset—who had run onto gold, and had come down to Mackenzie Bay with his secret, and some heavy pokes to prove it! Dubarry wasn't squeamish about playing the game rough. And he baffled the Mounties and—won!"

"If a dead man ever wins!" old Angus muttered.

"I followed him into the Slave wilderness," Le Noir went on, heedless of the interruption, "and I sold him my silence for a fair share of his—luck! He paid until he found out—but never mind what he found out. He died sudden on Dead Man's Portage!"

"And because he had found you out and stopped your blackmail, you—murdered him!" The old man was snarling.

"Tush-tush!" Le Noir baited. "You thought it was fur he was after. You didn't know his fur game was a blind to hide his main objective. You were scared he'd cut into your fur dangerously, and—it was you who killed him!"

"You lie!" the old man raged, and the sergeant wondered.

Wolfe saw the savage glare in Black Brule's eyes as old Mackenzie threw the lie into his teeth, but the sergeant himself felt the shock of the man's next words.

"When I produce that blasted Red Coat, who disappeared—and I can produce him—do you think you can convince him that I lie?" he snarled. "Listen, old man—whoever it was killed Armond Dubarry, tied up his secret in a knot. The old parchment map which you——"

"You stole from my post!"

"You stole it first from the dead Dubarry," Le Noir snapped. "But that's beside the mark. It's gone. I lost it. But nobody could read its meaning. I tried for five years and got nowhere with the riddle. Now I know a better way!"

He paused and fixed the old man with a cold, hard gaze.

"The point is—there's only one who knows its secret, and that one is——"

"For the last time I tell you, I will not——" the old man began.

"A woman," Le Noir went on, "whom you can deliver into my hands! I'll do the rest, and—we both win!"

"No—no—no!" old Angus cried, his voice pitched high with protest.

"It's either that, or—Kenyon!"

But for the grip of Père André's hand on his shoulder, Icy-eyed Wolfe might have forgotten that he, too was playing a subtle game, when that name fell like a serpent's hiss from Brule Le Noir's lips.

Old Mackenzie's face was a death's mask of indecision; then at a sound on the river, a gleam of cunning shot into his bleary old eyes. Perhaps he and the little priest were the only ones who heard it—Le Noir was too intent upon his evil purpose, Wolfe too frozen by the shock of Kenyon's name.

"Give me until to-morrow night," old Angus muttered.

"To-morrow night, then," Le Noir

rasped. "That's the last! I'll bring the Mounty along in case you——"

"So much the better," Mackenzie agreed. "We will quickly silence him with——"

"A knife!" Le Noir snarled.

"No—with the truth! Listen, Le Noir."

The old man's face was smiling grimly now, as if his fear had been suddenly swept away by something that removed the last vestige of his indecision.

The something was that sound on the river!

Wolfe heard it now, and so did Brule Le Noir, whose dark features above the thick black beard, turned a pasty-gray. It was the old, haunting ghost chant of the dead Dubarry's passing brigade!

"Checkmate, Le Noir!" old Angus snarled vengefully in his turn. "Against your threat, I'll dare to play—the purple mask!"

The tread of approaching feet sent Black Brule scurrying with a curse through the back door, and out into the safety of the night.

BACK in the mission, Wolfe smoked a thoughtful pipe with the silent little priest. It was Père André, however, who broke the throbbing silence.

"Well, m'sieur, which man killed Armond Dubarry?" he asked.

The sergeant smiled grimly. The priest had told him little, but had put him in the way of learning much. He had verified his Mackenzie River hunch.

"Of one thing, at least, I am certain, father," he said. "When I go back south, I shall take with me as a prisoner, Brule Le Noir!"

"For the murder of Armond Dubarry?"

"No!" Wolfe snapped. "For the murder of Henry Dorset, the trapper!"

"Ah!"

A silence ensued, and the sergeant re-

turned his verdict on the slayer of Armond Dubarry.

"It was old Angus Mackenzie who killed Dubarry!" he said.

Père André smiled.

"It was neither, m'sieur—Armond Dubarry is not dead!"

CHAPTER X.

THE CABIN.

WOLFE slept on that startling statement. He could make nothing out of it, and the little priest would enlighten him no further. If that were true, the five-year murder mystery was bursted like a bubble.

The fate of Kenyon also disturbed the sergeant's dreams. Then, there was the morrow's journey with its possibilities. And in the back of his mind—the mysterious cabin!

In the early dawn, a voice awakened him. It was Père André with a call to breakfast.

"It is wise, m'sieur," the little man advised, "that we start early and avoid the daylight's spying eyes. Old Mackenzie had thrown the gauntlet, and Black Brule is like to take the war-path!"

Wolfe mulled that over while he ate alone in candle-lighted silence. The priest had eaten, and was busy outside, making the canoe ready for the journey.

"I wonder," speculated the sergeant, "what the end of this day's journey will be."

The journey proved to be a lengthy one, and into the specter-haunted depths of the Upper Slave wilderness. As they pushed on deeper and deeper into that desolation of loneliness, the river sang its requiem of death in a more ominous key.

Its rugged shores lifted higher as the advance was made. Then back of the dark slumbering forest ahead, Wolfe saw the grim, granite barriers, which

constituted the advance guard of Hollow Mountain.

Somewhere he knew, under the shadow of those mighty peaks was Dead Man's Portage, and the hidden mystery of the Great White Barrier!

His eyes grew bleak with their cold, icy cast, as he photographed on his memory the landmarks of the wild terrane, and tabulated each twist and turn of the leaping stream; so that, if necessary, he could easily follow it in the dark.

Père André's eyes twinkled approvingly. A man of the North himself, he appreciated these precautions.

They came eventually to the seeming blockade of a high, rugged wall of granite. Closer approach revealed it to be a spur of the mountain, running east and west, and the river swerved to a parallel course with it into the west.

Père André did not follow the swing of the current. He shot the birch straight at the towering wall and into the shallow eddies of a little cove, where he brought it to a stop at a natural landing and indicated that Wolfe was to debark.

Wolfe saw before him a dark fissure in the rugged cliff that sloped upward in a steep, twisting trail. When the priest announced where they were, the sergeant's pulse beat a bit faster.

"This, m'sieur, is Dead Man's Portage!" came the information. "It crosses this range, which is but a spur of the main mountain, and gives a quicker passage to the other side. That way"—he pointed down the wildly rushing river—"it is ten miles farther, but safer. The stream rounds this spur and doubles back on itself, eventually reaching Thunder Canyon, immediately opposite our present position, and which we reach by taking the portage in a fraction of the time.

"It is a dangerous risk, m'sieur, and few canoemen take it, preferring the longer way round; but we shall take

it, because—it is wise for m'sieur to know it!"

Père André hid the birch back of a boulder, and Wolfe followed him up the twisting trail to the top of the draw. Then began a danger trail, which the sergeant would not soon forget.

It wound through narrow crevices, and over dark chasms of Stygian blackness, spanned by granite slabs worn smooth by the passage of countless moccasined feet since the days when the world was young.

There were black gaps, split in the solid rock, sepulchral hollows, fathomless depths, breath-taking drops over sheer ledges, cavernous tunnels that multiplied the sounds of their passing into weird, ghostly thunder!

Before the sergeant completed that mad journey, he was ready to concede that Hollow Mountain was justly entitled to its significant name, and that Dead Man's Portage was all that the gruesome title implied!

When he came to the end of it, he smiled grimly at the little Père.

"So," he said, "here is where the mystery of Armond Dubarry had its grim beginnings, eh?"

"And here also, m'sieur, it will have its fateful end!" Père André prophesied.

Abruptly, Wolfe found himself looking down on the river once more, and into the maw of Thunder Canyon. Rising beyond this, tier on tier, were the gray, granite, snow-capped cliffs of Hollow Mountain, flame-red at the moment with the crimson blaze of the setting sun!

Wolfe was immediately aware of an ominous sound like the muffled boom of exploding artillery, a sound that eclipsed the lesser roar of the frothing waters beneath him, that rose up out of the canyon's depths, and rolled through the mighty cliffs in deep, thunderous mutterings like the rumble of giant drums!

He sought its source, and found it where the plunging river leaped into oblivion back of a vague white shroud of mists that hung between the walls. The deathless pall of white blotted out the world beyond, and out of that white pall came the tumultuous sound.

Wolfe knew it for what it was, a roaring cataract of gigantic proportions, that belched up vaporous fog-banks in Titan rage, and rumbled its wrath like a monstrous Cyclops!

"And that, m'sieur"—Wolfe held his breath as the little priest calmly told him what it was—"that is the Great White Barrier! One may not go beyond, and yet—men have!"

Icy-eyed Wolfe turned away from that gripping sight, appalled. There was a steep descent, but they did not take it. Instead, Père André piloted him a short distance through an intricate maze of boulders to a level opening on the cliff top.

Here stood their objective—a small, log cabin! A strange place for a cabin, thought the sergeant, looking at it with vague misgivings.

Yet he saw it was a clever retreat. A step from its door, one had a commanding view of the canyon, and what might take place below. That was why it was built, he guessed.

But who built it?

To his coldly inquiring eyes, the little père offered no solution of the riddle. He had already intimated that the cabin would "speak for itself." He offered nothing further.

Wolfe did not urge. He had long since decided to play the cards as fate dealt them to him.

Opening the door, Wolfe discovered a small, compact interior, excellently equipped for comfortable living, well-stocked with food—this he thought strange—and as clean as a pin.

"I will tell you this much, m'sieur," Père André offered, "it has had an occupant—recently!"

"Clearly!" Wolfe smiled icily. "Who?"

The little father also smiled—enigmatically.

"At present, it has been prepared for—you!" he said.

"I don't promise to occupy it!" Wolfe snapped, feeling his suspicion growing into full-fledged premonition. Everything seemed too cut and dried!

"You will occupy it!" Père André predicted.

"What makes you so—dead sure!" Wolfe barked.

"When you have read its message, you will understand, m'sieur!" came the elusive reply.

Wolfe looked about him. It was a one-man shack, built of green spruce, which proved it of comparatively recent construction!

"Who built this cabin?" Wolfe shot back of him irritably, then turned suddenly to find himself alone.

Père André had vanished into thin air!

A strange and wily little man, thought the sergeant. Then he made a leap for the door with a belated thought piercing his brain. What about a canoe? Without one, he was left, securely marooned on Dead Man's Portage!

Had he deliberately stepped into a trap?

He made his way through the boulder maze, but saw nothing of Father André. The priest had evidently "hot-footed it" back over the portage, and Wolfe doubted his own ability to travel that dangerous way fast enough to overtake him. He returned to the cabin, pondering the situation, and made a discovery.

Leaning against the side wall, where he had not seen it before, was a small birch-bark canoe.

Wolfe's cold, grim smile immediately came back to his lips. The canoe—if he could locate the paddle—gave him complete mastery of the present situa-

tion at least, and no present worry. Being alone did not bother Icy-eyed Wolfe.

He was the kind of a trailer who preferred to trail alone. Kenyon was the only man he had ever made an exception of. He and the keen-eyed, silent corporal had mushed many a fateful trail together.

Thinking of Kenyon, Wolfe entered the cabin to search for the paddle. With a grunt of satisfaction, he saw it at once, safely reposing on pegs above the window.

Lifting it down, he examined it critically to test its balance. His eyes stopped at a name, carved on the handle.

With a pounding heart, he carried the blade to the light to make certain he had read the name aright. It was clean-cut. There was no mistaking the paddle's ownership. The truth stabbed into Wolfe's brain like the slash of a knife.

It was Kenyon's thin, highly polished blade!

LIKE a voice the cabin had spoken! A thorough search of it revealed many things that left Wolfe bleak-eyed and thoughtful. A rifle over the bunk was undoubtedly Kenyon's, as were certain articles of clothing hanging on pegs behind the door.

An open fire place told its story, too. The cabin had been built when there was need of warmth—possibly during the past winter, after Kenyon had come mushing north. Over the fireplace a crude mantel had been fashioned.

On this was a tin of tobacco, and Kenyon's brier pipe!

Wolfe remembered the pipe, and the corporal's pride in it. It had been sent to him from England, a gift from his mother two years ago.

On the mantel also was a pair of strongly powered binoculars that Kenyon had found on a dead German officer "over there"; and over the mantel, carved with a penknife on the smooth

surface of a peeled log, was an inscription which settled any remaining doubts that was in the sergeant's mind:

THIS CABIN IS DEDICATED TO THE USE
OF THE SCARLET ON A TRAIL OF FATE.

Kenyon had built it!

And the corporal had used it to watch events below—events that had undoubtedly won for him knowledge of the things that had got him into trouble.

He had played the game as Wolfe himself was playing it—a waiting game—with fate dealing the cards! And as the sergeant would continue to play it, but—

With better luck—he hoped!

CHAPTER XI.

WEIRD HAPPENINGS.

DUSK was settling in the depths.

The bold cliffs stood out in soft silhouette against the flaming after-glow. Purple shadows shrouded the hollows. Below, the vague, misty pall of the booming cataract had turned into a gray gloom of mystery, shrouding the unknown.

From the door of the cabin, Wolfe speculatively watched the subtle twilight changes. The little père had said that here, where it began, would also end the tragedy of Armond Dubarry.

He wondered, and even as he wondered on the tragic mystery, the sound of gunshots cracked with smashing echoes through the hollow resonance of the darkening canyon walls!

The sergeant moved swiftly into dynamic action. In the throbbing beat of ten seconds, he had Kenyon's binoculars trained on the canyon depths.

The powerful, prismatic lenses brought up to him in clear detail the strange scene enacting on the river below. He picked out four canoes in a swirl of battle. Three were giving chase

to one, and one of the three was rapidly gaining on the single birch.

Rifles spat hot lead in vicious, staccato barks! Between the walls of gloom acrid powder smoke lifted in a pungent, nostril-stinging stench!

It shut off Wolfe's view before he could identify any of the grim participants. Then as suddenly it lifted to a draft of wind, and his eyes picked up again the red glare of battle.

But it was a losing game for the single birch. The pursuing canoe had passed it, cut off its retreat, hemmed it in a pocket in the center of the three attacking craft.

Wolfe by now had made out at least two of the participants. In the pursuing craft was Brule Le Noir—in the single birch was that slender figure, garbed in scarlet—the wearer of the purple mask!

Wolfe's heart stood still. He had every reason to believe that mask hid the face of a woman!

He watched the unequal battle with throbbing nerves. The scarlet-cloaked figure was untouched by the flying lead, though her two paddlers, one by one, received a death wound and toppled from the birch. Black Brule's game now dawned on the sergeant. He was not trying to kill but to capture her!

A shout of triumph went up when her last oarsman collapsed, and she dropped her rifle and swung to the blade.

Futile effort, Wolfe saw, as he sped to the cabin and returned with Kenyon's rifle. He pumped a shot into the steersman of the craft blocking her retreat. He heard Le Noir's snarl of rage as the canoe swerved out of control, and the lone birch went by it to momentary safety like a shot.

Black Brule was giving immediate chase, and the sergeant was lining his sights once more, when a mighty bellow lifted out of the murk from down the canyon.

Wolfe tore his eyes away from the scene below him, and saw a flotilla of gray birches emerging as if by magic out of the ghostly shroud of the Great White Barrier!

They came, shooting, and they came out of the very heart of the booming cataract! It was incomprehensible, and it put Brule Le Noir and his French quarter-breeds to instant rout. His canoes turned tail and fled upstream into the enveloping mists of twilight.

A loud bellow of derisive laughter followed the thwarted Northman, and Wolfe recognized the booming tones of Jean St. Pierre Bateese.

The lone birch with the purple mask shot to safety in the center of the rescuing canoes, and together with them, disappeared back into that vaporous shroud of mystery that hung over the canyon's end!

To Wolfe it had been a startling, kaleidoscopic picture of swift action, occupying but a few, breath-taking moments, and he had seen with his own eyes, the miracle of the Great White Barrier—the appearing and disappearing of men-laden canoes where there was “no known passage to barge, bateau, or birch!”

THE sergeant prepared and ate his supper in a grimly thoughtful mood. After the meal, he lighted a candle and gave himself to a deep study of the mystery.

It was not often Icy-eyed Wolfe was stumped, but he acknowledged himself baffled now. No one had ever accused him of having nerves, but they were jumpy since he struck the Upper Slave.

His coat hung on a peg, scarlet side out. Its color drew his eye, and reminded him of Kenyon's little inscription over the mantel: “This cabin is dedicated to the Scarlet on a trail of fate!”

Icy-eyed Wolfe rose, tingling to his toes. He had taken up that trail where

Kenyon had left off, and he would pursue it to its fateful end.

He strode to the tunic, and dug his hand into the pocket. He had suddenly remembered something—the old parchment map! Unless they had taken it while he was ill, he might read something out of it that Brule Le Noir had failed to discover.

Much to his surprise, it was still where he had placed it. Either it had been no object to Jean St. Pierre Bateese, or else it had been forgotten in the swift run of events.

Wolfe spread the old parchment out on the little table, built into the wall under the window, and sat for an hour, trying to fathom its meaning under the dim light of the sputtering candle.

It was a map of some kind, undoubtedly, but it hid its secret under a maze of intricate lines and symbols. It came to him suddenly, what it was. The canyon below had been vividly stamped upon his brain, and the old parchment's tangled lines slowly formed themselves into that startling picture!

It was a map of Thunder Canyon and the Great White Barrier!

Wolfe's bleak eyes snapped. So far so good. He now gave his attention to the symbols.

There was a flight of arrows, following the stream, and diverging in two directions, after they entered, what was presumably the ghostly pall of the cataract. At the diverging point was a skull and cross-bones!

The sergeant now gave rigid thought to these.

Above the skull was an all but obliterated word, which he eventually made out to be, “Kismet”—Fate!

“Sure!” Wolfe decided. “And the bones point the way! But which is the right way—the way to avoid fate?”

At the top of each crossed bone was a smaller symbol. On the bone to the right of the death's-head was an obelisk. On that to the left, an asterisk.

There was nothing else, but the cunning sergeant didn't need anything else. He smiled coldly, and eased back into his chair. He interpreted the obelisk, or dagger, to mean—danger! The asterisk, or star, was the symbol of hope—safety! That was clear enough.

To the right of Kismet—fate, was danger—death! While to the left of it was hope—safety! Kismet, the skull, was the parting of the ways, where right choice meant life or death. That was also clear, but—what was it within the veil of those impenetrable mists, that was represented by the gruesome symbol of fate itself?

One must know when he reached the parting of the ways, and that unanswerable question made a blind plunge into the Great White Barrier, on the chance that Wolfe had read its secret aright, still a dauntless dicker with death!

Yet, beyond the Great White Barrier was to be found the final solution to the mystery. Beyond that white pall was the magic lodestar that had attracted the rapacious greed of men. Beyond it, also loomed at present, another mystery, in the woman with the purple mask.

Who was she? Where was Armond Dubarry? Was he alive, as Père André had intimated? Was Corporal Kenyon alive or dead? Where did old Angus Mackenzie fit into the riddle?

Wolfe rose to a pacing of the cabin floor, with still another vital query throbbing in his head. Would he dare, after a more careful study of the old parchment map, to take the tragic plunge into those impenetrable mists?

Icy-eyed Wolfe's coldly calculating brain answered—yes!

His bleak eyes shot to the old parchment, still lying on the table beneath the window, where he had left it.

He was just in time to see a pane crash inward with a clatter of breaking glass, and a long arm reach through.

Wolfe leaped to save the map, but a bony, bloodless hand with emaciated flesh covering skeleton fingers, lifted it, and vanished with it back into the black void of night.

Then came an unearthly screech of diabolical laughter that curdled his blood. It was the screech of a madman—nerve-racking, inhuman!

Wolfe snatched one of his service Colts from its holster lying on the bunk. He wheeled toward the door in one swift, flying motion, and then jerked to an abrupt stop—finding himself looking into the black bore of a leveled gun!

He stared in dumfounded amazement.

"Stay where you are, M'sieur Scarlet Coat!" commanded a low, vibrant voice he had heard before.

And blocking the door to his egress, stood the mystery woman of the Upper Slave!

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOMAN OF MYSTERY.

PALE as a ghost she was, her black eyes swimming pools of darkness, which held his gaze like magnetic poles.

Wolfe, seasoned reader of human emotions, saw on the instant, that strong, inward fear was driving her nerves to the near breaking point.

Of what was she afraid? Surely not of him. Clearly, therefore, it had to do with that strange, mad laughter that had pierced the night with horror!

That sound had raked his own nerves on the raw. What or who it was, he could not imagine. He had seen only the gripping, skeleton fingers grasp and vanish with the old parchment map.

"You—heard?" she whispered tragically.

"What would you have me say?" he asked. "That hideous screech shrilled through the hollows like the wail of a mad lynx!"

She pushed into the cabin, and closed the door softly. With a convulsive shiver, she stood limp, gazing at the

broken window. The gun with which she had threatened him, slid from her hand with a thud to the floor.

Wolfe started toward her, but she was on the *qui vivé* instantly, swinging back with her slender body pressed against the portal.

"Please, m'sieur!"

The cry was a wail of anguish out of the very depths of her woman's soul, filling her dark eyes with the tragedy of tears.

The sergeant hesitated, undecided. A woman's tears were sometimes tricky, and he did not forget that he was dealing with a woman of mystery, trying to hide something that it was his duty to know.

Icy-eyed Wolfe was playing a desperate game. He hardened his heart. Keen sense of duty enabled him to drop once more the cold mask of icy bleakness over his throbbing emotions. Grimly, even harshly, he reached forth his hand to yank the door open, regardless of the soft barricade of feminine loveliness blocking his way.

But Wolfe did not carry out his purpose, nor so much as touch the woman standing there. Once more he jerked to an abrupt stop, listening, and—watching her.

Again had come that wail of madness on the night!

This time it came from out of the canyon's depths, far distant. A wailing pathos of sound it was, like a haunted soul in the throes of torment, crying out a name—over and over again—with a heartrending insistence.

"Hélène! Hélène! Hélène Dubarry!"

WOLFE stood stricken dumb with amazement. The striking of that last name into the pent stillness had sent an icy chill through him. It had died away into the distance like the fading wail of a windigo!

Hélène Dubarry!

Wolfe looked down into the shadowy pools of the fathomless eyes straining up into his own.

"Tell me who that was!" he barked hoarsely.

She smiled wanly at the fierceness he had forced into his tones. Opening the door, she listened intently, then pointed out into the dark shadows.

"M'sieur Scarlet Coat is at liberty *now*, to solve the mystery for himself," she said sweetly, with emphasis on the "now."

The thing had gone, as she knew, and he might as well attempt to chase a will-o'-the-wisp!

"A moment ago," he growled, "you were not so cocksure of my inability."

"That moment is gone, m'sieur, and—it will not come again!" she replied, backing slowly from him across the threshold. "Good night, M'sieur Sergeant de Police!"

"Wait!" Wolfe snapped, his eyes holding her own.

Why, he could not have told, unless it was the intangible, elusive riddle of her—and of what she was hiding from him. The bleak-eyed sergeant had always found a grim satisfaction in matching his wits against the cleverness of men. Now it was a woman!

If it had been a man, he would undoubtedly have backed his brusque command with a gun; but dealing with a woman had put an element of uncertainty in the situation.

She had paused beyond the threshold, watching his perplexity with a half-humorous, sad smile.

"In the name of Heaven, then, tell me who you are!" he cried.

The answer, with its startling import, sent a clammy chill chasing up his spine.

"I am Hélène, m'sieur—Hélène Dubarry!"

And she was gone like a wraith into the night, before he recovered from the shock of it.

AFTER that startling disclosure, the sergeant spent a futile half hour pacing the cabin floor. His brain was in a dizzy whirl. Things had moved fast and furious, and with confusing, climactic suddenness, since he had landed in the Upper Slave wilderness; and yet, the deeper he waded into the tangle, the worse of a riddle it became.

He sat down to a soothing pipe, and was for some time preoccupied with somber reflections. The old parchment map was gone, but that mattered little. Its lines and symbols were photographed indelibly on his memory. It had nothing further to tell him concerning Kenyon's "trail of fate."

The manner of its disappearance was what was puzzling Wolfe. Whose was that bloodless hand with the skeleton-like fingers that he had seen vanish with the old parchment?

And there was still ringing in his brain like jangling bells, that haunting, windigo wail of madness!

"Hélène! Hélène! Hélène Dubarry!"

The mystery woman of the Upper Slave, was Hélène Dubarry! That was even more brain paralyzing. Not a single word was there in Inspector Brinklow's reports on the case about a woman—to say nothing of a woman with that startling name.

Evidently she had until now kept her identity and her sex cleverly concealed, as well as the mystery with which she clothed herself.

Was that the reason for the scarlet cloak and the purple mask? Had she hidden back of them, and deliberately made a mystery out of herself for some subtle purpose that was yet to be disclosed?

It was up to him to find out, and it was up to him to solve the uncanny riddle of that screeching specter of the night.

Suddenly an acid thought bit into Wolfe's brain. What connection did

she have with Armond Dubarry—dead or alive? Was she Dubarry's— But the sergeant's thought was cut off in its inception by an uncanny sound!

He had not closed the door, and now within the threshold came sound of a falling body!

Wolfe wheeled about, expecting almost anything after the unexpected happening of the last few hours. He stopped, rigid, staring. A coatless man, in ragged shirt and torn trousers, hatless and disheveled, was dragging himself into the cabin.

Seeing Wolfe, he paused, swaying drunkenly and uncertainly on his supporting arms.

The sergeant gazed into an unrecognizable face. A matted, unkempt beard masked the pale features. Fever inflamed eyes stared back at him out of dark, sunken sockets.

The eyes suddenly lighted with the faint glimmer of a tired smile. The pallid lips parted, and a husky whisper issued from them. One word fell—one familiar word.

"Wolfe!"

The next instant Wolfe had fallen beside the man, and was lifting him in his arms.

"Kenyon!" he cried.

CHAPTER XIII.

KENYON'S STORY.

THE corporal had given Brule Le Noir the slip at Angus Mackenzie's post, where he had been left in a canoe, bound. He had slipped his bonds, pushed the canoe offshore, and paddled away downstream unseen, keeping at it until he dropped from sheer weakness, due to his long incarceration in Black Brule's camp where he had been confined for weeks.

After that he had intermittently drifted with the swift current, and used the paddle until forced to rest again. He had gained a good lead and main-

tained it till dusk began to drop over the wilderness. Dead Man's Portage was in sight before he caught a glimpse of Le Noir's canoes burning up the trail behind him in a swift pursuit.

Knowing that he could never maneuver the steep trail to the top of Dead Man's Portage, he had taken the longer way around, following the wild course of the river, and maintaining his lead in the swift rush of the stream.

He had debarked near the portage ascent in Thunder Canyon, and had fooled Black Brule by a clever bit of strategy in allowing the canoe to plunge on down the stream to disappear in the greedy maw of the cataract.

He was too weak from the exertion to reach the safety of the cabin above, and had hidden in a pool of darkness under the canyon wall, from where he had witnessed the spectacular fight of the lone birch in its effort to escape Brule Le Noir's trap.

He had tried then to make the portage, but had slipped and fallen. After that all was a dark blank to the corporal, until that madman's unearthly screech rocked him back to consciousness.

Then had taken place something that neither Wolfe, nor the woman who had announced herself as H el ene Dubarry, had been aware of. It was that that had driven Kenyon to drag his body to the top of the portage, to the little cabin, and into Wolfe's waiting arms.

His eyes were bright with fever as he spilled his news in a husky, tragic voice.

"Brule Le Noir has captured that screeching lunatic, and made off with him up the river!"

The significance of that was only partially clear to Wolfe. He saw that Kenyon was burning up with fever, and laboring under an intense excitement. He tried to calm the corporal in order to get a better understanding of the situation.

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"Keep your shirt on, old man," he soothed. "That's far better than if he had captured the—woman!"

"That's just it—he may!" Kenyon cried, struggling out of Wolfe's arms, despite the latter's effort to keep him quiet. "Le Noir slipped back with the rest of his canoes, after his first rout. He caught that mad fool just as he came down from the portage, and I heard the plot and know what Black Brule means to do.

"It's diabolical," Kenyon continued. "He intends to wait till the moon rises, and then he'll set that madman loose in a canoe. The crazy fool knows the secret of the cataract, of course. He'll make for it like a shot, and Le Noir with his crew of cutthroats will follow him and learn the secret—that's the plot—like the hounds and the hare, and it will succeed!

"He'll find out what he's sought for years—Dubarry's secret, and that's not the worst of it! He'll catch her unsuspecting, and unprepared, and then——"

"We'll see what we can do!" Wolfe snapped, getting into his coat, and buckling on his service guns. "By the way, Kenyon, I don't quite get the mystery of—H el ene Dubarry. Perhaps you can explain that."

"Good heavens, man, don't you know?"

"There are a lot of things I don't know," Wolfe growled.

Kenyon exploded another bomb in Wolfe's ears. "That madman is Armond Dubarry, and she is his wife!"

"Dubarry—wife!" Wolfe was floored for the moment. "Sure, I see it now, but she knocked all the sense out of my head when she told me she was H el ene Dubarry. What about Dubarry himself?"

"Dubarry was not fatally wounded back there, five years ago," Kenyon explained hurriedly. "Angus Mackenzie found that out quick enough, and spirited him away in the night. That

accounts for the strange disappearance of the body.

"You see," the corporal went on. "Dubarry came out of it, a raving maniac, talking about things it wouldn't do for the Mounted to hear. He was wanted for murder in the Mackenzie River country, and——"

"But he didn't commit that murder!" Wolfe interpolated.

"No, but it was fastened onto him," Kenyon replied, then spilled another bit of news that caused the sergeant to stare. "Dubarry was not his real name. It was Mackenzie—Armond Mackenzie—he is old Angus Mackenzie's son!"

Wolfe kept silent, as Kenyon concluded his story. His eyes were fastened on the floor.

"And he wasn't shot on Dead Man's Portage. He was shot in old Angus' trading post by the brother of Henry Dorset!"

So blew up another theory of Icy-eyed Wolfe, but he was beginning to see the light, to piece together the loose ends of his Mackenzie River hunch.

"I see," he rasped. "But Dubarry stole the old trapper's secret all right, even if he didn't do the killing. Brule Le Noir was the one who did that."

"And fixed the blame so that it fell on Dubarry," Kenyon added. "Even fooled the Mounted up there—followed Dubarry and blackmailed him!"

"There must have been gold—plenty of it!" Wolfe said.

"What lies beyond that cataract is unknown," the corporal returned; "but it is undoubtedly gold. Dubarry made only one trip, however, out of here, and that was to bring back his wife—Hélène. That trip was fatal. Dorset's brother saw him, followed him back, and—shot him!"

Kenyon was silent for a moment, his eyes burning with an inward flame.

"Since then," he said, "that girl has lived in hell with a madman! But she has stuck to him through it all—

carried on for him—put his brigade back on the river. The worst of it is, she doesn't even yet know that Armond Dubarry stole the secret of the Great White Barrier!"

"It seems you've got pretty close to Hélène Dubarry, old man," Wolfe commented with an intent look at Kenyon. "Seen her often, and talked with her much, eh?"

"And learned to—love her!" Kenyon answered.

"Feared as much!" Wolfe snapped.

"But she doesn't know it!" Kenyon added swiftly.

"No, she wouldn't from your lips, old man—she's Armond Dubarry's wife!"

"Got to do something to warn her, Wolfe!"

"Right!" Wolfe rasped. "There's only one way, and that's a gamble with death."

"You mean——"

"The Great White Barrier!"

THE moon peeped up over the granite peaks, pierced the mists, and dropped silvery shafts down into the black, canyon gloom. The shadows lessened, and the gloom diminished.

Wolfe, waiting at the water's edge in the same inky pool of darkness under the canyon wall that Kenyon had previously occupied, watched, bleary-eyed, the dim materialization of shadowy movement on the river.

There had been no keeping Kenyon back. Armed with his own rifle, and Wolfe with his service Colts—each grimly silent now—they waited, watching.

A canoe—two of them—five—ten—drifted quietly down with the roll of the river, close to the west shore where the shallower eddies swirled. It was a forbidding flotilla—gleaming guns glinting in the moonlight!

Wolfe had delayed the fateful plunge into the roaring cataract's blinding mists

until the last minute, hoping for a possible chance to rescue the mad Dubarry from Le Noir; but the odds were too great. There was not a chance, and the time had come when they could delay no longer.

They must take the uncertain risk. Kenyon knew no more about the secret of the cataract than did the sergeant—not as much, in fact, as Wolfe had seen, and interpreted to the best of his ability, the old parchment map.

Wolfe had brought the canoe down on his shoulders. He now dropped it into the water. They entered it silently. Wolfe shoved off into the stream.

They felt at once the clutching grip of the river. The birch-bark canoe—a mere shell of paper-thinness—swung into the current, and the mad race with death began!

Down the white path of moonlighted rapids it shot like an arrow, pointed straight for the mists, and toward the roaring challenge of the Great White Barrier!

Its swift flight was not discovered. Black Brule and his armed quarter-breeds, gave no sign that they had seen, and even if they had, there was scant time for aggressive action.

On they plunged. The vague mists were just ahead. The tragic plunge was made!

But even as they were swallowed up in the barrier's gloom, another canoe came out of it! They caught a glimpse of a flash of scarlet—that was all. Too late by a split second to cry out a warning, but they knew without question who it was!

It was Hélène Dubarry, seeking her mad husband, and running unknowingly into the jaws of a trap!

Thus fate defeated the Mounties in the very object for which they had taken the risk. The girl was now behind them! And in front of them was—what?

CHAPTER XIV.

KISMET!

FOR just five throbbing seconds by the pounding beat of the sergeant's heart, Wolfe and Kenyon were smothered up in the frightful, opaque mists without sight of anything. Then they shot into the moonlight again.

Kenyon gripped the thwarts, eyes staring wildly ahead. Wolfe's sinewed fingers were clutching the thin, flashing blade; his brain was holding to the image of that old parchment map, and directing his hands to keep the craft to the left—always to the left!

It was a moment of breath-taking uncertainty with nothing but a mental photograph of lines and symbols on an old parchment map to go by.

Wolfe clung doggedly to his original interpretation of those lines and symbols, however; and his cold eyes, keen as a rapier's point, pierced the trail ahead, seeking for Kismet.

The words beat in his brain: "To the right of Kismet is danger—death! To the left of it is hope—safety!"

But would he know when he reached the place of the skull, the pivot upon which life, or death, hung on the balance of fate?

They plunged on into the Unknown, making no attempt at speech. The canoe was leaping down a white pathway of death at the pace of the wind.

Then a wall suddenly leaped up and at them out of the moonlit gloom ahead—yet not a wall, but what appeared now to be a gigantic boulder, lifting out of the tumbling waters, and set like a massive barrier across the way.

There was little time to speculate on it, but even as they shot toward it, Wolfe saw that it was formed in the shape of a human head—that its top was like a skull!

His compressed lips relaxed into a grim smile. His bleak eyes flashed in the light. He had found—Kismet!

So far, so good! He forced the birch still farther to the left, sent it speeding like an arrow into the smoother waters that showed to the boulder's left passage.

To the right of it, as they sped by like a shot, they heard the deep roar of the cataract.

Wolfe heaved a sigh of infinite relief. He looked at Kenyon to find the corporal's face pale and haggard.

"Cheer up, old man, that part of it is over!" he shouted. "It remains now to find some one to send back to the rescue of Armond Dubarry and—his wife."

The passage they were on grew gradually smoother, and ran to an end in a small lake that lay cupped in the heart of a rugged country, rimmed in by granite cliffs.

Scarce a ripple broke the lake's surface, as they pushed out toward its center, seeking some sign of the habitat of man.

Nothing but a lonely desolation of empty silences brooded over it. Windigo country, Wolfe recalled it to be. Even the tragic voice of the cataract did not penetrate into its seclusion.

They saw no living thing, nor heard a human sound. It was as though it were indeed deserted to the "windigo spirits of dead and forgotten *voyageurs!*"

Then, with startling abruptness, a voice they both knew, boomed a challenge on the night. It was the voice of Jean St. Pierre Bateese, and now they saw the big Canuck pushing out from the shore in a birch canoe.

The Canadian knew Wolfe at once.

"By gar, eet ees dat leetle boy up to som' more hees meeschief, eh?" he cried. "Of Kenyon, disheveled and unkempt, he was not so sure at first. "*Mais oui*, eet ees de corporal! *Bien!* Dat leetle Hélène, she will be glad of dat."

His eyes swung again to Wolfe.

"But I don' compre'n', m'sieu', how you get t'rough dat passage so easy, lak dis?"

"On nerve, my friend, and the crest of the wave!" Wolfe barked.

"You see anyt'ing dat girl?"

"Listen, Bateese——"

Wolfe, then, very quickly gave Jean St. Pierre Bateese the tragic news, to which the big Frenchman reacted like the explosion of an exhaust valve.

"Come wit' me, m'sieur!" he cried, and his mighty bellow lifted on the night, calling the old Dubarry clan.

JEAN ST. PIERRE BATEESE led the Mounties back to the head of the lake. There, he dragged his canoe to safety on the rock-bound shore.

Wolfe followed suit. Then he and Kenyon trailed the Canuck up a long, twisting way to the top of the very boulder formation that looked like a human skull, and marked the partings of the ways between life and death for those who braved the mists of the Great White Barrier.

Below them boiled the waters of fate!

Jean St. Pierre Bateese shot his eyes up the white river trail, tested his rifle, and threw a shell into the firing chamber. Here he meant to make his stand against the wolf pack when it came.

"M'sieu', I tell you once, I keel Armond Dubarry," he suddenly said to Wolfe. "Eet was for her. She don' want de world to know he's crazy mad. She rather t'ink heem dead! I lov' dat girl, m'sieu', lak beeg brodder. I lay me, my life down for her!"

"Bateese, you are a noble fellow," Wolfe said.

The big Canuck grinned.

"Now we geeve dat Black Brule leetle s'prise, eh?" he cried, shifting his eyes back to the stream. "For long tam he wait for dis chance. *Bien*, he gets eet to-night an' som't'ing else!"

They had not long to wait for the

tragic happenings of that night. They came with sudden swiftness, and with brain-paralyzing finality.

Like a wild thing cresting the raging waters, a bounding birch shot down the stream. The watchers held their breath at the race with death. The flashing blade caught glints from the silvery light, marking its course, even as its blow cut the spray like a dart.

A gasp of recognition finally came from Kenyon.

It was Hélène Dubarry, escaped from the trap behind her as by a miracle, and running before the pack, seeking help to save a madman.

But already the grim chase of the hare and the hounds was on! There loomed in the distance behind her, the mad Dubarry, standing poised perilously in his bounding birch, flinging the taunt of his mad laughter back at the pursuing craft strung out at his rear.

The girl swept by the rock—to the left of Kismet even as Dubarry played his weird, wild game of death before it.

He played it in full sight of his beholders. In that moment Armond Dubarry was a cunning madman, daring death as he took his vengeance.

Wolfe saw at a glance what he meant to do. The others saw it, too, and stood there, gripped in a tense expectancy.

But Brule Le Noir, thinking only of his triumph—the winning of the Great White Barrier's secret at last—came steadily on in Dubarry's wake, followed by his bloodthirsty crew, bellowing hoarsely.

At that moment Hélène Dubarry appeared on the rock. She saw instantly what was to happen, and buried her white face in her hands to shut out the frightful picture.

She knew that Armond Dubarry had chosen Kismet for his vengeance!

The madman, daring Brule Le Noir to follow him, in a last, wild shriek of taunting hatred, shot his birch to the

right of the great rock, and plunged down into that booming pathway of death!

The last that was heard of him was his mad laughter. Brule Le Noir followed the sound of it to his doom.

And one by one followed his canoes!

Not a word was spoken for long, dragging moments. The grim watchers seemed gripped by the spell of Armond Dubarry's terrible vengeance.

Then Hélène Dubarry lifted her white, tear-stained face toward the stars, and whispered a prayer.

And silently they departed, leaving the stricken girl to the comfort of Kenyon's arms.

IN the flame-red beauty of a scarlet fall, they were wedded, those two, at old Angus Mackenzie's trading post—Corporal Kenyon and Hélène Dubarry.

The big trading room at the post was a mass of green spruce and balsam, brought down from the Upper Slave by Jean St. Pierre Bateese.

The little Père André tied the wedding knot, and the little man's eyes twinkled even as he gave the solemn blessing of *le bon Dieu*.

Old Angus Mackenzie's smile was peaceful and happy as he gave the bride away. Worry had been banished from his old heart, and peace had been restored to his wilderness.

Kenyon was the happiest man there beyond a doubt, and Hélène Dubarry's dark, luminous eyes glowed with fathomless lights, as they smiled on the corporal.

Sergeant Wolfe's was the only face missing from the scene, causing the only dark cloud in Corporal Kenyon's bright skies of happiness.

After the ceremony, they repaired to the feast. A long table had been spread in the rear of the big trade room, and old silver blazed in soft candlelight on snowy linen.

Here, they were making merry when

Icy-eyed Wolfe pushed through the door with his greetings.

He had come all the way from Fort McMurray, and apologized for his unavoidable tardiness by presenting two gifts he had brought down with him from Inspector Brinklow.

One for the bridegroom—one for the bride!

Kenyon's was a sergeant's commission for valiant service rendered on the Upper Slave. He stared at the totally unexpected surprise with keen gladness.

All watched the little Hélène as she slowly opened her gift. It was a soft package, wrapped in a black fox skin, and her trembling hands laid bare an old tunic, bearing a corporal's stripes.

It was the tunic she herself had sent down to Fort McMurray. The tunic that had carried the tragic message that had brought Icy-eyed Wolfe trailing north.

An unbidden tear fell on it, as she slowly lifted it and pressed her rosebud lips to the sacred scarlet. Then she looked up at the newly made sergeant, her eyes glistening with love.

A twinge of sadness came over Icy-eyed Wolf as he looked at Hélène and Kenyon. Such happiness would never be for him. His rôle was that of a man hunter who stalked the lonely trails after the enemies of society. And he knew that he could never forsake that rôle.

DON'T MISS

THE FROZEN PIRATE

By HOWARD E. MORGAN

This stirring serial of the Yukon country starts in our next issue.

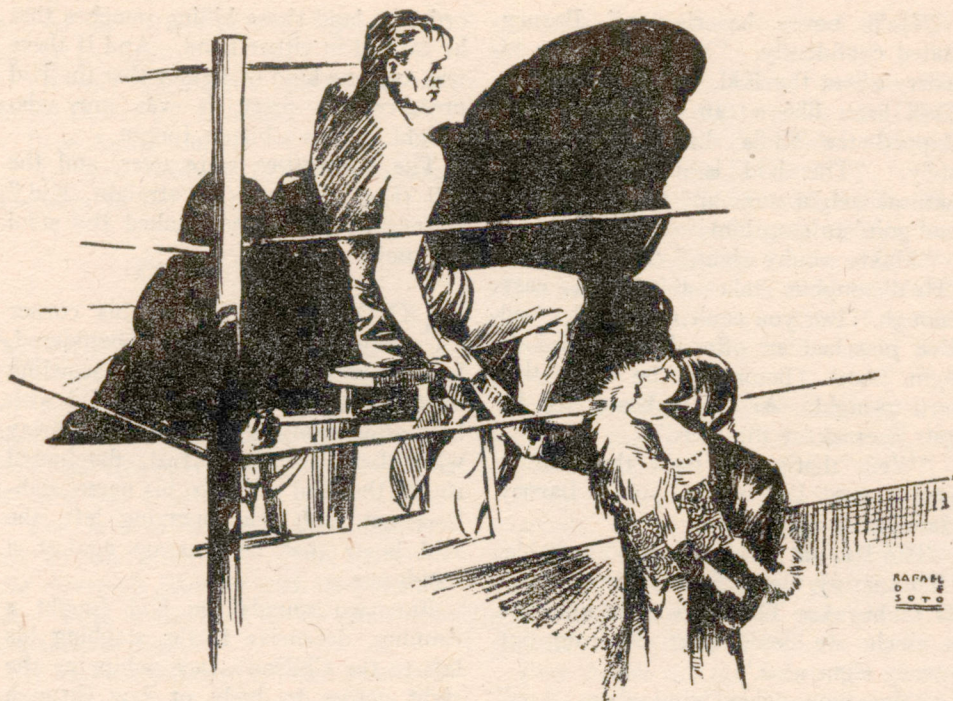
AUTOMOBILE DEPOSITS

IN an age when time saving and safety are both important factors it's natural to expect an invention which combines the two. A bank in Dayton, Ohio, has inaugurated a service to automobile depositors. Now, the bank's customers can drive up to a window in the bank, make their deposit, and drive on, all without leaving their car.

The bank installed an iron-barred window that could be reached from a car. Arriving there, the automobile depositor rings a bell that serves to summon a teller. The deposit is passed through the bars, the depositor receives an acknowledgment slip, and the transaction is completed.

This scheme serves the depositor in several ways. He does not have to seek parking space in a congested area before making his deposit. He is relieved of much of the danger of transferring large sums of money from his place of business to the bank. Also, the service serves the general public by making parking space more available in the congested areas in which most banks are located.

It seems certain that bank architects will plan a window for this service in the future. Watch for the driveways and windows that will be a feature of the modern banks.



The Leather Business

By B. B. Fowler

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I. ON THE BUTTON.

As he lay on the rubbing table in the dressing room with Barney working over him, Jimmy Sparks, the "Shuffling Kid," was thinking about his best friend, Larry Carter, the middle-weight champion.

Ever since the Kid had come into Sam Bloomberg's stable along with Carter, Larry had always been at the ring side for the Kid's fights. But tonight he would not be there. For Carter was in the West, training for his

fight with Pete Pulaski, the leading contender for his title.

Not that the Kid was worrying over his fight to-night with Hilario Mendez, the Chilean menace to the lightweight division, for this was one battle that the Kid faced with supreme confidence. But the Kid always felt better with Carter there.

Sam Bloomberg, the Kid's manager, came into the dressing room, his round, red face rippling in agitation, as it always did when one of his boys was fighting. He chewed the big, black cigar nervously as he rapped out: "The semifinal is about over. How is he?"

"He'll never be righter," Barney stated confidently. "You don't have to worry about the Kid. He'll smear this Chili bean like a can of paint." He slapped the Kid's shoulder affectionately. "The Kid is fighting at his natural weight now, and there ain't any one goin' to stop him for a long time."

"Maybe you're right," Sam admitted. "He'd oughta take this bird easy enough. But you can't never tell. And I've just had an offer for the Kid to fight 'Ace' Thomas, if he takes this bird to-night. And if he beats Ace, he gets a crack at the title."

"Well, that's one fight the Kid is gonna get, I'm tellin' yuh," Barney stated positively.

The Kid sat up on the rubbing table. "This is my night, Sam. I know that. If taking Ace Thomas was as much of a cinch, we could start counting our money right now."

"Now you never mind about Ace," Sam said fretfully. "All you gotta do now is go out and take this Chili guy."

"He'll take him all right," Barney repeated, "an' never even raise a sweat about it."

The Kid crawled through the ropes into the white glare of the lights, with the roar of the crowd in his ears; and every thought not connected with the battle faded from his mind, leaving him eager and ready.

While Sam Bloomberg fussed over the boy's hands, Barney muttered instructions. "Remember, all straight punchin'. Shoot 'em in when he starts hookin' and swingin'. Step away, and pump 'em in, and you'll nail him every time."

The Kid nodded, taking the measure of the Chilean from under his lowered eyelids. "A rough, tough, two-handed fighter, Jimmy conceded. But at the same time he knew that Mendez was built just right for him.

Mendez was the rushing, tearing fighter, leaving himself wide open in

order to land those killing punches that he carried in either hand. And if there was any one kind of fighter that the Kid preferred to meet, it was one who fought as this Chilean fought.

The formalities were over, and the bell rang. "Pump 'em straight, Kid," Barney snapped, and yanked the stool out under the ropes.

MENDEZ came out of his corner with a rush, a bony-shouldered, heavy-muscled bunch of scowling viciousness. He tore into the Kid with both arms swinging. And backing away with that deceptively fast, flat-footed shuffle that had won him his name, stabbing out with that unerring left, the Kid knew that he was up against a tough one.

For two rounds the Kid fought a running, defensive battle, stabbing his left to the Chilean's face, whipping the right across to body or jaw through every opening. In the third round, Mendez rushed the Kid into the ropes.

He landed two jarring punches to the Kid's jaw, and with the scoring of these two he threw caution to the winds. Head down, he threw punches like hailstones. This system had won all his other fights, but then, his other fights had not been with deadly sharpshooters like the Shuffling Kid.

As elusive as a phantom, the Kid slipped away from the ropes and retreated across the ring, catching the storm of gloves on elbows and shoulders. The voice of the crowd rose to a crashing crescendo. This was the stuff they paid their money to see. This was the stuff that stirred their blood.

But as he retreated, the Kid's eyes were as watchful as a cat's; his keen brain was alert as a trap; his trained body was set with a perfect balance, even in retreat, to punch with either hand, decisively, and devastatingly.

Just as he felt the ropes at his back

again, he saw his opening, and his left shot out like a streak of light and landed flush on the Chilean's mouth.

Mendez jolted back on his heels, his arms coming up instinctively. But, before his guard was up, the Kid's right followed the left with every ounce of his weight behind it, and Mendez fell like a stricken tree. The rising yell of the crowd stopped short, then crashed out in one great roar.

Barney slapped the Kid on the shoulder as he came back from the corner where the Chilean's seconds were bringing their man back to consciousness. "Atta stuff, baby," he said. "Just like I knew yuh would."

A half hour later the Kid left the arena with Barney and Sam Bloomberg behind him handling the crowd of reporters. That was one of the changes that Larry Carter had made in the Kid. When he was featherweight champion, fighting under another manager, the adulation and praise of the press and the game's hangers-on had been music in his ears.

But since he had come into camp with Carter, the Kid had changed. He had taken on some of the good-humored restraint, and quiet avoidance of public adulation that marked his buddy. In other words, the Kid was growing from a tough little battler into a quiet, gentlemanly young chap, low voiced, friendly, and clean cut.

About Carter, the man whose friendship had come to mean so much to him, the Kid knew very little. What his right name was, and where he came from, the boy did not know. Only Sam Bloomberg knew that, and he would never tell any one. For, beneath his loud flashiness, Sam carried an honor that he cherished above all else. His boys were the cleanest type in the game, and Sam shot square with them. So Carter's past remained a mystery.

But the Kid, like every one else, knew that behind Carter lay a background of

breeding and education. All the Kid cared about now was his warm friendship. All else would come out at the right time.

The Kid was thinking of these things as he strode purposefully along the crowded street away from the dubious section where the arena was located. He threaded his way through the crowd, listening amusedly to the comments on his late fight.

A few blocks from the arena he passed the glaring fronts of a row of notorious night clubs. He stopped momentarily on the sidewalk to allow some people to alight from a taxi; and as he paused, the girl walked into the Kid's life.

She stepped out of the taxi with another girl and a man and walked across the sidewalk toward the Blue Goose, toughest of the many tough night clubs in the row. The Kid watched them absently as he waited for them to pass, looked squarely in the girl's eyes and promptly took the count. Figuratively, the Kid caught it flush on the button, and went down as though an anchor had been tied around his neck.

He gazed at the young fellow in instinctive hostility, a tall, clean-limbed young chap, with a wide smiling mouth, and clear, friendly eyes; saw that he was, beyond a doubt, attached to the third of the party, a tall, graceful girl, all blond prettiness and white fox furs, and knew that the boy was one whom he would like upon acquaintance. Then the Kid's eyes went back to the girl.

She was a stranger in town, the Kid saw that at a glance. It was patent in the way her great, dancing brown eyes devoured her surroundings. She gazed along the row of garishly lighted fronts, with the soft color fluttering excitedly in her cheeks, and her eyes wide with animated interest.

She was small; little enough, the Kid was thinking, to pick up in his arms and walk away with. And then, because he

was young, and romantic, and hard hit, the Kid began wishing that some wild and impossible thing might happen; that an earthquake might rock the street, or a sudden riot might break out, so that he could pick her up and carry her out through the panic-stricken crowds—to be acclaimed as her rescuer, her hero. Oh, the Kid had stopped a fast one, and no mistake.

He watched her enter the Blue Goose, and with hardly a second's hesitation, he followed. Even if there was no chance to meet her, the Kid made up his mind that at least he must have a longer and closer look.

CHAPTER II.

BROWN LIGHTS.

THE Blue Goose was always a popular resort for the mob that moved in the vicinity of the arena, and to-night it was packed with the after-the-fight crowd. The usual gathering of managers, promoters, fighters and sport followers filled its noisy floors. And the Kid knew that it was not the kind of a crowd that such a girl should mix with.

He followed the man and the two girls into the clamor of the night club, and stood back while they paused to look for a vacant table.

As they waited, the Kid saw the young fellow indicating some of the better-known figures that were in the price. He motioned toward a group of men at a near-by table, and the girl swept the party with her glowing brown eyes.

The Kid turned his head, and saw that the young fellow was pointing to "Wildman" Wilson, acknowledged leader of the welterweight division. Wilson was probably the most colorful fighter in town. He boasted that he did his training in the night clubs and his road work in taxicabs. Every one knew Wilson, and it was obvious that the young chap was pointing him out to the girls as more or less of a character.

Wilson turned in the direction of the little party, caught the full kick of the brown eyes upon him and swaggered forward. A handsome brute, in a hard, dark-browed fashion, Wilson took his attraction for the opposite sex as a matter of course. His escapades had won for him the name of "Wildman." And, with a few drinks aboard, the Kid knew, he was capable of following out any impulse that came to him.

Edging forward, the Kid watched Wilson through narrowed eyes, while his heart leaped. This was his break, as unbelievably lucky as a street riot. This was his break, and he moved forward.

Wildman Wilson stopped in front of the girl. "Hello, little one," he said, with an ingratiating, gold-toothed smile, "haven't I met you somewhere before?"

The girl drew herself up rigidly with hot color flaming up in her cheeks. The boy stepped forward, his face white and scared, but cold with anger. "You've made a mistake," he said. "The young lady doesn't know you. I'll have to ask you to move on."

"Oh, yuh will, will yuh?" Wilson snarled, his face hardening into a fighting scowl. "And who the hell are you to tell me to move on?" His open hand shot out, and sent the young chap crashing backward into a table.

As the boy got to his feet, the Kid took a swift step forward. Out of the corner of his eye he saw three or four waiters hurrying toward the disturbance. In another minute Wilson would find himself in the street. But the Kid wasn't waiting for that. This chance was made to order for him, and he was taking advantage of it.

Wilson turned to the girl, and found himself staring into the Kid's eyes. "I'd beat it if I were you, Wilson," the Kid said quietly, almost gently, but his gaze was as cold as steel. "I'd beat it and leave these people alone." And as he spoke, the Kid held himself in readiness for what he knew was coming.

His naturally vicious temper inflamed with liquor, Wilson was in no mood to brook any opposition. "Oh, yuh would, would yuh? Well, yu're gonna move now, Kid, let me tell yuh." And his arm drew back for a mighty swing.

If Wilson had been sober he never would have telegraphed a punch that way—at least not to a veteran like the Shuffling Kid. Before Wilson's fist had started forward, the Kid stepped in and nailed him flush on the jaw with a right-hand smash that carried everything he had.

As Wilson crashed down, carrying a chair into ruin with him, the Kid saw the men from Wilson's table coming forward. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw one of them jump toward him, swinging as he came.

The Kid's head moved just that fraction that allowed the punch to go harmlessly over his shoulder, and then caught the man with a right hook just under the ear, and that worthy slumped down under the table.

A squad of waiters were struggling through the crowd, but the men who were with Wilson were closing in on the Kid. "Let's get out of this," he snapped over his shoulder. "There'll be a wild free-for-all in another minute." With the boy and the two girls behind him, the Kid staved off the rush of the crowd.

Dodging and ducking, he shot his punches straight and hard, as cool as though he were in the ring, and every punch was counting. He backed up through the door onto the street, fighting as he went. The boy thrust the two girls into a waiting taxi, and held the door open for the Kid.

INSIDE the taxi as it shot downtown, the boy reached out and grasped the Kid's hand. "My name is Patten, Gerald Patten, but it would have been mud if you hadn't stepped in when you did."

"It was nothing," the Kid said in embarrassment. "The Blue Goose is rather a tough place on a night like this, and I saw that you were strangers. My name is Jimmy Sparks," he told the boy.

Gerald Patten gazed at the Kid, his brow creasing into wrinkles. "Sparks," he repeated. "Not the Shuffling Kid?" he asked eagerly.

"The same," the Kid admitted. "That's why I knew Wilson and the sort of bad actor he was and butted in the way I did."

Gerald turned to the two girls. "Miss Terry, and Miss Braithwaite, may I present Jimmy Sparks, better known as the Shuffling Kid, the next lightweight champion of the world."

He turned to the Kid with a few of the wrinkles returning to his brow. "But I thought that you were fighting to-night."

"I was," the Kid assured him, "but that's history now. The morning papers are on the street now with the story. I won in the third."

"A prize fighter," Miss Braithwaite exclaimed, her brown eyes showing those dancing, exciting lights even in the dimness of the taxi. And the Kid thrilled to her voice. "But I thought that all prize fighters were scarred and battered like that awful creature in the restaurant."

"The Shuffling Kid is in a class by himself," Gerald put in hastily. "There aren't many like him."

In five minutes the Kid found that the three of them had just come from the theater, and had visited the Blue Goose for a late supper. And in another two minutes the Kid found himself included in the party.

Before the Kid left them they were all chatting like old friends, and the Kid had made a date for the next evening.

It was in the small hours of the morning when the Kid floated into the hotel

with a dazed and dazzled stare in his gray eyes, and found Barney slightly perturbed, and Sam Bloomberg in a state of fuming worry.

"Yuh told me 'yourself," Sam stormed, "that you was goin' downtown for a bite to eat. And I been waitin' here for two hours, thinkin' yuh got run down with a taxi, maybe. That's a fine way to use your manager, and you on your way to bein' champ. Where yuh been anyway?" Sam wound up. And through his bluster, the Kid saw relief and pleasure shining.

Sam would hear soon enough about the fight at the Blue Goose. Just now, the Kid decided, he would tell him as little as possible. "I went downtown," the boy explained, "and met some friends. How did you like the job I did on the Chilean?" He knew how to bring Sam back to a plane of rejoicing.

"Yuh was great in there last night." Sam's fat face beamed. "If yuh do as well when yuh meet Ace Thomas next month I ain't kickin' any. To-morrow I got to beat it to Denver, and look after Carter.

"I didn't want to sign yuh up again so soon, but I couldn't pass up a chance like I got last night. Barney here will get yuh in shape, and Carter 'an' me'll be back here the day of the fight. Now be a good kid, and mind what Barney tells yuh."

In the morning the Kid was a little worse, if anything. He drove Sam down to the station in his roadster, and at an intersecting street, when the traffic signal turned from green to red, drove merrily on, to an accompanying gasp from Sam and a shrill blast from the traffic officer's whistle.

"What's the big idea, anyway? I suppose you're one of these guys that don't have to bother about traffic signals." The traffic officer's face was purple with rage. "I suppose you're rushin' up to keep a date with the mayor and couldn't wait for the lights.

What color was that light when yuh passed, anyway?"

The Kid's gaze was far-away and blank. "Brown," he said. "Brown, officer."

The officer's eyes popped with the strength of his rage. "Brown!" he roared. "You're one of these wise guys, eh? Must have your little joke, eh? Let me see your license, and I'll give you a chance to tell the judge that brown one."

Sam Bloomberg laid a hand on the officer's arm. "But, Mr. Officer," he implored. "The Kid didn't mean anything. Listen, this is Jimmy Sparks, the Shufflin' Kid, and he's just drivin' me down to catch a train."

The officer's manner underwent a sudden and complete change. "The Shufflin' Kid, eh! Yeh, I recognize you now that you say so. I saw you fight last night, and won ten bucks when you laid that Chili guy away. Here's my name, mister. Just send me a ticket next time you fight, and I'll call it square."

"Sure, officer," Sam agreed, "I'll send you a coupla ring-side seats the next time the Kid shows." As they drove away he turned to the Kid. "Now what made you say a goofy thing like that for? Brown!" he snorted.

"Aw, I was thinking of something else," the Kid remonstrated, his face red with confusion.

CHAPTER III.

THE KID'S DECISION.

SINCE the Kid was already in good condition, Sam allowed him a week of freedom before he should go back to camp and train under Barney's supervision. "I don't like to have you trainin' for this fight and me not here," Sam told him. "But I couldn't pass up the chance to sign you up with Ace when the promoter guaranteed the winner a chance at the title."

"Everything is going to be all right, Sam," the Kid assured him. "As long as I have Barney to look after me, I'm satisfied. I know that you have to look after Larry now."

"I gotta do it, Kid, and that's a fact. Carter's gonna have his hands full defendin' his title this time. But just as soon as we leave the ring, we'll hop a train east, and that'll land us here the mornin' of the fight. I'll be in your corner that night. And I wanta see you right for that go, Kid."

That night the Kid began to take advantage of his week of freedom and kept his date with the girl. And three nights later he found out all about Corinne's reason for being in town at this time. It was Corinne and Jimmy now—they had progressed that far.

Corinne had come up from Boston, where she lived with her mother, to see her brother. In the five years since her brother had left college, neither Corinne nor her mother had visited the boy in New York. He went to Boston periodically and sent them ample money for all their needs, but beyond that, they never saw him.

And loving the boy as they did, both mother and sister longed to live nearer him, to see more of him. But always he had pushed the idea into the future, telling them that they should be together as soon as his business career allowed him to settle down definitely.

Just now, Corinne told the Kid, he seemed to be always on the go. All she knew of his business was what he had told her; that he was in the leather business. This trip of hers had come about when Lilian Terry, visiting Boston, had persuaded Corinne to come back with her.

Arriving in town, she had written a letter to her brother's address. His reply, coming several days later, informed her that he was out of town on a business trip, but would be back in something over a month. And, at Lilian's in-

itation, Corinne decided to stay until her brother returned. She had written him to this effect, and waited his reply.

"Gee, I'm glad that you're in town and free this week," the Kid exclaimed. "Next week I've got to go into camp and start training for the Ace Thomas bout. And I want to see you every night till I go away if you'll let me."

Corinne looked at the Kid with the dancing, mischievous lights fading out of her eyes, leaving them quiet and sober. "I wish you'd leave this business of fighting, Jimmy. I wish you'd quit and make a start in something else. You're too nice a boy to keep on fighting until you become like all the rest of the prize fighters." Corinne was thinking of the crowd she had seen in the Blue Goose.

The Kid's heart leaped at her words. She did care then—enough to want him to quit the game. "That's just what I intended to do, Corinne. After this fight with Ace Thomas, I'm going to fight for the lightweight championship, and after that I'm quitting. For the last two years I've been studying, looking forward to entering college."

"But why wait for another fight?" Corinne argued. "You have enough money to put you through college, and have some left over to make a start afterward. Why take the chance of being disfigured for life, perhaps seriously injured, for the sake of a little more money?"

"I've got to go through with these two fights," the Kid remonstrated. "Sam has always used me right, and I can't let him down now." And all the girl's arguments failed to move him.

ON the last night of his freedom, the Kid drove out again with Corinne. Far outside the city, they parked their car and watched a yellow moon climb through the ladder of the trees.

"Training is always an awful grind, Corinne. But this time it's going to be

harder than ever," the Kid said gloomily. "I'd give all I own to stay in town for the next month."

Corinne leaned forward and impulsively clasped the Kid's hand. "Leave it all, Jimmy," she urged. "Come to Boston and enter Harvard. You're too fine for this business of fighting."

The Kid clutched her hand. "I can't, Corinne. I'd do anything else for you. I want to get an education so I can meet you fair. But I can't start till I've done the square thing by Sam."

For a long time the girl was silent. And when she spoke her voice was low and gentle. "All right, Jimmy, I can see how you feel. And I think you're right—up to a certain point. Perhaps it wouldn't be right for you to back out of this next fight. If I say nothing about that, will you promise something?"

"Anything," the Kid told her fervently.

"After this fight I want you to go straight to Boston," she said. "Leave the whole fight crowd behind you and start afresh. You know," she went on, "ours is one of the old Boston families; full of old ideas about breeding and blood. I want you to be able to come to me in Boston, Jimmy; you know that."

"But neither my brother nor my mother would accept you if they knew that you were a prize fighter. But if you'll leave everything and every one connected with the fight business behind and start in at Harvard, I could bring you into our home freely and proudly."

"Oh, Jimmy, isn't it worth quitting this business for? Why, I know you'd like my brother. And I know he'll like you. Perhaps he could get you started in the leather business with him when you were through college."

The Kid's voice was husky with emotion. "It's worth everything to me, Corinne. I'd give my right arm to be able to promise what you ask. But I can't."

"Even if I quit the game after this fight I couldn't split with Larry Carter. He's my friend for life, no matter where I go, or what I am. Oh, if you only knew him, you'd understand. He's the best fellow that ever lived."

Whenever the Kid had spoken of Carter, Corinne had pictured him as like one of the men she had seen in the night club where she had met Jimmy. He was probably a good enough fellow, she reasoned, but a prize fighter nevertheless, stamped with the marks of his profession.

She withdrew her hand from the Kid's clasp, and her voice sounded cold and hurt. "Then there's nothing more to be said, Jimmy. Please take me back to town."

All the way back to the city Jimmy tried to reason with the girl. But she was unmoved by his words. To her, Jimmy was the one man in the world for her, and she could not bear to think of him going on in the ring; taking the terrific punishment that he must have to take; gradually losing all the boyish fineness and straightness that she loved in him.

She was hurt more because of the Kid himself than by her own keen disappointment.

The Kid left her and went gloomily back to the hotel to face the grind of training with a heavy heart, lacking all the usual fire and dash of his youthful optimism.

At camp, under the watchful eyes of Barney, the Kid went through his paces perfunctorily. His skin was clear and shining with health, but his brow was furrowed with a frown of worry. As he boxed with his sparring partners he lacked that blinding speed and dash that had always characterized his work.

He outboxed and outgeneraled his sparring mates, making them look clumsy and awkward. But any other time he would have been blasting them out of the ring by the fierceness of his

attack. And, watching the Kid work, Barney began to worry.

Before the month of training had gone by, the Kid was moving in a heavy cloud of gloom, and Barney's worry was deepening. "You've gotta snap out of it, Kid," he told the boy time after time. "You've gotta snap out of it if you're goin' to beat a bear cat like Ace Thomas."

Even the telegram from Larry Carter, bringing him the news that he had knocked out Pete Pulaski in the fourth round, failed to bring the Kid more than a momentary sense of rejoicing.

CHAPTER IV.

LARRY DISAPPEARS.

ON the day before the Kid's fight, as Sam Bloomberg and Larry were on their way east, a terrific rainstorm swept the Middle West, washing out roads, and tying up traffic, and Sam pulled into Chicago nearly twelve hours later than he had expected.

Barney brought the boy into town, piloting him through the formalities of weighing in and inspection, and brought him back to the hotel to get some rest before the fight.

When Sam Bloomberg rushed into the hotel, fussing and fuming, followed by Carter, he found Barney waiting for him in the lobby. "How's the Kid?" was Sam's first question. "Is he right?"

Barney shook his head gloomily. "He's in the best condition I've ever seen him in yet," he said. "But he ain't right, Sam; not the way that we know him. He's got something on his mind, and I think it's a girl."

"A girl!" Sam snorted. "Now, I knew there was something wrong with the Kid the day I left him. He was actin' kinda funny that mornin'. That's the way it goes, yuh can't let these boys outa your sight but they get into some kind of jam. A girl! Let me get hold of that Kid, and I'll fix him."

Carter caught Sam by the sleeve as he turned toward the elevator. "Just a minute, Sam," he said calmly. "Let me talk to the boy for a few minutes alone. You know I can do more with him than any one else."

"Mebbe you're right," Sam admitted fussily. "You find out what's the matter with the boy. I want him to be all set to-night. If he ain't right, Ace Thomas is gonna give the Kid an awful pastin', and I don't want to see the boy take anything like that." Sam's boys were far more to him than just so many fighters he was managing.

When Larry caught the Kid's hand in a strong, steady grasp, some of the gloom that hung over him lifted. Larry knew how to handle the boy and he was able to get at the Kid's trouble as no other man could have done.

In five minutes the Kid was telling Larry the whole story; pouring out every detail of the affair from that first night in the Blue Goose up till the present. The only thing he omitted was his refusal to break with every one he knew in the game. There are some things that one man cannot tell another, no matter how close their friendship.

As the Kid talked, Larry listened, nodding his head slowly; and though his face was calm and impassive, a strange light began to glow in his eyes. When the boy had finished, Larry gripped his shoulder briefly.

"It's going to come out all right, Jimmy," he said encouragingly. "You go in there to-night, buddy, and fight to win. You're going to see this tangle of yours straighten out, you take my word for it."

The Kid smiled feebly. "I wish I could believe you, Larry," he said. "But Corinne gave me her terms, and I can't meet them. And I tell you straight, I don't give a damn what happens now."

Down in the hotel lobby, Larry buttonholed Sam Bloomberg. "It's time

to take him over to the park, Sam. I've done all I could now, but I've got an idea that I can help him a lot more before the evening is over.

"I'm going now and I don't expect to get to the ring side until the fight has started, but I'll do my best." And Larry rushed out to the street and jumped into a taxi.

THE fight was held outdoors, and from the first row of ring-side seats to the last, far-off bleacher bench, the park was packed. When the Shuffling Kid came into the ring, with Sam Bloomberg and Barney behind him, the roar of the crowd rolled down over the banks of seats in great crashing waves of sound.

From his corner, the Kid glanced along the first row of seats, looking for Carter, and, failing to find him, his heart sank still lower.

Waiting for the bell, Barney gave the Kid his last instructions. "Keep away from this bird for a few rounds. Stand off and box him. And if he starts crouchin' and weavin' rip in the old uppercuts. All ready, baby, the bell is comin'."

Ace Thomas came out of his corner cautiously, looking like the tough bear cat that he was reputed to be. His shoulders were thick and sloping; his arms long and heavily muscled. There was no man in the lightweight division more dangerous than this same Ace Thomas, with his bearlike strength and bulldog courage.

Alongside of Ace the Kid looked like a motion-picture fighter. His skin shone like wet silk under the blaze of the flood lights, and he moved as effortlessly as a shadow.

The two men circled each other while the voice of the crowd stilled to a tense, expectant murmur. Then Ace led with his left. The Kid bobbed like a cork, stabbed out with his left, then, shifting like a wisp of light, shot his famous

overhand right to the side of Ace's head.

Ace came through, and there was a flurry of gloves that the eye could hardly follow. But Barney saw Thomas score two solid smashes to the Kid's ribs, and knew that it wasn't so good. For, if the Kid's right had carried his usual steam, Ace would never have come through the way he had.

Any one who knows the game knows that the trained fighter moves inside the ropes like a piece of fine machinery. He blocks, ducks, and punches mechanically, his brain working in perfect time with muscles and sinews.

But the truly great fighter has one other asset, a fighting heart that sends him crashing through at the right moment, that adds to his punches that whistling, burning speed that carries all before it.

Barney knew from the first bell that the Kid was in there to-night without that fighting heart. He was Jimmy Sparks, a great fighter. But he wasn't the Shuffling Kid that had been featherweight champion at twenty-one. He wasn't the little thunderbolt that had hammered the best of his class into defeat.

In the second round Ace Thomas began to show the class that had made him one of the leading contenders for the title. He rushed the Kid, ripping short, vicious hooks through with both hands; boring in ferociously; shaking the Kid's punches off him as though they were of no more consequence than so many drops of water.

But, heart or no heart, the Kid was a great performer. Most of those hooks of Ace's were landing on gloves and elbows. He fought as he retreated, throwing stiff jabs into Thomas' face, crossing over with a hard, straight right.

But it didn't stop the relentless rush of Ace. It was clear to every one that it was simply a matter of time before Ace would wear the Kid down with his

smashing attack until he was ready for the finishing punch.

There were tears in Barney's eyes as he stared under the ropes, and he was muttering under his breath: "Come on, baby! Come on and cut loose. You can do it, Kid. You can mow this palooka down like a bunch of grass if yuh cut loose. Come on, baby."

The Kid was the apple of Barney's eye. Every time the Kid collected a stiff one, Barney winced as though he were receiving the blow himself.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHUFFLING KID.

IN the third round, the Kid showed some of the stuff that had made him great. Ace Thomas came out of his corner with a rush and tore into the Kid. He caught him off balance, and his rush rose in fury to a snarling, vicious charge. He ripped his punches through from the waist, putting everything he had into every drive.

And, thrown back off balance, the Kid retreated, swaying, ducking as he went, rolling with the punches. In that moment Ace Thomas saw victory beckoning.

And, with the frenzied howl of the crowd in his ears, the Kid weathered the storm. With the ropes at his back, he threw himself into Ace, battering through his guard until Ace gave ground.

At the end of the sixth round the Kid was back-pedaling, stabbing mechanically with his left, shooting his right without any of his old steam behind it. The crowd started to razz him, and Barney felt his heart grow sick within him.

It was the first time he'd ever heard them razz the Kid, and it shook Barney worse than anything had shaken him before.

The Kid came back to his corner at the end of that round, his head droop-

ing, his shoulders sagging wearily. He was only fighting mechanically now, his heart was gone. There was nothing to fight for anyway, even Larry had deserted him. The Kid slumped into his seat and leaned back wearily against the ropes.

As he leaned back a hand came through the ropes and grasped his arm; a hand that sent a wild thrill through him. The Kid straightened up, and stared down into a pair of big brown eyes that were glowing with a light that the Kid had never seen there before. "Corinne!" the Kid gasped. "You, here!"

"I came to tell you I was sorry, Jimmy," the girl said. "I didn't understand. But I want you to win, Jimmy. I want you to win for me."

Something warm started in the Kid's heart and flooded through his veins in a strengthening stream, and his muscles tingled. "I'll do it, honey. I'll show you."

As the girl stepped down, the Kid turned in his seat and faced the opposite corner. He pushed Sam Bloomberg to one side when he tried to talk. And in the Kid's eyes there was the flame of battle.

THE bell clanged, and for the first time that night the real Shuffling Kid came out of the corner. He charged across the ring, a bobbing, weaving tornado, and as he weaved he threw a deadly hail of leather through Ace's guard.

He staggered him with sledge-hammer rights, slashed him with lefts that cut and ripped, and Ace broke through to clinch desperately.

The referee pried them apart, and the Kid went into action again with a sweeping fury that carried Ace off his feet. He stepped around Ace like a flitting wraith, throwing viciously accurate punches from all angles.

And, peering under the ropes, his eyes

shining, Barney was shrieking deliriously. "Atta baby! Atta baby! I knew yuh had it, Kid. Oh, sweet patooty, will yuh look at that! There's the sweetest little performer that you bums'll ever look at! Atta baby! Oh, attababy!"

The Kid came over to his corner and stared down over the ropes. Corinne was there, clinging to Larry's arm, her eyes shining, the color fluttering in her cheeks. The Kid couldn't imagine what she was doing there with Larry Carter, and just then he didn't care.

He threw her a smile of sheer boyish joyousness, and the look that she gave him back made his heart leap again.

Sam Bloomberg fairly stuttered in his excitement. "Yuh got him goin' that time, Kid. But yuh gotta knock him out to win. He's got the first six rounds by a mile."

Barney glanced up at Sam pityingly. "He's gotta knock him out!" he repeated scornfully. "Why, it's all over now, Sam. I can hear the birdies singin' over in the other corner this minute. The Kid is hittin' on all six, and there ain't any two guys in the park could stop him.

"Up yuh go, baby, there comes the bell! This is the round! Smash him down, Kid!"

The Kid crossed the ring like a galloping shadow and met Ace coming out of his corner. He stabbed him with a left, flashed the right, and smashed the left across again as Ace ducked. The punch landed flush on Ace's eye and turned him half around as he was getting set to punch.

And as he swung, the Kid ripped his right across like a bullet. Ace shot back against the ropes, bounced off, and fell flat on his face on the canvas.

As the Kid stepped down from the

ring, Larry yelled into his ear. "We'll see you at the hotel, Jimmy."

WHEN the Kid arrived at the hotel with Sam Bloomberg and Barney he found Larry and Corinne waiting for him. Larry did the explaining.

"You just about floored me, Jimmy, when you poured your story into my ears, and I found out it was my little sister you were talking about."

"Your sister?" The Kid's jaw sagged. "Then you're the brother that's in the——" he paused.

"In the leather business," Carter finished. "I didn't want Corinne or mother to know that I was in the fight game, so I always referred to it as the leather business. But that's all over now. I've defended my title for the last time. I'm retiring from the ring and going into the leather business in fact."

Larry paused long enough to smile down into his sister's eyes. "I know that Corrie is going to be all right with you, Jimmy. You can go through with your fight for the title if you want to, then go to college as we always planned.

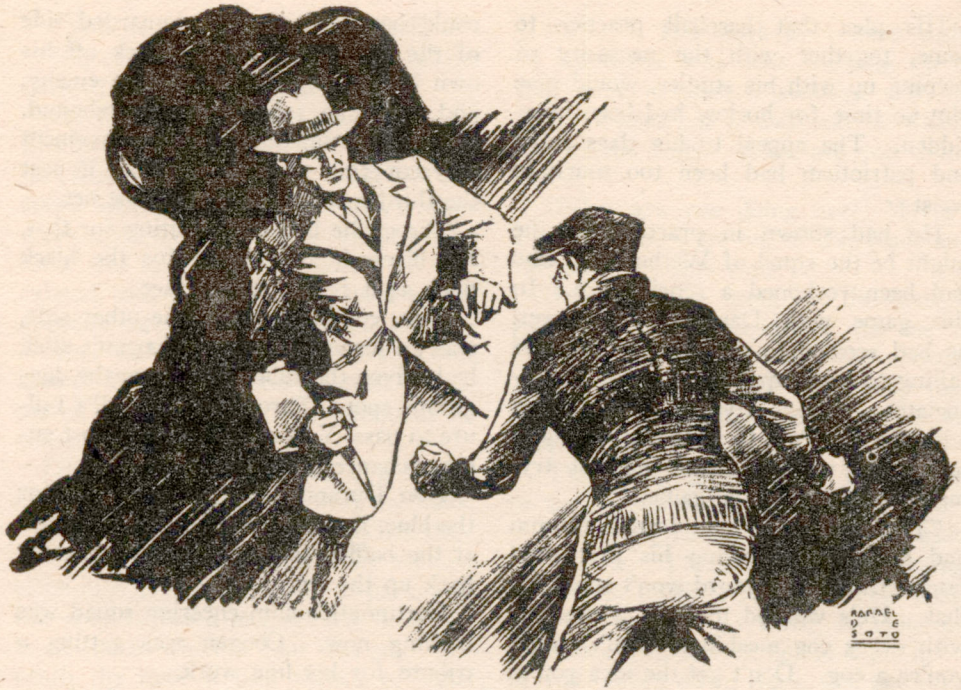
"Afterward, if you want to, and I make a go of it, you can come into the leather business with me. Is that all right with you, Jimmy?"

The Kid's eyes shone. "I'll say it's all right, Larry." Then he met the girl's eyes, and speech failed him.

"Just now," Larry said, catching Sam and Barney by the arm, "you're coming out with me and give these two children a chance to talk things over."

"How about me?" Sam Bloomberg wailed. "It looks like all I was gonna get outa this deal is a coupla ex-champs." But his fat, red face shone with pleasure. "I guess maybe I'll come around an' get a job when you get that leather business of yours runnin'."





Frank Merriwell Keeps His Vow

By Burt L. Standish

The author of the famous Frank and Dick Merriwell Stories.

A SERIAL—PART I

CHAPTER I.

TEAMWORK.

THE Yale freshmen were cheering madly as their hockey team hammered at Dartmouth's defense. The puck chasers from Hanover were fighting to hold their thin lead of one score through the third period of the match.

Frank Merriwell, filling the place of "Skipper" Wetherford at left wing, was

driving down the ice with the disk in his possession. He was a swooping, darting hawk, swift as a shooting star, elusive as mercury.

This was Merriwell's first game with the freshman sextet. Following a serious disruption of the team through sickness, injuries, and the loss of two players who had fallen by the wayside at the time of mid-year exams, Frank had been conscripted and impressed into service.

His plea that baseball practice to come, together with the necessity of keeping up with his studies, would give him no time for hockey had been overridden. The appeal to his class spirit and patriotism had been too much to resist.

He had shown in practice that he might be the equal of Wetherford, who had been reckoned a scoring ace. In this game with Dartmouth, however, he had seemed to develop the fault of failing to team up with some of his associates. Coach Lyford being down with the flu, Paul Grimm, the manager, had twice warned Frank against trying to play the whole game.

"This is no one-man team," Grimm had declared, following his first mild remonstrance. "Lyford won't stand for that. He's worked to build a machine with every cog meshing. Don't forget you're a cog. Don't get the idea you're the whole thing. Just because you've got the puck, don't try to score when another man is in a better position. Pass it to the other man. Cut out the solo stuff, or out you come."

The "Flash" had previously been aware that, for some reason, he had aroused the manager's distrust or antagonism. He had an odd feeling that Grimm had been forced, against his inclination, to accept him as a member of the team.

Now, with Merriwell sweeping down the ice, Dartmouth threw forward three men to check him. They came at him with a rush.

Swinging along the boards at the right, Curt Holt, the other wing man for Yale, called sharply. Coogan, in the strings for Dartmouth, had leaped to the side of the net to meet the attack by Merriwell if he got through to try a shot, and Holt saw a chance.

But Frank seemed deaf—deaf to everything in the wild tumult of the crowd that was aroused by his flashing action. Instead of passing to Holt, who

could have shot at the unguarded side of the net, he rapped the puck off his own boards, zigzagged past the enemy, and took the rubber on the rebound. With a continuation of the movement in recovering the disk, he shot it past the third man in a drive for the net.

The goalie had been waiting for that. He blocked, and leaped for the black puck as it fell to the surface.

Holt, coming in from the other side, was an instant too late. Coogan's stick had driven the rubber far from the dangerous spot. Through Merriwell's failure to pass, Yale apparently had lost another chance to score.

Don Durant, center and captain for the blue, flashed a wasted look of wrath at the baffled forward, who was racing back up the ice.

Dartmouth's slim cheering squad was barking now. Coogan was getting a tribute for his fine work.

On the other hand, many of Merriwell's disappointed classmates were criticizing him. Some were more than a trifle bitter. One fellow rose up and howled:

"Grand-stander! Grand-stander!"

Watching from the players' box, Grimm had clamped his jaws a little harder. Behind his spectacles, his gray eyes had narrowed. He spoke to Pat Emery, a regular substitute forward. Emery caught up his gauntlets and stick, ready for action.

The Flash had raced back up the ice in time to do some effective back checking when the visitors temporarily went on the offensive following that blocked shot. He seemed to be trying to make up for his failure to score. With Bardley in distress before the net, he scooped the puck away from an assailant with a dexterous poke-check, and flipped it to Durant. Durant broke away with it, and the green peril was reduced for the time being.

Now Merriwell was all over the ice. He wove and darted through the Dart-

mouth players in savage determination to break up their passing defense. Knowing the final period was slipping away, he appeared possessed by a cold but flashing fury.

Yet it was Holt who finally took the puck into position to shoot for the net. He had been given the chance, however, by Merriwell's body checking. But he missed the open side of the net by inches. A groan of dismay came from the Yale crowd.

Dartmouth's right defense got the puck, Merriwell was on him like a tiger. Out flew the rubber to Durant. Durant smashed it against the goalie's chest. Another failure!

Frank Merriwell was in position to do his stuff before Coogan could recover. *Wham!* He cracked the disk past Coogan. The whistle shrilled.

The score was tied.

Yale was still cheering when Pat Emery skated on before the next face-off and reported to the referee. The cheering ceased abruptly as Merriwell was seen leaving the surface. The man who had electrified the crowd by tying the score for his team had been replaced by a second-rater. A stunned silence fell upon the spectators.

FRANK left the ice slowly, his head well up. His face was an inscrutable mask. His eyes, turning for a moment to the right, found Cynthia Barget. She was sitting between her brother, Kirk, and Foxhall North, the "Speed Demon" of the sophomore class, who had at last found a way to meet her. Barget and North were rather "doggy" in informal evening clothes.

Kirk Barget was laughing outright, and there was a faint, cold smile of satisfaction on North's face.

Cynthia, watching Frank, looked bewildered and angry. She couldn't understand why he had been pulled off. Catching at her brother's arm, she sought an explanation.

"I think," said Kirk, "they're afraid his head will blow up like an overinflated balloon. Why, Cyn, you've got sense enough to see that he mistook himself for the whole frosh team. He was doing his best to play Dartmouth all by his lonesome. I guess the manager wouldn't stand for it, that's all."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cynthia, a flame of resentment leaping into her dark violet eyes. "Well, I think he's about three quarters of the team. He's made three of their four goals."

"He'd make them all if he could, and never give another man a chance. But that isn't hockey as it's played in this old school. Lyford doesn't build his teams on that principle. I guess it's only a matter of letting Merriwell alone, and he'll kill himself by trying to hog the spotlight."

North made no comment. Since his defeat by Merriwell in a skating race, he had wisely refrained from revealing his bitter hatred for the freshman by words. There were times, however, when his face betrayed him.

On the ice, the two centers were ready, their blades on the surface. The referee dropped the puck, and the bell sounded.

Somehow the Dartmouth center got the jump on Durant. He snaked the disk around the Yale captain and darted and squirmed past the flying men of the blue team who charged to check him. When he was blocked by the home-team's defense, he passed back to his right wing. The latter, instantly covered by Emery, was forced to pass also.

Flashing into action like a meteor, Curtis Holt snatched the puck and was away with it.

"There!" exclaimed Barget. "Watch Holt! He'll show 'em now! A better hockey man than Merriwell ever'll live to be."

Cynthia said nothing. She had met Curt Holt, and she didn't like him in spite of his distinct but well-bred ad-

miration for her. She could not escape a feeling that there was something secretive and sly about the fellow, for all of his air of complete frankness.

Both teams were fighting furiously to break the tie in the brief remaining time of that third period. The action was blood stirring. The spectators were crying applause and encouragement. Holt's name came in a roar from the Yale crowd.

Feeling sure that he was out of the game for good, even though it were to run into an extra period, Frank Merriwell narrowly watched Curt Holt's every movement. The fellow could play hockey. No doubt of that. Lack of faith in Holt's ability had not caused Frank to fail to cooperate with him on the ice.

The Dartmouth men were fierce in their determination to stop Yale and regain the one-point advantage snatched from them by Merriwell before he was taken out. They swirled around Holt. A heavy body check sent him down. Falling, he made the pass to Durant. He came up, snarling. Instantly he was in action again. And it was he who finally got the puck in position for a drive at the open side of the net.

Leaning forward to watch intently, Merriwell held his breath. He saw Holt hesitate—a slight faltering for a mere fraction of a second. Enough to rob him of his chance. Dartmouth's left defense spun into position to cover the opening. He beat the puck down when it flew from Holt's stick. Coogan at his side, drove it away.

Merriwell turned his eyes on Paul Grimm. The manager's face was pale and disturbed. His forehead was furrowed by a frown. He was staring through his horn-rimmed glasses like a person who had seen something he couldn't quite credit.

Now the Dartmouth captain had the puck. He was scooting up the ice, with his check following closely. Yale's right

defense was deftly dodged. The Yale goalie crouched with legs outspread, covering as much of the net as he could.

The Dartmouth captain bluffed a shot and passed back to his left. The wing man also bluffed a shot, but he passed the rubber to the opposite wing. The latter smashed it by the distracted Yale goalie. The disk stretched the net just as the bell sounded for the end of the period.

Teamwork had defeated Yale.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLASH TALKS BACK.

TAKING his rubdown on the slab, the Flash became aware that Paul Grimm was standing near. "I want to see you before you leave," said the disappointed manager.

Grimm was waiting, alone, when Frank walked into the room. His face was set. He turned resentful eyes upon the fellow he had summoned before him.

"You lost the game for us, Merriwell," he accused.

"Really!" exclaimed Frank, his eyebrows lifting in whimsical surprise. "That's news to me."

Grimm flushed. "What are you trying to do, kid me?" he demanded.

"Oh, no! I'm simply meeting you on your own ground. Of course you didn't really mean it when you carelessly cast the burden for losing the game on my shoulders. Of course you're too much of a gent to try to get rid of the load that way."

"What's that? Are you insinuating that I——"

"Oh, no! Nothing like that. I never insinuate. I'm merely saying that you, knowing full well that you'll be blamed for losing the game, wouldn't think for a moment of attempting to duck the issue by passing the buck. In other words, your backbone's a good hard structure."

Grimm gasped. "Why—why—look here, Merriwell, you can't talk to me like this!"

"Can't I? Why, I thought I had already. Anyhow, I tried to, and if I failed, I'll make another attempt, just to see whether you're right or not."

"I won't stand for such insolence!"

Frank promptly pushed a chair toward the manager. "There are some who can't take it standing," he said. "You have your choice. I prefer to be on my feet when things I don't relish are coming my way."

"What I want to know," Grimm almost shouted, "is why you failed to cooperate with Holt after the first period. What made you try to be the whole shooting match after I'd warned you to cut it out? On four distinct occasions you failed to pass to Curt when he was in perfect position to shoot into the net."

"And on five distinct occasions previous to those you mentioned, Mr. Grimm, I passed to him under the most favorable conditions for him to score. Result—we gained not one lonesome point. That wasn't so good. Anyhow, I looked at it that way.

"Furthermore, on various other occasions when he had the puck and I got into position to net it he either failed to pass me or bungled the job. I believe I made three of our four goals and Durant made the other one. Correct me if I'm wrong. Holt had more chances than anybody, but he didn't sink one to-night. Think it over."

The manager clutched at the back of the chair and leaned forward, peering at Frank through the thick lenses of his glasses. "Are you—are you accusing Holt of laying down?" he asked huskily.

"I've suggested that you think it over."

"But you're crazy, Merriwell! Next to Wetherford, Curt's been our best score getter. Why would he——"

"I don't know. All I know is that

I had reasons, before I went into this game, to suspect that he might not do so well to-night."

"Reasons! What reasons? What do you mean? Explain yourself!"

"Call it a hunch if you want to. I have 'em sometimes. They're something a man can't explain."

"But that's ridiculous." Grimm took a breath. "It's silly. What have you got against Holt?"

"Nothing—if you wipe out his performance on the ice to-night.

"Let me ask you something, Grimm. Didn't you see him hesitate a moment when he was in position to sink the puck after you had taken me out of the game?"

"Do you mean to insinuate that Curt Holt was trying to throw the game?"

"I'll have to remind you again that I don't insinuate. I've told you what I saw. I ask if you didn't see the same thing."

"But he couldn't—he wouldn't—— Look here, Merriwell, I was warned that you'd make trouble on the team. I was told you always make trouble. If I'd had my way——"

"I wouldn't be here now. You're not telling me anything that I didn't know before, Grimm. But I'll remind you again that I didn't want to play hockey. I'm coming out for the baseball team. Football and baseball's about as much as any fellow can go in for and keep up in his studies. Besides, I've made a few intefesting enemies who demand a little of my time and attention. Probably it was some of them who whispered dulcet words of slander about me into your receptive ear."

Paul Grimm stared at the Flash as if he were a freak in a circus side show. He had summoned Frank before him to give the man a proper dressing down for his failure to obey orders regarding team play, but the interview had taken a twist he had utterly failed to foresee. The exchange had left him

feeling almost as dignified as a door-mat on a rainy day.

He writhed like a trodden worm. Suddenly he stiffened. His jaws snapped together. He'd show the insolent fellow.

"Who do you think you are, anyhow?" he cried. "How do you get this way? Who gave you the impression you're such a superior creature? You're merely lucky. You were lucky to-night in making those three points in the game. It's lucky for you that you're name's Merriwell. If it'd been Jones or Smith you'd never have attracted any attention here at Yale. It's the reputation of your father that's got you where you are."

"Now that," replied the Flash, "is a lot of boloney, Grimm. As far as I've gone, I've found the name of Merriwell a handicap. Instead of a help, it's an obstacle to be hurdled. Everybody expects the son of a famous man to be a dud, and I guess that a good many of them are."

"Well, I've always had my doubts about your father." The manager's face had taken on an irritating sneer. "It's my opinion that he was an over-advertised third-rater."

TO Grimm's surprise, Frank laughed.

"Of course you're right," he agreed affably. "It always makes me boil with indignation when some lowdown sports writer for the newspapers drags my dad's name into the public prints. They do it every day, too. Let some football or baseball player pull a stunt that thrills and amazes the fans, and those scribblers say he's 'done a Frank Merriwell.'"

The bewildered manager goggled through the lenses of his spectacles. It was growing more and more difficult for him to tell whether this beaming, clear-eyed fellow was serious or not.

"What I want to know now, Merriwell," said Grimm, attempting to regain

his dignity and self-possession, "is proof of your charge against Curt Holt."

"But," protested Frank, "I haven't made a charge against him. I merely called your attention to certain things and inquired if you had noticed them."

The manager swallowed three times before he finally managed to say: "You practically accused Holt of being a Judas. You've got to back it up."

"I've explained why I concluded that I was wasting my time trying to cooperate with him. Will you be good enough, sir, to point out the instances when I failed to mesh like the cog of a machine with any other player of our team?"

"But every cog has to mesh to make a machine run smooth. That's Lyford's theory, and it's correct."

Grimm drew himself up, threw back his slightly drooping shoulders, and sought to project his retiring chin. He could feel the singular dynamic force of the fellow he had attempted to reprimand, and he would show him that he likewise was a man of force.

"Now," he went on stiffly, "whether you did so directly or indirectly, you have made a serious charge against an efficient and valuable member of the team, Merriwell. It's my conviction that you did it to cover your own malfeasance. You—what're you laughing at?"

"Malfeasance," said Frank, "is good. It's delightful. It's splendid. I won't forget it. I shall add it to my vocabulary. On the first appropriate occasion I shall let it trickle from my tongue. Thanks so much."

Grimm blew up. His dignity went to pieces like the pod of snapweed touched by an offending finger.

"Wipe that grin off your map and listen to me!" he snarled. "You've put yourself in dutch. No player can come before me and blackguard another member of the team—charge him with crookedness—without an atom of proof but a hunch. The team's already had

hard luck enough, without being disrupted by a concealed trouble maker.

"Merriwell, you're suspended until further notice."

"It's all right by me, Grimm. But I've got other things to do. So I object to being suspended. I prefer to be dropped. Just tell me I'm all through, and let me depart in peace. That'll make us both happy."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," blazed Grimm. "You've given yourself away, Merriwell. That's what you were working for—to get off the team. Well, you're liable to find yourself up before the board, on charges. You've been flying pretty high since you entered this school, but you may discover that you're down in the mud the next thing you know."

Frank stood quite still and gazed at the manager. He wasn't smiling now, and Grimm's eyes wavered.

"More than ever," said the Flash, as if speaking to himself, "I wonder how some men get prominent places in college activities."

He shrugged his fine shoulders. "Any time I'm called up before the board I shan't hesitate to defend myself, sir. When it's all over, maybe I won't be the only one that's smeared with mud."

He turned, walked deliberately to the door, and paused to look back. "Good night, Grimm."

The door closed quietly behind him.

CHAPTER III.

THE ATTACK.

FRANK left by the players' entrance, which opened into a short, alleylike passage leading to a side street. There was no light located in the passage, but a street lamp outside sent its white gleam slicing at an angle into the mouth of the place.

Stepping forth, the Flash saw what seemed to be a shadow within a

shadow, pressed back into a niche of the wall that was untouched by the street light. A less observant person might not have noticed it, for it was as motionless as something fixed and inanimate.

"What are you doing there?" demanded the freshman, stopping five feet away.

The shadow stirred. "Just a moment, Merriwell," said a low, repressed voice.

The figure came out of the niche. A loose, long dark overcoat, worn like a cape and buttoned with a single button at the throat, hid the man to the calves of his legs. A shapeless slouch hat, pulled down over the forehead, added to the shadow that prevented Frank from discerning his features.

"What do you want?" Merriwell asked, on guard.

Without replying, the unknown flung open his coat, exposing a white expanse of shirt front, and leaped at the Flash. The latter sprang backward like a cat as the fellow's hand descended slashingly. The wrist of that hand was seized by fingers like bands of steel.

Assailant and assailed spun out of the shadow into the border of light that shone into the passage from the street lamp.

"Excuse my curiosity," said the freshman. "I'd like to see what you've got for me before I accept it."

He gave the man's arm a twist that brought a gasping cry from his lips. Something glittering fell with a ringing sound upon the flagstones.

The fellow hurled himself against Merriwell in a surge of fury. A bit of ice that had formed over a sunken flagstone sent them both down with a jarring suddenness.

With his long black coat flapping around them both, Frank's antagonist clawed about with his left hand in search for the knife. The freshman locked an arm round the man's neck

and whirled him over with a rolling motion that carried them both away from the spot and back into the shadows again.

Two of the hockey players, coming out into the passage at this moment, were astonished by the sight of those writhing, struggling, panting figures on the flagstones.

"What's this?" cried one of them. "What's going on here?"

"It's a fight!" said the other. "Separate them!"

They lay hold of Merriwell and his assailant and proceeded to yank them apart.

"Why, it's Merriwell!" exclaimed Don Durant, staring into Frank's face as he hoisted him up. "Who's the other, Curt?"

"I don't know," answered the voice of Curtis Holt. "He's——"

"Don't let him get away!" shouted Merriwell, as the unknown tore himself free from Holt's grasp.

With a sweep of his arm, he sent the captain of the hockey team spinning. He saw his assailant stoop to snatch something up before he bolted for the mouth of the passage, his long coat flapping behind him like the wings of a giant bat. Then he collided with Holt, who awkwardly got in his way. Somehow, one of Holt's feet tripped him up again.

"Great Scott! I'm sorry!" Bending to give the Flash a hand, Curt slipped, maybe on the little patch of ice, and fell upon the fellow he was trying to assist.

"Thanks!" grunted Merriwell, flinging Holt aside. "You're a great help in time of need!"

Bounding up like a rubber ball, he dashed out to the sidewalk just in time to see the fugitive plunge through the open door of a taxi that had apparently been waiting for him. The taxi driver stepped on the gas. The taxi sped away.

"What," asked Don Durant, reaching Frank's side, "was it all about?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Curt Holt, coming up. "Who was that fellow?"

"If you hadn't been so anxious to help me," said Merriwell, smiling queerly, "maybe I could have stopped him long enough to find out his name. I'd say he's a carver by profession."

"A carver?" wondered Durant. "What sort of a carver?"

"Why, a meat carver. He tried to practice on me with a knife."

They listened, wide-eyed, to Frank's crisp account of the attack upon him by the skulking stranger.

"Why, that," said the hockey captain, "was an attempt to kill you, Merriwell."

"I had a suspicion that it was something like that," returned the Flash dryly.

"But you must go straight to the police and report it."

"But I can't believe Merriwell's right," put in Curt Holt. "He may have some enemies who'd like to beat him up, but it doesn't seem possible that any of them would try to murder him. I'm sure he was mistaken about the knife."

"You see, Durant," said Frank, "how skeptical the police would probably be, when Holt, who was right here on the ground and saw the scoundrel make his get-away, appears to have a notion that the man merely wanted to pet me a little.

"Didn't you observe, Holt, that the bird snatched something up from the ground before he flew?"

"No," answered Curt promptly, "I didn't see what it was he grabbed up. As far as I can say, it may have been his watch, which he had lost out of his pocket in the struggle."

"And you, Durant—how about you?"

Durant shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry, but I didn't see what it was either."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PUZZLE.

MERRIWELL'S roommate, Rock-wall Bowie, was waiting for him when he arrived at the dormitory. The Texan's rugged face wore an expression of deep resentment. He put down his pipe as the Flash came into the room.

"I was too hot under the collar to hang round for you to come out after that there so-called hockey game, partner," announced the "Pride of the Panhandle." "Will you kindly explain what the idea was in roping and hog-tying you to let a never-was and never-will-be like Pat Emery take your place? Right after you'd tied the score, too!"

Frank gazed with an expression of almost tolerant pity upon his exasperated chum. "There, there, old mustang," he murmured soothingly. "Keep your blanket on. I'll make it all clear to your befogged intellect. It's simple enough. Grimm saw that I was becoming soaked with perspiration and he was afraid I might catch cold if I stayed in."

Bowie shook his head. "I can't see anything humorous in what Grimm did to you to-night. Holt was the jasper he should have taken out, but Holt is left in, and you're made the goat. If I'd been in your boots I'd rared up on my haunches and howled like a wolf."

Frank laughed. "Well, you've come out for the class crew, Rocky, and you never can tell what they'll do to you. Maybe you'll have your chance to rare up and howl."

He slipped out of his warm sweater. "Hello!" he exclaimed examining a clean-cut six-inch slash in the garment. "Now that was too close for comfort."

The wondering Texan stared at the slash also, and asked questions. Merriwell's concise account of the encounter with the unknown who had attacked him electrified Bowie.

"Well, now," roared the rearoused Westerner, "mebbe you reckon that was likewise a joke! Mebbe you opine that that there sneaking varmint tried to tickle you with his stabber just to see how hard you'd laugh over it. Well, if you do, you certain ought to be committed to the State institution for the feeble-minded. What did the onery coyote look like, anyhow?"

"I told you he had a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, Rocky. I got barely a glimpse of his face when we reeled out into the light for a moment, in a clinch. I can't describe his looks, except to say that he seemed to have a twisted mouth that was drawn up at one corner like a snarling grin, and there appeared to be a long scar on his cheek, like a gash.

"But I'm not sure about it. Maybe he didn't look that way at all. Maybe it was the poor light and my imagination that made me think he had a twisted mouth and a scarred cheek."

"Didn't you tell Holt and Durant what you thought he looked like?"

"What was the use? I wasn't sure about it, and it seemed ridiculous and fantastic. Even now it's pretty hard for me to believe that I was attacked by a scarred-faced man who really meant to stick a slice of cold steel into me."

Rocky pointed at the slit in the sweater. "There's proof enough that it wasn't no delusion, pard, but I reckon you were plenty fooled about the way that poison snake looked. You stated that he 'peared to be wearin' black clothes and that he displayed a strip of white shirt front when he flung open his long overcoat so that he could wield his carver. That sounds to this yere humble ranny like that there murderous-minded hombre was all dogged out in more or less formal raiment."

Frank nodded. "I got an odd impression that he was wearing evening clothes, but that adds to the fantastic

atmosphere of the whole business, Rocky."

He was serious enough now.

"Maybe you failed to observe," said Bowie, "that Kirk Bargot was among those present at that game."

"I saw him there—with his sister and Foxhall North."

"Bargot and North are sophomores. They're not the sort to fritter away their valuable time at a freshman hockey game just for mere amusement, partner."

"They were with Cynthia. She knew I was going to play in that game. Probably she insisted on attending."

"Bargot's your rank enemy, and North doesn't love you extensively since you beat him in that skating race, Flash."

Merriwell made an impatient gesture. "What are you trying to do, Rocky?" he exclaimed, frowning a little. "You seem to think Kirk's behind every attempt to damage me. But you can't connect him up with this affair."

"Mebbe not," allowed the grim Texan. "Did you notice that both he and North were adorned in their dinner jackets?"

"What of it? Didn't they have a right to——"

"Hold your hosses, pard. I'm still wondering why they came to a hockey game formally attired. I'm also wondering why Bargot left his sister with North and took his departure pronto, right after Grimm hooked you off the ice in that last period. He oozed out, quiet but hasty, like he'd just remembered an important engagement. And he was packing a long black overcoat, draped negligently over his arm, when he ambled away from there."

Frank's seriousness vanished; he burst into unrestrained laughter. "And you doped it that he galloped right round to the players' entrance, where he hid himself in a dark niche of the wall and waited for me to come out.

When I appeared, he promptly jumped forth and did his best to make mincemeat of me. Well, Rocky, you're all wet."

"Mebbe so," allowed the unconvinced Westerner, "but you've sure got to admit that it could 'a' happened, Flash."

"But it didn't. I would have recognized Bargot if it had been he who attacked me."

"If he didn't do it himself," returned Bowie stubbornly, "he was concerned somehow. Mebbe you opine he's reformed because he been sort o' quiet and toned down since his mother took a furnished house in town, where she could be near to look after him. It's my idea the old girl has set down on him plenty hard.

"It must have jarred her right much when she found out that her offspring had been mixed up with crooks and ruffians like 'Shade' Fowler, 'Black Jack' Lasker, and Olin Swanson, the 'Masked Marvel.' If she's got the sense of a sage hen she must 'a' got it through her bonnet that only luck had kept said offspring from being exposed and kicked out of college—mebbe roped by the police and given a stretch in the stone jug."

Once more serious, Frank had abruptly lifted a hand to check his roommate. His eyes had narrowed, and a thoughtful, speculative expression had swept over his mobile face.

Rocky had seen his chum like this before. It meant that the Flash was on the track of an elusive idea, seeking to put things together and reason out a conclusion. The Texan waited with ill-concealed impatience.

"Curtis Holt roomed with Dan Harkness, the crook who turned out to be Shade Fowler, when Harkness was a student here," Frank muttered presently; "but Curt swore he never had cause to suspect the sort of fellow he'd tied himself up with. That seemed rea-

sonable enough, for nobody else was wise to Harkness."

"You're forgetting your own roommate at that time—Mortimer Wright," said Bowie. "He turned out to be one of the Fowler gang."

"But he's dead. He was killed in an airplane crack-up when he was fleeing from arrest. That's why the warning I received by telephone before the game to-night sounded like a hoax."

"Warning! What warning? You didn't tell me anything about it, pard."

"This is the first time I've seen you since it happened, old bronchobuster. It sounded so foolish that I haven't said anything about it to anybody—not even to Grimm when he wanted to know why I distrusted Holt. I said that maybe I'd had a hunch that Curt wouldn't do so well, and let it go at that."

"Well, now you're beginning to intrigue my curiosity aplenty," declared Rocky. "What about this yere warning?"

"Somebody called me on the phone. The voice was like a woman's, though it was queer and harsh. Right off, I got the impression that it was a woman trying to make me believe that it was a man speaking. Just as soon as she was sure that I was myself, that she was talking to me and nobody else, she told me that Curt Holt would lay down in the hockey game to-night and give Dartmouth a chance to win."

"Suffering dogies!" exclaimed the Texan. "That sure was peculiar—taking into consideration the way that ranny played."

"I tried to find out who I was talking to," Frank went on. "I kept asking who it was speaking. She didn't pay any attention to that. Instead of answering, she urged me to be on guard against a treacherous attack. 'You must look out for Mortimer Wright,' she said. 'He swears he'll kill you.'"

"That was crazy, seeing as how

Wright's been dead and buried for weeks now."

"I thought maybe I hadn't got the name right, and I made her repeat it. Then I decided that I was being kidded, and I started to kid back at her. Right in the midst of it I became aware that I was wasting my hot shots on a dead wire. She'd hung up on me."

"This," said Rocky Bowie, "is more than passing strange. What makes it too queer for words is that you were attacked by somebody who did his durnedest to bump you off."

"But even if Wright weren't dead, it couldn't have been he. Wright was a slight, frail chap. The fellow that cut the slash in my sweater was much taller and stronger."

The Texan threw up his hands and sat down heavily on a chair. "I'm remarking," he said, "that this yere affair seems to have some features that makes it resemble a jig-saw puzzle. The job is to find the missing piece and fit it into place."

CHAPTER V.

VISITORS.

FRANK and Rocky were still speculating over the singular affair quite a while later when the door flew open with a bang, and "Freckles" Chatby bounced into the room, followed more leisurely by Jasper Stretcher. Behind Jasper appeared a third person, a rotund, pink-faced, sad-eyed youth who bore no small resemblance to a fat boy in a circus side show. Probably a conservative person would have estimated his weight at not less than two hundred and twenty-five pounds.

All three were wearing informal evening clothes.

Chatby's garments, probably hired for the occasion, were more than ample for his diminutive figure; the legs and arms were far too long. On the contrary, Stretcher's trousers seemed to have been cut at high-water mark, and

the sleeves of his coat terminated at a point which exposed a long section of his thin, bony wrists.

The fat fellow's clothes were so tight for him that he appeared to be in momentary danger of bursting out of them with an exploding sound like that of an overblown balloon.

Merriwell and Bowie sat up and stared at the queer-looking trio.

"Hopping horned toads!" gulped Rocky. "Tell me what they are, and you can have 'em, pard."

"Now don't get fresh, cowboy," advised Freckles. "Don't expose your ignorance just because you're unfamiliar with the appearance of real swells in regalia. If you keep your face closed, nobody'll more than suspect that you've only recently broke loose from the sagebrush."

Stretcher bobbed his head at the end of his pipestem neck. "As some wise old bird has said," he rumbled in a deep basso, "a tight mouth spills no beans."

"This delicate child," said Chatby, with a wave toward their corpulent companion, "is Mr. Littleton—Wyncoop Percival Littleton, sometimes familiarly referred to as 'Winkie.' Mr. Littleton, these two wall-eyed yaps are Mr. Frank Merriwell and Mr. Rockwall Bowie. Just at the moment, their manners do not seem to be all that one could wish."

Frank rose promptly and made haste to grasp Littleton's plump hand. "Excuse me if I refrain from violent enthusiasm in my greeting, Mr. Littleton," he said. "I'm afraid extreme agitation of your fore limb might start a seam in your raiment and precipitate a calamity."

"I've been afuf-fuf-fraid something like that would hu-happen ever since I ju-ju-jammed myself into these glad rags to-night," stuttered the fat fellow in a startlingly high-pitched falsetto. "I had this sus-set of sus-scenery built to order for me not longer than sus-sus-six

months ago. Now look at the darned things!"

"You see," Chatby hastened to explain, "Winkie's taken the gland treatment."

"The gland treatment?"

"Yeh. Up to the age of twelve he was stunted and frail and sickly. He was so awkward about coming forward that it was thought he might never attain the stature and proportions of an ordinary well-developed man. It was then or thereabouts that his parents heard of a doctor who had been very successful in stimulating the growth of undeveloped children with the gland treatment.

"Well, they took the poor child to see that doctor, and the doctor shot a charge of gland treatment into Winkie's system. The results were astounding. The patient reacted to the charge almost immediately. He began to grow and expand like big business, and he has kept it up even to this day. The question that is now giving him some anxiety of mind is when he is going to stop growing and expanding."

"I sure would advise you to go on a diet," said Bowie, shaking hands with Wyncoop Percival Littleton.

"I've tried to dud-dud-dud—to reduce the amount of my daily fare. I've cuc-cuc-cuc-cut it down almost to the pup-point of starvation. It hasn't made a bub-bit of difference. I've just about lul-lul-lost hope." Wyncoop's effort to squeeze forth a tear was a complete failure.

"Never mind, Winkie," encouraged Freckles, patting him on the back. "We're going to try to forget our troubles to-night. We're going forth to make whoopee, you know."

"At this hour?" said Frank in surprise.

"Oh, this is just the shank of the evening," put in Stretcher. "There's going to be a big opening to-night, and we've been invited to fall into it."

"I have been invited, you mean," corrected Chatby, tapping himself on the chest, "and I invited you and Winkie to be my guests.

"This I did in confident assurance that our hockey team would mop up Dartmouth, and I would be so overburdened with money that I'd just have to throw some of it away. But alas and alack! cruel fate in the guise of a dumb-bell manager, Mr. Grimm, decreed otherwise, and I find myself slightly hampered by the loss of what ready cash I possessed."

"Have you been betting again, Chat?" asked Frank. "I've warned you against gambling. Did you gamble on the game to-night?"

"But I couldn't see that it was a gamble, Flash," protested the little chap. "With you in Wetherford's place, it looked like a sure thing. A man who fails to grasp a golden opportunity is a goof. I'm no goof. But Grimm, the poor fish, threw a monkey wrench into the works. He took you out. Dartmouth won. I'm sunk. Help! Help! S O S.

"Unless you permit me to touch you gently for a small loan, Frank, I must forgo the pleasure of taking Winkie and 'Stretchie' out to the gala opening of the Gypsy Grove. It will break their hearts, and I know you're not so unfeeling that you would willingly be the cause of broken hearts."

Merriwell dropped on a chair again, shaking his head and fighting back his desire to laugh. "When will you learn that such golden opportunities often turn into bitter disappointments, Chat? When will you quit being a sucker? Now some Dartmouth lad will return to Hanover with his pockets bulging with your money."

"Oh, but I didn't bet with a Dartmouth man. Quite the contrary. It was a vile Yale soph who won my coin. I overheard Foxhall North commenting adversely on the prospects of the team,

with you in Wetherford's position. I heard him say the odds favored Dartmouth. That stirred my ire.

"I challenged him to back up his talk. I informed him that you would strengthen the team. I offered to bet fifty we'd win. He took me up. Just like that. Now what could a poor guy do? I had to put up or shut up. I put up. 'Foxy's' got my fifty. I'm going to be a trifle cramped till I get my next allowance from home."

"Now," said Frank, "I understand why North was interested enough to attend the game."

I GUESS there was plenty of bub-betting," put in Littleton. "It's my opinion some of our sporty cuc-classmates lost their sh-sh-sh—lost their sus-sus-sus—their undergarments. I dropped a few berries myself."

"Let's make it unanimous," said Stretcher sadly. "I'm ten to the wrong side of the ledger."

A sharp, demanding knock sounded on the door.

"Now, whoever is this?" grumbled Bowie. Then he lifted his voice: "Turn the knob and push."

A moment later, he was staring questioningly at Curtis Holt, who stalked into the room like a tragedian. Holt's face was pale and set. The gaze of his shifty eyes settled on the Flash, and he ignored the others. He was plainly laboring under repressed excitement.

"It's a little late for calling," he said in a hoarse, unsteady voice, "but I couldn't wait until to-morrow. I understand you've practically charged me with throwing the game to-night, Merriwell."

Frank stood up. "Who told you so, Holt?" he asked.

"Never mind." Curt advanced and halted within arm's reach of Merriwell. He seemed to be shivering a little. "I've come here to inform you that you're a liar."

There was a moment of dead silence in which every person in the room seemed to hold his breath.

The hush was broken by Rockwell Bowie, who roared: "Sock him, pard! Let him have it!"

Gazing straight into Curt's angry eyes, the Flash smiled a slow, strange smile. "It's hardly fair of you to place me at such a disadvantage, Holt," he said evenly. "You're in my room. There are several of my friends here, and you're alone. That prevents me from answering you as I would if the situation were reversed."

"Well, you can throw him out," came from the aroused Texan. "If you don't do it, I will."

"Just a minute, Rocky," Frank interposed. "This is my affair, and I'll attend to it in my own way."

"You'll take back that dirty stuff and apologize, or I'll brand you publicly as a liar," raged Holt.

"Of course, you got this from Grimm," said Merriwell. "When he accused me of failing to cooperate with you in the game, I called his attention to the fact that I'd tried to do so without success. I also reminded him that you had lost a chance to score, through hesitation or delay, a few moments after I was taken out. I don't know why you did that and I'm still wondering. Perhaps you can explain it."

"Explain it!" shouted Curt, choking with wrath. "I don't have to explain anything to you. I'll show you what I think of you."

He struck at Frank's face with his open hand.

The hand of the Flash flew up, and his fingers closed upon the wrist of the fellow who had attempted to slap him. Whirled about, Curt felt his arm snapped round behind his back and his hand thrust upward between his shoulder blades. Frank's other hand shot over Holt's shoulder and jabbed his chin round to one side, holding it there.

"Will somebody please open the door?" requested the Flash.

Helpless, seeking fruitlessly to break away, Curtis Holt was marched swiftly out into the hall.

"You see, I could throw you down the stairs if I wished to," said Merriwell almost gently. "I won't do that, Holt, but I advise you to get out of this house at once. And I've a notion that you'll be wise if you don't stir up too much talk about the game to-night. However, that's up to you."

He stepped back into the room and reclosed the door.

"Now that," squeaked Wyncoop Percival Littleton admiringly, "was what I call fuf-fast and fuf-fuf-fancy work. I never saw anything done so quick and easy. Why, he was just a ch-ch-child in your hands, Merriwell."

"Let's forget it," said Frank. "What's this Gypsy Grove thing you fellows are all dolled up to take in? If the number of your guests aren't limited, Chat, why can't you let me in on it?"

"You!" cried Bowie. "You can't go out making whoopee with the bunch of rounders, partner. You're on the hockey team."

"Say were, Rocky—say were. Grimm suspended me, and after what's just happened, I have a feeling that I'm going to be very much *de trop*, if you get my French. It's been many days and nights since I've busted loose and kicked up whoopee. I'm sort of going stale and getting rusty."

"That's the talk!" cheered Chatby, elated. "Come with us, old man, and we'll show you all there is to be found in this backward burg. The Gypsy Grove's new restaurant, as near to the Broadway night club idea as the law will allow. Everybody has to wear fish and soup to get by the guardians of the gate.

"This is the opening night, and only those who have received invitations, together with their friends, can make it.

I have a card. I'll add you to the list of my guests if you'll loosen up and come across with the small loan I mentioned a short time ago, Frank."

"Don't worry about that, Freckles," returned Frank, a light of eagerness in his face. "I'll be the banker for the party. Give me time to get into the necessary togs, and I'm with you."

"Three rousing ch-ch-ch—three good loud hoorays!" piped Winkie. "The problem's solved. The pup-pup-party's complete."

But Rocky Bowie shook his head, frowning apprehensively. "I've got a hunch this Gypsy Grove place is going to be too swift for New Haven," he said. "There'll be too many hip flasks and flaming Mamies. The police are right liable to walk in. Maybe you'll take a ride in the wagon."

"Now that's encouraging," Frank laughed. "I've never had a ride in the wagon. It would be a treat."

"You've gone nuts," growled Rocky.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE GYPSY GROVE.

THE main floor of the Gypsy Grove looked like a stage setting by Joseph Urban. The central space, where were placed the tables for patrons, was surrounded by artificial trees, amid which, at one side, appeared the gable façade of a straw-thatched, vine-covered cottage. Five musicians, who seemed to be real gypsies in gay and fantastic attire, were located on a balcony outside the latticed window of the cottage.

Opposite the cottage, set back among the trees, stood a little V-tent beside a small waterfall. Cunningly concealed lights cast a mellow sunlight glow over the scene, save where effective purplish shadows suggested the mystery of forest depths.

Nothing like such a restaurant for the lovers of night life had ever before been opened in New Haven. The skeptical

or suspicious had expressed a belief that this one wouldn't remain open long. For if liquor were not dispensed there, of course the patrons of the place would be the sort to bring their own, and the hilarious doings would soon become a scandal not to be left unsuppressed.

Seeing to restrict their clientele, in the beginning at least, to a class that would give the place the stamp of respectability, the proprietors had announced that admission on the opening night would be wholly by card. Somehow Frederick Chatby, a freshman at Yale, had got onto their list, along with a few other undergraduates.

"You're a little late, gentlemen," said the head waiter regretfully, as Chat and his companions appeared, after surrendering their hats and overcoats to the checker. "So many have exercised the privilege of bringing their friends as guests that we haven't a table left. However, if you'll wait a while——"

"But there's an unoccupied table in the very center of the floor," said Chat. "That's good enough for us."

"I'm sorry," replied the waiter. "That's reserved for our entertainers. Some of them are coming on now."

From out of the purple shadows of the grove at the opposite sides of the room advanced two couples in evening dress, two gentlemen and two ladies. Meeting at the central table, they greeted one another courteously, and seated themselves.

A moment later, sitting at the table, they began to sing "Tales from Hoffman." Their voices blended beautifully, and the throng of patrons at the surrounding tables, all of whom were likewise in evening attire, gave them rapt attention.

Frank Merriwell laughed happily. "Why, this isn't what I expected at all," he confessed. "I was looking for them to warble 'Red Hot Mamma,' or something like that. What a delightful disappointment!"

"It's tut-tut-terrible!" piped Wyncoop Littleton, apparently on the brink of bursting into tears. "It's tut-tut-terrible if we're too late to get a table. I've got to sit down somewhere and rest my fuf-fallen arches."

Frank murmured words into the head-waiter's ears. His hand discreetly found the head-waiter's hand. Something greenish and crinkly passed from hand to hand.

"Just a moment, sir," said the waiter, with an immediate accession of deference. "I'll see what can be done."

He spoke to another waiter. The latter nodded and moved away. From somewhere another table was brought out upon the edge of the floor and quickly set for four persons. The singers were being applauded for their first offering when the headwaiter motioned for the freshmen to follow him.

"Lead on, d'Artagnan," conceded Freckles Chatby. "By the might of your clever hand you have opened the way. The Three Mosquitoes will prance at thy heels."

An odd picture they made, more than a little comical, as they marched forward in line behind Frank; the pygmy Chatby in evening clothes several sizes too large for him, the long and lank Stretcher with his arms and ankles protruding from too short sleeves and trousers legs, the massive Littleton looking as if he were liable at any moment to burst forth with an exploding sound from apparel stretched beyond endurance.

Two sophomores, Gideon Tatman and Tewksbury Felland, sitting at a small side table, stared at them with amusement and ridicule in their eyes.

"Oh, look, 'Tewkie'!" exclaimed Gideon, snickering. "Here come the comedians of the troupe."

"Here come the comedians," echoed Tewksbury, blinking owlishly.

"Maybe I've made a mistake," Tatman hastened to allow. "I guess they

don't belong to the troupe. I believe they're Frank Merriwell and some of his impossible friends."

Passing them at that moment, the Flash hooked a toe around one of the legs of their table, by seeming accident and upset it, dishes, food and all into Tatman's lap.

Tatman uttered a squawk, threw up his hands, and toppled over backward. The table and the burden it had carried clashed and clattered down upon him. Felland, starting to rise in consternation, received a kick on the shins as Frank whirled about with a pretense of dismay. Felland promptly went down, with a howl, on top of the table and Tatman.

THE singers, who were about to respond to the applause by giving an encore, were immediately forgotten by everybody. The startled patrons of the place turned all their attention to the scene of the apparent accident.

"What a shame!" exclaimed Merriwell, looking down at Tatman and Felland. "It was so careless of me!"

Several waiters came hurrying up. They lifted Felland to his feet. Tatman scrambled up, choking with wrath, as soon as the table was lifted off him. He was a sight, with the reddish cock-tail sauce splashed over the white expanse of his shirt bosom and his face. Mopping himself with a napkin, he tried to glare at Frank.

"You'll pay for this!" he cried chokingly.

"Yes, you'll pay for this!" snarled Felland, whose habits of repeating the words of others had caused him to be called the "Hollow Echo."

"With pleasure," assented the Flash, feeling in his pocket. "Whatever it costs, it's worth the price."

"This is an outrage!" Gideon stormed at the head waiter. "This fellow did it on purpose. I demand that you eject him from the place."

"But you ought to know it was an accident, Mr. Tatman," protested Frank reproachfully. "And I'll offer to pay for any damages I've done. I'll even apologize for my carelessness. I'll do anything reasonable."

He removed his hand from his pocket and slipped another crinkling piece of paper into the head waiter's fingers. The head waiter's uncertain attitude vanished. He gazed sternly upon the bleating Tatman and the snarling Felland.

"Be quiet, please!" he ordered. "We can't have you making such a disturbance here. If this young man says it was an accident, of course it was. He's offered to pay you for any damages he may have caused you when he stumbled over your foot. You must be satisfied with that."

"But he didn't stumble over my foot," protested Gideon. "He deliberately stepped——"

"Of course he stumbled over your foot," interrupted the head waiter. "You had it sticking out when I passed. I had to step over it myself. Be quiet! Sit down! That will do! If you make any further fuss I shall be compelled to ask you to leave, and you may be sure that you'll never return."

"Well, this," gulped Giddy, settling, overawed, upon his chair again, "is too much!"

"It's far too much!" supported Tewk weakly, as he also sat down.

"My gosh, Flash!" giggled Chatby, when they were seated at their own table. "I thought we were done for when you spilled that pair of worms. But you got away with it. I wanted to howl, but I did my best to keep a straight face."

"I found it quite a job to choke back a few howls myself," croaked Stretcher.

"It almost made me cuc-cuc-cry," declared Littleton, his chair creaking under his weight. "I heard them calling us fuf-fuf-fuf—cuc-calling us fuf-fuf-fuf-fuf—saying we were marked devia-

tions from the normal type of human beings."

"That," stated Frank, smiling, "was what so annoyed me that I made a misstep and upset their table."

The quartet at the central table was singing once more. The patrons of the place were settling down again to enjoy themselves.

The rule for evening attire had been adhered to, and the gathering looked very "swanky." The black coats of the men made the white bosoms of their shirts look unsurpassingly white. The daring gowns of the ladies would have startled their grandmothers. Jewels glittered in the golden glow of the hidden lamps. The opening of the Gypsy Grove appeared to be a success.

"But it looks tame," complained Freckles Chatby. "Where's all the whoopee?"

"I think a lot of them have it in their glasses," said Frank. "It's early yet—for this sort of a place. I've a notion that things will begin to crack later."

The head waiter reappeared to take their orders, which he jotted down on a tab and handed over to an assistant. He maintained a sober face, but there seemed to be a knowing twinkle in his eyes when he looked at Merriwell. Before departing, he bent to murmur into the ear of the Flash:

"I trust you will have no more accidents, sir."

"I shall try to avoid them," Frank replied.

Looking around, Merriwell made a discovery that caused him to stiffen slightly. Cynthia Bargot was there. Her red-gold hair had caught his eye at once. She was sitting at a table not far from the center of the floor. Her companions at the table were her brother and Foxhall North. Now Frank understood why they had appeared at the hockey game in evening clothes.

Cynthia caught Frank's glance and

gave him a warning signal that was scarcely more than a mere flicker of her eyelashes and a slight shake of her head.

His heart had leaped at sight of her. Always she disturbed him like this. She was such a gorgeous girl, so aflame with life and fire!

Well, he was playing the game as she had asked him to, even though he was sure it would be of no lasting benefit to her brother.

Kirk had pledged himself to cut out drinking and behave as long as she had nothing to do with the freshman whom he hated so bitterly. She had thought it might be the only way to get him back on his feet, and Frank had agreed to help her by letting it appear for a time that their old friendship no longer existed.

But Merriwell was not a little disturbed by the success of Foxhall North in making the acquaintance of Cynthia through her brother. He knew that North, like many others, was a great admirer of Bargon's stunning sister.

Through a recent revelation of the Speed Demon's character and associates, Frank was equally certain that, although the man had the veneering of a well-bred person, he was actually a designing adventurer, an ambitious rascal who lived by his wits. Such a fellow would look on Cynthia Bargon as fair prey, big game to be stalked and snared.

"But Cyn's too wise to let him hoodwink her, even a little bit," Frank told himself now. "She'll see through North. Probably she has already and is merely tolerating him on Kirk's account."

He relaxed.

The singers were resting. The gypsy musicians on the balcony of the vine-covered cottage quickly swung into a lively Hungarian fantasia, a wild, blood-stirring piece, shot through with the throb of guitars.

"Hot dog!" exclaimed Chatby, beat-

ing time. "Now that's got some whoopee to it."

Frank was staring in a puzzled way at the leader of the musicians, a dark, savage-looking fellow, with aquiline features.

"What's the matter with you, Flash?" Freckles wanted to know. "You look as if you saw a ghost."

Merriwell took a breath. "Not exactly a ghost," he replied; "but I'm sure I've seen that old buzzard before. I'm trying to place him."

"I hope you don't place him anywhere near me," said Chat. "He looks as if he'd as quick cut a throat as eat his breakfast."

"I have him!" Frank exclaimed.

"Well, you can keep him."

"He's a real gypsy. Maybe they're all real gypsies. That fellow's name is Alfo. He was with the caravan of gypsies who helped Mortimer Wright to escape in the airplane that afterward crashed in the Adirondacks, when Wright was killed. Good Lord, this is queer!"

A strange premonition, a distinct foreboding, had swept upon Frank Merriwell. For a moment he seemed to sense something like hovering tragedy, and an odd chill ran through him. But that, he told himself, was silly.

It had come from his sudden recognition of Alfo, which had recalled the fate of Mortimer Wright to his mind. He shook himself and laughed.

The waiter arrived with their orders.

CHAPTER VII.

SUDDEN TRAGEDY.

IT was obvious that Littleton had ordered enough to appease a hungry longshoreman, but he peered at the portions that were placed before him with great disdain.

"Wa-waiter," he said, "will you be kuk-kind enough to bring me a mum-mum-mum—microscope?"

"A what, sir?" asked the surprised waiter.

"A microscope," repeated Winkie.

"I don't think we have it on the menu, sir," replied the waiter.

"Well, you shus-should have it," asserted the fat freshman. "How do you expect me to eat what you've pup-put before me without a mum-mum-microscope?"

"Why, I—I don't know, sir," admitted the bewildered attendant.

"Neither do I!" squeaked Wyncoop helplessly. "It'll be next to impup-pup-possible."

"But I thought you were on a diet, anyhow," said Chatby.

"At that, I have to have enough to sus-sus-sustain a humming bird, at least," was the retort.

"What we're really paying for," said Frank, "is the show. I've got a feeling that perhaps that'll be worth the price."

"Well, maybe we can go some place after it's all over and gug-gug-get something to eat," said Winkie hopefully.

Merriwell had not heard the reply. He was gazing in some surprise at a new arrival, a pale-faced fellow with a petulant, impatient mouth, who was speaking to the head waiter as he looked around.

It was Curtis Holt in dinner jacket, and he appeared to be in search of somebody. There was a hunted look in his eyes.

Observing the intentness of Frank's stare, Chatby turned and perceived Holt.

"Great smoke!" exclaimed Freckles. "What's he doing here? There's something up. Maybe he's looking for you, Flash. Maybe he's come here to——"

"I guess he's found the party he came here to see," said Merriwell.

Holt was following the head waiter onto the floor. He was conducted straight to the table where Cynthia Barget sat with her brother and Foxhall

North. He bowed to Cynthia and Kirk, and bent a little to say something to North, who was frowning as if far from pleased.

"Now that's queer, as the banker said about the counterfeit money," observed Jasper Stretcher. "He must know Foxy pretty well, but Foxy isn't hilariously elated over his appearance. In fact, he's more than mildly annoyed."

"It was Foxy who got my fifty bucks," reminded Chatby, moved to some excitement, "and Holt played like a lemon. I'm coupling up."

"Don't be ridiculous," advised Merriwell. "If Curt Holt held back in that game, I'll guarantee he didn't do it for a split in the winnings of a common gambler. There's something behind this that we haven't got wise to yet."

North was rising. They saw him make his excuses to Cynthia and her brother before he followed Holt off the floor. The pair passed out together into the anteroom of the Gypsy Grove.

"Well, anyway," said Chatby, "that proves there's something between those birds, and I wouldn't trust either of them as far I could throw a cat by the tail. They're a pair of crooks."

"Holt's in trouble," decided Frank, after a moment's thought. "I saw it in his face. He was pale and nervous."

"Now isn't that tut-tut-too bad!" sighed Wyncoop Littleton. "I hope he ch-chokes."

ON the balcony of the vine-covered cottage, Alfo, the gypsy, had risen to his feet. His four companions played a prelude, and Alfo began to sing. It was the "Gypsy Love Song" that came rolling in a deep baritone from the throat of the savage-looking fellow.

Every eye was turned toward the balcony. Every person in the room seemed to be instantly enchanted, enthralled.

Alfo sang with amazing expression and with feeling that stirred the listeners intensely. There was in his rich and

powerful voice the moving earnestness that a vagabond lover might feel for the queen of his heart.

There was such sincerity, such devotion, such passion and tenderness that the hearts of the listening ladies who gazed up at him from below were stifled with emotion, and the souls of their male companions were filled with envy and admiration. His dark face took on a glow, and his whole being seemed vibrant with an indescribable yearning. He was a picturesque, romantic figure.

"My gosh!" whispered Chatby. "Would you ever believe it?"

"Keep still!" said Frank, who was again overwhelmed by the feeling that something momentous impended. "Watch! Listen!"

"Slumber on, my little gypsy sweetheart,
Dream of the fields and the groves."

The voice of Alfo rolled through the place in great waves of melody. The soul of Alfo was in his eyes. He stretched out his hands toward the other side of the room as his song came to an end.

There was a burst of unrestrained applause, such a clapping of hands as nothing that had come before had elicited.

Still Alfo stood with his hands outstretched and his gaze fixed with eager expectancy upon a point at the opposite side of the room.

Chatby's hand clutched Frank Merriwell's arm. "Look! Look!" he urged. "The tent—the tent by the waterfall!"

A spot of golden light was playing on the tent amid the trees.

Frank was looking in that direction. He had seen the flap of the tent move. He saw it thrust open a little. From within the tent, sweet and clear and joyous, came the opening notes of another "Gypsy Song," rendered in French. Merriwell recognized it instantly as the wildly gay and electrify-

ing song of "Carmen" in the second act of Bizet's opera.

From the tent issued a girl whose slim and supple slenderness made her look taller than she was in fact. For a fleeting moment she seemed to hesitate, poised in an attitude of perfect grace, while the notes of the song poured from her lips like the laughing flow of the mimic waterfall behind her.

A black half mask hid her face almost to her carmine lips. In her hand she held a tambourine. In her bright barbaric garb of many colors, she was a picture for a master painter.

Following that moment's pause before the tent, the singing girl came swiftly out of the trees with a dancing movement that expressed the verve and joy of life. The stringed instruments of the musicians on the balcony were throbbing an accompaniment to which the tambourine in the girl's hands beat time.

Swaying like a reed in the wind, she seemed as light and free as the wind itself. Through an irregular isle amid breathless watchers she drifted like this-tledown to an open spot in the center of the room, from which the singing quartet and the table at which they had sat had vanished.

With the first note from the gypsy girl's lips, Frank Merriwell had received a shock. He had instantly felt that he had heard that voice before, but for a little time he was unable to recall when and where he had heard it. It came to him, like a blinding flare of light before she had reached the middle of the floor.

He had met her at a party which Cynthia Barget's friend, Zoe Vernon, had given for Cynthia. She was Myrna Queen, the strange girl who had sacrificed her musical career for the scoundrel, Dan Harkness, who had turned out to be Shade Fowler, the gangster.

But what had brought her back to

New Haven from where she had fled to escape the police who had hoped to force her to aid them in capturing Fowler?

Leaning forward, Merriwell stared at her. He was rigid, and the knuckles of his hand, grasping the edge of the table, were white with the force of his grip.

She was dancing, now, as she sang, with the glow of the spotlight upon her. Her body swayed to the rhythm of the music. Her arms waved like white ribbons above her head. Her fluttering hands made the tambourine tinkle and throb and clash.

On the balcony, Alfo watched her with burning eyes.

Something turned Merriwell's gaze from her, beyond her to where a dark figure in a long black coat had appeared amid the artificial trees. The man in black was gazing at her, as he seemed to hesitate a moment in the semidimness at the edge of the shadows from which he had emerged. His aspect was sinister.

Abruptly, as if he had reached a determination, the man strode forward, thrusting his way rudely amid the tables, to the annoyance of the disturbed patrons. The singing girl did not see him until he appeared before her in the glow of the spotlight. Then her song ended abruptly in a little choking cry of fear.

Frank Merriwell had also uttered a low exclamation, expressive of astonishment.

Down one of the man's cheeks to the corner of his mouth, which curved upward in a distorted grimace, ran a vivid scar like the healed wound of a knife slash!

"Good heavens!" Frank gasped. "He's the fellow who tried to carve me up after the hockey game!"

The patrons at the tables were watching the scene in silence, thinking it part of the program that had been ar-

ranged for their entertainment. They saw the scar-faced man grasp the shrinking gypsy girl by the wrist.

They saw her twist free from his hold and thrust him backward with her other hand, from which her tambourine had fallen, clashing to the floor. His coat flew open, exposing the whiteness of his shirt bosom beneath it.

Then the spotlight snapped out, leaving everything in the semidimness caused by the subduing of the other lights.

Frank Merriwell had leaped up and started forward. He fancied that he heard something like a choked gasp from the man in black, who swayed slightly before he slumped down to the floor as if his legs had melted away beneath him.

Two policemen in uniform appeared. Where they had come from so suddenly was a mystery. One of them knelt beside the fallen man, while the other loudly called for the lights to be turned full on.

The lights came up after a slight delay.

Looking down at the figure on the floor, over which the policeman was kneeling, Merriwell saw the handle of a knife, the blade of which was sunk to the hilt in the scar-faced man's breast. A scarlet stain was spreading over the white bosom of the man's shirt.

"He's done for!" said the kneeling policeman. "Somebody bumped him off in a hurry."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET DOOR.

FRANK MERRIWELL moved quickly after starting up from his table. He reached the masked gypsy girl almost as the legs of the scar-faced man gave way beneath him and let him down.

Merriwell caught hold of the girl, who was backing away. Not yet aware

of what had happened to the man, the Flash sensed that the tragic thing of which he had been forewarned by premonition had occurred. He was sure that, whatever had taken place, the girl would be held accountable.

"Get out of here, Myrna Queen!" he whispered into her ear. "Go! Go instantly, before it's too late!"

Even as he thrust her insistently into the deeper shadows and followed after her, the two officers arrived, and one of them knelt beside the fallen man. However, with the dimness that had ensued with the turning off of the spotlight, the policemen did not immediately see the haft of the blade that was buried in the man's bosom.

Where the shadows were deep at the edge of the artificial trees, the girl collided with Foxhall North, returning alone from the anteroom into which he had followed Curt Holt. North seized her.

"Wait a minute!" he ordered. "What's happened here, anyhow? What are you running out for?"

Panting, she attempted to break away from him without replying.

There was no time to try to argue with North. Merriwell's fist smote the sophomore behind the ear, and North went down, with a faint thud, on a bed of imitation moss. He was stunned, practically out for the moment.

The masked girl had vanished when the lights came up.

Frank had left North where the man had dropped. Hopeful, now, for the escape of Myrna Queen, he turned back to learn what had happened in those fateful moments of semidimness.

Up to this point the somewhat bewildered patrons had continued to think that what had occurred was part of the entertainment that had been planned for them by the management of the Gypsy Grove. Now, however, with the announcement of the kneeling patrolman that the man with the scarred face

and twisted mouth had been "bumped off," there came the shocking realization of their mistake.

Women screamed and clung to their escorts, who started to their feet, appalled. A scene of confusion followed.

"Where's that girl—the masked girl who was singing?" demanded one of the officers. "She mustn't leave."

Merriwell had pushed forward and looked down at the figure of the fellow who had come to his end so astoundingly and suddenly. The kneeling policeman had removed a tiny mechanical appliance from within the man's mouth at one corner and was examining it. The twisted mouth had reverted to its normal appearance. Only the vivid scar that stretched downward across one cheek remained to mar the still face.

But that scar alone, which Frank instantly decided was as artificial as the contrivance which had lifted the corner of the man's mouth, was not enough to prevent the freshman from recognizing Dan Harkness! Before him, dead on the floor, lay the erstwhile Yale student who had been exposed as Shade Fowler, the gangster!

The kneeling officer rose to his feet. "We were right, Mac," he said to his companion. "He's the bird we was after, but somebody spoiled the pinch for us by giving him the works when we had him as good as collared."

"It was that moll," replied the other. "Where did she ooze to?"

"I didn't see," was the regretful confession. "Not realizing he'd been knocked off here in the middle of this crowd, I wasn't paying any attention to her. Too bad."

"Well, what we've got to do now is try to keep her from making a lam. We want to question this bunch, too. Maybe somebody saw her stick him. You take the door while I get on the phone and call for some lads to help handle the job."

Frank shook off the benumbing spell that had followed his recognition of the murdered man as Shade Fowler. In spite of the fact that everything seemed to point to Myrna Queen as the one who had done the deed, he was unwilling to believe her the guilty person. Fear for her safety reassailed him, magnified many times.

She had been hurrying back toward the tent by the artificial waterfall when North had attempted to stop her. Merriwell went that way again.

His classmates, Chatby, Stretcher and Littleton, were somewhere in the midst of the mob of excited men and hysterical women who were beginning to crowd toward the exit in an effort to get away, but he couldn't look for them now. They would have to shift for themselves.

The little tent was empty. He had feared he might find Myrna Queen there. He was thankful when he failed.

Farther back, there was a shadowy spot at one side of the structure of imitation rocks over which the waterfall poured. He was peering into that shadowy corner when he was electrified by a soft whisper:

"Frank! Frank Merriwell!"

SHE was there, pressed far back into the nook. Her face, minus the mask, looked ghostly white in the gloom. He was beside her in a twinkling. From that spot only a small portion of the central floor, at one side of the room, could be seen through the artificial trees.

"I told you to get out of this place," he said swiftly, keeping his voice down to a murmur that he knew would be drowned by the disturbance that was still going on in the room. "Why didn't you do it when you had a chance? Now it may be too late."

"But I'm sick of it!" she replied passionately. "I'm tired and sick of running away from Dan Harkness—of hid-

ing from him! I've told him I was through with him. I've begged him to let me alone. I've even threatened to betray him to the police if he didn't keep away from me. It hasn't done a bit of good.

"He's crazy, Frank. And he's taken to drinking. He's drunk all the time now. I smelled booze on his breath when he grabbed me out there. He was so drunk he could hardly stand. If he hadn't been he'd never have gone down the way he did when I gave him that push."

Merriwell stared at her through the gloom. Her words had been the words of a hunted and desperate person ready to turn at bay on the hunter. She had uttered them in a husky, anger-choked whisper.

The Flash grasped her bare arm. "Look here, Myrna Queen! Don't you know what's happened to Harkness?"

"What's happened?" She caught her breath. "What's all the excitement about? What made those women scream? I saw policemen. I thought they were after Dan. I—I didn't want them to take me, too. I don't want to testify against him if he's arrested."

"You'll never have to do that now, Myrna Queen. He's dead."

She fell back a little and clapped a hand over her mouth. Through the shadows, her eyes gleamed, wide and wild. For a moment or two she was as rigid as stone. Then she caught hold of the Flash with both of her slim brown hands.

"What do you mean? What are you saying, Frank Merriwell? How can he be dead? He was drunk, and he fell when I——"

"He's lying out there on the floor, stone dead, with a knife in his heart. You say you pushed him, Myrna Queen. Somebody stabbed him with that knife."

She was speechless for a little time. She appeared like one who had heard something she could not quite believe,

could not understand. Presently a shiver shook her slim body.

"Dead!" she whispered. "He's dead! But I didn't do it! Oh, no! Oh, no, no, no!"

"The cops you saw had followed him in here to arrest him. Now they're looking for you, Myrna Queen. You could have got away if you had beaten it out of here when I told you. Now the door is guarded, and they're telephoning for more officers. Why didn't you go?"

"I didn't understand. You see, I didn't know what had really happened. But I can get away."

"The police will throw a cordon round the place. You'll never get through it."

She was still clinging to him with her hands. "You don't think I killed Dan Harkness, do you, Frank Merriwell?"

"You have just said you didn't."

"Oh, I didn't, I didn't. That's the truth, Frank! You must believe me!"

"But it's what the police believe that will count against you. Many persons saw you push Harkness. I was near enough to see it. I didn't see anybody else touch him, Myrna. There'll be plenty who'll believe you struck him with the knife when you gave him that push."

She shook him, almost fiercely, with her clinging hands. "Tell me you do not believe I did!"

"You've said you didn't, and I believe you. But what I believe won't help you a bit."

"Oh, but it does—it does!" she declared. "It will give me courage, Frank, to know that you believe me."

"I'm afraid you'll need courage, Myrna Queen."

"I know what the police will do if they get me. They're brutal, and they'd try their hardest to make me confess that I killed Dan. I'm going to try to get away now."

"But how——"

"Look!"

She turned and pressed her hand against a spot behind her. In the shadow, something moved, showing a black opening, like a long, narrow doorway.

"It's a secret door that leads down to the basement where the liquors are hidden," she explained. "If I go at once I can get out that way before any more officers come."

"Then go, for Heaven's sake!" urged Frank. "Don't waste another second."

He felt her eyes bent upon him in a last brief look. He thought she had paused to say a final word, but she faded into the darkness of the narrow doorway like a vanishing ghost. There was a soft click, and the doorway was no longer open before him. He put out his hand and ran it over a surface that seemed to be solid and unyielding.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LIVING DEAD.

THE excitement and confusion of the horrified patrons of the Gypsy Grove had subsided in a measure, though dismay still prevailed, caused by a notification that nobody would be allowed to leave the place until he had been questioned and his name and address had been taken by the police.

A swarm of indignant men and women was pressing around the closed door at which the two uniformed officers stood guard. A telephone call for assistance had already been sent to headquarters.

A few of the cooler headed or more stolid patrons had not joined the crush at the door. Seeming to realize the futility of attempting to get out at once, they were waiting for events to take their course. The most of them were talking, more or less feverishly, of the startling tragedy.

Now and then, as if fascinated, they turned their eyes toward the open space in the middle of the floor, where lay a

quiet form that was covered by cloths taken from the tables.

Emerging again from amid the artificial trees, Frank Merriwell was seized by Freckles Chatby, who uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Well, here you are, Flash!" Freckles exclaimed in relief. "We couldn't imagine what had become of you. You were gone before we knew you'd started."

"Where are Stretcher and Littleton?" asked Frank.

"They're in that jam out there somewhere. We decided that you got out while the going was good."

"And left you flat? Now that would be just like me, wouldn't it, Chat?"

"Oh, it doesn't make so much difference about us. There are some other Yale men here. But you, an athlete, a candidate for the baseball team—It'll be bad advertising for you, old man. It'll make you look like a high-flying night bird. That won't do you much good."

"I was in hopes you had hit the high spots. What do you suppose made that crazy skirt knife the gentleman right here before the eyes of everybody? Why didn't she have the sense to observe a little more privacy about it?"

Merriwell did not reply. His eyes had discovered Cynthia Bargot, sitting beside one of the tables. She had donned her fur-trimmed wrap. A moment later, he was standing before her.

"Where's your brother—and North?" he asked.

"Mr. North went out—before this dreadful thing happened," she answered, rising to her feet.

"But he came back."

"I haven't seen him since he went out. Kirk's trying to find a way for us to leave also—before the police can ask us questions and take our names. He thinks maybe he can bribe somebody."

She was pale, but her voice was low and calm. Her hands were clasped

tightly together. She was holding herself together in a way that told of remarkable power of self-control.

"He won't be able to do that," said Frank.

"He said he'd get me out somehow, so father won't find out he'd taken me to a place where such a thing could happen. He's sure father will be furious about it."

"He shouldn't have brought you here"

"But he wasn't to blame, Frank. I wanted to come. I didn't want him to come without me—for reasons you can understand. I might have kept him away. It was all my fault—really. I thought it would be great fun. I scarcely expected to be a witness to a murder."

Merriwell shrugged. "Of course nobody expected anything like that, Cyn. It's a tough break."

"It will hurt you, Frank. I was amazed when I saw you here."

But he was not thinking of himself. He was thinking of Cynthia Bargot, forced into court, perhaps, to testify to what she had witnessed in this place where a murder had been committed on the opening night. The thought of such an ordeal and such publicity for her filled him with a desperate desire to save her from it.

"Listen, Cyn!" His hand was on her arm. "Maybe there's a way. Come!"

"But Kirk—I'm waiting for Kirk."

"Every second of delay makes the chance smaller. There'll be more policemen here in a very short time. Kirk can take care of himself. Nothing serious will happen to him. You must come now!"

He looked around for Chatby, but something had drawn Chatby away while he was talking with Cynthia. There was no time to look further for the little fellow. The seconds, as Frank had said, were precious.

He slipped his arm through Cynthia's.

"We'll walk slowly, so that no one will pay particular attention to us."

They passed within a few feet of the still form that was hidden by the tablecloths. The girl shrank away a little. Onward past the bed of moss on which Foxhall North had fallen when Frank knocked him down, they strolled. Beyond the small tent amid the artificial trees, they came to the dark nook at the back of the waterfall.

"Maybe I can't find it," muttered the Flash, "but I can try."

He began to run his hand over the rough surface of the imitation rock, feeling of every knob or protuberance, pressing upon them, seeking to move them with his fingers. Here, somewhere, he had seen Myrna Queen touch something that had caused the secret door to open.

"What are you doing?" asked Cynthia wonderingly.

"I'm searching for the way out," he answered.

Then he passed and turned his head in a listening attitude. He had heard a sound of voices which told him that the police reinforcements had arrived. The precious seconds were flying.

"I know it's here—right here!" he whispered fiercely, renewing his search with his fingers.

Suddenly the surface moved. It swung away before his hand, and the long black opening, like a narrow doorway, appeared. A dull breath of damp, cool air came forth into his face.

Behind them, in the room where the dead man lay, covered by the tablecloths, sounded the tread of heavy feet. A swift backward glance through the artificial trees gave him a glimpse of men in blue uniforms and brass buttons.

"Quick, Cyn! In here!"

"But Kirk—"

"The cops have come! If they see us—"

Holding fast to her wrist, he stepped through the narrow doorway and drew

her after him. He found the door and swung it shut again. It made no other sound than a soft click.

Standing in blank darkness, they could hear nothing save the gurgling and splashing of the little waterfall, pouring down over the structure over their heads into a pool so regulated that it did not overflow.

Frank put an arm around Cynthia, and she pressed close to him, shivering.

"Oh, Frank! I shouldn't leave Kirk this way. I ought to go back."

"Too late for that, Cyn. I haven't an idea how to open the door from this side."

"But how do we get out of this?"

"There must be a flight of stairs here. If I had matches— But I haven't. This is one of the times when I wish I smoked. We'll have to feel our way in the dark."

He felt with one foot, with the utmost caution, for the first stair, and found it. Clinging together, they descended the narrow flight, almost with the slowness of crawling snails, coming in time to what was a landing on the level of the street floor.

Frank felt around them once more, this time with both hands and feet. He had cautioned Cynthia to stand still while he made the exploration. She kept hold of him with both hands, and warned him to be careful.

"This," he murmured, "is like playing blindman's buff, only I've got the girl and I don't know what I'm going to do with her."

Her arms slid suddenly round his neck. He turned to her, there in the dark, clasped her tightly, and kissed her. It was a kiss under conditions so strange that neither of them would ever forget it.

"As if *you* didn't know what to do!" she whispered breathlessly, after some moments. "Anyhow, I do—when you're the one who's got me."

"You dear!" he whispered back.

He resumed his exploration in the dark of the spot they had reached.

On three sides of the place he could feel nothing but heavy walls, in which his hands discovered no doors. The stairs which they had descended came down upon the fourth side. Beside them there was an open space where no wall existed, and there, running back in the opposite direction, he found the head of another narrow flight of stairs. This second descent, he knew, must necessarily lead down into the basement or cellar beneath the building.

Down that second flight Frank and Cynthia made their way with the same slowness and care as before. When they had arrived at the bottom they seemed to be in a narrow partitioned space, and this they followed in a reverse direction to an end in which a door was set. Beneath the door a thin thread of light showed faintly.

Frank turned the knob with the utmost caution and opened the door slowly. The pressure of his hand on Cynthia's arm had warned her to be silent.

They looked into a small room that was poorly lighted by a single dusty electric bulb, suspended by a cord. In the room were kegs, boxes and crates, distributed about without order or system. Some of the smaller crates and boxes were wrapped in burlap. The central portion of the room was comparatively clear.

Myrna Queen was sitting on a box, a few feet away. That she had heard some sound to warn her of their approach seemed proven by the fact that she was looking straight at the door when Merriwell opened it.

"Oh, come on!" she said. "I'm here."

But she uttered a low exclamation of surprise and stood up quickly when Frank stepped forward into the light, followed by Cynthia.

"You!" Her dark eyes were wide. "I wondered who was creeping up to that door in such a stealthy way. I didn't know, but I was sure it wasn't one of the bulls. What are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here, Myrna? I fancied you were out of this place and far away by this time."

"I would have been, but the door is locked, and it's too strong for me to break it open. So there was nothing for me to do but wait—and pray that the police wouldn't find their way down here."

"I'm trying to get Miss Barget out to avoid unpleasant notoriety."

The two girls were looking at each other now. There was no misreading the intense hostility in their faces. Cynthia had uttered no word, in spite of the shock it had given her to come upon Myrna Queen down there, but her eyes expressed aversion as well as hostility. Even the pose of her slender body and the poise of her head bespoke a sort of smothered repugnance.

A slow, strange smile came into the expressive exotic face of the gypsy girl. "Miss Barget seems to be quite disturbed by the sight of me," she said, with what was like an intonation of regret. "I'm sure I've done nothing to make her look at me as though I were dirt under her feet."

Cynthia turned to Frank. "You knew she was here," she accused. "How did you know it?"

"I hoped she had got out. I tried to help her get away."

"You tried to help her, Frank? After—after the terrible thing she did! How could you do that?"

"But she didn't do it, Cyn! She has told me so, and I believe her."

"But I—I saw her do something to him. I've heard a dozen persons say they know she struck him with the knife when she pushed him."

"But I was quite near when she

pushed him, Cyn. I didn't see a knife. She simply tried to get away from him. Somebody else stabbed him."

"Who else was there near enough to do it?"

"I don't know. There were people at the tables all round them."

"Oh, Frank! Of course she'd say she didn't do it, but no one else could have done it."

"Miss Barget has tried me and found me guilty," said Myrna Queen. "I could expect nothing else from her. Now she'd hang me if she could."

"I'm sorry for you. I pity you, but I certainly——"

"Keep your pity," blazed the gypsy girl. "I want none of it!" She snapped her fingers. "That's what I care for your pity and your opinion of me! You couldn't be fair to me if you tried, because Frank Merriwell has been my friend.

"He's the only person I've ever found in all the world who has been fair and friendly to me without a design of some kind. I'll never forget it!"

"Hush! Hush!" begged Frank. "The police! If they hear you——"

"Oh, they're bound to get me anyhow, Frank. I realize that now. I can't escape. And there'll be all those lying people who'll swear they saw the knife in my hand. I wouldn't be surprised if Miss Barget, herself, swore that she did."

"If you're innocent, why are you trying to get away?" questioned Cynthia.

"Because—because I know the cards are against me. I'd be a fool if I didn't know it."

"Keep your voice down!" Frank entreated. "Myrna, Myrna! Be careful!"

It enraged Cynthia to hear him speak her name like that, to see him show such anxiety on her account. Jealousy tore at her heart.

"Let her talk as loudly as she pleases, Frank Merriwell. Let the police come!

If they do not hear her, I think I shall scream and call them."

He stepped quickly to her side. "Don't be crazy, Cynthia! For your own sake, at least, don't do it. Think what it'll mean. If I've ever done a single thing for which you're grateful, remember it now, and don't raise an alarm."

She knew Frank had kept silent more than once when a word from him would have involved her brother in trouble and disgrace. That checked her now, silenced her while the pangs of jealousy still raged. An abrupt stillness came over them all.

Frank was listening. Only Myrna Queen seemed indifferent, like one who knew the worst must happen, and did not care.

A full minute must have dragged by while they stood there in silence, scarcely breathing.

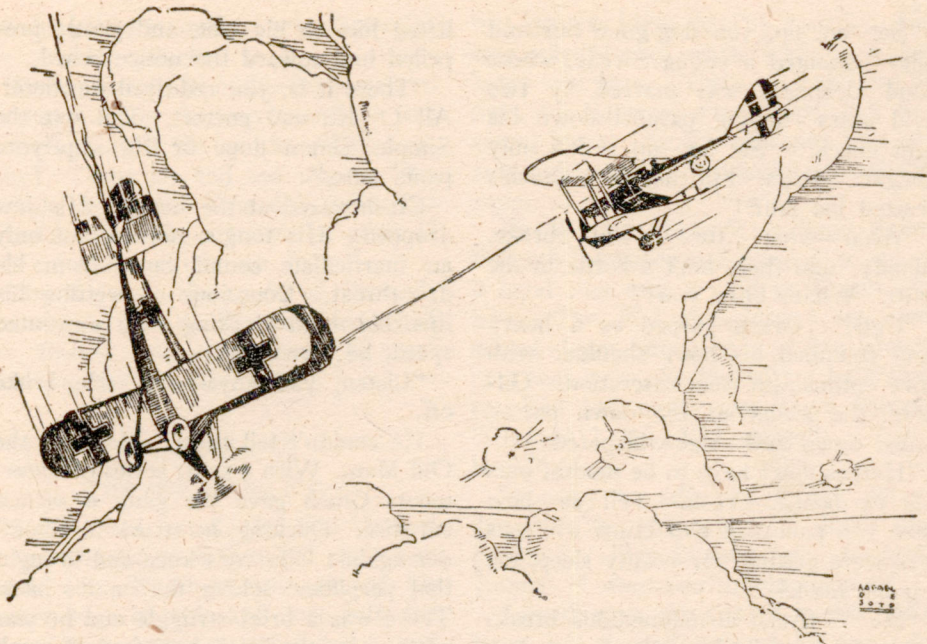
Then they heard a sound. Somebody was coming! Somebody was coming, but not by the way of the dark and narrow stairs that ran down from the secret door under the waterfall.

There was another door, the heavy, locked door that had baffled the gypsy girl's effort to get away before the officers arrived. Beyond that door they heard footsteps advancing. A key rattled in the lock.

Frank caught up a bung starter and sprang toward the door as it swung open. But he halted with the weapon half lifted as the light fell on the person who came into view. The face at which he stared was thin and gray and fox-like, with washed-out, furtive gray eyes. To Frank it was a ghostly face—the face of a dead man.

For there in the doorway apparently stood Mortimer Wright, whose death in an airplane crash had been recorded by the police!

The second installment of this Merriwell serial will appear in our next number, on the news stands March 1st.



Unclaimed Ships

By Thomas Lewellyn Light

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

THE group of pilots bunched before the notice board in the mess room of the 139th Squadron, A. F. C., gaped in astonishment. Their mouths hadn't been so wide open for many a day, for liquor was hard to come by in the shelled desolation a little to the north of Verdun. They were a hard bunch of air babies, ungiven to expression of petty emotion, yet their mouths were agape. They looked and read again:

Second Lieutenant Longquill. Albatros Scout. Down in flames over Verdun. Confirmed.

Second Lieutenant Longquill. Combat Fokker—type unknown, crashed behind enemy line. Confirmed.

No mistake about it. There it was in neat typewritten script with the "Old Man's" solid signature beneath it. They made no comment, for they knew that "Crash" Longquill was sitting at the table behind them. Crash, who had smashed more good ships than they had lost to the enemy—the only guy in the outfit who had failed to make good.

It was incredible. Crash's one-point landings and his unfailing ability in evading crossing the line were a by-word throughout the A. F. C. But Crash had at last scored a homer. Their amazement overcome, as one man they turned to shout congratulations to the one and only boob of their crack squadron.

"Set 'em up, you dog-gone husband killer," shouted a young Swede, whose blond cleanness was marred by two vivid scars running parallel down his right cheek. "Set 'em up if it's only vinegar. Boys, I'm happy. Crash's strutted his stuff!"

"What—what for! I'm broke, 'Blondy,' and there ain't a bottle in the outfit. What's bitin' you?"

"Ugh!" Crash gasped as a heavy hand thumped his bony shoulder with more enthusiasm than discretion. Gilmore, the leader of the dawn patrol, leaned down and stage-whispered:

"Heroes don't have to be modest outside of books, Crash. Tell us—how come you pancaked two Huns while us boys were getting our beauty sleep, eh, you big hunk?"

"Me!" Crash abandoned his breakfast and leaned back.

He hadn't been over the line, he'd taken a confidential message back to the base—a special mission for the Old Man. Glancing up at the circle of faces, he read in them something that had never been there before—real friendliness.

His heart felt warmed. At last he was accepted—one of the gang, but—why? Blondy had always spoken to him. In his quiet, characteristic manner, the Swede extended the friendship for which Crash longed. But to have Gilmore, the taciturn leader of the "dawners," slap him on the back! Crash was overwhelmed. What was it all about, anyway?

"I don't get you guys," he said. "It ain't my birthday, and my aunt hasn't died yet."

A laugh greeted the remark. Crash's aunt was unknown to them, but her good works in the way of socks and other home comforts were familiar.

"Aw, heck, I'll slap you," some one groaned.

Two weather-roughed hands grabbed Crash beneath his angular shoulders,

lifted him to his feet, and gently propelled him toward the notice board.

"There it is, you red-dyed murderer. All O. K., and correct. Cut out the Simple Simon dope or I'll slap yore pants sure."

Crash gazed at the board. His jaw dropped. His tongue moved, but only an inarticulate sound came from his dry throat. Conscious of wetting his lips, his mind working with unwonted speed, he forced out:

"Listen, you guys——" He broke off.

He couldn't tell them. He'd tell the Old Man. With a swift series of movements Crash gave the gang a second surprise. Ducking, he struck his shoulder against Gilmore's knee and brought that perplexed soldier flat on his back. There was a brief struggle and he was gone. As the boob vanished through the door, he heard a rising mutter of voices. Above them all came the Swede's excited shout:

"Crash has waked up. He is gone to raise Cain with the Old Man. Must have got three, and the Old Man has only posted two."

The laugh following the remark was lost to Crash. His tall, spare frame was ambling with space-devouring strides across the distance between the mess hut and the Old Man's office. Without the formality of knocking and waiting for the gruff invitation to enter, Crash flung open the door of the squadron commander's sanctum.

"You've made a mistake, sir," he burst out. "Credited me with two ships and——" He broke off, gazed uneasily at the gray-haired man sitting calmly at the desk, then continued courageously: "I've never got one."

The Old Man was smiling and nodding his head in confirmation.

"Sit down, Longquill," he said softly.

Crash sat down. The commander went on in a quiet voice, his tone almost caressing.

"What you going to do about it, Longquill?"

"Why, sir, I've done all I can do. I've pointed out the mistake." He wriggled uneasily and almost slipped off the chair.

"Anything else you can do about it?"

Crash's forehead creased in worried lines, but his eyes, narrowed as he concentrated fiercely on the problem, met the level gaze of the gray ones looking into his.

"I could say I misinformed you, sir. I could do that if it will make it easier for you to correct the mistake."

"And take a razzing from the boys, eh? They'll make it pretty hot for you, Longquill."

"Well, sir." Crash braced his shoulders and took a deep breath. "It'd be hard going, but you've been mighty patient with me, and if—if it'll save trouble, I'll do it."

"You don't seem to get me, Longquill. I've told a lie—two lies. They stand. Are you going to let me remain a liar, or will you put me right?"

The boob of the 139th considered the question. Slowly the lines on his forehead smoothed out. A questioning look came into his eyes. Then for the second time that morning, his jaw dropped. At last he understood.

"You mean, sir, you want me to go get two German ships, and—fix things that way?"

"Two! Great Scott, man, I want you to get fifty."

THE commander grinned. "I want you to make those razzers eat dirt. I want to see the men in the hangars rushing to the tarmac when they see your ship swinging down.

"I want to see the ambulance men on their toes when you bump the tarmac for fear you might be scratched up a bit. You are, or I'll say, you've been a 'wash-out.' No one expects anything of you. They call you Crash.

TN-6B

"Well, I've given you a start—even now they're talking about you. They're waiting to see what you'll do next. What are you going to do? Tell them I'm a liar, or go out and play hell with those guys across the way?"

Crash rose to his feet. Strange and wonderful thoughts were teeming in his brain. The Old Man's words had stung way down in deep places hitherto untouched by mere words. The Old Man had lied to give him a reputation, to give him a chance to make good. Crash lifted his head, filled his lungs. His voice was vibrant:

"Sir, I'll——"

Suddenly the boob of the 139th wheeled and dived for the door. Midst the emotions and unframed resolves, like an undertone in savage music, was the thought:

"I can't let the Old Man see me blub."

Once outside the door, Crash walked in his habitual manner, feet dragging and shoulders drooping. But his thoughts were going at racing speed. Once he swallowed. He felt all mussed up as he had felt once when his kid brother had been hit by a motor car while playing on the street.

It was while he was carrying the stilled little form into the house that fear, never afterward shaken off, came to him. But now something was growing within him—was sending the blood hotly through his veins.

Reaching the Nisen Hut wherein he had hitherto spent most of the time not devoted to dodging Huns, he donned his flying gear. A plodding run took him to the tarmac, where he confronted the flight sergeant with an unwonted truculence in his manner. He knew the sergeant, and knew what the sergeant thought of him.

"Drag out a Bristol, sergeant!" he snapped.

"Can't have one, sir. Commander said you were to stick to Camels."

"A Bristol, sergeant, and—be dog-gone quick!"

"Shades of eagles," muttered the flight sergeant. "He's drunk!"

Nevertheless, the boss of the hangars turned toward the group of watching mechanics and gave a terse order.

"Bristol for Mr. Longquill." In an undertone he growled: "Make it fast, or the awkward bum'll bump me off. He's loaded to the horn with dope."

Crash sighed with relief as he saw the Bristol being wheeled out. He'd put one over the sergeant, anyway. That fact gave him confidence in himself. Looking over the ship, he found a bullet hole unpatched.

"What's that?" He demanded, fingering the ragged edge. "Patch it and be quick."

"Yes, sir." The sergeant's voice was humble.

Five minutes later Crash was weaving his way up through the blue. When the tarmac was a mere splotch of gray and cold gripped at his throat, he leveled off. Neither to the north nor to the south did he swerve. In a wondrously straight line he hummed toward the east.

Gone were memories of his one-point landings. Gone were the thoughts that had hitherto made every flying moment an æon of vague uneasiness. He did not listen with straining ear for the engine to falter, nor did he look jerkily around the sky in an effort to locate prowling Fokkers. Methodically he tried out his guns and checked up on his instrument panel. Everything was running smoothly. All the air lore he had ever read or heard came flooding to his memory.

It seemed that he worked mechanically, doing things as he knew others did them, without overwhelming anxiety. Crash was coming into his own.

He glanced at the ground below, and made a swift comparison with his map. He was above the American field guns.

A matter of seconds and he was above the supports.

Wham! He heard the roar of a gun. He looked down and to starboard.

"Five hundred low and wide," he muttered.

Unconcernedly he swept on, ignoring the black smoke balls which Heinie archies splattered below him. Without apparent reason he pulled the stick and came back in a short loop. He rolled twice. Then having shown his contempt for the archies, he straightened out and carried on.

A little to the south he saw white puffs of smoke where American archies were plastering the sky. It dawned on him that where those white puffs of smoke hung he would find his quarry. Accordingly he banked around and headed south, dropping altitude a little.

There it was: A flicker of white as the enemy ship banked on a turn. It was retiring. No—it was coming north, toward him. For an instant the old worries descended on him in a brain-muffling fog. Gone was the clear thinking. Did the engine miss a beat? Did she rudder to port as she should? There was a lag which might let him down at a critical moment—

"Two! Great Scott, man, I want you to get fifty!"

The old man had lied to give him a good name.

Crash caught a grip on himself. He actually smiled. Pressing the stick trigger to warm up his forward gun, he nosed down a little more. The Heinie was close—was making altitude fast. At over three hundred miles an hour, the ships drew together. Crash crouched, eyes squinting along the fat barrel of his Vickers.

"Top wing left," he panted and touched the stick gently. "Center."

Another touch and the Fokker's cockpit lay dead over his sights. Tensely he gripped the trigger. A short burst came from his gun. Crash was

conscious of a thin whine as tracers and steel-jacketed bullets flashed over his right shoulder. The Heinie had opened at that identical moment.

His own shots—were they hitting? He couldn't see, the prop seemed to blur his vision. He was looping, sweeping down on the Fokker again. It evaded, rolled, side-slipped, swooped up and round. But Crash got his gun to bear and again spattered the seesawing target with a rain of deadly missiles.

The Fokker was running. He'd won. Fierce exultation swept over him and the resolve that the Hun should not escape him sent him screeching down in pursuit. One, two bursts he fired. Then he leaned back and laughed unrestrainedly.

The Hun was not running, but was falling out of control. What had he been afraid of? It was easy. Eagerly turning to the east, the boob of the 139th took stock of his ship. It was torn a little out on the wing, but what mattered? He must get another—must put the Old Man straight.

ENEMY archies opened up again in a vindictive burst of hate. Their shooting was better now and the air grew bumpy as high explosive shattered the silence of the lonely heights.

Crash paid no heed to bursting shells. He had caught sight of an artillery observation plane flying low and was forcing a steep dive to reach it before it fled. The archie fire redoubled in its intensity as the German gunners realized his intention. Then with suddenness it ceased. Crash wondering why, instinctively glanced around.

He saw the reason. Fear rode with him for a moment, tempting him to try to run from the four enemy ships hurtling down on his tail. He'd run into a trap—was cornered! Between him and the lines were the enemy.

Even as he banked on the edge of his

wings, the foremost Hun opened fire. But Crash's maneuver caused the shots to go wide. Desperately, but resolutely, the boob of the 139th sent his ship into the midst of the Fokker formation, which broke. In the short moment it took them to get into an attacking position, Crash tailed the Hun which had fired at him.

The Hun looped. Crash followed in a smaller loop and maintained a long burst as he came back over.

He never saw what happened to that ship until it struck the ground and burst into flames. The next moment the other three were whipping the air about him with their long-reaching fangs.

A yellow Fokker with death's-head and cross-bones emblazoned on its fuselage drove in, gun spitting a hurricane of bullets at the defiant Bristol hanging at the top of a loop. Inspired, Crash rolled and brought his ship right side up before it commenced to drop over.

The unexpected move caught the viciously shooting Fokker unawares. Crash swerved toward it, gun beating a rapid tattoo. His aim was wide of the helmeted figure crouching behind the guns, but his shots raked the yellow rudder from which the canvas ripped.

Without control the death's-head ship wavered unsteadily, then seasawed down with ever-increasing speed.

The Bristol did not get away unscathed. While yet he poured his bullets into his immediate adversary, the other two Fokkers jumped on his tail. Above the chatter of guns and roar of motors he heard a loud *ping* and knew that a wire had parted.

A swift glance to right and left assured him that his wing stays were unbroken. He concluded that a wire supporting the landing gear must have gone.

Crash muttered to himself as he real-

ized that his drum was empty. Falling in a tight spin, he tried to shake off his assailants in order to shove in a full one. Mistaking his intention—thinking he was trying to break off the engagement—the Huns swooped down recklessly, guns blasting death at their fleeing enemy.

Crash crouched over the Vickers, fingers working with nervous speed. The enemy bullets were tearing his plane to ribbons. Every moment he expected to feel the sting as the deadly steel found its target and tore through flesh and bone.

Right on his tail they rode. How they failed to get home on a vital part of his machine, Crash could never fathom. He stayed with the job, held to his spin until his gun was ready to reply to the hail of shot sweeping around him.

His break from the spin was not orthodox. He expected to see the wings float off into space under the terrific strain of his upward turn. The pilots of the Fokkers took no such chances.

They drove on down, heads turned as they cautiously drew back on their sticks. But their watchfulness could not save them both from the avenging fury which was again dropping floorward with reckless abandon.

Now, however, Crash's gun was talking. Almost calmly he drew a bead on one of the ships, a squeeze on the trigger and the Vickers was hammering away.

Tracers were melting into the fuselage of the Fokker. A thin wisp of smoke hung in the air, streaming from the cockpit. A thin flame giving off sooty smoke. Crash wheeled. He caught a glimpse of the other ship banking—banking away from him.

He sent his ship hurtling toward it, seizing the opportunity of engaging the blind spot. Again his Vickers hammered. Something crashed. He heard

it. Then the fourth and last enemy ship went dizzily down, its engine going full blast.

There was a dazed, unbelieving expression on the face of the boob of the 139th. His grim, oil-spattered face relaxed. He had won against terrific odds, had maintained the highest ideals of the squadron.

Now he could return, could tell the Old Man that he was not a liar, could and would ask for three other ships to be posted to his credit. He spoke aloud:

"I'll see I get Bristols in the future."

The Heinie A. A. gunners again bent to their task. Feverishly they threw shells into the smoking breeches of their guns. Now, however, they were shooting in coöperation and a veritable wall of bursting shell hemmed in the battle-torn Bristol.

It was a terrific air barrage, extending in an almost solid wall around and below. Swiftly the black walls, rent by dull red flame, drew closer. Oily smoke swirled.

Shell fragments whizzed through the air about the plunging ship. A strut was chipped perilously thin by a jagged splinter of steel.

Despite his perilous position, Crash's coolness did not desert him. He realized that he must get down to the floor where the guns could not reach him. Down he dived in short, breath-taking plunges, the gunners shortening range as he got lower and lower.

Then a sudden peace; he was safe. But on down he went until he was little over a hundred feet from the ground. Straightening out, he opened the throttle wide and sped for the line.

A glance at the fuel gauge showed him that in twenty minutes his motor would go dead. With the wind holding him to a ground speed of ninety miles an hour, he knew that he would be lucky to make the crossing. More-

over the ship was not doing all it should do.

Gaping rents in the wings, and a torn rudder did not help any. Desperately Crash looked about him. Were there other Hun ships about? Above and to the left he discerned a flight of ships. They were converging on his line of flight and dropping at the same time.

Crash knew them to be Fokkers drawn to the scene by the antiaircraft fire. There was the barest possibility that he could make the crossing before they cut him off. Once across the line, he resolved to make a crash landing.

Crash nursed his engine to get every ounce of power out of it. The Bristol was showing a tendency to drop by the nose. It required all his vigilance to maintain a steady, level flight.

Then from below came a storm of rifle and machine-gun fire. A glance at the nearing Hun ships now above and but slightly to the rear, and Crash dropped lower yet, barely clearing the barbed wire he hurtled along. He passed over No Man's Land and reached the American lines. A swift glance back showed him the Fokkers had abandoned the pursuit. The gas gauge informed him that he had five minutes more of flight.

Up he nosed. If humanly possible he would land on the tarmac of the 139th and return the ship intact. He didn't want another crash to his credit.

From now on Crash resolved he would handle his ship like the others handled theirs. Without worrying, he'd maintain real speed for the landing, and make a job of it from start to finish.

FIVE minutes later a very much tattered Bristol glided down to the tarmac of the 139th with a dead engine. Glancing at the wind indicator, Crash realized why he had been able to make it. The wind was dead, barely

sufficient to stir the linen hanging limply from the pole.

From hangars there came running a score of mechanics. In the van was the flight sergeant.

Crash was anxious. Would he make a mess of the landing and smash the ship? Would the flight sergeant give him one of his scornful looks which said plainer than words:

"You mutton-handed hayseed, why didn't you stay on the farm?"

Anxiety fell away from Crash. "Confound the sergeant," he growled. "I'll tell him to go straight to the devil!"

Recklessly he slipped down at high gliding speed. Within two feet of the tarmac he drew the ship level, and held her. Losing way, the Bristol settled down with scarcely a bounce, ran for fifteen feet, then with a resounding crash nosed over and sheared the prop clean off.

Crash climbed from the wreck and stood surveying the once-smart ship ruefully.

"Fine landing, sir." The flight sergeant's voice was respectful. "Landing gear badly shot up and gave out."

Crash looked at the man. Was he being sarcastic? No! He was quite sincere. He was looking at the boob of the 139th with respect and admiration in his eyes.

"Yes, sergeant." Crash's voice was as casual as he knew how to make it. "Do the best you can with it. Old Man'll raise the deuce with me if it's a total loss."

Then he walked to the Old Man's office, his heart thumping violently. Awkwardly he slouched along. Except for the gleam in his eye and a forward thrust to his chin, he was yet the same man of a few hours ago. This time he knocked at the door. From within came a sound of quick steps and a scraping of a chair.

"Been watching the crash landing,"

groaned Crash. He didn't know that the Old Man had spent the last half hour scanning the eastern sky. A moment later the gruff voice barked out:

"Come in. What the thunder you standing on the step for?"

Crash went in.

"Well!" demanded the Old Man. "I see you've made a mess of a Bristol. My orders were that you were to stick to Camels."

"You'll have to alter that, sir." Crash spoke as he'd never spoken before. "In future I want Bristols and I"—he hesitated—"I want to do more solo stuff."

Hastily the Old Man changed the subject. Crash was almost guilty of insolence.

"Well, Longquill, am I a liar?"

"Not by three ships, sir." Crash was in deadly earnest.

"What do you mean by that?" The Old Man leaned forward.

"I mean, sir, that I got the two ships you credited me with and I wish to claim three others!" There was a ring to Crash's voice.

The Old Man stretched back in his chair and gazed at the corrugated iron roof—a pious expression on his strong iron-gray face.

Brrrrr! The squadron commander picked up the telephone receiver.

"Yes, 139th Squadron speaking," he said, then carried on a conversation with the distant speaker.

"Yes. . . . Yes, Second Lieutenant Longquill. But he only claims three. . . . Other two must have been brought down by some one else. . . . But I insist. He's here now, just reporting and only claims three. . . . All right, list 'em as unclaimed ships."

The Old Man hung up. Turning to Crash, he said:

"That's the 42nd A. A. Battery. Insist you got five ships. They must be mistaken, eh, Longquill?"

"They must, sir." Crash added determinedly: "How about me getting a Bristol in future, sir?"

The Old Man sighed resignedly:

"Take two, Longquill, take two."



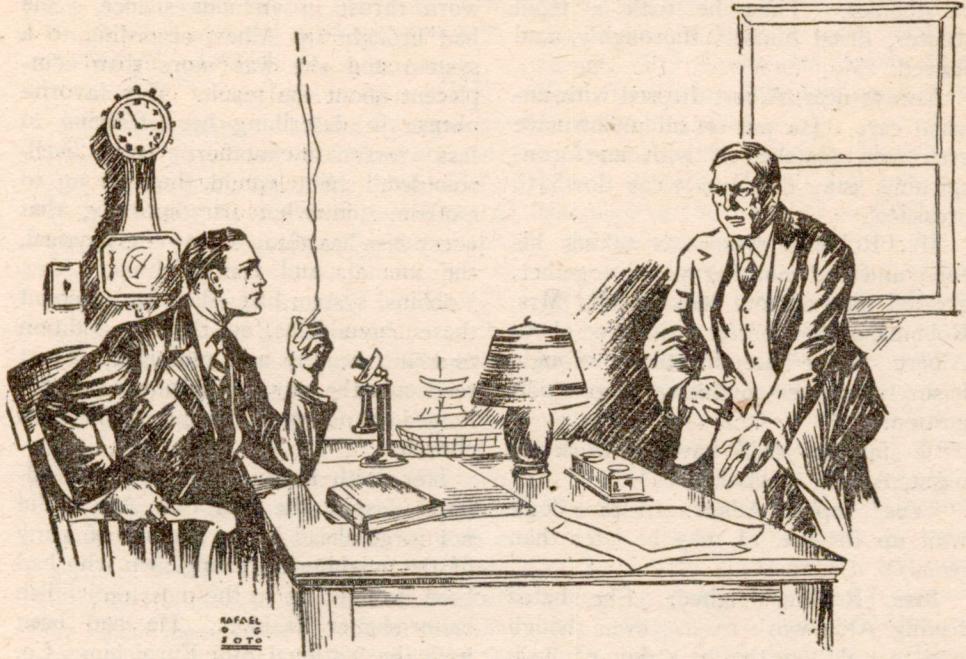
1930 OR 1934?

IT is generally believed that we are living in the year 1930, but the year may really be 1934 or later. This fact is indicated by a record of an eclipse of the moon in the Bible. Bible history says that Christ was born during the reign of Herod the Great. But Herod died in the spring 4 B. C., the date being fixed by a lunar eclipse which took place the night before his death.

Obviously, Christ must have been born not later than 4 B. C., and possibly earlier.

The church had no definite knowledge of the date of Christ's birth. It fixed the date, month and year, arbitrarily.

Astronomers are able to calculate the dates of past eclipses as accurately as those of the future, and so have determined the very day and hour of the eclipse that ushered Herod the Great out of this life.



Albert Was Different

By Earl Marvin Rush

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

CODDLED.

IT is the daily habit of the majority of young men to scramble out of bed at the last possible instant, wolf an inadequate breakfast, and rush into the office five minutes late. All well-schooled efficiency experts will agree that this is an especially pernicious habit.

Such young men begin the day hot and disheveled and so upset mentally as to be unable to function properly at their tasks for at least another thirty minutes.

Albert Robbins was different. At six fifteen each morning he was gently

roused by the faint tinkling of the alarm clock which was muffled under some pajamas in his chest of drawers. At six-twenty he threw back the blankets and began raising arms and legs in a series of exercises calculated to stir one's circulation to the point where he might get safely out of bed.

Bounding abruptly out of bed, like being awakened by an unmuzzled alarm clock, had a disastrous effect on the nervous system. Albert's mamma was not an efficiency expert, but she read the magazines.

This morning, as usual, Albert continued to wave his arms and legs about for five minutes before he got out on the floor and devoted himself to sterner

calisthenics. Then he took a tepid shower, dried himself thoroughly, and shaved.

Always neat, Albert dressed with unusual care. He put on an unobtrusive gray suit, matched it with an inconspicuous gray tie, and went down to breakfast.

Mr. Robbins, who was taking his food and the morning paper together, greeted him without looking up. Mrs. Robbins, on the contrary, fluttered about Albert as he ate in the thorough, leisurely manner conducive to good digestion.

"I suppose you'll have to work to-night, Allie?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Albert. "Please don't wait up for me. I may be later than usual."

Mrs. Robbins sighed. She hated having Allie work nights, even though it was only on the first day of each month. "Don't you think I had better send a lunch with you?" she insisted.

"No, no," said he hastily. "It's too much trouble for you and besides, you know, a hot dinner is better for one."

Mrs. Robbins sighed again. "Well, do be sure not to eat anything doubtful. People are always getting ptomaine poisoning at these restaurants."

"I'll be careful," promised Albert as he put on his hat.

"Now wear your rubbers and raincoat and take your umbrella. The paper says it will rain before night, and you must take care of yourself this March weather."

Obediently Albert incased himself in the rain garments and took up his voluminous umbrella. A moment later the door closed quietly behind him.

Albert's papa, whose natural pessimism had led him into the life-insurance business, threw down his paper and snorted in disgust. "You've coddled that boy until he hasn't the spirit of a poached egg," he said bitterly.

Mrs. Robbins received this time-

worn thrust in virtuous silence. She had brought up Albert according to a system and she was more than complacent about the result. Her favorite phrase in describing her offspring to less fortunate mothers was "well-rounded." She would then go on to explain, somewhat paradoxically, that every boy has three sides—the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. Mrs. Robbins' system had taken into account these three sides, so that in addition to being healthy and muscular, Albert read only the sounder literature and belonged to a good, correct, orthodox church.

Her faith in this system never faltered despite the fact that Albert did not forge ahead in the manner of many of the neighboring young men who had been brought up in the most outlandish helter-skelter fashion. He had been with the National Silk Furnishings Co. for five years and was still a bookkeeper at thirty dollars a week.

Yet Mrs. Robbins' confidence remained unshakable. That there could be any one in agreement with her husband she could not conceive. Albert's mamma was like that.

ALBERT, meanwhile, had boarded a car at the corner. Handicapped as he was by raincoat and umbrella, he was rather slow in producing a ticket. The delay irked the conductor, who had been made irritable by years of handling heavy traffic and by the recent installation of an unbeatable fare register.

"Hurry it up, Percy," he said contemptuously. "There's other people wants to get to work."

Albert reddened at the insult and stared hard at the man's cap, moving his lips as if memorizing the number it bore.

"Wait a minute and I'll write it down for you," continued the conductor, his tone more insulting still.

Swaying on a strap at the front of the

car, Albert was still conjuring up the devastating retorts he might have made when he reached his destination. It was precisely ten minutes of eight, his usual time, when he walked into the office. There the sight of Miss Harris, already at the switchboard, drove his transportation troubles from his mind.

"Would you like to go to a church bazaar to-morrow night?" he blurted at her.

Now no girl, least of all a girl like Rose Harris, likes to be approached as though she were being offered a golden opportunity.

"No," she said decidedly.

Vaguely aware that his invitation had been deficient in tact, Albert blundered on. "I'm sure you'd have a good time," he persisted.

Rose Harris plugged in a call somewhat viciously and then ran her luminous brown eyes disdainfully over Albert's umbrella, raincoat, and rubbers. His pallor of desperation slowly turned to crimson under her gaze. He shuffled uneasily for a moment and then plodded unhappily back to his locker.

Fifteen minutes later, as he was methodically posting his accounts, young Morrison rushed in with his usual show of industry and took the stool beside Albert. He opened a ledger, hastily cocked a green shade over his left eye, and carefully rolled the sleeves of his splendid shirt to the elbow.

"Mornin', ol' war horse," he said.

Albert returned the greeting. He admired Morrison for a man of the world.

The man of the world yawned prodigiously. "Feel low in the ol' mind this mornin'. Played poker till three and only won nineteen smackers."

Albert, who didn't play poker, hadn't been up till three o'clock since the age of colic, and always spoke of one hundred cents as a dollar, was grateful for these confidences. They somewhat as-

suaged the stings inflicted on his self-respect by the street-car conductor and by Rose Harris.

"Fine work, old—old-timer," he applauded, and bent to his work again.

At nine o'clock Mr. Downey, the manager, came banging into the office. Mr. Downey was an irascible man at best. It was evident that to-day was not one of his best days. Six bookkeepers cocked an ear in the direction of his private office.

Five bookkeepers ran hastily over their recent sins and began the preparation of plausible excuses. Only Albert remained unruffled. He was different. Not in his five years of keeping books had he been called into the private office to explain errors in his postings.

It was with a shock of horror, therefore, that he heard Mr. Downey utter his name. "Miss Harris, send that man Robbins in here."

The services of Miss Harris seemed somewhat superfluous, as Mr. Downey's bellow could have been heard for two blocks. Albert, his face flushing, slid off his stool and made for the lion's den, numb with amazement.

CHAPTER II.

CALLED DOWN.

BYNUM, the city salesman, sat in a chair beside the desk, coolly smoking a cigarette. His hat was on the back of his head and there was a sly look of satisfaction on his face as he regarded the astounded bookkeeper.

Mr. Downey, on the contrary, was pacing up and down behind his desk. He paused long enough to glower at Albert. The events of the early morning, whatever they had been, had plainly upset Mr. Downey's digestive processes and when Mr. Downey had indigestion he welcomed the opportunity to make an example of some one. He had a lot to say. But it was a long and a painful

time before Albert found out what it was all about.

The manager began with a dissertation on the labor involved in building up such a business and such a reputation as was enjoyed by the National Silk Furnishings Co. He gave the impression that he, Downey, had practically reared that vast business structure single-handed. And then to have that structure bowled over, knocked down, undermined, and laid waste by incompetence in the office— Presently Mr. Downey paused for words.

"But what?" began Albert, stammering uneasily.

"Don't what me," roared Mr. Downey. "No one should know better than you. Don't stand there and tell me you're not aware of the fact that we've lost the account of the Cosmopolitan Department Store, the best city account we ever hope to have. Bynum reported it to me yesterday.

"He said that Wilburson, the silk buyer, was so sore about errors in our billing—just one annoyance after another, he said—that he ordered him out of the office and swore he'd never do another penny's worth of business with us as long as he lived."

"But I don't—" began Albert again.

Mr. Downey ignored the interruption. "I went around to see Wilburson myself this morning and you know what he did? Said he never wanted to hear of the National Silk Furnishings Co. again and that if I didn't move fast, he'd throw me out of the waiting room. Bellered like a bull! Had every one laughing at me. He'd have done it, too. No control whatever over his temper. Why the Cosmopolitan Store ever picked a prize fighter for a silk-goods buyer, I can't understand."

Albert shifted his bewildered gaze to Bynum. The city salesman wore an injured expression that became almost a smirk under Albert's stare.

"But I'm sure," said Albert desperately, "that everything has—"

Once more Mr. Downey cut him short. "Listen, young man. I've had the last excuse I want out of you. Always excuses; never a lucid explanation. Business is none too good right now and I can do without one of you bookkeepers. And you can bet your bottom dollar that you're the one I can do without first. Losing us the Cosmopolitan Store! Get out of here!"

Slowly Albert walked back to his desk. He knew that the other bookkeepers, although they appeared engrossed in their work, were grinning at the panning he had just received. Morrison winked broadly from beneath his green shade. But Albert was as yet too bewildered to feel any resentment.

It was possible, of course, that he might have made an error in posting the account of the Cosmopolitan Store. But that there could be several mistakes—just one annoyance after another, as Bynum had reported—he could not believe.

Instead of proceeding with his regular work, which was so important on this first day of March, he got out a file and went carefully over every transaction with the Cosmopolitan Department Store for the past six months. Everything, so far as he could find, was correctly posted, and the account had been paid promptly and to the penny each month.

Finally he put away the file and resumed his interrupted posting. But his mind, when he came back from a hasty lunch, was still dwelling on the problem. His eyes met those of Miss Harris over the switchboard and the disdain she expressed drove him into an attempt to justify himself.

"Old Downey blew up quite a storm this morning, eh?" he said with an attempt at lightness.

"And you came out of it with as much dignity as a wet cat," retorted

Rose Harris. "Are you the only one around here that ever makes a mistake?"

BUT I'm quite certain that I didn't make any mistakes," said Albert eagerly.

He shifted his rubbers and looked so pathetic that Miss Harris felt herself verging on hysteria. "Then why in the name of sense did you let him talk to you that way? Is your backbone made of India rubber? If Mr. Downey had said half as much to me as he did to you, I'd have wrung his neck if it had been my last act."

With that she pulled a hat over her lustrous brown hair and went angrily down the stairs.

Albert went back to his locker. He was quite unable to understand this girl's attitude. Six months ago she had seemed very friendly.

Rose Harris, eating her lunch with more savagery than is conducive to good digestion, was even more at a loss to understand it. When she had taken this switchboard job a year ago, she had instinctively read in Albert Robbins qualities a little higher, a little finer, than those possessed by the other young men about the place.

He was tall and fit looking, with clear skin and intelligent gray eyes. His tastes were more profound. While the other bookkeepers were yawning over sporting pages during spare moments, Albert was out in the shop studying the fabrication of hosiery, lingerie, and dainty silk dresses.

Once, to her delight, he had taken her on a tour of inspection. She found him as familiar with processes, styles, and prices as Mr. Downey himself could possibly be.

She had felt, at first, that here was a young man whose natural abilities and knowledge of the business would bring him rapid advancement. Now, as she lunched alone, she knew that she was a

fool to be so concerned about and to grow so angry with a man who was meek enough to be bullied by any insolent office boy.

Thus Rose Harris, angry with herself for being angry, returned to the office more furious than ever.

Ordinarily Albert would have pretended to join Morrison in his periodic complaints at being forced to work on the first night of every month. But this afternoon he was quiet to the point of moroseness. Even his delight at the prospect of dining downtown was tempered by the formless resentment that was beginning to rise within him.

He felt himself ravished by conflicting emotions, among which stood out the burning desire to show them—the other bookkeepers, Bynum, and Mr. Downey, but more especially Rose Harris—that he was a man not lightly to be trifled with when aroused.

At six o'clock Mr. Downey emerged from his private office. "I want every man back promptly after dinner," he barked. "No excuses will go this month. The man who isn't back to-night needn't come back at all."

Shortly after this ultimatum, Albert got gloomily into his heavy-weather accessories and set out alone for the Crystal Cafeteria. There he automatically collected on his tray such foods as his mamma would feel to be reasonably free from the threat of ptomaine poisoning, and sought a small table well in the background.

Ordinarily he thrilled to these monthly visits to the Crystal Cafeteria. The glitter of setting, the hum of companionship, the inspiring strains from the three-piece orchestra, combined to convince the happy Albert that this was, indeed, life he was witnessing. But to-night Albert was different. Life had taken on a newer, a more somber meaning.

Beginning absently on his soup, Albert fell to thinking on the utter un-

reasonableness of Rose Harris. She couldn't seem to get a calm, impersonal viewpoint about anything. Did she expect him to act like a fool and a madman; to go about calling Downey a liar and punching fellow workers on the nose at the slightest provocation?

Albert was just in the midst of these considerations of the absurd expectations of Miss Harris when a tray-laden girl, after pausing for a moment to scan his face, gracefully seated herself opposite him.

Roused abruptly from these bitter cogitations, Albert almost strangled on a spoonful of soup. The idea of any one ignoring empty tables to sit opposite him was astonishing enough in itself. But when that person happened to be the most beautiful creature in his known world, it became a happening beyond belief.

For the first time in his life he was startled into staring at a young woman with no feelings of embarrassment whatever. The untoward events of the day had induced in Albert that stage of misery when he could look a whole universe in the face with complete detachment.

A rehearsal of the causes of his misery, too, was beginning to result in an unaccustomed glow of anger. Tonight his anger centered about Rose Harris, because Miss Harris, though he did not know it, was the only person in the office whose opinion he really valued.

As Albert continued to watch his lovely vision unload her tray, his thoughts were deflected into a new channel. Did Rose Harris think she was the only girl in the world? She believed he hadn't any spirit, did she? He supposed she preferred some one of Bynum's caliber, a flashy, philandering braggart with a silly mustache and an insinuating eye.

He had seen Bynum draped over the switchboard almost every day, chatting in his sly, confidential way. Very well,

she was welcome to that stripe. Some day he, Albert, would give her the surprise of her life.

He only wished she were here now. He'd show her that he was as audacious as the best. He had half a mind to strike up an acquaintanceship with this lovely girl who had honored him with her sweet confidence.

He was revolving this staggering idea in his mind when he became aware that Morrison and his crony Wedge were bearing trays in his direction. They were staring at him reproachfully. Morrison even closed one eye in that suggestive manner of his.

Quite suddenly Albert knew that these two actually believed him the dinner companion of this radiant creature. This knowledge crystallized his wavering attention. On an impulse he proffered the salt cellar to the girl.

"I find the soup not salty enough," he said quickly.

As quickly the girl raised her unbelievably golden head, her dark, innocent eyes on his. "Thank you," she said, and flashed a dazzling smile full upon him.

CHAPTER III.

NOT ON THE PROGRAM.

MORRISON and Wedge, who were near enough to follow the exchange without being aware of the subject, drew abreast with envious glances. Albert acknowledged their greetings with a certain distant affability. Morrison and Wedge were good fellows. A little crude at times, but good fellows. He had nothing to say against them.

Albert was emboldened by the success of his maneuver. He again addressed the girl, who had been covertly eying him, a little hint of a smile twitching the corners of her rosy mouth.

"Not a bad eating place for a cafeteria, though," he remarked, seeking to hinge this cleverly onto his initial statement. Albert's tone was that of a man

who condescended to cafeterias but infrequently.

"No, it don't seem bad," replied the vision in throaty accents.

The grammar jarred a bit on Albert's notions of precision. Nevertheless it had the effect of placing him more at his ease. The girl, despite her wondrous beauty, was human and approachable. Again he had the wish that Rose Harris could see him now.

She wouldn't be so sure that he was a one-woman man. This last phrase, coming from something he had recently read, caught his fancy. His chest began to expand and his eye to kindle. Mightily he longed to do a noble deed, a brave deed; to respond to the cry of a maiden in distress.

As if in answer to this wish there came a sudden exclamation from his companion. In it there was dismay, if not actual distress.

"I've—I've lost my pocketbook," cried the vision in her low contralto. For a second she stared distraughtly about the cafeteria. Then her frightened eyes sought Albert's. He thrilled at the appeal he read there.

"It's not of the slightest consequence," he said, with a gesture expressive of the all-embracing confidence of the male with two weeks' salary tucked snugly in an inside pocket. He picked up both dinner checks. They were lying very close together.

"I shall be only too delighted to be of some slight assistance."

His sudden command of polite language and the coolness with which he uttered it both pleased and astonished Albert. He marveled that he could ever have been dumb in the presence of the helpless sex.

Another dazzling smile of relief was his reward. "Oh, you're very kind, sir," cooed the girl, rising with quick grace. "I don't know what I'd done without you."

Under the stimulus of this tribute to

his masculine sufficiency, Albert draped the vision's cape carefully about her slim shoulders. For an imprudent moment he contemplated abandoning his rubbers and umbrella. But even his regret at the presence of these accessories was swallowed up in the envious stares of Morrison and Wedge as he and the girl halted beside the cashier's desk.

Once outside, Albert was glad that prudence had prevailed. It was raining with all the dismal permanency of March.

"Oh, my hat," exclaimed the girl in pretty vexation.

"Please take my umbrella," pleaded Albert. "It would be a shame to spoil so lovely a hat."

She glanced up at him, a puzzling little smile on her lips. She wouldn't think of depriving him of his umbrella. Perhaps he would walk around to the Grand Theater with her? That would give her the chance to thank him.

Albert waived the proffered thanks. He was glad to be of further assistance. "So you're an actress?" he asked. His small adventure was in the way of reaching real proportions.

"Yes," she admitted modestly. "I play in the 'Oh, Darling' musical comedy. Have you ever been behind the scenes?"

"No. I don't go in for the theater much, you know," admitted Albert indulgently.

"Then you must come along," she said, tapping him playfully on the shoulder. Albert tingled at the intimacy of the touch and obediently followed her down an alley toward the lighted stage entrance. "Gus, this is my cousin," she said to the doorkeeper. "He's coming in for a minute." Grudgingly the doorkeeper admitted them.

ALBERT trailed the girl past a welter of crates and trunks and banked scenery to the far side of the stage. There she indicated a folding chair that

stood in an obscure corner of the wings. "Make yourself right at home here," she directed, "but keep out of sight. I must go dress now. See you later."

Hanging his umbrella on the back of the chair, Albert prepared to look about him. Now and then a girl in street clothes came in and hurried up the short flight of stairs to the room above.

Now Albert's mood of adventure, born as it was of bright lights, gay companionship, and the soft strains of music, was not of the stuff that wears well. Gradually, as he sat alone there in the semidarkness, with scarcely a sound save an occasional reverberation in the vast gloom above his head, his romanticism ebbed away.

He began to fidget, to cross and recross his legs. He recalled his mamma's solemn admonitions against the wickedness of the world in general and the depravity of the theater in particular.

Straining his eyes in the murk, he found that his watch marked a few minutes past eight. Across his mind came a vision of the office, with the other bookkeepers bending dutifully to their tasks; of his own vacant stool before which Mr. Downey doubtless paced.

If he left at once, he could be back in the office by eight thirty. He worked much faster than the other bookkeepers. That was why the more important city accounts had been assigned to him. Probably he could still finish his work by the time they did.

For five minutes more Albert hesitated, debating not so much what to do as how to go about doing it. Somewhere a buzzer sounded and about him there began to assemble a group of young ladies in the most shocking dishabille.

This decided Albert. He planted his hat firmly on his head, grasped his voluminous umbrella about the middle, and began to sidle unobtrusively and un-

seen across the stage in the direction of the entrance.

Albert was just negotiating the mazes of a tropical setting when there sounded near him an ominous swish. The next second he was engulfed in a flood of light, the blare of music, and a bewildering swirl of the shocking young ladies he had sought to escape. He turned from the latter, his rubbers shining, his long raincoat immobile about his ankles, his stout, bulging umbrella grasped convulsively about the middle, and for a moment faced an audience hungering for musical comedy.

It was a situation calling for cool, calculated action. Albert, untrained in emergencies, was bereft of the necessary qualities. Uneasy a moment before, he now became frantic; even more frantic than the stage manager, who was beginning a profane little dance in the wings as he considered the advisability of ringing down the curtain.

Albert, his face crimson, his eyes glazed with horror, sought escape. He was trod on and buffeted about by a well-trained and determined chorus, whose intricate dance movements closed up each gap as soon as he made for it. This lack of success, together with the laughter that was gathering force in the audience, was not conducive to poise. Albert's mind became temporarily unbalanced.

Finally, amid such laughter as the "Oh, Darling" company had not evoked in weeks, he was forced near the wings, into which he popped like a frightened rabbit. The audience did not guess that the celerity with which Albert vanished from the scene was due largely to the strong arm of Mr. Moses Feldman, stage manager.

"Break up my show, will you!" cried Mr. Feldman wrathfully. In the backstage privacy he proceeded to shake Albert's brain into still more hideous confusion. Albert was limp. Things began to fly from his pockets.

THEN the stage manager, in his natural zeal, overstepped himself to the point of assaulting his victim in the eye. The blow hurt Albert's eye severely, but it also had the effect of clearing his brain. He had often received plenty of punishment in boxing bouts at the Y. M. C. A. gymnasium, but never before had he been struck in anger.

A hot, blinding, primitive passion surged over him. He shuffled off his rubbers and threw aside his hat. Then, as he began rapidly to shuck off his raincoat, something told the stage manager that the affair was not at an end.

He backed away, and because he was cornered in the wings, he backed onto the stage. Albert, now rid of his rain garments, followed belligerently. In this manner the two appeared before the audience just as the chorus pranced off.

Mr. Moses Feldman, fascinated by the insane glare in Albert's good eye, backed over a property garden seat and went flat on his back. There was another roar of laughter from the audience, which still believed that this pantomime was part of the comedy business of the show.

Oblivious now of his audience, Albert went instantly into action. He flung aside the garden seat, grasped the squealing stage manager firmly by the coat collar and began agitating him with long, undulating jerks.

"Shake me, will you?" he shouted, pivoting about.

From pivoting, Albert went to whirling. As the movement gained momentum Mr. Feldman's feet left the floor and began to come into contact with things. A flight of garden steps slid down with a crash. Sections of property trees and pillars flew through the air. A Grecian urn, done in wood, went over and wobbled erratically into the orchestra pit.

Under ordinary circumstances the curtain would have deprived the audience of this spectacle. But the man

whose duty it was to manipulate the curtain, believing that his services would not be required for at least forty minutes, had gone down to the corner for a cigarette. Gradually, however, the laughter died down. The audience began to realize that the scene was becoming too destructive to be a part of the comedy business.

The orchestra, led by the cello player who had been bowled over by the Grecian urn, scurried through the small door under the stage. Albert, giddy though he was, discerned two large policemen scrambling onto the stage. Abruptly he paused in his evolutions and hauled the speechless Mr. Feldman to his feet. For a moment they swayed dizzily, face to face.

"Hit me in the eye, will you!" panted Albert. With that he knocked the other destructively into such stage property as had not already been devastated.

At that instant he found himself in the clutches of the law. Grimly he watched Moses being hauled forth from the wilderness of scenery.

"Oi, oi," wailed the stage manager. "He's ruined the show. He's ruined the show."

CHAPTER IV.

PUBLICITY.

"I'LL ruin you," shouted Albert. "Hitting me in the eye!"

"Shut up," warned the big policeman, tightening his grasp. Despite his sternness there was a hint of enjoyment at the corners of his mouth. "You've ruined enough for one evening, young feller."

"Wagon's ready," announced a third policeman laconically.

"Better put on your coat," said Albert's custodian. "You're all warm. These your rubbers and umbrella?"

Albert, sliding into his raincoat, answered by kicking them savagely into the wings. Then, jolting along in the patrol wagon, he listened with tight-

lipped contempt to the continuous wailing of Mr. Feldman.

The night police-court judge, bored by a slump in affairs criminal, took a kindly interest in the case. "Well, Mr. Feldman," he asked when the two had been booked, "what have you to say for yourself?"

Mr. Feldman had a great deal to say and he spent twenty incoherent minutes saying it. Finally the judge interrupted him. "Calm yourself, Mr. Feldman. You confuse me. Now you say when the curtain went up——"

"The curtain goes up and all at once the audience begins to laugh and——"

"Well, you say your show is a musical comedy."

"Yes, yes. And when I looks out on the stage this feller is out there and the audience laughing their heads off at my show."

The judge frowned judicially. "I don't see why you should object to the audience laughing at musical comedy."

"But, judge, the comedy business hadn't started yet."

"I see. You considered the laughter premature."

"Yes. And pretty soon he gets into the wings and I remonstrates with him, the low——"

"So you remonstrated with him?" The judge studied Albert's eye for a moment.

"Yes. And then he chases me on the stage right before the audience and grabs me by the collar and whirls me around. Honest, judge, you'd never believe it how dizzy I am yet. And then he smashes me in the eye." Mr. Feldman wagged his head and began to wail afresh. "The scenery that feller ruined, you wouldn't believe, either."

"Perhaps not," agreed the judge reservedly. "Now, young man, what have you to say for yourself?"

Albert's jaw was still set. "It isn't much," he began grimly. "I met one of the company at dinner and she in-

vited me to wait behind the scenes during the performance. After a time I remembered another engagement and started for the stage entrance. The curtain went up while I was walking across the stage. When I finally got off, this man shook me and then hit me in the eye. That made me angry, judge, so I went after him. That's all there is to it."

"Do you know the name of this member of the company who invited you behind the scenes?"

"No, but I wouldn't tell it if I did."

Mr. Feldman, who had raised his head eagerly at the question, dropped it again with a moan.

"Did you have any difficulty in gaining admittance?"

"Not the slightest."

The judge regarded the ceiling for a moment. "Well, Mr. Feldman, inasmuch as Mr. Robbins was invited on the stage by a member of your company, entered with the consent of another member of it, got into the performance by mistake, and was assaulted merely for trying to get out of a bad situation, I don't think you have much of a case.

"However, I'm going to slate the case for trial at nine to-morrow on charges of assault and battery. You may go free to-night on your own cognizance."

It was nine fifteen when Albert left the police station. It was ten thirty when he reached home. The long tramp through the rain, while it did not cool his anger, left him thoroughly tired. In four minutes he was in bed and sound asleep.

At six ten next morning he was roused by the violent ringing of the alarm clock beside the bed. He leaped immediately to the floor and began going through the most rigorous physical exercises in his repertoire.

His mamma, alarmed at this break in the old routine, rapped anxiously on the locked door. Albert paused in an at-

tempt to twist his spine double to assure her that he was already up. Presently he strode into the bathroom and forced the cold shower to the utmost. In the act of drying his back, he tore the bath towel in half. It proved to be the only one in the room. Albert did not hesitate. He snatched the mat from the floor and went over himself with renewed viciousness.

SHAVING was difficult on account of his eye, which had had no attention and was very bad. Albert dressed hastily, putting on the rough tweed suit he had always regarded as too flashy, and the hard-heeled tan boots he used for tramping.

He chose from among the gift shirts he had never worn, one in blue, with collar to match. Finally he rummaged among his Christmas ties and selected one in brilliant stripes. Thus attired, he went down to breakfast.

The outfit, the eye, and the belligerent set to Allie's jaw very nearly induced a fainting fit in his mamma. "What on earth has happened to my poor boy?" she moaned.

"Ran into something," said Albert curtly, as though that explained everything. He waved her away. He was in no mood this morning for extended elucidations.

Mrs. Robbins shed tears at his casual heartlessness.

Albert fixed his good eye on the plate of scrambled eggs before him and smiled bitterly as he considered how like they were to his own disordered affairs. He had run to meet romance; he had tried out chivalry. And what was his reward? A very sore eye, the loss of his job, probably a fine in police court, and the inevitable contumely of Rose Harris. His lips curled cynically. Truly he was a disillusioned man!

His father, who had merely glanced up from his morning paper with a kindling eye, came all at once to life in

a leg-slapping, choking outburst. "I knew it was too good to last," he gasped finally. He wiped his eyes on his napkin and passed the paper over to Albert.

"Boy, when you did bust loose you certainly made a job of it." And with that he went off into another paroxysm of mirth.

With his alarmed mamma looking over his shoulder, Albert rapidly read the boxed item on the front page.

A young man about town, booked in police records as Albert Robbins, 3369 Euclid Avenue, dined last evening with a chorus girl from the "Oh, Darling" musical comedy, which opened at the Grand for an extended run. Later, presumably waiting behind the scenes to take the young lady out to supper, he inadvertently went on with the first number.

In his impromptu make-up of rain garments, Albert won his audience immediately. Three minutes later he answered an insistent curtain call in the company of the stage manager, who is said to have remonstrated with Albert back of the scenes to the extent of whanging him in the eye.

The second little skit literally brought down the house—or parts of it. It consisted of a sort of dervish dance, with Albert acting as the pivot. From lack of proper rehearsals, probably, Mr. Moses Feldman's flying heels came into contact with most of the stage settings. A Grecian urn, in particular, caused a hasty Thermopylaean retreat from the orchestra pit.

Their dance completed, the two actors bowed dizzily to the small but entranced audience. Then Albert, in what seemed an extravagant climax, tapped the stage manager so carelessly in the eye that the remaining scenery was completely devastated. Thereupon the police closed the act and the box-office manager refunded money to the insatiable among the audience or gave them seats for later performances.

The third act will take place in police court at nine o'clock this morning, where the two comedians will appear before Judge McMahon on charges of assault and battery.

With the stricken cry of his mamma ringing in his right ear, Albert slammed the paper down on his uneaten breakfast and fled. "Don't forget your rub-

bers and umbrella," she cried, true to habit under the most adverse conditions.

Mr. Robbins chortled with renewed violence.

"I'm forgetting them forever," shouted Albert, pulling his hat savagely over his eyes. He slammed the door after him. Two minutes later he was boarding his customary car at the corner.

TIME and a rainy morning had not softened the conductor's mood. "Well, Archibald," he said, "have you turned me in to the company yet?"

"No," replied Albert quietly. "I've thought of a better plan."

The conductor guffawed insultingly and winked at the passengers standing on the platform. "And what's that?"

Albert leaned over the intervening bar and glared into the man's face. "If you ever address another disrespectful word to me," he elucidated quietly, "I'm going to bust you in the jaw."

A look into Albert's eyes, both sound and damaged, convinced the conductor that his fare meant what he said. "All right, all right," he said hastily, "if that's the way you feel about it."

"That's precisely the way I feel about it," Albert assured him. Then, pulling the brim of his hat farther down over his face, he moved up to the front of the car.

Through force of habit he got off the car at the customary corner. He was hungry by this time and boldly entered a quick-lunch room that Morrison and Wedge always humorously referred to as "Ptomaine Joe's." There, as he was defying a lifetime observance of the laws of good health over a full order of buckwheat cakes, pork sausages, and villainous coffee, these two men of the world rushed in for a bite of breakfast before reporting at the office.

"Hello, ol' war horse," greeted Morrison.

"What an eye!" said Wedge. "*What* an eye!"

The two silently appraised that blue and swollen organ until they had finished their coffee and sinkers. "Some queen," admired Morrison.

"She's all that," admitted Albert, who had quite forgotten the chorus girl until this minute.

"How do you do it?" asked Wedge.

By way of answer Albert merely closed his sound eye in an insinuating manner. His reserve heightened the opinion that the two had suddenly conceived for him.

"Pulling that innocent stuff all the time," mourned Wedge. "Hurry up, Morris. The old man will be hard to get along with this morning." And with one last respectful look at Albert, the two fled. They were, he noted, ten minutes late, as usual.

At nine o'clock sharp Albert appeared at court. His late adversary, Mr. Moses Feldman, joined him, his generous face wreathed in cordial smiles. The judge, after some browsing, announced that Mr. Feldman had withdrawn his charge of assault and battery. He, the judge, in dismissing the case, hoped that the night had brought to them both the sober realization of the evils of unbridled passions.

Promptly Mr. Feldman grasped Albert by the arm and led him into the street. For a moment Albert regarded the other questioningly, in his manner the same savage calmness that had been there all morning.

"If you got it a little time, Mr. Robbins, I should like to talk with you," said Mr. Feldman genially.

"I haven't anything *but* time this morning," retorted Albert.

"Good," ejaculated the other, taking him once more by the arm. "Listen! Such telephone orders and such a line at the box office you wouldn't believe. I advertise in the papers every day. I got posters in all the pool rooms and barber

shops. I pay good money to a publicity agent and what does the robber do? I ask you?"

Albert did not know the answer to this riddle and so made no reply.

"Such a publicity you give me no agent ever thought of," went on Mr. Feldman happily. "Good for every first page in the country."

CHAPTER V.

A MAN OF DECISION.

ALBERT felt his rancor rapidly evaporating. His affair with Mr. Feldman, after all, had been but the unfortunate culmination of long-accumulating wrongs.

"It was all my fault," he said generously. "I'm glad to hear that your show really hasn't suffered a loss."

Mr. Feldman stopped short and faced Albert with hands aloft. "Loss!" he cried. "Before noon I bet the house will be sold out solid for two weeks. If that's a loss I should be in the pants business."

After another interval of silence Mr. Feldman chuckled. "Some new comedy business I am working out along the line of last night's stuff. A laugh in the first two minutes is worth a dozen later on. To you I am grateful, Mr. Robbins.

"I'd like to do something besides giving you a season pass for two. You won't be ashamed of the show, you can bet it. All new scenery and costumes I am getting as soon as possible."

It was Albert's turn to halt. "Could I talk with you in the office for a few minutes, Mr. Feldman?" he asked.

"All morning you could talk if you wanted it," beamed the other.

It was ten thirty when Albert shook hands cordially with the showman and left the office of the Grand Theater. His face was still set in grim lines but there was a gleam in his good eye that had not been there before.

A few minutes later he became aware that he was passing the Cosmopolitan Department Store. Smiling a little, he entered the huge store and took the elevator to the sixth floor.

A girl came to the window and languidly addressed him. "Whoja want to see?" she asked.

"Tell Mr. Wilburson that Mr. Robbins, of the National Silk Furnishings Co., would like to see him for a few moments," he said.

The girl's languor vanished. "Cert'nly," she said. "Mr. Robbins of the National Silk Furnishings Co."

Albert watched her disappear into an office, leaving the door open behind her. There was a moment of silence. Then a chair creaked heavily and a roar of anger came from within. A second later a stocky, bull-necked man bolted into the waiting room.

Albert felt his own rage mounting again. He pulled his hat brim a trifle farther over his discolored eye. "Mr. Wilburson," he began quietly enough, "I've come to find out just what——"

The silk buyer grew apoplectic. "I told Bynum and I told Downey that I never wanted to hear of National Silk again and that I'd throw out the next man they sent around here. You'll find that I'm a man of my word." He advanced on Albert threateningly.

"Easy," said Albert. "I came here like a gentleman to find out what is wrong with us and I expect to be treated as a gentleman. We'll discuss details in private."

And with that he evaded the other and walked into his office. There he took off his hat, seated himself, and calmly waited.

HE had not long to wait. There were heavy, deliberate footsteps and Mr. Wilburson appeared in the doorway. "You'll find," he repeated passionately, "that I'm a man of my word."

Albert rose truculently. "Listen," he said impressively, "I've been in police court once this morning and another appearance won't make any difference in the way *I* feel. You had better consider the results of being thrown out of your own office, for that's exactly what will happen if you lay a hand on me."

Mr. Wilburson, whose temper was not untinged with caution, hesitated and was lost. He admired the man who would stand up to him. Suddenly he laughed explosively and closed the door after him.

"By golly," he cried, "that's the finest shiner I've seen in many a day. Are you the Robbins that broke up that musical show last night?"

"I am," said Albert, seating himself again, "but I didn't come here to talk about that. I know that the National is trying to shoot square with you and I know you want to do the same with us. You've inflicted some remarkable shiners on your own account.

"I know a sportsman when I see one; that's why I know you'll give us a sporting chance. If there's anything wrong with our goods, service, prices, or accounting I want to know it. You can trust me to square past scores even if you never do another dollar's worth of business with us."

Wilburson, as Albert had guessed, took more pride in his rough-and-tumble past than in his extensive knowledge of silk goods and feminine fads and fancies. Albert's sporting terms appealed to that pride; and Albert's black eye and recent escapade appealed to his humor.

He kicked the door shut behind him and sat down at his desk. Then, slowly filling and lighting a stubby brier pipe as if considering his choice of words, he swung round toward his visitor and began to talk.

It was nearly noon when Albert reached the offices of the National Silk

Furnishings Co. He faced Rose Harris across the switchboard, his hat still truculently over his eyes. "Kindly tell Mr. Downey that Mr. Robbins would like to speak with him," Albert said coldly.

Miss Harris, who had read over the account of Albert's adventures until she could recite it word for word, had a glint of tears in her luminous brown eyes. Viciously she plugged in a call and repeated his message.

The answer was an unintelligible roar from the manager's office. Albert, who had expected this, opened the door and stalked in. Mr. Downey, who was apparently having two bad mornings in succession, fell back in his chair in speechless indignation. Albert dropped into the chair beside Mr. Downey's desk, laid his hat thereon, and regarded Mr. Downey himself with an ironical smile.

That smile roused the manager. "Fine trick you played me last night, running around with chorus girls as if you didn't have a care in the world. It's the last time you'll ever do it. You're fired! You couldn't keep books here again if I had to keep them myself." With a sudden angry gesture he swept Albert's hat to the floor.

Albert, still smiling, recovered his hat. This time he planted it on Mr. Downey's desk with such emphasis that a shower of papers fluttered to the floor. "Now you'll listen while *I* do the talking," he said. "I've endured enough of your childish petulance to last me a lifetime. First of all, I've just come from an interview with Mr. Wilburson."

Mr. Downey, who had gone white with fury at Albert's unexpected attitude, snorted. "I hope he threw you out of his office," he said.

"This is the morning I'm not being thrown out of offices," continued Albert calmly. "But that's not the point. After we had come to an understand-

ing regarding this very thing, Mr. Wilburson informed me that Bynum had approached him with a scheme to take on some inferior goods at top price.

"Then they would split the difference between our actual billing and the fake billing Bynum would make out and collect on. He told me that Bynum was actually doing this with two other silk buyers in town."

Mr. Downey began to splutter incoherently.

I KNOW," interrupted Albert. "If it's true you'll fire Bynum the way you've fired me. But he'll miss his job more than I will mine. I wouldn't keep books for you another day if you *did* have to keep them yourself. In the first place you're responsible for giving salesmen the opportunity to do this thing. Collection of accounts should never be left in their hands."

"Is that so?" croaked Mr. Downey. He was stumped for words.

"Quite," said Albert cheerfully. "Now there's one thing more before I go. At ten o'clock I had a little conference with the manager of the 'Oh, Darling' musical comedy company. He's planning on bolstering up the show a bit and on fitting the entire chorus in four changes of costume.

"Here are his specifications and a blanket order if you care to take it on."

Mr. Downey, mechanically glancing over the specifications, looked up with a sneer. "Fat chance," he said. "I couldn't possibly get this order out within five days."

"Possibly not," said Albert. "But I could go out in the production department right now and get that order filled within four days."

"What do you know about the production department?" barked Mr. Downey.

"A lot," returned Albert shortly. "What do you suppose I've been doing all the years I've worked around

here?" He picked up his hat and strode from the office.

Mr. Downey overtook him halfway to the door. "Keep your shirt on, Robbins. You ought to know me well enough to take me with a barrel of salt. A nine hundred and sixty dollar order and the Cosmopolitan Store account back! Listen! If you can go out in the shop and get this order out even in five days you can be the new city salesman on the sixth."

With an effort Albert remained obdurate. "I'll need the day to think it over," he said carelessly.

"Take it," said Mr. Downey. "Your pay will go on just the same."

Albert resumed his way to the door, oblivious of the amazed stares of every one in the office. In the waiting room he was again halted. Rose Harris, the glint of tears still more pronounced in her luminous brown eyes, confronted him. "Do you still want me to go with you to that church bazaar to-night?" she asked almost timidly.

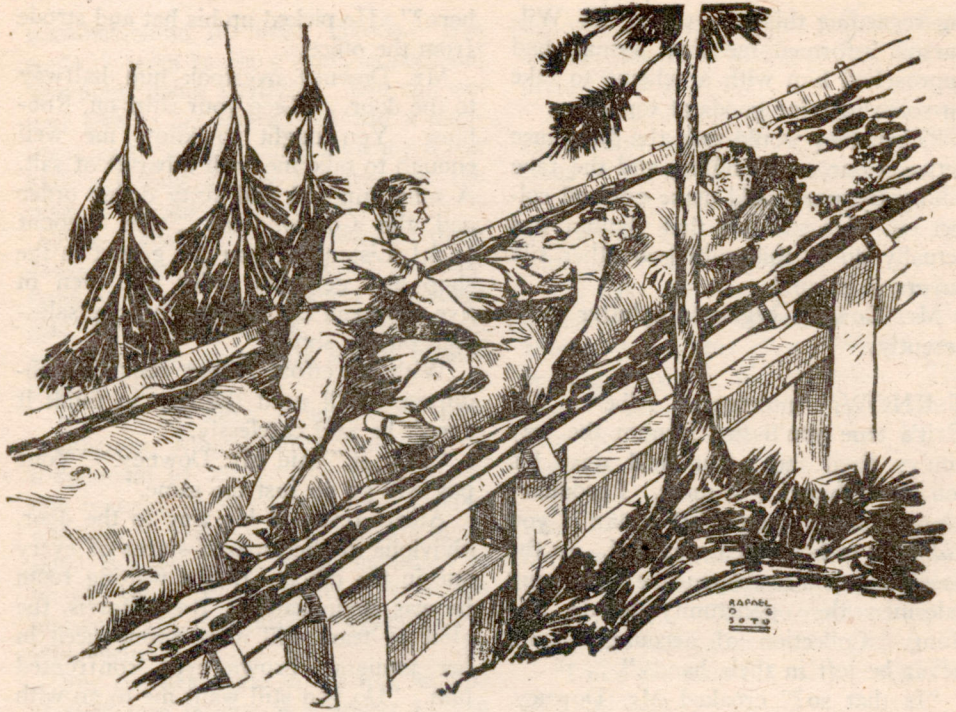
Albert looked down at her casually. "No," he said decisively.

"All right," rejoined the girl meekly. She turned as if to reënter the office.

With an abrupt movement Albert swung her about into his arms. He crushed her tight for an instant and planted an awkward kiss on her left eyebrow. "But we are going to have dinner downtown to-night," he said, "and then see that show together. The manager gave me a pair of complimentaries."

Rose Harris, very red and breathless, looked up at him. There was a hint of the old sly mischief in her upturned face. "A pair?" she said. "I had noticed only the one."

But this time Albert was different. He was neither hurt nor embarrassed. Instead he touched the damaged eye almost reverently. "This," he replied with a grin, "was more in the nature of a talisman."



Forest Gold

By Howard Rice Hill

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

THE TIMBER GRABBERS.

THE very tall, broad-shouldered youth reached forth a hand to open the door bearing the sign "Z. Scanton, Timberlands," but jerked his hand away from the knob and fell back a step as the sounds of a bitter argument burst from within.

Even as he hesitated, the door crashed open, and the disheveled figure of a man shot into the street. In the dim background stood a second man, a gun glittering wickedly in his hand.

"Show up here again, Walker, and I will let you have it," snarled the man inside.

The second man had recovered his balance and was now standing as one in a daze. But at the words he seemed to awaken, and with a hoarse bellow of rage he turned and lunged for the doorway.

"Scanton, you crook! You dirty crook——"

The roar of the gun cut the words short. But the bullet failed of its mark, for the tall youth, with a pantherlike movement, had gripped the gun hand and flung it sharply upward. His other

hand caught the uplifted fist of the man called Walker. For a brief moment the tableau held while the two engaged in the argument glared upon the intruder.

"What are *you* horning in for?" came wrathfully from the man with the gun.

"Who—me?" The newcomer looked surprised, then grinned engagingly. "Me, I was only saving my own skin. You nearly creased me, partner. Are you Scanton?"

"Scanton—yes." Suspicious eyes bored into frank blue ones. "You got business with me? All right, then, come in."

Scanton planted a thick boot against the door and it slammed shut fairly in the face of the enraged Walker who, before turning away, hurled a final bitterly spoken threat.

"I'll get you for this, Scanton!"

Scanton, still gripping the gun, shrugged and swung to his visitor.

"Dangerous business, mister, walking into my affairs that way. What did you want of me?" he demanded sharply.

"Plumb accidental, it was," came apologetically. "My business—well, I heard you were locating people on timber claims and I aimed to get me one. Came down from Portland for that purpose. Hope I'm not too late. Name's Barry West."

Scanton thawed. "Oh!" He extended a damp hand. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. West," he said smoothly. "This Walker, now—maybe I was a little hasty. Fool's got an idea I crooked him. Claims I located him on burned-over land instead of green timber. All a mistake, of course."

"Oh, sure." Barry West tossed the affair aside with a shrug. "But about a claim— When could I look at one?"

Scanton's shrewd eyes searched the visitor from head to foot. The inexpensive suit and altogether shabby hat might belong to anybody. And the man talked like a boob—a boob from the city. The timberland dealer seemed reas-

sured until his glance came again to the youth's deeply bronzed face. Then he frowned; suspicion gleamed in the close-set eyes, only to be quickly masked.

"To-morrow," said Scanton. "Party going in by horse, and you can ride with them. A fine quarter section of Douglas fir you'll be getting, Mr. West. Relinquish after a year to some lumber company and pocket the easy money. Eh?"

"That's fine!" Barry West seemed grateful.

"You've got five hundred dollars, I suppose, Mr. West. That's the locating fee. Cash in advance. Business on the square, but business—that's my slogan." Scanton laughed but it was a laugh without mirth, and his eyes took on an avaricious gleam as a pile of crisp bills were promptly transferred to his desk from the wallet of the visitor.

"All right." Scanton pocketed the money and swung to his desk. "We leave early in the morning. Six o'clock. You be here."

"I'll be here," promised Barry West, as he rose to leave the dingy little office with its litter of blue prints and township maps.

AT this juncture the door from the street flung open, and a man strode in. Rolled in would have described it more correctly, for the newcomer was as gross in body as Scanton was tall and angular.

"Folks said there was shooting here," bellowed the newcomer in a husky voice. "What happened, Scanton?"

"Just another of those crazy claim holders," said Scanton quickly, and Barry West thought he detected a signal flash between the two men. "Tried to jump me. Fired to scare him. That right?" He turned to Barry for confirmation. "This is Judge Julius Molk, Mr. West."

"Howdy, Judge Molk," said Barry. "Sure that was right, Mr. Scanton. That man Walker acted like a right mean timber wolf."

"Well, have a cigar." Judge Molk with an air of pride handed Barry a long panatela decorated with a green-and-gold band. "Import these from Havana," boasted the big man. "Carry my own brand, too."

Barry seemed properly impressed as he examined the colorful brand with its monogram "J. M." Lighting the weed, he bade farewell to Scanton and the jurist, and leaving the office, turned toward the Douglas City Hotel.

Immediately Scanton sprang to his feet and stepped to a window, his eyes shrewdly following the retreating figure. His lips formed a thin straight line as he turned back to Judge Molk.

"Trail walk! One foot in front of the other, like a man walking in a trail—that and the man's outdoor face. Damn! Mean anything to you, Molk?"

Judge Molk moved his ponderous body to a chair and lighted a fresh Havana before replying. A significant smile played across his thick lips.

"I," he declared, "spotted that gent and his Injun walk the minute he dropped off the Portland local. Lean and hard, tanned, Injun footed, holding his arms bent, sort of, as though ready to ward off limbs across the trail. Humph! What did he want, Scanton?"

"Wanted to locate, damn him! And you think he's another of 'em?"

"I do," growled Judge Molk, his good nature deserting him momentarily. "Prowling around. We've got to stop him. Picking's too dam'd good here just now. Give us another year, and we can take our piles and light out—South America—anywhere it's safe."

"Well, you know what to do." Scanton's voice was a snarl. "But we've got to get that blasted Walker, too. Better deal with him first—before he gets to

this man West and squawks his head off. Think of something, can't you?"

Judge Molk, his air judicial, smoked silently a moment before replying.

"Walker, eh?" he said at last. "That hill-billy! Well, dead men tell no tales—eh, Scanton?" He chuckled good-naturedly, as though at some light joke. "Here's an idea—pull up and listen."

CHAPTER II.

THE NET CLOSES.

IF Barry West was conscious of the eyes that followed him as he swung down the town's main street toward the hotel, he gave no sign. Without so much as turning his head he entered the hotel and went immediately to his room and bolted the door.

He then removed from a leather bag a packet of letters, one of which he selected and read with pursed lips. The letter read:

DEAR BARRY: Drop everything and hot-foot it down to Douglas City. Investigate the timber claim locating being carried on by one Zeb Scanton and associates.

We know this outfit is running a crooked game—locating people on barren or burned over lands, but the trouble has been to pin it on them. They're shrewd and they're ruthless. My hunch is that it's a conspiracy to gobble up all that fine fir timber in back of Douglas City.

This is probably the most vicious timber-grabbing ring operating in the country today.

We know they've located "dummies" on the best of the timber, probably intending to turn the claims over to some big lumber company. For the present, however, find out who these crooks are and just how they're getting people's money under false pretenses.

You may run into a peck of trouble, Barry, for this gang seems to be influential as well as ruthless; but you see with your own eyes; get the goods on them. And if you get half a chance—though I doubt that you will—slam 'em in jail.

By the way, keep your eyes open for Operative 36—Vincent Trask. We sent him on this very job six weeks ago. No word from him at all. Something fishy about the affair, Barry. Trask came highly recommended, and

I do not doubt his ability. But he may have been knocked over and planted by that gang of cutthroats. Find out.

Yours,

KED.

The simplicity and friendly style of the letter, Barry knew, cloaked an iron-clad order from Kedman, head of the United States Secret Service, Western Division. Ked was friendly but he demanded results.

Troubled lines formed in Barry's clean-cut features as he struck a match, and touching it to the letter, watched the paper curl into charred fragments. So Vincent Trask wormed his way into the Secret Service!

Six months ago Barry West had been a forest ranger stationed in eastern Oregon. His success in dealing with a certain greedy lumberman, who attempted to acquire government timber by illegal means, had been such that the young ranger found himself pressed to transfer to the secret service. And so, being a youth with a strong craving for adventure in the raw, he had accepted the offer.

Trask, too, had been a forest ranger. He, however, had nearly been caught in the same net with the predatory lumberman, and resigning from the service to avert certain disgrace, had dropped from sight. Barry recalled Trask's parting words.

"Some day, West, I'll pay you for this. I'll get you and *I'll get you good!* We both know why you did it."

Barry understood the significance of those words. While off duty in Portland, the two rangers had met Valerie Lane. And Valerie, finding the citadels of her heart stormed by the two impetuous young woodsmen, had seemed to yield to the more polished Trask. Barry, concealing his hurt beneath a careless grin, had quietly backed from the scene. He had not seen the girl again.

All this came back to Barry now, and he shrugged. Trask, he knew, would

at this moment be in prison had he not received a friendly tip from Barry to resign. But Trask had chosen to believe Barry's carefully laid net had been aimed at him alone.

"Such," said Barry to himself, "is life in the Far West," and turned his thoughts to the business in hand.

As he considered plans for his future actions his mind grappled with the problem of how best to deal with Scanton, evidently the "key" man of the timber grabbers. Walker—why not question Walker, evidently one of the victims? Acting on the thought, Barry promptly set forth in search of Walker.

But Walker was not to be found. The lobby of the hotel was crowded with a motley collection of woods workers, traveling salesmen, and a scattering of people difficult of classification. These latter, Barry decided, were timber claim seekers, lured to Douglas City by the discreetly worded advertisements of Scanton.

But Walker was not among them. Nor was he to be seen in the small lumbering town's main street, nor the various saloons which seemed to flourish openly.

An hour later he returned to his room. As his hand touched the door knob, the sixth sense of the forester prompted him to pause, nerves tingling; and when he slowly opened the door one hand held a flat automatic.

Barry's eyes swiftly swept the room and came to rest upon an object which lay upon the bed. He gasped.

The object was the body of Walker. A red stain over the heart told its gruesome story.

Stabbed to death!

BARRY quickly closed and bolted the door. Hasty examination assured him that Walker was beyond human aid.

His eyes again searched the room, and suddenly he stiffened. A familiar odor

had assailed his nostrils. He fell to his knees and began a minute exploration of the threadbare carpet. The search was rewarded, for after a few minutes he sprang to his feet with a grunt of satisfaction, a small scrap of colored paper held in one hand.

"Fast work!" marveled the woodsman. "And now they'll be after me as soon as they can get here."

Barry drew a chair to a far side of the room, and tipping back against the wall, rolled a cigarette and considered his plight. His mission, then, had been guessed. Walker's lips had been closed for all time, and now an effort was being made to load upon Barry's shoulders the guilt for the murder.

Action—and lots of it—was therefore essential.

Barry went to work swiftly. Nor was he any too soon. A muffled tread in the uncarpeted hallway gave the first hint of impending trouble. Then came a fumbling at the door. Barry, again seated with his chair tilted against the wall, waited. He had purposely left the door unlocked.

Crash! The door flew open. Barry sprang to his feet in well simulated surprise. He found himself confronting a grim-faced individual who did not need the star he wore to proclaim his authority.

"Constable Langster," barked the man. "I arrest—huh?"

A look of consternation bordering on the ludicrous had spread over the heavy features of Constable Langster. His eyes swung from the bed to Barry, from Barry back to the bed. The bed, its white counterpane smooth and unruffled—and without stain—bore not the slightest sign of having been recently disturbed. Certainly it held nothing of interest to an officer of the law.

"You were saying?" drawled Barry, with a guileless air.

"I—I—guess I got the wrong room," sputtered the constable. "Going to ar-

rest a feller, I was. Mistake—excuse me, mister."

"That's all right, constable. We all make mistakes. Come in and have a smoke with me." As the constable hesitated uncertainly and lowered his gun, Barry reached toward his vest as though for a cigar. When the hand came forth, it came with the speed of light, and it held not a cigar but the flat automatic.

"Up with 'em!" Barry jerked in an undertone. "Now toss your gun onto the bed. Thanks! Now do exactly as I say, constable, or I'll sure make your insurance due and payable.

"Step to the door and call the others. Then walk back into this room. And—no monkeyshines!"

The constable, moving like an automaton, did as directed. Hurried footsteps followed his low-voiced hail, and then two men rounded the doorway—and stopped, rooted to the floor.

"Howdy, Scanton! Howdy Judge Molk! Glad to see you both. Come in and join the constable." The automatic descried a slow arc, taking in the three men. "But first be kind enough to park your guns on the bed. Go ahead," as Scanton hesitated, "there's no one there—now."

"What does this mean, young man? Do you realize——" Judge Molk seemed to choke on his own righteous anger.

"That you represent the majesty of the law," cut in Barry, a hard note in his voice. "We'll pass that for the present, your honor. Got any more guns? All right. By the way"—Barry fished in a pocket with his free hand and produced a scrap of colored paper—"some one seems to have dropped one of your private cigar bands in my room, judge. Mighty careless, wasn't it?"

Judge Molk's florid face turned a mottled white.

"And now," snapped Barry, "all three of you line up against the far wall. Fine! Now sit down and hold hands.

First one that lets go, I'll plug, pronto! Thank you, gents."

Barry lowered his gun and grinned down upon his three prisoners, all of whom glared back with interest.

"Right friendly folks, ain't you?" mused Barry. "Here I am, a harmless individual trying to get me a nice timber claim. And what do you do? Plant a corpse in my room, that's what! Now what did you want to go and do that for? You tell, Scanton."

Scanton's jaws opened and closed twice before words would issue.

"You—you——" he began.

"Yeah, I know," grinned Barry. "First chance you get, you'll send me over the trail along with Walker. Figured I was some sort of an investigator, didn't you?"

"Well, what th' hell are you?" Scanton snarled furiously.

"I'll tell you," said Barry amiably. "Call me an ex-forest ranger, fired for cause. Never mind what cause." He winked. "Came down here to get into this locating game. You gents seemed to be making a clean-up from what I heard. Always room for one more, says I."

Judge Molk cleared his throat noisily, and now that the danger of quick death seemed to have passed, his vocal chords began to function again.

"Why," he demanded, "did you not say so in the first place? Why go pussy-footing around the way you did? Look at the trouble you put us to," he ended plaintively.

"Yeah, bumping Walker and everything," said Barry. "But you can't say I asked for trouble, your honor. It was your idea that I was a government man that made all this trouble. For that matter, you'd 'a' bumped Walker anyhow, wouldn't you? The extra trouble was in lugging him to this room. That right?"

Judge Molk permitted himself a faint smile.

"You," he complimented, with something like admiration in his tone, "would have made a lawyer." He turned to Scanton. "Looks like we got off on the wrong foot, Scanton. This young hellion seems to have us over a barrel. Should we take him in?"

"Let the five hundred dollars ride for partnership," Barry cut in quickly. "And—maybe I'll forget how Walker got into this room."

"A guy like you," Scanton growled, "will get rich in this timber racket. Yeah, we can use you all right—if you can keep your mouth shut."

"Watch me," said Barry.

"By the way—where's——" Judge Molk nodded toward the bed with its smooth counterpane.

"Oh!" Barry grinned. "He's in the bridal chamber. Had quite a job swapping bedding. I'd let him lay if I were you. Mystery death, eh?"

The others readily acquiesced. Presently they trooped from the hotel. Barry drew a long breath of relief. He had won—for the present.

CHAPTER III.

DISCOVERY!

AS the mounted cavalcade set forth early next morning on the all-day climb into the rugged Coast Range Mountains, Barry found it difficult to believe that he was engaged on the most dangerous mission of his career. The dozen or so riders, men and women, formed a gay, carefree party, marveling at the mighty firs, the verdant canyons, the tall ferns that grew with almost tropical luxuriance on every hand.

A thousand varied hues were reflected back from the deeply corrugated bark of shaggy old trunks that had been centuries in the making. Huge cones twinkled giddily from the tips of forty-foot limbs. Sunlight, filtering through the thick foliage in long, white shafts, formed dancing patterns on the trail,

lending to the whole a touch of unreality.

For five miles the riders had passed through cut-over lands before plunging into the green timber. Fifteen miles of this before the party would reach its goal—the timber being “located” by the timber racketeers.

Fifteen miles through one of the richest fir forests in the West, every towering tree of which represented gold, and for the possession of which greedy men were destined to plot, to steal, even to kill!

Barry shrugged aside the unpleasant thought that had intruded like a black shadow. He wondered who were these latest victims of the Scanton gang, and he began to scrutinize faces whenever opportunity offered.

His eyes fell upon the graceful form of a girl riding just ahead of him, and lingered there, puzzled. Something in the set of the girl's well-formed shoulders, the poise of her golden head, awoke painful memories.

Then the girl turned. Eyes met in mutual recognition.

“Valerie!” gasped Barry. “Why—why are you here?”

The glad smile which had flashed momentarily in the girl's vivid face faded swiftly. She spoke coolly. “For the same reason the others are here, I suppose, Mr. West. Does it matter?”

“Matter!” Barry reigned closer. “You must go back, Valerie. You—you—”

The girl's throaty laugh broke in on Barry's stumbling words, and he mentally cursed his inability to remain articulate in this girl's disturbing presence.

“Oh, don't worry about me, please, Mr. West,” the girl was saying. “I was reared in Oregon and this, I am sure, will not be a difficult trip. Why, everybody's taking timber claims now! It's quite the thing, Mr. West.”

“Valerie, listen to me! It's not the

trip. It's—I am working for these people—and——”

Barry broke off abruptly as a rider drew alongside. He turned to face Scanton. Scanton was staring in open admiration at the girl, his close-set eyes seeming to caress her youthfully rounded form. Hot words rushed to Barry's lips. Then the lips set in grim white lines. He slowed his horse and fell back, and a moment later Scanton joined him.

“Likely gal, eh?” Scanton, grinning, gestured toward Valerie Lane. “Didn't take you long, eh?”

The knuckles of Barry's clenched fists were white as he gave reply. “Yeah,” he drawled, “but how about this locating? What am I supposed to do, now that we're on our way?”

Scanton shot a quick glance around before answering. “You take four of the party,” he said, “and show them the section corner marked on the map I'll give you. Tell 'em these are their claims, each claim cornering at the corner. Hundred and sixty acres apiece. That's all. I'll locate the others.

“But if any of your party tries to read the iron marks on the trees or asks you to do it, you steer 'em off. Get me?”

“Sure,” said Barry. “Sure, I get you. You don't want them to know this isn't the right land.” He winked significantly.

“All right,” Scanton resumed. “You can figure the layout. We give 'em the legal description of the land, and they give that description to the land office—the boob! 'Tain't our fault if they describe the wrong land. In case they squawk, all we do is say they made a mistake.

“When one of 'em gets dangerous—well, you saw Walker. Give us another year, and we'll control enough timber to clean up a million, not counting the cash we slice off in locating fees.”

“I see,” said Barry in an even tone,

but marveling inwardly at the boldness of the scheme. "But how do you keep in the clear? Should think the government would take a hand."

Scanton laughed gratingly. "The government," he said, "did take a hand. Sent an investigator in. He's still here—working for us. What's a few government officials more or less. They all fall for money. Or, if they don't, they'll fall for lead. A man can disappear without a ripple out here in the mountains."

"Working for you?" Barry was aghast. Could the man be the missing Trask? "What—who is he?"

"Name of Brown," said Scanton, and Barry breathed a sigh of relief. "He looks after the lodge we built out here to accommodate overnight the suckers we bring in. He makes himself useful—in other ways."

SCANTON'S plan worked as smoothly as the timberman had predicted. City dwellers transplanted to the forest primeval, the prospective claim holders, with but one exception, had eyes only for the lofty firs. Trees meant gold—forest gold.

The squared stake, marked on its four sides with symbols, they accepted as the right section corner without question; to the similarly marked witness trees, each of the four standing in the abutting quarter section, they vouchsafed only casual glances.

Each claimant stood dutifully for a moment on the land which was to be his, thus complying with the terms of the timber and stone act that the land be visited in person. All were frankly more interested in the price which might be obtained for the timberland once title should be obtained. Scanton had directed Barry to say the timber, worth one dollar per one thousand feet today, would have a stumpage value of four dollars a year hence; and this Barry did.

Valerie Lane had been in Barry's

party, and she alone evinced more than passing interest in the markings on witness trees and stake. Barry observed that she carefully inspected the figures carved into the wood where the bark had been blazed off, and made notes in a small book.

He sought to approach and warn her, but she avoided him in a manner so pointed that he gave up in disgust, his cheeks flaming.

As the two parties merged at the appointed spot on the trail and continued on toward the lodge, Scanton drew up beside Barry.

"Easy, wasn't it?" said Scanton. "If any of 'em did read the section corner markings, they'd forget the figures by the time we get back to Douglas City.

"All I do," he confided, "is to give 'em the number of the adjoining township and that puts 'em six miles away. Suckers! Every one of these claims has been filed on so many times we've beat trails through the woods!"

"Smart work," Barry forced himself to say, at the same time recalling with apprehension Valerie Lane's careful recording of the surveyors' iron marks. The beat of hoofs broke in on his thoughts as Valerie drew up in the trail behind Barry and Scanton.

"Oh, Mr. Scanton," called the girl, "as protection against an unreliable memory I jotted down the numbers on the witness trees of my quarter section. It was Township No. 1 North, Range No. 2 West, W. M., Section No. 26. Is that right. And what does W. M. mean? It was on the tree."

"Means Willamette Meridian," Scanton flung over his shoulder with a laugh. "Trust a woman to get all balled up. It was Township No. 2 North—not No. 1 North, which is six miles away, girlie."

"But I am certain——"

"I'm telling you, ain't I? Township No 2 North." Scanton's voice was harsh.

Valerie's lips opened as though to speak, then closed, and her gaze shifted to Barry who had permitted his horse to fall back beside the girl's. His heart went heavy as he observed the growing suspicion in her eyes.

"Do you know the Township?" Her lips curled faintly.

Barry's face was grave. "Why, it was—— Mr. Scanton must be right, of course."

"Oh!" She looked puzzled, and Barry thought the single word spoke volumes.

Before Barry could speak, Valerie had spurred her horse ahead. Scanton promptly reigned beside Barry. The timberman's eyes were cold, menacing.

"Know what I think?" he growled in an undertone. "That gal's been sent in here. She's an undercover agent!"

"No, no——" began Barry, then checked himself.

"No, eh?" echoed Scanton grimly. "Well, you saw how she checked up on those corner markings, didn't you? How come you let her get away with it?"

"I—she——" Barry's lips closed firmly. The thought struck him that nothing he could say would help Valerie, whereas every word he uttered in her defense served to weaken his own position. For he, as one of the gang, must suspect all others not of the gang.

"Well," decided Scanton, "she and I'll have a little powwow to-night. And if she doesn't come clean"—he gestured significantly—"it'll be just too bad for her."

At that moment the riders came suddenly in sight of the lodge, a roomy log building set picturesquely in the center of a small clearing, and Scanton ceased speaking. As Barry and the others dismounted, a man came out of the lodge and greeted Scanton. Barry's blood ran cold.

The man was Vincent Trask!

Barry thought swiftly. He must brazen it out—some way. Play the game and wait for the breaks. Discovery was certain now. And then—— But Scanton was speaking.

"Meet Mr. Brown, Mr. West—the man I told you about. Mr. West has joined the firm, Brown."

Brown! And so Trask was Brown! A forest ranger gone crooked, a secret-service man turned renegade. Barry drew a deep breath.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Brown." He forced a smile. His teeth were clamped together like a vise.

Trask's handsome face was like plaster. And his eyes held a peculiar glint that Barry recalled having observed on one other occasion. Then Trask smiled—a smile not pleasant to look upon.

"Ah, yes, Mr. West. I'll see you later, perhaps," and he turned away.

Watching Trask without seeming to watch him, Barry saw him start violently. He had, of course, observed Valerie Lane. And the girl, turning at that moment, saw Trask, and the surprise which flashed in her face was followed by a warm smile.

Barry waited to see no more. He moved away from the group. He must have time to think, to plan some move. But think as he would, no plan came to his whirling brain, save one. He must see Trask and close his mouth, by threat or persuasion. This failing, Barry knew, he might never hope to return to Douglas City alive!

Presently a Chinese announced supper. The memory of that meal was long to remain engraved in Barry West's brain. His eyes flicked now and then to Scanton, but the timberman gave no sign that he had learned Barry's identity. Valerie would not meet his eyes, but he felt rather than saw her watching him when his attention was elsewhere.

The meal ended, Barry went in search of Trask. But Trask was not to be

found. Casually Barry strolled to the door. The night was black as pitch. Somehow the restless sighing of the trees seemed to sound a warning of impending disaster, and he loosened the gun in his shoulder holster.

In the corral the horses were stamping restlessly as if they, too, had sensed the unusual. Barry took a grip upon himself. Nerves. He must keep a steady hand now. Horses feared only prowling bears or mountain lions. Habit impelled him to walk toward the corral, picking his way carefully in the darkness.

And then—a crash as of thunder, fantastic lights, and darkness!

Barry, a lifeless mass, lay sprawled upon the ground. Above him bent the sinister figure of Trask.

"Got you at last!" gloated the renegade.

At the words another figure emerged from the Stygian background. The voice of Scanton, discreetly lowered, broke the silence.

"Not dead? Good! Afraid for a moment you'd cracked him too hard. I've a score to settle with that gent that'll take more than a crack over the head." His harsh voice rose to high pitch, and his voice echoed eerily among the firs. Within the lodge a girl heard—and shivered.

IT was morning when Barry awoke to the ceaseless chatter of birds. His head was splitting. But what concerned him more, his hands and feet were securely bound with rope. Memory returned with a rush. His eyes, glazed with pain, searched his surroundings.

He was lying on the ground in the forest. And there was a man there—Trask! With a six-shooter held in readiness.

Barry attempted to rise but was unable to manage it. Trask sneered.

"Out of it at last, eh? All right, West. I'll cut your lashings so you can

walk." And suiting action to words, he slashed the rope binding Barry's feet.

"Now get up. This is your day of judgment. Ever pray?"

Barry staggered to his feet. "Trask—you can't do this! Think, man! The service!"

"Service be damned!" snarled Trask. "And as for thinking, did you think when you double-crossed me—forced me to resign?"

"But Miss Lane, Trask—you and she—"

Trask laughed. "What's that to you? She'll stay here with me as my wife. You're out of it now. Let's get going. The chief is waiting at the lodge."

Trask gestured with the rifle, and Barry turned and began to walk in the direction indicated. Valerie—if only she were safe. What must she think of him?

Trask seemed to read Barry's thoughts. "Miss Lane," he sneered, "has you tagged as some sort of a crook, while I am a secret-service operative. So don't worry about what she'll think."

Another minute and Barry was standing before the lodge, and because of the short distance he had walked, he guessed his captors had kept him in the woods near by so as not to arouse the suspicions of the prospective claim holders, who, of course, had been started homeward on the Douglas City trail early in the morning.

Scanton, holding four horses, was waiting impatiently. His face broke into a leering grin.

"Smart, wasn't you, Mr. Detective? Fooled us down at Douglas City, didn't you?" His face went livid at the recollection of the coup of Barry's, and he broke into profanity. "By Heaven, you'll never fool anybody else—not after to-day. Get him onto a horse, Brown, while I get the other one."

Other one! Barry's eyes became riveted to the door of the lodge through

which Scanton disappeared. But the timberman did not immediately reappear, and presently Barry heard a woman's cry. Then a disheveled figure dashed from the door, and he recognized Valerie Lane. Scanton was close behind the girl. At the steps of the lodge he rudely grasped her arm.

"Listen, you yellow-haired little devil! You wouldn't come clean so now you'll stay with us for a while. Until you're ready to talk. Huh! Two of you, eh—you and this man West.

"Well, we'll take care of him first and then find a way to keep your pretty mouth closed. Might even marry you. Hah-hah!" Scanton laughed loudly at the thought.

"That's an idea," he pursued. "Judge Molk'll perform the ceremony after our party at the mill's over. I'll tame you, girlie. Once I get that fight knocked out of you, you might make a good wife!"

Before she could fling the angry reply that sprang to her lips, Trask spoke. "Lay off, Scanton. I told you about this deal, didn't I? She's not in on the undercover work. Besides, she and I are——"

"You go to the devil!" roared Scanton, his face livid. "You tell me? Ha! That's good. You heard what I said and that goes!"

Trask's retort was broken off short as Barry, his hands still tied, flung himself from his horse. The young woodsman was white with anger. Die he might, but he could not stand this!

But it was a futile gesture. Two guns sprang from holsters. Barry halted, stiffened.

"Back on that horse," came from Scanton in a menacing tone. "Don't mind killing you now if I have to. But I've made other plans for you." He turned to Trask. "You and I will settle this other matter later. Let's get going; it's a long ride to the mill."

Valerie accepted Trask's hand as she

mounted her horse. For a brief instant her eyes met Barry's, and the youth sought in vain to read the message there. She scorned him, of course. A forest ranger turned crook—Trask had told her that. And yet——

"Hell!" Barry breathed. Women he could not fathom. Moreover, there was plenty to think about now without worrying about a girl who cared not a snap of her finger for him.

As the four riders turned into the mountain trail leading back to Douglas City, Barry wondered what fate lay in store for him. What did Scanton mean by the "mill." Would Judge Molk and Constable Langster be there to witness his inglorious finish? Doubtless they would, for Scanton would have sent them a message by one of the returning party.

"Oh, well"—Barry squared his shoulders and breathed deeply of the fragrant mountain air—"such is life in the Far West."

"What's that?" came from Trask, riding close behind.

Barry grinned. He was in command of himself once again.

CHAPTER IV.

SCANTON'S REVENGE.

IT was midafternoon when the small cavalcade swung off from the Douglas City trail. Presently Barry saw a medley of buildings which he identified as a sawmill, apparently not in operation. From this plant led an overhead flume which Barry recalled as having crossed the main trail.

Smoke was pouring from the chimney of a log cabin, and a yell from Scanton brought two men to the door whom Barry easily identified as Judge Molk and Constable Langster.

"Got your message," boomed Judge Molk jovially. "So, we came up to sit in on the fun. When does it start? And who's the lady?"

Scanton grinned significantly. "She's mine," he announced, "or will be after you tie the knot all legal and proper. She's just a little girl trying to get along as a detective or something, but maybe she'll learn to like the woods—and me.

"The fun?" Scanton became harsh. "It starts pronto! This gent"—he indicated Barry—"is going for a ride, mountain style."

The flume! Barry felt his spine prickle. Why the flume?

"Fella went down that flume once and they never found hide nor hair of him," pursued Scanton. "Timbers grind a man into sawdust. It's better this way. Leave you in the woods and some one might stumble onto you. How'd you like it, Mr. Secret Service?"

If Scanton had expected Barry to cringe, he was disappointed. Barry's eyes held cold scorn as they moved from one to the other of the timber grabbers. He had tricked them, and now they were about to repay in their own coin—death—close his mouth forever that their dastardly operations might never be revealed.

Expectancy flamed in the eyes of Judge Molk, of Constable Langster. But Trask's face, Barry observed, was like chalk. So! The renegade had found Scanton's reference to Valerie too strong to stomach.

Barry looked at Valerie. And something in the girl's eyes caused his heart to leap. Well, too late now to matter—much. He turned to Scanton.

"There's one thing, Scanton. You've got Miss Lane all wrong. She has no connection with any governmental department. She—"

"Says you," burst snarlingly from Scanton. "We listened to you once, young feller. Never again!"

"Right!" snapped Judge Molk. "We deal our own cards from now on."

Barry shrugged. His eyes sought Valerie's appealingly. "Well, so long—girl!"

"Barry—Barry!" The girl's voice rose in a hysterical cry.

Then she swung upon the others, and withering scorn blazed in her eyes. "You'll swing for this, Scanton! I see it all now. And you—Vincent Trask—I thought—I thought—" Her voice broke off in a choking cry, and she buried her face in her hands.

"Hah!" Scanton's palms slapped together in an angry gesture. "Sweet on each other, eh—you and this timber wolf? Well, so much the better; it'll make a better show all around. You shall have a front seat, girlie!"

Scanton turned slitted eyes on Trask. "Over to the flume with him!"

Barry's blood boiled. He resolved to put forth one final desperate effort. Better to die fighting than to submit tamely. He raised his bound hands and brought them down on Scanton's head. Like a wild man he flung fists and feet, and for a moment the others, taken by surprise, were on the verge of retreat.

But Constable Langster, approaching from behind, threw his long arms about the fighting youth, and Barry found himself helpless.

Scanton cursed. "Just for that," he snarled, "you'll go down bound hand and foot."

With Trask's gun boring into his back, Barry mounted the platform where the flume had its beginning. An icy hand clutched his heart, and he fought for self-control as he gauged his chance to exist in that raging torrent. "One chance in a thousand!" reason told him.

The flume, he quickly perceived, was a veritable giant of its kind. Built of two-inch planks, it measured five feet across its open top, tapering to a point at the bottom so as to form a long, sinuous, unbroken V.

Lumbermen, seeking to evade the cost of a logging railroad, had cleverly conceived a structure which would carry twenty-four by thirty-six inch timbers

twenty feet long as easy as the ordinary flume carries a one-inch plank—carry those monster bridge timbers with the speed of an express train.

A low-pitched roar, sullen, menacing, rose from the tumbled surface of the water speeding through its box prison. A caged beast, snarling defiance. Demanding food—freshly sawed timbers to be hurled into Douglas City, ten miles away, within as many minutes.

A thing alive, the flume seemed to Barry in the brief moments that he permitted his fascinated eyes to dwell upon it.

Over the roar of the water came Scanton's voice, gloatingly. "Here's your chariot—and what a ride *you're* going to have!"

The words ended in an animallike growl. Barry, glancing briefly at the timber which Langster and Trask were moving along the landing platform toward the flume by means of cant hooks, turned cool eyes on Scanton and grinned.

"See you in hell, Scanton," drawled the young woodsman.

An instant later Barry found himself bound to a timber with heavy cords. Faces were leering down at him as the timber poised on the very edge of the rushing water.

Willing hands were thrust against the timber. It began to move. Barry, staring upward, thought the sky had never looked more lovely. Or was it the sky? Perhaps it was the fright-widened eyes of Valerie Lane. Yes, the girl—she was bending low. The next instant her lips were pressed hotly against his.

Then Barry saw the form of Trask come hurtling toward him. In Trask's hand was a knife; Barry awaited the blow. What matter now?

But the unexpected blow never fell. Barry saw the flash of the knife at his side, and then his hands were free. His hands but not his feet, for Trask, his

purpose detected, had been jerked back from the flume.

"For the service—and for her!" cried Trask, and pivoting made ready to sell his life dearly.

Three guns barked simultaneously. The renegade's bullet-riddled body slumped forward, but in falling one hand caught Scanton and jerked him forward; the timberman, screaming with fear, tumbled into the flume.

In the split second which had elapsed between the moment the cords were severed and the timber splashed into the swirling torrent, Barry had time only to rise to a sitting posture when the surge of water struck him, and the timber began to move, slowly at first, then faster.

"Barry!"

Barry flung his arms outward in time to catch the girl in a wild leap from the platform to the moving timber.

"With you!" he heard Valerie's words over the roar of the water, now gathering greater speed as the flume pitched sharply downward.

BARRY struggled desperately to maintain balance. Should the big timber turn over, both he and Valerie would be ground to pulp against the unyielding plank sides of the flume. He must free his legs from the cords that still bound him to the timber!

"Valerie! We've got to fight. Can you—"

He gestured toward his bonds. The girl's face was white as she nodded understandingly.

"If you can—hold my—other hand," came from her breathlessly.

The girl was reaching toward the knotted rope. Now one slim hand was tugging at the knot while Barry held the other in a crushing grip.

Then Barry saw the cords fly free and he drew the girl back to safety. Carefully he rose to a half standing posture, shoulders thrust forward, arms extended. In this balanced position he

might be able to counteract the wild lurching of the swiftly moving timber and retain equilibrium.

Valerie was lying prone on the timber, her hands clutching its sides. The rush of the wind swept her hair back in a straight line.

Where the flume began at the mill it had been slightly above ground level. But now it soared to dizzy heights as the ground fell away in a canyon. Barry, crouched low, every muscle tense as whipcord, caught fleeting glimpses of treetops. They seemed to flash past him in blurred procession.

"Sixty miles an hour—a chance in a thousand!" the thoughts flashed through his brain.

Once he glanced over the side of the flume to the ground far below. He glimpsed a cabin. Before it stood a man, staring upward, mouth open, limbs seemingly paralyzed as his eyes caught sight of the tiny human "riding the flume."

Now the timber gave a sickening lurch as the flume curved sharply. Barry felt his heart stop beating as he fought madly for balance; something trickled down his forehead and into his eyes, partially blinding him. His breath came in deep gasps; the muscles of his legs seemed to have turned to wood.

Cautiously he shifted one foot, then the other. The change of posture gave him momentary relief.

"Help!"

Like a cry from the dead the sound struck Barry's ears. He flung a quick glance over his shoulder. Scanton!

In the desperate fight for life he had forgotten Scanton and his plunge into the flume at the loading platform. The timberman was clinging for life to the rear end of the timber. He was obviously half drowned, crazed with terror.

Barry need but kick Scanton's hands and the man would wallow helplessly—like a water-logged plank in the roaring

waters of the flume. Or, in another moment he would doubtless relinquish his hold. Then—death!

But had not the chief said to "get them?"

With a swift movement, Barry slipped loose his belt. Moving with extreme caution he stepped backward—an inch at a time. Without turning his head he flung one end of the belt behind him. He felt a tug, knew that Scanton had grasped the strip of leather and was pulling himself to the surface of the timber.

Barry moved forward again. He almost leaped as he saw Valerie roll lifelessly toward one edge of the timber. Fainted!

Gritting his teeth Barry bent and lifted the limp form. A double task now! He must hold the girl in his arms while he fought to retain his balance, to keep the timber from spinning. His lips opened in a prayer; it was a prayer of thanksgiving for sturdy limbs and a sound body.

A group of buildings flashed by. Douglas City must be nearing. To Barry it seemed hours since the wild ride had begun, actually it had been only minutes. But they were minutes pregnant with death!

The next instant Barry caught a flash of water ahead, and he knew that even at the end of the crazy journey a new danger threatened.

The water from the flume would pour into a pond. From this pond the timbers were dragged by workmen and loaded onto cars. He steeled himself for the final plunge.

It came with startling abruptness.

Suddenly the big timber seemed to shoot outward into space as though fired from a giant rocket. It arched into a long parabola, nosed downward like a swooping plane and plunged with a tremendous splash into the pond. At that instant Barry leaped with Valerie in his arms.

Desperate determination drove Barry to furious efforts. As his head rose above the water he grasped the girl firmly with one hand and stroked madly with the other. He felt bottom beneath his feet, and stumbled through the shallow water to the bank, laid the girl's form down, and plunged back into the water.

Scanton was struggling weakly. Barry grasped the man and once more fought his way to shore.

Scanton was gasping for breath; but he was conscious. Barry, fighting off a sudden faintness and impelled by a fighting spirit that gave strength to his wabbling knees, stared down at his enemy. A telltale bulge beneath the man's coat caught his attention.

"You won't need that any more," gritted Barry, and pocketed Scanton's gun.

He then whipped a thong from Scanton's boot, rolled the man over on his face and bound his hands behind him. This accomplished, he gave his attention to Valerie. A dash of water in her face, and the girl's eyes flickered open; she smiled.

"Are — are — you — an angel?" her voice came throatily.

"Not yet," said Barry, grinning.

CHAPTER V.

BARRY DEALS.

THE strange procession passing down Pacific Avenue, Douglas City's main thoroughfare, brought curious crowds to the curbs. Some one had witnessed the dramatic finish of the flume ride, and the story had spread like wildfire. No one had ever ridden the big flume and lived to tell of it.

Men stared wonderingly at the tall, bronzed youth, gun in hand; their amazement deepened as the bedraggled figure trudging ahead of Barry became recognized.

And marching beside the tall youth

was an indescribably pretty girl whose water-soaked clothing in nowise detracted from her fresh young beauty.

At one point a man dashed into the street.

"Scanton—what's the idea?" he called.

It was Barry who answered. "My parade, mister. Vamose!"

The man shot one quick glance at the resolute face of the speaker, another at the steadily held gun; then melted into the crowd. Barry marched directly to the jail.

"Lock this man up and don't let him out under any circumstances," he said to the astonished jailer. The flash of a small gold badge brought understanding to the jailer's face, and he nodded.

"Now," said Barry, after the steel door had clanged behind Scanton, "hot-foot it over to the justice of the peace and bring him here."

As the jailer dashed away on his mission, Barry glanced curiously at Valerie Lane. The girl had dropped into a chair; tears were streaming down her face.

Barry swore to himself. Just like a woman. Cry after the excitement was all over. The girl caught his glance, and she smiled uncertainly. Barry felt his blood leap.

"Right lively ride, that," he said inanely, and mentally kicked himself for a dunce.

Before Valerie could reply, the jailer burst into the jail. With him was a bespectacled individual in a rusty frock coat.

"Understand you wanted me," said the newcomer.

"I do if you are the J. P.," said Barry. "I am swearing out warrants against some of your leading citizens. I hope they ain't friends of yours."

"Who are they?"

"Scanton—Molk—Langster."

The justice of the peace stared incredulously. Barry's hand flashed from a pocket. He displayed the gold shield.

"Good enough!" The justice of the peace turned to leave. "I'll be back in a few minutes with the papers."

"You'd better be," was Barry's grim warning.

As the official left the jail, the clatter of hoofs brought Barry to a window. Judge Molk and Constable Langster!

Barry examined the gun he had taken from Scanton. Fully loaded. Lips set in thin lines, he waited. He had not long to wait.

Outside a rifle roared. Plaster flew in a shower about Barry's head.

"Flat down—quick!" he flung at Valerie and the jailer.

Barry did not return the fire. Instead, he uttered a piercing cry—the cry of a man mortally wounded. The trample of hurried feet was followed by the appearance of Judge Molk and Constable Langster.

"Got him first shot. Good work, constable," boomed Judge Molk's voice.

"Rotten work! Stick 'em up—pronto!"

THE two men whirled; they stiffened.

It was no wounded man who confronted them, but a man whose eyes glittered dangerously; whose gun swung from one to the other in a manner discouragingly businesslike.

Hands reached upward promptly. That instant the justice of the peace strode into the room.

"Reckon you'll proclaim court in session," suggested Barry.

"Reckon so," echoed the justice. "You sign these warrants?"

Barry slipped the gun to his left hand. With his right he grasped a pen proffered by the official. He scribbled names on lines left blank and added his own name.

"Now do your stuff," commented Barry.

The justice's eyes swung from one to the other of the group. A judge of the higher court—Molk! But his thoughts

returned to the small gold shield—symbol of Uncle Sam. The shield won.

"Court," he declared oracularly, "is now in session. You gents are charged with the murder of one John Doe Walker. I bind you over to the circuit court for trial. Jailer, lock 'em up!"

"Good work," Barry praised, as the stunned prisoners trooped into the cell block. "The murder charge'll hold 'em until the department of justice has a chance to act in a few other little items—such as swiping government timber and perhaps using the mails to defraud, not to mention a second murder charge."

Appropriating the jailer's desk, Barry sought and found a telegraph blank and penned this message:

KEP. Federal Building, Portland: Everything's jake. Trask cashed in, but he went out like a man. No trouble except that I got the gang in jail and my pants wet. Wire instructions.

"There! Now I'll just amble over to the telegraph office—"

"But—but what are you going to do with me?"

Barry froze in his tracks. Again he experienced that strange tumbling sensation in the region of his heart. Valerie Lane, her eyes shining, was looking into the puzzled face of the young secret-service woodsman.

"Why—why——" Barry stuttered, and his face turned crimson. As though in search of help, his glance strayed to the grinning faces of the jailer and the justice of the peace.

Barry swallowed. It was now or never. As he spoke his voice seemed to be coming from far away, and for an instant he had the strange sensation that some one else—not Barry West—was speaking.

"Say, Mr. Justice of the Peace, do you—er—do you, well, marry folks?"

"You betcha!"

Barry forced his eyes to meet Valerie's. She was smiling mistily.



Six To One

By Gordon Lord

A SERIAL—PART VI

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERY HOUSE.

DONALD HARPER'S first reaction was to reveal himself immediately, tell what he knew, and demand the arrest of the criminal whose identity he had just guessed. But it was doubtful whether Dokely would believe. His evidence was, after all, of the flimsiest, and, if his theory was correct, the murderer would be warned before the police could reach his hiding place.

Harper's best plan was to slip out the back way before the searchers returned, and to corroborate his discovery by finding the criminal lair. There

was no possibility of their flight, since two of the doomed men were still alive.

Accordingly, Harper rose from his clump of bushes, but he dropped immediately. A man was watching from the porch. If Harper attempted to walk to the back, he would be in full view, and the alarm would be sounded at once. For the moment he was safe, and his obvious course was to remain where he was until the coast was clear.

Presently, Harper heard the sound of footsteps. The men were returning from the gate. He saw their faces plainly as they walked past him. Then they stopped not more than ten yards from him. He could not see them because of the turn in the path, but he could hear every word spoken.

"Hey, there!" came Dokely's voice. "Who are you?"

"That's my butler," was the answer, in Burton's voice.

"Come down here," called Dokely.

It was evidently the man Harper had seen standing on the porch. The sound of footsteps was heard on the gravel path.

"Now then," said Dokely, "he may still be in the grounds. Let's step back here where we can see the gate, so that he can't sneak out while we're standing here talking."

The four men walked back, past Harper again, and stopped on the path at a point between Harper and the gate. Harper cursed himself for his foolishness in not making for the exit as soon as they had passed him. His best chance was now gone.

"He did either one of two things," said Dokely. He may have slipped to the back of the house and made his way at leisure out of the grounds."

"There's a wall completely surrounding my property," cut in Burton.

"He could climb it," said Dokely tersely. "He's an active man. If he didn't do that, then he's still hidden among the trees here in front. If he went to the back, we've lost him for the time being, and there's no sense looking."

"But if he went toward the front, all we have to do is to comb the ground from the house down to the gate, and we're sure to find him. But the first thing to do is to sound the alarm. Supposing you do that, Benenson. We'll wait here while you go to the phone."

Dokely was speaking in lowered tones, but he was so close to Harper's hiding place that every word came as clearly as if he were speaking directly to him. Benenson's footsteps, a second later, sounded out, as he walked back to the house.

Harper's situation was precarious. The clump in which he was concealed

was almost the first that they would reach when they started to search. That meant that the men would not yet be spread out, and he would have all four to contend with.

On the other hand, Harper was so close to them that if he attempted to creep away, and circle to the rear of the house to comparatively safe territory, they would hear the slightest sound he made. It was, however, his only chance not to be caught like an animal in its burrow. Besides, it offered the chance of immediate action.

Harper dropped down on all fours and commenced his escape. He felt forward with one hand at a time to find safe footing clear of any branch or twig likely to crackle. Then he drew his foot up to the area his hand had showed him was safe. Next he advanced his other hand to find safe ground for his other foot.

His progress was slow and painful, but at least it was noiseless. He only ventured to vary it under cover of some other sound, as when one of the men, tired of standing still, commenced to pace up and down, causing an almost continuous sound for a few moments with the crushing of the gravel under heel.

There was but one entrance to Burton's house. The driveway turned slightly at the gate, forming an angle, then swerved sharply near the clump of bushes to pass the front door of the house, and continued in a broad circle to curve back to the gate and leave by the entrance. The island in the center, carved out by the road, was covered with trees and bushes. This territory Harper had to traverse, and cross the road again, before he attained the safety to the side and rear of the house.

When Harper reached the road, he glanced stealthily in either direction. There was no one. Making as little noise as possible, he stepped across it, and then lost himself in the small grassy

park on the north side. Once there, he walked quickly and without fear until he reached the wall. It was some six feet high, but using a dislodged stone as a footing, Harper climbed over it easily.

HE found himself in an open field.

He paused for a moment before he found his bearings, but once he had them, his way was easy. His aim was to circle the residential district, taking small streets and back lots, skirting Table Top on the north, and then to take a short cut down the hill to the main road.

Once there, Harper had but a short walk to the house he sought. The only likelihood of discovery—and that was small enough—was on the main road, which might be patrolled as a result of the alarm that Benenson had spread at Dokely's request. But that was more likely to be a formality than anything else. A posse at this time of night was next to impossible, and the half dozen men that were after him could do little in the way of search.

Nevertheless, Harper was alert for anything on the main road, and did not breathe freely until he had left the road, and was in the private grounds of the house he had come to enter. He had as yet no definite plan and had acted from impulse more than anything else. He was, in fact, not even sure if his suspicions were justified. He had little tangible to go on.

Harper's escape had been motivated as much by anger at Dokely, and his refusal to take seriously the theory of the impersonation of Kinney, as by any conviction that if he were granted a few hours freedom he could solve, once and for all, the mystery.

The house before which Harper stood was a large one. It was built of rough, gray stone. There was no light visible. Harper advanced toward one of the ground-floor windows. It was but a

few feet from the ground. Lifting himself up to the sill, he reached for the top of the lower frame, and pushed gently. The window was unlocked, and slid noiselessly up the groove. There was a heavy curtain behind it.

When the window was far enough open to permit Harper to enter, he put his head and shoulders through it, and carefully looked through the curtains. The room was in darkness, and was, apparently, empty. He swung his feet around, and dropped to the floor. The door, at the opposite end, was ajar. Through it came a dim light. Somebody was still up.

Harper slipped off his shoes and put them in his pockets. They were somewhat bulky, but it could not be helped. He tiptoed across the room and put his head out of the door. The light came from a reading lamp in another room. The door opened onto a corridor.

Harper stepped out. Keeping himself in the shadow of the wall, he crept to a point opposite the room from which the light came. A woman was sitting on a couch, reading. His heart thumped as he recognized her. It was the woman who had fainted in the arms of John P. Richards at the Grand Central Station!

Suddenly, from the back of the house, and as if from a cellar, came a voice. It was "Grease's," the man who had stood guard over Harper earlier in the evening.

"Hey, Mollie! Still reading? Come on down and be sociable."

"All right," she called back. "I'll be right down."

She put her book down on a table, stretched her arms back, and rose from her seat. Harper flattened himself against the wall. She passed from the room, and turned in the direction of the voice.

Harper saw her go toward the back, then turn and disappear in the wall. He

had never known there was a door there. He decided to investigate before leaving the house. His decision cost exactly one life!

HARPER tiptoed down the hall, and found that one of the wall panels had been slidden back, disclosing a flight of stairs. Even then, if he had turned back, all might have been well. But at that moment he heard some one fumbling with the knob of the front door. Harper had not a moment to lose. The only possible place he could hide was down the stairs. He could see the bottom. A light from some other room illuminated them, but he could not be seen. And, simultaneously, he saw his hiding place.

There was a small landing at the head of the stairs, but there was no door except the sliding one and no possible hiding place. But Harper noticed that the stairs themselves could be covered precisely as a set of cellar steps. There were two pairs of doors covering the head. One, folded back like the top of a box, was hooked to a vertical position, but was too far from the wall to afford any protection. The other folded inward and downward and left a small space between the steps and the wall. The front door was already opening.

Without further hesitation, Harper jumped down the first few steps and then wriggled in between the door folded down and the wall. The door rested on a small shelf, and it was on the floor of this shelf that he hid. The door was massive, and the inside was covered with leather. There was a large leather flap that projected beyond the edge. By drawing it back over the open end of his cubby-hole, Harper was able to screen himself completely from view. The woman had just spoken to the men in the cellar.

"There's some one in the house," she said. "I heard a funny noise, like a window opening."

"Nerves are on edge, Mollie. Nobody could possibly know we're here. Forget about it and have a bracer."

"I'm nervous enough, Grease. I always am whenever you pull a job. Especially one like this. I don't like it."

"Don't be a fool," said Grease. "Here's the best thing we ever had. Rooms, food, nothing to do, and a big wad at the end of it. You'll end by scaring me out of the whole business."

"Fat chance of that," said another voice, big and powerful. Harper guessed it belonged to the gorrillalike "Brute."

"I can't help it," replied the woman's voice. "I wish you'd take a look around."

"Boss come in yet, Mollie?" the Brute demanded.

"I heard the front door open just after I came down here."

"Well, we'll have a look around if it'll make you any happier. Come on, Brute, let's go."

Harper heard their footsteps as they went past. He could not see them, but it sounded as if there were three men. He remained where he was. It would be foolhardy to risk leaving while they were searching the house. He had learned all he needed to know, and would take the first favorable opportunity to leave. He could hear the woman pacing about in the cellar. Presently there were footsteps overhead and the men descended.

"Mollie or the maid must have left it open," said Grease. "Don't mention it to her. You know how scary she is. If you tell her you found an open window, she'll be all nerves. We looked thoroughly enough. If any one were in the house we'd have found him."

"Sure," replied the deep voice. "There's nothing, Mollie," he called as they reached the foot of the stairs. "Just imagination. I'd have thought you'd had no nerves by now, after ten years with Grease."

"I know," she replied, "but I get that

way once in a while. Kind of a hunch, I guess."

"Hunch, hell," said Grease. "When it's a hunch, there's something in it. A fly couldn't hide in this place without our finding it. We're no children at that game."

"Well, maybe," she said. "Only I still feel funny."

"Cut it out, Mollie." There was the sound of a cork drawn from a bottle.

"Well, here's how."

"Mud in your eye."

"Wonder what the boss wants us for," said a new voice. "He's got something ready."

"Mebbe another job," said Brute. "He said they'd follow fast after the third. No sense stalling around, taking chances."

"No chance to this," said the third man. "When the boss handles things, there ain't no chance to it."

"Think he's a tin angel, don't you, Itch?"

"Well, you gotta say he's handled things pretty smooth. The bulls ain't nowhere."

Harper, fascinated, remained where he was. His hiding place was small and cramped, but he could not have moved of his own volition. The cold-blooded manner in which he heard these men speak of murder had, for the moment, paralyzed him.

"Nor never will be, either. The boss knows every move they make. The only guy that's even guessed anyway near is this Harper. Have a nice talk to him to-night, Grease?"

"Heart to heart. I told him what a nice fellow he was. He was charmed by my conversation. Never interrupted me once. You could learn a lot from him, Mollie."

"Stop it, Grease. Talk about something else."

"You're nervous as a cat to-night, Mollie. Better have another shot."

"I'm nervous enough, Heaven knows.

I felt that way all evening, even before you went out, earlier. And then you met this Harper. I'll be glad when it's all over."

"Come on, Mollie! I never saw you like this before. You used to be as steady a hand as there was. What's come over you?"

"I wish I knew."

"And besides, Harper fixed it all up for us. He's probably got a cot in the jail for the night. Free rent!"

"It isn't Harper particularly," said Mollie. "It's nothing definite."

"The boss is much slicker than Harper. Natural ability is what the boss has. Take the time Harper wanted to wire to the prison. An ordinary guy, no matter how much experience he had, wouldn't have thought quick enough."

"What was that story, Itch? The boss never told us. He just said he'd had a close shave."

"Close is no word," said Itch. "But what's that?"

THERE were footsteps above. They came through the panel doorway. There was a click and the sound of something sliding shut. Then the feet descended the stairs. Harper, by peering through the leather flap that concealed him, could see the man. It was the boss.

"How many times did I tell you never to leave that panel open?" he snapped. "That's one rule I won't have disobeyed."

"There couldn't be any one around at this time. Besides, we'd have heard any one coming in."

"I don't care what you would have heard," the newcomer snapped. "There might have been hell to pay. Harper's loose."

"What do you mean?"

"Dokely arrested him after he admitted he was at the ball field and after he reported the murder before it hap-

pened. He broke away, and he's loose somewhere."

"We searched the house a short time ago," said Grease. "Mollie thought she heard a noise, and we went through it. But there wasn't any one. I'm sure of that."

"And Dokely is sure to question Burton, and he's as likely as not to blab. We've got to get him to-night, and after that you're free to go."

"And Witherby?" asked Itch.

"Witherby, I'm going to handle myself. I have the money in the house, and I'll turn it over to you as soon as we get back. After that, you can stay on for a few days if you want, or you can go immediately. It will be the end of our agreement. But Burton first. Here's the plan.

"Grease, I want you to act as chauffeur. There's no need for disguises to-night. You'll wait around the corner of the drive, just out of sight. You two others will come in the car as far as the corner of Reade Street, on the north side of Burton's grounds. There you get out. You walk in through Burton's gate and turn to the left until you see the car. But be careful you're not seen.

"You wait by the car. When they're both there, Grease gives the usual signal. Burton is expecting me. I'll suggest a stroll to clear his head. When we reach the car, grab him in the usual way. Drive north as far as the old Masterman field. Then we get out and do the job. All clear?"

"Yes."

"I'll be waiting upstairs. Come up as soon as you have your kit. Mollie, I want you to sit in the hall, near the panel. I want to know if any one comes here while we're out. If any one does, go down immediately. Under no circumstances must you be seen. It wouldn't surprise me if Harper came some time to-night."

Then the boss turned around and

walked upstairs. Harper heard the panel slide open and shut. He thought rapidly. It was impossible to escape now. He would have to wait until the men had gone, then walk up the stairs and get out. If he couldn't find the spring that released the panel, he could batter it down. There would be no one in the house, except Mollie, and perhaps some servants, who would be thoroughly scared. Harper knew that there was a telephone. He would then warn Burton, and tell Benenson of the plan and of the identity of the criminal. Benenson would attend to the rest.

A minute or two later, Harper heard the footsteps of the gang of assassins go up the stairs. He heard the outer door that covered the stairs let down into its place, then the familiar click as the panel was shut.

Immediately Harper jumped from his hiding place and ran down. Perhaps there was some other exit or even a telephone. He had hardly fumbled for a light in the cellar when he heard a heavy rumbling noise above him, and the creak of hinges.

Taking a match from his pocket, Harper lit it and looked up. He was just in time to see the heavy door that had been his place of concealment swing shut. It was a massive affair, and as soon as he saw it he knew that it had been shut from the outside by means of hydraulic power. He was locked in the cellar!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SEALED CHAMBER.

HARPER hesitated a moment and lit another match. There was a switch next to the door. He turned it on, and found himself in a comfortably furnished dining room. There was a half-empty whisky bottle and four small glasses on the table. There were two doors on the left-hand side, and one on the right.

Harper opened one of those on the

left. It gave onto a bedroom. There was a small screened ventilator, but no other exit. He returned to the second door. That, too, led to a bedroom. He crossed the room rapidly and tried the door to the other side. It led to a small workroom and the bathroom.

But of telephone or exit there was none. The entire suite of rooms was evidently subterranean, and there was not even a window. Each room had a small ventilator. Beyond that, Harper was completely cut off from the outside world, except for the heavy door over the staircase. He grabbed a small iron wrench from the workroom and dashed up the stairs. First, he tried pulling the door. There was no knob, and when he tugged the projecting piece of leather, it ripped off.

Harper felt for the crack between the door and the ceiling. It was too small to wedge his iron instrument into. He tried his knife, but the blade snapped off like tin when he exerted pressure. The door was of solid concrete, perhaps a foot thick. It was impossible to move it except by the hydraulic mechanism.

Harper commenced to feel for a spring, or some mechanism that would open the door. He found none. He took his iron wrench and beat heavily against it. The padded leather absorbed the blows. There was scarcely a sound. Then he beat against the concrete walls and steps. The furious poundings echoed hollowly through the rooms. He glanced up at the door, with its thick padding of stuffed leather. It was undoubtedly constructed to be sound-proof.

Harper walked back to the dining room and sat down in a chair to think. A man's life depended on his getting out of the cellar. There was no exit except by the concrete door. The door could not be moved by hand. It was inconceivable that it could only be opened and shut from the outside, else

the assassin gang would risk death by starvation in case the boss was compelled to be absent for any length of time, or if any accident should befall him while he was masquerading in Rockville.

There was no opening mechanism on the staircase. Of that Harper was certain. The walls were solid concrete, smooth and bare. It was unlikely that the lever would be found in either of the bedrooms. That left the dining room or the small workroom.

Harper commenced at the door near the stairs, and worked toward the left. He felt every inch of the walls, patting them hurriedly. He tried turning the electric light switch on and off. Nothing happened. He looked behind every object in the room. He lifted up the rug and examined the floor.

Then he stepped into the workroom and repeated his examination. This time Harper was more successful. He found that what seemed to be an electric light switch was a dummy. The button made no click when he turned it. It was a screw. He twisted it rapidly, until it came off.

Breathlessly he fumbled with the metal plaque which the fake button had held in place. It came off. But then he stood in consternation. It hid nothing more or less than a keyhole. If it was by this means that the concrete door was operated, the suite of rooms had been designed as a prison as well as a hiding place.

Harper ran back to the other room and commenced to search the table drawers for a key. There was none. He entered the bedroom and searched the bureaus, carefully, leaving no evidence of his disturbance. There was no key. He walked to the ventilator and commenced to yell. Then he waited. But nothing happened. It probably led to the roof, and his yells were muffled in the air passage. But not until then did he become despondent.

HARPER had little idea of time, but he knew that his search had occupied not less than an hour, possibly two. By this time, Burton was undoubtedly dead, murdered and branded like his codirectors. He could no longer save him. The best he could hope to do was to escape after the return of the murderers and effect their arrest.

Harper was the only person who knew who they were, who even suspected the identity of the mysterious boss. There was nothing to do except wipe out all traces of his search, return to his hiding place under the door, and await their return and an opportunity to leave the house. He had failed to save the life of Burton. Heavily, he replaced the false electric switch. Slowly he scanned the room for traces of his activity. Then he turned out the lights, ascended the stairs, and sat down on the small shelf that would become his hiding place when the door was opened.

There was nothing more to do. He cursed himself for his curiosity in following Mollie when she had disappeared through the sliding panel. But for that, he could have escaped, brought the police, and arrested the criminals before they had a chance to kill Burton.

Harper waited a long time before his senses were startled by the click that meant the panel had been slid back. It was evidently operated by some mechanism below the level of the floor, for though he could hear distinctly the machinery, the concrete floor above concealed effectively any further noise.

Not even could Harper hear the footsteps of the person who had slid open the panel. It was probably Mollie, frightened by the opening of the front door and waiting to see if it was the gang or some stranger.

It was the gang, for a few moments later a heavy rumbling sounded, and the door slid back. He crouched in his corner, suddenly afraid that the door would

close all the way to the wall and crush him against it. Slowly the concrete slab approached him. He held his breath. It was already touching his shoulder when it finally came to an awkward stop. Then the wooden trap above it was lifted. Harper heard the voices of the returning assassins.

"O. K., Mollie!" said Grease. "You see you were worried about nothing. We weren't even seen. Everything went according to schedule. He was a dirty cuss, though. Cringed and cried—phew! I hate 'em like that."

"And it's all over now," said Mollie with relief.

"All over, and out into the cold world again!" bellowed Brute.

The men were in the dining room. Harper heard them drawing up chairs. The panel above was shut. He would have to wait until it was left open for him, or until the gang was asleep.

"Well, I guess we rate a little farewell party," said Brute. "The boss said he has some real good stuff for us. He's coming down with it—that and the jack."

"Funny guy!" said Grease. "I don't know yet exactly why he did all this. Only I've been sure from the beginning he had plenty of facts behind what he said. Right from the beginning of this, the first time he ever spoke to me about it, I'd have stacked his word against any evidence in the world. He said they put one over on him, and so put one over on him they did."

"More than that," said Itch. "He's got plenty of reasons."

"Ever tell you what they were?" asked Mollie.

"Well, not exactly. But he said he had 'em."

"Aw, you make me tired. Always pretending you know all the inside stuff that he ain't telling us. What's next on the program for you, Itch?"

"I'm sticking with the boss. Nobody's seen me. I'm safe enough, and

he said he could dig something up for me."

"Well, Mollie and me for safety, eh, girl?" said Grease. "Australia for us, and then it's Mollie, the milk girl."

"You won't stick at that stuff," exclaimed Brute. "The game gets you. You'll be back."

"No, sir. Not us. Me and Mollie's been talking about it for years. Now, we got our pile."

"Try and do it," said Brute. "Me, I'm gonna see a little high life on my pile."

"Run through it in a week," said Grease. "A fool like you won't get anywhere. And you better step careful. The bulls know what you look like. You're too big. You won't be safe unless you cut yourself in half and make two Itches out of yourself."

Harper heard the panel slide open and shut, and footsteps go past him.

It was the boss. "You're free, men," he said. "Here's the money. You'll find a little extra. You deserve it. And I brought the bottle down. I'll see you in the morning, after the usual signal. When do you plan to go away?"

"Not for a few days yet," said Grease. "Mollie and me will be the first to leave, but not for a day or two yet. I'll let you know in time for arrangements."

"Have a drink first," said Brute. "Here's to the best man that ever planned a job!"

They drank.

Then the boss' voice was heard again. "Well, good night."

"Good night!"

THE boss' steps passed Harper. He went back to the hall, after shutting the panel.

"Well, she's all over but the shouting," said Brute. "Here's to it! Cozy place to leave, though."

"Ever think," said Grease, "what a job it must have been to fix this place

up without anybody knowing it? Secret rooms, secret panel, secret machinery, secret garage under the regular one for the other car. Wonder how he did it?"

"Picked up a gang in New York," said Itch. "Same as he picked us up. Big money, smuggled 'em in, nobody knew they was even here. An ordinary guy couldn't do it, but a man'll do anything for him and not talk about it after."

"Funny the way all of them acted at the end," said Grease. "All except Burton! He was a hound, though. Writing Black Hand letters to himself and to the others to get the bulls to move faster. Then the Kinney business this evening, swearing it was Kinney when he knew it was the boss, just to save his own skin."

"Yeah, the boss sure picked his man. Promised Burton he'd save him, and he was ready to do anything the boss asked. Would 'a' killed his own mother to save his hide. Pour me another shot, there, Grease."

"I'm goin' up for a bit of air," said Itch. "Too stuffy here. Any one comin'?"

"No."

Itch walked up the stairs, shot open the panel, and, to Harper's supreme relief, failed to shut it.

Harper waited perhaps five seconds. Then he stretched his feet out from his hiding place, felt for the steps with them, and cautiously lifted his body to a sitting posture. Then he stood up on the stairs and mounted to the head. The panel was open. He glanced out into the corridor. No one!

Silently but quickly Harper walked to the front door. It was ajar. He was about to step boldly out when he caught sight of Itch on the porch.

Harper hurried back and went into the room by means of which he had originally gained access to the house. It was empty. He knew that the window

opened almost noiselessly. He lifted it carefully and glanced out. There was no one in sight. He put his feet on the sill and vaulted to the ground below. Best close the window, he thought, else they might become scared and leave suddenly.

Harper climbed to an awkward position on the sill and lowered the sash. It made no noise. He looked about him again. It was daylight already. His wrist watch had not yet stopped. It was almost seven o'clock. He walked quickly toward the back of the house where there were some trees and shrubs. His heart was beating violently when he finally reached their cover. He was safe at last!

Harper walked a good hundred yards and down a small gully, where he could not be seen from the house, before he sat down and put on his shoes. His first sensation, now that he was out of danger and had no longer the problem of the Rockville murders on his mind, was, curiously enough, one of hunger. He laughed at himself for it. But he had been extremely active for the last twelve hours without having had a bite of food.

Harper kept to the fields until he thought he was about opposite the short cut that led up the hill. He was extremely anxious not to fall into the hands of one of Dokely's men. It would only mean added discomfort and annoyance. He would then have to tell Dokely all that he knew, and he wished to give the information to Benenson and permit him to make the capture and take the credit. Table Top was undoubtedly being watched.

So thinking, Harper had walked up the hill and approached Table Top from the rear. Two fences and a small ditch, and he was back on Thomas Witherby's property. He made for the house, but keeping the garage between him and the entrance so that any one there could not see him. Flattening himself against the

garage wall, he advanced toward the house.

When Harper reached the end of the wall, he peered cautiously around the corner. Then he walked boldly forward. But he had hardly taken more than two or three steps when he saw the door opening. He turned quickly and ducked into the garage. Through the half-open door he saw a strange man step onto the porch—one of Dokely's men, undoubtedly.

There were two cars in the Witherby garage—the roadster, and a large sedan. At the back, there was a small tool room, and it was there that Harper determined to hide until he could get word to either Patricia or Thomas Witherby.

He had not long to wait.

The door opened and there was a light step. Patricia appeared.

Harper waited until she was in the center of the garage before he stepped from his hiding place.

"Good morning, Pat," he said.

She looked startled; then said: "Hide, quickly."

He had just time to duck behind the limousine when the door opened and the man he had seen on the porch entered.

"It's so funny to have detectives all over the house and grounds," she said to the man. "How many of you are there? I never can remember."

"Just three," he replied. "One at the gate, one patrolling the grounds, and one in the house. I'm afraid it rather annoys you, but Dokely feels sure he'll come back here, and we don't want to lose him again."

"Will you open the door for me?" she said. "And then stand outside and direct me. I'm so clumsy, I always bump the sides."

The man stepped out. Harper leaned forward to catch her words.

"Wait for me here," she whispered. "I'll be back soon."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WITHERBY TALKS.

AS soon as the car had left the garage, Harper walked back to the tool room, made himself comfortable in one corner, and went to sleep. He did not wake up until Patricia had come back with the roadster. He heard her drive in and say to the detective:

"Will you close the doors for me? I'm going to stay here and work on the car. It caught some brand-new knocks this morning, and I want to find out what they are. You didn't think I was an expert mechanic, did you?"

"I knew you had all the feminine accomplishments," he replied gallantly, "but I didn't suspect you had the masculine ones as well."

"Oh, yes!" she said brightly. "I once found out how cute I looked in overalls, so I decided I'd have to become a mechanic. If you wait a minute I'll show you how nice they look."

She walked into the tool room. Harper rose as she entered. She put her finger to her lips in sign of silence and took down a pair of overalls that were hanging on the wall.

"Don't look," she whispered, as she prepared to put them on. Harper turned his back until he heard her footstep again. She was dressed in a set of dirty dungarees, several sizes too large for her.

"They don't make them quite my size," he heard her say as soon as she was outside, "but they're cute anyhow, aren't they?"

The detective mumbled some answer. Then Pat's voice came again. "Run along, now, and relieve your men. I have work to do."

The garage door closed and Pat came back into the tool room.

"Now," she said sternly. "Tell me what's happened. Why did you do it? Dokely has given orders to catch you dead or alive."

"I had to," he replied. "I found out who the murderer was just when that fool Dokely was trying to arrest me, and I needed time to check up. I've been busy all night, but I know almost everything. Has Luce been here?"

"He telephoned this morning. He's in a dreadful state. His friend Burton was——"

"I know. It's awful! But your father is safe, or will be soon."

"Uncle Robert was urging him over the phone to leave Rockville until it's all cleared up. And he's dreadfully worried about you. And so is 'Tom-Tom.' But they're both sure you're innocent. And Benenson is on our side too. That makes four of us."

"Pat, I've got to see your father as soon as possible. Can I get into the house?"

"I'm afraid not." She shook her head despairingly. "There are three of them on the grounds, and then that dreadful person in charge is in the house. And he's always everywhere."

"I've got to get in the house," Harper repeated doggedly. "And if you don't help me, I'll manage it myself."

"Don't be a stupid. You know I'll help, only I don't see how. And these overalls are all greasy, and my mind never works unless I'm clean."

"Don't they eat lunch or something?"

"The other shift relieves them when they eat. Dokely doesn't take any chances."

She had slipped the overalls from her and stood, pert and proper and slender, before him.

"Ugh!" she said, "but those overalls are dirty. I feel as if I needed exactly six baths before I became Patricia again."

Then suddenly: "I have it! I want to go over to Uncle Robert's anyway. You hide in the rumble seat, I'll drive over and stop for Tom-Tom on the way. Then you can talk to him as long as you like, and when you're through

the four of us can play bridge. It'll make us forget things for a while."

"But I want to speak to your father here, and not at Luce's."

"Well, I'm going, and Tom-Tom is going, and if you don't want to come you can sleep in the garage or go out and get caught. You don't appreciate good ideas, anyhow, and you deserve to be captured."

"I'll come," he said, and many times he regretted his words. "Will you fold me into the rumble seat?"

"All right," she answered, "if you show me your hinges."

"That's the trouble. I have no hinges."

"Then you'll have to be squashed instead of folded. Shall I get a hammer? I can pound you in."

"Let's try without a hammer first. Maybe if you just smooth me at the creases we'll manage it."

Harper raised the rumble seat and stepped in. Though the space was rather large, the fit was tight.

"Shall I get the hammer?" asked Patricia, anxiously.

"I'll remove the cushion first," he suggested. "I might fit then, and it'll be more comfortable without the hammer."

He removed the seat, then climbed in again. By folding up his legs where the seat had been and by hunching his shoulders in the space usually reserved for feet, he was able to hide effectively.

"I'll stop at the house for Tom-Tom," she cried.

HARPER felt the car stop a few seconds later as Patricia drew up in front of the main entrance to the house.

"Will you ask Mr. Witherby to come down?" he heard her voice.

"I'll tell him," was the detective's answer. "You're a fast worker if you've fixed the car already."

"I changed my mind," she said, "and decided to go driving instead. Thanks!"

It was a minute or two before there was a step on the porch and Witherby's voice sounded out, "Well, 'Sandy'? What do you want?"

"I'm taking you over to Uncle Robert's," she said.

"And if I don't want to go?" he asked.

"This is a command from the body in which all authority is invested. Step in."

Witherby snorted. Then Harper felt his weight on the running board as he got in the car. The motor whirred, and they sped down the gravel path.

To Harper, packed and crated and cramped as he was, the ride seemed endless, and the car seemed to find every pebble in the road, with a lavish proportion of rocks and holes. His head ached from the bad air, and his mind refused to work. He knew only that he had to speak to Witherby, and speak to him alone. In all fairness, that was essential before doing anything further.

Since Patricia had left him no choice in the matter, the interview would take place at Luce's. Thereafter, Harper would inform Benenson of the identity of the criminals, giving him the name of the boss, the whereabouts of the band and the location of the secret chamber in the house.

Benenson could then make the arrests, take the credit, and leave Dokely to the criticism and ridicule that were bound to follow.

At length Harper felt the crunch of gravel under the tires, and the auto was brought to a stop. A moment later the rumble seat was lifted, and Patricia surveyed him.

"Are you still alive?" she asked.

"What's in there?" asked Witherby, walking over. "Harper! Man alive! How did you get here?"

"A fair-haired angel found me in the garage," he replied, climbing out and stretching awkwardly. "She curled me up and stowed me in the hold."

"Cheerio!" called a voice. The tall form of Luce was approaching. "I saw the car drive up and I came down to do the honors.

"But I didn't see Harper. How in the world did you manage? Dokely is fine-combing the country for you. He sends a man down here every hour or two. And besides everything else, he has a case of assault and battery and resisting arrest and a half dozen minor crimes against you. How did you get here?"

"I was in the rumble seat."

"He *was* the rumble seat, folded up," corrected Pat.

"You might be seen here," remarked Luce to Harper. "You'd better come inside."

"I'll be safe there, at any rate."

"And then?" questioned Luce. He was leading them into the house and up the broad stairs to his study on the second floor.

"And then we'll see."

"But where were you, and how did you get away?"

"A combination of strategy and Patricia."

THEY had reached the room, and the four of them sat down. Luce was near the door, Harper next to the window on the far side of him.

"What made you break away from Dokely?" asked Luce.

"I had a hunch."

"About what?"

"About the murderer."

"And you followed it up?"

"Bull's-eye! You've guessed it."

"What's the matter with you this morning, Harper? You seem to be evading."

"What's the matter with you, Luce? You seem curious."

"You've been curious since the beginning."

"Do you resent it?"

"See here, Harper. You're talking

in circles. If you don't want to tell me, say so. But if you're willing to tell, I want to know. Where were you last night?"

"I slept out in the fields."

"I thought you said you were investigating."

"So I was."

"Then how could you investigate and sleep in the fields at the same time?"

"Perhaps I read the answer in the stars," replied Harper carelessly, as he rose and stepped toward the open window.

"I'd keep away from the window," said Luce.

"Why?"

"Dokely has offered a reward for you, and if any one sees you at the window Dokely is likely to hear of it."

"I'll take the chance." Harper had turned his back to the others and was leaning out of the window.

"I said keep away from that window," said Luce.

There was a new tone to his voice, a hardness that made Patricia shiver.

"What difference to you?" called Harper over his shoulder.

"Suppose you're caught. It means I'm harboring a man wanted by the police."

"Aren't you used to that?"

"Harper!"

This time he turned around.

"Well?"

"Get away from that window."

Harper remained motionless.

"You're a bluff, Harper. You were in this house last night. You think I'm the criminal. Your mistake was in coming back."

There was a slight lift to Luce's eyes as he spoke, an air of mockery. But his mouth was drawn tight, and there was menace in his expression as well as his voice.

"I know you did it," answered Harper steadily. "I know you're Chester Merline. I wanted to talk to Witherby

before arresting you. I wanted to know his reasons for not acting. I didn't want to tell Patricia yet. I wanted to leave you one last loophole. That's why I came over now, instead of revealing you at once."

"It was an error"—there was a gleam of satisfaction in Luce's eyes—"a tactical error, and you've lost."

"I've won. What can you do but escape for a few days of haggard freedom before you're caught?"

"You don't realize your exact situation," said Luce dryly. "I have a gun with me." He half drew a small automatic from his pocket. "In this room and in every other room in the house is an alarm that connects with the secret chamber in the cellar. All I need do is touch a button and I'll have three men to help me.

"They've committed murder for me, and they'll commit more murders if I ask them to. The cellar is also designed as a prison. I'll put the three of you in it with enough food for two or three days. That will give me time for my get-away, which is arranged to every detail. I'll never be found.

"I'll send a letter in a few days, telling where you are. The letter will not be traceable. As for Mr. and Miss Witherby, they won't be missed until to-morrow."

He turned to the telephone on his desk and called the Table Top number.

"Hello, Rawley?" he said when there was an answer at the other end of the wire. "This is Mr. Luce speaking. Mr. and Miss Witherby are staying here for luncheon; then the three of us are going to town for dinner. They won't be back until some time to-morrow."

He replaced the receiver and turned back to Harper

"Do you still think you've won?"

"Yes," answered Harper, and his voice came calmer than he expected. "You've admitted the crime to me, and,

therefore, you must bolt. And when you bolt, you admit the crime to the whole world. I've won, I tell you."

"And Witherby?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I can disgrace Witherby, and Patricia with him. Then I disappear."

Harper made no reply. He could feel the trembling of Patricia and the tenseness of Witherby at the other side of the room, but his eyes never left Luce.

"On the other hand," continued Luce, "we may be able to make a bargain. There's a certain story that Witherby would not like to have made public. As long as no hand is raised against me, I promise no one will know. But the instant anything is done to apprehend me, the story comes out."

"Even if Witherby were willing, which I doubt," said Harper, "do you think I'd let you escape? You've betrayed every one and everything you've come in contact with. You've committed four murders, and added torture to each of them. Your mind must be growing weak, Luce, if you think I'd let you go."

"And Patricia? Have you thought of her?"

"Whatever Tom-Tom may have done," said Patricia, "he is responsible for to his God, not to his daughter."

There was a cloud passed over the eyes of Luce as he heard her words, but his voice was unchanged when he spoke.

"In that case," he said, "I think we'll have the story. Perhaps Witherby is willing to tell it now."

"I am," said Thomas Witherby, and his voice was the voice of a broken man. "What difference, now that it's over? I'm glad to tell it. I've kept it so long that it's a relief to unburden myself at last.

IT is over twenty years ago that it happened. There were seven of us, close friends all—we five directors, Chester Merline, and Peter Moore.

"Moore dropped out early. He didn't have what the rest of us had—an intense ambition, a feeling that the world owed us an opportunity to show what we were worth. Peter Moore was content to plug and plod all his life, living frugally and honestly, nothing more than that.

"But we others had dreams. We were all of the same age—just past twenty-one. To spend the best years of our lives working at a routine job for some one else, to be dependent on the good will or the whim—whichever it might chance to be—of some employer, some master—that went against the grain.

"We wanted power. We hungered for it. It was less the money than the desire to be our own masters, to mold and create instead of to slave. We talked of it constantly, it became our ruling passion.

"Chester Merline and John Richards were engaged to be married. They needed money more than the rest of us, but we all felt the same urge—youth and life crying out for an opportunity.

"And then the opportunity came. Charles Jacobs was a local curiosity. He was an inventor. Every week he had a new scheme. People laughed at him, but he was happy—working and thinking of his inventions all day long. We envied him his peace of mind. If we had only had some technical training into which we could throw all our energies for the sake of the work and the love of it—but we hadn't.

"We used to stop in and talk to him. We were the only ones he ever spoke to—Wendell particularly. To Wendell he told everything.

"One day when Wendell stopped in to see Jacobs, Jacobs told him he had struck it at last. He had a successful formula for the manufacture of a concrete, a fireproof material that would look like a wood floor. A big cement company had offered him a sum of

money for it. He was going to accept. He would accept at the end of the week.

"Wendell pleaded with him. Why not form a corporation instead? He could make much more money; he could give us a chance to show our ability. He had no need of the money, in a lump sum, that the cement company offered him.

"But Jacobs was obstinate and selfish. It was the first successful thing he had accomplished, and he was unwilling to trust its exploitation to a group of inexperienced men. Wendell spent half the night arguing with him. No result!

"Jacobs laughed in his face, pointed to his safe, and said: 'There lies my fortune. If nobody takes that by the end of the week, presto! I'm a wealthy man. No, sir, I can't trust it to a bunch of cubs like you, even for friendship's sake.'

"Merline was away on a visit at the time. He was trying to secure a job that would give him enough money to get married on. Wendell called the five of us together and put his proposition.

"Jacobs was happy and had no need of money anyhow. If the formula were stolen, he'd forget all about it in his next enthusiasm. We, on the other hand, needed it. The argument was convincing—true, too, for that matter. Why shouldn't one of us sacrifice everything for the sake of his friends? Steal the formula, rob the safe!

"With luck, he'd get away with it. Without luck, he'd go to jail—for the sake of his friends. It sounded romantic. It was romantic. We'd draw lots, and the loser would be the goat. We were all a bit scared, but we all voted for the idea.

THEN Burton spoke up. He said Merline wasn't there. He said Merline was worth the lot of us for loyalty and honesty. He, for one, wouldn't go through with it if he lost,

and he doubted if any of us would. At any rate, he wouldn't trust us, and the scheme was out of the question if he didn't go in on it, because he could then give us all away and send us to jail.

"But Merline, he said, was a different matter. Merline would go through with it. We were all revolted by the proposition, at first. But we saw the strength of his position. Burton could prevent us from accomplishing the scheme, and we were determined on it. The only alternative was on his terms.

"We'd been drinking a bit, of course. I'm not trying to excuse or justify, I'm only trying to make clear the motives. We were dishonest, we deserved all we got. At any rate, we did it. The plan was to tell Merline about it when he came back. Unless he'd landed a good job, he'd be willing.

"We were to draw lots—a six-to-one chance for all concerned—one man out of six. Five numbered pieces of paper, and one blank! The one who drew the blank would steal the formula. And now for the—thing.

"We each drew a number, with Merline away. Peter Wendell, No. 1; John Richards, No. 2; Burton, No. 3; Kinney, No. 4; myself, No. 5. That's the order in which we were branded later. We were to come to the drawing with those numbers on slips of paper in our pockets.

"Burton would pass out six blanks. The five of us would substitute our numbered slips for the blanks. Merline would be the only one to show a blank. 'The odds are six to one,' we told him. But he was framed!

"Chester Merline came back without a job. He was despondent. He fell in with the scheme. He robbed the safe. Jacobs caught him. He killed Jacobs in self-defense, and went to jail. But he got the formula and turned it over to us before he was caught. We held it for a year before using it, to avert suspicion.

"It was Nearing, the banker down at Brewton, who financed us. I talked him into it. While I was negotiating the business, I saw a lot of his daughter, Margaret. I fell in love with her and we were married. With her, I had almost forgotten my crime. I was happy. But at odd times, I remembered. I had stolen another man's money, another man's woman, another man's happiness.

"About ten years ago I was very sick. I was delirious for days, and I told the whole story to Margaret, who was nursing me. I never knew I had told. But it was more than she could stand. After that, it was just a matter of time before she died. Broken-hearted!

"But, before she died, she wrote a letter to her first sweetheart, Chester Merline. She told him everything. Merline told me that the other night—the night you came downstairs, Harper. You remember, it was the night you were knocked out."

"You can see for yourself," said Luce, addressing Harper, "what they deserved. I had been in prison for ten years before I found out. Thereafter, I thought of nothing but my revenge. I could see the four of them, wealthy, enjoying the fruits of their crime.

"It was my crime no longer. I could have shown the letter and had them prosecuted. But they were wealthy and might have been acquitted. Besides, I wanted to wreak my own revenge.

"I began to ponder how. From that moment, I did nothing but what would help me when the time came. The first requisite was a disguise. As Chester Merline I would be known and watched. As Robert Luce, I could work covertly and unsuspected. My motive would never be guessed.

I HAD ten years in which to perfect my scheme. I had been fat, but I grew thin. Prison diet does that naturally. "My hair was changing color. I thought different thoughts so

that my face would have a different expression.

"I developed my facial muscles so that I could change the shape and expression of my face. I even experimented on means of changing the color of my eyes. And, when I finally was released, I had a facial operation performed. You know how well my disguise worked.

"But, meantime, two other things happened. An old, miserly uncle of mine died intestate, and I was the only heir. I wonder what he would have thought if he had known the use his money was going to be put to!"

Luce laughed. For the first time before these people, he was throwing off his careful mask and showing the man who had plotted the deaths of his former friends.

"And then I started to pick among my jail mates those who would be best suited to my purposes. Itch Gruening, the little fellow, I picked for his blind loyalty that amounted almost to worship. Brute I chose for his superhuman strength, and Grease for his cleverness and intelligence. You've seen for yourselves how well I selected. I could always judge a man.

"And I judged Burton. I picked him as the one who, under promise of life, would help me. Burton gave me a character as an old friend he had met in Europe. He helped me whenever I needed help. And yet I kept him scared. I was using him for my own ends, and had no intention of letting him go free simply because I happened to find him useful.

"As soon as I came out of jail, I was met by appointment by the three men I had chosen. I then approached Burton, and bought and constructed my house in Rockville. The subterranean chamber I thought at first I might use as a prison to keep all five men in, but later I decided the risk would be too great.

"My first move, when I was free, was to send letters. I never signed them. The first was to the effect that I had full proofs as to what they had done, and on the day that any one tried to give me away for the second time, I would forward the proofs to the district attorney's office and to all the leading daily papers.

"With Witherby, I threatened to tell Patricia, besides—to tell her personally, and, if she didn't believe the papers, to show her her mother's letter. The other letters were biblical quotations. I sent them at intervals, frequent enough to keep my threat well in the front of their minds.

"The other night I decided to tell Witherby who I was. It was a worse punishment than death—to know his guilt, to know that I was near him all the time. But Witherby deserved the worst. It was Witherby who had stolen the girl I loved—who had married her."

Luce paused again. He glanced up at the clock for a moment before continuing.

"It's growing late, and I must put you down in your cellar soon. As cleverly as I planned my vengeance, just so clever is my get-away.

"There are some details, Harper, that may interest you. You were getting in my way. I left the branding iron in your room, I hired the decoy, Le Brun, I impersonated Kinney the night of his murder and caused Dokely to arrest you.

"Once, you came close. It was when you wanted to send a telegram to the prison, inquiring about Chester Merline. But I tricked you, just as I've tricked you now.

"You remember I went into another room to fetch the telegram forms? I wrote two telegrams of the same number of words. One was to a hotel in Ossining, asking for room reservations. The other I showed you. When Benenson and I were in the office sending

it, I remarked that the clock was twenty minutes slow. Both Benenson and the operator turned to look at it, and I changed the telegrams. The harmless one was sent.

"Then I phoned to a friend in Ossining and asked him to send the telegram to Benenson, and told him what to say. Last night you thought you tricked me again, but to-day the tables are turned. Now tell me how you found out."

FROM the table next to him, Harper had picked up a book and it lay in his lap. It was a one-volume edition of Shakespeare. "I knew it was Merline early last night," he said. "I remembered the words that were spoken in Richards' room the night he was killed—'Merline ought to be satisfied with *this job.*' I had suspected it before—witness the telegram—but I was fooled by the answer that was sent from the prison.

"There were many things passing through my mind those last few minutes at Burton's, before Dokely tried to arrest me. I needed time to collect my thoughts. It was for that, rather than anything else, that I resisted and broke away. I thought for a moment it was Burton, for a moment it was Luce—even you flitted through my mind, Mr. Witherby.

"Before I entered Burton's house I had picked up a watch, put it in my pocket, and forgotten about it. When I escaped, I found I was holding it in my hand, with the back open. There was a picture in it. It was a picture of Margaret Nearing, and there was an inscription on it—'To Chester from Margaret.'

"I recognized the picture as Mrs. Witherby. I'd seen it on the desk. I knew her name was Margaret, but I never suspected it was Margaret Nearing. I looked at the initials on the watch—RL—Robert Luce.

"Then I knew. I understood your fondness for Patricia, the daughter of the woman you had loved. I simply went to your house to try to get evidence. I would need it when I confronted Dokely."

Harper stopped speaking. He was still sitting near the window, though far enough away from it so that he could not be seen from outside. Automatically, without glancing at the pages, he was fingering the book in his lap. Then his gaze wandered outside. Suddenly he seemed to see something. He leaned forward and started, then quickly sat back to conceal the move.

But Luce had noticed. "What's that?" he cried.

"Nothing," returned Harper. There was a slight tremor in his voice.

"You saw something through the window."

"I saw nothing."

"Harper," said Luce coolly, "you're going to tell me what you saw. If you don't, I'll shoot you down like a dog. You're the one who's been in my way the whole time. If it hadn't been for you, I'd never have been suspected, and I might have had Patricia besides. If you don't tell me what you saw, I'm going to shoot."

He had taken his gun from his pocket and pointed it at Harper.

"I saw Dokely," answered Harper slowly. "He just walked up the pathway, then dodged behind a tree."

"What would he be doing here?" Luce demanded.

"Perhaps some one saw me in the fields near here this morning, and reported it."

"Show me where you saw him." Luce rose and stepped to the window. He did not take his eyes from Harper.

"There," said Harper, pointing to one of the trees.

"Harper, I'm going to look. I'm going to take my eyes off you. But my gun is pointed at you, and if you so

much as move for any reason, or touch me, I'll shoot. If you're trying to trick me, you'll pay for it."

Then Luce turned his eyes to look. "I see nothing," he said coldly.

"He's behind the tree, I told you. You'll be able to see his shadow when he moves."

Luce was still gazing at the tree. His right hand held the gun pointed at Harper, who stood at his left. In Harper's left hand was the heavy book. Slowly he raised it until it was in front of the muzzle of the automatic. His right hand, still pointing, was extended.

And then Harper went into action. The book was thrust suddenly at the revolver, both acting as a buffer for the bullet and jolting the gun out of Luce's hand; the right arm, outstretched, swung and caught him full in the neck. The gun clattered to the floor a second after the deafening report.

Luce went staggering back, and Harper, with the impetus of his two blows, charged him while he was still off balance.

It was over in a few seconds. Physically, Luce was no match, and Harper, bowling him over, held his two hands pinioned on the floor while he pressed with the full weight of his knee on Luce's stomach.

"Call Benenson," cried Harper, "and tell him to come at once with some men." Then, turning to the man he was holding, he said, "I had one more trick than you did, after all. There was nothing behind the tree."

WHEN Benenson arrived, Luce was trussed in a chair upstairs, while Harper stood guard over him with his gun. Luce was handcuffed and turned over to the Rockville chief.

Harper explained the location and layout of the cellar in which Luce's hirelings presumably still were. Under Harper's direction, Benenson and his men stationed themselves so that they had their guns trained on any one who might try to shoot his way out through the single exit from the chamber.

Harper located without difficulty the button that operated the sliding panel. Directly inside the anteroom he saw a small knob. He turned it and heard the dull rumble that told him the machinery to open the heavy doors was in motion.

Benenson had no trouble. The three thugs and Mollie realized the trap in which they were caught, and, obeying instructions, they mounted the stairs to the house level, one at a time, holding their hands high over their heads.

A few minutes later, Harper and Patricia Witherby stood in the study on the second floor, and through the open window, watched Benenson remove his five handcuffed captives.

"Poor Tom-Tom," Patricia murmured slowly.

Donald Harper looked down into her eyes. They were wet, and looked up, close to him. So close, in fact, that he could, if he bent down slightly, kiss away the tears.

Which he proceeded to do.

THE END.

Beginning in our next issue

THE FROZEN PIRATE

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MICHAEL I. PUPIN, Scientist.

SOME fifty-five years ago, Michael I. Pupin was a peasant lad on the banks of the Danube in Hungary. To help pay his way at a country school, he herded cattle. He learned of America, and dreamed of it as the land of opportunity.

He ran away from home to come here and after hardships finally arrived. He fought his way. He learned English with the help of a little girl and by reading signboards.

He yearned for an education more than anything else. He went to Columbia University. He was an honor student. Winning scholarships, he studied engineering here and abroad. He became an inventor and his devices and discoveries revolutionized telegraphy and telephony.

To-day Pupin is a millionaire and a college professor, one of the very few who has wealth who prefers to be known as a teacher.

Pupin's life is inspiring to every ambitious young man. His career shows what can be done against great odds. He won success in a strange land, with a strange language and strange customs. America offered him what he could not have in his own country, opportunity. He made the most of it.

He won out because he fought. He came of a race of fighters. His forefathers were transplanted from Austria to Hungary to be soldiers against the

Turks. They were given land for military service. He grew up in a warlike atmosphere. He merely transferred his fighting spirit from the battlefields to business.

Pupin was born in 1858 in the town of Idvor, province of Banat, then in Hungary, now in Jugo-Slavia. He came of peasant people. In his younger years he was taught by his mother. Then the boy persuaded his father to let him go to school in a town fifteen miles away.

From this school he brought home the story of Benjamin Franklin and his kite. It was his first knowledge of America. He told his family of how Franklin had drawn lightning from the clouds by flying a kite in a storm.

Pupin's father was enraged. He believed the story opposed the teaching of the Bible. He forbade his son to return to the school. But the mother interceded and saved the boy's chance for an education.

To earn some of the money needed to send him to school, Pupin watched cattle at night to guard them against thieves. He loved to lie on his back in the fields and watch the stars and listen to the resonance of bells in the night air. While doing this, his watch on his cattle was not the keenest, so he devised a way to keep aware of where they were.

He thrust a lance into the earth and, lying down with his ear beside the metal

point, he was able to tell by the vibrations whether his charges were moving quietly or were being driven away. Many years later he recalled this use of the vibration theory and it aided him in the electrical experiments which were to make him famous.

But Pupin grew dissatisfied. He wanted more than could be found in his native hills. He thought of the land of Franklin and determined to go there. Of this period, he said:

"At fifteen I saw a poster advertising some steamship company's trips to America. My mind was made up. I saw that opportunity lay, not in the hills, where idle speculation as to the light of the stars and the resonance of church bells taught me no more than the superstitious neighbors could tell of these phenomena, but in America where one could read and work and study."

HIS father opposed him, but he had the encouragement of his mother. He sold his watch, his cap, and almost all of his possessions to get funds for the trip. In 1874 he sailed without enough money to buy a mattress for his bunk in the steerage of the *Westphalia*.

He landed at the Battery in New York City, as he said, with a piece of apple pie in his hand and five cents in his pocket. Then began his hard struggle from menial tasks to a professorship at Columbia.

He must have been a strange figure in his native costume, although New York was accustomed to the weird dress of immigrants. His red fez was jeered by bootblacks. Pupin fought his first fight in America, and won.

"It is strange," he said years later, "how the turning points in my career have been made by fighting."

One of the results of this fight was that a bystander offered him a job. Pupin turned it down because it did not include a youth with whom he had become acquainted on shipboard. But

later that day they both got jobs with a farmer of Delaware City, Maryland.

There Pupin worked as a farm hand, drove mules, and had other odd jobs.

"This was one of the most valuable experiences of my life," Pupin said. "I worked later in a boiler room. Most people would think these jobs widely divergent, but they are very similar. Those experiences taught me to take off my hat to the mechanical engineer who subdues the rebellious temper of steam, and the American farmer who taught the world how to soften the virulent temper of the mule."

It was here that he got his first instruction in the English language. The small daughter of the farm foreman helped him to get a start and he kept adding to his knowledge by reading signboards at every chance.

When he decided he had enough mastery of English for him to make his way, he started back to New York, where he believed the greatest opportunity lay. He worked his way on farms in Delaware and New Jersey.

Back in the city, he had jobs at various times in a cracker factory and in an iron foundry. It is said, also, that he worked in a Turkish bath for some years, where he met well-to-do persons who took an interest in the education of the young foreigner.

During this time, he studied at Cooper Union, the haven of many a young immigrant who later won his way to the top in the land of opportunity. He got, in some way, a scholarship at Adelphi Academy, where he made an excellent record.

Five years after he landed at the Battery with five cents in his pocket, Pupin entered Columbia University with three hundred and eleven dollars which he had saved to go to college. Almost at once he made his personality and his ability felt. He continued to work at odd jobs to help pay his expenses.

In his first year he won a prize for

proficiency in Greek and another in mathematics. In his second year he somehow was drawn into athletics and he won a wrestling championship. After that he taught wrestling as well as tutored other students in Greek and mathematics to make money.

Pupin was graduated at the head of his class in 1883. His scholarship had won recognition and he was able to study science at Cambridge in England and later in Berlin, where he got his degree of doctor of philosophy.

It must have been a temptation when he was abroad as a young man to return to his native country, for Pupin never lost his love for his own people or for their traditions and aspirations. But 1889 found him back at Columbia, with the position of assistant in electrical engineering. He helped to organize the university's engineering department, and in 1892 was made adjunct professor of mechanics. In 1901 he was made professor of electromechanics and, after twenty-eight years, he still holds that place.

DURING these years Pupin experimented with electrical resonance and electrical currents in rarified gases, which resulted in the invention of electrical timing devices. These were his first inventions, and in 1902 he sold the patents to the Marconi Co., a deal which paid him well then and still brings him large royalties.

When Pupin first arrived in this country, there was a maze of electrical wires overhead, as there was in every other city in this country or elsewhere. No one had found out how to transmit electricity successfully underground. Pupin made a study of electrical transmission which resulted in his best known invention, the "Pupin coil."

This is the device now used everywhere in telegraphy and telephony and made possible the placing of wires underground. A by-product of it is the

beautifying of every large city, not to speak of the greater safety to life from underground wires.

The principle of the famous coil was simple. Its purpose was to avoid the loss of electrical power over long distances and, placed at intervals along a long-distance power line, it kept the strength of the electricity high enough to permit the sending of messages or to carry the voice. The device made possible the first telephone line from New York to San Francisco.

Another contribution to science that Pupin made was in connection with the X ray. At this time it was little more than a toy, whose practical application was not dreamed of. But Pupin recognized its possibilities. He took an X-ray picture of a man who had one hundred small shot in his brain. With the aid of the picture the shot were successfully removed and Pupin had demonstrated the use of the X ray in practical surgery.

To tell of the honors that have come to Pupin because of his work would require calling the roll of most of the scientific societies in the United States. He had been president of the Radio Institute of America, of the New York Academy of Sciences, of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers and of the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences. When he was made president of the last named, he said:

"This is a higher honor than I ever expected to attain. What will Idvor, my native village, say when it hears that I am president of the largest scientific association in the greatest country in the world?"

He said afterward that the attitude of the villagers would be that America could not be such a great country if a man who was once a child in little Idvor could become president of America's greatest scientific society.

Pupin said the hardest thing he had

had to bear in his life was the death of his wife.

"Nothing has been hard about the rest," he declared. "It has all been play. The greatest reward a man can have for efforts in any field is the satisfaction of knowing that his work has been of use to his fellowmen."

He explains also why he prefers to be known as a teacher rather than as a millionaire. His belief is that the future of this country depends on science and that youth should be trained in it.

"It is toward those growing up in the colleges," he said, "that we must look for the accomplishments of the future. What happens in the next ten years depends upon these young men who are now receiving their training in science laboratories all over the country. The great need of the United States is thorough training and research in the fundamental sciences."

IT will be noticed that the main idea of most of the men whose careers are reviewed in this department has been of service, in one form or another, to other people. They have kept their eyes, not on the material rewards for themselves, but on doing the work that would give the other fellow a better chance, more comfort or more enjoyment in life.

That is a good thing for you to remember. Take care of your job to the best of your ability and the money and promotion will come along as a natural result. If you are in business for yourself, make the best possible service to your customers your main idea and your business is bound to increase.

If you work for somebody else, good work will bring its reward in more pay as well as in a clear conscience that you are earning your money by giving the best you've got.

This idea was what Pupin had. But in addition he had courage, the ability

to work hard and the determination to get somewhere in the world. It required courage to leave his homeland to take his chances in a strange country. But he saw opportunity there and he was not satisfied to let it pass.

It often is the man faced with the greatest difficulties who makes the most of his life and gets farthest. There's a reason for that. He learns to fight against misfortune and hard luck. He keeps in training to make the most of every opportunity. He's always on the alert for every chance and more than that, knows how to make the most advantage of it.

If you have reached a fairly easy place in life, don't stop and rest. Keep on. There's more to be done, even if only for the satisfaction you will get from doing it. The idle man is usually the most unhappy.

Now Pupin's way was a lot harder because he had to go it alone. When he was working to learn English and make a start so that he could go to college, there were few to encourage him. He had to fight it out. That kind of thing makes some men bitter.

If you are not in that situation and feel that a word of advice will do you good and encourage you, write me a letter telling me about your problem. Maybe some disinterested advice will give you the push you need to start you on the way up again. If you don't want your letter published, if it is of general interest, say so. Address all inquiries to John Hampton, care of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: I am coming to you for advice, and hope you will answer. I am greatly interested in aviation and am ambitious to become a pilot. I go out to a flying field every Sunday. I have flown several times and have studied all I could about planes, getting information from libraries and other sources.

I never get tired of learning all I can, and often sit up late at night studying the latest

technical books on aviation. I have tried all the concerns and aviation companies that I know of and cannot get a job. I am told that only trained help is wanted in the aviation industry. I would like to get with some one and learn aviation from the ground up. I would be willing to take the smallest job and try to work my way to the top.

Do you think that I can succeed in this profession? Could you offer any suggestions? I am eighteen years old.

There are a number of schools here which teach technical work and flying. These courses cost plenty of money and I cannot afford them.

I have written a short story on Western life, which I am going to try to sell. Do I have to have it copyrighted before I send it to a publisher? I have a little talent in the writing line and hope to earn enough to pay my way through an aviation course. E. K.

AN aviation course would be the best way for you to get a start, but if you cannot afford it, don't be discouraged. You are young, and can afford to prepare yourself more slowly for the work you like.

I judge from your letter that your knowledge of aviation is entirely theoretical. You must have practical knowledge as well. Have you an aptitude for mechanics? A knowledge of engines would help you greatly. What of a job in a garage to break you in? What kind of a job did you ask for when you saw the people at the flying fields and aviation factories? Don't expect to start at the top or in the middle. You can command at the start only the least responsible jobs. You must work up from the bottom. It will be of benefit to you later on.

A start must be made somewhere to give you a training in mechanics. Try a garage, as I suggested, or an automobile or airplane motor factory. In the meantime keep your eyes open for jobs at the flying fields and airplane plants.

No doubt your idea of what you would like to do is pretty high up. But take anything you can get to start with

that will give you a chance to learn. Then when you have enough practical knowledge of motors and planes you will be able to sell your ability.

No, you don't have to copyright your stories. The magazine you sell them to does that. Good luck with them.

DEAR MR. HAMPTON: Perhaps you can help me. I am twenty-one years old. I have a grammar-school education, quitting school to go to work at the age sixteen. I have been employed at several different jobs. First, as a concrete-building block maker, machine-shop guard, then as a truck driver, and finally ended up with driving a taxi for two years.

This last position I like best of all, as I particularly am fond of driving most any sort of automobile. This has been a small ambition with me, but was unable to make a paying proposition of it.

I have been looking for quite a while for that which would best suit me. So far I have been unable to find it. L. T.

LET me say first that you alone can judge your abilities accurately and make the proper decision. Don't take mere liking for a particular field as meaning that your abilities lie in that direction. Make your ambitions fit your capabilities.

In my opinion, aviation and electricity offer the best fields for young men with mechanical ability. From the fact that you have driven a taxi I take it that you have some knowledge of engines and motors in general. That would be a good basis for a start. But you would have to develop a pretty wide knowledge for it to be of any use to you.

If you have enough liking for it and a willingness to learn, I believe aviation, either in the mechanical end or in piloting, offers a good future. It is somewhat dangerous, of course, but adventurous as well. There are many flying fields and plane factories in New Jersey. You probably would have to start at the bottom.

The same is true of the electrical

field. This work probably requires more technical knowledge at the start but there is no reason why you cannot learn rapidly to be a first-class electrician, either in general work or in industrial plants of any kind. The pay, I believe is good in both fields.

There are two ideas. Think them over; try them out if they appeal to you.

E. E. A.—I feel that I should not recommend any particular school in the line you are interested in, since I know little of what they have to offer or seek to accomplish. My suggestion, however, if you are sure you want to go into this line, is to watch the advertisements in the magazines. Write to one of the schools for information as to what they teach and what they will do for you in the way of getting you a job.

Find out all possible details before you make up your mind. When you get the information consider the proposition carefully, and if you feel it offers you the opportunity you want, take advantage of it.

Dear Mr. Hampton: I will be frank with you in stating my problem. I believe I have what the scientists call the inferiority complex, or timidity.

I am a graduate of a high school, have never attended college. I have held a good many jobs, all of which were unskilled labor. I applied for a position with a mercantile and grocery establishment in the town where I lived but was told that I did not have enough experience, so I have never got a position. I have been offered positions with companies as a house-to-house salesman but do not like that kind of work.

I have applied for positions with several companies. My name has been placed on file and I have not heard from them since. It has been about two years. Would you advise me to write

them again? What do you think of a person taking a correspondence course? —A. A. R.

Lack of self-confidence is not unusual. Don't let that discourage you. It can be overcome if you are willing to take the trouble. If you read TOP-NOTCH regularly, read what I have to say in a later number about courage. It will help you. Your problem requires courage. Face it.

Basing my opinion on what you have told me, my advice to you is to take the job as a salesman that has been offered to you. You may not like it. But it is a job. By doing it you will be training your character to do the things you don't like to do. A man without a job is in a bad position. He has to take what is offered, not what he wants. A job is something to build on. It leads to better things. Save your money and make yourself independent enough to go into the field you like later.

You seem at sea as to what you really want to do. You apparently know what you don't want. Make up your mind. Think in a positive way. Be forceful. As a salesman you will widen your acquaintance. Eventually you will run across the opportunity to better yourself.

You are handicapped by being unskilled. Many men are in that position, and there are not enough good jobs to go around. Learn to do one job well, and there will be plenty of openings for you.

No, I should not advise you to write again to the companies from which you have not heard for two years. It is evident that they have nothing for you.

Many correspondence courses are worthwhile. I cannot advise you further unless I know what you want to learn.

Above all, do something. Go after a job; don't wait for it to come to you.

A Talk With You

News and Views by the
Editors and Readers

FEBRUARY 15, 1930

IN this department in the preceding issue of TOP-NOTCH, we promised to give a good bit of the space to letters that we receive from readers. We did this because we thought it was the privilege of readers to be heard from, and because we thought these letters would interest the other readers of the magazine.

Many letters have come in about the new Frank Merriwell stories. The large majority have been quite favorable. A few have been unfavorable. Here's one from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The writer is an old reader of TOP-NOTCH and the Merriwell stories.

EDITORS OF TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I am compelled to write you, expressing appreciation of the Merriwell stories now appearing in TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE. I am one of the old followers of the Merriwells. Those famous *Tip-top* stories of years ago won't ever be forgotten, and, strange to say, though sixteen years have gone by and war experiences passed over our heads, Standish has the same power to hold his readers' interest in his characters as in years gone by. Although I may be considered somewhat old-fashioned, those college stories of clean American youth, faced by stirring experiences, with a touch of romance sprinkled here and there, with creations such as Captain Wiley, Joe Crowfoot, Dale Sparkfair, endear the readers to the author until one can picture them as real life, without too much underworld stuff, as we can read that in everyday newspaper stories. I hope you can some time take us back to some of our former characters, connect us up with old Frank and Dick of other days. Even

now I can hardly wait for your stories to appear. Here's to your every success.

Very truly yours,
W. F. TULLY,
A Merriwell follower.

The following letter is from Bywood, Pennsylvania, and from a new reader of the magazine. It's always interesting to hear from new readers.

EDITORS OF TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I notice in "A Talk With You" that you would like more letters coming in from readers on the stories in TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE, so I have complied with this request.

Although I am a new reader of your magazine, I have found out that the first two or three issues were enough to convince me that from now on I am a *steady reader* of your magazine.

Regarding the new Frank Merriwell novels, they certainly are great! Keep publishing these excellent fiction treats. I found after reading a few of them in TOP-NOTCH that Burt L. Standish's stories are an excellent quality of fiction.

Your novelettes also live up to TOP-NOTCH quality. Among those I especially enjoyed were: "Wagon of Death," by W. Hoagland; "The Headless Monarch," by F. N. Litten; and "Man-size, Plus," by Forbes Parkhill.

The short stories certainly do lead in variety, and I have enjoyed every one.

Up to the latest issue my favorite authors are: Burt L. Standish, Sydney Horler, Erle Stanley Gardner—how about a Speed Dash story soon?—Reg Dinsmore, and Gregor Ziemer—"Tropic Wheels" was great.

I have only one objection—why not print a war or air-war story now and then? A steady reader.

WILLARD R. PRIDE.

Opinions differ, as do the writers of the two following letters.

Which do you think is right? The first is from Springfield, Missouri; the second from Chicago.

EDITORS OF TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: You have asked for "frank" opinions from your readers on the Merriwell stories now appearing in TOP-NOTCH,

though I doubt if that is what you really want. Usually, I have found, when one asks for a frank opinion, he merely wishes some one to corroborate his own conclusions.

Being only thirty-one, I could hardly be classed as an old-timer, though I read several dozens of the Dick and Frank Merriwell stories as a small boy, between the ages of nine and twelve. For that age, and if the calendar could be turned back twenty years or more, they still might be considered good reading.

It's too much like meeting an empty-headed, but pretty, childhood sweetheart, after she has grown to maturity, still empty-headed but lacking her girlish charm.

Standish's characters do not converse, but seem to stand off and make well-prepared, flowery speeches at each other, as in a free-for-all and extremely polite debating society. The dialogue, to me, seems stilted and unnatural; too much like trying to amuse a crowd of modern youngsters with the staid and precise dance steps of our forefathers.

I should like to see more short stories and fewer novelettes in TOP-NOTCH.

Sincerely,
P. A. LA RUE.

EDITORS OF TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Just a few lines to thank you for bringing back to me one of the finest and most interesting authors I have ever read, Burt L. Standish.

I have been a reader of Standish for over twenty years, and don't believe I have ever missed one of his famous Merriwell books. In Frank and Dick Merriwell, Mr. Standish has created one, or rather two, of the finest ideals of American youth this country has ever known. I am a father of two children, and one of the prescribed readings I mete out to my boy is the Merriwell series.

I derive just as much pleasure now as I did twenty years ago from the writings of these wholesome books.

Please convey my best wishes for continued success and a long life to Mr. Standish, and thank him heartily for the many, many hours of pure enjoyment he has given me. I also recommend his works as the greatest moral study a young man could have. Nothing I could write in mere words could fittingly describe the respect and gratefulness I have for Mr. Standish. Hoping he continues his good work for TOP-NOTCH, and thanking you as the medium of returning his writings to me, I am,

Gratefully yours,
EDW. J. HARDING.

You'll notice that these writers not only express their opinions, but give their reasons for these opinions. It is these reasons, we think, that primarily make the letters of interest to other readers of the magazine.

In the Next Issue of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

On the news stands March 1st

A new serial, beginning in this issue

THE FROZEN PIRATE

By HOWARD E. MORGAN

This remarkably vivid story is about a special government agent and free fur traders in the Far North. It abounds in outdoor action and tense encounters. Don't fail to read Part I.

DEATH ZONE

By LESTER DENT

An engrossing full-length novel of the Saragossa Sea—that place of mystery.

FRANK MERRIWELL KEEPS HIS VOW By Burt L. Standish

The second part of another splendid Merriwell novel.

TO MAKE A CHAMP

By Vic Whitman

An unusual story of the prize ring.

ON THE WINGS OF THE STORM By Samuel Taylor Moore

A yarn of balloon racing, which is packed with excitement.

Other good stories by other good authors

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Read what others have done with my amazing new proposition. H. C. Hanson, of North Dakota, left a drug-clerk's job and reported earnings of \$75 in one week's spare time. H. H. Brown, former army man of New York, made \$30 in a 7-hour day. Mrs. Eva Mc-Cutchen, of Oklahoma, quit a \$10-a-week office job and cleared \$26.55 the very first day. These earnings prove the remarkable possibilities of my plan.

AND A WONDERFUL CHANCE TO MAKE

\$15 a Day Besides!

Yes, right now, I'll give you groceries at rock-bottom, wholesale prices and a wonderful chance to pocket \$10 to \$15 cash profits in a day. L. C. Van Allen, of Illinois, reports profits as high as \$125 in a single week. Gustav Karnath, a farm laborer in Minnesota, says, "Made \$20.35 the first 5 hours." Mrs. B. L. Hodges, of New York, writes, "Never before have I made such money. Never fail to make a profit of from \$18 to \$20 a day." Of course some of my people make more than others. But these earnings of a few of my representatives show the wonderful opportunities that are waiting for you. And right now I offer you an *even greater* proposition than I gave these people.

Household Supplies at *savings of nearly one-half!* Thus you have a wonderful chance to *make big money* and also *save big money*.

No Capital—No Experience Needed

You positively don't need capital or experience. It makes no difference where you live. No course of training is required. All you do is call on your friends, neighbors and my established customers in your territory and take care of their orders. I never sell through stores. *You alone get the profit on all orders from these customers.* Keep your present job and start with me in spare time if you want to. Oscar Stuart, of West Virginia, reports \$18 profit in 2½ hours' spare time. Mrs. K. R. Roof, of S. Carolina, with household duties and children to care for, earned \$50 the first week in her spare time. This shows the tremendous possibilities.

Big Profits for Pleasant Work

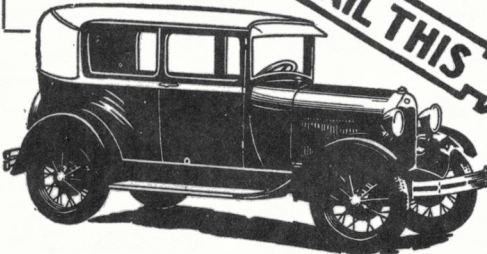
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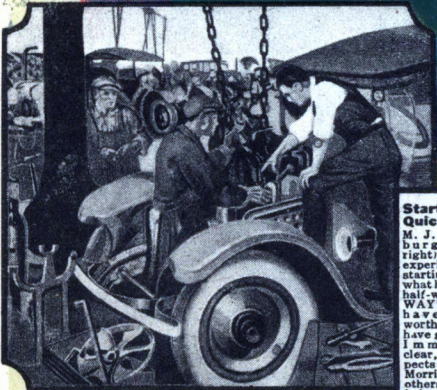
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Ten agreements in my big free Auto book. No. 1 is "I will refund every cent of your money if after receiving my training you are not absolutely satisfied." This and nine other wonderful agreements make my "JOB-WAY" course the training for you! Be sure to get my book and read all ten agreements.

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