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Volume 21  Contents for JANUARY, 1922  Number 1

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"PORTLAND (ORE.) Telegram" "MEMPHIS Press"
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"A sharp sentence came from Stanhope in Arabic. His eyes blazed with a cold menace."
(See page 9)
BENSON lit a cigarette and then turned to Williams. "What is it?" he asked.

"What?" answered Williams irritably. "What is—what?"

Benson jerked his head to indicate a tall figure in uniform at the other end of the moon flooded, lantern lit verandah.

"His damned indifference," he explained.

"Who, Stanhope? Hadn’t noticed it."

"Yes, you have—everybody has," continued Benson. "He’s politely bored. Looks at women with glassy eyes. I wonder if it was something at home."

"I don’t know. . . . I don’t think so."

"Ah!" said Benson. He could say it well.

"When a man acts like Stanhope, it’s always something. Cherchez la femme, I suppose."

"Stuff!" retorted Williams. "Man’s been in the interior for years, alone. Of course he finds it difficult to adjust himself all at once."

"Alone?" repeated Benson, meaningly. Williams laughed.

"According to reports on file he was alone—no other whites."

"Ah!" said Benson again, in his inimitable way. "Ah! You don’t imagine he’s color-blind, do you? There was a rumor. You know, about a little Arab girl of wonderous beauty."

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing! I was just wondering. Those silent fellows always are deep. He reminds me of a wounded lion in tall grass—silent, but instantly ready to pounce down on one."

"Fine fellow," Williams said.

"Splendid!" agreed Benson. "I like him. I mean to know him better."

The night was warm. An immense, theatrical moon hung over the scene like an awesome portent, fierce yet serene, the
luminary of a barbaric world. From the brilliantly illuminated house came the pleasant sounds of music and women's laughter, as the dancers moved rhythmically. Here and there couples and small groups occupied chairs or the railing on the spacious verandah. Only the man in the far corner was alone, his tall figure listlessly leaning against a post, his cigarette burning idly while he stared with reminiscent, unseeing eyes into the tropic night. A third, in civilian dinner garb, joined Benson and Williams and sat down.

"Wonderful night," he observed pleasantly. "The tropics are always fascinating. There's a strange, warm thrill in the air—do you feel it? If I were twenty years younger, I'd go looking for a girl and try spooning under that preposterously immense moon."

"Alas!" signed Benson, with mock gravity, shaking his head, "the youth of today don't need a moon. They prefer to do their hugging while dancing those absurd American dances. It seems to me that both the music and the dancing could be done away with—the hugging's the thing! Yet, there's Stanhope over in the corner. I don't think he's quite reached thirty, so he's young, handsome, single, and mooning over there in loneliness cussedness.

"You know him, don't you, Latimer? Well, what makes him so icy? He gives me the impression of being a volcano. When he was introduced to that American girl, he smiled like a Chinese joss—you know, a smile came to his lips, but his eyes remained fixed. The girl shivered—I saw it! He hates women... but why?"

Latimer turned his amused eyes to glance briefly at the quiescent figure in the far corner, then shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Cawn't say, really," he offered, with his noticeable accent. "Decent enough chap—rawther well thought of at the Home Office. I once heard that he was the victim of some flirt back home. I don't recall who she was, but as I heard the story it seems that she was married to a bounder, and took it out upon the world. Led Stanhope on until he found out she was married. Broke him up and he came here—at least that's what one hears, but you can't put any faith in it, you know. Queer business."

He reached for the bottle, poured himself some foaming carbonic and thrust his tawny mustache into its effervescent coolness.

"Hot country, this," he went on, refreshed. "I shall be glad to get back to England. The tropics are fine, but not as a permanent diet."

"When do you go?" asked Benson, enviously.

"In a week."

ALLEN STANHOPE, the subject of the conversation, looked out upon the still African night like a man numbed and stupefied by intense cold. For some time he had been insensible to everything except the innumerable memories that thronged upon him and the dull aching that filled his heart. His veins seemed stagnant, as imagination allowed pictures to drift through his mind, half dulled, half sharpened by the keen pain that they revived.

It was the first time in three years that he had heard music or the sound of a white woman's laughter. His thoughts became sharp and poignant with bittersweet scenes of other days. He thought of the woman whose heartless coquetry had nearly been fatal for him. He remembered how she had led him on and on: had let him kiss her, and then had told him that she was married. Something within him had crashed softly, and he had rushed out of her sight. It had sent him blindly away from home. He wanted to be far away from her. He had found a berth in the East African service, and for seven years had been in the interior.

And tonight, by some unkind fortune, a wanton whim of a capricious fate, he
had come face to face with her again. The shock had laid a hard finger upon heart and pulse for one blinding, bitter moment. He saw her go as white as death; then he had bowed and passed on, a devil's tattoo beating in his heart; a cynical, sardonic smile on his lips.

"Kismet!" he told himself with some of his acquired fatalism. . . .

What was she doing here?

He heard later. Some one was pointing her out for the fresh, blond beauty of her.

"There's General Claxton's daughter," the man had said. "That superb little blond. Her name is Throckmorton. Married the younger Throckmorton of Sussex. He died last year and she came here to live with her father. Wonderful type, isn't she? She looks as if she's fresh from London! Better watch that complexion of her's here, lest the sun burn her up. She's holding quite a court, isn't she? . . . Yes, all the men here are wild over her—could have her pick of any of us—in or out of the service! Have you met her? . . . Come over, and I'll present you. . . ."

"So—she was General Claxton's daughter!" he reflected.

It displeased him. General Claxton was his superior officer, and he would have to have more or less business with him. It was annoying. But he knew, now, after seeing her again, despite her beauty, that she held no further fascination for him.

Still, tonight, with the old familiar sights of civilization about him again, long forgotten happenings persisted in resurrection. He shook himself. It had all been submerged until tonight, when the sight of Alice, the sounds of music, the white women with gleaming, bare shoulders, lustrous with silk, fragrant with perfume, brilliant with jewels—alluring, human, silken toys, recalled it all.

Calm introspection told him that the wound she had once given him had healed.

Only a scar remained.

SEVEN empty, bitter years on the borders of the Lado! No, it had not all been bitter and empty—there was Nadia, who had been with him two of those years. She was dead. An overwhelming longing filled his heart at the thought of her. Why hadn't she been spared to him, the little golden Arab girl?

But then, unpleasant retrospection is profitless and pointless.

"Pshaw!" he told himself abruptly. "I must stop this, or I shall end up by thinking myself very badly treated, a martyr—the last consolation and refuge of masculine vanity and impotent egotism! She concerns me no further, so I'll put her out of my mind. If I have to meet her, I shall be friendly—as if nothing had happened. That will probably hurt her more than if I confessed to a hurt."

Gradually the vividness of his anger dimmed and left him calmer.

"Why bother about her at all?" he thought. "She isn't worth the effort."

The passion he had once had for her was dead. The thought or the sight of her left him cold and unmoved, save for this one hour of savage mental chaos. Yes, it was dead—buried in the charnal house of disgust. He smiled cynically. Strange that her face, once so familiar, once so well loved, should now cause him to turn away with nauseous repugnance.

He threw away his cigarette, shouldered his coat to a firmer fit and made his way to the three men who were sitting at the little wicker table.

They hailed him and invited him to join them. The talk turned, as usual in East Africa, to guns and game. Stanhope's opinion was asked on the king of sports.

"I prefer an Enfield .303," he said, "above the heavy express for lions. It gives you more shots and is quite powerful enough for any of the soft-skinned game."

"Perhaps for you," laughed Latimer, "but I prefer the .577 express. When you hit anything, it stays hit! I'm not
a good enough shot to play with a pop-gun. I want certainty."

Absorbed in their topic, the men talked on until the music stopped again, and the dancers thronged out to the comparative coolness of the verandah. Others joined them, and Stanhope turned to face the curious, direct look in the eyes of Avic Talmage. He smiled and rose.

Another pair of bright eyes had been furtively watching him from the other side of the broad verandah. Alice Throckmorton wanted very much an opportunity to talk to him alone for a few minutes.

His sudden appearance had given her as great a shock as it had him. With her, however, the dead ashes of a dim memory began to stir and glow, and desire fanned them into living embers. It needed but a word from him to start a conflagration. For, in her heart of hearts, the world-worn coquette had always loved him, and always would. A shadow of disappointment crossed her face as she saw him join the vivid American girl.

There was a flicker of cynical amusement in Stanhope's eyes. He told himself—and believed—that he hated and distrusted all white women. He had had many samples of their veracity and honor. He had been presented to the American girl, Avis Talmage, that afternoon, and, aside from the fact that she was an American and compellingly attractive, he had paid no further heed to her. He looked upon all beautiful white women as a test to his resolution of abstinence.

"A burnt child dreads the fire," he told himself. "White women are fatal playthings—for me, at any rate."

As they strolled along the length of the verandah, talking with the ready frankness and ease of well-bred people, the girl examined him with quick, covert glances. He puzzled her. She had never before met anyone like him.

His was an odd face, browned by years of exposure to the tropic sun. His features were rather delicate, and bore a look of thoughtful and reticent calm. The tall, slender and singularly well-knit body would have been better suited by the jeweled costume of a Louis Quinze courtier than the uniform he wore. His clear color, the calm, imperturbable eyes, had intrigued more than one woman's fancy. In fact, women looked at him far oftener than they did at far handsomer men.

"You have quite a formidable reputation as a strict disciplinarian," she was saying, smiling up at him as if she expected him to refute it. "General Claxton was telling us how you handled the Wanderobo uprising."

His eyes smiled at her through a cloud of bitter memories. . . . It was a Wanderobo spear that had pierced Nadia's heart when she flung herself in front of him and intercepted the deadly thrust.

"It is necessary to be strict with the natives in the Lado. They would not understand leniency. To them it is fear or weakness. They are fierce, elemental savages, hardly human. The only thing they understand is force."

"Even the strictest etiquette doesn't demand that I agree with you in everything," she laughed. "Just think how different my father's code is from yours."

He looked at her questioningly, and she continued:

"My father is going to conduct the mission and schools at Butonga. His code is kindness, forbearance, and he believes religion can conquer even your natives."

He looked courteously incredulous. The girl noted it and stiffened slightly.

"So your father is a—missionary?"

It was not a question; rather a statement. To him all missionaries were fatuously simple and misguided individuals, sometimes detrimental to discipline.

"Are you, too, going to Butonga?" he asked.

"Yes, for a while. I am going to help with the school."
He smiled slightly. It smacked of the foolhardy to him.

"I don't want to discourage you," he said, "but I don't think it's quite safe. You know that Butonga is near the German East African border—across the Sotik plains; and there are still many German outlaws at large—fellows who escaped into the bush after the war and now fraternize with the natives. Sometimes they live with the natives, and occasionally they incite them to violence—to further their own safety. That's why we keep a garrison at Kajabi. I would venture to advise that your party postpone going to Butonga for a while."

"I'm not afraid," said the girl simply.

He looked at her with more interest. The music started again, and the other guests began to drift into the house.

"Do you dance?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not," he answered. "You see, this is the first day that I've been with my own kind for several years, and I've forgotten how. I don't believe that I could manage all these new dances anyway."

"In several years?" she repeated, musingly.

"Well," he continued, "it's three years, to be exact. I've been in the interior for seven years. Of course, I've come out for a day or two to Nairobi two or three times, but never to the coast."

"Then let's sit here," she decided, indicating a bench in the moon-drenched garden.

"Come, tell me about your work in the back country. What do you do, and what does it look like in the interior. This mysterious Africa of yours is full of romance for me. And I'm going into the interior myself in a week, and so I'm interested, you see, in getting first hand information."

So he sat down and told her of the interior, of the wild country that borders on the Belgian Lado; of the wonderful animal life; of the natives and many other things while the girl listened with rapt attention.

It was hardly a fortunate thing for him, fresh from years in the back-country, to be suddenly thrust vis-à-vis to a charming, beautiful young girl. The volatile charms of her rocked the granite walls of his resolve dangerously; the Spartan injunction upon his soul wavered.

The tropical African moonlight is eerie; there is witchery and madness in it. She had a brilliantly classic head, perfect as a narcissus, fitly shaped for a bust of Athene. An Egyptian profile; flashing, fearless, amber tinted eyes. Her's was a strange and compelling beauty that was at once Greek and Lydian, at once classic and oriental. Her body was divinely formed, and she walked with the free grace of an Arab girl. About her there hung a faint, tantalizing aura of oriental perfume that called with a vague allure.

Stanhope stirred. He was ill at ease.

CHAPTER II

They talked pleasantly until the music stopped again, then a few daring spirits, youthful blood fired by the exotic beauty of the night and a natural craving for excitement, suggested that they visit the native quarters and see the native dances. It was still early, and despite the protests of some of the older people, a party of laughing adventurers was soon formed.

Stanhope added a quiet protest to General Claxton's, that it would be unwise to take white girls into the native sections at night, where Kabyle, Arab, Portuguese half-breed, Hindoo, Moor, negro from Soudan, and all other populations met in incongruous blending. But he was overruled and disregarded by the laughing young men and women.

Avis Talmage was pounced upon by a young lieutenant named Kirby and borne off as his companion in the adventure. Stanhope saw Latimer assisting Alice Throckmorton with a light wrap. So she, too, evidently was going. He watched
the jolly preparations for departure with unsmiling eyes and lips.

General Claxton asked him if he were going.

"Why, I suppose I might as well," he answered.

"Well, if you go, I won't have to," said the general. "Keep an eye on them, will you, Stanhope, and see that they don't pry where they shouldn't."

Stanhope nodded, and the general walked away to his beloved whist.

As the night was perfect, they decided to walk. Most of the young people had coupled off, and as Stanhope had not invited anyone to accompany him, it began to look as if he would walk alone, or make a de trop third somewhere. Avis Talmage saw his plight and signaled him to her side. Her companion, Lieutenant Kirby, an irrepressible youngster to whom life was one glad song, shot a look of mock anger at Stanhope.

"S-so!" he said, with a hiss. "We're going to have a chaperon! What in the world is a moon good for with a chape-ron! Two is company—"

"And three," interrupted the girl, with an imperial gesture commanding silence, "is a story in the magazines. Don't be absurd, Eddie! You're not being funny."

She turned to Stanhope in undecided apology.

"Oh, I don't mind him," he assured her. "Everybody knows that Eddie has a screw loose somewhere."

Eddie grimaced, and as they walked, took up his complaint.

"I don't see," he said gravely, "how you can prefer anyone to me. I beg you to pause in your mad career and consider several things. Take my—ah—personal attractions, for instance."

The girl smiled, while Stanhope motioned him to go on.

"Go on, Eddie," he encouraged. "Which one hurts you most?"

"Take my nose, for instance," went on Eddie, taking no notice of Stanhope's levity. "While you wouldn't call it classical, it shows a—a—marvelous power of concentration. You can see it isn't too long or too short; it's sort of re-troussé; it's a first-class, good natured, good looking nose. Anybody who'd look at it would be bound to say, 'There's a man who'll make a good husband!' Don't you think so?"

"I really hadn't noticed it," answered the girl, smothering a laugh.

Eddie looked grieved. Stanhope said:

"That's surprising, Miss Talmage. Why, Eddie's nose is the first thing anybody notices when they come to Mombasa. It's a landmark. It stands out like a mountain range."

"And here I've seen you every day since you came," sighed Eddie, to the girl, "and you never even noticed it! You've probably not even noticed how good looking I am. How 'sharper than a serpent's tooth'—but let it pass—let it pass—" (resignedly). "I don't suppose you noticed my mouth. I wish you would. Look at it, now. Isn't it a handsome mouth? Do you see the humor, the sterling character of it—or don't you? Look how it matches my nose, lying under it like a—a—"

"Tunnel," supplied Stanhope hopefully.

"Lèse-majesté!" groaned Eddie, while the girl laughed heartily. "You Philis-tine! While I don't claim to be the handsomest man in the world, still—" He threw out his chest and strutted a bit, then: "You couldn't do better, Avis, if you searched the world over. Note how—er—interesting and unique my beauty is. If you'll study my face closely—I wish you would!—you'll be intrigued at the surprising incongruities. You'll discover, for instance, that my forehead and chin are of—a—entirely different—'schools'—if I may use the word in this instance. There's no mediocre regularity. My ears—"

"Should be pinned to your head, Eddie," interrupted Stanhope. "I'm constantly apprehensive that a strong puff of wind will come along, strike your ears and set you sailing for parts unknown. You
should have 'em trimmed at least once a month, otherwise you look distressingly like a water logged one-master, with mains'l and jib spread—"

"See!" chortled Eddie, turning to the laughing girl. "See? He's jealous! Jealous of my—"

"You're both absurd," she decided. Then: "Look! Those little lights through the trees, and that African sky above—it's superb!"

"Our Mecca," said Stanhope. "Those are the native quarters."

W HEN they entered the old Arab quarters, the high spirits of the adventurers became somewhat subdued. The girls crowded a bit closer to their escorts and twittered occasionally.

The moonlight lay wan and eerie upon the narrow street. A patrol of Swahali soldiers passed, rifles aslant. From the café's came the wailing of flutes and hautboys, the stirring thrill of muted drums: barbaric music, yet harmonic, and pleasing to civilized ears.

The projecting wooden balconies of the houses were brightly colored, and some of them held painted girls, who smoked cigarettes and hailed the passers-by with liquid monosyllabics. The mellow radiance of the moon flooded the street with mysterious illumination, despite the many colors, the lights, its obvious dedication to the cult of pleasure. Silent, white robed figures moved through the shadows like fantastic monastical processions.

The adventurers trooped to the largest of the café's, led by several eager young officers. One or two of the girls demurred against entering, but the majority, thrilled by this abrupt unveiling of the raw, became audacious with the spirit of adventure and longed to gratify their insatiate curiosity.

They all entered and seated themselves, ordered coffee, and bore the grave stares of the Arabs.

On a raised platform, a scantily-clad Kabyle girl, as fair as any of the visitors, was dancing. The room was in silence, save for the rattling of the dancer's beads and spangles, and the low music of hautboys, flutes and muffled drums. Not a word of conversation came from any one; not a rattle of cups or spoons; not a sound did any of the audience make. Motionless, mute, the Arabs watched the dance.

There is music and music. Old Socrates, thrumming his lyre, produced different harmonic effects from Sappho's Mixolydian strains. The jubilation of angelic hymns is quite different from the ribald can-can. Music, per se, is not always and necessarily a good thing. It can be made both the glory and the scandal of the universe. In this instance it was one of those hypnotic oriental melodies; a tune that somehow was inflammable, suggesting death or murder, or other unutterable violations. The air pulsed with it as the dancer writhed and twisted, her kohl-tinted eyes shrewdly fixed upon the foreigners; her sinuous, henna-tinted hands fluttering up and down as she contorted her stomach and shoulders.

Stanhope, glancing suddenly at the English girls, saw intense fascination exhibited by some, and impersonal, cynical indifference in others. Avis Talmage's face was pink and white by turns as she followed the dancer's movements; meaningless movements save for their suggestions of barbaric violence and license.

Slowly the sinuous dancing girl wiggled between the rows of silent Arabs, her red lips parted in an avaricious smile. She had decided upon Latimer as her bourne. He was nearest to her of any of the whites, and he was in civilian clothes, so he craftily concluded that he would prove more profitable than any of the natives or officers.

The Bacchic boom of muted tom-toms increased; the hautboy players prolonged a wild note, while the dancer half-closed her eyes in assumed ecstasy and shuddered violently, shaking her meagre charms.
"You have quite a formidable reputation as a strict disciplinarian," she was saying, ... as if she expected him to refute it."
Latimer grew scarlet and turned his embarrassed eyes away, but the dancer was not to be foiled. Turning slowly, she bent backwards, her head nearly touching the floor, and thrust her face into that of Latimer. The room was tense. The Arabs did not smile. They were watching the foreigner with scowling interest.

Stanhope bent and whispered into Latimer’s ear:

“She wants money—give her a coin!”

Understanding flashed into Latimer’s eyes. He fumbled for a coin, produced it and handed it to the dancer.

She whirled away immediately; the music flared up again, and once more she began her writhing advance upon the foreigners. Again the music slowed and dimmed; again a hush, like a storm cloud, came over the room. Stanhope was ill at ease. He sensed the Arabs’ unvoiced resentment, but could do nothing.

The dancer gyrated with supple ease: the music grew passionate and sensuous, with an exultant desperation. It poured fire into the veins of the listeners. The dancer passed a hooded figure and was coming toward the whites, when the Arab rose with a sibilant remark. It was plain that he resented the preference that the dancer was showing the whites. In a moment, the whole room was on its feet. There was a flash of steel in the Arab’s burnoose. He was sure of the support of his countrymen. The dancing girl uttered a sharp protest. Almost at the same moment Stanhope stepped forward and drove his fist heavily into the Arab’s face.

It was a smashing, punishing blow. The Arab lay as if dead, bleeding profusely from a broken nose. His knife fell to the floor. A menacing murmur broke out from the Arabs. The English girls crowded close to their escorts. Alice Throckmorton smothered a frightened cry.

A sharp sentence came from Stanhope in Arabic. His eyes blazed with a cold menace as he faced the room full of white-clad figures; then another staccato sentence, and he turned and pointed to the door.

“Get out,” he said in English to his friends, and they hastily obeyed. Avis Talmage looked back to see him standing against a table in a careless attitude, the personification of blasé indifference; yet the Arabs’ eyes fell when he looked at them. The icy regard held vivid danger.

It was a chastened and excited little army of adventurers that returned.

Avis Talmage walked with Stanhope and Eddie Kirby in deep silence. Only once did she speak.

“Do you think it was necessary to—hurt him so?” she asked quietly. “Was there real danger?”

“There was,” he answered tersely. “It was necessary. This is Africa.”

She stole a glance at his tense face. It both interested and frightened her.

Alice Throckmorton had managed to maneuver her escort abreast, and she engaged Stanhope in vivacious conversation regarding the country in the interior, technical East African commonplaces and experiences, and talked with a bright authority and authenticity that silenced the American girl.

Stanhope at first shrank from her in aversion; then he answered calmly, his immutable laconicism holding her at a definite distance.

She had heard Avis Talmage’s remark, and Stanhope’s answer; now she said with grave approval:

“It was the right action at the right moment, and properly performed. Hesitation or delay might have been both dangerous and serious for us. The native police are never very prompt, and heaven knows what might have happened before they arrived.”

Stanhope answered nothing. Occasionally he glanced at the beautiful Mrs. Throckmorton. Her calm friendliness puzzled him. Swift to read all women, and incredulous of good faith in Alice
Throckmorton, he was perplexed. He naturally suspected her motives in taking up so calmly the threads of an intimacy that had been so tragically severed years ago.

CHAPTER III

As he was about to leave that night, Alice Throckmorton came to his side and smiled calmly up at him. “Take me outside, Allen,” she said, in her cool voice. “There’s something I’d like to talk to you about. And bring me an ice, like a good boy.”

He brought the ice and seated himself beside her, a lazy curiosity in his eyes.

She glanced at him occasionally as she nibbled at the ice, suggested that he could smoke if he wanted to, and then looked about her. They were quite alone on this far, dim corner of the verandah.

“Allen,” she began, quite calmly. “Have you—forgiven me?”

He looked at her coldly. “For what?” he asked.

“That’s—not like you,” she said, in a totally different voice. “Please don’t try to hurt me—it’s quite unnecessary. I—I—admit I was a little fool, and I treated you shabbily. Now that I’ve abased myself properly, won’t you say that you forgive me? I—I—really want your friendship, Allen. I was very young then, and very foolish—you won’t hold that up to me at this late date, will you? I want your friendship.”

“You have it,” he answered, after a moment, quite easily. “There’s nothing to forgive—unless you mean a—a—boy’s impossible passion for a married—”

“Please!” she interjected. “Don’t say the rest of it! You are hurting me.”

She stopped for a moment, then went on in a low voice that was perilously close to sobs:

“Allen . . . I didn’t mean to hurt you then. . . . I was a thoughtless child. . . . I didn’t know. . . . Please believe that I am sincere in what I’m telling you. After you left . . . I was conscience stricken. It has preyed upon me ever since. You . . . disappeared. . . . I never knew what happened to you until I came here to live with my father last year. Can’t you forgive a foolish little girl who—who—was not so very happy in her—marriage, and sought excitement—perhaps dangerous excitement—to fill a—void? You are one of the men whose good opinion I want to keep. Won’t you—shake hands—and say we’re friends again? Can’t we start upon a fresh, clean page again?”

For perhaps a minute they both sat in silence. Then Stanhope turned to her and held out his hand.

“There’s really no reason why we can’t be friends,” he said evenly.

She grasped his hand and their fingers locked for a moment, then drew apart. She dabbed at her eyes. “See?” she said. “You’ve made me cry!”

“I’m very sorry,” he replied gravely. “There’s nothing about all this to make you cry, is there?”

“N—no,” she answered. “And now we’re friends again, aren’t we, Allen?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, I’m glad!” she said. “I—I—don’t want to lose old friends. I’m so alone now, except for father. I don’t want you to hate me—you won’t, will you?”

General Claxton came up at this point, seeking his daughter, and the three of them stood and chatted for a few minutes; then the General and Mrs. Throckmorton left, after inviting Stanhope to call on the morrow.

Stanhope walked to his rooms in busy thought. He knew that Alice Throckmorton was not an ingenuous school girl, therefore her apparent naïveté and frankness must be assumed.

But why?

Did she imagine he would take up the thread where it had once been broken? He shrugged his shoulders.

“She’s nothing to me,” he told himself. “And never can be.”

Then he dismissed the subject.
CHAPTER IV

STANHOPE’s sceptical education had been unusually complete. He was born with position and money, also an ardent desire to get all the joy possible out of the drab old world. He denied himself nothing, but, being a gentleman, he never overdid anything. The towering dreams and great expectations of his early youth had been smothered in the inevitable disillusion of experience. Such intrigues as had come his way had left him calm and serene. As he understood women better, he developed a graceful impudence that endeared him to the whimsical feminine heart.

Once he had felt deeply—when he met Alice Throckmorton—but that experience had only disillusioned him still further. As he looked back, he regretted none of the charming companions of former days save one: the young Arab girl, Nadia. Had she lived, he would have been content with her always and given her an unswerving fidelity. She had been all things to him, save a mental stimulant. Instead, she possessed a naive truthfulness and a child-like simplicity that, for him, balanced her intellectual lack.

But she slept in the Lado!

Love, however, had never entered until he saw the American girl, Avis Talmage. Women had stirred him before, as a soft, fragrant breeze stirs the surface of a lake to glittering response; but now the depths moved and thundered against the wall of disbelief and cynicism he had reared. It was an entirely new emotion, holy as religion, deep rooted as the hope of immortality.

Quick to analyse, he perceived almost at once that the entire chemistry of his flesh cried out for this one woman. But it was too new, too soon after seeing Alice Throckmorton again and steeping himself anew in anchorite philosophy. It came at a time when he was not ready to receive it. He fought it stubbornly with cynicism, attacked it with all his accumulated experiences. But it rose above the tumult, clean, unsoiled, triumphant.

STANHOPE spent busy days with General Claxton, going through routine matters, and meeting Alice whenever that worldly-wise young woman could improvise an accidental encounter. She was keen and clever, and her intuition told her that Stanhope cared for Avis Talmage almost as soon as he was aware of it himself. But resolve strengthened in her heart the more she saw the man to whom she had once been so heartless.

At the time, she had laughed; but when he disappeared, she gradually began to understand that in her innermost soul she loved him, in her selfish way. True, she had not played fair... but what else could she have done? She was married, and Stanhope had rushed away without another word. Had he asked her to obtain a divorce, she would have done so. The shattering blow to his ideals she didn’t fathom.

Now, when she saw his unresponsiveness, and feared that his affections had gone to another, her passion for him was sharpened to a new keenness; it was born anew, with new vigor and tenacity.

Her shrewd, hard sense told her that a woman who has interwoven herself with a man’s fortunes, and bound him to her side with the hempen ropes of the commonplace, entered the very fibre of his life—as lichen enters the bark of a tree. So she began to plan a future for him. She interested her father, who was in a position to further Stanhope’s advancement. She sometimes joined Stanhope and her father when they were in conference, and skillfully led Stanhope into channels calculated to please her father. Stanhope was puzzled. The general did not even suspect anything was going on under his nose.

Stanhope had called upon Avis Talmage and her father at the latter’s request. Doctor Talmage was a fine type
of elderly, benevolent scholarship. He was a slight man, with the scholar’s brow and eyes, and the stoop. He had a smile that was engaging and bright, and there was humor, too, about the mobile mouth; he, like Ulysses, had once known well the cities and the minds of men. Now he earnestly and enthusiastically gave the best he had to a thankless, self-imposed task, and believed in the importance and necessity of his work. A mutual liking and respect grew between the two men.

It was a tense and concentrated week for Stanhope. He saw Avis at every opportunity, and her keen wit, her unquestioned intellectuality, her freshness and charm, her great physical allure, sent the blood singing through his veins in a rioting song. It was hard for him to see her alone at any time, as she seemed to be the Mecca of every young man in Mombasa. Her garden and verandah were usually occupied by one or more sadly stricken young officers or civilians in the service.

She awakened him from his old lethargy. All his previous life seemed like hueless dreams; like a trance, sad colored and heavy with monotony. Early ideals revived and began to grow real again. He began to wake to each new day with a feeling of pleasure. All the fire and passion he had once felt for Alice Throckmorton, all the tenderness and affection he had lavished upon Nadia, seemed weak and shallow to the deep emotion he felt for Avis.

They were sitting under a great fig tree in the garden—for the moment alone—and talking of the interior. He told her of his solitary exile with a soldierly simplicity and a picturesque coloring that held the girl interested.

“Every two or three months,” he was saying, “I received bundles of magazines and newspapers. That was my only contact with the world outside.”

He laughed.

“It’s a rather queer amusement reading newspapers and magazines months old—something like riding backwards on a train; you see things after you’ve passed them.”

“And you had no companion but the natives?” she asked.

“Yes, Ahmed, my personal servant, gun-boy, secretary, companion, guide, philosopher and friend.” He was smiling. “Ahmed is a peculiar fixture in my life. He is part Arab, part Portuguese, part native and everything else. He speaks most of the native tongues, and has been with me ever since I came to Africa. He’s my constant companion on sefari.”

“It must have been lonesome,” mused the girl, “even with Ahmed. Yet, it is fascinating. I can’t quite get over the wonder of the tropics—I love it! Mombasa, with its polyglot population, the men in uniform, the foliage—it all might have been taken out of a page of Kipling.”

She surveyed the luxuriant foliage briefly.

“It’s wonderful—I love it all!”

“It forms a wonderful background.”

“It’s a veritable Eden,” she went on, seemingly not noticing his irrelevance.

“Before the coming of the snake?”

“Before?”

“Assuredly.” He felt his ribs gratefully.

“And just before—”

“I think,” she said, with equal gravity, “I ought to go in and see if Daddy—”

“It is not good for man be to alone,” he pleaded.

She sniffed, smiling.

“You know that the—ananyone can quote Scripture to his purpose.”

Stanhope sniffed the air.

“Do you smell brimstone?” He regarded his feet. “They don’t look like hoofs, so—”

She laughed, and he joined her.

“Tell me,” she continued, “did you really kill natives?”

“Well, I suppose I did—several; one has to, you know. I was there to do it if necessary. I’d rather I didn’t have to do it, but—it becomes necessary!”
"It's horrible," said the girl. "I suppose, as you say, it has to be done, but it seems terrible to me—it frightens me."

He smiled.

"Desdemona was frightened, too, but she liked it; women usually do—don't they?"

"Well, I don't!" she declared.

"Oh, yes you do!" he went on imper turbably. "I don't think you're quite sincere when you deny it. It was terrible to Desdemona, too."

"Desdemona?"

"You recall she loved Othello for the dangers of his past—I think she loved him more for the damage he had accomplished."

"But I don't see—" she began, then:

"Well, I don't think—perhaps in a way, I do like it. But tell me—" hurriedly "—is that all you did—fight?"

"That's all," he acknowledged. "Except to make a few sketches. But those tropical Lado scenes would have set a Turner crazy, so I tore 'em up and stopped trying."

They were joined by two importunate young men who bore the girl indoors, laughingly protesting, to sing. Stanhope was unable to see her alone again that day.

STANHOPE left in a pleasant mood and made his way to the club. Here he greeted several acquaintance, and was in turn hailed. He made his way over to a table where General Claxton, young Kirby, Latimer and Williams were playing a desultory game of whist.

"Don't go, Stanhope," General Claxton said. "I promised Alice I would bring you home to dinner myself. You are dining with us tonight, you know, and I had an idea you would drop in here."

"We'll go together. What, trumping, Eddie?"

"Eh?" said the youthful Kirby, looking up suddenly.

"Don't disturb his reverie," said Latimer gravely. "He's in love. I hear somebody came back from Nairobi today."

Kirby blushed and lost a trick in his confusion, much to the General's consternation.

"Hang it, Eddie!" he exclaimed. "Has that Portuguese witch affected you to the point where you can't tell a club from a heart?"

"He plays by instinct," offered Williams. "All he can see is hearts. When is it going to take place, Eddie?"

Kirby grinned. "Go ahead," he invited. "I can't help it if all the beauties chase me around. I'm too good-looking to go about the streets without a guard—"

"Play that trick!" interjected the General.

Kirby trumped it and smiled.

"Why not let your friends know about it?" complained Williams. "We'll all turn out for it in dress uniforms, and you can pass under an arch of drawn swords as you come from the church door."

"I saw it in the moving pictures—it's a pretty effect. You'll order out the whole regiment, won't you, General Claxton?"

"I'll bring the band, too!" retorted the General, sarcastically. "That's my trick! . . . Help yourself to those cigarettes, Stanhope—they're good. Tarlton brought them from Cairo last week, so they're still fresh. . . . Who deals?"

"I do," said Latimer, reaching for the cards.

Stanhope watched the play until the game ended, smiling at the good-natured abuse that was heaped upon Kirby's head. At last General Claxton threw his cards down.

"We lose, Eddie," he announced. "There's no use trying to play scientific bridge with you for a partner! . . . Wait a moment, Stanhope. I've got to get some papers upstairs, but I'll be back directly. Order the car, will you, Eddie?"

He left.

The card players rose, cheerfully ban-
tering one another, until Kirby turned to Stanhope.

"There's no reasoning with these fellows," he laughed. "They think because they're four or five years older they possess untold wisdom—as if wisdom, in the matter of women—was a question of age! Suppose I do look twice at these little Arab beauties? You'll admit there are some wonderful looking women amongst them. By the way, Stanhope, someone mentioned here this afternoon that you had an Arab—or was it a Kabyle—girl out in the Lado—"

He stopped suddenly, as an unseen finger sank into his ribs. He looked at Stanhope and flushed. The General came back just then and saved the situation.

IT WAS a quiet, pleasant dinner that evening, although Stanhope regarded Alice frequently and was ill at ease for a while. He gradually overcame it, however. She unobtrusively fitted herself into the conversation regarding his duties and plans, and applauded his father's and his decisions.

Later, when the general went to procure some photographs he wanted to send to his sister in England, Alice turned to Stanhope and said:

"Let's take a turn or two outdoors. It's frightfully hot tonight."

He hesitated but the fraction of a second, and the slow color mounted to her cheeks, for she had noted his indecision.

"Don't you find it warm?" she continued.

"I'm used to it," he said shortly.

She led the way to the garden, and he, perforce, followed.

"Father and I were talking about your handling of the Wanderobo uprising," she said, in a quiet tone. "It was splendid, Allen, splendid! I'm going to tell you a little secret out of school—but don't ever say I told. You won't, will you?"

"I'd rather you wouldn't tell me anything—out of school."

"But—this is something that can be told. Promise you won't tell?"

"Yes."

"Well," she continued, "father has recommended you for the D. S. O."

Stanhope stared.

"You must not tell," she instructed. "You should have had it long ago, but father does procrastinate so! He hates—simply hates—to write reports. But the report has gone, this time. Heaven knows you've earned it many times over."

He colored vividly.

"I did nothing," he said, his tone slightly curt. He was ill at ease at this method of ingratiating approach.

The girl was looking into his eyes, but both the soldier and the man in him recoiled.

"I knew you would say that," her voice still quiet. "But not everyone has the daring, the strength, the courage, the genius to seize the right moment for action and success. Father also recommended you for promotion."

A weary smile crossed his face. Was she enthusiastic, or effervescent?

"I really wish you hadn't urged your father to send that report, Alice. I am not seeking honors—or promotion."

It surprised her that he did not value the decoration. Then she glimpsed, for the first time, how meretricious the reward of a tawdry decoration must seem to a man who had waited to die at Sita-tunga as patiently and heroically as the blue legions at Verdun.

"It cannot compensate you, of course," she said finally. "But I thought you would want it. As for promotion—you are ambitious, are you not?"

He shrugged his shoulders. Conversation became difficult between the two. Finally, with some show of impatience, he excused himself to his host, bid Alice good-bye and took his leave.

FOR STANHOPE the week sped rapidly. He spent every permissible moment with Avis Talmage, in common with several other young men who were desperately hit by the vivid American girl.
They had arrived at a point of easy badinage that kept both of them laughing at their exchange of conversational shot. Whenever the conversation veered in any way to the personal, the girl skillfully guided it into other channels—and Stanhope, quick to sense her attitude, had accepted the tangent, warned by her evident displeasure.

But tomorrow she was leaving for Butonga, and now, as they sat on the garden bench, in the witchery of the tropic gloaming, his heart pounded dully with misery at the thought of losing her so soon.

"We will probably meet again at Butonga, sometime, won't we, Mr. Stanhope?" she asked. "I suppose you go over the territory occasionally?"

"I shall," he answered. "I intend to go over it often. I shall probably see you at Butonga. I'm sorry you're going so soon. I intended to make the trip myself in a month or so, and if your party could have waited, I'd have been glad to conduct it; but I can't leave just yet."

"I'm sorry," she answered. "I should have liked to have you take us down. Only Daddy must go at once."

"Won't it be lonesome for you?" he asked. "You have never really been in Africa until you go into the interior; and I imagine a young girl would find it too lonesome, too isolated."

"There will be so much work to do," she said. "I won't be lonesome. Do you think, Major, that girls are only a matter of clothes and balls and pleasures and frivolity? Some of us have serious work to do—and like to do it."

"Well," he answered, "I'm coming down to see you soon."

He paused and looked absently at the glowing sky.

"I shall miss you," he finished.

Many men had been attracted to her. Stanhope could understand what drew them. They found a finer fibre and a purer metal than was usually found under the surface of such youthfully bewildering beauty. As he suddenly turned to her and met her eyes squarely, he felt the blood come to his face. He thought he saw a faint response that tinted lip and cheek.

"But why should you miss me?" she queried demurely. "There are ever so many wonderful women here—really marvelous types. Are you not interested in them?"

"No, not even passably."

"No? I thought you, as well as all the other men in Mombasa, were madly in love with that perfectly stunning Mrs. Throckmorton."

"Mrs. Throckmorton!"

"Now, that's not a bit nice of you!"

"If you don't mind my saying so—what I've seen of you has spoiled other women for me."

"What terrible exaggeration!" she laughed. "What can you possibly know of the real me? I'm a demon! After so short an acquaintance—"

"Years and years," he suggested, meekly.

She frowned, an untrustworthy frown that soon became laughter.

"My impetuous friend—you are very amusing! If it were not for your formidable reputation as a fighting man who is a recluse and has no use for civilization—but—you see, I have heard a great deal about you . . . so I can't believe you, and become frightened. I really suspect you of trying to be too ideally conventional. . . ."

He did not answer. Strange confusion and tumult threatened his equipoise. Swift pulses were beating in throat and temple.

The girl, too, was vaguely uneasy. She caught her breath. There was something in the air that nearly stampeded her.

"Penny for your thoughts," she continued, at length, with deliberate lightness of tone.

"I was thinking," he said, suddenly turning to face her, "that there is a question I'd like to ask your father—with your permission."

"My father?" she said. "What do you
want to ask my father?" Then a blindness thrill of premonition halted her, and at
the same instant she knew from his eyes.
"No—don't!" she cried breathlessly.
"You mustn't! I can't allow—"

Her utterance failed. She placed a
hand upon his arm.
"Major Stanhope," the girl continued
tremulously, "I never dreamed that you
were in earnest—"

"You must have seen," he interrupted
swiftly, "from the very first moment that
I—"

"Don't—don't say it!" she begged, in a
whisper. "I have no right to listen.
Oh, what have I done! Is it my fault?"

"Your fault?" he echoed. "I don't
understand."

"Believe that I am sorry!" she whis-
pered. "I did not know—truly, I did not
dream—I am engaged—to a young man
—at home! Oh, please!"

She saw the blood forsake the bronzed
fairness of his face, leaving a dusky paller.
He looked as if he had been given
a mortal blow. For some reason, it
wounded her as if she suffered herself.

"You let me believe . . . ."

"Oh, forgive me!" she cried, her glori-
ous eyes filling with unrestrained tears.
She was bewildered and pained before
the man's agonized suffering. " Truly, I
did not dream—until tonight—"

Her voice failed. Dimly, she began to
glimpse some prescience of the pain that
would forever shadow her own life if he
were not a part of it. She did not love
him as yet; she had seen too little of
him, but there awakened in her a pity, a
tenderness, a regard that drew her to him
with an indefinable attraction. She be-
gan to dread a future that seemed to be
condemned to isolation and pain. She
thought of her fiancé and shuddered.
What had she known of love when she
bound herself to him? It came over her
with the sense of a shock that he meant
nothing to her. She had yielded to an
impetuous wooing; an insistent attack;
she had mistaken a sincere liking for
love. Propinquity had accomplished the
balance. At that moment, if Stanhope
had taken her into his arms, she would
have awakened and capitulated; but the
moment passed. Her statement reared
like a mountain wall between them, and
both saw the wall instead of looking at
each other.

He sat like a man in a dream, a su-
preme anguish gnawing at his heart; a
fendish, gibbering imp rose within him
who drove a fanged spear into the vitals
of his being.

Was he branded, then? A thing set
apart? Was his eternal lot the bitter
one of always wanting another man's
property—another man's wife?

Slowly a stark, curious hopelessness
came over him; a lassitude; an accept-
ance of what seemed to be the inevitable.
"Kismet!" he told himself, with resigned
weariness.

He rose, bowed gravely, and without
another word walked out of the garden
into the street.

HOUR AFTER HOUR he walked
blindly about the shore, hardly
conscious of motion, driven on by the
chaotic, mental whirlpool. He hated,
with a fierce, vitriolic hatred, the entire
world of white women. By contrast, the
little Arab girl, Nadia, loomed like an
oasis in the empty desert of his life. He
let his thoughts wander caressingly over
the memory of her.

Again he saw the primitive boat,
carrying the party of restive, migratory
Arabs, as it stopped near his bungalow on
the White Nile, the Arabs pitching camp.
He had strolled over and had been re-
ceived as the master of the domain. His
numerous native soldiers insured respect.
Again he saw the great, gaunt Arab,
black as a desert hawk, strike the slim
girl. He had remonstrated. The Arab
had desisted, but cast a look upon the
girl that promised vague terrors at the
first uninterrupted opportunity. Stan-

hope had caught the look. He had also
seen the expression in the girl's eyes.
She was very fair, and he became sus-
"She watched him swing out of the gate with a curious look in her eyes, part hate, part longing."
picious. He asked sharp questions. He was told she was the product of an Arab mother and a French father. The mother had died upon the trip south; the father had never seen the girl. She became the property of the mother's second husband.

The Arabs had seen the cold menace in Stanhope's eyes. He had numerous soldiers. They became frightened. Would the Baas accept the girl as a gift? As an evidence of good will from the chief? He did. The Arabs left soon after.

Again he saw Nadia on the earthen bank of the little stream that ran near his house. A tall girl, barely eighteen, who carried some of her clothes in her exquisitely shaped hands. She caught her draperies up, exposing slim limbs far above the knees, and stepped into the stream to wash the clothes. Wading amongst the gorgeous, plumed papyrus and lotus, she made a picture not soon to be forgotten.

Her face was beautiful, with small, regular features and luminous eyes; her figure superb in its slim beauty, with an intoxicating hint of adolescence. It seemed to glow and thrill softly with the spirit of youth.

He recalled, with a wearied regret, the days when the secret of womanhood had first whispered into her ears, and the glorious years that had followed—years full to the brim. He recalled, too, the day when she had thrust her own body between him and the savage Wanderobo spear, and had sheathed in her own heart the death that was meant for him.

And that night—a hot, breathless night. as only comes in the Lado—she died; happy with him and loving him to the last second of consciousness; died with her arms clasped around his neck and her great eyes looking up into his, until the last ray of light in them was quenched; died while the dawn rose in the east and cast a hallowed radiance upon her, the herald of a day to which she never awoke.

She had loved him! Some exultant masculinity in him rose and thrilled at the thought, though it left him white as death.

The dawn was slowly lifting as he turned his steps to his rooms, weary, a lassitude, an apathetic resignation upon him. He would always love Avis Talmage, deep down, where the eyes of the world never penetrates, though he knew it was without hope. He wanted to include her in his hatred for all white women, but he could not. He wanted to convince himself that she was inferior to Nadia, but could not. He told himself that he would try to forget her, and knew at the same instant that he never could. But the thought of her fiancé stopped him. She was another man's wife—or soon would be. That ended the matter for all time.

CHAPTER V

STANHOPE'S work broke somewhat the stupor of suffering that had fastened upon him. Detail forced his attention. He welcomed it avidly as an anodyne for his grief. Avis Talmage and her father had already begun their journey to the mission across the Sotik plains. He had not seen Avis since the night in the garden, or had any word of her.

By the sheer power of will, he forced himself to assume his work. As it demanded continual consultation with General Claxton, he came more often in contact with Alice Throckmorton. Her attempts to interest him, her interest in his work, began to irritate him more and more. He was in no mood for the society of any woman, least of all that of Alice Throckmorton.

THE weeks sped by, and with them went the keen edge of his desire for Avis Talmage. Time is the kindliest of alchemists, but it could not altogether eradicate her from his heart. He knew her to be another man's property, but he could not forget her. She was con-
stantly in his thoughts, assuming gradually, as time went by, the status of an ever-present penumbra upon his subconsciousness. He became accustomed to his state, to his routine, to his environment.

For Alice Throckmorton he began to cherish an emphatic dislike. She was manipulating the ropes of commonplace with clever fingers—and might have ultimately succeeded if Stanhope had never met Avis. A feminine clairvoyance partly discerned this, but it did not dampen her ardor.

She had noted his evident interest in the American girl; she saw the look in his eyes whenever her name was mentioned; she put two and two together with a sure logic; and her conclusion that Stanhope loved Avis Talmage gave her a bitter hour.

Stanhope came out of the house where he had been in conference with her father to find Alice cozily comfortable in the shade of a mimosa tree. There was no denying her fresh, blond beauty and charm. She smiled brightly to him and closed her book.

"Another of those terrible novels!" she exclaimed, looking up at him as he stood before her. "Futile triflings with the fragments of the seventh commandment."

He eyed her inquiringly.

"As bad as that?" he said. "Then it ought to go into a tenth edition."

"Won't you sit down, Allen, and have something cool? You look all done up."

"Thanks, no," he answered. "I've an appointment at the club with Latimer—he's just come back, you know—and I wouldn't want to keep him waiting."

"Business, I suppose," she said, eyeing him. "You work too hard."

"Oh, no," he answered lightly; "I don't work hard at all. Well, I must be going."

And he went. And she watched him swing out of the gate with a curious look in her eyes; part hate, part longing.

ROUTINE MATTERS kept Stanhope busy for several weeks. Then the first disquieting rumors came from the Sotik region. "It makes me apprehensive," confided General Claxton to him. "There are still a number of white outlaws in the southwest forest country, and if they try to incite the Masai, there'll be trouble. I think it would be wise to order some men down there to protect the missions. What do you think?"

Stanhope was uneasy. Avis was in the danger zone on the frontier without adequate protection. His resolve was born quite suddenly.

"Benson and Williams are going to M'guzo Nyanza in a few days to relieve Clark and Hastings, so I'll go along and drop off at Butonga and see what's taking place. If it looks serious, I'll bring the whites out to the railroad; if not, I'll look around a bit."

"Better take some cavalry with you," cautioned the General. "You never can tell about the Masai, you know. They are herdsmen by profession, but warriors by choice."

"I think not," decided Stanhope swiftly. "I'll just take my man, Ahmed. Troop movements would soon start a fire if there's trouble smouldering; and the whites might suffer before we could reach them."

"Well, suit yourself. But I think it would be wise to have some cavalry follow you within two or three days' time."

"Perhaps. But I will only be a few hours from Wakamba, and if necessary I can reach the native troops there."

And so it was settled.

Some dynamic force urged him on, so that he hurried the others, and next day they entrained for the journey to Kajabi Hill.

An undefinable unrest had taken possession of him, and his restless eyes had hardly noted the look that Alice Throckmorton gave him when he left.

(Concluded Next Month)
MR. WILLIAM CHALLONER and his large grey car left Rockwell Bay in a cloud of dust and a mood of profound depression. The first was due to excessive speed, the second to the—Red-Haired Girl.

There are those who approach the business of falling in love in the manner of a nervous bather viewing the deep end for the first time; others leap at it with all the dash and verve of a quarter-back in a gridiron contest. Of the latter school Bill Challoner was a prominent member, and from his first glimpse of the Red-Haired Girl he had realized that he need seek no further for his ideal. Concerning her name and station in life he was completely ignorant; he knew only that she had descended like a vision upon Rockwell Bay three days before, accompanied by a severe female of uncertain age, and that all his efforts to achieve speech with her had proved fruitless. Hence his gloom.

Bearing these facts in mind, one may comprehend something of his emotions when, rounding a corner a few miles out of the village, he came suddenly upon the Red-Haired Girl herself, seated upon a gate and waving a supplicatory hand.

The car shot past her, groaned abruptly to a halt and backed rapidly.

"Hello!" said Bill inanely. At the moment he could think of no more original remark.

"I'm awfully sorry to bother you," said
to a halt and backed rapidly."

AND RUPERT'S ELOPEMENT

Illustrations by Marshall D. Smith

the Red-Haired Girl, "but are you by any chance going to Wellhampton? I've twisted my beastly ankle or something, you see."

Bill, offering up a silent thanksgiving, stepped down from his seat. He had had no intention of going to Wellhampton, but he was not the man to quarrel with Providence.

"Yes," he answered, "I am. The lure of the bright lights, and so forth. Can I give you a lift?"

"I should be awfully grateful. I simply must get there quickly."

"It shall be done. Grab my arm, will you?"

He assisted her tenderly to the car, climbed in after her and let in the clutch. They jerked forward and slid away down the road.

For a brief space Bill drove in silence, his brain whirling with the marvel of this happening. As he mentally rehearsed a few good conversational openings, he glanced furtively at his companion. Never, in the course of a long and varied experience, had he beheld any one to compare with her; from head to foot she was perfect, a girl to dream about. As he studied her, he was conscious of some vague familiarity about her features, but was unable to identify it.

"What about your ankle?" he asked at length. "How will you manage at Wellhampton?"

She turned and favored him with a
smile that caused the car to swerve alarmingly.

"Oh, I can hobble along. I’ll manage."

Bill nodded approvingly.

"The bulldog spirit."

He paused to summon all his resolution.

"Er—my name," he volunteered, "is Challoner—William of that ilk."

The girl started and turned quickly.

"Really? Mine is Anne Fleming."

Bill uttered an astonished yell and bounded in his seat.

"Great Scott!" he cried. "Then you must be Chick Fleming’s sister! I thought you were like some one I knew."

"How strange, meeting like this!" said the girl.

"Of course, I’ve often heard of you. You’re the artist, aren’t you?"

Bill nodded and bent upon her a wide, ecstatic grin.

"This is splendid! We’re old friends! We must follow this up. You’re staying in Rockwell, aren’t you?"

"Yes, at the inn."

"I thought so. I’m putting in a few days with an aunt of mine. The white cottage on the cliff. Staying long?"

The smile faded from Anne’s face and gave place to an expression of faint anxiety.


"But this ankle—"

She relapsed into silence, and, Bill’s attention being called for by a series of serpentine curves in the road, regarded him reflectively.

UNDER no conditions could Bill have been described as handsome. The judges of a seaside beauty competition would have considered him unworthy of a second glance. At school, until he became large enough to show active resentment, he had been known variously as “Face” and “Ugly.” But there was about him an air of quiet competence; one gained the impression that he would prove a stout fellow in emergency. His jaw appeared to have been fashioned from a chunk of solid granite and his eyes, which normally looked out upon life as at some diverting spectacle, could on occasion rival in cold truculence those of a Texas bandit. Anne seemed satisfied with what she saw, for she turned to him impulsively.

"Mr. Challoner," she said quickly and with a trace of nervousness, "it—it sounds terrible, but—but I wonder if I might ask you to help me?"

"Help," returned Bill promptly, "is my middle name."

"When do I start?"

The car hummed up a short hill, seemed to hang poised for an instant upon the crest, and embarked on the long slope down into the valley beyond. Anne stared steadily before her, a little frown between her brows.

"It’s—it’s very difficult to say," she began slowly, "but you’re a friend of Chick’s, and I must get help, so—you see, I’m running away."

"Running away?"

"To get married."

There was a stricken silence. An elderly laborer who chanced to be passing escaped annihilation by a miracle and the width of a coat button; his fluent curses were swept away on the wind.

"Married?" echoed Bill dully.

The day, which a moment ago had been a unique specimen of its kind, had become suddenly grey and unpleasant. He felt as if he had sustained a stunning blow in the diaphragm.

Bill rallied with an effort as the girl’s voice continued:

"You see, since my people died and Chick went to Alaska, I’ve been living with an uncle and aunt in the country. They’re rather—strict, and I didn’t get about much. About two months ago, when I was in New York for a weekend, I met Rupert—my fiancé. My uncle found out about it and forbade me to have anything to do with him, because he’s an artist, and Uncle George hates artists.
“Of course he’s never seen Rupert. I wouldn’t promise anything, so they packed me off to Rockwell Bay to stop my meeting him. But I couldn’t stand it any longer, so Rupert came down to Wellhampton, and I arranged to meet him there this morning, get married and vanish.

“It must be done today, because my uncle is coming down tomorrow. But I’m afraid my aunt suspected something this morning—she’s at Rockwell Bay, too—and I’m afraid she may wire to Uncle, or try to come after us or something. This ankle of mine rather handicaps me, you see, and—and I thought if you could help us to get away with your car, it—it would make everything all right. I know it sounds an awful lot to ask, but I’ve heard so much about you that I seem to know you quite well, and I must find some one—”

HER VOICE died away. Bill, who had listened to the breathless, incoherent confession with the glazed expression of one far gone in liquor, saw that her cheeks were scarlet. His first instinct had been to protest, to abduct her by force—anything to avert this frightful calamity. But as he looked at her profile his brain simmered down. He had said that he would help, and help he must; to refuse now would be the action of a bounder of the first water. His heart warmed to her; she had pluck, anyway.

There was, moreover, a morbid irony about the situation that was not without its attraction. The contemplation of one’s shattered illusions is an absorbing pastime.

“Of course!” he said bravely. “We’ll pull this through all right. Don’t you worry.

“But tell me, why is your respected uncle so biased against artists? Some of them are not at all bad in a good light.”

Anne, who was rapidly recovering her composure, shot him a quick glance of gratitude.

“I don’t know much about it,” she said.

“But I believe Uncle George was once in love with some one, and some artist man came along and cut him out. It’s made him rather bitter.”

“What’s your uncle’s name?” asked Bill.

“Ralston.”

Bill started, seemed about to speak, and checked himself. There was a short pause.

“I see,” said Bill absently. “Well, what do we do now? Collect the fortunate Rupert, I suppose?”

Anne nodded.

“Yes. I’m to meet him at the Beach Hotel and find out what he’s arranged for us.”

“Right,” said Bill, treading heavily upon the accelerator.

“Hold tight.”

Ten minutes later the car slid to a standstill at the side entrance of the Revere Hotel, Wellhampton, that vast and expensive caravanserai whose floating population consists almost entirely of Hebraic financiers with features and jewelry of equal prominence.

“Less crowd at the side here,” explained Bill. “We don’t want to figure as one of the town’s free entertainments if we can help it. Shall we stagger inside?”

Anne, leaning on his arm, limped up the steps and into the lounge of the hotel. Hardly had they crossed the threshold when she uttered a startled cry and gripped his arm convulsively.

“What’s up?” asked Bill anxiously.

“Ankle?”

The girl pointed down the long room.

“There’s Uncle George! And he’s seen us!” Bill observed a tall individual detach himself from the throng and stride rapidly in their direction.

“Oh, dear!” said Anne. “What can we do?”

Bill thought swiftly. Crises of this nature are the test of a great man, and he
"Bill thought swiftly. Crises of this nature are the test of a great man."

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did not propose to suffer the ignominy of failure.

For a single moment the idea of stunning Uncle George with a potted plant and escaping in the subsequent confusion appealed to him strongly, but he was compelled to dismiss it as impracticable. He turned quickly to Anne as her relative, in his reckless haste, impinging heavily upon a peripatetic waiter and was momentarily delayed.

“Look here, can you manage to get out to the car alone?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Well, slip out and get into it while I hold off Uncle. Watch the door and if you see him coming out, get below the side of the car and keep out of sight. If I’m not out again with young Rupert inside ten minutes, get some local rustic to fetch you a cab and drive to the coastguard station on the South Cliff. Then you’ll be out of Uncle’s way and I’ll bring Rupert along as soon as I can. See?

“By the way, what’s Rupert’s other name?”

“Fisk,” said Anne. “All right, I’ll do it. You’re a brick!” She nodded, turned and was gone through the door as Uncle George broke loose from the indignant menial and came charging on.

BILL inspected the enemy carefully. Uncle George was tall and lean, with hair only slightly grey and a pair of remarkably penetrating blue eyes. He was immaculately clad and bore rather the air of the complete clubman than that of the domestic tyrant.

“Mr. Fisk, I suppose?” barked Uncle George, standing squarely before Bill and rivetting him with his eye.

Bill gaped at him. The question was so unexpected that for a moment it deprived him of speech. Then, as he grasped its inner meaning, he grinned happily.

Uncle George had never met artist Rupert, and, seeing his niece enter upon the arm of a young man, had leaped at the obvious conclusion. The situation seemed to Bill to bristle with possibilities.

“Well, it’s a very jolly name, I always think,” he replied, chattily. “So terse and crisp. Don’t you care for it, Mr. ——?”

“Ralston’s my name, sir. Where’s my niece?”

Bill regarded him with the politely puzzled expression of a small child who has just been asked a riddle in which it is not interested.

“I’m afraid—” he began courteously.

“Don’t quibble with me!” snapped Uncle George. “I saw her with you a minute ago.

“Where has she gone?”

“Oh!” said Bill, as one who at last grasps the point of some subtle argument, “now I see what you mean. Look here, sir, suppose we sit down and talk about it for a minute? I suffer from fatigue to an extent you’d scarcely believe.”

Uncle George glared at him and glanced quickly at the door, as if debating the advisability of giving chase to the peccant Anne.

Then apparently deciding that she had too long a start, he swung abruptly on his heel towards a table in a corner.

“I suppose we may as well have this out here and now,” he observed acidly, as they took their seats. “You’re the young fool who wants to marry Anne?”

“Strictly between ourselves,” said Bill earnestly, “I don’t mind admitting—in confidence, of course—that such is the case.

“And by the way, sir, will you have a little drink?”

“No, I won’t!” rapped out Uncle George.

“And besides, understand me, young fellow, I won’t have it!”

“You needn’t be so emphatic about it,” said Bill, in the tone of a parent soothing a fractious infant. “I heard you the first time.

“You could only have had a lime-juice,
Once upon a time there was a certain lady, whom we'll call Miss A. There was also a certain fellow—B, shall we say?—who wanted to marry her. Unfortunately, he was very slow about it, and another fellow—C, for the sake of argument—turned up and cut in at the game. Or so B thought. Whereupon B, being hot of temper and rather foolish, chose to consider himself ill-used and cleared off, bag and baggage, and was not seen again.

"I hope I'm making it quite clear to you?"

NO SOUND came from Uncle George. That gentleman's face was very pale and he was gazing at Bill with the fixed, unearthly gaze of the man who sees visions.

"Now that," pursued Bill, evenly, "was where he made his error. Miss A had been waiting for B to speak, and when he sheered off without a word, it—disappointed her. But she had her pride. So she remains Miss A at the present moment, because the artistic Mr. B was never more than one of those jolly good friends."

He paused again and took out his cigarette case. Uncle George, emerging slowly from his trance, swallowed rapidly and accomplished halting speech.

"But—but I don't understand. How do you know this?"

"I'm afraid I've misled you to a certain extent," said Bill. "My name's not Fisk, though I'll admit I wish it was. It's Challoner."

An audible gasp came from Uncle George.

"Then Julia—"

"If you take the main road to Rockwell Bay," went on Bill imperturbably, "and then the path across the fields, you'll come to a little white cottage on the edge of the cliff, beside the church, In the sittingroom of that cottage, on the mantelpiece, is a photograph of you. My Aunt Julia put it there."

There was a quick scraping sound as
"Marching briskly away from the road, along a footpath that provided a short cut to the village of Rockwell Bay, was the tall, upright figure of Mr. George Ralston."
Uncle George pushed back his chair and gained his feet.

His eyes were very bright and his hands shook a little.

"I don't understand it all yet," he said, "but I can't wait now. I shall see you later."

He made as if to go, but Bill held up a hand.

"One moment. Before you go, may I take it that you withdraw your objection to your niece marrying whom she chooses?"

"You may," answered Uncle George after a moment’s hesitation, "I’ve behaved very badly to her. I can see that now.

"I’ll try and make it up one day."

He turned and made his way quickly towards the door. Bill sat motionless until he had disappeared; then he beckoned to a small boy, heavily weighted with brass buttons, who happened to pass at that moment.

"My young friend," he said, "do you happen to know a Mr. Fisk, who is stopping here?"

The infant ran an expert eye round the lounge.

"Yessir!"

"There’s the guy, now, with the lady, over in that corner there."

Bill glanced in the direction indicated and rose to his feet.

"Thank you, my son."

He placed a coin in a damp palm and sauntered across the lounge. A moment later he was surveying the fortunate Rupert.

He was not impressed. Mr. Fisk looked more like an artist than any artist has a right to look. He was a lank, pale young man, with long black hair, a quantity of which fell in a cascade over his right eye. He wore a wide, flowing tie and cloth topped boots. Bill’s first impulse was to ring and have him cleared away, but for Anne’s sake he fought it down.

"Mr. Fisk?" he said coldly. Rupert started perceptibly and looked up.

"Er—yes," he said.

"A word in your ear," said Bill. Mr. Fisk hesitated, noted Bill’s breadth of shoulder, and glanced at his companion. The latter, a highly decorative young lady, garbed several years in advance of the latest fashion, made a face at him.

"Run along, Rupe," she commanded. "Don’t be long."

Mr. Fisk rose with manifest reluctance. Bill turned and led the way across the lounge over to the side door.

On the steps at whose foot stood the grey car he halted.

"My name’s Challoner. I’ve come from Miss Fleming."

Mr. Fisk started.

"Oh—er—yes?"

"She can’t come to the hotel at the moment, but you’re to go out and meet her.

"Just what arrangements have you made?"

The more Bill saw of the elegant Rupert, the more he marvelled at Anne’s choice.

But, being a right loyal knight, he stifled his doubts.

"Well," began Mr. Fisk hesitantly, "arrangements—yes. You see, I haven’t exactly—"

"Have you made any at all?"

"Well—not exactly. You see—"

His voice died away in a strangled gasp as Bill’s large right hand enfolded the nape of his neck and shook him gently.

"See here, my young artistic friend," said Bill grimly. "Miss Fleming is relying on you. If you’re trying any sort of game with her I’ll come after you and make you look like a wet Friday in January."

"She expects to meet you this morning, and she’s going to. She’s waiting for you now near the coastguard station on South Cliff."

"Go to it."

A weariness was creeping over Bill.
He felt that not even for Anne's sake could he endure the ordeal of carrying this creature to her in his car. He had borne much that morning and to witness their meeting would be the last straw. Rupert must find his own way to the tryst.

"Trot along," he said.

"But—" began Rupert, but suddenly quailed.

"Trot along!" repeated Bill. "Explain to Miss Fleming that I've made it all right with her uncle and that she's got nothing to worry about. Now, are you going?"

"All right," said Rupert.

He tottered down the steps, crossed the road and disappeared in the direction of South Cliff.

As he vanished, Bill grinned—a somewhat wry grin.

"As a matrimonial agent," he observed to a friendly sparrow, "I seem to have made quite a hit."

And then he mused—

"Yes, quite a hit!"

He walked out to the car, started the engine and climbed in. Slowly he drew away from the curb and headed out of the town.

IT WAS as he cleared the last of the houses and whirled out upon the main road, at a speed akin to that of a bullet, that he suddenly became aware of the Voice.

"I say," it said gently, "could you slow down a bit?"

"I can hardly breathe."

The car swerved violently, missed the ditch by half an inch, steadied, slowed and stopped.

The astonished Bill swung around in his seat and stared incredulously at the smiling countenance of Miss Anne Fleming, who was leaning forward in the tonneau and apparently revelling in some private joke.

"Anne!" said Bill faintly.

"I say, where on earth have you come from now?"

"I've been here all the time," said Anne. "As soon as I got outside the hotel I saw how mean it would be to drag you into it and then leave you to face everything alone. So I stopped in the car, because I was afraid to come in again and meet Uncle. Then I saw you come out with Rup—Mr. Fisk, and—and—I suddenly felt that nothing on earth would induce me to marry him. I must have been mad!

"Because I don't meet so very many men, you see, and he—he could talk well. I suppose I must have been fascinated a bit.

"I've been an awful little fool. He looked a most appalling bounder beside you, somehow, and—"

"Oh, look, Mr., er, Challoner! There's Uncle George over there now.

Marching briskly away from the road, along a footpath that provided a short cut to the village of Rockwell Bay, was the tall, upright figure of Mr. George Ralston.

"What is he doing there?" inquired Anne.

Bill grinned happily at her.

"He's on his way to abolish the reason for his dislike of artists," he said. "Let's get on!"

The grey car shot forward.

SUDDENLY Bill threw back his head and laughed aloud, to the imminent peril of both car and passengers.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Anne.

Then Bill after a moment of silence:

"I was wondering what the coastguards think of Rupert!"
The
JUDGMENT OF JOHAN COULL
A powerful tale of the North Sea and the salvaging of ships which fell prey to German submarines

By Frederick Sleath


Illustrations by Raymond Sisley

In the saloon of the Seabird, of the Carn Shipbreaking and Salvage Company, Big Jim Martin, managing director, sat with Davis, his under-manager, and MacArthur and Stewart, skipper and mate respectively, the chiefs of his salvage staff. The Seabird lay, with two sister vessels, at anchor on a North Sea shallows, over a sunken auxiliary cruiser—the Warpindi, a large liner that Big Jim had come to raise. For weeks divers had been busy at her shot holes; she was almost ready for lifting. One of them, straying from his fellows that afternoon, had made a strange discovery. Big Jim and MacArthur were newly returned from a trip to the sea bed to confirm the report that had been brought to the surface.

"There's five of them," he said, and he looked from one to the other of his assistants with the air of a man who had broached a subject that wants a deal of explaining.

"They lie in beauty side by side!" MacArthur murmured.

Davis hitched himself up in his deck chair.

"Do you mean to say," he enquired, "that five German submarines are lying down there, and undamaged?"

He spoke a little querulously, for he was ill from a long spell of overwork ashore, and the heat of a very hot day had tried him, placed though his chair was in the draught of the open larboard and starboard doors. Big Jim reached over and filled his empty glass with iced lime juice before replying.

"If I had not seen them, Davis," he replied, "I would scarcely have believed it myself. But there they are, not forty feet from the stern of the Warpindi—just under us, by Jove! Jackson missed his direction when he went down, and walked straight into them. First one, then two, with one athwart on top, and then the other; almost as if someone had chosen the place and popped them all down together. And not a plate started on one of them—leastways as far as we could see. It's mighty queer, and I've heard of some queer things at sea in my time."

"You said something about a freighter being there as well, MacArthur," he continued, after a pause, and addressing his captain. "I didn't see her. Where was she lying?"

For a moment there was silence, as a wistful, far-away look came into MacArthur's eyes. Then:
“Just beyond the furthest away sub, sir,” replied the skipper. “She is on her side, half her bottom torn out amidships, though whether by mine, torpedo, or collision I would not like to say. I found her by tumbling up against a great pile of her coal.”

“Did ye happen to notice her name?” Stewart asked him.

“I did—the Artie. But where she hailed from I couldn’t make out. The weed has her badly. . . . Been there at least a year before the subs, I should say.”

“I missed her altogether,” Big Jim admitted. “My light began to get bad just about there, so I hauled out. I noticed you stayed down a bit longer. Reckon we could find a good many of her kind lying about if we liked to look for them. It’s the submarines that strike me as queer. I could understand one being there—”

“So could I,” interrupted Davis. “Or even two. Some of the Hun boats leaked like sieves under pressure, and might easily have filled—a good many did. But five! It’s a bit remarkable. Will you raise them, sir?”

“I don’t think so, Davis,” replied Big Jim, shaking his head doubtfully. “Though if they are really undamaged except for leaks it would not be difficult, and I must say I’m a bit curious. . . . But shift your chair up now. Steward wants to come in.”

The steward had appeared to set the table for the evening meal, and was standing—the cloth on his arm, his hands filled with knives and forks—gazing doubtfully at the deckchair stretched across his pantry doorway. Languidly Davis arose, folded up his chair, and went on deck, his nerves too apprehensive to let him remain through the jarring clatter of the table setting. There he remained until it was done, his elbow resting on the hot deck rail, his gaze on the oily sea, in his mind thoughts of the five mysterious craft beneath him.

How had they come to be there? He too, had heard of some queer things at sea in his time, but never anything like this.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT was settling down. Dew was falling. But no coolness was in the air; no evening breeze had come to clear the ship of the heat with which ten days of torrid, windless weather had filled her. He responded unwillingly to the steward’s call. Dinner in that stuffy saloon had little appeal to him, and he lingered in the entrance alley, looking in at the men inside, more than ever unwilling to enter; for two engineers had joined the party, and the overcrowded place reeked with tobacco smoke.

MacArthur was telling the newcomers of the submarines; they were listening intently, now and then interrupting him with an eager question. Back to the bulkhead, his great shoulders almost on a level with the portholes, Big Jim Martin sat playing solitaire. The draught from the open portholes was playing on his beard where it lay, parted in two at the chin and pushed out of the way over his shoulders; occasionally loose strands would blow down among his fingers. To push them back again was the only movement he made apart from the playing, so completely absorbed did he appear in his game.

Stewart sat watching him from the other side of the table, but to Davis it seemed that he was far more interested in what MacArthur and the engineers were saying; and at every question asked he would twitch his head around a little, as though the better to hear the reply. Suddenly he turned and put a question himself:

“Did ye notice whether ‘Artie’ was the only name that freighter had, MacArthur?” Stewart enquired.

Davis entered, his curiosity aroused. Stewart was a dour old Scots seafarer, who seldom spoke, seldom showed interest in anything, and never asked a question unless for a very good reason.

“Hello, Davis! Been having a squint
overside at those submarines?” MacArthur remarked facetiously, as he noticed the under-manager. “What was that you said, Stewart?” he continued immediately, directing his attention to the mate. “‘Artic’ the only name? . . . I don’t know. It was her stern I looked at, and as she is on her starboard side, the name was pretty high up. All I saw was A-r-c-t-i—the second “c” had dropped off, I expect. Now that you have mentioned it, though, I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if there was a second name. There was plenty room for it. The lettering began well to her port side. . . . Jove! that would make her one of old Johan Coull’s boats. They were all the Artic-something. . . . Good Heavens!” he added slowly, his manner suddenly becoming solemn. “Young Johnny Coull must be lying down there, and I knew him better than I know anyone here. She must be the Arctic Queen!” “I was thinking that,” said Stewart quietly.

STEWART turned to Big Jim, as though to say something more. Davis had never seen him so animated. But the entrance of the steward to light the lamp preparatory to serving dinner, checked him, and no one else spoke until the man—the curious fellow—had gone away.

They were eager to do so, however, or to listen. The name of Coull was more than well known to them, and MacArthur’s disclosure had suddenly made them aware that, all unwittingly, they had stumbled over the threshold of the tragedy connected with it. Old John Coull had been the owner of the Arctic Line, a famous Scandinavian line of many vessels, liners, whalers, and tramps. Although a millionaire, he had commanded several in person, and won great renown by his voyages into the world’s least frequented seas. Only two of them had been lost in the war—there lay the tragedy, his own and his son’s—the one was a whaler, the other a freighter. Hence MacArthur’s certainty that he had found the ship of his friend.

Young Johnny Coull had followed in his father’s way, and bade fair to become the greater sailor of the two. During the war, at one time when ships had almost ceased to cross the North Sea, he had persistently run the blockade to bring the coal so sorely needed by his country. A torpedo had found him in the end. Old Johan had set out in a whaler to bury his grief in the Greenland Seas. A few weeks later a British “Q”-boat had picked up a lifeboat containing all that was left of his crew; a lifeboat submerged to the gunnel, its oars and sails gone, its tanks and bottom pierced with augur holes, its eight occupants dead, save one, unconscious and dying—sure evidence to the allied world of the work of the German submarine.

What had added interest to the story to those aboard the Seabird was the fact that Big Jim had commanded that “Q”-boat, with Stewart as his second in command.

“You were going to say something,” Davis reminded the latter, as a clatter of dishes in the pantry broke the silence.

“Do you mind where we picked up that lifeboat, sir?” said the mate to Big Jim.

Big Jim nodded.

“Where?” demanded Davis.

“Just about ten miles North of where we are now,” said Big Jim quietly.

“Oh, the swine!” exclaimed MacArthur. “They must have sunk old Johan on top of his son.”

“It looks very like it,” Big Jim admitted.

He pushed away his cards, and continued in deference to their expectant glances:

“It seems a perfectly extraordinary coincidence,” he said. “And perfectly extraordinary that we, of all people, should tumble up against it. I knew Old Johan, MacArthur, even better than you knew young Johnny. But the most remarkable thing to me is those submarines being there as well. Is that coincidence?”

“No, it’s not,” said Davis. “There’s
none of it coincidence at all. It's far too extraordinary. Old Johan must have come here visiting the spot where young Johnny was drowned, and those five submarines caught and sank him. And I'll bet my last dollar he sank them as well."

"How?"

"I don't know. Possibly he and his crew were taken aboard as prisoners, and they scuttled them out of revenge for young Johnny."

"I believe you have struck it, by Jove!" burst out MacArthur. "Old Johan thought the world of young Johnny, and so did the gang who usually sailed with him. It's just the sort of thing they would make up their minds to do as soon as they saw they were going to be collared."

"And what do you make o' that boat-load o' deid folk?" asked Stewart.

"That's the strongest link of all," maintained MacArthur, warming up to his theory. "Those were the people who did not fancy drowning. So they hid. And the Germans simply left them with a sinking ship and stove-in boats, rather than waste time looking for them. It's pretty convincing. Don't you think so?"

"I doubt there is more in it than that," grunted Stewart.

"You could test it, sir, by raising one of those submarines," Davis suggested.

"Aye," Big Jim agreed. "And I admit I'd like to get to the bottom of it. But do you really think it worth while?"

"Rather," answered Davis, without hesitation. "What a story, if it is true."

"We'll see if the weather looks like holding tomorrow," Big Jim promised. "After all, the Warpindi's our game, and we must get her up while the calm lasts. Better not say anything to the hands about what we think, or there will be precious little interest left for her. . . . Now, steward," he continued, raising his voice, "you have heard all we are going to say, so get the food on the table. If you let a word get for'ard, it's in another ship you will do your next trip. Quick's the word!"

THE STEWARD hastily brought in the dinner; the two engineers departed to eat in their own quarters; and no more was said of Johan Coull and his son—nor much of anything else, Big Jim seeming indisposed for conversation, and MacArthur, usually the wit of the party, sombre from thought of young Johnny Coull. But for once Stewart volunteered a general remark at mealtime, and that about the heat: he had never experienced such a spell of it in the North Sea before, he confessed to Davis.

Because of it, and also because of the disturbed nature of his thoughts, Davis could eat little; and the same causes kept him from sleeping, when, at the close of the tedious meal, he could escape to his berth. All the sleep-bringing tricks he could remember or devise he tried; he flung the clothes from him; without either bringing peace to his throbbing mind, or ease to his tortured frame. One after the other he heard his companions turn in. Unable to endure the irritation of the useless struggle any longer, he slipped down from his bunk and went out on deck.

The deck plates were still warm to his feet, but the air was cooler. He took long draughts of it into his lungs. The muscles of his forearms thrilled gratefully to the wetness of the dew as it struck through the thin cloth of his pajamas from the rail. Beneath him the gig gently rubbed against the Seabird's side. The sea lay still and inviting, waveless in the slack of the tides. There were haze patches showing faintly against the darkness of the further waters, but his sailor's eye could note no fog danger. Acting on the impulse, he swarmed down the rope ladder to the gig, cast off, and gently pulled astern.

The gig had been lowered and left in the water for the seams that the heat had opened to close. There were several inches of leakage in her bottom. When about a cable's length from the Seabird he unshipped oars and lay down in it, cool for the first time for days.
So at ease did he feel that he could have slept there, undisturbed even by the faintest remembrance of the grim drama so lately troubling his mind. But at regular intervals he raised his head to judge of his position by the lights of the Seabird and her consorts. Each time he might as well have lain in peace, for the gig hardly moved.

IT WAS from no sudden apprehension that he was drifting away, that he rose with a start from the bottom of the boat and looked over the side—not at the Seabird, in the other direction; a chill struck through his body and soul that did not come from the water. His hair rose stiff on his head; his flesh congealed and contracted all down his backbone at the touch of some deep and primordial fear. Not a hundred yards from him was a sight he had never beheld in the wildest of his dreams—a ship rising without a sound out of the depths of the sea.

A full rigged ship! Already her masts and yards were exposed to the level of her main topmast crosstrees. Slowly she rose higher, her upper topsail yards breaking above the surface—first the main, then the fore, then the mizzen—she was rising in almost perfect trim; the point of a high flying jib-boom appeared almost simultaneously with the crossjack yard on her mizzen. Soon he could make out her poop and forecastle. There she rode, motionless, her hull submerged, but the lines of it clear to him. For from truck to keel, from counter to cutwater, she glowed with a ghostly, white phosphorescence that clothed every stay, every brace and halliard, and hung in long streamers from every cap and end, and from every point of her dropped in a fine, glittering shower into the sea.

A phantom ship! That was his vision. With the thought departed the physical effects of his fear. He stirred, slid on to one of the thwarts, shipped the oars, stroked into the direction of the Seabird, then resolutely shut his eyes and rowed away.

He was under the Seabird's stern when next he opened them and the vision had disappeared. Gently he sculled to the rope ladder, and with a thankful exclamation, made fast. He had been afraid—not of that ship, for, after the first involuntary panic, it had been but a warning symptom—but that the rest of his sanity would leave him before he could make good his return. The severity of his illness had at last dawned on him. Ships did not rise from the depths of the sea unless to men faced with nervous breakdown. He had struggled with his angry nerves too long, and now they were bent on their revenge.

He clambered aboard, hurried to Big Jim Martin's berth, and roused him.

"I'd like you to look me over, sir," he said. "I feel a bit queer. Just seen the Flying Dutchman rise out of the sea."

Big Jim was out of his bunk in an instant, and had caught him by the shoulders.

"Stewart!" he called.

The old mate came in, was told the story, and without a remark fell to to help Big Jim. They stripped off the soaking pajamas, towelled Davis vigorously, and got him into his bunk. They did not attempt to distract him with useless remarks or questions. To them there was nothing strange in his tale. They also regarded it as a warning symptom. Each in his time had seen the Flying Dutchman come tearing up into the gale, and knew the condition that evolved such a phenomenon. Their sole concern was to aid the comrade whose state had called from the deep a still greater phantasm. Deftly Big Jim took his temperature, felt his pulse, quietly put questions. His relief was obvious as he gave the result of his diagnosis.

"I was afraid of sunstroke at first, Davis," he said. "But it's not that, thank goodness. It's your nerves. I bargained on this trip pulling you together a bit, but it is only making you worse. Back
"Not a hundred yards from him was a sight he had never beheld in the wildest of his dreams—a ship rising without a sound out of the depths of the sea."
you go tomorrow in one of the other ships, and for any sake stay away from the yard for six months at the very least. Mix him up a drink, MacArthur.”

THE SKIPPER had appeared while he was speaking, roused from his sleep by the unwonted stirrings. Without a single curious query, he began the drink mixing; and while he mixed, Davis repeated his tale.

In the midst of it he noticed Stewart, at a sign from Big Jim, follow the latter out into the saloon. Thence came the sound of their voices for a little while, then the sound of their departing footsteps. The gig was tied up not far from his open porthole; he thought he heard men getting into her and the splash of oars, and stopped talking to MacArthur to raise his ear to the opening to listen. But he heard nothing more, and thinking himself mistaken, he lay down again and resumed the conversation. A few minutes later, however, he knew his ears had not tricked him. The gig bumped against the ship’s side. The rope ladder rattled as from men scaling it hastily. Quick footsteps sounded across the deck plates and into the saloon, and he leaped from his bunk as Big Jim and Stewart entered.

“Man! It’s a ship right enough,” the former exclaimed. “And what’s more, it’s the Arctic Belle!”

“Old Johan Coull’s ship!” exclaimed MacArthur, his excitement almost choking him. “What ‘private locker o’ Davy Jones’ is this we have tumbled into?”

“Are you sure, sir?” Davis enquired incredulously.

“Quite sure, Davis,” Big Jim replied, now calmer than any of them. “The dawn is coming up. We will be able to see her from the deck in half a minute.”

He turned as he spoke, and they followed him out on deck, crowding on each other’s heels. Along the eastern horizon a faint lightness was beginning to appear. Against it, dim but unmistakable, hung the silhouette of a ship.

With one accord they made for the gig, and closed with the stranger. The stars had paled. There was a greater blackness on the face of the waters than the night had imposed. Darkly she towered above them, a great nebulous mass, rank with the tang of sea growths and dead fishes, only the vague outline of her tophamper shell to be discerned; for the phosphorescence which had enabled Davis to see her so clearly had died, save where it glowed faintly in patches of greatest blackness. Yet Big Jim was certain as to whose ship she was, Stewart and MacArthur hardly less certain. They lay on their oars in her loom and waited for morning, awed, silent, afraid to approach her more closely in the darkness.

THE SHADOWS at last came scurrying over the sea. With the rush of the summer dawning, the light of the morn broke above the horizon. The strange craft lay revealed, a ship sunk to the level of poop and forecastle, a monstrous, slimy thing from the bed of the sea. The weed covered her: not an inch of her planking or cordage was visible. It made a sponge of her hull, grew thick round her masts, hung in huge masses from her lower spars, festooned every stay, and interlaced between the yards as close as ever canvas filled them.

“That is why she phosphoresced so much, Davis,” whispered Big Jim. “There can’t be so much wrong with your nerves, if they could stand what she must have looked like last night.”

“Do you think it is the weed that has lifted her, sir?” MacArthur inquired in a whisper.

“No. It’s that! . . . Do you see it, Stewart?”

Big Jim pointed to a rounded mass of weed, swelling a little above the surface of the water between the mizzen and the mainmast. Stewart nodded, but did not speak. Still in the same hushed tone that they were all adopting unconsciously, Big Jim continued:

“That’s her hatch tarpaulin bellied out.
She must be half full of some kind of gas, and the hot weather has brought her up. One thing certain now—she’s the Arctic Belle. Gad! I wonder what is behind it all."

"First the submarines. Then Young Johnny Coull’s ship. Now Old Johan’s," MacArthur recapitulated. "And she’s at anchor, too. Do you notice, sir? Whatever had he been doing here?"

"Aye," growled Stewart.

"We’ll get a cradle under while this calm lasts, and try to find out. Back to the Seabird. Quick," Big Jim ordered.

"The sun will crackle up that tarpaulin once it gets overhead, and down she’ll go."

MACARTHUR and Davis dashed the oars into the rowlocks and pulled strongly away. Boats were setting out from the other vessels, the growing light having discovered to their crews the presence of their strange companion. But at Big Jim’s signal they closed on the gig, and he issued his instructions. Ere the sun had well cleared the horizon, the Arctic Belle was safe from any immediate danger of sinking.

The big steel buoyancy cylinders, brought for the Warpindi’s raising, had been towed alongside and strapped together in pairs by hawser passing underneath her keel. Divers were on board, clearing the way to lazarette and forecastle. There were to be placed the patent flexible air envelopes, which, when expanded, would help to keep her afloat when her hatches were opened. Soon they were in position and filling. Slowly she lifted her bulwark out of the sea.

The waist of the Arctic Belle was filled to the level of her bulwarks with a mass of weed and slime. Strong hose jets from the Seabird cleared it. Freed of so weighty a burden her deck rose flush with the surface of the sea—and continued to rise, slowly, almost imperceptibly.

"It’s but a wee hole that sank her, to let the water out again as slow as that," grunted old Stewart. "She will easy stand the hatches being opened, sir. The pumps will soon suck her dry."

The deduction was incontrovertible, and Big Jim at once led a working party aboard, armed with axes and crowbars for the stowing in of the hatches. Davis noticed that the men walked gingerly, casting nervous glances about them. With the weed hanging rankly from the spars overhead, it was more like entering a grotto raised temporarily from the depths of the sea. And the smell of the sea bottom was stronger, almost nauseating. But the odor of the gas that rushed through the gaps made in the hatches was distinctive enough, and he looked quickly around to see that none of the men were smoking.

"It’s acetylene, sir," he exclaimed in surprise.

"Aye. She was lit and warmed throughout with it," said Big Jim, "and the sea has gradually eaten in among her carbide. Go and see how her waterline is behaving."

But the releasing of the gas seemed to have produced no effect on the whaler’s buoyancy, and soon two powerful centrifugal pumps were sucking at the water in her hold.

"She’s rising fast, sir," reported Davis, leaving the bulwarks and rejoining his chief.

"She must have been scuttled," said Big Jim. "Served the same way as that lifeboat. You know, Davis"—his glance roved over the ruin—"this makes me sad—or savage; I am not sure which. There was not a finer ship afloat. Nor a finer sailor," he added in an undertone. "Somehow I feel he is still abroad... Let’s have a look into the saloon."

They squeaked aft towards the poop and climbed it by a ladder, weed-filled to its rail top. With difficulty their sea boots dug for foothold; their hands slipped on the slimy rails. On the poop itself the weed was knee deep. At nearly every step things wriggled from underneath their soles.

"She will never stand all this top-
hamper when she lifts,” said Big Jim, gazing doubtfully from the overgrown poop to the overgrown masts. “Hey, MacArthur,” he called, “send the hands aloft to clear her upper rigging. She will turn turtle if we’re not careful.”

He stopped to watch the carrying out of his order; but Davis waded on, his curiosity too great to allow him to delay. He reached the saloon entrance and passed within. Yet with one foot still lingering on the threshold, he paused there, hesitating.

IT WAS a great place, broad, long, and high, unusually so; fit skipper’s quarters for the great skipper who had lived there—probably died there! But the under-manager’s hesitation sprang from another cause. Outside, the weed had choked the broad decks, fouled the clean timbers, and made grotesques of the stately masts and spars. Here there was no weed. A fine mud overlay each object, making each line and surface more severely straight and plain.

From without sounded the voices of the salvagers, the crash and thud of the falling weed, the splash and gurgle of hold—human sounds. Slowly he began his inspection, treading softly, as though in fear of disturbing some silent sleeper.

But none such remained. The berths were empty, left just as their former occupants had left them when they took their departure, some to die perhaps in that scuttled lifeboat; or in one’s and two’s to those five. In the under-manager’s heart a new wonder had eclipsed the old wonder of those sunken submarines. Big Jim came in, followed by Stewart and MacArthur. Silently he waited for them to make the discovery that he had made.

They came from the berths and joined him, MacArthur last, hardest to convince of the three.

“D’ye ever see anything like it!” he exclaimed in an incredulous amazement. “He has had a harem aboard with him.”

It was true. Six of the berths had contained women—girls, rather; girls who had worn the fine dresses that Davis had seen hanging in the cupboards, and the shapely boots and shoes littered about the floors. And on a whaler, bound for the Greenland Seas!

“There was a woman in that lifeboat,” said Stewart. “The kind that would have worn these bits of things in there.”

He left them at once, and passed out of sight into an alleyway that led from the forward end of the saloon.

“We said nothing about it for the sake of old Johan,” Big Jim explained.

“A straighter man never sailed the seas,” murmured MacArthur. “There is a lot more in this than we can see at present.”

“It’s not a whaler, this, at all,” grunted Stewart abruptly, reappearing in the saloon. “Come here.”

They followed him through the alleyway and down a companion that descended to the ’tween decks, and thence straight on, apparently, to the depths of the ship. But it was onto the ’tween decks he led them, through a doorway that opened from the companion. They saw the great space of the upper main hold stretching before them, still flooded kneedeep, still reeking with the odor of acetylene and fouler gases, but little at first of what it contained, for the only light that lit the place was that streaming scantily through the breach in the hatches, whence the glinting pump pipes descended deep down into the lower hold. And what they did see, they could scarcely bring themselves to believe.

“It’s surely never a court?” whispered Davis at last.

“That’s what I was thinking myself,” grunted the old mate, not nearly so impressed as the others.

“It is,” said Big Jim soberly.

AGAINST the further wall of the ship was a judge’s bench; on one side of it, a juryman’s enclosure, a prisoner’s dock on the other. Benches and desks, whose purpose was not so readily dis-
"There he is," he said, suddenly, stopping and holding the lamp steady."
cernible, stood in between. But the general scheme was clear. Someone had planned to sit in judgment here. Who? And on whom? . . . And to what end?

"If they caught him trying this game," Big Jim muttered, "it is easy to understand that scuttled lifeboat."

He plunged boldly through the water in the direction of a door in the forward bulkhead, immediately in front of which point the dock had been set. He moved so quickly that the others could not overtake him. But he stopped of his own accord at the sound of a heavy crash on deck, a crash that was immediately followed by a chorus of shouts and cries from the crew.

"For the love of Mike, come on deck, sir," a man called out, poking his head hastily through the breach in the hatches.

"Gad! I hope no one has fallen," exclaimed Big Jim, turning immediately and splashing toward the companion.

But no one had fallen. The crash had come from a heavy mass of weed that had slithered down from the mainmast, clearing the lower yards as it fell. Beneath the main yard were grouped the crew, unhurt, staring up at something that swung above their heads; something still enmeshed and held together by the weed—the skeleton of a man; a man who had been hanged by the neck.

Stewart and MacArthur hurried forward. Davis started to follow, but seeing Big Jim lift an ax and dart below again, he turned and raced after him.

"Do you think it is Old Johan they have hung there?" he enquired, excitedly, catching up with him at the beginning of the 'tween decks.

"No, Davis," he answered gravely. "It is someone who came out of this door to stand his trial here. . . . Stand clear."

With a swing of the massive shoulders the ax came up and round and down. The whole bulkhead trembled and groaned beneath the blow; the door gave almost the width of its frame. They found themselves sprawling on the floor of the forehold, a place darker than the one whence they had stumbled. But not dark enough! Davis felt Big Jim grab him and drag him outside—out and away from that silent company into which they had intruded: men waiting to stand their trial like that other, thirty or forty of them, drowned in their chains.

"Young Johnny's death must have made him mad," said Big Jim, solemnly. "A kindlier man never sailed. Go and tell MacArthur to see the hands off the ship. They mustn't get to know. Get all gear back to the Seabird, and tow those cylinders clear."

"And the pumps?"

"Leave them. We must find out what happened."

DAVIS went on his mission. When he returned Big Jim had descended the companion again, and stood leaning against the side, gazing pensively down at the receding water.

"He is down here," he said, and Davis did not venture to question him.

Quickly the pumps sucked the water away, and they heard the sound of the leak bursting in. Stewart and MacArthur had joined them by then—Davis had told them. Stewart came direct, but MacArthur from a stealthy visit to that door in the forward bulkhead.

"My God!" he whispered to Davis, shaking his head expressively.

They had brought flash lamps with them. Big Jim took one and pushed on.

"There he is," he said, suddenly, stopping and holding the lamp steady.

A pace or two away was the end of the alleyway. Against a storeroom door, in the act of breaking it down, leaned a huge man.

"It's Johan," murmured Stewart.

Davis drew back, awed. But Big Jim gently took the body in his arms and set it upright away from the door. With his own strength he completed what the dead man had almost done. They looked within. In the light of the lamps three white spouts of water showed gushing
from the vessel's side. A large augur stuck out from a fourth uncompleted. But another sight it was that held their gaze.

In the far corner stood a dead German sailor and a dead girl, locked in each other's arms. . . .

"He was probably an old sweetheart. And she set him free. And he scuppered the lifeboats—the pumps also, very likely, and by night. Then the two went down there to sink the ship and to die together—Old Johan followed them—too late!"

BIG JIM was speaking. They were up on deck raising the pumps out of the hold, quite unaided by any of the men.

"Women are wonderful," he continued, speaking almost to himself. "The best and the worst. And the worst more wonderful than the best. That girl down there—a decoy—God knows what—" He checked himself abruptly. "Stove in that forward hatch, Stewart," he ordered. "We'll just let her go down."

. . . Davis stole aft and closed the saloon doors!

THE REMAINDER
Or, And That's That
By Katherine Negley

A lawyer is a man who can prove that you believe a thing you know in your heart you do not believe.

A doctor is a man who can persuade you that you need an operation for appendicitis when you go to him to be treated for rheumatism in your left shoulder.

A minister is a man who can make you worry about the place where you have to suffer for your sins, but who can not make you worry enough to stop committing the sins.

A new woman is one who smokes cigarettes, votes, holds office, and marries a man who makes twenty dollars a week—that is, he makes twenty dollars a week when he is working.

A telephone operator is a girl who is ringing your number.

A merchant is a man who buys a suit for twenty dollars, marks it sixty dollars, sells it to you for fifty-five dollars, and makes you think you are getting a bargain.

A realtor is a man who sells you a house on the top of a hill, reached by seventy-nine steps, when you had fully made up your mind to buy a home on the level, with a street car going by the door.

A salesman is a man who can convince you the flivver he wants to get off his hands will give you more mileage than the six cylinder car you had planned to buy on monthly installments.

A musical comedy girl is one who can not sing or dance, but who is restful to the eyes.

A wife is a woman who takes your name and everything else you have while you live with her, and makes you pay alimony when you leave her.

And you—

You are what is left when they all get through with you!
The Story by S. Omar Barker
With Illustrations by Garrett Price

HIGH up on the Rio Lucero, where the crags of old Bull o' the Woods cast their darkest shadow on the red sandstone ledges of the canyon, stand two squatty little cabins. Like two crouching enemies they face each other across the brown and red dumps of hand-worked mines below them.

Of the two drab little dwellings, the one that sits close under the steep slopes of the massive Bull o' the Woods, and looks toward the north, never seeing the sun except in summer, is much the newer. Its walls are lower, its dirt roof is fresher and less carefully rounded, as if it had been set up in haste—while its companion of the other slope shows even through gray marks of age the loving hand of careful workmen...

Years ago two prospectors, just entering the age of grizzled beards and mellowed hearts, wandered up the trackless canyon of the Lucero and there, in the red sandstone and white quartz cropping out along the gorge, found traces of yellow gold. They stopped and dug a mine, and together they built a warm and roomy cabin as high up out of the shadow...
of Bull o' the Woods as they could climb. There, when they had brought supplies and made their crude furniture, they would sit together during the long winter evenings, smoking friendly pipes and sharing tales of labors past and hopes of joys to come.

When summer came again they spent long hours with pick and hammer, burrowing holes in the canyon's bottom. Evenings they would sit beside their cabin, or squat against its rough wall, watching the colors deepen from gold to blood red, and then to black, as darkness fell on the heights of the huge peak that reared its head eternally above them. Then they would talk of the prospect holes and discuss the latest signs of gold, and finger the tiny nuggets they had thus far found, hazarding many a guess as to the luck of the morrow. But whether luck was with them or against them, they were contented, for they loved this life of hard but hopeful digging, with its solitude. To them, a prospect hole was home. The clank of picks and bars on hard crystal quartz was the voice of heaven in their ears. The life and each other they loved, these two old men—better, they thought, than yellow gold itself.

So passed five seasons. Then one day MacGregor found a vein richer than their dearest hopes. From the segment which his pick had exposed the vein seemed to writhe and twist almost horizontally across the canyon, scarcely twenty feet below the surface. It meant a fortune!

It was August and that evening they sat in the mild shadows beside the cabin, and talked and laughed and dreamed like children, until the great gray moon had cleared the crags of the peak above them and sailed high among the stars.

When they had turned in for the night MacGregor could not sleep.

Gold! Riches! Wealth!

These kept throbbing through his brain with such dreamlike insistency that a doubt finally rose in his mind as to the reality of his fortune.

Then silently he stole out of the cabin and down to the canyon, climbing carefully to the bottom of one of their uneven shafts, where he gathered several stones and carried them to the surface. Even in the moonlight his keen prospector's eye was reassured and he clambered back up to the cabin, shirt-tails waving in the cool breeze of August night. But up in the cabin Pop Hadley had sensed MacGregor's absence and, waking, had gone out and seen the shadowy movements of his partner down in the canyon. A suspicion crept into his brain that the other was planning foul play. In all their years together there had never been a suspicion in the mind of either. They had, each for the other, the simple trust and honesty of a Damon and Pythias. There had not then been wealth to tempt them; now there was gold—gold that so often plays havoc with the trustfulness of kindly souls, the yellow turning to the red of blood before the eyes of men.

And so these two old miners quarreled on the very eve of their realization and set at naught the long years of brotherhood and trust. Pop Hadley, all the calm gone from beneath his shaggy brows, demanded a written agreement. MacGregor, sensitive to the core, and reticent and reserved as Scotch blood could make him, took offense at the suggestion. An almost wordless, but none the less intense, quarrel followed, with the ultimate result that MacGregor forbade his former partner entering the shaft where he had found gold, paid him in nuggets for his share of the little cabin, set Hadley's portion of the furnishings outside, and ordered him to move out as soon as possible.

Hadley, the bristly ringlets of his gray beard quivering with anger and emotion, replied that he would leave the cabin—yes—but the mine—never! Then he in turn promised MacGregor he would kill
him if he ever set foot on the ladder that led to the vein of new found gold.

Within a week Hadley had started the walls of a new cabin over on the other slope, under the very nose of Bull o’ the Woods. Before winter he had moved into it and built a trail from it to the canyon’s bottom.

The former partners ceased to speak to each other, but, oddly enough, each obeyed the other’s warning and did not return to the shaft where MacGregor had found gold. It was not fear of violence that had held them, for such men are unwont to be afraid. Perhaps it was a desire to show contempt for the wealth in question. Maybe it was merely the whim of old men, or again a desire to avoid the pain of further quarreling. At any rate the old ladder leaned unused and with time decayed against the stone wall of the shaft, both men diligently and silently sinking shafts and excavating branching tunnels all about it in an effort to tap the paying vein elsewhere in its meandering beneath the surface.

CHRISTMAS came and passed, and if either man felt anything of regret, or had a desire to become friends again, he kept his own counsel and made no sign. Each went for his own supplies and when questioned by the curious at Padilla’s store in the tiny village of Valdez concerning the other, replied sharply that “he did not know.”

Often during the next summer they swung their picks or plied their bars within a dozen feet of each other, but said no word. A look of bitterness grew on the faces of both and the last sandy locks of MacGregor’s hair became white as snow above his hollow temples. It was as if a great cancer ate at the heart of each.

CAME the second Christmas Eve of bitterness on the Rio Lucero. Pop Hadley, his empty pipe in hand, sat at the little window of his cabin and watched the line of shadow creep up the opposite hillside, crowding the sunlight slowly upward as the winter sun sank lower and lower behind the somber ridges that dropped off westward from the summit of Bull o’ the Woods.

Darkness came. Pop Hadley lighted a lamp and then resumed his seat by the window, watching, as he always did, for the appearance of a light in MacGregor’s window across the canyon. It was Christmas Eve, and in spite of himself his mind saw visions of other years when this night had meant joy to the child heart of him—then visions of the years when he and MacGregor had smoked and cracked nuts and talked or played cribbage together, reminiscences of other happy Christmas Eves crowding their conversation.

An hour of darkness passed and no light appeared across the canyon. The watcher became uneasy. Something was wrong. He had seen MacGregor go in with wood at dusk, so that he must be there, but there had not even been the flicker of the match with which he would have lighted his pipe. By nine o’clock Hadley could control his fears no longer.

Cursing himself for a soft hearted, silly headed old fool, he put on his heavy arctics, bundled himself up thoroughly, and started out. As an after thought he returned for a small flask half filled with brandy.

Two feet or more of snow covered the ground, still as crystalline and light as when it had fallen, for even the sunlit day had been cold. Tonight the air was bitter, with a still, stinging cold. On such a night, breath freezes and eyes throb with pain from the frost, but Hadley hardly sensed it.

At the door he paused for breath, and then knocked. There was no answer. He pulled the latch and walked in. There had been a fire in the room, but it was chilled now.

“Mac!” he called in an uncertain voice. “Who are ye?” came the voice of MacGregor, hoarse but still defiant. Then Hadley could discern the shadow of his shoulders stooped over the table near one of the little windows.
"Though dressed only in rags, and apparently an old man with long white hair and beard, the stranger showed marvelously few evidences of suffering from the extreme cold."
"It's Pop, Mac!"

The old man's voice quavered in spite of himself.

"I didn't see no light in the windy, and I calc'lated ye might be sick and need me, Mac, so I come clean acrost through the snow an' all."

"Need ye? Need ye?" MacGregor stood up, his voice torn between bitterness and tears. "Had ye coomed from hell, back ye could go for any bit I'd be needin' ye!"

Hadley came a step nearer. There was pleading and contrition in his voice.

"It's yer old pal, Mac," he begged, "Old Pop Hadley come back to ye!"

He could not see the tears on MacGregor's wrinkled old cheeks as he answered, still defiant and bitter:

"Ye bin no pal o' mine! I dinna want ye here! Out! Away with ye!"

Hadley sobbed audibly as he turned back to the door. Suddenly a faint cry as if for help came to the ears of both men. It seemed to be but a few feet from the door. Wonderingly they listened, for men were not wont to travel up the Rio Lucero even in summer; but when the cry came again they rushed out together and down the path. There, lying exhausted in the snow, was a man.

Quickly they carried him in, lighted a lamp and began chafing his hands. Though dressed only in rags, and apparently an old man with long white hair and beard, the stranger showed marvelously few evidences of suffering from the extreme cold. In a few moments he had revived enough to sit up between the two old miners in front of the stove where MacGregor had rekindled a roaring fire. For a time the three old men sat in silence. Then the stranger spoke. There was an indefinable sweetness in his troubled tone.

"I must be on my way!" he said.

MacGregor started in astonishment.

"Man, man, ye'll ride with us the night! Aye, 'tis a cruel night to be travellin' forth! Ye'd freeze in a mile!"

In a moment they had persuaded him to stay, and he sank back in the crude chair, a strange little smile on his face.

Suddenly Hadley remembered where he was. He rose and started putting on his coat.

"Well, I'll be goin' back now, Mac," he said apologetically, "I'd a' most forgot."

"Aye, pal, and so had I! But ye'll rest the night with yer old partner, won't ye Pop?"

The eyes of the two old miners met over the white head of the stranger, and without a word the breach of years was sealed. Together they prepared food for the stranger and then afterwards the three sat contentedly smoking their pipes by the fireside. Hadley and MacGregor were curious about their guest but remained courteously silent, and though he offered no explanations his very presence seemed to emanate peace and contentment.

It was almost midnight when MacGregor laid a bed for the stranger before the fire, and the two old miners turned in together in the straw bunk in the other room. It was as it had been in the old days, and, with the bitterness draining from their hearts, the two old men slept like children.

With morning they came out to build a fire, but their guest was gone. On the table was a little note: "I was a stranger and ye took me in." That was all.

"God save Him—and us!" said MacGregor, kneeling and pulling Pop down beside him.

Strange things have happened when the snow lies deep up the Rio Lucero and in the shadows of Bull o' the Woods, and there are those who scoff to hear them told. But there in the old cabin on the sunny slope above an untouched mine shaft live two contended old miners who will tell you truthfully of that Christmas morning when a stranger left their little shanty, never a track in the snow to tell where he had gone.
The WARD OF ROBBERS' ROOST
By Crittenden Marriott

Author of “Isle of Dead Ships,” “Sally Castleton, Southerner,” “Ward of Tecumseh,” etc.

Illustrations by T. Wyatt Nelson

[TOLED IN THE PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS: Many years ago Venable Morton, one of the Virginia Mortons, in crossing the Mohave desert lost his life from thirst. With him died his wife. A baby, Stella, was rescued by Tom “Fair,” a man whom circumstances had recently turned outlaw, and who had arrived on the scene just in time to promise the dying man that he would return the child to Virginia. But Fair could not establish contact with the Eastern Mortons and was obliged to keep her with the band of desperadoes with whom he surrounded himself at Robbers' Roost, a mountain fastness, whose only entrance was beneath a waterfall. Stella lived the life of a healthy, hard-riding boy, dressing the part, accompanying the band on more than one gun-running expedition, and being known to everybody as “Bob.”

Stella grows up and Jim Barker, sheriff of the county, a notorious character, casts covetous eyes on her. Fair—growing old, and feeling the allegiance of his band slipping away, with Wade, a young insurgent, having friendly relations with Barker—knows that he cannot protect Stella much longer, and sends Green, a friend, to Virginia to bring means of rescue from the Mortons. Green brings back “Go Ahead” Morton, a dashing young federal department of justice operative, accompanied by his colored servant. The night before Go Ahead is due to reach Loboville, county seat, however, Stella, unknown to Fair, and with the connivance of Wade, joins a gun-running expedition across the Mexican line, which Fair, thinking to allay the unrest in camp, sends out in charge of Wade.

Returning to Robbers' Roost, Wade lures “Bob” to the “J. B.” Barker's ranch, awaiting Barker and a padre for the marriage. Wade, however, thinking to double-cross his chief, himself proposes to the girl, only to be refused. He is about to coerce her, when Go Ahead appears on the scene, and knocks Wade to the floor, and in turn J. B., who suddenly appears, Stella escaping on Go Ahead's horse. Go Ahead, not knowing that “Bob” in reality is his cousin, takes J. B.’s horse to follow the cloud of dust off in the direction of Robbers' Roost. On reaching the crest of a hill he suddenly confronts “Bob,” who is being pursued back by the bandits, whom she had overtaken, and who, knowing Wade's plot to hold her at the “J. B.” are suspicious of her escape—especially so when Green, who comes up at that moment, informs her that her rescuer is no other than her cousin, and she turns back to find him. On meeting “Bob” at the crest of the hill, Go Ahead turns and rides by her side. They slowly gain on their pursuers, but Go Ahead's horse stumbles and throws his rider; “Bob” leaps to the ground, and they hide in safety as the pursuit, now joined by Barker, presses on and out of sight. A pair of stragglers from the band in put in their appearance; Go Ahead seizes their horses and, with “Bob,” marches the two bandits into Loboville two hours later, and presents them to the astonished Barker. Barker does not dare attack Go Ahead in the open, especially since a company of soldiers is stationed in town, but invites Go Ahead to come to his office when he and “Bob” have had supper at “Bridget’s,” a boarding house, which Go Ahead promises to do. The present installment starts here.]

Bridget's was built on the “system of units” plan. Originally an adobe building, it had been supplemented by frame, and even by galvanized iron additions, until it had taken on a nondescript aspect.

When Go Ahead saw it he grinned.
“Did somebody build it from the correspondence-school directions in the Women’s Home Chronicle, telling how to build a house out of a soap box and a tin can?” he asked.
Stella’s eyes widened. “Why!” she exclaimed, “I never thought of it in that way before; but that’s just what it does look like.”

Then her innate loyalty to her friends got the better of her sense of humor. “I don’t care,” she protested. “It’s clean, and the eats are good, and Bridget’s a good sort! She’s been mighty good to me, and I’m mighty fond of her.”

“Good boy! Stand up for your friends. I hope she’s got a room for us.”

“I’ll go in and see!”

Coloring faintly, Stella scurried around the side of the house, darted into the adobe section, from which appetizing odors were floating out upon the air, and precipitated herself into the arms of a comfortable-looking Irish woman who was cooking at the stove.

“Oh, Bridget, Bridget!” she cried. “I’m so glad to see you.”

“Arrah, and is it yourself, mavour-neen?”

Bridget’s arms closed about the slim form of the girl.

“Sure, it’s the long time since you’ve been in, so it is. . . . Ah! You needn’t be tryin’ to explain at all. It’s meself that knows what’s been goin’ on. . . . Why, why, darlin’! What’s after bein’ the matter with ye?”

Stella was sobbing on the woman’s motherly shoulders.

“Oh, oh, Bridget!” she gulped. “I’m so miserable and so happy and so—so—”

“Whist, child! That’s enough for one bit! . . . Who is he, darlint?”

“He?”

Stella tore herself free.

“Sure! Sure it’s a man in it, there is. Whatever else should a girl be happy and miserable all at once for?”

Stella drew herself up. “You’re all wrong, Bridget,” she said, coldly. “I’m not a girl. I’m a man and—”

“Not a girl? Arrah! Ain’t ye now? Think of that!”

“No, I’m not.”

Stella stamped her foot.

“I’m a man—or a boy, anyway! And I’m going to stay one. I—I—Oh! Why won’t the men let me alone?”

“God knows, dearie. But I’m thinkin’ maybe it’s just because they are men—the poor omadhouns! Who’s been troublin’ ye now? Barker?”

“No! Yes! Oh, it’s too long to tell now. But Wade and Barker trapped me at the J/B ranch this morning. And if Go Ahead hadn’t come a—”

“Who come along?”

“Go Ahead. My cousin from the East. Dad sent for him—”

“Sure an’ I know. Fair sent me word about him a month ago. It’s a fine mouth-fillin’ name he’s got. But I suppose he got it because he was most unlike it. Likely he turned out to be a lah-de dah dude.”

The Irishwoman dropped her eye lids to hide the twinkle.

“Dude! Dude!” Stella laughed scornfully. “Well, if you’d seen the way he handled Wade and Barker this morning, and Barker again just now—Oh! I wish I had time to tell you all about him, but it would take me a week. But he’s a real man and—and he’s nice, too!”

Bridget shrugged her mighty shoulders.

“An’ wouldn’t anybody be nice to a pretty girl cousin the first time he sees her?” she scoffed.

“But I’m not pretty. And he doesn’t dream that I’m a girl—and I’m not. I won’t be a girl! And he mustn’t know it if I am.”

Bridget stood back and ran a shrewd, appraising eye over Stella’s face and figure. “I’m thinkin’ maybe it’s right you are,” she conceded. “It’s a lot more like a rowdy boy than a girl you’re lookin’ right now. But in three months belike—or maybe in less—Well! It’s not sayin’ I am. An’ as for pretty—! But no matter about that! Where is this buckaroo of yours?”

“Out in front. He’s looking for me—the ‘Stella’ me, you know; and he doesn’t know he’s found me. He’s come here to wait for word from dad where he’s to meet me. But—but—” (the girl’s face...
crimsoned) "he says he wants a room—a room—for us, and—"

"And why not?"

"Bridget!"

"Seein' that it's a boy you are?"

"That's different!"

"So it is, so it is! Sure, child, it's only teasin' you a bit I was. I'll give him a room, but as all my spacious guest chambers are full I'll have to give him a wee small one next to me and to put you in another small one at the front of the house."

"Bridget!"

"Ah! It's the one next to me I'll give you if you're wantin' it so bad as all that. . . . An' now I'll go see that young man of yours and see whether it's give my consent I will. . . . Oh, whist, child I'm not doubtin' that it's all right he is. But I'll give him the onct over before I trust him or any other man. An' if he ain't all right, niver a step will you be goin' off with him, so you won't."

Unheeding all of Stella's protestations, Bridget turned to the Mexican woman who was helping her at the stove and gave orders as to the dinner. Then, head up, she started for the front of the house with the solid, dependable motion of a battle ship going into action.

Stella, however, clung to her. "He is all right, Bridget," she panted. "He is. Dad sent for him—"

"So he did. But he's never seen him."

"No-o! But I have. And I know a man when I see one. He came out here to help me, and he got into dreadful trouble—that is, it would have been dreadful trouble if he hadn't been so splendid. Oh, if you'd seen the way he handled Wade and Barker, and Diego, too! Everybody calls him 'Go Ahead,' and—and—" (a shadow crossed the girl's face) "and it makes him so venturesome and—"

Bridget stopped short. "Saints defend us!" she cried. "An' is it you—you—that's complainin' because a man's venturesome?"

"N-no-o-o! I guess we're all sort of venturesome. But Go Ahead runs it into the ground. He came to Loboville just to get Jim Barker's goat today—and he got it; and now Barker'll shoot him down from behind, or pay some one else to do it."

"I know he will. And—"

"There, there, darlin', don't be takin' on so. You can just tell him who you are an'—"

"But I don't want to tell him who I am."

"I—I want to ride and talk and—and all that with him first—"

"Indade an' you won't!"

And Bridget resumed her interrupted progress to the front of the house.

Meanwhile Go Ahead had sat down on a bench near the front door and had been trying to concentrate his mind on the revision of his plans, which had been somewhat disarranged by the completeness of Barker's surrender. Go Ahead was familiar with Barker's type, and he knew well that such men are never so dangerous as after they are beaten, for then they fight by proxy, or from ambush.

To recover his lost "face" Jim Barker must somehow destroy his adversary, and he would not dare to fight fair. Go Ahead knew that it became him to guess what Barker would try to do next and to forestall him.

But he had great difficulty in keeping his mind concentrated on the problem. Just as he would get a train of thought straightened out and running smoothly, some act or word of Bob's would pop into his mind and he would lose his place, go off at a tangent, and later find himself miles away from the conclusion at which he had been aiming. After this had happened several times, he jumped to his feet, fuming.

"Confound the boy and his scrapes!" he raged, to himself. "I've got to get him and his troubles out of my head. He's a good kid, but he isn't the whole works by a long shot. He's just an immaterial cog wheel, after all."
GO AHEAD glanced at the watch on his wrist. "Where the devil is the boy, anyway," he fumed. "He's been gone long enough to rent this whole shebang, let alone engaging one room. . . . Oh, he's all right at that. Looks sort of effeminate maybe, but— Oh well, you never can tell about these kids. Lots of 'em haven't got sense enough to be afraid. . . . Oh, hello, Bob! Thought you were trying to buy out the place!"

Stella and Bridget had come upon him unawares.

Stella was confused for the first time since Go Ahead had met her. She had no answer ready to his chaff, and she responded only by introducing him to Bridget—and she did this awkwardly. Bridget's stern stand in regard to him, to say nothing of her insinuations, had left the girl ill at ease.

Bridget, however, quickly swept all awkwardness aside.

"Bob's been tellin' me how you helped him out this mornin'," she said. "Sure an' it's meself that's mighty grateful to you for that same. Bob's like me own boy; I brought him up, so to speak. An' that Wade is a dirty blaggard to try to hurt a gossoon half his size."

Bridget's eyes searched Go Ahead's face as she talked for any sign that might betray consciousness of Stella's sex.

But she saw none. Go Ahead only grinned.

"Help him?" he retorted. "It was he who helped me and saved my life. Have you seen him in action, ma'am? No? Well, you've got something to live for then. He does honor to your bringing up.

"I think I never saw a likelier youngster—if he wasn't so darned venturesome."

Bridget wailed her eyes at Stella, who grinned reluctantly.

"Yes," she answered, glancing back to Go Ahead, "an' him so slim and ladylike too."

Bridget was determined to probe Go Ahead's mind to the very bottom.

"Sure thing. He's good looking enough to be a girl."

Go Ahead grinned maliciously at Stella, who was looking down and blushing deeply.

"But he doesn't fight like a girl, no ma'am.

"He and I have got to be great pals in short order."

Bridget was satisfied. "You can't always be tellin' about young things like him," she replied, with a meaning that Go Ahead was far from suspecting. "You'll be after wantin' rooms?"

"Yes!"

Go Ahead's face became grave. He looked about for possible listeners and saw none.

"I've come from the East to get my cousin Stella," he said. "I believe Fair sent you word?"


"The messenger had difficulty in finding me, I believe; and then of course he had to take some time to find out whether he could trust me. We left for here a few hours after he broke the news. He said you would probably have a message for me."

"I only knew that you were comin'."

"Well, in that case, I was to stay here till it did come in some form or other. So you see my stay is pretty indefinite. Bob has promised to stay with me and to go East with me, and Stella, when I find her."

"If you can put us up—"

"Sure, I can do that. Green came by yesterday an' told me that you was on the way before he went on to the Roost. Most like he got there last night."

"He did."

Stella chimed in before she thought.

"Wh—?" queried the Irishwoman, surprisedly.

"Yes. He—he was with the men who were chasing us this morning. I—I recognized him."

Stella thought she had got out of her predicament very well.
BRIDGET accepted the explanation with a nod. "Sure! Then Fair knows you're here an' he'll be sendin' you word soon," she said to Go Ahead. "You'll be here the night, any way. Come in, an' I'll be after showin' you the rooms. It's only two small ones I've got."

Two minutes later Bridget threw open the door of a tiny bedchamber and let Go Ahead enter.

"Bob's room is back, near mine," she said. "I'll take him to it. Supper'll be ready in half an hour or less."

"I'll be ready for it," laughed Go Ahead, with real earnestness in his voice.

At the door of Stella's room Bridget would have gone on. But the girl stopped her. "Green came to meet me," she said, hurriedly. "He brought me a message from dad. He knows that I know Go Ahead. So dad probably won't send any other message. And Go Ahead'll wait and wait till Barker manages to get him shot from behind. I—I've got to get him away from here quick. Can't—can't you help me?"

Bridget looked at the girl tenderly.

"You lamb," she breathed. "It's meself will get a message from your father this very night."

"But—but—how can you?"

"By weey board! How else?"

"Oh!" Stella laughed hysterically.

"And what will Ouija say?" she demanded.

"I'll have to be consultin' it afore I'll know? But I'm thinkin' it'll be instructin' the two of ye's to wait for that minx Stella somewheres east of here, close by the J/B ranch belike. Now I must be hurrying. Sure, I've got twenty-odd hungry men to feed in less than half an hour from now, an' if I'm not ready they'll be tearin' down the place, so they will."

SUPPER was ready on time and Bridget's place escaped the fate that its owner had conjured up, though no one who saw the men eat would have doubted that its escape was narrow. Like a torrent they poured into the dining room when the gong sounded, and like a horde of devouring locusts they swept the table bare.

Stella and Go Ahead were there with the first, but they stayed longer than the last, most of the others making their escape the moment they finished their meal and scattering to affairs that interested them. Several, however, waited outside until Go Ahead came out.

When he did appear, one of these, a clear-eyed, determined-looking ranchman, came up to him, with the other two close behind.

"My name's Brown," he said. "I own a big ranch near here. My friends, Nelson and White"—he gestured toward the others—"also own big ranches. We all saw you get Barker's goat a while ago. Course, we don't know just what your game is, an' we're not askin' you to spill it till you get good and ready. We're only tellin' you that we'll back your play against Barker to the limit—and that's the sky. Call on us, any time!"

Go Ahead nodded.

"That's mighty fine of you," he said, noncommittally. "I'll be glad to call on you if I need help. But I hope I won't need it."

Brown grinned. "I'm betting that way myself," he remarked. "After seeing you handle Barker I thought you'd do. But we just wanted you to know that there are lots of honest men here who are pretty well fed up on Barker and his gang. S'long."

"So long!"

THE three men turned way, and Go Ahead looked around for Caesar and the horses he was to bring. Caesar was not visible, however. No one was visible, for the matter of that, except one man sitting on a bench close by. So he started back to the hotel.

At the door Bridget met him. "I've just been gettin' word from Fair," she said. "If you an' Bob will be leavin' about two o'clock in the mornin' so as to
get to the J. B. ranch about daylight, you'll find Stella there. If you don't find her soon, ride on toward Mustin and she'll be with you afore you get there.”

Bridget's words were accurate enough, as a whole and in detail, though they were somewhat misleading in spirit.

Go Ahead's face fell. The pending meeting was exactly what he had come West for, but it had been arranged with a speed that was not altogether welcome. It involved his leaving Loboville with a suddenness that would permit Barker to assert and other people to believe that he had weakened and run away. Of course he could and would keep his promise to “drop in” on Barker before he went, but he could not afford to notify him when and where he was going, for to do so would be to endanger Stella. As a matter of fact he did not want to leave Loboville until he had smashed Barker completely—to Fair's advantage.

Nevertheless he could not disregard Fair's instructions, the authenticity of which he had no reason in the world to doubt. He must not only meet his cousin, but he must take her immediately East. He could not get back in less than ten days, and what might happen in ten days he could not guess. However—

A BRUPTLY Go Ahead dismissed the matter from his mind. His duty was plain. He must set about it and consider later what was to be done next.

“All right,” he answered. “Bob and I'll be there on time, Where's Fair's messenger? I'd like to talk to him.”

“He didn't dare wait. Sure it would get him in bad if any of Barker's spies recognized him.”

“All right. Er—where's Bob?”

“It's takin' a nap, he is. The poor boy's—”

“Thank the Lord!”

Go Ahead's exclamation was fervent.

“I was just going to ask you if you couldn't get him to sleep a little. He's a mighty good boy, but he's only a boy—not more than sixteen, is he? His muscles haven't hardened, and he's had a mighty hard day of it. If we're to ride tonight—”

“Be aisy. He's asleep now, an' if it's knowing anything about boys I do, he won't be wakin' for twelve hours if he's left alone.”

“Good. I've got an appointment to keep tonight and some other things to attend to right away, if we're to be getting away before daylight. And I'd just as soon that Bob shouldn't know. He'd give me Hail Columbia if he found out I'd done anything without him. So—”

“I'll not tell him.”

Bridget turned away, and Go Ahead went back to the door to look for Caesar. He found him standing by the rack with four horses, which, obedient to instructions, he had obtained somewhere. Out and over to him he went, noting out of the tail of his eye that the fourth of the diners who had waited outside was still sitting on the bench by the door.

“Those the best horses you could find?” he remarked, contemptuously— and loudly enough for the man by the door to hear. Caesar fell in with his lead immediately.

“Yessuh!” he answered promptly.

“Ain't they fine?”

“Fine? Those things?”

Go Ahead bent down to examine a hoof.

“Have the best three just east of town on the main road at two o'clock tomorrow morning,” he breathed. Then he straightened up. “Look here,” he exclaimed aloud, “I'm no damn tenderfoot. If you want to sell me horses you bring good ones—and bring 'em by nine o'clock tomorrow morning. Understand?”

“Yassuh! Yassuh!”

Without a nod or a word further, Go Ahead strode off, up the road, toward town.

NIGHT had fallen, but the full moon had popped up over the eastern horizon, making the country almost as visible as it had been in full daylight; and
Go Ahead, pausing and glancing back in the heavy shadow of a building, could see that the loafer on the bench was following.

Little he cared, however. He was going to see Barker, and he was entirely sure that his coming would be unexpected and that no spy would have a chance to get in a warning before he arrived.

Down the broad white road he walked briskly, till just opposite the sheriff’s office; then, turning on his heel, he crossed the road, opened the door of the office, beneath whose lowered window shades he could see a thin line of light, and walked in.

“Evening, sheriff!” he said.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Go Ahead walked off with Stella, the sheriff watched him for a moment, then strode back into his office, called certain of his minions, and ordered them to keep a close watch on Go Ahead. This done, he sent for Go Ahead’s prisoners.

Smilingly the men came in, convinced by the fact that he had sent for them that all that had happened in front of the office had been a farce played for the benefit of the onlookers, and that now they were to be set free, perhaps even to be complimented on the way they had behaved.

But Barker was in no mood for smiles or smirks. Outside, he had concealed the rage that was seething within him because he dared not give it vent; later, inside his office, he had held it in leash because he did not wish his subordinates to guess (as if any one doubted it) that he had been holding it in. But the first sight of the bandits’ grinning faces broke through his defenses; and he threw all restraint to the winds.

Like a hurricane his wrath descended on the two helpless prisoners. He cursed them by the lords of heaven and of hell, by their ancestors and by their progeny, by their looseness of tongue and by their lack of brains; he heaped upon them epithets which had been conceived by men who wallowed in the primeval ooze, and which, re-phrased in every generation, have been handed down the ages— he spared them nothing that brain could devise and tongue could utter. Even an asbestos record would have flared up before it had recorded half that he uttered.

Under the impact of his words the two men quailed as if from the beat of a literal tornado. For in his eyes they thought they read the promise of sudden death.

But Barker had no thought of murder; for one thing he dared not kill and for another, he needed the men. After a time his throat grew parched and his tongue thick, and his fury wore itself out.

“For two bits, I’d let you hang,” he choked, at last. “But I’m going to let you get away this time because I need you. But if you ever make such double-damned asses of yourselves again I’ll skin you alive.”

THE two men drew long breaths.

They were, at best, mere riff-raff, cowardly, cruel, dull and brutish, who had drifted into crime because they had lacked intelligence to earn their livings by any other way. They were used to being cursed, though not so sharply as by Barker, and they never thought of resenting it. They were only too glad to get away under any conditions. With tightened hearts they awaited to learn for what they were needed.

It was a simple enough task, after all. “Miller’ll take you back to your cell,” explained Barker, “and give you files. You take them an’ get busy on the bars in your window. Soon’s it’s dark—an’ I want ’em filed through by then—Miller’ll give you a couple of horses. You get out of town quick’s you can and ride like the devil to Robbers’ Roost. Don’t go near Fair. Hunt up Wade instead an’ tell him that the man we saw at the J/B ranch and the girl we were chasin’
"'I want to warn you that I'm going to marry Stella Fair and get her money.'"
are both here. Tell him the girl’s mashed
on the buckaroo an’ gone clear over
to him, an’ if he don’t want to see her
showin’ the doughboys the way to the
Roost he’d better come quick an’ carry
them off. Get me?”

The men nodded. But Hen did more.
Hen had an incurably clacking tongue.
“Maybe the gal ain’t gone back on us,”
he said. “She signed to us to keep still
about knowin’ her and whispered that
she’d fix things for us. An’ she did per-
suade the man to turn us over to you.”

“Say that again.”

Barker’s order came sharply.
Hen said it again in almost the same
words. “I guess she thought that was
the surest way of getting us free,” he
finished.

“The devil she did.”

Barker’s voice showed profound amaze-
ment. For a moment he wondered if
Stella could actually still be loyal to the
band and had kept and would keep its
secrets. But very quickly he dismissed
the idea. If she had really had the men
turned over to him, she had done so for
her own reasons and not from any love
for him and Wade; of this he felt very
sure. Perhaps she had so far kept the
location of the Roost secret for her
foster father’s sake; but that she would
continue to do so was unbelievable.

“Don’t matter,” he went on, to the
men. “You tell Wade what I said. Tell
him I ain’t sure she’s told where the
Roost is yet, but I’m sure she’s told
pretty near everything else she knows an’
she’ll tell about the Roost by tomorrow
if she’s here to tell. Tell him to bring
his men to the North Arroyo crossin’
just north of town an’ leave them there
an’ come to this office for the latest news.
There’s a captain and a half platoon of
doughboys come in here today, an’ the
moonlight tonight will make it too risky
to race around town promiscuous. You
get all that?”

Yes, the men got it; or so they said.
Barker turned to his deputy.

“Take these men back and lock ’em in,
with files,” he ordered. “See that they
get some chow early. Send Jake out to
get some horses, an’ have them waitin’
in the arroyo, too.”

SOME two hours later, in the brief
interval between the setting of the
sun and the rising of the moon, the two
bandits climbed through their doctored
window and scurried away to the north
arroyo, where they mounted their horses
and scurried away.

And not long afterward Go Ahead
walked in on Barker with his careless
greeting.

At the sound of the opening door
Barker and Miller, seated at the table and
engaged in earnest (and profane) con-
versation, sprang to their feet, dropping
their hands to their pistol butts as they
moved. But an instant later Barker,
noting that both of Go Ahead’s hands
were in the loose pockets of his coat and
that each pocket showed a suspicious
looking protuberance that might well be
due to a revolver muzzle, took away
his hands, an act that Miller speedily
imitated.

“Evenin’!” replied Barker to Go
Ahead’s greeting. “Come in an’ sit
down. Didn’t hardly expect you tonight.
Thought you and Bob would be too
chummy.”

BARKER intended his words to be
insulting; like Bridget, he wanted to
trap Go Ahead into some word or glance
that might betray knowledge of Bob’s
sex.

But as Go Ahead had no knowledge on
that point to betray, Barker’s words
passed clear over his head.

“Had to come tonight or not at all,”
he said lightly, seating himself so as to
face both Barker and Miller. “Got to
take the 9:34 train over to Mustin to-
morrow morning. Be back the next day,
but didn’t want to keep you waiting so
long’s all that. What did you want to
talk to me about?”

Barker, though easily taken by sur-
prise, and though slow in repartee, was by no means a fool. Given time, he could puzzle things out fairly well. Go Ahead had got the best of him twice that day, largely by taking him by surprise. But since then he had had time to reach certain deductions. In fact, that was what he and Miller had been engaged in doing when Go Ahead came in.

On reflection he had been unable to believe that Go Ahead could be merely an irresponsible cow puncher who had accidentally butted into the game at the J/B ranch. He might have accepted him as such if the proceedings at the ranch had been all; though why an errant cow puncher should interfere in behalf of a seeming boy whom he did not know would still remain to be explained.

But they were not all. After Stella had escaped, Go Ahead had followed her trail. If he had known that she was a girl such action would not have been very puzzling; but, assuming that he thought her a boy—and Barker really believed that he did so think her—it, too, elamored for explanation. Then Stella's abrupt volte-face and attempt to get back to the ranch after she had talked with Green (who was a partisan of Barker's and who had been mysteriously absent from the Roost for a month) seemed to indicate some understanding between Green and Go Ahead and Stella—especially when Go Ahead joined the girl and aided her to escape. Of course Green had explained all this glibly; but now Barker was beginning to doubt the explanation.

And, finally, when Go Ahead and Stella had turned up at his very door with such exceeding patience and had later gone to Bridget's (Bridget being a very old friend of Fair's), Barker concluded that Go Ahead had come to Lobo county on some very definite errand. Remembering Fair's opposition to his wish to marry Stella, reckoning that Fair had guessed that he had not given up his design and might readily have learned of his intriguing with Wade, and recalling the fact that Fair had promised Stella's real father that he would send her to her friends, the sheriff had little difficulty in making a shrewd guess at the truth.

About his only error, in fact, was that he assumed that Fair, like himself, had learned that Stella had inherited a fortune and had acted accordingly.

So sure was he of the accuracy of his deductions that, now that chance offered, he determined to put them to the test.

"What I wanted to see you about is mighty soon told," he said bluntly. "I want to warn you that I'm going to marry Stella Fair and get her money, an' that no damn imitation cow puncher's going to come out here from the East and carry her off."

**T**HIS time it was Go Ahead who was surprised. But Go Ahead reacted more quickly than Barker ever could—and he was not enough surprised to take his hands off the pistols in his pockets.

After a gasp of amazement he laughed. "Bravo, Barker," he said. "Evidently, I've cruelly misjudged you. You've got a lot more imagination than I thought. Now tell me who the imitation cow puncher is, and why you're taking me into your matrimonial confidences, and we can talk."

But Barker was not to be balked. "Oh, cut out that bunk," he growled. "You c'n talk all right; an' you got the best of me twice today, I'll admit. But you can't do it again. I guess you think you've got the girl all right an' that you're goin' to get away with her an' her money. Well, you ain't. You ain't even got another guess comin'. You've used up your guesses an' you've played things a little too fine. You're goin' East on the Limited one hour from now, or you're goin' to stay here for keeps in a nice hole in the ground."

"That so?"

Go Ahead's tone showed a confidence that he did not entirely feel. "Yes, that's so." Barker's voice was grim. "You think you've got me be-
cause you've got me covered from your pockets. But you ain't. Why, you fool! It's me that's got you covered. You ain't the first man that's tried to get me in this office. I'm loaded for you and anybody else. . . . Don't believe me, hey? All right, I'll show you. And after I've shown you, you take your hands out of those pockets mighty careful and put 'em up."

WITH his foot the sheriff pressed a spring; and the three window blinds of the room, suddenly released, shot upward with a whirr. Framed in each window stood a man with revolver trained on Go Ahead.

"Put 'em up," reiterated the sheriff.

GO AHEAD did not put his hands up. He did not even take them out of his pockets. Instead he laughed and rose—very, very leisurely—to his feet. He had no desire to provoke the men at the windows to action.

"Good stuff, Barker," he admitted. "Trouble is, old man, I think about two jumps ahead of you. I asked Captain Carter to surround this place as soon as he saw me enter it tonight; and I haven't the least doubt that he's done it. The regulars are apt to be on time, you know. Listen!"

Go Ahead was romancing. He had sent no word to Captain Carter. He was trapped and his chance of escaping was infinitesimal. He knew very well that Barker had no intention in the world of sending him away by train; that the suggestion of such sending was merely to get him to take his hands from the revolvers that covered Barker. Once he did that his shift would be short. He said what he did on the bare chance that his words might create a diversion that would give him a chance for his life.

But while he spoke he heard, they all heard, in the road outside the rasp of a sharp order and the quickly following beat of footsteps.

At the sound Go Ahead spun round to the window, jerking his pistols free as he moved. But he had no use for them. The men at the window had vanished, and he swung swiftly back in time to stop Barker and Miller from attempting to fire.

"Easy, boys, easy!" he counselled.

The next instant the door burst open and Captain Carter sprang in—with Bob by his side!

"What's the matter here?" he cried.

Carelessly Go Ahead returned his weapons to his pockets.

"Nothing to speak of, Captain," he replied. "Somebody tried to hold the sheriff and me up through the windows. I guess you've scared them off. But I'm a whole lot obliged to you for coming, Captain!"

The captain looked a little bewildered. But he shrugged his shoulders. "I'm satisfied if you are," he answered.

"I am—for the time being. Er—Captain, if you're patrolling toward Bridget's I'll be glad to go along with you, if you don't mind?"

The captain smiled.

"Curiously enough, I'm going to that very place," he observed.

Go Ahead turned to the sheriff.

"Night, night, Barker!" he said. "Be sure to see me off on the 9:34 tomorrow morning."

SMILINGLY Go Ahead followed the captain out of the office. But as he stepped through the door he caught Stella's hand and pressed it.

"Thank you, boy," he said, feelingly. "That's the second time you've saved my life today. How did you know where I'd gone?"

Stella's breath was coming very quickly.

"I made Bridget tell me," she whispered. "Then I went for the captain and the men. We've been waiting outside. When the blinds went up and I saw those men outlined against the light with their guns—Oh, Go Ahead, if you'd been killed I'd have hunted them down and killed them both!"
CHAPTER XII

Wade, as Go Ahead had guessed from his bandaged head, had suffered more or less severely from Diego’s ambush. And Diego also had suffered. Wade had been the first to bolt through the door into the semi-obscenity of the corridor, and Diego had fired instantly without waiting to make sure who was coming. The bullet struck Wade high up in the forehead, passed through the skin, circled over the top of the skull, and went about its business, the shock knocking him over.

Barker, bursting out on Wade’s heels, had already drawn his sheath knife, the only weapon that Go Ahead had left him, and this he hurled at Diego—or rather, at the flash of Diego’s pistol. The knife, however, went true, transfixing Diego’s right arm and causing him to drop the pistol without firing a second shot.

All three, being then weaponless, stopped fighting, recognized each other, and reckoned up the damages.

Diego’s wound, though painful, was not dangerous and did not disable him. Wade’s wound was not disabling either, and, if he had gone quietly to Robbers’ Roost and taken care of himself there, he probably would have had little trouble. But the long chase in the blazing sun, the rage over his humiliation at Go Ahead’s hands, and the final fury that possessed him when he found that Go Ahead and Stella had slipped through his hands in some inexplicable way, played hob with him.

Fever racked and exhausted, he at last got back to the Roost and tried to sleep, but for hours he could not do so. And when, about midnight, he did at last close his eyes, it was only to be awakened by the arrival of the two bandit messengers that Barker had sent.

He was in no condition and in no mood to listen quietly to the story they told nor to the message they brought. Quicker of comprehension than Barker, he grasped the essentials of the situation before the men had more than fairly begun their tale, and, maddened by the fever in his veins and the triphammer throbbing in his brain, he sprang to his feet and rushed out of the cabin.

A moment more and the brazen alarm bell of Robbers’ Roost sent its wild summons through the sleeping camp.

Up and out, from cave and from cabin, poured bandits, women, and children—all who went to make up the population of the Roost. Some came shivering, wild-eyed with fear; others came ready to fight for their lives. Never before in the history of the Roost had the bell rung in the night, and those who heard it knew that it betokened no light danger.

With the others came Fair, half-dressed, buckling on his pistol belt. To Wade, still sounding the bell, he rushed. “What’s up?” he demanded.

Wade threw down the padded mallet and turned, glaring. “The whole show’s up!” he raved. “You traitor! You and that girl of yours have sold us out.”

Both men snatched at their revolvers, but Wade was a trifle the quicker. Two shots rang out; and Fair crumpled down.

All about sounded the click of revolvers. But Wade did not hear them, or did not heed them. “It’s true!” he yelled. “Word’s just come from Jim Barker. Fair’s girl is at Loboville with that man we were chasing today. He’s a ranger or somethin’. She’s mashed on him; and she’s sold us out.”

“That’s a lie!”

Hot faced, furious, Green broke through the crowd. “That man’s not a ranger or anything like it. He’s Bob’s cousin, come from the East to take her home with him and keep her out of Barker’s clutches. Wade took her with him the other night to sell her to Barker. He tried to play a dirty trick on her at the J/B ranch, an’ Go Ahead dropped in just in time to stop him and made monkeys of him an’—”

“Crack!”

Green’s voice broke—stopped. Desperately he tried to draw his gun. But
Wade’s bullet had gone too true. Midway of the effort he crumpled down beside Fair.

From the crowd a yell or rage sounded. But before action could follow, another man sprang forward, hands uplifted. “Hold on!” he yelled. “Don’t shoot! If we’ve been sold out we’ve got something else to do besides killing each other. Don’t kill any more till we know. We’ll need all the men we’ve got if the doughboys are after us.”

The words came as a douche of cold water to the maddened men, recalling them to a realization of their own danger. “That’s right, Ames,” cried a single voice. “What’s up? Make Wade tell us!”

A roar of agreement went up. Ames snatched at the chance. On Wade he swung.

“What’s the yarn?” he demanded. “Give it to us straight.”

Wade’s passion still was high. “Bob’s sold us out,” he raved. “Barker sends word that she has, an’ Green has just owned up to it. Barker says we’ve got just one chance. He says he knows that Bob has told this Go Ahead ‘most everything; but he’s not sure she’s told him how to find the Roost yet or that he’s passed it on to the soldiers. He and she are stayin’ at Bridget’s tonight, an’ if we can get there before daylight we can catch ’em asleep and end things for good and all. Then the doughboys can go plumb to; they ain’t never found the Roost, an’ they never will till somebody shows ’em the way. Who’ll go with me to get ’em?”

Two-thirds of the men shouted acclaim; the rest were hesitant. On the outskirts of the crowd sounded the wailing of the women.

Wade guessed that some were holding back.

“How many won’t go?” he yelled. “How many sneaks and cowards ‘ve we got here? Speak up now! Show your colors.”

No one spoke. To speak out alone was to face instant death; everyone knew it. And to speak out with others would probably be to provoke a battle whose result no man could guess. Wade’s lips curled back from his teeth.

“Nobody, eh?” he cried. “All want to go? All right, we’ll all go. Get your guns and horses and all the cartridges you can pack. Be back in five minutes. Any man that tries to hide and sneak out of going will be dragged out and hanged. Understand that, all of you! Now go, quick!”

Like a covey of quail flushed by the dogs the men scattered. And in less than five minutes they were back again, mounted and ready. Wade, who was a born leader, whatever else he may have been, rasped his orders.

“Omaha Kit, Broncho Smith, Two-Gun Neal and Toady Pete will stay here to man the machine gun and hold the entrance. Black Ames will come along as my lieutenant. Where’s Ames?”

“Here!”

“All right. Start your men. Get ’em outside the valley. I’ll follow as quick as I see that nobody’s skulkin’.”

Probably nobody skulked, though Wade made no attempt to search the camp to see. He believed that his words would be sufficient warning, and in any event he had no time to spare. Close behind the last man he rode out beneath the waterfall.

To the top of the column he raced. “Straight ahead, Ames,” he ordered. “You know the way. I’ll hang behind an’ see that no white-livered dog slips away. Get to the North Arroyo before dawn. Stop there while I see Barker. Go!”

It had taken five hours for Barker’s messengers to reach the Roost; and it took all of five more for Wade’s cavalcade to get to Loboville. Through the long ride Wade hung behind, now on one flank and now on the other, shepherding his men with sudden death lurking in his
eyes. If any of the riders had thought to slip away, they noted his vigilant figure and thought better of it, probably hoping for a safer chance later.

The band reached the arroyo as strong as when it left the Roost. Long before it arrived, Barker, almost as mad as Wade with anxiety, and denied the relief that Wade had obtained from vigorous exercise and imperative watchfulness, had quit his office and hurried to the rendezvous and back, not once but many times.

Barker had, in fact, more to lose than Wade or any other member of the bandit troupe. Few of the latter were generally known and few of them had any important possessions to lose. If the worst came to the worst they could scatter to the four winds, leaving little behind. The Mexican border, close at hand, offered easy passage to safety. Some of them, perhaps, had become attached to their homes and women and children at the Roost and would regret losing them; but these were few, and practically all of them would soon get over their regret.

Barker, on the other hand, had everything to lose. Years of success had made him over-confident; he had thought that he could never be displaced; and he had made no provision for the future by hiding or investing his booty and graft elsewhere, and doom had come upon him so suddenly that he had no time to remove it. Only that morning he had been a king, ruler over this domain, with none to dispute his power. And then, in the space of a score of hours, Go Ahead had swept the ground from under his feet and brought him face to face with utter ruin.

Half a day longer, if Go Ahead lived, would complete his destruction—and, even if Go Ahead did not live, the web about him had come so close that the most that he could hope to do was to save something from the wreck. Backward and forward, from office to arroyo, he wandered, straining his eyes and his ears for anything that would betoken the coming of the band.

When at last he came he was there to meet it. "Wade!" he called. "That you? . . . Bully! The sun'll be up in half an hour. You ain't got a minute to lose."

"Everything all right?"
"Yes. All right, if you move quick. They're at Bridget's, fast asleep. Move quiet. The soldiers are at the other end of the town, but you don't want to wake them."

Wade shook his bridle reins.
"You goin' with us?" he questioned.
"No, I mustn't be seen. I'll be at the office to look out for things in case of trouble. Hurry!"
"Right!" Wade turned back to his men. "Come on, boys," he called softly. "Quiet now! We don't want to flush the game—"

A slight confusion in the ranks caught his eye, and he stopped.

The moon had dropped out of sight, but the flush of dawn was reddening the eastern horizon, and by it he saw a horseman break away from the others and race off. From his belt he snatched his ready revolver, only to let his hand drop. He dared not shoot—a single shot would alarm the town and might—probable warn his quarry.

More, his tired eyes, roving about his men, told him that the man he had seen flee was not the only one to go. In the few seconds he had spent with Barker desertions had been many; perhaps one-third of his force was gone. Nevertheless, the cards were dealt and had to be played.

"Never mind, boys," he challenged. "Let the skunks go. We're better without them. We know who'll stick and who'll run away, now. Come ahead!"

Five minutes later Bridget's was surrounded, and Wade, with a half dozen helpers, was raging through the rooms, holding up the sleeping men, questing the place for Go Ahead and Stella—and not finding them!

At last he found Bridget. And she laughed at him.
"Faith!" she said. "It's, too late entirely you are. I'm thinkin' that it's too late you always are in dealin' with Go Ahead an' Bob. It's half a dozen hours since they went away."

Bridget shrugged her shoulders. She could make allowance for Wade's condition and for his disappointment.

"Search for yourself," she invited. "But you won't find them. It's the truth I'm tellin' you."

"Where did they go?"

"Sure, they didn't tell me."

The words were literally true. They had not told her; she had told them. Wade's pistol went up.

"Tell me quick!" he ordered. "Tell, or—"

"They didn't tell me! Sure, wouldn't they be the foolish ones to tell me when they knew you were comin' to ask?"

"They didn't know it."

"Then why did they go away with the soldiers, leavin' two doughboys to satisfy whoever might be watchin' about the house? . . . Oh, you needn't be lookin' for them soldier boys; they went away an hour or two later. . . . It's beaten you are, an' if you'll take an old woman's advice the quicker you get away from here an' out of the country the better it'll be for you. An' that's the God's truth."

A man—one of Barker's men—burst into the room.

"Barker's here looking for you, Captain," he cried. "Somebody's just 'phoned from the ranch that the man an' Bob are there!"

CHAPTER XIII

WHILE Wade and his men were riding to Loboville, Go Ahead and Stella were riding eastward, with Caesar at their heels.

They had left Bridget's early, much earlier than was necessary to get them to the J/B ranch at dawn. This was Stella's doings—this, as well as the fact (for it was a fact) that when Captain Carter and his men had escorted them to Bridget's, two doughboys had entered the hotel in their place and they themselves had gone on and finally back with the captain until Caesar could be found and the horses brought. Go Ahead had protested, but Stella had insisted, and ultimately Go Ahead had given in.

Stella had been anxious to get away from the town. The terror that had seized her while she waited with the soldiers outside Barker's office had not left her. Barker had been beaten again—beaten by herself this time; and Go Ahead believed he was done for. But Stella had heard too many tales of the sheriff's methods to credit this; in the old days she had enjoyed these stories, but now the memory of them terrified her. That Barker would never again attack Go Ahead directly—this she believed; but that he would try to assassinate him she did not doubt.

How he would set about it she could not guess; if she could have guessed she would have been less troubled. That he had already summoned Wade to do the work for him she of course did not know, any more than she knew that the hotel was to be attacked before dawn. She knew only that Go Ahead was in desperate danger so long as he stayed in Loboville, and she was determined to get him out of it. And when she succeeded a load was lifted off her mind.

It never occurred to her that she was leading him directly into even greater danger than any he could have faced in Loboville.

ALL the rest of the night they rode, unmolested, beneath the glinting desert moon, until, close on to dawn, Luna dropped beneath the horizon, leaving only the low-hung stars to mitigate the darkness. Later came the actual dawn, with the grotesque shapes of sun-tortured vegetation silhouetted against the rosy flush of the eastern horizon. And beyond these rose the low buildings of Barker's ranch.
"While Wade and his men were riding to Loboville, Go Ahead and Stella were riding eastward, with Caesar at their heels."
As the light grew, Go Ahead leaned forward, scanning the landscape far and near, seeking for some sign that Stella had arrived before him. Stella herself did not look at the country; instead, she looked at Go Ahead frowningly, jealously irritated that he should be so eager to see this minx whom, so far as he knew, he had never beheld. Caesar, meanwhile, nodded in his saddle.

Finally Go Ahead gave over his search for the moment.

"We're too early, Bob," he said. "I was afraid we would be. There's nothing to do now except go to the ranch house and wait there till she turns up."

"Go to the ranch house!" Amazement amounting to incredulity drove the sleepiness from the girl's eyes. "You—you don't mean it?"

"Why of course I mean it! Why not?"

"But—but—"

Stella broke off. Already she had learned the futility of trying to induce Go Ahead to be prudent.

"But Fair didn't say to wait in the ranch house," she ended, desperately.

"Of course he didn't. But where else are we to wait?" Go Ahead laughed at sight of the dismay on Stella's face. "It does seem like venturing into a hornet's nest, doesn't it?" he admitted. "But it really isn't. Barker we left in Loboville; Wade is probably up north; there can't be any one much here except Diego. We'll just tie him up or set a guard on him, and then we can make ourselves at home. See?"

"But suppose Barker comes after us. Suppose his spies saw us leaving—"

"Couldn't. He'd have jumped us long ago. And even if he did come after us we'd be safe or safer behind 'dobe walls than out in the open."

"But—but why not go on?"

Go Ahead opened his eyes. "Why, we can't go without Stella," he protested.

It was on the tip of Stella's tongue to say something very derogatory about her other self. But she checked herself just in time.

"Fair said if she didn't meet us at dawn for us to go on, and she'd overtake us," she pleaded.

"Yes, but it isn't dawn yet. We've got to wait somewhere, and we've got to rest while we wait. I'm not 'specially sleepy myself, but I wouldn't mind forty winks, and I guess you wouldn't, either. And then, of course, we've got to give the horses a chance to eat and rest a bit, or they may play out on us when we least expect it."

Stella gave up. "You know best, I suppose," she said. "But I wish you wouldn't wait for Stella. I don't believe she's coming at all."

Go Ahead looked at the girl gravely.

"I hope she will come," he replied. "If she doesn't I'll have to consider going after her. You see, Barker told me last night why he wanted to marry her—"

"What?"

"Yes! I thought from what Green and you said about her that it was curious that he should want her so badly. But now I understand."

"You—you don't mean he told you about her money?"

"Eh? . . . So you know about it, too. Yes, he told me—indirectly. He warned me that he was going to marry her and take her money himself, and that I'd better put all such thoughts out of my head."

"He told you—that? He thought that you—"

"Seems so. Oh, he's just got money on the brain. He's—"

"But what did you say?"

"Me!" Go Ahead chuckled. "Oh, I turned it off some way. I ought to have told him. But no matter. I couldn't well tell him anything without spilling all the beans. But the long and short of it is that I've got to get Stella away from that robber camp before Barker goes back to it."

Bob's voice quivered with suppressed passion.

"I s'pose you want her for yourself!"

Go Ahead did not answer. But he
turned and looked at Bob long and gravely. Then, still without speaking, he looked away.

After a while Stella looked up. Then she uttered a startled exclamation. “Oh, we’re right at the house,” she gasped. “Oh, oh! Please don’t go inside. Goey!”

“Go anywhere else—beyond the barn there—anywhere.”

“All right.”

Go Ahead turned his horse slightly. His brief anger had melted, giving place to concern.

“You’re played out,” he said. “And it’s no wonder. That’s what makes you so temperamental. We’ll camp beyond the barn, on one condition, and that is that you’ll lie down right away and take a nap.”

But Stella shook her head mutinously. “I’ve got to do my share,” she said.

“All right. Then we’ll go inside the house and you can sleep there.”

Go Ahead relaxed his slight tug on the reins, and his horse instantly tried to turn in toward the ranch house, now just abreast. This brought Stella to terms.

“No, no!” she cried. “I give in. I’ll lie down.” Under her breath she added, “But I won’t sleep.”

“Good enough.” Go Ahead dragged his reluctant steed back to its course.

A moment later the three had passed, apparently unseen, beyond the barn, and were screened by its bulk from the eyes of anyone who might appear in or about the ranch buildings. Very quickly the blanket rolls were unstrapped and tossed down, the horses provided with nose bags, and Stella, resentful, but true to her word, had lain down, resolved not to close her eyes.

But the sand man was abroad and when, a moment later, Go Ahead stepped lightly to her side, he found her fast asleep.

Long he stood looking down on her in silence. Then, muttering, “Poor, tired, plucky boy,” and resolving in his heart of hearts that he’d “take jolly good care of Bob when he got him East,” he went back to Caesar.

“Caesar,” he asked, “how sleepy are you?”

“Me? Ain’t sleepy at all, Mr. George, suh.” Caesar never dreamed of using such an appellation as “Go Ahead” instead of the aristocratic “George Ashmead.”

“Well, I am! And I guess you did sleep most of the night. Do you suppose you could keep watch for an hour while I take a nap?”

Caesar drew himself up.

“Course I can, Mr. George, suh,” he replied with considerable dignity.

“Well, I’ll trust you. Come over here.” Go Ahead led the way some twenty feet northward to the north end of the barn. “There isn’t a thing to do except to stand here, at this corner, and keep your eyes open,” he said. “You can look east and west along the road we just came by, and north across the road, and now and then take a look over your shoulder past Bob and me and the horses along the side of the barn to the south, to make sure that nobody’s trying to slip up on you from behind. The first human being you see, wake me quick. And wake me in an hour anyway—one hour.”

“Understand?”

“Yassuh, I understand!”

“Well, do it, or I’ll skin you alive.”

“Yessuh!” Caesar grinned. Evidently the threat was a mere verbal pleasantry, without terrors.

With a nod Go Ahead strode half a dozen feet to the rear and flopped down on his blankets as Stella had done. Like Stella, too, he was asleep in an instant.

Caesar watched him take his place; then, bristling and determined, he set himself to keep unremitting vigil. And he did keep it. He obeyed Go Ahead’s instructions to the letter, keeping excellent watch up and down and across the road that ran in front of him, and periodically looking behind him. If danger had come from any of these directions he would undoubtedly have detected it.
and given warning. But, actually, it did not come from any of these directions.

The passing of the travelers along the front of the ranch buildings had not been unnoticed. Diego had lain awake nearly all the night, suffering from the pain of the thrust through his upper arm. More, he was standing at the window of the bunkhouse, staring out into the dawn, when the three rode by. He thought he recognized Go Ahead, and finding that the party did not reappear along the road beyond the barn, he crossed from the bunkhouse to the barn, where, head pressed against the boards at the back, he listened with all his ears. Soon he was rewarded by the sound of voices and then, finding a convenient knot hole through which to peep, by the sight of the man whose quick-wittedness had got him his wound.

Then he went to the ranch house, to the automatic telephone, and called up Barker’s office. The bell was still ringing when Barker got back from seeing Wade and his men off for Bridget’s. He heard it, indeed, as he came up the path, and quickened his steps to a run in consequence. ‘Phone calls at that hour of the morning were rare and likely to be important.

“Hello!” he yelled, and when Diego’s excited accents came back to him he swore aloud.

Diego recognized his voice and took no note of his profanity. Volubly, in mingled Spanish and English, he gasped out his tale.

At first Barker refused to believe it. Regularly, all the night through, his spies had reported, each of them with the assurance that Go Ahead and Stella were asleep at Bridget’s.

“Nonsense, Diego,” he raged. “You’re loco. It’s somebody else. Those other dubs are here at Bridget’s.”

“No loco, señor. You think I know not the hombre who have trick me yesterday? No, señor, no!”

“Well, I’ll find out and—if they’re not here, perhaps—What are they doing?”

“They make sleep, señor. All but the black man, who stands on the watch.”

“The black man? What black man?”

“I know not, señor. Never have I seen him before.”

“Well, can you get at them? How many men have you?”

Diego explained that it would be easy. The señor remembered the big hole that the great wolf hound had dug beneath the back of the barn the time that he found himself shut up therein? The hole had been filled with loose earth, easy to dig out. It opened between the black man and the sleeper, . . . But yes, the earth was of a great looseness. Of a surety his men could remove it unheard and slip through unseen. He himself would lead them in spite of his wounded arm—wounded so cruelly by the knife of the señor. The señor understood that there were knot holes through which one could observe and learn when the chance best offered. The señor could imagine—But the señor had no more time for imagining. “Never mind all that,” he broke in. “You get those birds! Get the two men any way you like, but get them! And get the girl, too, but don’t hurt her; and then you light out for the Roost with her and the others, whether they’re dead or alive. Call me up when you’re ready to start and let me know.”

Barker slammed the ear piece on the hook and rushed out of the office and up the road toward Bridget’s. He was done for so far as Loboville was concerned, but if Diego got that girl he might yet force her to marry him and escape with her to the East. He would stake all on the chance, would cast his lot openly with the bandits. The padre was at the Roost; that was why he had not been at the ranch the morning before. If he had luck, he might yet win.

Diego also hurried. Swiftly he called his men, most of whom were up and about by this time, and led them to the barn, where swiftly but cautiously
they re-excavated the hole beneath the barn sill. What noise they made was drowned by the trampling of the horses close beside and by the sound of munching of oats in the nose bags.

Caesar, continually shifting his gaze from right to fore, and from fore to left, and back to right again, looked less often over his shoulder; and when he did look his eyes, directed high, passed over the ground almost at his feet. Even when at last the surface caved softly in he did not notice the cavity any more than he noticed any other depression in the unfamiliar earth.

And Diego, truth to tell, gave him little time for observation. The moment the hole was clear the Mexican was down, club in hand, writhing through. Once only he had to stop, deterred by a touch from the man at the knot hole when Caesar looked backward; then when Caesar turned away to search the distances before him, Diego slid through, sprang upward, and ran cat-footedly forward over the few intervening feet.

In the air his club rose, held in his left hand—rose and came down; and without even a grunt the unsuspecting negro slumped to the ground. An instant later the other ranch hands, following through the hole in quick succession, flung themselves bodily upon the sleepers.

The struggle was brief; for Go Ahead it was very brief. With him Diego had ordered his men to take no chances, and he opened his eyes only to see a club descending. When it struck, life for him temporarily ended. Stella, awakened by the struggle, squirmed aside just in time to dodge the pounce of two Mexicans and to snatch at her pistol, but before she could fire was overwhelmed beneath the weight of others, in whose grip she found herself utterly helpless.

The whole affair was a matter only of seconds. Even Diego, who had turned promptly away from Caesar, confident that his blow had gone home, was only just in time to see the finish.

Exultant, but none the less careful, he issued swift orders, and in a moment the prisoners, conscious and unconscious, but all tightly bound, had been locked in a room in the ranch house, the horses, laden with the camp impedimenta, had been brought around to the door, and Diego was telephoning again to Barker, who was just back with Wade from Bridget’s.

"It is done, señor," he exulted. "We have them all. . . . Sir, señor, the señorita is not hurt except in her mind. . . . Si, si, señor! She makes the great fury. But the men—ah, señor, they make the great fight! They struggle like the devils! But I and my men, we overpower them at the last. And now they sleep soundly, perchance never to wake again. Me, I know not!"

"Can that!" Barker’s patience snapped. "Tie the men across their horses and start north with them and the girl mucho pronto. Bring only two of your men. We’ll cut across and meet you in Skeleton Valley. Understand?"

"Si, señor."

Five minutes later Diego and his men were off. Go Ahead and Caesar had been hung across their saddles, with their hands and feet lashed together beneath their horses’ bellies, and Stella, her hands tied behind her, had been forced to mount a horse led by Diego.

Diego, surveying his work, felt well satisfied. He did not know that while he was telephoning to Barker, Go Ahead had revived in answer to Stella’s frenzied appeals; nor that Stella, stopped by the coming of the Mexicans, had slipped into Go Ahead’s hand the tiny penknife with which she had been trying to cut his bonds.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR AN HOUR or more Diego and his helpers trotted northward with their captives. Diego, exultant over his success, and forgetting the pain of his wound in the joy of his triumph over the man who had outwitted him
twenty-four hours before, chatted volubly with his men, boasting, not without reason, of the skill with which he had planned and carried through the attack. On the supposedly unconscious man bound to their horses he heaped epithets and derisive comments.

To Stella, however, he was polite and even apologetic. He was wise in his generation, was Diego; he knew that Barker wanted to marry Stella, and he took it for granted that if Barker succeeded (as he probably would) in achieving his desire, the time would almost certainly come when Stella would boss the Barker household. Consequently he was not at all anxious to incur her permanent ill will.

"Ah! Señorita," he said, "it makes me the heart heavy to bind the hands of the señora. But what would you? It is only that I dare not leave them free. The señora is so strong and so quick I dare not give her the chance. One moment, and all my work is undone. And then—ah! Then—it would not be good for me when I meet the Señor Barker."

Stella was not thinking about her own discomfort, though this was not small, for never before in all her life had her hands been bound. She was thinking about Go Ahead and was realizing that she had brought this thing upon him by her failure to tell him who she was. Had she told him he would not have camped by the J/B ranch; he would have gone on, swiftly, at all hazards, and by this time they would all have been on the train bound eastward. Instead, Go Ahead was a helpless prisoner, Caesar was probably dead, and she herself was at Barker’s mercy. It was a heavy price to pay for a whim.

But she might at least prevail on Diego to make things easier for his prisoners. Plainly he wanted to conciliate her, and the only question was how far he would go to do so.

To him she turned and made her plea.

But Diego only shook his head. It hurt his heart to refuse, he protested, but he had no choice. The señor, her friend, was dangerous—ah! but he was of the most dangerous! Did not he, Diego, know that? No, no, no! He dared not relax the bonds even in the slightest. Tied as he was, the señor was harmless; in any other way he was not to be risked.

The horses had started on the up-grade leading to the crest of the first swell over which Go Ahead had followed her the day before. As they climbed, Stella turned in her saddle, her eyes sweeping the country behind. She hoped against hope that she might see something, if no more than a trail of dust, showing that friends were on their trail. But she saw nothing.

Suddenly, as she faced back to the front, an outcry close behind her made her turn once more—just in time to see Go Ahead’s horse rearing and fighting against the bridle rein with which his Mexican captor Antonio held him. As she watched she saw him tear himself free and race away, buck-jumping furiously across the sandy slope, apparently trying to throw off the helpless form that was lashed so securely across his back.

SO SUDDEN, so unexpected was the outbreak that for a moment the three Mexicans stared, open mouthed. Then, at Diego’s sharp command, Antonio spurred out after the burdened horse, rope in hand.

But the truant showed no mind to be recaptured. Simultaneously with Antonio’s rush he started away on a run. Soon, however, he stopped and again began to buck, only to race off once more the moment the Mexican approached. Finally, when Antonio, with rope whirling, was almost close enough for a throw, he bucked once more, so furiously, so desperately, that the bonds that held Go Ahead on his back gave way and Go Ahead himself was flung crashing to the ground.

At that moment, liberated from the weight, the horse raced up a small draw
in the slope and vanished, with Antonio hard upon his heels.

Heart in mouth Stella had watched the struggle, longing to go to Go Ahead’s aid, but restrained from doing so by Diego’s powerful grasp upon her bridle. But when, afar off—for the chase had taken Antonio far—she saw Go Ahead hurled from his place and felt Diego’s grip momentarily relax, she drove her spurs into her horse’s side and strove to break loose.

She failed, of course. Her hands were too tightly bound, and Diego’s grip, relaxed as it was, was still too firm. The brief struggle ended in the only way it could end. So also her plea to be allowed to go to Go Ahead’s help failed. Diego, who had hesitated for a moment whether to go to Antonio’s help or not, instantly decided against it.

“No time,” he said, angrily. “Come!” With a gesture to his remaining henchman, he turned back to the trail, dragging Stella’s horse after him and leaving Antonio to retrieve his apparent carelessness by himself.

In vain Stella pleaded. A moment later the horses passed the crest and even the field of the struggle was hidden from her gaze.

Half an hour later, cresting the second hill, beyond which lay Skeleton Valley, Stella saw Barker and Wade and the bandits at the bottom, gesturing impatiently to her captors.

Barker spurred out to meet them as they raced down the slope. He glanced at Stella and nodded, then he stared at Caesar’s black face, and then, missing Go Ahead, he turned scowlingly to Diego.

Diego did not wait to be questioned. He understood what his master wanted. Volubly he explained.

“I do not wait, señor,” he ended. “I make haste, as you command. I go back now swiftly to hasten Antonio, if the señor wills.”

Barker frowned. “Is the fellow alive or dead?” he asked.

Diego shrugged his shoulders. “Alive, I think, señor, when we leave the ranch. But now—quien sabe?”

BARKER hesitated. But after all, he concluded, what difference did it make? He had the girl; that was the main thing. There was plenty of time to attend to Go Ahead’s case later. And Wade was in a hurry to get to the Roost.

“All right,” he said. “You and your other man go back and hurry Tony. Turn over the nigger to somebody.”

From Diego’s hand he took the rein of Stella’s horse and turned away.

Wade was watching. When Barker turned toward him he waved his hand.

“All right, boys,” he said, wearily, and started ahead. But he swayed in his saddle as he rode; his wound, coupled with the intense physical and mental stress of the last twenty-four hours had brought him very close to his ultimate limit.

It was an hour later when Barker and Stella, looking back from the crest of the last swell, beyond which lay a wide expanse of loose and continually shifting sand on which the horses’ hoofs left no permanent trace, saw a rider in the dirty white clothes affected by the Mexican peons, leading a laden horse down the slope they had last crossed. The interval was too great to permit real scrutiny, but neither Barker nor Stella doubted that it was Antonio with the recaptured horse and prisoner. Later, as the two followers drew steadily nearer, Stella bowed her head hopelessly. Barker, reading her face, was so well satisfied that when the newcomers caught up with the bandits, at the verge of the waterfall, he did not take the trouble to go back to examine his beaten rival.

Once inside the valley and at the village, Wade, climbing painfully down from his saddle, staggered away to his cabin and went in. He asked no help and he received none.

The men regarded both him and Barker with hostile eyes, blaming their present predicament upon his leadership and finding no consolation in the capture of
Stella and two prisoners of whom they knew practically nothing. Many of them put up their horses and then gathered with frowning brows to talk things over; others rode directly to their quarters, snatched up what they could carry safely, and hurried away by the waterfall entrance.

Barker, however, noted nothing of this. The capture of Stella and Go Ahead had gone to his head. Once more he felt triumphantly victorious. Up to the door of Fair's house he led Stella.

"Go in," he ordered. "Put on those woman's clothes I brought you and wait till I send for you."

Stella apparently did not hear him. She was looking about for Fair.

"Where is my father?" she demanded. "Fair is not your father. If you mean him, he's dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes. I'm sorry for you and for him. But he got in the boys' way last night, and they shot him."

"Who did—Wade?" Stella's voice was deadly.

Barker hesitated. "Maybe. I don't know," he answered. "I wasn't here. There was a lot of shooting. But that's over and done with. And we ain't got time to waste. You do as I tell you. Put on those woman's things, and wait."

Stella stared at him. "I know why you want to marry me," she said. "Wade told me yesterday. He wanted to marry me and kill you for the same reason. . . . Oh yes. he did! . . . You—you want my money. Well, you're welcome to it, if you'll let Go Ahead go free. If you kill him, or if he dies, or is dead already, you'll never get it. I'll kill myself first."

Barker laughed unpleasantly. "Don't worry," he said. "I don't know whether your Go Ahead is alive or not, but I hope he is, and I haven't the slightest idea of killing him. I want him as a witness to our marriage. I'll need some one to go East with us and testify in court that you married me willingly and all that, and—"

"You're loco!"

"Not a bit! The padre is here, and you've got to tell him that you want to marry me. Then you've got to marry me in Go Ahead's presence, willingly and pleasantly. When you've done that I'll let him go. If you don't do it he'll be no use to me as a witness and I'll turn him over to Wade. . . . Wade loves him, you know."

"You beast!"

"All right. Say what you like, now; but see that you talk right later if you want your man to live. Now go in and put on those things I told you to."

He pushed the girl inside the door and shut it upon her. Then he strode away to Wade's cabin, near by.

Wade himself was not visible, but in front of the cabin stood the two horses with their silent burdens. The man who had last joined the cavalcade was just hitching his own horse at the rack.

Barker paid no attention to him. Instead, he strode up to the horses, recognized Caesar by his color, and turned to the other. "Is he dead?" he asked of the guard, who came hurrying up, as he bent to peer into the captive's face.

Then abruptly he felt the muzzle of a pistol thrust against his ribs, and heard a well remembered voice in his ears. "Not so dead as you'll be if you make any breaks," it said, in steely tones.

Slowly Barker straightened up. His face, agape with terror, was ghastly in its pallor.

"Go Ahead!" he gasped.

"Yes! Now you go ahead into this house. Keep your hands by your sides, but don't try any tricks, if you want to live."

Barker obeyed. He could do nothing else.

Through the doorway and into the cabin he staggered, hoping yet fearing that Wade might be there and try to fight.

But Wade was not there. Another
"Barker... sprang to his feet, and put his hands on the table to jump over it. But he did there, white man!" he gasped. "Hol' on there. You jes' stay where you is till Mr.
not jump, Caesar had jumped, too, and had snatched up Go Ahead's pistol as it fell. 'Hol' on George gits ready to receive congratulations. You hear me?' And Barker stayed.
door at the back showed where he had probably gone.

Go Ahead did not worry about him. He had seen him come in and was confident that he was no longer worth considering—certainly not for the moment. To Barker he turned. “Put your hands up,” he ordered. “Face to the wall. Put your hands flat against it.”

Obeying, Barker felt himself swiftly and completely disarmed.

“Now go to the back room,” ordered Go Ahead. “Let’s see what’s become of Wade.” One pace behind, he followed Barker to the door.

Wade was in the room, but, as Go Ahead had conjectured, he was clearly out of the game. Stretched on the bed, he was sunk in a stupor that looked final. Go Ahead merely glanced at him; then he waved Barker back to the first room, followed him, and closed the door.

“Call two of your men,” he ordered. “Tell them to untie my man Caesar and bring him in and lay him on the lounge yonder. Tell them to handle him gently, that you want him to give you some information. Then tell one of the men to bring Bob here. Put it in your own words, but get the idea over. And remember, I’ll be right behind you and that one false move means death.”

LIKE one in a dream Barker obeyed. To the door he went, closely followed by Go Ahead, called two men who were passing and gave them Go Ahead’s orders.

When the men had gone Go Ahead turned to Caesar. “How do you feel, old man?” he asked, affectionately.

Caesar’s eyes rested on him, at first hesitantly, then with dawning recognition. “Mr. George, Mr. George!” he cried. “Glory, glory! I thought you was killed, Mr. George!”

“Not yet, Caesar. Lie still, old man. Everything’s all right—and the rest is going to be so in a minute.”

He crossed back to his place behind Barker as the door opened and Stella came in. But it was Stella in very truth—not the Bob that he had traveled with and fought with and lived with for ages in the thirty hours that had elapsed since he had first met her in the living room at the J/B ranch. Gone was the rough clothing, the broad brimmed sombrero, the high boots, the belt and revolver; gone in fact was everything that had distinguished the Bob whom he had known, everything except the smooth sunburned cheeks, the appealing eyes, the curly hair. By some magic the slim short boy had become a slim, tall girl.

BUT Go Ahead knew her. Not for an instant did he pother over strange resemblances and all such stock-in-trade foolishness. He knew her; beneath a hundred disguises he would have known her. “Bob!” he cried, flinging off his hat. And again, “Bob!”

And with the going of his hat Stella knew him. “Go Ahead!” she gasped. Then abruptly her color faded and she crumpled down.

Go Ahead dropped his gun and caught her as she fell. He forgot all about Barker. But Barker did not forget him. He sprang to his feet, and put his hands on the table to jump over it.

But he did not jump. Caesar had jumped, too, and had snatched up Go Ahead’s pistol as it fell.

“Hol’ on there, white man!” he gasped. “Hol’ on there. You jes’ stay where you is till Mr. George gits ready to receive congratulations. You hear me?”

And Barker stayed. Stella opened her eyes, and Go Ahead looked up.

“Pretty near, Barker,” he commented. “Pretty near. But not quite. Just about two jumps behind, as usual.”

Go Ahead reached out and took the revolver from Caesar’s uncertain fingers and said to him, “Now you sit down, Caesar, and get all the rest you can,” he ordered. “You’ll need it. We’re going to get out of here. . . . Bob, dear, will you see how many horses are outside?”
Go Ahead knew perfectly well how many horses were there, but he wanted to give Stella something to do. She was still shaking from head to foot.

But his request brought her to her feet instantly. To the door she stepped. "Five, Go-ey," she said. "One of them has a man tied to it. Oh, I thought it was you!"

"It was—once," Go Ahead grinned. "But that little knife of yours did the trick. It made a bully spur to bring on a fit of buck-jumping, and it cut the ropes enough for the bronc to throw me off; and it finished the job on the ropes before unsuspicious Tony came back to put me up—and then took my place—after we had traded clothes."

GO AHEAD shifted his gaze to Barker. "Now, Barker," he said, "you're going to escort us out of this valley, past the machine guns and all. I'll set you free as soon as it's entirely safe to do it; and I won't report on your—er—activities, until—well, say until I find somebody to report them to."

A mile south of the waterfall Go Ahead halted. He had noticed sundry dust trails rising along the horizon.

"Barker," he said, "I'll keep my promise. It's entirely safe to set you free now, so I'll do it. Beat it!"

The three stood looking after him with curious expressions, no two alike, on their faces. And at last Stella spoke.

"Are—are you quite sure you are right in letting him go, Go-ey?" she asked.

"Quite. . . . Not that I think he'll go very far. See those dust trails there—and there—and there?" he pointed.

"That's Uncle Sam's cavalry. The flying men spotted Robbers' Roost from an airplane day before yesterday, and the troops are closing in all around. Barker may get out of the ring, but I don't think he will. He'll probably be forced back to the Roost; and from what I heard the men say after I traded places with Antonio, it's dollars to doughnuts that they'll hang him the minute they know they're trapped."

SEVERAL hours later, as the tired horses plodded into Mustin, Go Ahead turned to Stella. "Bob, dear," he asked, "what time does the train for the East go through?"

"Why—in—in about an hour. I thought I told you."

"You did. And I was just thinking that an hour was just about long enough to get married. You know I love you, Bob?"

"And I love you, too, Go Ahead. But—but I'm a—a—criminal. I've rob—"

"Forget it, Bob, dear."

"Oh, don't I want to forget it! Don't I want to forget it! And I want to marry you, but—but I won't unless—unless you take all that money that I inherited and that Barker wanted to marry me to get. You will take it, won't you?"

Go Ahead smiled.

"I'll do whatever you want me to do, Bob," he said.

"But—well, there's the county clerk's office in the court house where we can get a license; and there's the church and parsonage alongside it; and if we want to catch that train we've got no time to spare. So—"

But as the three got on the train three-quarters of an hour later, Go Ahead was wondering uneasily how he was ever going to tell Bob that it was another girl altogether who had inherited that fortune, and that she herself had nothing.

"She shall never know it if I can help it," he decided at last.

(The End)
The
HILLS OF HOME

Story by
Leslie Gordon Barnard

Illustrations by
Dom Lavin

WITH the coming of dusk a spirit of relaxation descended upon the Fair Grounds—that part of the Midway, at least, where "Tinling's Mysterious Maze" and "Taylor's Tornado Terrors' Wild West Show" were once again thrust into a cheek-by-jowl intimacy that would, not so long ago, have been not merely repellent as now, but would have been fraught with grave dangers of a physical clash as well.

Tomorrow the Fair would open its gates to the pleasure loving crowds; today it was a hive of industry, with everywhere the sights and sounds of preparation to greet eye and ear.

But now, in the hush that came at dusk—a breathing space between the daylight effort and the strenuous night's work still lying ahead—Old Martin found time to think of his Cremona. Ordinarily he took it out on Saturday nights for its weekly inspection and care. Ordinarily, too, it did not matter to him that they laughed at him. But tonight—it was different!

Tonight was the anniversary, and Martin Conyers' mind was traveling back through the years to the day when he and Dorinda had been wedded, and she had given him this instrument, this violin that seemed to hold within itself some magic response to the slightest whim and touch of the virtuoso.

Martin slipped out into the soft twilight, the violin in its case under his arm. He knew a quiet spot at the far end of the area occupied by "Tinling's Mysterious Maze"; just back of the canvas belonging to the Taylor outfit. Privacy otherwise was not for such as Martin, whose pittance as a handy man about the show included a humble bunk in a common tent or dormitory—according to available accommodation—and excluded any more luxurious living.

All day he had been thinking of the hills of home; here in the soft dusk, he would let memory have sway.

"Hi, there, play us a tune, Conyers!"

Martin started, looking up into the face of Patrician Bill. William Vanderlip had his name on the Taylor pay-roll against the title of manager, but his finicky airs, his immaculate clothes that were so in contrast to the general rule in "Taylor's Tornado Terrors"—won for him the title of Patrician Bill.

The old man paid no attention. Loyalty to the Tinling outfit, combined with
a sense of dislike for this young man, forbade speech.

Patrician Bill, still smiling, disappeared behind the canvas. Martin became so lost in retrospect again that his tormentors gathered unnoticed until they opened fire.

"How's the baby tonight, Martin?"

"Mind you don't scratch her, lad!"

"Wanta watch out, there. Some day she'll fall to pieces, like the one-hoss shay!"

Martin went on with his task, though some inward spark flared defiance. It was well enough that his own should make gentle sport of him, but this alien crew roused his ire. Patrician Bill had gathered others of the Taylor crowd to g uy him. All the old animosity that had found birth back in the days when first he had joined the Tinling show, when feeling between the Tinling and the Taylor outfits had run high—some old hatred between the owners that the falling foul of each other over concessions at various

Fair Grounds fanned into a flame—came now to urge Martin to defiance.

He decided to ignore them. To flee would have been to lose caste and dignity. He finished his task with minutest care, set the violin expertly under his chin, and drew a bow experimentally across its strings.

"Just one little tune, Conyers!"

They were at him again.

"Atta boy. Just so's we know you're not kiddin' us!"

"I'll betcha he can't play at all!"

They might not have existed for Martin. Then Patrician Bill stepped forward.

"Here—let me have a try, old fellow. I used to be able to play the scales on one of them."

He set hand, as he spoke, upon the instrument. A second later he staggered back. There was still power in that old right arm of Martin's. His left arm was behind him, holding the precious instrument, his right hand, clenched, threatened more. His whole wizened body was trembling; his pinched little face with heavy crown of hair, white as driven snow, was flushed darkly.

"Damn you!" swore Patrician Bill, and lunged forward. Someone held him back. From the Tinling area came the sound of shouts and running feet. Someone had seen, and sounded the alarm. Preparations for the opening of the Fair must wait; the old feud called.

Into a miniature riot, where fists had already begun to play, a slight, girlish form suddenly slipped. An upturned tub afforded her opportunity. She appeared above the surging men, flushed and lovely, in the last rays of sunset breaking through cloud.

"Stop!" she cried, and her voice carried strangely. "Cut the rough stuff—quick now!"

She was dressed in the cowboy costume of the Taylor show; in her hand, uplifted, was a quirt.

"The first man that strikes will feel this!"
Both sides fell back, the Taylor crew because they knew that Taylor's daughter had all her father's fearlessness and determination; the Tinling men in deference perhaps to her magnificent girlhood. Old Martin stood staring up at her—her voice always had a curious fascination for him. He still clutched his violin to him, as though it were a baby, and they might take his child from him.

A man's voice spoke authoritatively.

"What's the matter here now? Why—Leigh!"

Orville Tinling's big form thrust itself forward. Leigh Taylor gave a little sigh, as though the responsibility no longer was on her shoulders.

"Huh!" sneered Patrician Bill, staring darkly at the newcomer. "There's nothing to get so fussed up over. I only wanted your old man there to play us a tune, and he wouldn't so I thought I'd show him how. I'll bet he can't play that darn thing at all. He's like the rest of the Tinling outfit—all show and nothing to it."

The opposing forces surged forward ominously. But Orville's voice cut in:

"Get back there!"

He turned upon the offender. "You beat it now, Vanderlip, or there won't be enough left of you to make glue out of. Anyhow you're trespassing on Tinling territory."

Patrician Bill spat contemptuously. Then swaggering he withdrew his forces to the exact line between the two areas.

"I'll bet you," he challenged, "anything you like that the old dodger there can't play anyhow."

"Beat it!" advised Orville Tinling.

"Bet you fifty iron men to twenty-five!"

"Beat it!" said Orville again. Rather ostentatiously he turned to the girl.

"Come, Leigh!"

She let him help her from her improvised platform; they walked away together.

Patrician Bill spat again. One or two of his fellows snickered. Bill's violent passion for Leigh Taylor was common property. He cursed their humor roundly.

The Tinling men had gathered together in conference. They seemed genuinely aggrieved that a fight had been denied them. The monotony must be broken somehow. One of their number approached the border line.

"About that bet! Us fellows'll just take you on."

Over the gambling terms recent animosity was forgotten. The Tinling forces were mostly a younger generation who held no deep rooted anti-Taylor animosities.

Old Martin had forgotten them all. His beloved violin was safe; that was all he cared. He went back to the shack-like dormitory, and in the flickering light of acetylene gas blowing in the draught he examined again the tender inscription that marked the gift. But quiet was not to be his. A delegation followed him in. They brought all their persuasion into play. The scoffers were without waiting for that tune. He must really play—anything at all. Then the Tinling side would be triumphant and the bet won.

"Give you a dollar, Martin, for just one weeny little tune!"

No reply.

"Give you two!"

The wrinkled hands worked a little more feverishly, smoothing the varnished surface as one might pet a child.

"Make it five."

Martin's faded blue eyes met those of his tempter, almost in appeal. Five dollars! More than a hundred miles of railway journey in that—getting on towards two. Hidden away in a secret place was a fund that grew so slowly Martin wondered sometimes whether the years might not beat him out after all—whether old age might not suddenly pounce upon him and so end all chance of this long-planned trip away up north—north to the hills of home. No one seemed to think that he needed money—beyond small silver for a little tobacco and similar indulgences.
His days of usefulness in the show were nearly past now; they let him stay, giving him his keep in exchange for odd jobs he did. And he would have scorned their charity, even as he refused to consider borrowing. He had his own standards.

"Ten dollars!"

Three hundred miles and more! Tomorrow the Fall Fair would open here—in this last stopping place before the warmth of the south welcomed them to winter quarters far from this more northerly haunt. Another winter—would the spring find old Martin still a hanger-on of this traveling show?—or would Tinling's have moved on leaving him in a lonely resting place with a meager cross with the Requiescat in Pace? The hills of home! Up in the north country where he had courted, and wooed, and wed; where first his career had been determined, and two lives had found a partnership of happiness and quickly-growing fame. Ah, well!

"Twenty!"

The bills were crinkling under his very nose now—four crisp new fives someone had procured fresh from the cashier's stock.

Martin waved the offering impatiently away. His hollow cheeks seemed more gaunt and white; his eyes a still more faded blue.

"Twenty-five!"

ENOUGH, with care, to do the trick—with what he had saved up—and if he lived simply. Someone would shelter him for the week's stay at home, for a small consideration. He would remain anonymous; none must know the old man who would, for one great week, ramble about familiar haunts; the old mill, moss-grown—he wondered if the rotting wood of the dam still held together to lure youth to feats of daring; the bosky dell just below the mill, where violets might be had for the picking, and bulrushes for a mild wetting of the feet; the local "lovers' lane" where he and Dorinda had often walked after twilight, and planned the future that was to be. No clouds then upon the sky of promise!

Martin set the violin tremblingly in the case, clicked the clasps decisively, and fled.

It was dark enough now to find seclusion. The soft mantle of night was a grateful covering. Familiar sounds of hammering, and shouting told of preparations for the opening. They barely penetrated his consciousness.

Voices of passing workers reached his ears.

"He's weakenin'. The old boy's queer—never played since I can remember, but treats his cussed old fiddle like a baby in arms. But he's weakenin'. I guess he don't get much money. The boys are bound they'll win that bet. Gordie says they'll pay as high as fifty dollars if he'll play. That'd be a fortune to old Marty."

They passed on.

Old Martin pulled hard at his pipe.

Fifty dollars!

More voices in the darkness; softer ones this time—a man's and a woman's; the man's with just a suspicion of boyishness about it, the woman's soft and mellow and—fascinating. They passed on towards the area of the Taylor concession. Old Martin's eyes were keen enough to make the figures out, silhouetted for a moment against the dull gleam of lights through canvas. Mark Tinling's boy, Orville, and Leigh Taylor! Martin chuckled softly at the train of thought they induced. Mark wouldn't be so dead against it—but Sammy Taylor! Yet Cupid would no doubt have his way. Young—and in love! Martin was back again, roaming the hills of home in the days when the world was young for him, and Dorinda was very nearly his world.

Fifty dollars!

"No, sir!" said old Martin, as though the tempter stood before him. Presently he went in to hide away, surreptitiously, the beloved instrument in its specially padded bed in the single trunk that contained the worldly possessions of Martin Conyers.
FROM apparently simple causes do large issues spring. Yet, probe the matter carefully and beneath simple causes one will often find deep under-currents. An assassin’s pistol in the streets of obscure Serajevo throws Europe into conflict and the world into chaos, but no student of history regards the incident as more than a surface symptom. So was the incident of Martin’s violin playing and the ensuing trouble.

Back of it stood that old feud between these two rival shows—rooted in beginnings almost forgotten; back of it, still more, stood Patrician Bill. For him the way to a definite end seemed open; small liking he had for the recent truce that threatened to become something more peaceful still. What if the peace terms be signed on a marriage register? Young Orville was becoming open in his courting, where previously it had been so surreptitious that even Patrician Bill, watching Leigh Taylor like a hawk, was blind—for a time. Well, he had his eyes open now!

“First thing you know,” someone had whispered maliciously in Bill’s ear, “first thing you know, my lad, it’ll be Tinling and Taylor!”

That went deep.

Patrician Bill worked covertly but effectively. All week nothing but the rush of long, busy days, with the fine weather bringing eager crowds to the Fair, saved the inevitable physical clash of the forces. As it was there were minor incidents. One or two of Tinling’s boys, and as many of Taylor’s henchmen appeared in their respective camps with bloodied noses and eyes that called for the healing ministrations of raw beefsteak.

Nothing really important—just skirmishes, but with a gradual working towards that clash which Patrician Bill anticipatedly smiled to think upon.

Friday it was, with things moving steadily towards the inevitable climax, when Martin, on his way for a period of quiet and a pipe, was overtaken by Leigh Taylor.

“I always get as far away from the show as possible,” he told her. “Not that I don’t like it—only I guess you understand how it is.”

“Sure! I know!” she told him quickly. “I’m that way myself. Sometimes I get so fed up singing to that gawping crowd outside the show just to attract them so old Skinny Jones can get in his barking for the Wild West Stuff, ‘just startin’ within, leddies an’ gents—only ten cents a head—children in arms free—biggest value on the grounds’—you know his line. It seems cheap, don’t it? Sometimes I feel I can’t stand it; I’ve just got to get away and sing to folks who’ll appreciate it. I’m not saying my voice is anything to write home about, but I feel I could make good in a real singing show.”

“You could!” declared Martin. “I’ve heard you.”

“You think so—really?”

“Aye,” Martin nodded. “You remind me so of a singer I used to know. She was very—wonderful—she was!”

Leigh’s eyes were shining. She said again: “Really? Honest? I’m so glad. I’ve always longed for it. Did you ever long for a thing so much it seemed to tear something out of your heart?”

He looked away, smiling queerly.

“Let’s go over and sit where we can see the water and the boats,” he suggested presently. “I always like these grounds for that.”

THEY went together in the best of comradeship. One of Tinling’s men homeward bound after a brief time off duty, and bearing outward signs of inward and illegal stimulation, hissed a crude epithet in old Martin’s ear and nodded towards the girl. Martin went on unheeding. She said:

“You won’t get into trouble with—your people—by coming with me?”

He laughed.

“They’ll not meddle with old Martin. Besides it’s all tomfoolery this. Just talk and threats—and they never tore a shirt yet.”
WAYSiDE TALES

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She caught his arm.
"Oh, but it isn't! You don't understand! There'll be trouble—there's bound to be... unless..."
"Unless?"
He caught up the word, encouragingly. Clearly the girl was troubled, and Martin's old heart was a gallant one.
"Unless you play!"
"Tush! My dear child, how silly. If they're looking for trouble they'll find it, whatever I do."
She shook her head in a vigorous negative.
"Listen, Mr. Conyers. Tomorrow the Fair closes at ten-thirty, and there's to be a Benefit Concert, you know, at the Midway Theatre for the Indigent Actors' Fund. Orville—Mr. Tinling's on the committee, and I can arrange for you to play just as easy as can be. Everybody—all the show people I mean—will be there. Don't you see what a chance it is?"
Martin smiled his refusal.
But the girl hurried on. "Oh, Mr. Conyers—can't you see—it's this way—if you and I were sort of to act together... I could come on and sing, and you play behind the scenes. That'd get our crowd. An' then, suddenly, when they're not expecting it, on you'd come playing. That'd get your crowd. I'm sure it would work."
"You don't share the general belief?"
He was eyeing her quizzically.
"About your ability to play? No, Mr. Conyers. You see—I've heard you!"
"You—what?"
"One time when we were at the Florizel Fair. I was out alone in a long ramble through the woods. I heard strange bird-notes, and went to investigate. It was wonderful."
"Ah!"
"You're not angry with me?" There was a strangeness in his eyes that must have evoked this question.
"Angry, child? No. Only I thought I always went far enough away from folk that none could hear. Sometimes in the woods like that, sometimes in the cities, I get a quiet corner away by myself. But I've never played to an audience since—since she left me."
He was staring out across the blue stretch of water again.
"She?"

OLD MARTIN hesitated. Then he drew out an ancient hunting case watch, and opened it, to show within the old-fashioned picture of a girl in clothes of another generation—a girl whose eyes held you, whose mouth was a thing of sweetness, whose chin held all the firmness that lovely curves could reveal.
"We—we used to be sweethearts as children," said Martin. "Long days together we've roamed the hills up north. She was a great one for the open, was Dorinda."
"Then there came a time when the roving spirit took us further, and her voice and my fiddle went well together. Perhaps, miss, you have heard of Annette Carleton."
"Why, yes. I've heard Daddy speak of her so often. She was very famous as a singer when he was a young man."
Pride shone in Martin's old eyes.
"That was Dorinda," he said—"my wife."
Leigh sat up with a jerk.
"Then you are—"
He nodded.
"I am Coppelli. That's between you and me, miss. She would have it that a violinist should have one of these queer foreign names. Besides she was Miss Annette Carleton—Dorinda was her middle name—and wedded, so said all the newspapers, to her art. Few knew that she was also wedded to me."
He went on after a space, half apologetically.
"You understand—she was temperamental. For years we went together from place to place, happy in our roving existence, not booking too far ahead, that caprice might lead us joyously as we felt inclined. Those days were—very happy days."
"You're a stubborn, selfish old man! That's what you are!"
The old man was lost in retrospect—wandering mentally through Elysian fields of memory.

She touched his arm gently.

"You said—she left you?"

"It was her fame did it—that and her temperament. She worked too hard—it got her nerves. Maybe, miss, you're too young to know what nerves can do when they get askew—how quick they'll change a person. It wasn't my Dorinda any more. Maybe, too, I hadn't the patience I should. One thing led to another—the gulf grew. One day she left me. I had a letter after a while. She was going away for a rest, then she'd arranged for a manager to attend to her bookings. It was better, she said, we should part. It was affecting her art. You see, Miss Taylor, that wasn't my Dorinda at all—her nerves were gone—"

Leigh nodded sympathy and understanding.

"She—she never came back, Mr. Conyers?"

"She never came back."

"And you? You went on with your own career?"

He smiled queerly.

"No, Miss Taylor, I just couldn't. I wrote and told her I was expecting her back. I was then. I said I'd never play for folks again, until she came back. I meant it. I haven't all these years."

His eyes were searching her face for sympathy. Not in long years had he opened his heart like this; laid bare before the human gaze the secrets of his life. Leigh Taylor was—different. He felt that here was understanding. But the cloud in her eyes troubled him. When she spoke he understood.

"Do you think that was—right?"

"Right?"

"Or brave?"

A little flush came to touch his cheeks. There had been moments when he had said this to himself—moments that grew rarer as the years went by.

The girl went on:

"Don't you think maybe you owed it to folks when you could play like that—to use your art?"

He answered slowly:

"Maybe you're right."

The confession cost him something; he added almost fiercely, leaning towards her in his earnestness: "Maybe you're right, but you don't know—you don't know what it's meant to me to cling to that thing. I've kept saying to myself—I'll stand by my vow, and some day she'll come back. It's sort of grown to be part of me. Why, miss, often I've longed to get back home—I want to go back among the hills up north before I die. I could have made the money easy with the violin—but somehow I couldn't do it. And it's too late now to change. I couldn't play before folks—I'd lose my nerve."

Leigh said quickly:

"You could—if you'd try. And you're going to try for me—are you?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Mr. Conyers—if your Dorinda were here—the old Dorinda you know, she'd want you to help me that way. I just know she would."

Quite obviously he was not listening.

Memory had claimed him again. She stood up, biting her lip, a little flush in her eyes.

"Martin Conyers—you will do this for me!"

"I couldn't, Miss Taylor!" He spoke quite humbly.

Leigh turned furiously upon him, the quick temper of the Taylors consuming her. She stamped an impatient foot until the dust rose from the dry turf.

"You're a stubborn, selfish old man! That's what you are! There'll be trouble, sure—and it'll be all your fault! Just when—when Dad and Mr. Tinling were getting over their silly squabbles. Don't you see, if there's another fight what it'll mean to—to Orville and me!"

Martin was staring out at the blue distance across the water.

"Oh," he said at last, and turned to see Leigh's form retreating with a swinging, impatient stride. "Oh!" he said again.
"Orville and me! That’s how the land lies."

He continued to stare so long that the white steamer, with the red and black funnel, plowing along outward bound, became just a smudge on the horizon.

"Maybe," he said, "maybe she’s right. But I couldn’t play—I just know I couldn’t. My nerve’s gone. They’d only laugh at me."

By and by, when the sun was westering, and a sense of duties neglected came to him, he rose to hurry stiffly away. A windblown swirl of dead leaves followed at his heels—dry, dead things that told of the coming of winter by and by. But the smile on his face persisted. Decision had come. Enough that two lives had been spoiled; if two might be saved there might be some atonement to justify the doing.

The shack-like dormitory was very quiet.

Elsewhere the noise and the hubbub of the Fair was in full swing; the hot autumn sun made the interior of the place drowsy—some flies, awakened by the heat, buzzed contentedly.

MARTIN sat down on the edge of the bunk, and slowly drew the little trunk to him. A new excitement gripped him. To play—after all these years! To thrill anew with the plaudits long silenced! To let his beloved violin—her violin—sing again! He could do it; confidence sprang into sudden growth; he would make his violin sing the message of peace. Leigh was a fine girl—and her voice!—so like the one he had known; and Orville—he liked Orville. Besides—a quick thrill seized him—he would never have done this for money—but maybe that offer would hold good. Twenty-five dollars? Fifty? ... The hills of home?

Slowly he drew the case from its place. lifting it tenderly. A sudden fear contracted his heart. It seemed so light! Perhaps hope had given him new strength, though. His hands trembled as he slipped off the catches. He stared dully.

Faded purple lining!—and emptiness! The violin was gone!

Gusty emotion swept him. Unbelief—desolation—by and by hatred! A fierce, all-mastering hatred—something akin to the tigress robbed of her cubs.

Taylor’s men! That would be it. All the animosities from out the past years came to confirm, to inspire hatred.

A blur was before his old eyes—a strange, blinding blur! He would call his own men to witness—their fellows who sometimes dubbed him Daddy Martin, who, if they laughed at his foibles, did not hurt with their sympathetic humor. They would avenge his loss!

He stepped to the entrance of the dormitory. A single shout would do it. The empty case was clutched to him.

Then it was the blur in his eyes ceased to blind him, and he saw it. Caught in the hinge, drab against the darkness of the lining, unmistakable evidence of guilt—a glove, small, fringed, familiar. Leigh’s! Leigh Taylor’s glove! Out of a struggling admixture of emotion emerged again a gusty anger. So she had dared—dared to touch this beloved instrument—the link with the past—Dorinda’s gift! Dared no doubt because she was piqued that he would not help her... though he had intended to do so at last!

Old Martin laughed; not a pleasant laugh—not like his usual self. He would just call them all to see!

"Anything the matter, Martin?"

The old man had not seen the lad approach. Orville Tinling stood smiling down at him, but sympathetic concern was in his eyes. Orville was a good lad—always thoughtful, always considerate. Martin stammered out: N-n-no, Mr. Tinling, thanks. Nothing much!"

"You mustn’t let the boys rag you too much about that old violin of yours. They don’t mean any harm, Martin."

"I don’t mind the boys, Mr. Tinling. Not a bit."
Orville nodded, and went away. With softened eyes Martin watched his going. Orville was a good boy.

From behind his back, the tell-tale part sheltered behind his wizened body, Martin drew the empty case. He disengaged the gauntlet, and carefully hid it away in his trunk. On top of it he put the empty case.

He shut the lid down quickly. The trunk reproached him. He should have had that lock fixed—but all these years none had dared touch the instrument.

“Martin—oh, Martin!”

“Coming!” said old Martin.

The cook’s voice: “Help me fetch in some of this wood, Martin, there’s a good chap. Say—what’s the matter—you look like you needed a doctor.”

“It’s nothing,” protested Martin. “I’m—I’m getting old. cook.”

He set to work on the task. Five minutes later the cook found him sitting limply on the woodpile, and at the risk of scorched food went and tucked him into his own bunk.

Voices passing after a while came to Martin’s ears.

“So poor old Marty’s caved in, eh? Poor old scout! Funny how they go like that often. No reason at all, y’know.”

Martin managed a queer little smile.

“Fine old fellow, Martin,” said a second voice. The boys’ll sure be cut up about it. Maybe he’ll pick up when we move South again. We’ll shove off Monday morning.”

South! A cold hand seemed to be laid upon Martin’s heart. South—and his heart was in the north! The hills of home! Some inward voice spoke to him. He nodded in dumb resignation. The burden of years was upon him. It came to him that he was now as near the hills of home for which he longed as he would ever be.

Outside the cookhouse, beyond the hearing of Martin, more than one confidence took place—with the cook at the center.

“I reckon,” said someone, “we won’t tell old Martin. No use worryin’ him. We’ll all be there tonight, and if he pulls it . . . whoee! There’ll be some ruckus. There’s been something coming to this Taylor outfit long enough! Everybody be there early. Front seats!”

Everybody was! Two front rows of grim faces, upturned to the stage. Perhaps because of them the early numbers fell flat. They were waiting—anxiously—for the coming of the Taylor contributions to the programme.

But their own card went up first.

“Tinling’s.”

Cheers from the Tinling contingent! A booing chorus from the Taylor element. Silence at last while the baritone voice of Orville Tinling resounded in a song of romance and love. Perhaps because it did not lack inspiration it held them silent through it all.

“Tinling’s! Tinling’s! Tinling’s!” The chant echoed through the building, drowning the applause, overwhelming opposition. There was only the one contribution from them.

A new card went up: a rather good act that seemed interminable. Then—“Taylor’s”—at last.

Cheers from the Taylor element! Grim silence from those front rows.

The cook it was who whispered the word first—a word that passed from lip to lip along those grim front rows.

“It’s ’im, boys. It’s that”—the cook supplied effective adjectives—“Patrician Bill!”

Very debonair he was, stepping forward in immaculate evening dress, in his hand a violin. A hush held the audience. Even the Taylor element forgot to cheer. Others, not in “the know,” seemed to sense a tenseness of the atmosphere.

He bowed to the audience—this debonair, smiling young man. He swept a yet more deep obeisance to those grim front
rows. His eyes, though, seemed to flash a warning signal to the Taylor hosts beyond, at the last—it seemed as though uneasiness had come upon him. Those imperturbable faces—poker faces—staring up from just beyond the footlights!

He put the violin under his chin, and raised the bow. The pianist played the opening chord.

“Up, boys!” shouted the cook, but before they could move a queer little figure, in very old-fashioned evening clothes, green and shiny with age, crinkled with long preservation, smelling of mothball and camphor, pushed up the aisle. From the floor he cried in a voice that carried, so strangely vibrant was it with passion,

“Don’t you dare play that!”

A new hush held the house.

Somehow Martin managed to reach the stage. He held out his hand for the instrument. He was trembling like a leaf, Patrician Bill’s mouth twisted scornfully.

“You thief!” cried Martin. “You cad! First you steal—then you throw suspicion on a woman!”

Patrician Bill went white. It seemed as though he would strike.

“Give me that violin!”

Martin was coldly insistent now; action had banished the trembling.

Patrician Bill hesitated—but only for a moment. His glance went for a moment to those front rows. He relinquished the instrument.

The instant he had it back, a chill came to Martin. His wizened body shook again. Some urge had brought him from
MARTIN struggled to get his nerve. It seemed as though a stronger mind was holding his weak, failing one, as though no power could make him play. He tried to start a simple thing that always went so well—when he and Dorinda worked together—one, too, that he had often practised since.

Listen! They were laughing at him. All but the front rows. They seemed to be pleading with their eyes to him.

"Sit down, old fellow! Beat it there, and let's get on with the show!"

Catcalls! Hisses! Mortification for those front rows turned to anger.

Old age had claimed him! He could not play!

The front rows would avenge him but they must not fight—for him. He must tell the boys to be quiet. Leigh had said—

What was that? The strain he had been trying to play, rich, mellow, familiar—a human voice. It came from the wings. How it recalled to mind the old days. Then he had played the obligato for Dorinda. He came in just like this.

THE house was suddenly hushed. Old Martin was playing! The years were bridged at last. Forgotten were the audience, forgotten his years, forgotten the weakness that had paralyzed him. His whole soul poured into the music. That was what held his auditors—not perfection of technique that once was his, but the throbbing power of the music... and the singer's voice blending so sweetly.

She appeared just as the last note ended in a burst of harmony.

Great waves of applause convulsed the house. Taylors and Tinlings—and all who heard!

Old Martin heard them dimly. He was moving towards the singer. And she towards him. Perhaps her woman's quick perception hastened her.

Old Martin, arms outstretched, one hand clutching the instrument that had
not lost its power to sing for him, groped his way forward.

"Dorinda!"—they heard him cry. And then Leigh caught him in her strong young arms.

A SENSE of floating on air! Then a consciousness of occasional joltings, slight but perceptible. The comfortable feel of clean, cool sheets. Luxury—after the crude methods of the show bunks.

Ah! he had it—he was on a train! The curtains parted, faces leaned over him, familiar faces, somehow, but not to be placed—yet. A cool hand on his forehead. He remembered now. He had played, and then Dorinda had come.

"Dorinda!" He spoke the word softly. His arms went up, encircling the neck above him. He became conscious of eyes meeting his, eyes that were not Dorinda’s. Hers were black and these—He stammered: "Who—what?"

"Hush, Mr. Conyers! It’s I—Leigh Taylor. There, you must be quiet. You’ve been ill. The doctor said if we could get you away it would help. The shows have moved South already. We couldn’t take you then."

"Oh!"

He turned over in the berth. South! It all began to come to him now. Dorinda had been Leigh, and now they were taking him South to get well. He almost laughed.

South! Oh, it would be balmy and lovely down there, but his heart cried out in protest. He would hate this year its sunshine and its flowers.

It seemed that through every inch and every fibre of his body new life surged. Snow—and pines! He thrust a cautious white-crowned head through the curtains. In the opposite seat were two young folks, blissful though all the world might stare. Leigh and Orville!

He called gently. It seemed a shame to disturb them—but he must know.

Leigh explained, anxiously: "I don’t know if you’re well enough to stand the story."

He smiled, asking: ‘Is it very sad?’

"Not sad—no!"

"Joy," he reminded her, "doesn’t kill."

"Perhaps it’s as well you should know now," she said, still doubtfully. "You see, Mr. Conyers, after you—you played so wonderfully, the newspapers worked up the story. It made a great feature for them, and I guess it got copied pretty widely. I guess I was so excited—I talked more’n I should. But you know how these smart reporters get things out of you. Anyhow the papers all copied it, and inside three days we had a wire."

"A—wire?"

Martin struggled to a sitting position.

"From—from your home place, I guess. A village up north. Tremville."

"Some of the folks I knew!" Martin’s eyes were eager.

Leigh nodded.

"They’ve been searching for you for a long time."

She stopped, the story seemed to choke her expression—perhaps she was afraid to tell it. But a sudden light dawned in his eyes. He said, unbelievingly, tremulously:

"You don’t mean that she—that Dorinda?" She did not have to speak; he read the answer in her eyes.

"We’re taking you to her, Martin dear," said Leigh, happily. "You see Orville and I—we decided to get married at once—and we thought we’d start our honeymoon by taking home the one who fixed things for us. Afterwards we’ll join Tinling and Taylor—"

"Tinling and Taylor?"

"Oh, of course, you didn’t know. Orville’s Dad and mine—"

But Martin had ceased to listen. . . .

HE WAS STARING out the window. His mind just now could hold only one thought; his heart feel only one swelling of emotion. Across fields pure with the white of the first snow, a flaming northern sunset poured its rays, touching pine-clad slopes with glory. Further to the north, blue in the dim distance, lay the hills of home.
ENDS AGAINST THE MIDDLE

By Hamilton Craigie and Walter Graham

Illustrations by Paul M. Satterfield

THAT investigator, F. Jackson Melville-Smith, leaned back in his leather cushioned mahogany chair, placed the tips of his slender, well manicured fingers judicially together, exhaled a cloud of oily-blue smoke from his expensive cigarette, and silently regarded the man seated facing him across the ornate desk.

His visitor seemed ill at ease. The pic-
tures on the walls, the thick piled rugs, the brocade hangings—even the mahogany desk at which the presiding genius of the place was seated—filled him with apprehension. He was out of his world—and none knew it better than he. It showed in his manner; the nervous twitching of his hands, with their blunt and discolored nails; the scraping of his heavy brogans; the roving, uneasy glint in his prominent, pale-blue eyes.

"Well, Mr.—Mr."

Melville-Smith glanced at the slip of paper previously handed him by Geraldine, the semi-decorated blonde guardian of the outer defences.

"Well, Mr.—er—Dugan, what can I do for you?"

"Wot I spill you'll keep under your hat—am I right?" inquired Mr. Dugan, in a husky, asthmatic whisper.

Melville-Smith elevated his aristocratic eyebrows the merest fraction of an inch.

"Our—ah—relations with our clients are, of course, highly confidential," he explained stiffly. "Pray come to the point, Mr. Dugan. My time is scarcely my own today."

Mr. Dugan took a firmer grip on the narrow brim of the stiff hat that he held between his knees, and leaned forward.

"Here's th' point, Mister," he said.

"I'm—bein' blackmailed—leastwise, I'm expectin' t' be."

Melville-Smith raised his heavy brows another quarter of an inch. His caller scarcely appeared to promise good picking for a blackmailer, unless that blackmailer's ambitions were extremely modest.

"Yes—?" he queried, after a pause. "Proceed, Mr. Dugan."

"This bein' confidential," proceeded Mr. Dugan, "I'll wise you to the play."

"Y'see—me an' my partner, Max Bohnheim, was mixed up in a lay that wouldn't look any too good to th' bulls. But there ain't but one thing t' show f'r it: a—a paper—er—papers. And that there evidence was bein' brought back to us so's we could burn it—me an' Max never did trust each other such a much—an' what does th' jasper that was bringin' it do—huh? Why—he goes an' gets stiff with bootlegger whiskey—goes stone blind, is taken to the hospital—an' cashes in!"

"Ah—most unfortunate," murmured Melville-Smith, making a little clucking sound with his tongue. "And—what of the—ah—evidence?"

"Why—" returned Dugan disgustedly, "th' poor boob leaves it in a dress-suit case, an' leaves th' case in th' spill—I mean th' railroad station—an' it ain't till last night that I finds where it's at. An' that's in the express office, an' tomorrow morning—it's agoin' t' be sold as unclaimed baggage."

The investigator's brow contracted in deep thought.

"You wish my advice?" he asked, after a time. "You understand, of course, that my fees are—ah—commensurate with the reputation that I have built up."

"Huh?" queried Dugan. Then he grinned, for the first time. "Let's have the advice, Mister," he said briefly.

"Well, then," remarked Melville-Smith, "bid in the suit-case."

"Yeh," growled his visitor, "that's easy—to say! But Max—blast him—he's found out where the suit-case is at, too—and I've only got six hundred iron men in my name. Maybe he's got more, and'll beat me in the bidding—I dunno! But—certain sure—once he gets his hooks on that suitcase—good—night! We've had—trouble—and he's out to get me."

"You wish my assistance in this very delicate matter?" asked Melville-Smith.

Dugan straightened in his chair.

"You get that paper, an' th' six hundred berries are yours," he stated with decision.

"My fee is one thousand dollars for a case of this particularly delicate character," explained the investigator, his eyes on an engraving on the wall above Mr. Dugan's head. "But the balance of four hundred could be taken care of by a note—I, of course, retaining the contents of
the suit-case until you—had—ah—met the obligation.”

He leaned back in his seat, on his face the dreamy, introspective look of a stone Buddha, the tips of his well manicured fingers judicially together—fingers that in an earlier day had earned him a living somewhat less respectable. Mr. Dugan showed his yellow teeth in a snarl.

“Rub it in!” he growled. “All right—that goes.”

MELVILLE-SMITH produced his gold-mounted fountain-pen and some slips of blue-tinted paper.

“Describe the suit-case,” he said shortly.

“Some class,” said Dugan. “Regular size—‘L. S., New York City’—in black letters on each end. Sale’s at ten in the morning. Continental Express Company, on Varick Street.”

“The case—pardon the pun, a very bad one—shall have my very best attention,” promised Melville-Smith. “If you will call here at two tomorrow afternoon—”

Dugan departed.

In the corridor he turned and grinned at the door of the criminal investigator’s office.

“That’s insurance, young fella,” he muttered. “But if six hundred berries will bid in that suit-case—why—I’ll have Max where the hair is short—and—you’ll be—up Salt River!”

II

AN HOUR LATER Melville-Smith, having dismissed his beefy partner-assistant, “Sure-Mike” Monahan, with some low voiced instructions, was interrupted in his meditations by a discreet tap on the door leading to the outer office.

Monahan, an ex-policeman, usually attended to the “leg-work” of the firm, although he could put two and two together with a minimum of mental effort. Entered Geraldine, a card in her slim fingers.

“Looks like money from home, Chief,” she remarked, as she handed the pasteboard to the operative:

MAXIMILIAN BOHNHEIM
PROMOTER

“Show the gentleman in,” instructed Melville-Smith. “But wait—”

Crossing the floor to a cabinet, he produced a microscope and a weighty-looking volume. These he placed on his desk; then assumed a studious pose. “All set!” he exclaimed.

Mr. Bohnheim was a portly personage, expensively attired and as extensively be-jewelled; red of face, short of breath, loud of speech, and smoking a strong and costly cigar.

“I’m going to be blackmailed,” he announced without preamble, as the door closed behind him. “I need your help—and I’ll pay well for it.”

Melville-Smith lifted a restraining hand.

“Please be seated, sir,” he remarked with dignity. “Pray do not again destroy my mental concentration on this problem—a most important one. A man’s life depends on the developments of the next few minutes.”

“Sorry,” grunted Mr. Bohnheim as he subsided into a comfortable chair and watched with interest the man at the desk.

For perhaps five minutes Melville-Smith bent over the shining metal tube. Then he arose with a smile and a sigh. But when Bohnheim was again about to speak he stopped him with uplifted hand, taking up the telephone.

“Brown!” he said briefly into the instrument.

A pause of several seconds. Then:

“Ah . . . Brown . . . ? . . . Melville-Smith . . . Williams is . . . innocent . . . you may tell the district attorney that prosecution is useless . . . if necessary I will myself take the stand . . . yes . . . of course I’m certain . . . I do
not make mistakes...yes...Williams should be released on his own recognizance...immediately. Good-bye."

He turned to his visitor, on whose face was an expression of respectful wonder, tinged with an almost incredulous awe.

"And now, Mr.—ah—Bohnheim, in what way may I serve you?" he asked.

Curiously enough, Mr. Bohnheim's first words paraphrased those of the amiable Mr. Dugan:

"Vod I am sayin'—you'll keep id under your had, yess?" he queried.

Then, to Melville-Smith's assurance that the secrets of his clientele were a matter of professional honor, the pudgy visitor leaned forward in his chair, and for the second time that afternoon Melville-Smith became the recipient of an identical confidence:

"I am being blackmailed," announced Mr. Maximilian Bohnheim. "Dot iss—I will be—unless—"

AGAIN Mr. F. Jackson Melville-Smith's expressive eyebrows arched upward in genuine surprise.

Then, from behind the poker mask that was his face, his alert brain gave no sign that he was hearing again the story which he had heard from Mr. Dugan that very afternoon. For that is what it was, in substance.

As Bohnheim ended with Dugan's identical words: "—and tomorrow morning it's agoin' t' be sold as unclaimed baggage," the operative's brow wrinkled in deep thought. Then he surveyed his vis-a-vis in one swift glance of lightning appraisal.

And as in the case of Mr. Dugan, a diplomatic reference to his fee was followed, after a decent interval, by the self-same admonition:

"Bid in the suit-case," pronounced Mr. Melville-Smith.

Mr. Bohnheim, however, beyond exclaiming at the futility of this procedure, for the same reason as that advanced by his quondam partner, stated his assets at a slightly higher figure, viz., "one 'grand.'" And, as in the case of Mr. Dugan, when Mr. Bohnheim had expressed his willingness to part with the thousand in exchange for Mr. Melville-Smith's offices in securing the suit-case, Mr. Melville-Smith mentioned the matter of his fee—only in this instance it totalled fifteen hundred dollars.

But Mr. Bohnheim was evidently, despite certain ingrained characteristics, somewhat more of a gambler than his partner.

"Hob to it!" he growled. "You ged dot case, produce th' paper, an' th' jack is yours."

It can not be said that F. Jackson Melville-Smith was ever at a loss—in anything. Dugan's appointment was for two o'clock.

"If you will call at this office tomorrow afternoon at 1:45," he stated, "I believe I can promise you some inside information—"

He smiled frostily at the implication, and waved his visitor out.

Once in the corridor, Max Bohnheim—Cagy Max, as he was known from East Houston unto Harlem—turned, and, even as his erstwhile partner had done, grinned over his shoulder at the closed door of the suite. "Dod's insurance, young fella," he murmured, even as had Dugan. "A thousand iron men'll do it, an' I'll cop—Dugan can grab th' onion, and—you—c'n hold th' bag, f'r fifteen hundred, if you c'n do it."

III

WALL-EYE DUGAN believed in having an "ace in the hole," in this instance Mr. F. Jackson Melville-Smith, but if, by any combination of circumstances, he could bid in that suit-case, he would take a flyer at it, at any rate.

Of course, in the event of his being successful, he had no idea of keeping his
appointment with the operative. A thousand iron men would be much safer in his own pocket—he guessed yes.

Now, as he mooched unobtrusively into the auction room of the Continental Express Company, a covert glance assured him that his partner was not among those present.

Hope was reborn, and with it an accession of confidence, as, several lots having been knocked down for trifling sums, the auctioneer, a beefy individual who might have passed for a policeman out of uniform, lifted into view the object of Dugan’s desires: the suitcase in which reposed that for which he had mortgaged his peace of mind.

“Ladeez—an’ gen’lmun,” intoned the auctioneer, “I have here lot No. 3114—a fine, sole-leather suit-case.

“You know, nothing venture, nothing have... faint heart never won fair lady... Steve Brodie took a chanst... wot am I bid, ladeez an’ gen’lmun, fr’t this elegant article... wot am I bid...?”

DUGAN threw a quick glance over his shoulder. There was a rather thin crowd, and nowhere among them could he discern the rotund figure of Maximilian Bohnheim. He couldn’t understand it—this continued absence of his one-time associate, but—he would take the goods the gods provided, also the suit-case, if—his luck held.

He would work fast. Articles such as this rarely ran higher than a few casual bids, ending usually at ten dollars or so at the highest.

“Five bucks,” croaked Wall-Eye, nervously, his heart in his mouth.

“Five dollars from th’ gent in th’ green kelly... the gent in th’ green kelly bids five dollars, ladeez an’ gen’lmun. Going at five dollars... wot do I hear, ladeez an’ gen’lumn... going at five dollars... five dollars—” chanted the auctioneer lugubriously. “It’s worth fifteen if it’s worth a nickel... going...”

“Ten!” snapped a voice behind Dugan, incisively.

Wall-Eye whirled on his heel, but the owner of the voice, a drab, brown-hatted, inconspicuous individual of uncertain age, was unknown to him. He licked dry lips. It would not do to appear over-anxious. Still—

“Fifteen!” he barked, scowling, and, almost immediately—

“Thirty!” snapped the man in the brown derby.

Wall-Eye was conscious of an abrupt unease.

Was it possible that his great secret—his and Bohnheim’s—and, yes, Melville-Smith’s—had become the property—was about to become the property—of another? There was Chinese Mike Gil-hooly, for instance, who would give his eye-teeth to do him dirt—but, well—it was nobody’s property as yet, at any rate.

But as the bidding rose, with the curious psychology of such things enticing others beside himself and his brown-hatted competitor, Wall-Eye became distinctly uneasy. He was certain that the two or three others were merely casual bidders, drawn in by the competition between himself and the second bidder, but of the latter he was not so sure.

By this time the figure had passed the century mark, reached half way to another by tens and twenties—and there hung.

Wall-Eye debated with himself. By this time, also the casual bidders had dropped out, leaving only himself and the brown-hatted individual.

As he opened his mouth the figures were abruptly taken out of it by a familiar, booming voice:

“Two hundred!”

Dugan’s heart sank. Max was on the job—with a vengeance—and well Wall-Eye knew what that vengeance would be if Bohnheim were successful—five years—a “finnif” in stir at the very least. For Bohnheim was a wolf who had cut his eye-teeth on the Dollar Mark.
"His thick fingers were reaching for the ink-well when there came a demonstration in flank."
BOHNHEIM, indeed, had followed much the same line of reasoning as had Dugan. Let Melville-Smith secure for him the contents of that suitcase if he could—he, Bohnheim would have a stab at it, at any rate, perhaps saving a portion, at least, of that fifteen hundred—and—a penny saved is a penny earned.

But now, in cut-throat competition, paced, as it were, by the man in the brown derby, they had run the figures up to five hundred. Dugan was approaching his limit, and he knew it only too well—defeat and all that it implied stared him in the face. If the bidding passed six hundred he was—done!

“Five hundred, ladeez an’ gen’l’mun—I’m offered five hundred,” began the auctioneer—and Dugan’s heart gave a sickening lurch. Well, in the words of the former: “nothing venture, nothing have!”

A curious tension had made itself felt. The crowd, sensing the unusual, were interested observers. Dugan swallowed—twice.

“Six hundred,” he said, hoarsely, his voice flat and strained.

For a moment the auctioneer’s voice rang startlingly clear in the sudden silence:

“Six hundred, gen’l’mun—I’m offered six hundred . . . six . . .”

And then, viciously abrupt:

“Seven hundred!” snapped Bohnheim, and Wall-Eye, with a look of unutterable hate, subsided inertly into a convenient chair.

The brown-hatted man had not been particularly active in the later bids, injecting merely a casual figure just large enough to keep him in the running. Now, however, as Dugan waited to see the suitcase knocked down to Bohnheim, for it was inconceivable that the third bidder would continue to compete for it, in response to the auctioneer’s somewhat languid appeal this individual stated nonchalantly:

“A thousand.”

IT WAS now Bohnheim’s turn to worry. He had effectually disposed of Dugan, but it began to look as though the shabby individual might be the proverbial nigger in the woodpile, or thereabouts.

He cleared his throat nervously.

“Twelve hundred,” he offered, in a low voice. He, too, was approaching his limit, and if the mysterious competitor passed that figure he would know for a certainty that he was neither capping for the house, nor—just taking a chance.

Pins could have been heard dropping all over the room as the auctioneer echoed Bohnheim’s bid:

“Twelve hundred, gen’l’mun . . . twelve hundred . . . this valuable suit-case going at twelve hundred . . . going . . . going . . . go . . .”

And then—

“Fifteen hundred!” pronounced the nondescript, much as if he were announcing a pinochle meld.

A grunt that was half a groan issued from Bohnheim’s thick lips; a snarl, in which wonder was merged in a certain savage satisfaction, from Dugan. Between himself and his former partner it was at least a stalemate.

But as the two, faces averted, wended their separate ways from the room, in the mind of each was a clamorously insistent question-mark:

“Why—why—WHY?”

IV

IT WAS HARD upon one-forty-five, the hour of Max Bohnheim’s appointment with Melville-Smith. The operative, seated at his ornate desk, was engaged in nothing more exciting than the thoughtful digestion of an excellent luncheon, aided by the consumption of an expensive cigar.

If he was conscious of any interior disturbance at the approaching event, his manner did not betray it. But then, Melville-Smith’s was a superb aplomb, his self-possession was never greater than in
the face of a difficulty, however exigent.

As the announciator at his elbow trilled softly—once—he did not change his position by so much as an eyelash, save that his right hand, with a lightning motion, dropped below the level of the desk as the door opened, disclosing the puffy features and the gross, heavy body of Maximilian Bohnheim.

"Ah—good-afternoon, Mr. Bonheim," greeted Melville-Smith, smoothly, before his visitor could speak.

"You’re on time, I see. Good . . . well, sit down, sit down . . . just a minute . . . ."

The "promoter" gazed at the detective in a sort of stupid wonder, as he seated himself gingerly on the edge of a chair.

"Y’ don’t mean to tell me you’ve—" he was beginning, but Melville-Smith silenced him with a wave of the hand. There was an odd look in his face, as of mingled doubt and assurance, one might have said.

"Just a moment, Mr. Bohnheim," he repeated, his head turned sidewise as if listening.

For a brief instant a thick silence invaded the room—for a split second it seemed as if time stood still . . . the ticking of the wall clock like the beating of a heart . . .

Then, once again, there sounded the trill of the announciator, as the heavy curtain at the operative’s back rippled along its length as if at the noiseless passage of some heavy body.

Then the door swung wide—and Wall-Eye Dugan strode into the room.

One look he gave at the stolid figure of Bohnheim, then his lips twisted in a mirthless grin as his ratlike glance traveled swiftly from Bohnheim to Melville-Smith, and back again.

"Wot’s th’ game, hey? Th’ double-cross, hey?" he grunted.

But at Bohnheim’s bewildered look a swift indecision usurped the black frown on his face, to be replaced immediately, however, by a savage bleakness of hate as he took a swift step toward his quondam partner.

"You damn stool-pigeon!" he mouthed. "I don’t know wot th’ lay is, but I wouldn’t trust you in jail with leg-irons on, an’ you c’n lay to that!"

For a brief instant the two men glared at each other across the intervening space, Bohnheim’s heavy face slowly paling to a mottled, unhealthy gray.

He made no reply, none save for the venom of his glance as his hand stole toward his pocket.

"Gentlemen—gentle-men!" put in Melville-Smith, suavely, yet beneath the silken tone there ran a hint of iron. Again, the heavy folds of the curtain swayed slightly behind him as Dugan subsided into his chair, and the two men, their private quarrel for the nonce merged in a more compelling interest, turned to the operative.

But Melville-Smith forestalled them with uplifted hand.

"Gentlemen," he continued smoothly, "let us get down to cases, or, rather, one particular case . . . I have been active in your behalf, as the representative of both of you, and I believe I can suggest a compromise which will satisfy you both."

He paused, and Dugan cut in sourly:

"’S all right, Mister, but that ain’t comin’ across with th’ goods, I’ll say. An’ wot’s more—there ain’t no dicker that’ll suit me with Bohnheim. Y’ didn’t get th’ case—y’ fell down on that—f’r I seen it knocked down to a guy at the auction—an’ so did Max here."

"Dod’s ride," seconded Bohnheim, for once in accord with his former associate. "We know—we’re wise y’ can’t produce it—you ain’t got it!"

"Well, gentlemen," remarked Melville-Smith, with unruffled serenity, "there is just one thing, or, rather, two, which I would like to have settled before proceeding further. If I can deliver the goods as you so aptly put it, will you
stick to your original agreement in the matter of my—er—fee?"

"Sure—but—" began Dugan and Bohn-heim in chorus—"you can't—you ain't—"

"Well—is it agreed?" demanded the operative, crisply.

At their further assent, he went on:

"When I undertook to recover the suit-case and its contents for both of you I undertook to serve you—both—without fear or favor. I do not believe you will care to hear, in detail, just what progress I made, or what methods I employed, but it is sufficient to say that the individual who bid in that suit-case did so from entirely different motives than your own. . . ."

He frowned thoughtfully.

"It was a rather intricate matter—but I worked—fast. As it happened, certain features of this—ah—case dovetailed into another in which I am interested—and so. . . ."

He spread his hands wide with a little, flicking gesture as Dugan and Bohnheim leaned forward eagerly, incredulity writ plain on their faces, and yet a certain anticipation.

WITH a swift, sudden motion Melville-Smith's right hand disappeared beneath the desk, to come up again, holding something at which both men exclaimed hoarsely, unbelievingly.

It was a thick, heavy envelope, half open, protruding from its flap a thin sheet of coarse paper circled with a rubber band.

Melville-Smith flicked it open with a flirt of his thumb, his glance embracing them with a tolerant smile.

"The—ah—goods, I should say. Is this the—casus belii, gentlemen?" he inquired blandly.

Then—with a pantherish spring Dugan had left his chair. With a rapid movement he had circled the desk even as Bohnheim, moving lightly for all his bulk, blunt fingers extended, hurled himself bodily at the operative, pig eyes aflame.

An ink-well skittered crazily, caroming along the thick glass surface—there came a frightened cry from the office without—a thick oath from Dugan—the spank of a clean-cut blow. . . .

Not for nothing had Melville-Smith possessed that eye of ice, the grim mouth, witness of the days when as "Sure Thing Smith" he had been famous as the King of Con-men. His leaness was the leaness of the athlete—the long, slender fingers whipcord and steel.

Even as Dugan, mouth twisted in a snarl, reached for that envelope the operative's fist, behind it his two hundred pounds of iron-hard muscle, curved in a short arc—Dugan gasped, staggered, gave back two stiff, mincing steps, on his pasty countenance a ludicrous commingling of pain and sheer surprise.

BOHNHEIM, his crafty face a-gleam, had seen his opportunity. His thick fingers were reaching for the ink-well when there came a demonstration in flank.

An enormous hand, at the end of an arm, massive, rigid, smote him just behind the ear, then, without apparent effort, lifted the promoter to slam him backward into his chair.

The curtains closed—the arm withdrew—Bohnheim, his face a pasty-green, eyes glazed, sat hunched over, breathing in short gasps, thick fingers nursing his neck where had landed that mighty blow.

Dugan, one hand braced against the desk, leaned forward, swaying, his gaze fixed in a sort of stupid wonder on the operative. Of Bohnheim, seemingly, he was unaware.

Melville-Smith's smile continued, if anything, even more bland, impersonal. Again his hand came upward from beneath the desk, holding the envelope between finger and thumb.

"One—moment, gentlemen," he stated, with a soothing, unctuous expression. "Apparently you are in agreement that this is what you have been seeking—you—identify it?"
Bohnheim swallowed painfully, twice, fingered his ear, coughed, ran his thick fingers inside his collar.

Finally:
"Doc's id," he exclaimed heavily.
Dugan, his gaze fixed in a grudging admiration on the operative, answered, in a thick whisper:
"Surest thing you know—boss," he said, in corroboration.
"Some man!" was his brief, inward comment. He sat down slowly, lips pursed, hand caressing his jaw.
"Well, then," remarked Melville-Smith, "there remains merely the small matter of my fee...."

Plainly, it was Melville-Smith's intention to ignore the—ah—late unpleasantness. Well, in that case—
"That's all right, Mister!" interjected Dugan, hastily. "You hand over that envelope an' th' letter, an' I'll come through with th' kale, like I said I would."

But Bohnheim's voice rose in shrill protest, his racial instincts getting the better of his discretion:
"Vait—vait—Mister. I'll make id two thousand—I'll make id..."

The operative's eyes took on a brief glint, like the sun on ice.
"Gentlemen, I must remind you that this is not an auction," he interrupted sternly. "However, since there appears to be a trifling physical difficulty in the way of handing over the envelope to both of you, with your permission I will divide its contents equally, both of you to retain a half. Or I will agree to tear it up if you say so—and destroy it."

For a moment both Bohnheim and Dugan sat, open-mouthed—then:
"Suits me," averred the latter, with a broad grin; and, a trifle more hesitantly from Bohnheim:
"Well, I guess."

If it had been at one time in the minds of either of his clients to take forcible possession of the envelope a variety of reasons, not the least of which had been the cool gleam in the gray eyes of the operative, had given them pause.

With characteristic reluctance, as became his disposition, at a polite suggestion from Melville-Smith, Bohnheim produced the amount of his fee, Dugan following suit.

Both expressed themselves as satisfied with the destruction of the evidence rather than tempt fate by the possession of so much potential dynamite, and as the operative, striking a match, held it to the now historic envelope, they watched it shrivel with mingled feelings of thankfulness and regret.

"This will doubtless be a lesson to you, gentlemen," observed Melville-Smith, "but—I shall be glad to serve you on any future occasion."

Wall-Eye Dugan and Maximilian Bohnheim stood not upon the order of their going. They went at once.

The door had hardly closed on the departing visitors when the curtain at Melville-Smith's back was agitated violently. A huge man, florid of face, with a paint-brush mustache, and rolling between his lips an unlighted cigar, breezed in.

This was Monahan, Melville-Smith's partner and assistant.

As he eyed the money on the desk he appeared to exude one vast silent chuckle.
"Well, Fred—I'll say that was pretty smooth—and then some!" he gurgled.

He eased himself into a chair with a ponderous grunt.

"Clancy remembered me, a'course. He ain't been an auctioneer so long that he's forgot what it was to be a cop. A sawbuck f'r him, an' a ten-spot for Quigley, who did th' fake biddin'—there wuz nothin' to it, bo. But I'd admire to hear what them two guns would a spilled if they'd knowed they wuz biddin' f'r an empty suit-case. Th' envelope—you can gamble I copped it soon's we could open the bag. I'd like to have kept it—honest—but—well—we played it—"

"Both ends against the middle," quoted F. Jackson Melville-Smith.
THREE of the four persons grouped at the head of the bed leaned forward to catch the name the boy had spoken. Only the boy's father, who was deaf, did not move.

The doctor looked curiously at the others.

"What did he say?" he asked.

The boy's mother shook her head. She appeared disturbed.

"Does he know anyone named Maisie?" persisted the doctor.

"No," said the woman, in a low voice. She looked away for a moment, out of the window, at the cheerless prospect of snow clad trees and fence posts. Then her eyes swung back to the doctor's face. Before his scrutiny they dropped.

"Yes, he does!" exploded the boy's sister, suddenly. "You know he does, mother! We all know her."

The elder woman moaned at the revelation, and raised a shaking hand to solicit silence.

The physician, a young man, was puzzled by the turn affairs had taken. He felt an unexpected stretch of thin ice under his feet. After a moment, he said:

"If Anne is right, Mrs. Lockett, it might be well to send for this . . . Maisie. That was the name he called before that we couldn't make out."

There was a trace of irony in his polite utterance. Swiftly, he added:

"I don't promise that it will do any good; but it might. It wouldn't hurt, anyway."

The boy's mother was worried. Her face communicated her emotion to her deaf husband, who leaned toward her.

"What's the matter?" he asked, in his hollow, lifeless tones. "Is George worse?"

The doctor shook his head in reply, and was on the point of speaking. The young woman called Anne, however, again had taken the explanation into her own hands.

"There shouldn't be any secret about it," she cried, passionately. "George's infatuation may be ridiculous, but if Doctor Hedrick can do anything to help him, we shouldn't hinder him."

In response to this turmoil of pronouns, the young doctor nodded his thanks and agreement.

"'Maisie' is Maisie Walkirk, the actress," continued the boy's sister, with a
defiant glance at her mother. "He doesn't
know her, of course, but he's seen her
dozens of times on the screen, just as all
of us have. He's been mad about her ever
since the first time. Mother knows it . . .
we all know it. That's all there is about
it. He's crazy about a moving picture
actress he's never seen except in the
films."

"I see!"
The young doctor nodded with sympa-
thetic understanding. He began then to
look grave, and continued in that attitude
for some moments, while mother and
daughter watched him anxiously.

"It's pretty bad, is it?" he asked, at
length.

"Yes," said the boy's mother. She
leaned over the figure of her son, and
brushed a hand across his forehead. Sudden-
ly she fell to weeping, burying her face
in her arms on the small table beside the
bed-head.

The boy's sister again took up the
thread of the story.

"She was at the Cross Roads Theater
once for three nights. He was there every
night. Since then—and that was three
years ago—he's seen her every time she
was there, or at Lethbridge. Her picture,
I mean . . ."

The doctor nodded.

"At first he carried on like—well, in the
usual way, I suppose. We laughed at him,
thinking it would wear off. But it didn't.
He used to dream about her, and talk
about her in his sleep. At first we thought
it was funny, but now . . . ."

She broke off, and in shrill tones made
her father understand what had trans-
pired. The deaf man nodded sagely at
the doctor, and made a curious grimace
indicative of his sympathy for and dismay
at his son's predicament.

"Is she so beautiful?" asked the young
doctor, not without interest.

"I suppose so!" The girl's tone was
almost sullen. "She's slim and blonde,
and . . . oh, she's beautiful enough! In
the pictures, anyway."

"Well," said the doctor, looking at the
boy's mother, "don't cry. That won't
help. I'm glad you told me, Anne, though
I don't see that it's helped matters much.
The case is certainly unusual."

He fell again to thinking.

The occasional sobs of the boy's mother
clearly indicated her feelings. She expe-
rienced a deep personal shame that her
boy should have lost himself so completely
over an actress. The fact that he had
never seen her was less moving than the
consideration of her profession. To the
young doctor, accustomed to the narrow
prejudices of his church-going country
clientele, the woman's emotion was un-
derstandable in its full significance. He could
not sympathize with it, but he did not
underestimate its sincerity.

A fantastic thought came to him, which
perhaps would not have occurred to an
older and less romantic physician. The
boy was nearer death than his parents or
his sister suspected. Hoping against hope,
the doctor had not yet dared to tell them
the whole truth.

The boy's sister read his thought.

"Would it help, Arthur, if we got Maisie
Walkirk to come to Lethbridge?" she
demanded.

"Anne!" cried her mother.

Doctor Hedrick impatiently gestured
the mother to silence.

"There's no call for you to be shocked," he said. "Anne's suggestion is perfectly
intelligent. I'm sorry to say, Mrs. Lockett,
that George's condition isn't at all favor-
able. Anne's idea is . . . hm-m! . . . I
don't know! If Miss Walkirk were in the
next town, it would be easy enough; I
don't doubt but she'd come—though even
then I'm not sure it would do any good.
As it is, she may be in China; certainly
she isn't any nearer than California."

A HOPELESS SILENCE fell upon
the group. Mrs. Lockett was weep-
ing again. The eyes of the deaf man
roved from one face to another, striving
to keep step with their thoughts. The
ticking of the tall clock on the stairs came
to the doctor and the boy's sister with
intolerable distinctness. It was the girl, again, who spoke first.

"We can’t let George die this way," she cried, angrily. "We’ve got to do something. And we don’t know that Maisie Walkirk’s in China, or even California. We’ve only got to telegraph to find out. ... And," she added, fiercely, "if we can’t get Maisie Walkirk, I guess we can borrow an actress somewhere who’ll look just as beautiful!"

The doctor smiled faintly at the girl’s outburst, and passed his arm tenderly through hers. Then he shook his head.

"It won’t do," he said. "I mean we can’t impose on him. It’s got to be Maisie Walkirk or nobody."

"Shall I telegraph?"

"No, I’ll attend to it when I get back to town," said the doctor.

She squeezed his hand, and her wild eyes softened. He slipped into his overcoat, and picked up his bag. Together they descended the stairs to the lower floor. At the door, hat in hand, he paused. A clearer sense of the futility, the absurdity of what he was countenancing, came to him.

"For God’s sake," he said, "don’t hope too hard! She may not come, even if I reach her. And, anyway, it’s just—just a forlorn hope."

He placed an arm about her, and as she swayed to him, their lips met and clung.

"Poor little girl!" he whispered. "Brave little girl! It hurts me, Anne. He is your brother ... and I am helpless! Anne, do you love me?"

"Yes," she said, tensely. "Whatever happens!"

From the window, Anne Lockett watched him crank the little car in which he had driven out to the farmhouse, watched him climb into it, then watched the receding car until it was out of view. Her gaze was eager, breathless, adoring, and her eyes still saw him when the car and its occupant had passed from sight. Composing her face, she returned to the boy’s bedside.

Her brother was tossing restlessly, and a steady stream of meaningless syllables flowed past his lips. Again Anne Lockett and her mother leaned quickly forward. ... Out of the strange language of delirium leapt a name.

"Maisie," muttered the boy. And after a moment ... "Maisie!"

The dead man twitched his daughter’s skirt.

"What does George say?" he eagerly asked.

Anne Lockett thought of the young doctor, skimming the cold country roads toward the town of Lethbridge. She met her father’s gaze frankly.

"He said, ‘Maisie,’" she patiently explained.

GEORGE LOCKETT was in luck. Dr. Arthur Hedrick felt this keenly, as he looked with professional interest on the pictured face of Maisie Walkirk, while a fast train whirled him toward Chicago. The portrait was in a photoplay journal that he had purchased before boarding the train, and which contained, in addition to the portrait, a brief account of Miss Walkirk’s luminous career.

The luck of George Lockett consisted in the fact that Chicago is less than three hundred miles from Lethbridge, while California is rather more than three thousand miles distant. And, punctuated, the telegram which Dr. Hedrick had received in response to his own—addressed to California—read as follows:

"Maisie Walkirk in Chicago this week. Whitestone Hotel."

As he surmised, Anne Lockett had wished to make the journey herself, but the urgency of the trip had seemed too great to the physician. He could not guess what difficulties she might be called upon to overcome, and, with a sigh, he had turned over his practice to a friendly neighbor, and fared forth himself with Anne’s instructions to him to “spare no expense.”

The photoplay journal purchased by the doctor at the station in Lethbridge re-
"Maisie Walkirk's famed temperament bloomed into sudden fire."
vealed that Miss Walkirk, while astonish-
ingly young, was the widow of a former
director, although at present unmarried.
She had begun her career in stock, and for
a time had played unimportant parts on
the larger stage; then, with the boom in
motion pictures, her beauty had been in
demand. She had worked, it appeared,
in several large studios, and was now the
bright and particular star of one of the
largest corporations in the country.

Studying the laughing face of the pic-
tured Maisie, Dr. Arthur Hedrick in-
dulged the professional fancy that her
beauty considerably outweighed her brains.

At the Whitestone Hotel, in Chicago,
he was informed that Miss Walkirk was,
at the moment, out. The amiable clerk
had no idea when she would return, but
was certain she was "making a picture"
some place, and would probably be late
in returning.

Thinking of the nine o'clock train that
evening, on which he had hoped trium-
phantly to bear her back to Lethbridge,
the doctor sighed. As he was turning
away, the clerk said:

"By the way, that's the press agent of
her company over there. He's just come
in—there, now he's sitting down! Per-
haps he may be able to help you."

To the engaging young man thus
pointed out, Hedrick explained the situ-
ation with the eloquence of complete
simplicity.

"You may think what you please of
George Lockett," he concluded, "but the
fact is, Mr. Wright, only Miss Walkirk
can save his life.... I don't even promise
that, but it's our last chance. She's our
last chance!"

The doctor's eloquence would have been
unnecessary. The astonished newspaper
man could scarcely believe his ears, so
great was his delight.

"It's gorgeous!" he panted. "Gorgeous!
I've been inventing stories about screen
people for years, and some of 'em were
pretty good—and here you come along
with one that's true, that knocks my best
pipe into a cocked hat!"

He hugged himself ecstatically, then
bounded to his feet.

"Come on!" he said. "She's at the stock
yards. I'll call a taxi, and we'll be there
in twenty minutes."

"You think she'll go?" queried the doc-
tor, as they seated themselves in the ma-
chine.

The press agent chuckled hysterically.

"If she doesn't go willingly, I'll have
her chloroformed and delivered by ex-
press," he promised.

This extravagant language surprised
the sober Hedrick. He contrived a grate-
ful smile, and subsided.

"Drive like hell!" ordered Mr. Wright,
with his head outside the door.

THE DOCTOR was not prepared for
the spectacle of Miss Walkirk in
overalls and a jumper, but he smothered
his amazement, and allowed the publicity
man to explain the visit. It was a harrow-
ing tale as narrated by that expert. The
star's blue eyes widened with astonish-
ment, then narrowed to pity. Hedrick
saw at once that she was beautiful—in-
credibly, astoundingly so! He marveled
at the calmness of the men associated with
her. Their pulses seemed entirely normal;
he could almost feel his own leap. The
"almost" seemed to qualify his thought
and make it respectable. Oh, George
Lockett was in luck!

"Is all this true?" demanded a heavy-set
man, with shrewd eyes and a dominating

"I beg your pardon," said Wright, the
publicity expert. "This is Mr. Sultan;
Doctor—our director."

The doctor shook hands with the heavy-
set man.

"Yes," he replied, with a little smile.
"Mr. Wright's account is a bit florid, but
in the main the story is true. Young
Lockett, I may as well admit, doesn't
seem to have a chance... and yet...
I've seen miracles happen in my profes-
sion."

"Why, it's perfectly beautiful," cried a
handsome young woman, who, unlike the
star, was correctly garbed. I never heard of such devotion in my life. But if he receives you'll have to marry him, Maisie! Won't she, Ted?"

Mr. Wright, being called upon, responded with his usual readiness.

"That would be the fictional denouement," he admitted, solemnly. "In this instance, it offers difficulties, I fancy."

He smiled whimsically at the star.

Philip Sultan ponderously broke into the conversation.

"A true story," he ejaculated, "eighteen karats fine—and not a newspaper in the country will fall for it! They'd call it one of Ted's publicity frame-ups."

"Call 'em fakes," murmured Mr. Wright, with a gesture.

"I'm not thin skinned."

Maisie Walkirk's famed temperament bloomed into sudden fire.

"What a witty lot we are!" she sneered. "Gigging like imbeciles, when we should be crying buckets, every one of us!"

She looked savagely about. Then she fastened her eyes on the director.

"Well, Phil, do I go back with the Doctor?"

"Either you go with the Doctor, or you're fired!" snapped Sultan.

"You darling!"

Miss Walkirk sprang to his side, and dragging down his head bestowed a daughterly kiss upon his bald spot.

The nonchalant camera man suddenly became restless. Then he entered the field with an idea.

"Say," he observed, in deprecating approach, "we need a deathbed scene in this picture. Everybody but me seems to have forgotten it. Here's our chance, it seems to me!"

Five men and four women turned horrified eyes upon him. Mr. Theodore Wright bent a questioning gaze on the Doctor.

"Shall I kill him, Doc?" he gently asked. "Just as you say!"

The camera man became again resentfully nonchalant. His ideas never had been appreciated. His philosophy of life was a bitter one.

The doctor was intently regarding Miss Walkirk.

"I wonder," he mused, "if George ever wrote to you. Do you recall the name, Miss Walkirk?"

The screen star suddenly wheeled, and frowned down the laugh that threatened to follow this naive remark.

"No," she said seriously. "But I receive so many letters, Doctor, that it is not strange if I forget. And yet, do you think this young man is the sort who would write letters to me?"

Hedrick was now willing to agree that Miss Walkirk's beauty and Miss Walkirk's brains were bestowed in equal proportion.

"Of course, you are right," he said, with a blush. "And what you say about your letters hadn't occurred to me. I suppose your—correspondence—must be large."

"Colossal!" added Mr. Wright, the press agent. His explosion sounded almost profane. "I answer most of this young woman's mail, and my hand is about worn out writing autographs and answering mash notes."

"Will you be quiet, Ted!" snapped the star. Her eyes flashed. "Doctor Hedrick is not interested in your confessions, nor in my correspondence."

In this, she was even then wrong.

After a moment, she asked, "When do we start?"

"Thank you," said the young doctor, earnestly. "I should like to shake hands with you, if I may."

HEDRICK AND SULTAN dined with Maisie Walkirk at the Whistler in splendid state. In the glamor of lights and music, the young man from Lethbridge was monosyllabic. His glances at the actress were almost furtive. She had been beautiful in overalls, at the stock yards. Now, in evening garments of daring cut and color, she was something more; but he could not find the word for it.

He had not been a man to run to movie shows, he had told himself. How much
he had missed! He knew now... and yet... how many of the admirers of Maisie Walkirk (and their number he dared not conjecture) would sacrifice all their nights in the darkened theater for this one evening with herself! After all, he had the best of it. He had heard her laugh, had heard her talk, had seen her walk across a room toward him; and all this without vanishing at the edge of the tawdry screen. Whether he lived or died, George Lockett was in luck; but in luck, too, was Dr. Arthur Hedrick.

"If you don't turn your headlights off Doctor Hedrick, Maisie, we'll have two patients instead of one," remarked Philip Sultan, with the sour humor that Hedrick was beginning to understand. "Have you a large playhouse in Lethbridge, Doctor?"

"No," answered the doctor, blushing. "At least, I believe it is a small one. I confess I've never been in it!"

"You should be glad," commented the director. "See what happened to Lockett!"

Miss Walkirk laughed, then sobered at sight of Hedrick's face. He had been reminded of the tossing, restless figure as he last saw it, and the agonized faces of mother and sister bending over it. Again he stood with Anne at the farmhouse door, and heard her parting words... A spasm of pain crossed his face. He began to hate himself.

"Pay no attention to Sultan, Doctor," said Miss Walkirk, quickly. "He is as gentle as a babe. He feels as badly about your George as we do; but he wouldn't let us know it for worlds."

The director morosely lighted a cigarette.

"That's right," he said. "Let on you're doing this for love! I know her, Hedrick. If there were to be no publicity in this, you couldn't coax her within a hundred miles of Lethbridge with a new contract. She's as cold as..." He thought for an instant—as cold as a gambler's eye," he finished.

Miss Walkirk laughed again, and suddenly Hedrick wished he were clever. He would have liked to say something that would please her.

"I should like to see Miss Walkirk act," he contrived, laboriously.

"Your George may wish he hadn't," smiled the actress, "when he sees me as I am.

"I wonder what pictures of mine he has seen."

"No!" cried Hedrick, with sudden ardor. "He won't be disappointed in you!" Recalling her question, he colored, and added quickly: "I don't know. Probably all of them."

He gripped himself courageously, and devoted his attention to his plate.

They chatted for a time in the parlor car before seeking their staterooms. Sultan, who was to accompany them, complained bitterly because the train made seven stops before Lethbridge would be reached in the morning. He described it as no better than a milk train, although the distance was nearly three hundred miles. Then he immersed himself in a newspaper. His sardonic chuckle reached them from time to time, punctuating their talk.

LEFT to maintain the conversation without the director's aid, Hedrick felt helpless. The radiant presence of the actress, close beside him, left him breathless after every glance. At length he blurted:

"Miss Walkirk, please try to understand how grateful I am—we are—for your kindness. I can't tell you how much we appreciate it..."

"Don't try," smiled the actress, easily. "The obligation, you see, is on our side. Of course, Sultan will give the case publicity, and I'm afraid we can't stop him—but it will be the right kind of publicity. Nothing to injure you professionally, you know."

The doctor gestured.

"I'm not afraid," he said. "You're entitled to all the publicity you can get."

"Tell me about yourself," said Miss Walkirk. "Your own opportunities for
doing good are so many! I think of a doctor with awe and admiration."

Hedrick looked shrewdly at her.
"Do you?" he asked. "Or are you changing the subject?"

He laughed, and was at greater ease.
"I haven't any story, Miss Walkirk. I'm a country practitioner, that's all. This case of George Lockett's is the most interesting I've ever had. I suppose it's romantic; but I guess I'm not."

"You have imagination," disputed the actress. "With that you can do anything. And you are young."

She was no more than twenty-five herself.
"You think I invented this story?"
"Good heavens, no!"
"Then what do you think?"
"The average doctor would have branded the whole thing impossible. You didn't. You think I may fail, but you saw the possibility of success, and took the risk. There is a risk, isn't there?"
"Yes—a bit!"

"Well, you took it. You imagined what has happened, to date; and your imagination goes even farther."

Hedrick guiltily wondered whether she suspected the full reach of his imagination. He was silent.
"But you," he said, after a moment, "do a greater work than I. Your pictures have cured more headaches than all the doctors in the country, probably. How many people, do you think, tired and in trouble, go to the moving picture theaters for an hour, and come away cured?"

"I'm sure I don't know," laughed Miss Walkirk, "although the statistics would interest Sultan. You make it sound very attractive. I hope you are right. If I were giving a newspaper interview, I suppose I should rant about my art, and agree with you. Fortunately, I have Ted Wright to take care of all that. There is a good deal of hard work in what I do, you know. But I make a good living—a very good living—and I guess I have a pretty good time. Of course, I want my work to give pleasure, but if I didn't like what I was doing, I wouldn't do it. The fact is, Doctor," she continued with a mischievous glance, "your unexpected descent on us corrected a notion I had about myself—that I was a rather useless sort of person, presenting a false view of life to thousands of persons who accepted it at face value. I fancied myself a thoughtless purveyor of a subtle and perilous poison—that is a line worthy of Ted Wright—and I'm glad you think there should be no antidote for me!"

HEDRICK was overwhelmed with this flow of argument and philosophy. He managed to protest his sincerity.
"You are a wonderful woman," he said, with conviction. "To think that, as I looked at your portrait, I thought you just..."

"Just what?"
"Well, just beautiful!"
"You are atoning very handsomely."
"Has it ever occurred to you what a wonderful age this is?" continued the doctor, enthusiastically, and with more eloquence than originality. "All the fine things of the world are brought together in your home. Books, music, pictures...and the theater just around the corner! Lethbridge isn't a wealthy town, but there isn't a farmer I know who hasn't his player-piano or his phonograph and his books, and the pictures he likes...and who doesn't hurry through his work and get down to the Cross Roads in the evening to see a moving picture!" He paused for breath. "When I think of the way I've shut myself up," he concluded, bitterly, "I know what a fool I've been!"

Sultan's laugh broke in on the doctor's oration. The director had been listening.
"We all feel that way, one time or another, Doctor," he offered, consolingly. "But your argument is admirable. With Caruso in his parlor, Chambers in his library, and Maisie Walkirk at the Cross Roads, what can life offer more? I think I shall use that as a slogan of some sort.
Ted Wright himself couldn't improve it. 
... Just now," he concluded, "I'm going
to bed, and I suggest that you do the
same."

As he left her at the door of her state-
room, Sultan whispered vividly to his
star:
"For the love of heaven, May, keep
your lamps off that doctor, or there'll be
an epidemic of Locketts at Lethbridge!"

GEORGE LOCKETT had not died
in the night. A breathless appre-
hension had seized upon Hedrick, as,
with the actress and her director at his
heels, he pushed into the quiet farm-
house kitchen. The shocking thought
had come to him suddenly, and it was
with intense relief that he noted Anne
busying herself at the stove.
"Arthur!" she whispered, coming for-
ward.

His eyes questioned hers.
"No change," she murmured. "A little
weaker... Dr. Ames is here. He has
another patient. Mother is about pro-
strated."

She smiled wistfully at the actress.
"It is so good of you," she said, "and,
oh, you are so lovely!"

Suddenly she was in the arms of Maisie
Walkirk.

"My dear, my dear!" whispered the film
star. "Everything will be all right. I
am sure it will."

Sultan, grim and dark, dominated the
background with his huge presence. He
contemplated the tableau with stolid symp-
athy. Then his glance fell upon the odd
little man who sat apart, in a corner, a
dejected huddle of head and limbs.
Abruptly, the director seated himself be-
side the tragic figure. After a hopeless
attempt at whispered conversation, he
realized the situation, and pressed the
def.. man's knee.

Hedrick feebly took command.
"Ames should be down in a minute," he said. "Perhaps, though, we had better
go up."

He looked at Maisie Walkirk. After

the first glance of greeting, he had found
himself unable to meet the eyes of Anne.
A sense of guilt sat heavily upon his
heart. He found himself comparing the
women who stood beside him... The
dazzling beauty of Maisie Walkirk
seemed to transfigure the homely room.
Anne...? How he despised himself!
Yet by the side of Maisie Walkirk, her
eclipse was complete.

Followed by Anne and the actress, he
slowly mounted the stairs. The actress's
arm was still about the country girl.
Sultan and the deaf man remained below.

A brisk little man of middle age was
in the boy's bedroom. He stared with
candid disapproval at the group that stole
upon him. His head shook, almost im-
perceptibly, in response to the inquiry in
Hedrick's eyes. His tone, while gruff, was
kindly enough.

"You are in time," he said, significantly.
"If you will take charge, here, Doctor
Hedrick, I'll have another look at Mrs.
Lockett.

MAISIE WALKIRK was looking at
the boy in the bed. Her eyes were
round and wide, and her throat was
working furiously. Hedrick, moving for-
ward to her side, was shocked by the ap-
pearance of his patient. George Lockett
had failed much in the hours since last
the physician had seen him.
The actress moved with difficulty. At
the bedside she turned.
"Does he... has he...?"
"All the time," said Anne Lockett.
Miss Walkirk bent across the bed, and
placed her cool fingers on the boy's fore-
head. Then she sank to her knees, lis-
tening.
"How long?" she whispered.

Misunderstanding her, the doctor
shook his head. The actress lifted a
burning hand in her own. Then the hand
was withdrawn, with feeble violence; the
boy flung back his arm, striking his tem-
ples with his thin fingers.

Anne Lockett clung hard to the doctor,
but Hedrick's eyes were on the face of
the boy. For that moment, at least, he was again the competent professional... cool... waiting...

The actress spoke in a low, clear voice.

"Can you hear me, George? I am Maisie."

With the instinct of his profession, Hedrick suddenly felt that the boy had heard; that while the eyes remained closed, the boy was dreamily considering the words which had drifted to him. The eyelids flickered, as if their weight were too great to lift... or the dream too sweet to banish. The slight frame seemed to tremble; Hedrick could almost hear the heartbeats.

Then, with a terrible effort, George Lockett raised himself several inches from the pillow, and looked with unclouded gaze into the face he had worshiped. A little smile tugged at the corners of his mouth, and lighted candles in the deep caverns of his eyes, immediately dimmed...

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N HOUR LATER Sultan seized the doctor as the latter came downstairs.

"I'm sorry, Hedrick," he said, abruptly, "mighty sorry! Maisie told me."

Hedrick nodded, and waited for what was to follow.

"After all," continued the director, "we can't think of it except as the proverbial happy ending. If he had lived... well, the situation might be a little clearer than before. You know, of course, that the conventional story book ending would have been out of the question!"

He hesitated.

"Even now, our presence is a bit embarrassing. Please don't misunderstand me! We were very glad to come... but there is Miss Walkirk's work, of course..."

Hedrick interrupted with a curt nod.

"I understand," he said. "You're quite right. You will want to catch the next train, I suppose? Miss Walkirk is with Miss Anne and Mrs. Lockett. I'll tell her. And, of course, thank you very much!"

Understanding perfectly that the director's embarrassed speech was chiefly for him—Hedrick—he turned, and began slowly to mount the steps. He felt harassed and beaten, and centuries older in years and experience. Sultan had been right enough about George Lockett; the boy, at least, had died completely happy. He had not considered what might have followed George's recovery; he had not until now considered what would follow George's death. Indeed, as he began to think, he had considered no one but himself for many hours past. His emotions now were inextricably mixed. Without reason, he hated everybody—Anne, Sultan, Maisie Walkirk. Most of all, he hated himself.

Much of this sense of shame, this returning humility, he lost as, pausing near the top of the flight, he glanced through the stair rail into the boy's room. Maisie Walkirk had just placed a flower from her breast on the breast of George Lockett. Now, as she swiftly turned away, Hedrick confronted her at the door.

His heart was pounding.

"Maisie!" he said, and choked.

She nodded to the bed, ignoring his address.

"I have been saying good-bye."

Her level glance shook him. Her face was beauty, frozen.

"Forgive me," he muttered. "I'm sorry... so sorry..."

She shrugged, very slightly. "It was not your fault, Doctor Hedrick. I am sure you did everything you could. But you must now think of this poor girl, and the pathetic old man. And you have another patient now—perhaps several."

"I am thinking of you!" he gasped.

"It has been no trouble," said the actress, sweetly.

She pushed past him into the hall. Despairing, he made his last plea:

"You wouldn't stay... you couldn't...?"

"Stay for the funeral?" she finished, ignoring his meaning. "No, I'm afraid I
"Can you hear me, George? I am Maisie."

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can't. Good-bye, and please believe I am very sorry about what has happened.”

Anne Lockett had come from her room, and further speech was impossible. The country girl was worn and haggard. Suddenly she flung herself into the arms of the actress.

“You beautiful darling!” she sobbed.
“He wanted only you. Oh, you are so lovely!”

Miss Walkirk stroked the hair of the weeping girl.

“Doctor Hedrick did everything that was possible,” she said, soothingly, “and attempted even the impossible. You must be brave now, and some time when you feel better you must thank him.”

Her eyes for a moment were upon those of the doctor; then, with burning face, Hedrick watched the two descend the stairs.

AFTER a time, he went back to the room she had left, and sat down in a chair to think. The shame again was upon him. Furiously he cursed himself for a fool, and, as his anger passed, his vision cleared. Once, almost fearfully, he glanced at the silent figure on the bed. Accustomed as he was to death, he caught his breath, for he knew that he had realized—although in lesser degree—something of the agony that had tortured George Lockett. Were there to be two of them? Now, as one hopeless passion ended, was another to begin? How much more hopeless his own, dimly he was beginning to understand . . .

And yet, suppose—incredible—she yielded. Maisie Walkirk wedded to a country doctor! The star of a hundred triumphs, helpmate to a plodding, inimigious physician! He tried to image her in the home he would be able to give her—in the miniature church on Sunday—at the Cross Roads theater, perhaps, witnessing an earlier success; herself beside him, herself in glamor on the screen? A grim smile sat upon his lips as he saw the picture, the preposterous, incredible mockery of it.

And, admitting the absurd possibility, what would the years do for them? What would a single year do? Six months? Inconceivable! It would be a union of weeks, if not of hours; then an unhappy tangle, and inevitable separation. Facing it coldly, he could not doubt; but still . . .

Then, there was Anne. Shame again scorched him. Suppose again the preposterous miracle: what of Anne, who would still live and, perhaps, still love? Yet, if it were Anne with whom he were to walk the years, would there be no regrets? When would forgetfulness come?

In a curiously detached moment, Hedrick realized with a shock that it was less difficult for him to think of a life with Anne, trying to forget Maisie Walkirk, than a shadowy existence with Maisie Walkirk, trying to forget Anne. There was something at least real about the one; about the other an air of unreality that lent it the blurred outlines of a regretted but irrecoverable dream . . .

Hedrick was approaching sanity; but as he descended the stairs he had not forgotten the dream. Indeed, he did not want to forget it, and for one shocking moment he had been almost afraid that he might.

As he entered the sitting room, Sultan rose to his feet.

“T’m sorry,” the director said, “but our time is short.”

“I can’t ever tell you how grateful I am to you both,” contrived Hedrick, “and, of course, I speak for the family.”

“You’ll look us up whenever you happen along in our neighborhood,” said Sultan, picking up his gloves.

“I’m afraid not,” confessed the doctor. “I’m beginning to think I shan’t even go to the Cross Roads.”

He smiled wistfully as he took the actress’s hand; Sultan’s was on the door knob.

Anne Lockett, still bearing up under great strain, came swiftly forward.

“Oh, we shall both love you always!” she cried.
The door closed. Beyond its barrier, the two remained in the room and heard the roar of the auto that had brought the actress from the station. Someone called good-bye; then silence fell.

Hedrick sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. He was fighting it all over again. But now it seemed less difficult. With the closing of the door, a weight had fallen from him, leaving him torn and aching but free from burden. An unreal chapter was at an end. The girl beside him tried to understand.

"Arthur," she said, "you are tired. You have worked too hard."

Still bearing up, of them all; not yet had she given thought to herself. Did she suspect? No blame; no reproach... her brother dead in the room above...! Shame scoured his soul, and something deeper was burning swiftly upward.

Then he reached out his arms to her.

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Terrible—Simply Terrible

A Drama in a Thousand Parts

By Leslie Van Every

Without assistance or company, eccentric Simeon Spradley made a midnight transfer of a quart of You Know from his cellar to a burying-place in a rear corner of his lot.

But that is not all.

His heirs knew what he possessed in the way of bottled goods; and, though he dearly loved them, Spradley had only a disinterested ear for their direct hints, or innuendos, the taking of which might have resulted in a speedy consumption of his supply of stimulants.

And who is to blame him?

Not being blessed with immortality, Spradley eventually answered in the affirmative the call of his Maker. The houseful of relatives looked with favor upon Spradley and the disposition that his will made of his money and real estate.

But listen:

One paragraph of the will and testament contained the information that a hidden phonograph plate had been recorded the secret of the liquor's concealment and burial place.

Such an energetic crowd of search institutors had never before been seen in that neighborhood. But to go on: to find that which they sought, however, was not so easily done, as fully an hour passed before there appeared on the landing of a stairway, seemingly from nowhere, a tall lean heir, with a flat package in his hand. Just like that.

"Here it is!" he shouted. "Found it in a cubby-hole! Clear the way, and wind up old Uncle Sims' machine! It's only—"

But the dear man got no further; for, in his haste to descend to the floor below, he unintentionally caught one of his feet under a corner of a loosely secured carpet, and pitched forward in an ungraceful fall, smashing the secret into a thousand pieces!

And that is that!
LEAN and bronzed, hovering around thirty-two with deep laughter wrinkles seared in close about his dark blue eyes, Phil McClure was the sort who plays the game with the cards on the table, and he didn't hesitate in this instance.

He faced the man he hated as only a clean man hates a sneak. For a moment he was silent. Then he stuck out his hard hand and gripped the slim fingers of Mack Bramer.

"I owe you my life, Bramer," he said, slowly, as though he were selecting each word.

"We've always hated each other, and you could have let me go. I'll pay you back."

"The first time you call on me I'll square the debt."

Phil stooped over and wrung some water from his dripping trousers legs. Mack Bramer watched his quizzically, but said nothing until the young mill owner stood erect again.

"Allright, McClure, I'll hold you to that, one of these days," he said. There was something sinister in his voice. It brought a sudden red flare to Phil's face, but he turned away toward his cottage and dry clothes.

"No McClure ever broke his word. You can depend on me," he shot back over his shoulder, briefly.

Mack Bramer watched him going down the main street of the little village of Kaniksu.

"Huh! Pretty haughty, aren't you? Think you're a little above the average don't you?"

"But wait. Maybe Mack Bramer 'll take you down a peg, bye-'n'—bye!" he sneered as he turned toward the offices of the Dreary Hope Mining Company, where he was president, general manager, secretary and promoter.

The incident of his having pulled Phil McClure out of the mill pond, a few moments before, had happened at the noon hour and none of the workmen about the plant had seen it. Phil had started a short cut from his office to the main street, over the log boom. A treacherous log had whirled suddenly, causing him to lose his balance, and he had shot down into the water, beneath the flotilla of logs, where he would have perished, had not Mack Bramer, chancing to see the mishap, rushed to the rescue. It had been only a matter of pushing the logs apart and grasping Phil's arms, as he struggled frantically but hopelessly to force an opening from below.

The two men, the owner of the McClure Lumber Company and the head of the Dreary Hope Mining Company, had nothing in common.

McClure and Bramer were, in fact, open enemies, and only recently Phil had accused Bramer of being in Kaniksu for no
"Phil had started a short cut from his office to the main plant, over the log boom. A treacherous log had whirled suddenly ... and he had shot down into the water beneath the flotilla of logs."
good purpose. For long he had suspected that Bramer's real purpose, behind his fly-by-night mining scheme, was to direct labor agitation among the employees in a score of logging camps and mills, scattered through the fringe of the big woods west of the village.

In the slow period of business and labor readjustment, the mills, like all other lines of industry, were finding it necessary to reduce wages, by slow degrees, to meet declines in their commodities. For a time labor, especially in the Kaniksu district, had joined whole heartedly in this program, and had accepted wage cuts without complaint. Then had come a time of dissatisfaction, and open rebellion—and it dated from the advent into their midst of Mack Bramer in the guise of a mining promoter.

Shortly after he had established his headquarters in Kaniksu, the first committee of workmen had appeared before the operators, with demands for a stationary wage. They denied that they were acting under the advice or leadership of any organization or individual. But the wind pointed toward Bramer, who appeared to be a good mixer among the men.

It was after a series of such open clashes had been narrowly averted that the operators had organized a standing committee, with Phil McClure as chairman.

The work of the committee had been without result, and only the week before new trouble had boiled over, with the flat refusal of a committee of workmen to consider a further reduction scheduled to take effect six weeks later. The employers and employees had come to a deadlock the former standing pat on the cut and the latter declaring that if the new schedule were carried out the men would walk out, closing every mill and camp.

As chairman of the employers' committee, Phil McClure had gone straight from this meeting to Mack Bramer and charged him with being the labor agitator behind the dissatisfaction.

"That's for you to prove," Bramer had snarled.

"I'll prove it—and I'll get you," Phil shot back. "I've found out enough to know you are here for no good purpose, and I'm going to run you out of town."

"I'm not saying anything. But—don't go too far!" Bramer warned.

Phil had left him then, checking a stinging retort. The two of them had not again spoken—until Mack Bramer pulled Phil out of the mill pond and saved his life.

HARD AS STEEL from his years in the woods, where he had preferred to go instead of college, Phil was a lover of nature, and therefore a lover of his fellow beings. But he did not love Mack Bramer—and when the cause was just he could fight with the swift, deadly intensity of the tiger. At the same time, even to his enemies he was fair and just.

In dry clothes again, feeling no ill effects from his ducking, he thought over the dilemma into which he had been thrown.

"If he hadn't pulled me out, they'd have been arranging the funeral details by now," he said, half aloud. "Reckon that entitles him to one draw of the cards—come good or bad."

It did—and Mack Bramer wasn't overlooking the fact that it was his draw. But he took his time about it. He was playing one of those games which depends much on the psychological moment.

A MONTH passed before Mack Bramer presented himself in the office of the young lumberman.

"Guess you know why I'm here, McClure," he said, as his eyes darted to the window, to a picture on the wall, to the ceiling.

"To be frank, I can't imagine," Phil answered steadily. The voice of his caller had something more than a sinister twang to it.

"Haven't forgotten the funeral you missed a month back, have you?"
“So that’s it—retribution?”
“Something like that.”
“Something?” Phil questioned.
“Mostly something,” Bramer laughed nervously, as he made another hasty survey of the room.
“You had my promise. Shoot!”
“Can anyone hear?” he asked.
“When I talk to you I’m playing above board.”
Bramer deliberately walked to the door and opened it quickly. The space outside was empty, so he shut the door carefully and turned the latch.
“Don’t think you want anyone to hear what I’ve got to say,” he announced, as he came back to the middle of the room and calmly appropriated a chair. Extracting an expensive special cigarette from a gold embossed silver case, he struck a patent gold mounted torch and blew a cloud of fragrant smoke to the ceiling.
Phil watched him with a slow anger kindling his tanned cheeks.
“Bramer, you have one draw coming. Make it—and get out!”
Phil’s voice was hard, tense.
“I’ve got plenty of time. A McClure never breaks his word—and it’s my call,” the mining man sneered. “I’m only using your very words, if you will recall: ‘A McClure never breaks his word’—and a Bramer never forgets a friend—or enemy. I think you’ll choose to be a friend, hey, McClure?”
“I’m going to give you just five minutes. At the end of that time your chance for retribution will have come and gone.”
“No use us getting hot under the collar, McClure.”
Bramer sat up straight in his chair and threw away his cigarette.

“I hate you like a rattlesnake, and I’d crush your head just as quick, McClure,” he said, a little awkwardly, his eyes held steadily to the points of his highly polished shoes. “You’ve done more to bust up my plans around here than all the others together, and I could kill you for that. But this time you have failed and I’ve got you and all the rest of your gang in the vise. I can squeeze you until the last drop of blood trickles out of you, and then I can sell your pulp.
“That ain’t what I’m hitting at, though. I hate you—but I’d trust you further than any man I ever knew. I’d trust you with my pocketbook and know it was safer than if I had it myself.
“I’m not such an old bird, but in my day I’ve worried the police in half a dozen cities, and I’ve furnished some fine copy for the news hounds. I wasn’t born with the name of Bramer, or a bunch of other names a lot of people know me by. But that isn’t especially a part of this story of whatever you call it—retribution.
“I’ve got a kid sister. Her name is Norene Argall, which is my real name—Argall. She’s just turned twenty and has finished up a swell education at one of those royal joints up along the Hudson, where it costs a thousands bucks to ring the front door-bell. I paid the thousand, and a whole lot of other thousands along with it.
“Now the kid is the real goods. She thinks your Uncle Wearisome here is about the high muck-a-muck, the mogul of all geniuses. She’s got me set up on a pedestal a notch higher than the Rocker-bilts, the Morganfellers and some other poor upstarts like them.
“I got a message from her today. She’s started out here to the wild, wild woolly West, without even consulting me, to spend the summer with me and keep me cheered up while I’m directing the destiny of worlds. Well she’s due to land here next Wednesday morning. That is the first day of the month. That is the day the new reduced wage schedule goes into effect in the mills and camps. That is
the day the lumber industry of this section is going to be paralyzed, hog-tied and dragged out to the wolves. That is the day of all days when I will become king-pin around here. That is the day when I can't have my kid sister stepping in and messing things up for me."

Mack Bramer paused. His fingers had stopped their nervous twitching. His eyes somehow, were not quite so cold and lifeless, as he looked up at Phil McClure.

"Then you are the skunk behind all this discord!" Phil gritted between his clenched teeth, missing the point of all the rest of the recital in this one startling admission.

"I am," Bramer answered, coolly. "But we are talking about this here retribution business. A month ago you would have died like a rat in a rain barrel, if I hadn't pulled you out of the pond. You gave me the word of a McClure then that you would pay back the debt.

"I had you doped out for something with a knife blade to it. I was going to make you sweat blood—and then some. I'm here now for this here retribution. The kid's got to keep on thinking what she's always thought about me—that I'm the real goods.

"I can't take charge of her now. My friends aren't the sort I'd trust her out of my sight with.

"I want you to go to Spokane next Tuesday, meet Norene there that evening, look after her as you would your sister, and fill her full of hop about the good work I'm doing, until I can take charge of her!"

For a long moment Phil McClure stared straight into the eyes of the other, who came slowly to his feet.

"My God!" Phil whispered. "Are you crazy?"

Bramer did not answer, but slowly his flabby muscles drew up tense; his shoulders squared a bit, and he looked Phil straight in the eyes. Phil hesitated, then went on hoarsely.

"Next Wednesday morning I am going to be here to help put you behind the bars, where you belong, and to fight for my property rights!"

"If you go to Spokane not one man will walk out of your mill or camps, McClure," Bramer said, steadily. "Your concern will not lose one hour's time, now or at any time in the future!"

Phil McClure stepped backward; his knotted hand went out behind him gropingly, and found the edge of his desk. He took another step and leaned against it. Not once had his eyes left Bramer's face.

"You mean—that if I leave Kanisku next Wednesday—my company will not be involved—in the trouble," he asked, hesitatingly, scarcely believing what he had heard.

"That's what I said, and I never broke a promise—whatever else there is in my record."

Phil hesitated again.

"Give me a few minutes to get this straight in my head," he said, after a bit. Mack Bramer made no answer, but lighted another cigarette and leaned forward in his chair with his chin on his cupped hands.

Phil walked to the window which looked out across the yards to the main street of the village. The struggle he had been anticipating, the great battle he had been preparing for, cleared away, with a complete victory for himself. His two hundred employees contented in their work; their families would thank him for keeping them out of the turmoil. The logs would continue to roll into his mill pond; the wheels of his mill would continue their merry song. Prosperity would smile on him.

And then—then there was Norene. Norene Argall. A beautiful name. Just turned twenty; just out of her fashionable school. Look after and care for her!

Would he? Say, here he was, nearly thirty-two, with never a romance to his credit. He thought he wanted none such in his life. He had prepared himself as quickly as possible to assume charge of his father's great interests. Now he knew he had missed something.
Slowly the cycle of his mind turned, sending the prickly chills to his spine; the hot blood to his heart. But his mind did not keep on the same track.

He remembered the men he had worked with, in combating the evil influence among them—the other operators. They were the men who had trusted him. They were the men who were going to suffer next Wednesday, and the days and the weeks, and maybe the months that followed next Wednesday. If Mack Bramer successfully consummated his program, the mills and camps of those others, his friends and fellow workers, the ones who put their faith in him, would stand idle, while workmen fought a weary battle of resistance, while their families suffered, were in actual want. He would desert them, accept the good fortune which had been thrown at his head, and let them fight their own fight.

Standing there with the musical whine of the bandsaws in his ears, with the rumble of logging trains passing through the yard on their way to and from the woods, with the hum of well oiled machinery all about him, with the smell of the sweet, green pine and fir in his nostrils, Phil McClure, hard fisted fighter, fought the hardest battle of his young life.

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VER and over he fought the battle, contesting each point bitterly. With his fists clenched at his sides, with his jaws set and his eyes half closed, he struggled.

"Contentment and prosperity for my own men and myself; romance—a beautiful girl; keep my word to the man who saved my life," the one inner part of him whispered joyously.

"Traitor! Break faith with those who have put their trust in you; desert them at the crucial moment; let them fight the battle that is your battle, too. Traitor to the cause!" the other side of him snarled back.

"Traitor!" It bit deep into his flesh. It left a nasty pain, like an ugly claw had dragged itself across him.

"Look here, Bramer!"

Phil McClure turned suddenly. He had made up his mind. He knew exactly what he was going to do.

"I'll not do it. I'm no traitor. I'll have nothing to do with your schemes," he snapped.

Mack Bramer looked steadily back at him. His colorless eyes seemed suddenly green. His face went a bit whiter, then his eyes dropped, shifted to the window, to the ceiling.

"To hell with you! I might have known what your color was—you and all the rest like you. I kidded myself your word was good," he said. His tone was bitter. He turned toward the door. With his hand on the catch he paused.

"I said to hell with you and all your kind, McClure," he snarled. "I've piked along by myself most of my life, and I can keep on going the same way. For every mill I close down I get ten thousand dollars. Your plant will give me that much more—and I need the coin, you can bet. Putting the kid through a swell education joint like that takes the luce, and she's never been without it."

Phil had turned again to the window as Bramer talked. He heard the door open and close, heard the footsteps of the labor agitator in the office outside, knew that he was gone. Still he continued to stare out of the window, seeing nothing.

Out of the chaos of his brain, there came a picture, a sensation standing out vivid. He was in the water, an impenetrable wall of logs above his head, his lungs aching with the breath he could no longer hold. With the very blood vessels of his head bursting, he was pawing helplessly at those logs; then a flood of sunlight in the water, a hand reached down to him, the blessed relief of air rushing into his tortured lungs.

Mack Bramer, the scum of the world, labor agitator, leech, crook, had reached that hand down to him—and given him life again.

"The first time you call on me I'll square the debt!"
That was what he had told the man who saved his life. He had shaken that man’s hand. Bramer had sneered. “No McClure ever broke his word,” Phil had insisted hotly. But a McClure had broken his word.

“No, by God!”
He brought his right fist into the palm of his left hand with a bang.
“No, by God!” he said again. The next moment he had pulled his hat onto his head and dashed into the open.

Mack Bramer was nowhere to be seen.
Phil turned toward the main street and headed directly for the office of the Dreary Hope Mining Company. He spoke to several acquaintances grouped in front of the drug store, over which were located Bramer’s quarters.

“Did Mack Bramer come this way just now?” he asked.

“Just went into his office Phil,” one of the men answered. “Looked like he was ready to stab someone. Been stepping on his toes again?”

“No,” Phil answered, as he began mounting the rickety stairs to the troublemaker’s lair.

The following Wednesday morning, the first day of the month, nearly two thousand woodsmen and mill workers crowded into Kaniksu. They were in an ugly, surly mood. They were packed and jammed in the street, centering their attention on the offices of the bank, which were being used by the committee of mill owners. They had given their ultimatum, and now they were there to see that it was met, or to cause damage. They included at least ninety percent of the workers in the score of sawmills and logging camps in the Kaniksu district, where that day, with one exception not a log was rolling or a wheel turning.

The exception was in the very center of the turmoil, the great plant of the McClure Lumber company. From the sheds of that concern came the steady screeching whine of the band saws; came the exhaust of steam, the drone of planers, the rumble of logs shooting into the millpond. Not a man on Phil McClure’s payroll had walked out.

In the bank offices the committee of operators sat waiting for the chairman. The members of the committee were a grim, hard group of men, woodsmen all, and as they waited a slow white anger was growing within them. They heard the drone of contented industry about the McClure mill down the street; they heard the low rumble of defiance from their own men outside. And Phil McClure did not appear.

Presently Old Angus MacDonald grizzled veteran of the Northwest woods rose to his feet. He was visibly moved, and his voice shook as he expressed that which had become a fixed certainty in the minds of all.

“I’ve knowed Phil McClure’s father these forty years, I’d not have believed a McClure could turn yellow,” he said slowly.

“A week ago, Bramer, Mack Bramer was in Phil McClure’s office in a long conference. That same day Phil went to Bramer’s office. The day before yesterday Phil bought a ticket for Spokane. Today when of all days he should be here, he is gone. We have learned that Mack Bramer is the guiding hand behind all this trouble. We hear the drone of turning wheels in McClure’s mill.”

The old man paused for a moment, looking from one to the other. Their faces were only grim and set.

“It’s a hard thing to say to you men who knew Phil McClure’s father, and have worked with the lad,” he went on.

“He’s a traitor!” someone growled.

“It’s a hard thing to say of any lad,” Angus McDonald said. “But it is best said now and have it over with. Phil McClure has sold himself.”

In the pause which followed, there came a shrill rap at the committee-room door. Immediately it was pushed open and a young man, Bert Wallace by name, a clerk in the office of Angus McDonald,
came in. He hesitated, looking at his employer.

“What is it, Bert?” McDonald demanded.

“Pardon me for coming in like this, Mr. McDonald,” he said. “I thought I ought to come, though. I heard that Mr. McClure had left and that none of you know where he is.”

“Well, what about it,”

“As you know, sir, I was in Spokane yesterday on that Blackwell business.”

“Yes, yes! Go on. What has that to do with McClure?”

“I met him on the street, sir. Mr. McClure stopped me. He was with a young woman, sir. He introduced her as the sister of Mack Bramer, whom I have just learned is the leader of the trouble here in the mills. I just got in on the morning train, sir, and hearing what the situation is here with regard to Mr. McClure, I thought you should know at once.”

“You’re right, Bert. You showed some good sense,” McDonald snapped. “With the sister of Mack Bramer, eh?”

“Yes, sir. An extraordinarily beautiful young woman. And he gave me this message to deliver to you: ‘Tell Mr. McDonald and the others to sit tight and do nothing.’ What he meant by that I don’t know, sir.”

“Sit tight, eh? Well, I know,” McDonald sneered. “Much obliged, Bert. That’ll be all we need now.”

Bert Wallace left the room and the lumber operators faced each other again.

“Sit tight!” Angus McDonald repeated the words. “We’re licked right now, before we start. What do you men make of it?”

“I think Phil McClure has been sold to or by Mack Bramer,” Hugo Edwards, a logging contractor, spoke up. “Mack Bramer is a clever one. He’s about the cleverest I ever ran up against—and the most dangerous. He’s studied Phil for a weak spot and found it. He’s sicked this girl, who may or may not be his sister, up against him. Phil is young yet. He’s probably got a bunch of fool romance into his head about saving the girl from some terrible calamity. He’s lost his reason over a girl that’s as clever as her partner, Bramer. She and Mack Bramer have framed McClure. If he’ll go off with the girl, at this critical time, they’ll leave his plant alone. With his outfit operating, that means the backbone of our resistance is broken. With the biggest concern here going over to the enemy, we got a fat chance of standing pat and breaking this strike.”

“That’s exactly what I think,” Angus McDonald answered. “That means of course, that the name of Phil McClure is scratched from our membership, that he is no longer associated with us, that his name is blacklisted in the trade!”

“You are just a little hasty, gentlemen!”

THE WORDS rang out in the little room. They startled the committee-men seated there, who had been so engrossed in the subject before them, that they had failed to hear the opening of the door.

They turned now with sharp exclamations checked on their tongues. Phil McClure stood there before them, a grin lurking in the crinkles about his dark blue eyes and his wide mouth. They looked at Phil, then stared at the person beside him.

Standing close to him, as though for protection, her dark brown eyes soft and friendly, was a girl, who came no higher than his arm-pits. She was boyishly slim, with a round little face that was aglow with happiness and companionship, this sprite of a miss who smiled at the grizzled, grim woodsmen. From beneath the chic auto hat which she wore, peeped rebellious strands of the silkiest and softest amber brown hair, and from beneath the long lashes twinkled mischief, which seemed to say to each of them that they were nice old bears, and that she could love them!

“I heard the last of what Hugo Edwards said.”

Phil came forward easily, holding the
"'Men!' he repeated. . . . 'You all know Mack Bramer. His sister has come here to be with him, to help him.'"
girl's arm protectingly. "I think I understand exactly what you were saying and thinking. I am here now, though, and I ask one thing. Let me talk for one moment, please, without interruption.

"I want each of you men to know Miss Norene Argall. Miss Argall is the sister of Mack Bramer, who, as you know, uses that name solely to protect his interests when he may take up his good work in another locality.

"Miss Argall has not seen her brother in years, but having finished school, she is out here to be with him and aid him in his splendid work. Though he was too modest to tell her herself, I have told her of the great struggle he has made to save our industry from the disloyal, corrupt agitators who are menacing our existence at this time.

"Fired with the fine record of her brother, Miss Argall contented to hurry here with me, and lend her aid to him and the rest of us in the struggle. At the request of her brother, who is, of course, deeply immersed in his work at this time, I have taken Miss Argall under care and have assured her that she can be of very material assistance to us."

The girl Norene was looking up into Phil McClure's bronzed face. And as Phil looked deep into her eyes he began to flounder.

"I—I—" He lost the thread of his thought, and paused.

"I have heard such wonderful stories of the great forests of the West," she said. Her voice was soft, but it was a thrill, too. While she spoke to all of them her words seemed only for Phil.

"My brother would never tell me exactly what he was doing," she went on. "I have always worshiped him, since he has cared for me from the time I was a very little girl. Because of the hazardousness of his work I can now understand why he should not want to cause me worry.

"I want to do what I can to repay him. I thought that perhaps if I, a girl, went out and talked to these men about their homes and their children, and their loyalty to you, they might listen. I wanted to do it without my brother knowing it, to surprise him, though that really is Mr. McClure's thoughtful suggestion."

She was very girlish and very appealing as she pleaded, and slowly the dark scowl faded from the face of Angus McDonald. The others, too, listened and understood.

When McDonald came to his feet Phil was watching him, his face tense, but at the old lumberman's first words he relaxed.

"The outlook's been a lot different if your brother hadn't come, Miss Argall," he said. There was a crack in his voice that he didn't mean to be there, and he glared at Phil.

"All of us reckon it'd be the finest thing in the world if you'd help us, and we guess that your brother 'ud be mighty proud of you, too," he finished.

"You bet!" Hugo Edwards bawled, and the others joined the chorus.

"There, I told you!" Phil laughed at the girl.

"I was really terribly frightened when Mr. McClure wanted me to come right in here with him," Norene Argall confessed. "I'm—I'm not a bit frightened any more, though!"

"We'll arrange for the meeting, then," Phil said, softly. "In a way, it will be retribution for some of the things your brother has done."

The arrangements were easy, for no preliminary announcements were necessary.

The men had named the hour of twelve for an answer to the ultimatum on their wage proposal. They were packed, jammed about the bank building already, a surly mob, incited to blood, and ready to start something.

At twelve the members of the employers' committee appeared in the door of the bank. They arranged a rostrum of high boxes. To this crude platform which overlooked the surging mass of workmen,
Phil McClure helped Norene Argall, then sprang lightly to her side.

The strikers believed instantly that their demands were to be met, and a wild cheer went up. Then Phil held up his hand, and a silence fell over the mob. Norene Argall was trembling, but she stood her ground bravely, raising her eyes to Phil.

"Afraid?" he whispered to her.

"No! Not—not with you here," she answered him.

Before the open gaze of the multitude, Phil McClure laid his hand on her arm and squeezed it reassuringly. Then he turned to the waiting men.

From somewhere far back in the crowd there was a sudden disturbance, as a man began pushing his way forward. Phil had a fleeting glimpse of Mack Bramer's white face.

"Men!" Phil shouted. His voice was clear, distinct. It carried to the outer fringe of the silent crowd.

"Men!" he repeated. "What I have to say will not be much. You all know Mack Bramer. His sister has come here to be with him, to help him and the operators and employees in the adjustment of their differences. She wants to talk to you men.

"And when she has finished she wants her brother to come here to the platform beside her, and talk to you. She is proud of her brother. She has been told of the wonderful things he has done in helping solve the problems of readjustment, in which we all must cooperate in harmony, even though it may seem hard, at times, for all of us. She wants you men to do your part in bearing the burden now even as you did through the war."

He paused. Mack Bramer was shoving himself forward. Phil watched him, but he listened to Norene Argall.

"Honestly, Phil, I'm—I'm scared to death," she whispered. The name slipped through her lips as though she had spoken it all her life, but to Phil it seemed as though the floodgates of his heart had been opened.

"I think I'll call—your brother here, now," he answered.

But there was no need for him to call. Mack Bramer had reached the rostrum. The next moment he was beside his sister, and he had his arms about her.

"Norene!" he said, savagely. "What does this mean? What are you doing here? He promised to look after you."

"He told me of the wonderful work you are doing to help him and the other operators. It seemed so grand and noble, and I wanted to help you. We thought it would be so fine to surprise you. Have—have I done wrong?" she appealed to him.

"You've helped McClure—and the others—a lot," Mack Bramer answered her, turning to Phil to demand:

"Is that what you call retribution?"

Phil did not need to answer, though. Some one in the crowd raised a voice.

"Hey, what about it, Mack?" he shouted. "Are you coming through? Give the lady a chance to tell us about it!"

"What does he mean by that?" Norene asked.

"They look to your brother for our answer to their ultimatum," Phil put in hastily. "Bramer, what are you going to tell them?"

"Come on, Mack! Where do we get off?" another shout went up.

Phil McClure moved over close to Norene.

"I was just telling Mack the other day," he said, softly, as he looked at the girl, but spoke to Bramer, "that I hope, when this business is closed satisfactorily, that I can induce him to accept the superintendency of one of my logging camps. He is a genius at handling men, and he is getting along to where he should settle down and offer you some sort of a permanent home."

"Tell them they must go back to work," Norene begged of her brother. Wouldn't it be splendid to work for Mr. McClure?"

Mack Bramer squared his shoulders.
suddenly, as he faced those he had incited

to rebellion.

"There’s nothing doing, men," he said.
"You’d better get back on the job while
the getting’s good. We all got to do our
share these days!"

And the miracle of it is, that the mob,
which had been ready to tear asunder, a
few moments before, laughed. A deep,
rumbling roar of laughter went up. It
may be that the men saw and understood
the predicament into which their fearless
leader had been ensnared. It is more
likely, though, that they saw something
else which softened their hearts, for all
their eyes were on Norene Argall, stand-
ing there slim and straight, looking at her
brother in the full pride of sisterly love.
But whichever it was, they did not long
hesitate. In groups and pairs and singly
they began to rove out into the highways
that lead back into the woods.

Mack Bramer turned then to Phil Mc-
Clure.

The two men looked each other square-
ly in the eyes, then their hands went out
and met in a man to man grip.

"I’d like to take that job, Phil," the
ex-agitator said. "It isn’t the sort of
retribution I had figured out, but you’re
right. I’d better be planning on some
sort of a home for Norene."

He stopped then. Phil McClure had
forgotten the existence of his recent
enemy.

He was assisting Norene Argall to the
floor.

And he was taking an unnecessarily
long time to do it.

"Great little chance I’ve got of having
Norene around to care for me in my old
age!" grumbled the man who had de-
manded retribution, and had got it—or
something.

THE SNAP OF THE WHIP

By Harry Irving Shumway

She wrote me this, among other en-
couraging things:

"When I am with you I am not sure
—not that you bore me, but you inspire
no passionate longing in me. Your pres-
ence is comforting, soothing, but I am
not carried away—I am not taken out
of myself.

"When you are away, ah then I sense
an indefinite longing—little tricks of your
voice—manners occur to me and I
find myself half wishing you to come to
me—I feel that to be in your arms again
would not be unwelcome. Rather nega-
tive, I fear.

"Why am I like this?"

Not very flattering to me, what? Still
I felt that—hidden fires could be awak-
ened.

So I scribbled a short note in answer
to this letter and sent it to her by a mes-
enger.

I wrote:

"I feel the same about you, Clara."

It worked, too. She came to her
sense right away. I can be clever when
I wish to.

What, you don’t think I showed any
cleverness in writing a silly little sen-
tence like that? But, my dears, her name
is not Clara and that was the clever part
of it!
"He tumbled along the ground like an acrobat at a circus."

THE WHITE GOLD GUSHER

By James W. Earp

A fast freight whirled through Heldtown and a young man alighted. The handy foot of a hostile brakeman, not the helping hand of an obsequious porter, aided him. He tumbled along the ground like an acrobat at a circus. An old and dilapidated suitcase followed him with doglike affection, now under him, now over him, now embracing him. He then raised himself to shake a grimy fist at the vanishing cars. This done, he examined himself for possible injuries. A jagged hole in his trousers seemed to be the total damage done. He grinned a trifle ruefully.

He turned to survey the town about him. The sight of the narrow, dust-laden streets brought a gleam of interest to his eyes. On Heldtown's lone business street the crowds surging to and fro caused him to nod his head in approval. But it was the oil derricks in the distance that made him decide on his course.
Their skeleton frames seemed to nod a friendly welcome and bid him stay. Impulsively he held out both hands towards them.

"You old picture of hard luck," he said with a forced grin. "You look even more forlorn than I do. Shake, pal. Glad to meet you."

The agent of the V. V. & W. Railway had been an interested observer of the acrobatics. Now he hurried forward to do his duty, which was to keep trespassers off the company’s premises. He took one look at the young man and stopped still, mouth open, nose twitching.

"Bobby Burnett!" he finally managed to blurt out. "Why—"

"Sad Face Murray!" the other almost yelled as he scrambled to his feet and folded the agent to him in a bearlike hug.

"Am I dreaming, or is it really you?"

Without waiting for an answer he held him off and eyed him affectionately. Then he gave him a shake.

"You old disciple of gloom," he chortled, "I left you in Galveston. Now I find you here. How come, old sadness?"

"Got fired, of course."

Murray made a wry face.

"This was the only job I could find, so I took it. I’m the unluckiest—"

"Change the record," Bobby ordered.

"Here I am, broke, hungry, and with my only pair of trousers ruined, yet you don’t hear me complaining. Why? Because I know my old friend, Murray, is going to take me and buy me the swellest feed in town. No man is unlucky who has a friend.

"That’s me. Let’s go eat."

"I ain’t got nothing left but some pancake flour, Bobby."

Murray lifted hopeful eyes...

"If you like pancakes—"

"Adore them!" exclaimed Bobby.

"Lead on to the pancakes." Picking up his suitcase he prepared to follow.

"You see, Bobby," Murray explained on their way to the station, "I cook in the freight room. I’ve been broke for two days, and I’m on my last package of pancake flour. If the pay car doesn’t show up tomorrow I’m ruined."

Bobby laughed. Time enough to worry when tomorrow came.

Murray pushed open the office door and entered. Then, to Bobby’s surprise, he gave a cry of despair and sank down on a drygoods box that did service as a table. He pointed with an index finger at the package of pancake flour which lay half buried in a basin of soapy dishwater.

"My last package, too," whimpered Murray.

"Doggone them rats!"

Bobby howled. Murray gave him a reproachful look.

"I don’t see nothing to laugh at," he said, in fretful tones. "It ain’t funny to me. That’s all my grub right there."

"Well, we’ll get more," decided Bobby suddenly. "Get me a pair of trousers and I’ll go up town and see if I can’t letter a few windows for the Heldtown merchants. We need money, and that’s the only way I know of getting it."

While Murray was rummaging through the trunk for trousers, Bobby divested himself of the torn pair. On the shelf he found a whisk broom and removed the worst of the dust from his coat and hat. He donned the gray pair of trousers that Murray handed him and surveyed himself in the cracked mirror with a satisfied expression on his face.

OUTSIDE, Bobby looked up the one business street as if deciding on his course. As he looked, a thoughtful expression came into his eyes and he whistled.

"Is it possible?" he muttered wonderingly. "After looking all over the country for the place and then be kicked off into it."

He slapped his thigh in glee.

"System," he addressed the distant derricks solemnly, "you’ve struck virgin soil, or my name isn’t Bobby Burnett.

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
Jazz Band, strike up. The Jazz Artist has come to town!"

Halfway up the second block he found the place to commence operations. A board, supported by two upright posts, projected out over the sidewalk and bore the crudely printed sign:

GOLDEN CALF CAFE

Bobby surveyed the sign and chuckled. Four different tints graced the wording of it. Evidently the sign painter had run short of colors while painting, and had finished out with odds and ends.

"Whew!" whistled Bobby. "The artist must have been nervous, temperamental or intoxicated. Now, I know this place is what I've been looking for. Prices go up in the balloon with the rest. You're due for a touch of high life. Jazz Artists come high!"

He entered the café. A tall, powerfully built man with broad shoulders, twinkling blue eyes, ruddy complexion and two ham-like fists came forward. Bobby asked for the proprietor.

"I'm him," twinkled the one questioned. "Mr. Amos Peters. That's me all over. What'll you have, son?"

"Five minutes of your time to show you some of my samples. I have something every live business man needs. Permit me."

From his opened suitcase Bobby selected a huge bronze letter "G" and laid it before Peters. The caféman shrugged his shoulders dubiously. Bobby followed with other letters, until arranged on the show case in neat order were the words:

GOLDEN CALF CAFE.

"Say!" exclaimed Peters in spite of himself. "That's nifty!"

Bobby smiled and added more letters. Then he drew back and surveyed the result:

AMOS PETERS, PROP.

Peters looked at Bobby, as if for an explanation.

"Your sign," nodded Bobby with his most engaging smile. "Every real, live business man wants one. It will cost you one dollar a letter and I'll put them anywhere you say, preferably on a window. Now—which window shall I attach them to?"

Peters mopped his brow in perplexity mixed with admiration. This sort of salesmanship was new to him. It savored of sand-bagging a man. But his eyes twinkled as he said:

"What kind of a salesman are you, kid?"

"No salesman," objected Bobby. "I'm a Jazz Artist with a system. Now—which window did you say—"

"I didn't say," chuckled Peters. "But I'll tell you what I'll do, kid. If you tell me what a Jazz Artist is I'll let you fix both windows."

"Done, Mr. Peters. Jazz means simply speed. I speed up business that is jaded."

"Oh," said Peters thoughtfully and scratched an ear.

Bobby sorted out his letters and mixed the cement in water. In a short time he was pasting the letters on the window in perfect alignment.

"You're an artist all right," admitted Peters as he watched. "If you're as lucky everywhere you ought to coin money."

"I will, Mr. Peters."

Bobby started in on the second window.

"You just watch me."

When Bobby had finished Peters hauled a roll of bills from his pocket and peeled off fifty-six dollars. As Bobby pocketed the money he caught the delicious aroma of coffee coming from within. In an instant he was aware of his hunger again. He entered the place and slid on top of a stool. He grinned at the menu, printed in chalk on a blackboard behind the counter. Then he got a shock. Instead of the portly Peters a girl came forward to wait on him. He caught his breath in dazed wonder. This dainty maid had no business in such sor-
"'Whew!' whistled Bobby. 'The artist must have been nervous, temperamental or intoxicated.'"
did surroundings. He made quick note of the heavy braids of brown hair wrapped tightly about her well shaped head and her deep brown eyes. Then he heard her voice, the last thing necessary to tie Bobby to a captivity wholly desirable.

"What will you have, sir?" she asked, in a voice so soft and low and musical that it reminded Bobby of an instrument handled by a musician who knew how to bring out the full beauty of each little note.

"What have you?" he countered, anxious to hear her voice again. Of course, he could have read the chalk printed menu, but the chalk printed menu didn't make musical sounds.

"Roast beef, roast pork, baked heart and dressing."

She smiled indulgently at him.

"Which shall it be?"

"Beef and coffee"—dazedly from Bobby. He eyed his soiled hands and wished he could wash them. The girl seemed to read his thoughts.

"Washroom behind the curtain, sir."

T

HAT was all. The girl called his order back to the cook in the kitchen in the same carefully modulated tone. Before Bobby had finished with his washing, his meal was ready.

"Are you an oil man, too?" she asked, as Bobby tackled his food.

Evidently, she had not seen him at work on the windows and he wondered.

"Hardly," he replied. "I'm a Jazz Artist."

A puzzled look swept the girl's face, to be succeeded by a look of pity.

"I'm afraid you picked a poor town, sir. These natives wouldn't recognize jazz if they met it face to face in the street."

"You have me wrong," said Bobby, swallowing hastily. "I'm a business getter, an efficiency expert. For instance," he indicated the meat on his platter and grinned, "this place needs a man like me to pick its meat. On the level, miss, this is the toughest meat I ever tackled. The chef should be fired."

"I'm sorry sir, about the grub. But I only work here, and I'm leaving next week."

"Leaving?"

Bobby glanced up in dismay. To lose this queen so soon after meeting her? He leaned forward.

"Why, may I ask?"

"Because I don't like the town—that's why."

The girl gave her brown head a toss. "I'm going back to Chicago, where there are movie shows—"

"Just a moment," he begged, jerking out a notebook and pencil. "What else are you going back to?"

"Oh, everything!"—vehemently. "Ice cream, candies, street cars, bath tubs and—well, everything like that worth while."

"You're a regular mine of information," he told her gleefully. "Would you stay here, if I got busy and furnished those little things?"

A little pucker formed between her eyes and she stiffened slightly.

Her voice became one of cold formality. "Granted," from Bobby. "I'll get busy and supply those things. I've been too long finding you to lose you so soon. Why, girlie, I've been looking all my—all my—"

"And you can keep on looking!" She was getting stiffer and stiffer.

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "But anyone can see you don't belong in this wild town. I can't understand why you are here."

"For the same reason you are, perhaps," she retorted. "I might ask you why you are here?"

"I had no choice," he grinned. "I was kicked off a passing freight by a rough-neck brakeman, who refused to carry any free passengers, God bless him!"

His grin was infectious and he dimpled. He went on.

"Why did you come here?"

She studied him for a moment as if un-
able to decide about making a confidant of him.

She decided in his favor.

"Because my ticket wouldn't carry me any farther. You see, I'm a stenographer by trade, but in my spare time I tried to paint pictures to sell. Not having any luck and being tired of the coldness of the city and its lonesomeness, I quit my job, bought a ticket West, and—and here I am."

Bobby in his mind's eye saw the crude sign of the café outside. He sipped his coffee slowly and eyed her thoughtfully.

"Do you know," he said at last, "I believe we can be of mutual help to each other. You say you can paint pictures?"

"After a fashion."

"Are you good at making letters?"

"The best thing I do."

"Good. I'll drop around after supper and see you. What time do you quit?"

She gathered up the dishes he had pushed away and said coldly:

"Hadn't you better wait for an invitation, sir? Aren't you in something of a rush for a stranger?"

He waved a languid arm as if to disclaim any such desires.

"I'm in earnest," he said. "I've an idea whereby we both can make money. As for rushing people—well, that's one of the rules of my system. That's the way I expect to make my money."

"Your work is cut out for you here," she dimpled. "These folks have collected all the available hookworms for their own personal use. The word RUSH was ruled out of their lexicon when they were born."

"My jazz powder will end that," he told her, getting to his feet. "Where are the toothpicks?" He tossed a bill on the counter.

"On the counter."

She indicated a glass close by.

"Do you know,"—a pause while he carefully selected a toothpick—"if we had a modern hotel here we could make a fortune?"

"No doubt," she smiled. "A water wagon in the Sahara Desert would do the same thing."

She gave him a silver dollar in exchange.

Bobby picked up his battered suitcase to depart.

At the door he turned back.

"What time did you say you quit work?"

"I didn't say."

"Thanks," shortly. "I'll see you later."

He tipped his hat as he went through the door, and the girl stood looking after him with a puzzled expression on her pretty face.

CHAPTER II

But on the street Bobby bumped into Mr. Peters, who was returning from a hurried errand. Bobby collared him immediately and pointed to the intoxicated sign on the board above his head.

"Mr. Peters, how would you like to have a nice, nifty sign put up in place of that monstrosity there? Something in tasty blue letters edged with gold. I'll guarantee to put up a sign they can see from the depot."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea at that, would it?" Peters scratched his ear and pondered the proposition. "How much, kid?"

"Fifteen dollars for a sign six feet long and one foot high."

It took Peters but a second to make up his mind.

"All right, kid. Put her up. Now go on before I give you my café."

Bobby patted his roll and felt the silver dollar. A sudden idea struck him. He tossed the dollar in the air and caught it.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said, turning to Peters. "I'll flip this dollar to see whether you pay me thirty dollars for the sign or whether I make it for nothing."

This was a proposition after the café owner's heart.
"Flip," he said. "I'll call.
The dollar hurtled in the air. Peters called "heads."
"Huh!" wheezed Peters suspiciously. 
"I generally do. Has that dollar of yours got a head on it?"
Bobby laughed and held the dollar out 
for inspection. Peters satisfied himself and turned to enter the café.
"One moment, Mr. Peters," said Bobby, 
clutching at the coat-tails of the restaurant man. "What time does your waitress quit for the day?"
"Seven bells," replied the surprised Peters.
"What the—"

BUT Bobby was already across the 
street interviewing Mr. Brinkley Jones, who owned the pool hall. Mr. Jones was an easy victim. Ace Miller at the gambling hall was next. Miller guessed it was a piece of foolishness, but being a foolish man, etc.—

Five o'clock came and his letters were almost exhausted. Snicker's Grocery Store finished them for him. Snicker also contracted for a board sign to go up on the outside of the store. Bobby collected his fee, gathered up his tools and hastened down to the depot. Sad Face looked up at his entrance and essayed a 

smile.

"Here, Sad," said Bobby, tossing a ten dollar bill on the counter, "get some groceries for supper. Get plenty. Spend it all if you have to. I'm going down to the lumber yard on business."

And he was gone again. Sad eyed the ten dollar note, as if fearing a joke. Closer examination showed the note to be perfectly good. He slid from his stool and, locking the office door, hurried down to Snicker's Grocery.

Supper was ready when Bobby returned, bringing with him a can of white paint and two boards. Sad Face turned from his oil stove long enough to lift inquiring eyebrows, thought better of it and resumed his cooking operations.

SUPPER over, Sad Face, a cigar in his mouth and with a full stomach, broached the question nearest his heart.
"Bobby," he began lamely, "where did you get all that money?" He looked about him fearfully. "You didn't steal it, I hope."
"Of course not!"

Bobby gave a whoop and hit Sad a resounding thump between the shoulders.
"You old funeral face, I made it with my system. And I'm going to make more, Sad. In a year we'll have to have a staff to check up our income tax. It's a winner. Gaze on me, you chief of the mourners' bench, and see the one, only and original Jazz Artist in existence."
"We?" muttered Murray. "Not me. I never did have nothing. I never had no luck like that."

"Luck!" scoffed Bobby. "All piffle, Sad. It's system that wins. And you're going to help me play the system to a finish. Your luck, as you call it, is hard because you don't use your eyes, ears, and brains. Like millions of others, you are mentally blind. I was, too, until after the Potoka episode."

"All right, I'm blind. Sad Face got to his feet in a hurry. "But not too blind to see these dishes have to be cleaned. I'll wash them and you can wipe them. Then tell me about Potoka."

Bobby laughed. As he dried the dishes he talked.

"After I left you and Galveston, I met the agent of the Mammoth Letter Company. He sold me an outfit for lettering windows, with complete instructions, for ten dollars. It looked like easy graft, and it was. The letters cost you five cents, you put them on the windows and got twenty-five. The letters were made of plaster of Paris and were coated with bronze.

"I stopped over at Potoka, an oil town in Texas born over night on the heels of an oil gusher. It had four stores when I landed there. In six months it had one hundred and forty, and its population had increased sixteen thousand.
Some people made fortunes. I didn’t. All I had to show when the boom flivvered was a bare living.”

Bobby gave a snort of disgust. Then irrelevantly:

“Sad, suppose you were dumped down on an island where the people had wealth galore, yet had no clothes, no shoes, no automobiles or anything like that. And again, suppose you could supply these things. Don’t you suppose you would supply these folks and make yourself a fortune?”

Sad Face scratched an itching nose with a soapy finger.

“Of course,” he answered. “But there ain’t no such place.”

“But there was,” insisted Bobby. “Potoka was just such a town. A young fellow came in with a furniture store and made a fortune. Some brought autos, some poodle dogs, and so on down the line. But they all cleaned up. Why? Because they were Jazz Artists playing the oldest game in the world: ‘Find out what the people need, or think they need, and furnish that need.’

“Sad, I’m going to do more than that. I’m going to also find out the things they really do need and don’t know it and supply them. I’m going to give them luxuries, comforts and a broader outlook on life. I’m going to charge high for my treatments, but it will be worth it. I’m going to make friends while I make a fortune, then I’m going to get married. I’m going to do all this in Heldtown, too, old sport.”

“Some job!” said Sad Face. “Some job!”

It was five minutes of seven when Bobby entered the almost deserted café and set boards and paint by the door. The girl smiled as he climbed onto a stool.

“What are you going to do with the boards?” she asked.

“Nothing,” he grinned. “It is you who are going to do.”

From his pocket he brought pencil and paper. Rapidly he sketched a rough draft of the proposed sign. This he showed to her.

“It will have to be in blue letters, edged with gold, on a white background. Letters to be eight inches high and run over five feet of space. Can you do it like that?”

“I can, but I don’t think I will,” she said.

“Please! You get thirty dollars out of it,” he reminded her.

“And what do you get out of it, sir?”

“Your friendship, I hope.”

He looked up with a winning twinkle in his eyes.

“Won’t you do this?”

She smiled back at his grin.

“I will. I’ll begin tonight.”

Then he told her of the other order and its requirements. She laughed softly when he told her about the flipping of the coin. At a few minutes past seven she announced that she was ready. He walked outside, picked up his boards and paint and waited. She laughed and pointed to a flight of stairs leading up from the street at the side of the café.

“Oh,” said Bobby. “And I thought I was going to have a nice little walk with you! Oh, well!” in a tone of resignation. “I may carry it upstairs for you, may I not?”

“If you wish.”

At the door of her room she paused and held out her hand.

“You are very considerate, Mr—”

“Burnett.”

He supplied the name quickly.

“Bobby to my friends,” he added hastily, standing the boards against the door sill.

“Mine, Mr. Burnett, is Alice Tinsley.”

He caught the “Mr.” and stood silent. Their hands touched for a moment. Then she pushed open the door and entered, leaving him standing, hat in one hand and a bucket of paint in the other. With a sigh, he placed the bucket against the boards and retraced his steps down the stairs to the street.
CHAPTER III

A DAPPER young man in a neat fitting gray suit swung himself aloft on a stool and smiled boyishly at the girl behind the counter. Two weeks of constant meetings had caused their acquaintance to ripen into good comradeship.

“Good morning, Alice. How about that camouflage who claims to be a chef? What has he this morning that a gentleman might masticate?”

“Same thing,” laughed the girl. “We never change.”

He gestured wearily.

“Oh, well, bring it in and let me view the remains.”

She departed kitchenward. He heard the sound of growling voices.

“I had a fuss with the cook and the dishwasher,” she explained on her return. “The cook wasn’t going to warm up the sausages, but I made him.”

“You’re an angel,” he told her. “I should have gone back to the depot and got my own breakfast, but I had a deal to close and Sad wasn’t up when I left this morning.”

“What deal?” she inquired, all interest.

“The theatre one?”

He nodded. “With luck it should be in operation by Thursday.”

“Six days,” breathed the girl admiringly. “My, but you are the fastest worker I ever heard tell of.”

He ignored the compliment.

“How are you coming with the signs?”

“Fine!” her eyes danced. “I’m all done, except Wellman’s.”

She leaned across the counter and tapped him on the arm.

“And do you know that I have made oodles of money? I’ve got over three hundred dollars in the bank already. What else have you that I can do?”

“Nothing at present,” he admitted. “I’ve been so busy with the picture deal that I haven’t had a chance to look around. You know, before you can have good pictures, you must have good lights.

Thanks to Mr. Peters, the mayor, and the alderman, I’ve persuaded the city fathers that we need an electric light plant.”

“And we are going to have one?”

“We are. It’s a stock concern, though. With luck we should be operating in two months.”

“But the lights for the theatre?” she reminded him.

“Calcium,” he explained. “It will do temporarily. Which reminds me that your genial employer, Mr. Peters, is putting in a new set of fixtures, all mahogany, with glass mirrors back of the counter, and a cash register up ahead. I sold a hundred cash registers last week. There was a bankrupt sale in Wichita. I heard about it and wired for a hundred.”

“Movies!” from the girl. “Then electric lights, then cash registers. Goodness, Bobby Burnett! What kind of a man or wizard are you?”

Bobby passed a moist hand over a throbbing brow.

“Right now, Alice,” he said wearily, “I’m a Jazz Artist with a dull headache.”

“I’m so sorry,” she sympathized. “It’s a shame for such a nice kind man as you are to have old headaches.”

“Thanks, I’m repaid. But that isn’t all. Our old friend, Sad Faced Murray, also myself, are going into the electrical and gas fixture business. Sad says he is an ex-plumber and electrician and can wire houses to a queen’s taste. Which again reminds me that I must see Sad at once. I’ll see you at eight tonight.”

BOBBY finished his meal, paid his bill and hurried down to the station. Sad Face was there, pouring over the company’s books and growling like a dog with a sore ear.

“Say, Sad,” began Bobby, “what’s the express rate from Wichita to Heldtown?”

“What’s the difference?” slyly retorted Murray. “Nobody cares about the Express Company but you. If it wasn’t for you, I couldn’t afford smoking tobacco on my commissions.”
"Bugs! Get busy and find out. Wellman wants his soda fountain that I sold him and he wants it in a hurry, if it doesn't cost too much to ship by express."

Sad Face sorted out the book and became absorbed in its contents. After a brief wait he looked up.

"Five dollars a hundred," he announced. "What else do you want to know?"

"Not a thing. Send this message at once."

He tossed a written message to Sad, who read it and gave a start of surprise.

"Is this true?" he asked, looking up. "What do you mean, true?" countered Bobby, hiding a grin. He knew to what Murray referred. It was the order to the Ready-Made Home Company for a six room modern bungalow.

"This house," repeated Murray. "Are you figuring on marrying the brown haired girl who slings hash for Peters?"

"Not that I'm aware of. I'm buying that house for purely speculative purposes. And if you ever mention slinging hash in my hearing again, I'm going to bat you in the eye for luck. Now—rush that order. Also this one to that bankrupt house and tell them to ship the soda fountain by express."

"Always in a hurry," complained Murray. "What's the use?"

"Everything. Success belongs to the man who is always two jumps ahead of the procession. Remember the rule?"

"Hang the rule," from Murray. "I ain't no race horse."

"You are going to be, though, if you're to be my partner. I'll have no slacker teaming with me."

"I'm no slacker," grumpily growled the agent. "I'm just unlucky. You wait and see. Just about the time I get going good, something will happen to knock me cross-eyed. You'll see. It always does."

"Not while I'm with you," laughed the Jazz Artist. "I'm Fortune's favorite child."

Under his breath he added cautiously: "Sometimes."

The plug accommodation came in while they were talking and the express messenger swore his mightiest oaths as he strained at crated fixtures which were soon to make their appearance in The Golden Cali Café. Bobby looked at the express bill and went up to interview Peters.

Mr. Peters was washing the windows of his place as Bobby came up. He paused in his labors long enough to air his opinions on things in general, mostly window washers.

Window washers, Mr. Peters solemnly assured him, were as extinct as the Dodo. But they could all go to Jericho, so far as he was concerned. He could wash windows, and would. It wasn't beneath his dignity, even if he was the mayor of Heldtown. When he had finished he grinned.

"When will my fixtures be here, Bob? That's what's worrying your uncle right now. Are they on their way?"

"They're here," replied Bobby. "Just came. You owe me $1,876.59. I'll knock off the fifty-nine cents as token of good will."

"Two months' profits!" wheezed Peters. "Whoopee!"

"But gives you the swellest place in town," Bobby reminded him dryly. "What you need now is an electric piano to entertain your customers while they eat."

Peters chuckled. This amused him. He assumed a bantering tone.

"Of course, Bob, you haven't got one to sell, eh?"

"I have."

Bobby consulted his notebook.

"I'll lay you down one for $876.25, which includes express charges. They're worth three thousand of any man's money."

Peters' huge shoulders shook. He dropped a big fist on Bobby's shoulders that almost sent that young man down for the count.
“Tell you what I’ll do, Bob. When we git our electriic plant to working I’ll think about buying the pianny.”

“Let me sell you your own electric light plant?” begged Bobby. “For $275.00 I can install you a complete lighting system.”

“Sure you can,” snickered Peters.

He bent a kindly eye on this young hustler.

“I never saw your beat before for selling things. I'll bet a dollar you'd offer to sell me a wife if I thought I wanted one.”

“You bet I will.” Bobby pretended to consult his notebook again. “Ah, here it is—100 pounds of female, $500.00. A two hundred pound one costs $200.00. Over that weight a discount of ten per cent is given. In between weights three dollars a pound straight, and no discounts for cash.”

Peters entered into the spirit of the thing with a will. After much scratching of his ear, he said:

“I'll take one in the neighborhood of one hundred and sixty. She'll have to have red hair, brown eyes and a sweet disposition.”

“Your order is entered,” cried Bobby. “I hope to have some samples around soon.”

Peters laughed. The idea of buying a wife appealed to his sense of humor. But when Bobby had left him, he scratched his ear thoughtfully. Boomerangs were not unknown in Oklahoma.

CHAPTER IV

BOBBY dropped in to visit the rejuvenated Golden Calf Café and get Peters’ check. He was just tucking it away when Alice joined the two men. She shook a warning finger at the Jazz Artist.

“What’s this I hear about you trying to sell Mr. Peters a wife? What’s the joke?”

“No joke,” Bobby assured her solemnly. “Merely a business matter. You see I figure that somewhere there is a woman wants a man. And Peters here wants a wife—”

“Wait a minute!” bellowed the dismayed Peters. “I don’t either. That is—why hang it all, I said—”

“I’ll read what you said.”

Bobby opened his notebook.

“Never mind!” bawled Peters. “I give up. I’ll stay by my word. If she suits, all right. But don’t make it public. I’m the mayor, remember.”

“She’ll suit,” pursued Bobby. “We guarantee satisfaction, or money cheerfully refunded. But no goods exchanged after being used.”

Peters clumped away chuckling. Alice leaned forward to put a question. She was still interested in Peters’ intended.

“Bobby Burnett, have you any girl in mind as a wife for Peters?”

“No,” said Bobby. “It’s a money proposition with me.”

The girl permitted an audible sigh to escape her lips.

“Money is nice,” she admitted slowly. “But there are so many things that are nicer, so many things more worth having.”

“Right now,” he told her earnestly, “I’m interested in but two things. A bank account is one.”

She didn’t ask what the other was. Perhaps, from Bobby’s wistful eyes, she more than suspected what it was. Silence fell between them. She was the first to break it.

“Did you ever day-dream, Bobby?” she asked suddenly.

That was easy. Of course he had.

“Did you ever have one come true?”

That was different. He switched the cross-examination.

“Do you day-dream?” he asked. As she nodded in the affirmative: “What are they?”

“What do girls usually dream about, Bobby?”

That was a question he couldn’t answer. He bit off the end of a cigar and lighted it. Across the street Peters
was having an argument with Jones, the pool-hall man. Bobby thought of his first meeting with them and laughed.

"Are you laughing at me, Bobby Burnett?" with a touch of hauteur.

"No. Something else. Please go on. What about the day dreams?"

"They were of a great career. I wanted to be an artist and paint great pictures."

"Ever try to sketch old Heldtown?" he asked rather abruptly.

"Of course not!" She was indignant at the very idea.

"Now don't go up in the air. Painters have sketched worse looking places than Heldtown."

He waited for her reply. Receiving none, he went on:

"Will you take a little walk with me this evening? I've something to show you. Shall I call at the usual hour?"

She gave an almost imperceptible little nod of her pretty head. He tossed away his cigar and stalked out the door.

SEVEN O'CLOCK saw them picking their way through the crowd that swarmed the street. The crowd was mostly men—rough, uncouth men in coarse working garments and the smell of oil and grease still on their clothes. Almost all affected woolen shirts, open at the neck, and high topped boots. Across the street, in the pool hall owned by Brinkle Jones, a phonograph with a blunt needle and a cracked record was grinding out, "I'm going back to Caroline."

For an instant Bobby regretted selling Brinkle that machine and records. They strolled past Ace Miller's gambling palace, where the stakes ran high for those who wished to woo the goddess of chance. In there a raucous voiced singer was assuring all within range that he was "A Baby, Baby, Doll!"

Bobby felt Alice's fingers tighten their hold on his arm. She laughed nervously. The hoarse voice of the croupier at the roulette wheel was heard croaking:

"Electric lights, boys. Much obliged. All set? Let's go."

(On this wheel the "O" and the double "OO" could be played. They were extra percentage for the house.)

At the station they turned and looked back up the street. Heldtown was in her nightly debauch. The crowds, the narrow street, the flimsily built dwellings, and the khaki colored dust gleaming where dozens of kerosene lamps cast flickering beams like moonlight on the calm sea, made it all seem unreal. It was the dream town of some dyspeptic editor of a Wild-West magazine; Hoboken imagination of the West at its best, or worst.

"That's it," said Bobby pointing down the street. "I'd like a sketch of Heldtown as she is tonight. She won't be that way much longer. Already the changes have set in. Soon Miller's gambling den will be a thing of the past, so Peters intimated the other day. The electric light plant will enable us to have a great white way. Wellman is going to put up a new two-story brick. So is Jones. We're going to pave the streets. Also, we're going to build a big hotel. Will you sketch that scene for me?"

Before she could answer, a short, thickset stranger bobbed up directly in front of them and removed his hat.

"Mister," the newcomer said jerkily, "Jameson is my name. I'm a driller. My rig and everything is down at the depot and I ain't got no money to pay the freight charges on it, and I'm hungry and I'm broke. Can you stake me to a feed and a flop tonight? I expect maybe I can see some friends of mine in the morning and make a raise of enough to get my stuff out. I'll pay you back the first chance. I always pay my debts."

It was with no thought of charity that Bobby thrust a bill in the speaker's hand and waved him away, ignoring his thanks. He was a trifle annoyed at being bothered while with Alice. When the driller had departed he turned to find Alice trembling.

"I'm nervous, tonight," she explained
in a shaky little voice. “Please take me home. I’ll sketch Heledtown for you.”

CHAPTER V

FOUR MONTHS had made few changes in Heledtown, if you were to believe Sad Face Murray, unless you mentioned the fact that he and Bobby were partners and owned the General Gas & Electric Supply Store. Three new brick store buildings had gone up, the White Way was a reality, soda fountains were common things and the Palace Theatre was a thing of beauty, and was turning them away nightly, but nothing worth while had happened except that Bobby had bought himself an eight cylinder gas hound.

Sad Face was taking stock one morning when Bobby came bustling in. One look at his partner’s tearful face and Bobby howled.

“That’s right,” complained Murray. “Laugh if you want to. I don’t care. I know I’m the unluckiest guy in the world. If I have stuff nobody wants it. If I haven’t, everybody wants it. I go out on a job and before I’m through somebody else has something he wants done right now. I sure am unlucky!”

“You pessimist!” shrieked Bobby. “You’re lucky and don’t know it.”

“Lucky?” whined Murray. “Listen to my latest. I’ve been expecting it. I never did have a show that hard luck didn’t hit me a wallop in the jaw. Now, what happens? What does?”

He stopped and drew a long sigh, Bobby howled again.

“Go on, Sad. I’ll bite. What?”

“My sister!” groaned Murray. “She writes me that John has kicked the bucket and that she’s going to make her home with me.”

MURRAY choked with emotion. Bobby, too, grew thoughtful. He and Murray had taken rooms up town. There was no room for a woman.

“Can you beat it?” Murray was saying. “That dame’s sure my Jonah bird! She’s the champion female spendthrift of the world, barring none. She could bankrupt Rockerbilt in a year. She kept poor old John so poverty stricken that when he passed off he lacked nineteen bucks of having enough to square up with the undertaker.

“And I’ll be in the same fix in no time,” he finished, sorrowfully.

“Pshaw!” said Bobby. “Wire her to stay away. Show her who is boss. Lay down the law to her.”

“You don’t know Sara,” Murray sighed lugubriously. “Wait till you see her. One hundred and sixty pounds of muscle, determination and domination—that’s Sara.”

“Go on with the description,” coaxed Bobby. “You listen good.”

“And she has the reddest hair, brownest eyes and dangdest temper I ever met up with outside a parcel of wild wildcats.”

“Hang Sara!” snorted Bobby. “Forget your troubles and come for a spin. Close the shop for awhile. I’ve got sixty horses under the hood and I can make eighty miles and more an hour as easy as a duck swims four. Come on. I’ll shoot you to Wichita Falls in peace.”

“More’n likely in pieces,” grunted the invited one. “No, thanks. I’ve no desire to sprout wings as a male angel yet. Nixy!”

And he could not be shaken from his stand. Bobby left him to his gloomy thoughts and called for Alice as per agreement. She snatched hat and cloak and climbed in the car with him. The powerful car shot down the sandy street and out into the open country. For a space this occupied hands and mind. He steered the car to higher ground, where Heledtown in all her unkempt beauty spread out before them. Bobby stopped the car and waved his hand about him.

“There’s Heledtown, Alice. Sixteen times as large as when I arrived and sixteen times as dirty and squalid and sordid. What’s wrong with it?”
“That’s what I’ve been asking myself,” replied the girl soberly. “We have some few comforts, but beauty of any kind we have not.”

She surveyed the town thoughtfully, moodily.

“Haven’t you any suggestions?” he asked. “You’re an artist with an artist’s soul. What would you advise doing?”

She looked up at him quickly.

“You won’t laugh, Bobby?”

“Cross my heart,” he answered. “Go on.”

“Well, the first thing we need is homes; cunning little bungalows like that one over on Maple Street. They should have flower beds and lawns and—children playing on them. Are you laughing, Bobby?”

“I’m not,” he assured her solemnly. “I’m thinking.”

“And the bungalows should have hot and cold water and ranges and a tiled bathroom. And the streets should be widened and paved and parked. Then nice store buildings should be put up. But we need homes and bath tubs worst of all. If there was only a river near us.”

“But there isn’t,” he reminded her. “I was over to Potenate yesterday looking at their spring. I was in hopes that we might be able to get enough water to pay us to lay pipe and put in a plant for pumping and purifying. But it wasn’t big enough for us.”

Then with a sudden change in the conversation—

“I’ve never shown you my new oil well, have I? I’ll take you over. I want to see how the thing is progressing.”

“I wish you would,” said Alice. “Jameson told Mr. Peters how you staked him that night and then how you gave him the money to pay the freight on his outfit. I think that was mighty nice of you.”

Bobby’s face grew cherry red. He wriggled uncomfortably.

“Pshaw! Alice, that was just playing the system out according to form. I had to do it.”

IT WAS but a few minutes ride to the place. There were ten acres just a mile outside the city’s limits. It had grown from the chance encounter with Jameson that night. Jameson himself came forward to meet him. As usual, he was chewing forcibly on a cud of tobacco.

“Well, Jameson,” Bobby hailed him, “how goes it?”

“Well, Burnett, we’ve struck sand, but nothing worth while.”

Jameson drove a stream of amber colored juice at a fence post.

“Want to look her over?”

Bobby helped Alice from the car and they walked over to the huge derrick which was groaning and quivering, as the great heavy drill rose and fell in steady cadence, biting its way into the bowels of the earth in its search for the black gold. Her hand found his arm and squeezed it gently, a move that was not lost on Jameson.

“I hope you strike it, Bobby. With all my heart I wish it.”

“If I don’t I’m a ruined man.” Bobby essayed a laugh. “The only difference will be that I can ride out of town in my own car—that is, if I can afford to buy the gasoline.”

They returned to the car. He drove westward at a terrific clip. She seemed to sense he was taking this way of letting off steam and remained silent.

The sun had gone to rest when they turned back toward Heldtown. The derricks, smudgy and ugly, stood like lonesome sentinels on the plains. The lights of the distant town twinkled through a maze of gray brown dust like fireflies lighting their way through a fog. On the brow of the hill he again brought the car to a stop.

“Alice,” he said doggedly. “That’s my town. I’m going to see that she has homes and everything. I’ve got to.”

And she told him she believed in him. It was queer he did not notice the little tremble in her voice, nor the tenderness. But then, men have always been blind.
"'I ain't advising anyone to spend his money on an oil well. Oil's where you find her.'"
In the search for the wealth of the world they sometimes overlook the treasures at their feet.

BOBBY dropped Alice at the café and sped away down the street to their store. The ride had done him good. Already he was planning on the future of Heldtown. He thought of Sad's description of the sister and he laughed aloud. If Sara measured up to his pal's description he would have some fun out of Peters.

He looked in the store as he drove up. Sad was still buzzing around inside. Murray looked up and sighed as Bobby entered.

"What'd I tell you, Bobby? She's here. Dressed like a millionairess and her temper's worse and more than ever. I've been touched for her room—that's twenty dollars—and her board will cost me twenty-five. Oh—"

"If you're talking about Sara," grinned Bobby, "I want to meet her."

Murray waved a depreciating hand.

"Don't worry. You will. Oh, me! That woman will be the cause of me committing murder some day. Guess I might as well tell you all the sad news while I'm at it. She has hired herself to us at a salary of seventy-five bucks a week. Just think—seventy—"

"You're crazy!" cried Bobby, interrupting the wild harangue. "How could she hire herself to us?"

"You don't know Sara," sighed Murray. "Nope, you don't."

"But we don't need a clerk, Sad. You tell her so."

"Never!" protested Murray. "You tell her. But please, Bobby—for my sake—be diplomatic. Oh, be diplomatic!"

CHAPTER VI

THE genial Mr. Peters listened in high good humor when Bobby warned him that his happy bachelor days were almost over.

"Because," continued Bobby, "I've brought a subject to town for your inspection. She has red hair and a temper like a Kansas cyclone. She weighs one hundred and sixty pounds, has just buried one husband, and has no objection to burying another."

Peters' guffaw could have been heard a mile. A fist circled in the air for a clap on the back of the salesman. Bobby dodged and retreated to a safe distance.

"Her name is Sara Johnson, and she's a sister to Sad Face Murray," finished Bobby.

"Bring her around!" boomed Peters. "I like widows and I'm partial to red hair. If she measures up to standards I'm on."

Bobby knew that Peters was joking. He knew Peters thought he was joking, so he tried again.

"It's a fact, Peters. She's here and she's just as you described, only she has a temper."

"I like 'em with a temper," chuckled Peters.

"Good," said Bobby. "That's settled. Get on your best bib and tucker and tell Alice to be ready also. I'm going out to have a look at the well and then I'll come by and pick you up. I'll have Sara with me, too."

Peters promised. Bobby got into his car and made for the Border Queen well. It was Jameson who broke the news to him.

"We've struck rock," went on the surly Jameson. "I never saw or heard of such a thing in this country. And we broke the drill and got to have another."

"Do you advise drilling on through?" asked Bobby.

"I ain't advising anyone to spend his money on an oil well. Oil's where you find her. Maybe there's something on the other side—maybe not. But—" Jameson hesitated long enough to drown an adventurous fly—"I would kinda like to know what's on the other side of that there rock."

Bobby's mind worked quickly. If he
raised the money and they didn't strike oil, he was ruined financially. He took a cigar from his pocket and chewed nervously on it. The system had one good rule which said: "Whatever you undertake, see it through." He nodded towards the surly driller.

"All right, Jameson. I'll raise a thousand dollars. If that don't see us through—I'm all in, down and out."

Jameson drove another deluge at a fly before answering. He seemed to be weighing over a proposition. Then:

"You've been a good sport. I like good sports. If that don't see us through I'll go the rest of the way on my own money. I've got a hunch we'll find something. Maybe gas—maybe nothing."

"Meet me at Jones' Pool Hall at nine o'clock," said Bobby.

Sad Face Murray almost had hysteric when Bobby broke the news to him.

"I knew it!" wailed Murray. "I knew something was going to happen. Now what will you do?"

"Sell you my interest in this store for one thing, and go on drilling for the second," replied Bobby. "Draw me a check for a thousand dollars and this place is yours."

WITH many protests Sad obeyed. Bobby drew up an agreement which both signed. Bobby tucked the check in his pocket and asked where Sara was.

"Up in her room powdering her nose," glumly. "If my nose bothered me as much as hers I'd cut it off."

In spite of his troubles Bobby laughed. He found Sara and told her of the handsome Mr. Peters, mayor of Heldtown, who was dying to make her acquaintance. Sara giggled and climbed in the rear seat at Bobby's request. At the café they picked up Peters and Alice. Introductions took but a moment and they made for the distant hills.

"This is glorious!" breathed Alice, as the wind swept stray wisps of soft brown hair across her face. "I love to ride."

Bobby nodded. They became so engrossed in their own conversation that the couple behind were forgotten. Only once did they look back. What they saw set Bobby and Alice into smothered gales of laughter. The ponderous Mr. Peters heard and smiled foolishly, but he did not relinquish his hold on Sara's hand. And Sara—well, she was snuggling close to Peters, for all the world like a lost kitten begging for a home and a fireside.

"I'll bet that's a match," he whispered.

"Weren't they sheepish looking?"

"I didn't think so," she said softly. "I thought they looked cute."

He looked at her sharply, but she was looking ahead at something in the road.

"Well," he mused, thinking of Sara's extravagance, "Peters has plenty of money."

"Do you think money is necessary when two persons really love each other?" she queried, a tiny throb discernible in her voice. "Poverty is no disgrace, Bobby."

"Perhaps not. But it's hard on the women."

"Why the women?"

"Because—" he floundered helplessly.

"Well, because they expect more."

"Not when they love someone," she said, rebukingly.

Conversation languished. He was thinking deeply. On their return to town they stopped in front of the little bungalow on Maple Street that Alice had repeatedly admired. He got out of the car and offered her his hand. Peters and Sara made no move to get out and he left them alone.

"I want to show you something," he said to Alice. "Come!"

She followed him up the little pathway to the house. Inside a gasp of admiration escaped her as she saw the polished floors, the mantel fireplace, the large rooms, and the beautifully grained woods.

"Bobby, it's gorgeous!" She clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Whose is it? I never found out."

"Mine," proudly. "This and the car
are the only things I haven’t mortgaged. This is to be my home and my wife’s—if I can get her—when I make my stake.”

“Oh, money!” she pouted. “I’m getting so I hate that word.”

He did not answer. He opened another door and stepped aside for her to see. The tiled floors, the bathtub and nickled fixtures brought another gasp.

“Of all things, Bobby Burnett. I think you are simply wonderful to be able to think of all these things. But—” a slow little smile of sadness—the bathtubs and things are almost useless here.”

“I don’t think so,” he said. “I had planned on sinking a well. Then I thought of a standpipe and a force pump to lift the water into it.”

He chuckled as if over a joke as he pointed to the fixtures.

“Sad did the plumbing. Of course, he growled about it, but he did a good job just the same. Do you like it?”

“I love it,” softly. “Does the girl know about it?”

He nodded.

“Does she like it?”

Another nod.

“And when are you going to marry her?”

The musical voice was on the verge of tears.

“Aren’t you ever going to propose?”

“Yes,” grudgingly to both questions.

“When I make my system pan out to the end.”

“Let’s go back to the car,” she said in a voice that sounded suspiciously like a sob. “I’m tired.”

CHAPTER VII

BOBBY’S run of good luck had struck a snag. The next three weeks found him worse off at the end than before. Not a deal but what turned out on the wrong side of the ledger. His car went at the beginning of the fourth week. Things looked dark.

And then Jameson came to town with the news that he, too, was at the end of his resources. Whereupon, Bobby threw up his hands. He would do anything but mortgage the bungalow, he told Jameson.

“Don’t blame you,” muttered the sour Jameson. He chewed heavily on his tobacco. ”You’ve got friends though.” This last was in a speculative, indifferent tone.

Bobby turned on him indignantly.

“My friends will never say that I asked them to aid me,” he asserted heatedly.

He apologized for this outburst immediately.

“I beg your pardon, Jameson, old man. I’m all upset.”

THE driller departed without further comment. The next day Bobby heard with incredulity that the drill was working again. He hastened to the Border Queen. Jameson was surly and uncommunicative.

“Agreement, wasn’t it?” he demanded roughly. “Gotta right to go on if I can, ain’t I. You tell ’em!”

He spit viciously at the derrick.

“I’m gonna see what’s on the other side of that rock if I have to bankrupt every—every man in Heltdown.”

Two days later Jameson found out what was on the other side of the rock. Fifteen minutes later all of Heltdown knew.

Sitting on a stool at the Golden Calf, Jameson vented his spleen on everything connected with the oil game.

“Does Bob—Mr. Burnett know?” asked Alice in a weak, strained voice.

“Ought to,” growled the driller. “He was there when it happened.”

Alice sink limply on the nearest stool. Peters was at her side in a wink.

“Don’t cry, girlie. He’ll pull through some way. You can’t beat that boy. He’s a winner from the word go.”

“Say,” whined a voice from the doorway. “Where’s Bobby? Have you heard the news?”

Peters did not bother to look up. Only one man in Heltdown could whine like
that. In spite of himself Peters grinned.  
"I knew that well would be a flivver," went on Murray. "I hope Bobby hasn't done something desperate."

"For shame!" cried Alice, springing to Bobby's defense. "You know Bobby Burnett isn't built that way."

"I hope not," in doleful tones. "Because I just wanted to know—"

BOBBY BURNETT stood in the doorway, a cigar between his lips and a quizzical look in his gray eyes. He came slowly towards them until he was in their midst.

"Now," he said, taking the cigar from his lips, "it's time for confessions. Which one of you financed Jameson?"

He was looking directly at Jameson. Poker player though he was, Jameson gave an almost imperceptible start and his eyes instinctively sought out Alice Tinsley. It was only for a second, but that was enough.

"You?" he said accusingly. "Why did you do that?"

"Because," tearfully, "I couldn't bear to see you lose and make that girl unhappy. I wanted you to be happy with her. And you are so proud and stiff."

Bobby's eyes were tender as he gazed down on her. Wasn't that just like a woman? She was speaking again and her voice was far away.

"Now, I'm broke and I'm going back to Chicago. I finished your picture some time ago. I'll give it to you in the morning."

Bobby brushed his hand across his eyes. Peters misinterpreted the move.

"I'm marrying Sara today, Bobby, so I'll give you my check for the goods when I find time."

"Congratulations," said Bobby, still gazing at Alice.

Murray indulged in the luxury of another moan.

"And I've torn up the agreement," he announced, "so you still own half interest in the store. There wasn't no witnesses, you know, so you got to take it."

"Some system!" murmured Bobby softly. "You lose and then you win double. Some system!"

He choked. Something was pounding at his throat and demanding its release. A lightning like move of his right hand placed a bottle of whitish liquid on the mahogany counter. He stepped back and waved his hand at the bottle.

"It's nice to know you've good friends," he said in a hushed voice. "But this time your sympathies are misplaced. I'm a wealthy man."

It was Peters who lifted the bottle gingerly and examined it. Not satisfied with this, he removed the cork and sniffed it. This still did not produce results, so he cautiously tasted it.

"Water!" yelled the astounded Peters. "By the shades of Jericho, it's water!"

"It's not," protested the laughing Bobby. "It's pure gold. It will mean more to Heltown than a hundred oil wells. I've already found backing to promote a stock company. Soon we will have our own pure drinking water, hydrants and everything. If what Jameson tells me is true we have an inexhaustible supply of it."

"Inexhaustible?" snarled Jameson.

"Hell! We've got the Chinese sea to draw from."

Alice was eyeing the bottle with open eyes.

"And you aren't poor?" she cried, turning to Bobby.

"Poor!" ejaculated Bobby. "Why, I'm the richest man in the world unless—"

HE WAS LOOKING deep into her eyes when he paused. Something he saw there made him take one more gambler's risk. He reached for her and prayed that the goddess of chance would still smile on his undertaking. She did. But even more sweetly did Alice Tinsley smile.
Hold Fast, Boys

"That fellow's found a new way of cutting tire expense."
"How so?"
"Takes all corners on only two wheels."
—New York Sun.

Had One at Home

Singleton: They have machines now that can tell when a man is lying. Ever seen one?
Wedmore: Seen one? By gosh, I married one!—Boston Transcript.

Russian Into Russia

He went Russian into Russia,
With a lusty cheer and shout;
But, a sadder and a wiser man,
He comes a-Russian out!
—Chicago Journal of Commerce.

There's a Difference

Dick: Do you refuse to pay that fiver I lent to you?
Joe: Oh, no, Dick, I don't refuse. I just refrain.—Answers.

Exceedingly So

Rub: Have you ever thought seriously of marriage?
Dub: Sure—I'm married.—New York Herald.

Educated Dog

"Lay down, pup. Lay down. That's a good doggie. Lay down, I tell you."
"Mister, you'll have to say, 'Lie down.' He's a Boston terrier."—Nashville Tennessean.

Great Help

"Why whip the boy? It does him no good."
"Does me a lot of good," declared old Paw Wallop.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Taking Him Down

W. L. George, the English novelist, declared at a women's club in Chicago during his lecture tour that women novelists were inferior to men.
"Men," he said, "with their larger outlook, can write about all sorts of things. Women, however, only write about love."
"Well," said a woman novelist who was present, "that is as it should be. The best way to stir your readers is with a spoon."—Detroit Free Press.
Customer: How much are those peaches?
Attendant: I don't know nothin' about the price. I'm only here to see that you don't pinch none of dem!
Anxious

"Dear, do you remember where you were in 1910?" asked the bride of a few months.

"No, dear; I don't remember exactly," replied the young husband. "Why do you ask?"

"Why, I was reading today in the paper that in 1910 one person in every eight hundred in Britain was in prison."—Edinburgh Scotsman.

Too Far

Cornelius Vanderbilt objected at a dinner in New York to the American rule of politeness whereby men pull out and then push in ladies' chairs as the latter seat themselves at table.

"That," he said, "is carrying our table manners too ridiculously far. It reminds me of the Texas father.

"A Texas father was dining with his son in a Texas hotel, and in the course of dinner the son got into an argument with a cowboy. The cowboy called the son an offensive name, and the young fellow grabbed his knife in his fist and started around the table to be avenged.

"But his father seized him by the coat-tail.

"'Ain't ye got no table manners?' the old man hissed.

"'But, pop, ye heerd what he called me, didn't ye?'

"'Yes, I heerd all right, but that ain't no ground for yer forgettin' yer table manners. Put down that there knife and go at him with yer fork.'"—Detroit Free Press.

Handy to Have

"Pop, what do we mean by an elastic conscience?"

"An elastic conscience, my son, is what enables a man to stretch the truth without breaking his word."—New York Sun.

Giving a Guess

"Pa, what is this heel of Achilles?"

"Something new in rubber I s'pose."—Louisville Courier-Journal.
Producer: When you get to this bridge, you toter, throw up your arms, and fall into the river.
Actor: But, hang it all, I can't swim.
Producer: That doesn't matter, dear boy; you are supposed not to be able to!
"Why, professor, you're not looking so well lately!"
"No; the humor editor on our paper is away on his vacation, and I have to write all the jokes."
"Aunt, dear, may I present Mr. Peterson? Mr. Peterson was born in the Canary Islands."
"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Peterson. Maybe you will sing for us."

Down the Ages

"What influence have the ancient Greeks on a modern college education?"
"Well, we still throw the discuss a little."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Oh, Captain!

Young Lady: Dear me, Captain, what do you find the sailors to do when you are out at sea? Aren't the men very idle?
Captain: No, lady, I keeps them busy hoeing the sea weeds out of the ocean current patch.—New York Sun.

Not Particular

"I want you to teach my son a foreign language," said a lady to a teacher of languages.
"What shall it be madame," the teacher replied. "Would you like Polish, Czecho-Slovakian, Armenian or perhaps even Arabic.
"Well," mused the lady, "which is the most foreign."—Chicago News.

Strength of Will

The defendant, accused of stealing chickens, had been duly examined in court and at the conclusion the judge said:
"As I understand it, Sam, you entered the henhouse and then, deciding to resist temptation, left it. Is that correct?"
"Yessuh, jedge. Dass about right."
"In that case, can you explain how two of the hens were missing?"
"It was jes' this way, jedge. I took 'em. I reckoned I was entitled to dat many fo' leavin' de res."—Detroit Free Press.
Old lady: But why can’t you get work?
The gentleman: Well, lady, yer see, I’m an unhappy medium.
Old lady: What do you mean?
The gentleman: It’s like this, mum. I’m too heavy for light work and too light for heavy work!
THE INTERMISSION
And his time is worth five dollars a minute!
Their Turn

Gloria: Where are those wonderful servants of 50 years ago, that mother talks of?

Flavia: Oh, my dear, don’t you know? Why! They’re having servant troubles of their own!—Pittsburgh Gazette.

Unblushing

“Oh, yes, with the new thought one can accomplish anything. Why, one doesn’t even have to rouge! I can simply think a glow of color into my cheeks.”

“My goodness! I’m glad I don’t have such thoughts as that.”—Indianapolis News.

Assemblage

“So,” said the old general, “you think you would make a good valet for an old wreck like me, do you? I have a glass eye, a wooden leg, and a wax arm that need looking after not to mention false teeth, and so forth.”

“Oh, that’s all right, sir,” replied the applicant, enthusiastically; “I’ve had lots of experience. I worked for six years in the assembling department of a motor-car factory.”—Tit-Bits.

Something, Anyhow

“You are quite an old man, Bulginback, aren’t you?” “Yessah, and ’bleged to yo’ for de ‘tregation, sah. If I lives fo’ mo’ yeahs by de blessin’ o’ de Lawd, I’ll be an octagonal or a diagonal; I fhugs which.”—Country Gentleman.

Honesty First

“No,” said the old man, sternly, “I will not do it. Never have I sold anything else by false representation, and I will not begin now.”

For a moment he was silent, and the clerk who stood before him could see that the better nature of his employer was fighting strongly for the right.

“No,” said the old man again. “I will not do it. It is an inferior grade of shoe, and I will never pass it off as anything better. Mark it, ‘A Shoe Fit for a Queen,’ and put it in the window. A queen does not have to do much walking.”—Tit-Bits.

Objectionable

Observing a poorly dressed man stagger and fall prostrate on the sidewalk, a passing physician hurried to his side and began to feel for his pulse. Apparently the man was unconscious, and the physician was about to draw his hypodermic syringe from his medicine bag when a workman with a dinner pail in his hand stepped forward from the group of surrounding spectators. “Here, give him some of this!” he said, exhibiting a whiskey flask in his hand.

Grabbing this the physician poured part of its contents into the victim’s throat, whereupon the victim suddenly raised his head and spat it out, gasping, “Wot’re you doin’?”

“Reviving you with whiskey,” said the doctor.

“That ain’t whiskey; it’s cold tea.”—Cincinnati Enquirer.
A Ledger Fan

"The bookkeeper is always talking shop," "Isn't he, though? Why, he actually referred to his baby's learning to walk as a trial balance."—Boston Transcript.

Quite Proper

A Scotsman saw a sixpence lying in the road. Disregarding the traffic he rushed forth to secure it. He was run over and killed.

The jury brought in a verdict of "Death from natural causes."—Montgomery Advertiser.

All Sorts of Tools

Reuben: Longfellow said that in this world a man must be either anvil or hammer.

Glyn: He was wrong. Some men are neither; they are merely bellows.—Atlanta Constitution.

First Conjugation

Rusper: What are the three states of man?

Garard: Married, harried, buried.—Minneapolis Journal.

Embarrassing

Little Eleanor gazed long and thoughtfully at the young man who was calling on her grown-up sister Kate. "May I climb up on your knee, Mr. Browne?"

"Yes, of course, dear," smiled the young man who wanted to make a hit with the family. "Want to pull my hair—eh?"

"No; I want to see if I can find that word."

"Word? What word?" asked the puzzled visitor.

"I heard our Kate say this morning that if ever a man had the word 'idiot' written all over his face, it was you."—Passing Show.
The Marksman

Kermit Roosevelt, who has eight black-maned lions to his credit, was talking at an Oyster Bay luncheon about marksman.

"My friend Bang," he said, "is a fine shot. The other evening a chicken was required for dinner, and Bang volunteered to go out into the barn-yard and shoot it.

"Well, he disappeared with his gun and soon a shot was heard, then another, then three or four shots in rapid succession. But Bang didn't return with the chicken.

"So little Willie was sent out to see what the trouble was. Several more shots sounded during his absence, finally he came back.

"'Well,' his mother said impatiently, 'hasn't papa shot that chicken yet?'

"'No,' said Willie. 'It won't get in the way.'"—Detroit Free Press.

A Matter of Looks

A homely young chap, having his view obstructed by the headgear of the girl in front of him, ventured to protest. "See here, miss," he said, leaning over, "I want to look as well as you."

"Oh, do yer?" she replied, in a rich Cockney accent. "Then you'd better run 'ome and change yer face."—London Mail.

Reluctant Admiration

"D'jever see Harold Heartbreak on the screen?" asked Sayde, who presides over the tinware counter.

"Yeah, I've seen him," said Flora Bell of can openers and cutlery. "That fellow's a snake, that's what he is."

"Yeah, he's a snake, all right, but gawd, what eyes!"—Birmingham Age-Herald.
Priscilla Pett
"Why Wives Leave Home"

HITCHING HIS WAGON—
Star gazing!
"Now, professor, your candid opinion of my voice!"
"Ah, Mees, if you possessed in ze upper register what you lack in ze lower, your future would be assured!"

The Handicap

"Well! well!" interestingly ejaculated a motorist who had stopped his vehicle to pick up a young fellow in the big road. "So you were going to walk 10 miles to town in your bare feet? You are a pretty big fellow to be going barefoot."

"Yup, I'm 20 years old," replied young Jurj Jogg of Straddle Ridge, Ark. "I've wore shoes off and on for a year or so, but the dad-blame things make me so clumsy I can't run down a rabbit to save my life!"—Kansas City Star.

A Good Suggestion

"I attended a theater in London," says an American player, "on the occasion of the production of a play wherein the chief figure, the king, aged and infirm, was blessed with two sons. He was pacing up and down the stage with a wearied look, exclaiming aloud:

"'On which of these my sons shall I bestow the crown?'
"Immediately came a voice from the gallery: 'Why not arf a crown apiece, guv'nor?"—Philadelphia Ledger.

Apologies to R. K.

"What makes the people snicker so?" Said folks upon parade.
"'Snickerbockers, don't you know," The shameless punster said.
...
—Boston Transcript.

Next Step

Juliette: Don't be surprised if Mr. Sapleigh proposes to you tonight.
Kathleen: Gracious! Do you think he will?
Juliette: I do. When I refused him last night he said he didn't care what became of him.—San Francisco Bulletin.
News to Him
Frosh: Who made this fancy ink well?
Soph: Search me, I didn't even know it was sick.—Sun Dodger.

Why Not?
“How can I keep my toes from going to sleep?”
“Don’t let them turn in.”—Purple Cow.

Not So Fast!
“I hear that some of these profs lead a pretty fast life!”
“I don’t know! None of ’em passed me this year.”—University of Michigan Gargoyle.

The Plant
Bluh: I hear you are working in the shirt factory now.
Glub: Yes.
Bluh: Why, aren't you working today?
Glub: Oh, we are making night shirts this week.—Humbug.

Twas Bestus
There was a stage star named Celestus: When she danced the applause was tempestuous;
She whirled and she tripped
’Till her shoulder-strap slipped—
And they had to ring down the asbestos.
—Lord Jeff.

What’s the Address?
Mr. King: You don’t seem to worry much about your debts.
Mr. Jack: No, I always borrow from a pessimist who doesn’t expect to get it back.—Chapparal.

Gone!
“Is Mike Clancy here?” asked the visitor at the quarry just after the premature explosion.
“No, sor,” replied Costigan, “he’s gone.”
“For good?”
“Well, sor, he wint in that direction.—Mugwump.

Slanguage
Sweet Young Thing: Oh, mother, I simply love the sandy coves at Buzzard’s Bay.
Mother: Hattie! I won’t have you talking about people in such a vulgar way.—Harvard Lampoon.
NOT A BREATH

"I just gave Sam a drink now."
"That's foolish; now they'll all want some."
"Nope, he swore he wouldn't breathe a word of it."

The Style

Mable: Nice skirt Alice is wearing.
Jack: Yes, all wool and a foot high.
—Orange Bowl.

Punch

"I want to buy a Jewish piano."
"What's that?"
"Cash register."—Virginia Reel.
Alas, How True!
She: I don’t think it is right to say a woman can’t keep a secret.
He: What makes you say that?
She: No woman ever tried.—Cornell Widow.

In!
Gentleman (at the door): Is May in?
Maid (haughtily): May who?
*Gentleman (peeved): Mayonnaise!
Maid (shutting the door): Mayonnaise is dressing!
(Business of falling down steps.)—Voo Doo.

Has It Ever Happened to You?
"Say, waiter. C’mere, waiter. Waiter, zshish here planked shalmon?"
"Yes, sir, that’s planked salmon, just as you ordered."
"But darnnit, waiter, shalmon ain’t sh’tough as thish. Why, waiter, they never wash a shalmon sh’tough as thish here. Whash all thish gooey on the side here, waiter?"
"Why, that’s the salmon, sir, you ate the plank."—The Siren.

Mutual
He: I wish I were a star.
Bored she: I wish you were a comet, then you’d only come around once every 1500 years.—Orange Peel.

No Lien!
There once was a lad named Obrien
Who thought that he’d like to go fli
So he jumped from a wall
With his ma’s parasol,—
You can guess the result without trien.
—Sun Dodger.

Always!
How doth the gentle laundress
Search out the weakest points,
And always scrape the buttons off
At the most strategic points?
—Tar Baby.
Water, Water, Everywhere

“What makes Bibber look so out of spirits?”

“Says he’s waiting for his ship to come in.”

“His ship?”

“Yes, it’s out beyond the three-mile limit.”—Punch Bowl.

That’s Different

First stew: What’s that funny thing there?
Second ditto: Why, that’s a jackass.
First ditto: Yes, I know, but what is he riding on.—Pitt Panther.

Mrs. Malaprop

“My dear Mrs. Smith, I think your daughter recites remarkably well, don’t you?”

“Yes. All she needs is a short course in electrocution, sort of to finish her off, as you might say.”—Harvard Lampoon.

Fish on Friday

Bird: Do you want a nut sundae?
Chic: I always have a date for Sunday.—Lemon Punch.

The Hazery

Postman: Mail’s very crowded today. I’m overloaded so I can hardly walk.
Stude: What’s the excitement?
Postman: The Correspondence School is having a rally and they’re mailing a bonfire to each student.—Pelican.

Sometimes!

Prof: “Which is correct: a herd of camels or a drove of camels?”
Stude: “I always thought they came in packs.”—Scalper.

Simple, What?

“What’s the difference between a hairdresser and a sculptor?”

“Easy. The hairdresser curls up and dyes; and the sculptor makes faces and busts.”—University of Michigan Gargoyle.
Happy 'Till Then
Tenderly they placed the poor derelict who had just been run over by the street car into the ambulance.

"My good man," asked a sympathetic bystander, "were you ever married?"
A thankful smile fleeted across the pain-wrecked countenance.

"No, lady," he answered, "this is the worst accident that ever befell me."—University of Michigan Gargoyle.

Miss Conception
Mother (aside): Edna, your collar looks tight.
Edna: Oh, but Mother, he really isn't.
—Orange Owl.

Eventually
"What would you say, dear, if I put my arm around you?" asked the inexperienced youth.

"At last," responded the lady fair.—Showme.

Get Busy
Doc Horn (in chemistry): Boettner, what does A stand for?
Boettner: Just a minute, I've got it on the end of my tongue.
Doc Horn: Well, spit it out, it's arsenic.—Harvard Lampoon.

No Slacker
"There's a fellow who has rendered signal service to his country."
"What did he do?"
"Handled the wig-wags in the Navy."—Sun Dodger.
**Why Is It?**

"Did you ever notice that—"
"Go on!"
"That as soon as a girl finds out there is no Santa Claus she begins to believe in love?"

---

**Willy-Nilly**

None but the brave deserve the fair!
The craven oft may land 'em,
But, let faint-hearted men beware,
None but the brave can stand 'em!

---

**Remembrance**

I once wrote a verse to my lady's eyebrow.
It was beautiful, a charming bit of poetic fancy. Everybody admired it.
Now, five years later, this little poem has grown enormously in value. My lady herself treasures it—a sort of memento, I suppose, because—
She has no eyebrow to speak of.

---

**Naturally**

What did Mrs. Horner say after her maid-of-all-work departed?
"Help! Help!"

---

**A Mother Goose for Grown-Ups**

I know a little man
Who plays a little flute—
I wonder why his neighbors
Are learning how to shoot.

---

**The Way of the Day**

Ending of the ultra-modern story:
“. . . and so they were divorced and lived happy ever after.”
The Nineteenth Hole

A merchant and a parson played golf together, and the parson, nearly always beaten, was growing gloomy.

"Never mind, father," comforted the merchant, "one of these days you'll be preaching my funeral sermon and then you can take your revenge."

"And at that it will be your hole!" came the retort morose.

Sauce for the Gander

"You won't kiss anyone, dearest,"
He begged, "while I am gone?"
Lifting the face he deemed fairest,
Seeking her eyes of dawn.
"I'll not kiss anyone, lover,"
She shook delicious curls,
Assuaging the woe above her—
"Not anyone but girls.

"You won't kiss anyone ever
"While you're away, heart's own?"
She snuggled her face a-quiver
Against his shoulder strong.
"I'll not kiss anyone, sweetheart,"
He vowed, "out in life's whirls;
"At balls, on ships, in busy marts—
"Not anyone but girls!"

Marie Graeme.

Natural Surprise

A young woman in Washington had been describing to a friend in the diplomatic corps her experiences as a mountain-climber abroad.

"Ah, mees," said the count, "so you climb zat mountain. Eet was a foot to be proud of!"

"Pardon me, count, but you mean feat!"
"O-o-h!" exclaimed the count, "you climb him more zan once?"

A Slight Difference

Mrs. Pryer: Did you say it was your hub that was damaged in the accident?
Mrs. Voluble: No—my hubby!
The Pup—"There's something familiar about him!"
A FORCIBLE REMINDER
"Ah, that reminds me. I must redeem my watch next week!"

The Best Gift
What shall I send you, lady fair,
At Christmas time, my love to show?
A bit of sable fur to wear
Around your throat when north winds blow?

A string of pearls! A lustrous gem?
Brocades and laces, rich and rare?
A flaming, jewelled diadem
To nestle in your shining hair?

All these and more would soon be sent
Were not my coins so small and few;
So take my heart and be content,
For it is rich in love for you!

Prohibition Pie
Mince pie! what sacred memories cling
To you, mysterious savory thing!
Within your crispy punctured lid
What legendary dreams are hid.
Could we today, alas, alack,
Partaking of you, conjure back
Your innocence that time endears—
That festive kick of bygone years!

But woe is us! our dreams grow dense
On these your new ingredients.
You've taken on a Volstead hue,
You are the worst of dreams come true!
For now, we find you are possessed
Of demons we had never guessed.
They've smuggled into you bad booze,
Moonshine prescriptions, and home brews,
White buzzards and pink elephants,
And toads that do the simmy dance... .
You're not like mother used to make—
You're simply an amended fake!

Sophie E. Redford.

The Reason
Poke: How did Dullard get fired? A square bolt in a round hole?
Fun: No, a nut in the wrong place.

O Ladies!
O ladies, flashing on the silversheet,
We sometimes wonder at your affectation;
It takes so long to turn your head and meet,
The parties figuring in the situation.
Real life would make us swift and may-be rough,
To clear a matter up or call a bluff.

We marvel at the many maids marooned,
On lonely islands with the warm waves tossing;
Two lone survivors by ill-fortune ruined,
Herself and lover who assumes the bossing.
We feel so frequently are they thus caught,
Maroon insurance should be their first thought.

Thomas J. Murray.

Freudianism Up to Date
Psychoanalysis of the average man shows a definite love complex for that portion of the opposite sex who can render a cook stove symphony and a defensive reaction against the baby-grand performers.
"Ever been to Niagara Falls?"
"'Neve—never been married."
"Am Elusia a musical genius?"
"Am she? Boy, you oughta hear dat baby re-frain f'm singin'!"
Plugging Out

A Kentucky man seems to have found a relative of the city girl who thought it must be cold work harvesting the winter wheat.

The young woman of whom the Kentuckian tells is a native of Cincinnati, and was lately talking with him about tobacco and tobacco raising.

"I should like ever so much to see a tobacco field," she said, "especially when it is just plugging out."

---

Thought for Christmas

"Remember this at the counter rush—"
"Yes?"
"That a dollar will buy twice as much for a grateful man as for an ungrateful one."

---

Said and Done

The speedometer said sixty miles an hour.
The constable said it was ninety.
The natives said it was a crime.
He said it was the life.
His friends said it
With flowers.

---

A Color "Scream"

When Mabel, modishly attired,
Appears upon the scene,
Her skirt is fashion's latest word,
Her sport-hat shrieks of green.
Her belted coat is plaid so loud
You almost hear it shout,
Vociferous scarlet is the bag
She gaily swings about.

Her yellow gloves are so pronounced
In style they all but speak,
Her boots are crying out the fact
They're new because they squeak.
Her woolen scarf of vivid rose
Completes the color scheme—
It is no wonder people say
That Mabel is a scream.

---

The Bow Rondeau

A pretty bow, as ribbons go,
She wears her dainty chin below,
Its perfect moulding to declare;
Another in her dusky hair
Gleams with a tender glow.

And sometimes, when the breezes blow,
Their rough impertinence will show
Upon an instep, arched and fair,
A pretty bow!

At times on me she will bestow
A glance that makes my heart as snow
Before the sun. I long to share
The nearness of those bows that dare
To nestle close. I'd be, I trow,
A pretty beau!
La Touche Hancock.
The judge: Do you want a lawyer to defend you?
The judge: Do you want a trial by jury?
The judge: Well, what do want?
The bandit: N-no!
The bandit: N-no!
The bandit: Me—me muvver!
"Wal, young man, how old air ye? Old enough to vote?"
"No sir, I'm only eight—or I dare say it would be superfluous to say that you have long since attained your majority!"
"Yes, I know it is a lovely suit, Reginald, but are you sure it won't shrink?"
"Are you a criminal from choice, or were you led into it?"
"I can't remember when the profession didn't appeal to me, ma'am. I had a natural talent that way."

Drawn for Wayside Tales by Carl Anderson
Pruneville Personals

Mrs. Sloamy Saddler spanked little Claudy Saddler so viggerous before he went to bed last night that he opened up his prayer with, “Now I stand me up to sleep.”

At this writing, shirts are so cheap that Hash Beener is wearing two of them at once, to make up for lost time.

Gabe Saddler, who bought a box of candy the other day, and discovered a bit later that he had got back a counterfeit quarter in change, says it served him right for being in love!

Mitch Mudge, our weather prophet, had the corn-ache so bad yesterday that he went out and stole an umbrella some place.

According to Os Peachblow, the absent-mindest person in the world can concentrate while removing a porous-plaster from hisself.

Leslie Van Every.

The Luck of the Horseshoe

The grocer had a horseshoe nailed Above his gilded sign,
The teamster o’er his stable door Displayed no less than nine;
The blacksmith fitly hung aloft An old and rusty one,
The man that owned the new garage Alack, alas, had none!

The grocer’s till was tapped by thieves, Who shot him in the back; The teamster and the through express Collided on the track. The blacksmith drowned himself one day, And lo, it’s mighty funny, But that garage-man’s safe and sound And making lots of money!

Minna Irving.

Welcome Stranger!

After the first two divorces a woman gets to re-know Nevada very easily.

Automatic Prejudice

Judge: You say that you are in the publishing line. What were you doing with a loaded revolver on the highway at two a. m.?

Defendant: Making a magazine cover, your honor!
Restless upper: Say, George, go tell that dinged engineer to go to bed, can't you?
"What made you become a distiller?"
"Guess I had a taste for it, Mam."
Handy Indeed

Jones: The bandit has a pipe, these days!
Bones: Yes, about the only handicap he has today is the one he pulls over his eyes.

Put and Take

Orator: Yes, the only difference between capital and labor is—
Voice in the audience: Is that one bosses the works while the other works the bosses.

Excruciatingly Automatic

Promoter: Now, boys, this race is for the Colored Amateur Championship. The course is around Evergreen Cemetery, five laps.
Rastus: Can't be did, suh!
Promoter: Why not?
Rastus: 'Caze any time any cullud boy's feet gits near a cemete'y he spontaneously jines de puhfessional ranks!

A Trim Motto

The barber (eloquently, and razor aloft): Why, sir, the barber shop is—

The victim: Is the land of the fee and the home of the shave.

Ask Me, Ask Me!

Movie editor (stuck for synonymn, to dramatic critic): What's another name for "ingenue," Brown?
Brown: "Ingenuisance," of course.

A Condensed Victory

Mr. Binks: Better "lait" than ever, I suppose!

Original

Purchasing agent: Where do you get your yarns?
Textile salesman (modestly): Oh, I make them up myself.
DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW?

One of the objects in printing this letter is to show you what can be accomplished during your spare time. OZ BLACK is CARTOONIST for the LINCOLN STAR. He studied cartooning, under W. L. EVANS, when he was going to school and college. He only worked at his lessons during his spare moments. Sometimes it was four or five months between lessons.

If you like to draw don’t waste your time by drawing merely “fancy pictures.” You can have just as much fun learning how to draw REAL CARTOONS.

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How You Can Become a Successful Artist

DON J. LAVIN was for years art manager for the Chicago Tribune. Mr. Lavin is probably better posted on art department direction than any other man in America. He has been sought after by the biggest publishers in the country for director of their art departments. Among fellow artists Lavin is regarded as one of the most proficient illustrators with a pencil in the profession.

Your best assurance of success as an artist is to learn drawing from successful artists. If you are handy with a pencil you cannot develop your ability to better advantage than to learn the methods of such successful men as Lavin. Lavin teaches you, through the Federal Course in Illustrating and Cartooning, the essentials of successful newspaper drawing and art department work. Through his written lessons, as well as numerous charts and illustrations, Lavin explains to you the methods and secrets that made him known as the foremost newspaper art director in the country.

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Address..............................................................

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No person under 14 years of age is eligible for enrollment in the Federal School.
GEORGE HOLMAN RAY has recently taken a position with the St. Paul Dispatch in connection with his study in the school of Illustrating and Cartooning at Minneapolis. Mr. Ray was stationed at Crooked Bank Post, on the coast of the Hudson Bay, as a Cree Indian interpreter and store keeper, when he enrolled in the course, and worked out practical draftsmanship through correspondence in this far-away country, fitting quickly into practical application of his instruction upon his arrival at Winnipeg, where he soon became associated with Brigden's art department.

CARTER H. SUDDITH has recently completed the course in Illustrating and Cartooning, and is busily engaged in card writing and advertising design in Hyde Park, Chicago, recently receiving orders for twelve show cards to be placed in drug stores in different sections of the city. Portrait work and illustrating for advertising campaigns keep the young artist busy.

J. O. MITCHELL, of Montreal, recently completed $30 worth of work for one big firm, and reports two chalk talk performances recently given. He is preparing a new chalk talk program for professional performance. The accompanying portrait was taken in the drafting room of the concern with which he is employed as a mechanical draftsman. He finds the course in Illustrating and Cartooning helps him in new applications of his ability in draftmanship, adding a lucrative side issue.

CLIFFORD J. DOW, manager of the Mutual Telephone Company's station at Wailuku, Island of Maui, and telegraph editor and artist for the Maui News, finds his spare time fully employed in advertising illustration for business concerns in the Hawaiian Islands, and has had drawings published in Judge, Cartoons Magazine, and "QST," with reproductions in Judge copied in "Die Amsterdammer." He uses the Little Program of Division Three at Y. M. C. A. banquets and other entertainments in far-away Hawaii. "I never before believed the subject of practical draftsmanship could be so admirably covered, as in your textbooks and charts."

JAMES MIKUTA, pattern-maker for the Standard Steel Casting Company of Chicago, appears in recent issues of the Pattern-Makers' Journal, with interesting cartoons on the labor situation. He says: "Any success I achieve I will owe to the Federal School and its capable instructors. The textbooks and charts of Applied Cartooning and Illustrating form a reference library well worth the price of tuition for the whole course.

JESS FORD, Douglas, Kansas, won first prize for his "Fight Tobacco" poster, which is being exhibited in the state by the W. C. T. U., bringing the artist recognition in Kansas. The young artist is selling drawings, and says: "My luck is from close co-operation of Federal School advisors and instructors."

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   Beside me, gargling in the Wilderness
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