

ARGOSY

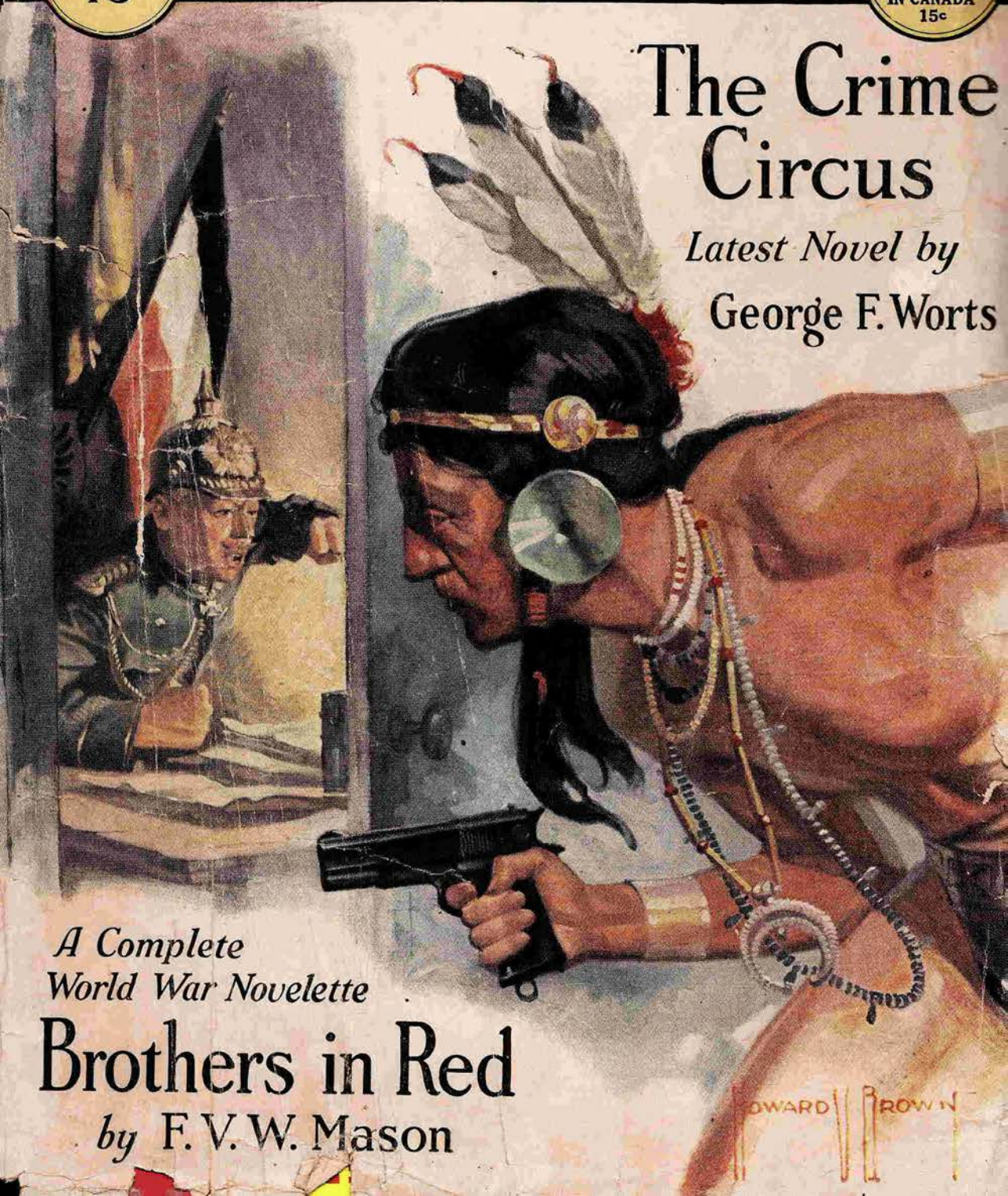
SEPT.
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

PRICE
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IN CANADA
15¢

The Crime Circus

Latest Novel by
George F. Worts



*A Complete
World War Novelette*

Brothers in Red

by F. V. W. Mason

EDWARD BROWN



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ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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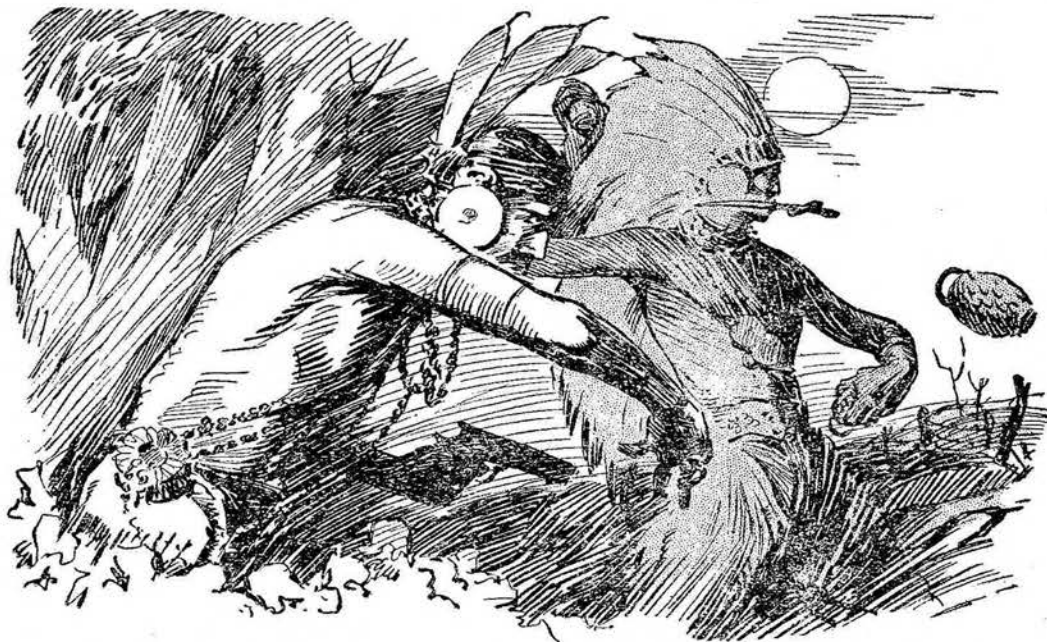
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ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 197

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1928

NUMBER 6



Spurr and his companion sent their grenades whistling among the men

Brothers in Red

*Whooping redskins in war-paint and feathers the Germans expected
—so it was up to the Yanks to accommodate*

By F. V. W. MASON

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.

"BY God," said Sergeant Spurr, "them frawgs is shore a frazzled lookin' bunch of hombres." He stood above the road gazing with absorbed interest at the steady

stream of retreating French from jet black eyes that gave to his gaunt, deeply-tanned face the look of a brooding eagle. A high, crooked nose, slightly twisted by the storms of a too turbulent youth, further strengthened the impression. He also had that aquiline faculty of seeing everything

without appearing to. In age he might have been anywhere between forty-five and sixty, for his thin hair was of an iron gray.

Every detail of the retreating troops told him a tale of defeat more vividly than could printed columns, and his brow clouded as he watched the battered, pitiful procession climbing from the valley amid a drifting pall of powdery white dust.

Spurr pushed his rabbit back from his broad forehead and turned to his companion.

"Look thar, Lance," he said, pointing to a staggering bearded figure in a tattered blue uniform which was towed along on its feet by a bit of rope from an overloaded *fourgon* wagon. "That buck's beat out, I allow. Them troops hev been in action two weeks an' more—jedgin' by their whiskers. Ain't seen a clean shaved walk-a-lot in the herd, barrin' that fat colonel awhile ago."

Corporal Lance turned his copper-hued visage away from the horizon toward the road, while his eyes rippled over the dejected mass on the highway like heat lightning on a July night. Deliberately he crossed his hands on the muzzle of his Springfield, and stood looking with splendid head outstretched and silhouetted against the deepening sky.

"Yeh, been in battle two suns gone," grunted the Indian at length. "Look at un wounds, all white by edge—no fresh blood."

Steadily the stream of men in blue trudged on, silently, doggedly, hollow eyes on the ground, with heavy feet moving in a dragging shuffle.

"Yep, and that's war as she is fit to-day," remarked Sergeant Spurr to his silent companion. "Not much like the hide-'n-go-seek we o' the Fifth Cavalry used to play with yore daddy, Red Lance. Now thar was a war what was a war—I allow I'm plumb feeble-minded to desert my smilin' acres to go gallivantin' back to a kind o' war I don't know nuthin' about—"

Corporal Lance turned an inscrutable face.

"When the war drum beat," he said, "then do the young braves most need the council of the old men—Johnny Spurr is a warrior wise with years—"

"Thanks, Lance," murmured the sergeant. "But I allow I'm too much of an old-timer for this kind o' war. Ain't no trackin' nor scoutin', nor fancy shootin'. Spect they let me keep my stripes account o' my service record," concluded the veteran bitterly.

"Let Johnny Spurr be patient," advised the Indian. "Before we dance about the smoking villages of the Hi-Nees there will come a need for the skill of Sergeant Spurr."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so," agreed the ex-rancher with a wry smile which belied conviction.

For some moments they stood on the high bank, which afforded an excellent view of the road as it stretched down from the wooded heights on which the solitary American battalion found itself to a wide, rolling plain that terminated on the distant horizon at the foot of some low, blue-tinted hills. It seemed as if all the armies of France were retiring along that firm, white thread of road, so crowded it was.

At length, tired of watching the disheartening spectacle, the two retired to the shade of a beech tree and, propping themselves up against its silvery trunk, eased their packs to the ground. About them, the men of Spurr's platoon sprawled in weird and ungainly positions as they smoked, napped, or gambled as suited their fancy. But the great majority slept.

"Eatin' or smokin'?" inquired Spurr, and tendered a frayed plug which he dislodged from his back pocket.

"Smokin'," grunted Lance, and, turning over on his stomach, proceeded to roll a cigarette, his back luxuriously turned to the warm June sunlight.

"The old sun shore does feel good, don't she?" observed the sergeant. "I

ain't been warm sence we put foot to this Gawd-forgot country nohow."

Lance passed a wiry hand over his thick blue-black hair and filled his broad chest until the buttons on the front of his O. D. blouse groaned and tugged at the restraining buttonholes.

"Too many clothes," he remarked as he settled back. "Injun no fight good with clothes on—keep muscles tight. No can breathe."

Between the tree trunks the waning sun glanced warmly, tinting the early summer leaves a bright emerald color, and somewhere near by a courageous thrush trilled softly. Through half-shut eyes Spurr watched a gorgeous red and black butterfly drift slowly past as though there were no war nearer than a thousand miles.

"Ain't he purty though," he murmured, half to himself. "Just like the little fellers t'home—by the bank of the Gray Hoss—I war a fool to leave it at my age."

Suddenly Lance sat up, his dark, glistening eyes wide as he watched the insect's flight. He pointed a muscular bronze hand at it.

"Bad medicine, Johnny Spurr," he said. "Red and black—color of the war path—to-morrow will be raised the war cry. I think many among us will take the great trail." His eyes, glancing up, rested on a great, white billowing cloud that lay torpid in the vivid blueness of the evening sky. "Our braves too anxious—no wise on the warpath."

With a studied carelessness, Spurr aimed at a discarded shoe some ten feet distant, and spat with deadly accuracy before answering.

"A word o' advice, Lance," he warned. "Don't air them sentiments promiscuous like—most o' these hombres with us are like the pup in his basket—all their troubles are afraid of 'em. 'Twon't do a mite o' good, and it'd make a sartin redskin o' my acquaintance as popular as a rattler at a church sociable."

Suddenly among the dull clank and clatter of accouterment from the highway came a new sound, like the puttering of a motor boat on a distant lake. Steadily the sound came nearer until a dispatch rider, heavily coated with dust, pushed his motor cycle through the swearing, sweating troops and came to a halt at the bottom of the bank with a squealing of brakes and the scuffling of heavy-soled shoes.

"Hey there, you sleepin' beauties," he shouted. "Where's the 106th?"

"Now you guess!" shouted a voice from the underbrush in a lisping falsetto. "We just love games in this outfit!"

Whereupon the dusty rider uttered several pungent remarks upon the speaker's family, looks, and private amusements, then addressed himself to Spurr, who sat with long, dust-covered legs stretched out before him, thoughtfully gnawing a stem of grass.

"Wal," he said at length, "thar's some o' the 106th down yonder," he jerked a thumb at the other side of the road. "Thar's some in Veetree le Chattoo and thar's a lot more in jail in Paris, and thar's some of us hyar. Which part was you lookin' for 'a pertickler?"

The man on the motor cycle blinked wrathfully and waved a gauntleted fist in Spurr's direction. "Don't be a damned fool," he snarled. "You're holdin' up important orders. I gotta find General Kent *pronto*. Snap out of it—where's he at?"

"Wal, why didn't you say so afore?" chided the sergeant. "He's yonder." Spurr pointed to a group of officers some distance from the roadside who clustered over a field map, and strained their eyes by the fading light.

"Chuck the shut-eye, Lance," said Spurr as he studied the general's face while the latter read the messenger's information. "The war chief's a-pullin' of his whiskers—I smell trouble in the air."

Suddenly he became conscious that

the officers were regarding him and his companion with more than ordinary interest. The suddenly suspicious veteran hastily reviewed his activities, official and otherwise, for the past two weeks. With apprehension he recalled a game of three-card monte at which a battery from Pennsylvania left most of their spare change.

Presently a spick and span orderly detached himself from the conclave and ran up to the beech tree.

"Report to General Kent at once," he said, a malicious grin on his face. "I reckon that little monte game you cleaned up has come home to roost."

Silently, Spurr arose, stowed his quid in a leathery cheek, and buttoned his blouse, while Lance smiled broadly and composed himself to further rest.

"No, you don't," said the orderly. "The general wants you too."

"Who, me?" Lance's eyes were mere slits above his high cheek bones as he looked up with an air of grave surprise.

"Yep, they ain't but one Corporal Lance in this outfit that I knows of. You're it, so get a wiggle on. I tell you the general's pulling his mustache."

Setting their caps straight, the two Westerners marched up to where the white-haired general stood writing busily in a little notebook. He ignored their neatly executed salutes, while he finished the dispatch, then looked up, his gray eyes hard and serious.

"I've a serious matter concerning you two men," he announced, "and I'll want no interruptions while I go into it."

Thirty years ago had Spurr learned that one may expect anything to happen in the armed forces of the United States, so he wasted no nervous energy in unhappy conjectures. He glanced across at Lance. The corporal stood, lithe body taut in the coarse olive drab uniform, with his finely chiseled features utterly impassive. He might have been made of the bronze his skin resembled.

"By golly," thought Spurr for the hundredth time. "That buck's a throwback to days afore the paleface diseases and firewater roined the Injun's health and morals. He's skeert, but he don't show his feelin's none."

For a moment the general spoke with a member of his staff, then stood looking from one to the other, his mouth grim and forbidding.

"You're Indian, of course," said Kent, addressing Lance.

Proudly the corporal lifted his head, looked the officer in the eyes, and spoke with grave dignity.

"Yes, sir, Red Lance, chief of the Osage Nation—"

A slow smile crossed the veteran officer's lips and he pulled thoughtfully at his sweeping gray mustache.

"Pure bred?"

Almost haughtily, the Indian made reply.

"Sir, since long before we penned in reservation, my people chiefs."

Suddenly the officer whirled on Spurr whose active mind was already searching for a reason for the sudden summons.

"And you?"

"Wal, sir, folks allow my great-granddaddy was Creek," replied Spurr on a sudden impulse. "I allow thar's where I get my Injun looks."

A thin, nervous-looking captain, wearing an H. Q. brassard stepped forward and raised a neatly gloved hand. He looked with disgust at the strange pair.

"As I said before, general, I think it's a great mistake sending these men," he said in high, almost querulous tones. "Every one knows you can't trust an Indian. They're no damn good any more—all rotters living off the Government. Besides—"

Quite abruptly the captain's voice died away as General Kent's hand fell like a hammer on his wrist. Anxiously Spurr noted that Red Lance's hand had strayed to the collar of his blouse. He braced himself for a spring.

"You may have learned a lot as a military attaché, Captain King," Kent was saying coldly, "but you haven't yet learned to keep your mouth shut on matters you don't know the first thing about. Now, you two men, come along with me and I'll settle this little matter with you."

Red Lance's hand dropped to his side. General Kent turned his back on the white-faced captain, and led off down the ravine to a clump of birches at the far end. A few yards behind him came Spurr and Lance, walking side by side, in subdued but earnest conversation.

"An' the next time, Lance," Spurr was saying savagely, "You reach for yore collar, I'll take that knife away from you. What if you'd speared that thar tenderfoot officer now?"

"One fool less," said Lance darkly, then, contritely, he put out a hand to his friend. "But Johnny Spurr is right—Lance, too, a fool. I came show white man Injun still good fighter. Osage brave still take un war path and kill un enemy."

Satisfaction twinkled in Spurr's eye at the corporal's change of tone:

"Yo're right, Lance, you cain't lift ha'ar when yer six foot underground." He lowered his voice. "Remember the ridge pole of yore lodge by the Gray Hoss don't sport no scalp locks none, the same being against the rooles of the Great Father, but hyar the game law's off, an' as I've told you afore, you can score all the coups you want. Not that it's joodicious to go spreading the tidin's about keerless like."

CHAPTER II.

A DESPERATE EXPEDIENT.

AT length the general halted and waited for the two straight, silently-moving figures to catch up, his arms folded above the triple row of decorations and campaign medals that covered his left pocket top. Then he

reached into a stained leather map case and unfolded a map which was crossed and recrossed with lines in various colors.

"Come over to this stone," he directed, "and I'll give you an idea of what you've got ahead." He looked up suddenly, his blue eyes narrowing. "That is—if you'll volunteer. I don't order men to go on forlorn hopes."

Shrewdly, Spurr studied his officer.

"I cain't live forever, sir," he said. "I'll go."

The general sat down, spreading the map on his lap, while Spurr peered over his shoulder and Lance squatted alongside, his jet black eyes fixed on Spurr.

Kent turned to Red Lance. "And you?"

The Indian laid a hand on Spurr's shoulder.

"Where goes Johnny Spurr, there goes Red Lance."

"Smoke if you want to," said Kent. "I'm not a stickler on etiquette. I guess the West does away with it."

He lit a pipe and commenced his instructions while red patches of the sunset climbed slowly up the snowy bark of the birches, and the smoke from the rolling kitchens settled lower and lower at the far end of the ravine. Very shortly darkness would descend, but on the road the struggling column ebbed steadily southward.

"It's a hundred to one shot," said Kent, "and you'll be doing miracles if you get the job half done. Now you know. There's still time to change your minds. How about it?"

But the ex-rancher and his companion remained silent, their eyes on the map.

"Men," commenced the veteran, "as we all can see, the French have been badly beaten. They're not to blame, they've been fighting a heavy rear guard action for two weeks and the poor devils have suffered casualties that would stagger the unbelief of Satan. In a word, they're all in. No reserves, no ammunition, no spirit, no nothing.

They're at the end of their tether. News has just come to brigade headquarters that the French are being driven back so fast that the rest of our division won't have time to move into position before the enemy attack."

Spurr stood up and slipped his hands in his back trousers pocket while his eyes picked out, with the skill of long years of experience, the outstanding landmarks on the map.

"In fact, they're so badly disorganized," went on the general in a voice which did not attempt to disguise his anxiety, "that their retreat will become a disastrous rout, should the enemy attack in force. And," his tone became even more grave, "we have positive information that the German high command has given orders for an attack at four thirty-to-morrow morning—"

Calmly the sergeant's voice interrupted, "And if they do attack, it's hash for breakfast?"

"Precisely," said General Kent. "Hash, most unpleasant hash, for breakfast. Their high command knows our main body isn't in position yet. Consequently they're doin' everything they can to put over that smashing blow before the rest of us come up."

Red Lance squatted on his heels, apparently incapable of understanding the import of Kent's rapid flow of speech. His eyes were shut like those of a cat, while the last parting rays of sunlight put living colors into his bronzed, savage face, with high lights flashing on the ridge of his high cheekbones.

Spurr's brow wrinkled as he stooped and plucked a fresh blade of grass. Then he addressed his superior.

"Wal, now, ef the general don't mind, I got a idear," he drawled. "They's nigh onto a thousand o' us Yanks here ahaid o' the rest. Why cain't our bucks throw a little bluff—a raid and mebber score some coups that will throw the fear o' God into the Heinies. We-all jest might stall them hostiles off long enough—"

But General Kent shook his tired gray head impatiently and dug his boot heel into the tender new grass at his feet.

"It's a good idea, sergeant," he said, "but it won't work. Trust the German Intelligence to foresee a stunt like that."

"Why, what 've they done?"

"A very clever piece of work; they've built up an impression, a real belief, among the men in the ranks that there are practically no Americans in this part of France. They've gone even further—" Kent suddenly looked up at the brown old veteran who stood gazing earnestly at the map. "Do you know how the plain German soldier pictures an American?"

Spurr shook his head slowly. "Shore I cain't, sir, but I presoom it's considerable oncomplimentary."

"They think we're all like him." General Kent thrust a brown finger at Red Lance, who only rocked on his heels and blinked. "Uniformed in paint and feathers, like the old-style redskins you fought in your young days, I expect."

Reproachfully Spurr stared at his general.

"Wal, sir," he said quietly, "I'm an old-timer and I'm kinder slow on some matters, I know, but I ain't too old 'or slow not to know when I'm being made a fool of."

His deep-set eyes cold and chilling, General Kent glanced up, but as he caught the hurt expression on Spurr's leathery face, his expression softened.

"Stop it, sergeant, stop that kind of talk," he snapped. "I'm not making a fool of you. I admit it sounds ridiculous, but the power of propaganda is great, and only when this damned war is over, will we ever realize how great it is."

"Propaganda, sir, what's that?" asked Spurr vaguely.

"Never mind. Now listen carefully to what I'm going to say." Kent looked away down the ravine to where the

battalion was making ready for night-fall. "Mind you, the fate of this particular division and another rests on your shoulders—forty thousand lives, and—and—God knows it's a terrible responsibility for you to assume, but it's got to be risked."

Slowly Spurr's tired old shoulders straightened themselves under his ill-fitting O. D. blouse, and he raised his hand in the old-fashioned army salute, the salute that was in vogue when Geronimo and the Prophet figured in the headlines.

Quickly, with the same salute, Kent returned it. A ghost of a smile twitched his gray mustache as he said: "I was just a green shave-tail fresh from the Point when that salute went out. Guess we're both old timers—I prefer those days when war was something beside scientific wholesale murder."

He pulled himself up.

"Well, here's the plan. It's essential that the Germans, the plain soldiers, be convinced that the Americans have really arrived on this front. It would badly damage their morale."

He leveled his eyes at those of the old plainsman. "To do as you suggest and send the battalion over would do no good. Why? Because the officers would tell their men that these were English, Canadians, and Australians dressed in American uniforms, and the men would believe them; they've been trained to. But if two or three men, men who can do real stalking and scouting, could get through into the German lines and let themselves be seen as American Indians in war paint and feathers, it would be the most effective kind of counter-propaganda. No power on earth could stop the German masses from realizing that the Americans were in the lines. They'd see with their own eyes and no amount of lying on the part of their officers could shake their belief. It'd raise hell with their morale. Do you see?"

As the general revealed the import of his plan, and its possibilities presented themselves in Spurr's crafty brain, he suddenly leaped in the air, cracked his heels together and let out a blood-freezing yell that brought the somnolent Red Lance springing to his feet, knife in hand.

"Comanche yell, wasn't it?" grinned Kent as Spurr, suddenly abashed, flushed painfully. "Had the real old ring, but don't do it again; you'll start a young panic among the French. I see," he added dryly, "that you've got my idea."

"Yes, sir," said Red Lance promptly, and sank once more to his heels.

"I think three men will be enough," continued Kent with a glance at his map. "One to stay behind and act as relay—you two to do the real work. I've sent Lieutenant Jones to find another man who looks like an Indian. Meanwhile study this map. A single error will mean disaster, so get the terrain in your mind, and for God's sake, get it right!"

Obediently, Spurr gazed at the map which was already growing familiar. Kent pulled a lead pencil from his pocket.

"See that line? It's the road below us, and this is where we are—that's Courcelles just south of us. Now what's this?"

"The battle line, sir," replied Spurr promptly.

"Right. You'll try to get into the German lines near this old farmhouse. Their first line should be behind the railroad shown here. Your job should be easier now that we're out of the trench systems. You'll have some cover, wheat, young trees and shrubbery, most of the way to Rubescourt."

"How fur is it?" queried the sergeant.

"About three miles, I should say," estimated the general after a hurried reference to the scale. "Avoid showing yourselves until you're well inside the German lines. It'll be hard, as

the enemy is heavily concentrated all the way along your route.

"By the way, they believe an Indian can do almost miraculous things in the way of getting by unseen. They also think of them as utterly merciless, terribly strong and enduring. But one thing." His voice became hoarsely grave. "Don't get caught. I don't know what they'd do to you—and afterward you'd get shot without further arguments. So when it comes to shooting, shoot first and last. About your shooting I'm not worrying; I see three bad cuts on your revolver butt."

Kent felt a sudden sense of confidence in the alert young-old man who stood there so quietly listening to words which would have made ninety-nine men in a hundred gasp in fear. If he failed, as there was every reason to believe he would in such a hopeless undertaking, it would not be the fault of Sergeant Spurr, but of odds too great for human powers to overcome.

"Now comes the almost impossible part of the whole damn thing." General Kent's face loomed white in the gathering darkness. "It's imperative that you capture a high ranking officer, a major or colonel at least—you can tell them by the heavy braid shoulder straps and their nasty manners."

"I allow, sir, I couldn't mistake their manners none—" Spurr broke off short as Kent's eyes met his.

"How you'll get him back I won't pretend to tell you. For the life of me I don't see how you can even get into the enemy lines. I know I couldn't, and I'm no tenderfoot. They've got their whole area swarming with pickets and patrols.

"It's a tough assignment, and I've picked you and Corporal Lance here as the men best fitted. One of you's an honest-to-God redskin and you say you're part Indian. You can both go silently where the ordinary man would make noises like a skeleton on a tin roof. Further, you know how to take

cover and you know how an Indian should act. Stop at nothing to be convincing."

CHAPTER III.

THE THIRD INDIAN.

SOME three hours later, a French artillery captain, straying from the road, put his head into a tumbled-down cow-shed not far from the ridge on which was bivouacked the American battalion. As his eyes pierced the gloom, he stared an instant, then with a wail of frantic terror turned and bolted headlong away from that abode of demons. Inside the shed a Comanche brave lifted his ochre and black-striped face and laughed until the long braids of his blue-black hair swung to and fro.

"Shore now, Lance," chuckled Spurr, "that Frawg's like to hit Paris afore dawn ef he keeps at the rate he was burnin' the sod. Hold still now, ye varmint, I aim to paint this Thunder-bird on yore left breast plumb ferocious-lookin'."

Corporal Red Lance worked his naked shoulders happily, causing a triple row of bears' claws—made of white pine—to clatter pleasantly about his black and red painted neck. From the tip of his moccasins, hastily improvised from an old leather duffel bag, to the crest of his gorgeous war bonnet, his muscles rippled free and unhampered. It was a happy moment for Red Lance.

"Johnny Spurr looks as did my father when he took the war trail against the Utes," he smiled admiringly, as the horribly-painted sergeant bent over him to apply the finishing touches. Under his skillful fingers, the Osage's features became a mask of savage ferocity dimly seen in the feeble rays of a smoking lantern. The plainsman himself was clad only in an improvised breech clout wound about his thin, muscular waist, which had been stained

to a deep reddish brown by the liberal application of leather dye.

Squatting on an up-ended grenade case, General Kent and another officer watched the preparations curiously, glancing occasionally at their watches.

"Now, where in hell is Jones with that other man?" General Kent fumed. "I ought to have known better than to send that misbegot chump—" He threw a glance over to the two men now almost finished with their preparations and conceded that their get-up was as near perfect as the conditions would allow. For a moment the veteran felt himself carried back to those days in Arizona when Geronimo's savages were harrying the countryside. It seemed hard to believe that all this was taking place in civilized France.

"What an eye for art you've got, sergeant," said the other officer. "I'd have the willies if you jumped at me."

Modestly Spurr readjusted three tall eagle feathers—wrenched from a protesting farmer's gander—among the black coils of the wig—borrowed from a Y. M. C. A. troupe in the back area—and stepped into the dull light of the lantern. Beside him towered Corporal Lance, his black and red striped features ghastly and weird, as heart-chilling and ominous a buck as ever caused a frontiersman to pray that his priming was dry. On the Osage's broad chest rose and fell a breastplate, improvised of willow twigs and beads filched from the library lamp of a nearby château. Like two hawk-faced, blood-thirsty braves from a Remington painting the pair stood with bowie knives glinting in their hands, but with very modern automatics and hand grenades in the fringed and painted medicine bags that dangled from their belts.

On the threshold was heard a step and Kent rose to his feet with a murmured "Thank God, Jones at last!"

The door opened to admit an anxious-eyed lieutenant who stepped in and saluted.

"Sir," he began, "I've combed the whole battalion for something that looks like an Indian—"

General Kent's eyes flashed fire as he stepped forward and thundered: "Don't you dare tell me you've wasted three hours for nothing!"

With a backward step, the lieutenant held up a warding hand.

"No, sir, I—I—I found one. He's outside."

Crisply the man was ordered in.

"So hilf me Gott!" whined a voice outside. "I aindt done noddings!"

"Get in there!" A stern voice and the sound of a boot being lustily applied preceded the appearance of a short, round-shouldered little man whose ears, heavy lips and curling black locks proclaimed him a child of Shem. There was nothing aboriginal about him but his nose. It was the nose of an Indian; like the beak of a proud and fearless eagle, it swept down in a majestic curve.

"Oi! Oi!" shrilled the newcomer as he caught sight of Spurr and Lance. "Is this a cigar store yet?"

Struggling to hide his mirth, the general outlined his plans to the newcomer. This done he whirled on the unhappy private who snapped to rigid attention.

"What's your name?" asked Kent, while the Israelite brooded darkly on the disaster which had befallen him.

"Moe Slafsky, sir. Slafsky's Splendid Suitinks," he said with a determined effort to keep his hands at his sides. "Please, mister—sir, I mean. Dun't esk I should go. It aindt right. No, I aindt going—I—I owe some moneys. Would you make of me a cheater?" With out-thrust palms, Slafsky pleaded, his small eyes rolling unhappily about the shed. "Say no and I'll make the general the finest uniform in the A. E. F. Wouldn't you please say no?"

"It's too late to get some one else," growled Kent to the lieutenant. "So he'll just have to go."

While the private, stunned by his fate, submitted limply, the guards, as one man, fell upon the unhappy Moe, and in a trice they bereft him of his clothing.

"Oi!" he wailed. "Mein pents? I vont go widdoud mein pents. Please, Mister General, couldn't I just keep mine pents, I'd catch cold—"

The general smilingly shook his head as a layer of shoe stain was applied to Slafsky's milk-white skin.

"You can leave him to wait just inside the German lines," suggested Kent. "If you and Lance don't return by four o'clock he's to come back and report to me. "We'll know you've been captured and act accordingly, God help us!" With a sigh of deep anxiety Kent dropped to the grenade case again.

A kindly soul produced a flask of cognac, powerful and stimulating even by the teaspoonful, and prevailed upon the still reluctant "Indian" to take a long pull. "It'll keep you warm," he said.

Lieutenant Jones swore. "What'll we do? There's no wig for him. He can't go over with a brakeman's haircut like that."

"Then I aindt goink?" Hope welled in Moe Slafsky's city-loving breast. He snatched up his trousers tenderly.

"You kin roach his haid like a Greek's. They don't sport ha'r none whatsoever," suggested Spurr heartlessly. With the aid of horse-clippers from an abandoned artillery caisson, the fell deed was done. Only a ridge running from front to back was left.

Moe reached out a shaking hand for the flask of cognac and took another long pull.

"Hey, you! Lay off'n that," cried the owner. "You'll be tighter'n a new pair o' boots!"

A strange assurance appeared in Slafsky as the last of the war paint was being applied. He looked loftily about the shed and toyed with the neck-lace which dangled from his neck.

"Vell, I'll go," he said. "Vy not?"

Ve Jews vas always scrappers. Look at Joshua, David and—lots of others!" In his round little eyes a belligerent gleam appeared, and, for an instant, his face seemed almost warlike. He mouthed savagely. "Vell, eef it comes to skinnink," he proclaimed with a flourish of his trench knife, "I'm as good a skinner as the next. Vy not? I've been skinnink peoples all mine life—and Goimans? Lead me to dem!"

CHAPTER IV.

INTO HOSTILE TERRITORY.

THE broad undulating valley of the Matz River lay strangely still and silent after the rumble and crash of artillery and the whining screams of shells which had shattered the daylight hours. Overhead a timid, icy moon shone forth unexpectedly now and again from behind clouds. At such time rifle shots would stab the stillness as some lurking patrol spied another in the sudden light.

A warm wind, smelling of dusty grain, blew gently down the valley and cooled the surburned faces of the troops which now lay exhausted, waiting for another dawn which would launch them again at each other's throats.

It was exactly twelve o'clock when Spurr led his companions out into the waving wheat which hid the opposing armies. Like drifting shadows he and Red Lance made their way, but Moe, his teeth chattering like a drummer's "bones," made sorry going of it. If there was a shell case to trip over, he found it. If there was a loose stone to dislodge, Moe's foot found it unerringly. He made more noise than a moose in a windfall.

"The fat cow makes the noise of a regiment," hissed Red Lance. "Let us leave him."

But Spurr shook his head. "We don't take him much further. We're already inside their lines."

Then to Spurr's horror Moe sat down and in perfectly audible tones announced that he was going back.

"I should go on?" he asked of the twinkling stars. "No, I coodn't. I don't vant to be a hero, and besides mine life insurance is run out. My poor Reba! Oi! Oi!" Like a turning rattlesnake, the Indian writhed back and firmly Red Lance's thumb and forefinger met in Moe's windpipe, while a long, thirsty blade glittered before his bulging eyes.

Like a jet of steam escaping from a valve, the Indian's voice whispered in his ear.

"To-night I take five scalps—I have sworn it. You come quiet or yours is first. You come?" He grasped the trembling little man's scalp lock and the keen point of his bowie pricked the skin under Moe's left ear. With alacrity Moe changed his mind.

"Soch a *schlimiel*—he should be on a reservation yet," breathed Moe to himself as the little column proceeded, crawling on hands and knees among the tall yellow ears whose tops swayed gently in the night wind.

Finally Spurr halted and signed to Lance to join him.

"Hear 'em?"

"Um," agreed Lance. "Five, meb-be six, hostile to right and ahead. Many hostile further away to left—"

"We-all's right among 'em so go careful like," breathed the sergeant and smoothed the rustling feathers of the tufted war bonnet which swayed on Red Lance's head. "After we pass that fust line we can leave Shakin' Bull behind—even *he* can find his way back."

"Ah-h-h cho-o-o! Ah-h-h cho-o-o!" Twice Moe sneezed thunderously, while Spurr's keen ears caught a diversity of sudden small sounds. The scrape of a boot on the ground, the "snick" of a rifle bolt drawn cautiously back and the faint clicking of accouterment.

"Sorry, gents," said Moe in clear

apologetic tones. "A straw tickled mine nose. I always sneeze ven—"

In the midst of his explanations, a black shape lobbed through the air and fell with a thud into the wheat a yard or so distant. From it came a sound which reminded Spurr of the hiss of an angry black snake. With the speed of released springs he and Lance scuttled forward and fell flat among the wheat ears as a tremendous explosion lit up the scene with a flash of an orange-colored light which revealed every detail of the battered terrain. A wandering puff of wind brought a rank, acrid smell which made Spurr's nostrils crinkle.

Hard upon the roar of the bursting potato-masher grenade, a sudden burst of machine gun and rifle fire rippled like the clatter of a giant riveting machine. Bullets sighed and whined about the two scouts as they lay flat to the earth. Cut stalks even fell athwart their naked backs, but as the fire slackened they were already worming their way forward with a speed almost uncanny.

"I allow the loud-mouth's took the big jump," murmured Spurr when the noise died away. "I can't hear him movin' none."

Several times as they crawled forward on all fours they passed corpses, German and French. The dead were indescribably noisome, so hideously bloated by their long exposure to the hot summer sun that a sickening stench wrenched at Spurr's stomach.

"Ugh," sniffed Red Lance when they left a particularly malodorous pile behind. "It a bad fight when souls of the dead wait so long for rest—"

"Wal, so fur so good," murmured the sergeant as they lay in the shadow of the wheat. Before them like a long bare wall lay a railroad right of way, raised to a considerable height above the earth level. On its crest a twisted mass of ties and rails made a gigantic hurrah's nest and a dangerous place to pass.

"Johnny Spurr—"

"Yes?"

Red Lance's lithe figure loomed close, the feathers of his war bonnet swaying forward like leaves in a wind. The moonlight glinted on his naked back, picking out the vertebræ with subdued high lights as he dropped beside the plainsman.

"When cross trail of iron horse, sky be behind. If hostiles not blind as gray owls in daytime, they see us when we pass over."

"Uh, huh."

"Well, then, Johnny Spurr, if Red Lance get hit, go on. The war chief has said we hold spirits of twenty thousand braves on our knife points—their ghosts torment us if fail."

Silently Spurr grasped the Indian's hand.

"Yep, that's our duty," he replied.

"And ef I gits plugged, jest you trot along and leave old John to sing his death song alone."

Like two drifting shadows, the raiders darted up the side of the embankment just as the moon reappeared from a momentary blotting out. To the sergeant, whose thumping heart seemed to beat like a drum, it appeared impossible that they passed unnoticed. But they gained the shelter of the uprooted rails, and Spurr was breathing a trifle more easily as they crouched among the splintered ties. He glanced over the other side, and his heart stopped dead.

"Look at that," he breathed, and Red Lance stiffened at his side.

Just below them, not fifteen feet away, was a mass of enemy infantry sprawled on the ground. Like corpses they seemed, as they lay scattered in groups and clumps waiting for the dawn of a day which they believed would end in a final triumph. The night wind drifting from the sleeping troops brought the acid smell of sweaty bodies, long unwashed, and the bitter tang of musty leather. So it was not the mirage it appeared to be.

Spurr and Lance froze in their tracks like hiding rabbits. Slowly Spurr's eye ranged up and down the embankment and noted that some twenty or thirty yards away a tongue of shrubbery reached almost to the right of way. But at intervals sentries marched back and forth, their heavy helmets hiding their faces in darkness.

To reach that tongue seemed utterly impossible when the sergeant realized that he and his companion would have to crawl all the way along the skyline twisting in and out like weasels among the ties and rails. He groaned mentally as he touched his companion and pointed to the shrubbery.

Infinitely patient, they inched their way along the top, craning at the sky, watching for a friendly cloudlet to veil their progress, then flattening with every nerve taut when the mercilessly white moonlight flooded ridge and plain again. Only men born to the forest could have begun such a stalk, and even their almost inhuman skill could not avail the inevitable betrayal to which their uncertain surroundings committed them. When they were within twenty feet of their goal a tie, delicately balanced on another, scraped against Spurr's naked shoulder, and fell with a resounding crash. With the sound the Americans flattened to the cinder-strewn ground and lay half visible in the moonlight.

"*Wer ist dort?*"

"*Wer ist dort?*" challenged a hoarse voice as the men nearest the raiders awoke, snatched up rifles and peered wildly about. Like a disturbed ant heap, the sleeping Germans roused into activity while the skin of Spurr's side crept in anticipation of the first singing bullet, which would put an end to their desperate adventure.

"*Wer ist dort?*" repeated the voice, higher pitched and with more insistence. And the sergeant's heart leaped as he caught the familiar sound of a rifle bolt snicking as it was drawn back. A wild thought seized him. Perhaps

he and Red Lance could spring up and, with a headlong dash, gain the shelter of the wheat on the side towards the Allied lines. But the thought of General Kent's cold gray eyes boring into his held the plainsman in place.

Three soldiers, their rifles held ready before them, advanced cautiously to the edge of the embankment and peered up at the top. Spurr could see their white faces, ghastly in the half light with pot-shaped helmets looming black.

A long moment they craned their necks, seeming to stare directly at him.

After a colloquy carried on in hoarse whispers, the three retraced their steps. With the sound of their feet crunching away the blood commenced once more to circulate in Spurr's veins. He glanced out of the corner of his eye at the Osage and made out the outline of his figure lying motionless among the rails. Not even the skin over his ribs moved.

An officer of some sort, with drawn automatic, came marching up to the sentry who had given the alarm. Spurr could see it plainly as the moonlight glinted on the short wicked-looking barrel.

He spoke hurriedly with the sentry, and also advanced to the bank, looked up and turned back with a bitter curse.

"*Der Dummkopf!*" he snarled sleepily. "*Was Sie hörten war der Wind spielend mit dem Laub.*"

While hope welled in the sergeant's painted breast, the Germans lay down again, and dropped off to sleep one by one as the sentry resumed his post, tramping methodically up and down. But he scanned the top of the embankment suspiciously for a long while.

At last the moon disappeared behind a large cloud, enabling the raiders to gain a position immediately above the point of shrubbery. But, as Red Lance pointed out, there was some fifteen feet of bare ground to be covered before they could gain the shelter of the underbrush.

For a moment they halted. Then Red

Lance laid a warning hand on his companion's back and held up a large stone. Expressively his eyes wandered to a spot back of the sentry. Spurr, divining his purpose, nodded.

With a sudden heave the Indian sent the stone hurtling far off so that it fell among the sleeping men, and struck one, who awoke with a shrill cry of alarm. At once the sentinel whirled about, peering in the direction whence the stone had landed, while Spurr and Lance glided down the bank and plunged into the grateful shadows of the rustling alders.

From then on, their progress was more rapid, and they made good time, darting from shadow to shadow, and from tree to tree, threading their way among the sleeping hordes of gray-coated enemies.

Once they lay motionless, while a file of machine gunners, grunting and sweating under their heavy Maxims, trudged sullenly by, not three feet away, and once a mongrel cur, spared from slaughter, yapped shrilly.

CHAPTER V.

THE RAID.

THEY had gone on for perhaps an hour when the Indian halted and sniffed.

"There is a hostile village ahead," murmured Red Lance at length. "I smell smoke."

Then the moon came out and showed a pile of ruins not far to their right. A white road led into it.

"Wal, unless my figgerin's bad," whispered Spurr, "that metropolis should sport the moniker of Coorcells. Thar's whar we pays our fust visit and attempts to inculcate into them ignorant hostiles a real and lastin' fear o' the hombre Americano. Sheer left out'n that burg after we've made our raid, and we'll go on to Touzes, and, ef all goes *bueno*, we'll head into Roobescoort fer to round up that

colonel gent the Big Chief was askin' fer."

Skirting the deserted road, they gained the edge of the town, finding it to be utterly shattered and apparently tenantless. But the smell of wood smoke pervaded the crumbled, blackened piles of masonry and belied its seeming desertion.

Red Lance glided up to Spurr and pointed to a shell-racked house standing on the outskirts of the village, and together they commenced a cautious advance in its direction. As they came closer, their ears caught the sound of voices singing in discord and exuberantly mingled with the scrape of a violin. The tune had the unrestrained, rudely sensual rhythm of a peasant bacchanal.

Darting from doorway to doorway, Red Lance led the way until they crouched outside the house from which came the sounds. After a moment's search, Red Lance found a small crack in the wall. As he peered in, he sharply caught his breath and drew his knife, but Spurr clutched his hand. Placing his eye to the crack in the crumbling masonry, the sergeant saw that the rear end of the cellar had been badly hit. Quite a large shell-hole yawned blackly. Through it men were continually passing in and out, their arms filled with dusty, long-necked bottles.

A small fire blazed on the centre of the floor and about it capered a trio of Germans, very drunk and uncertain, their heavy hob-nailed boots clattering on the stone paving as they executed some kind of fantastic farandole, with a dozen or more grinning blond-haired giants clapping their hands in accompaniment. The firelight glinted redly on their features, as with hoarse cries of pleasure they upended countless long bottles of pillaged wine, and flung the empty ones against the opposite wall with a crash.

Along another wall were stacked their rifles and ammunition belts, laid

aside for the more complete enjoyment of the carouse.

Spurr studied the conditions with grim pleasure, but his angular green-tinted chin shut like a locking safe as he caught sight of three or four terrified peasant women crouching in a far dark corner. They were sobbing fearfully as the fire flared higher and the dance grew more wild.

Signaling his companion to follow, Spurr led the way around to the back of the ruined house and crouched in the bushes. He could hear Red Lance's excited breathing as he peered at the surrounding ruins. There seemed to be no life or movement save in the cellar.

"Now fer it, Lance," he breathed, and drew his revolver, meanwhile sheathing the bowie. "I want you to hop right into the middle o' that *in-haska* and let out Old Thunder Crow's war whoop as you light. Let it out like the fightin' Osage chief you are, an' give 'em the hell they deserves. I'll bump off a few from the doorway.

"But remember, we don't aim to kill 'em all. Leave a few to pass about the glad tidin's that the Americanos have hit the war trail. Split the wind fer Touzee when I whistle."

"They a low tribe who play with squaws before the fight is won," muttered Red Lance as he settled the war bonnet squarely on his head.

A wandering ray of firelight struck the Indian's horribly painted face and turned it into a demon's mask as Red Lance drew back his lips from the whiteness of his teeth. His muscles bunched, and with widespread arms he launched himself down into the cellar. He landed at the edge of the fire, causing a thick cloud of sparks to roar upward.

"E-e-e-yah-yah-h-h! E-e-e-yah-yah-yah-h-h-h!" His war whoop was ear-piercing in quality and volume. Then in the darkness outside Spurr threw back his head and, cupping his hands, uttered a heart-stilling cry.

"Yah-yah-e-e—" Spurr strained his throat in giving the call which in his younger years had caused the flesh to creep on his back.

With flashing bowie poised aloft Red Lance stood a moment in the full glare of the fire, revealed in full savage splendor. Like autumn leaves in a wind the long feathers of his red-tipped war bonnet rose and fell amid the swirling smoke before the astonished eyes of that terrified assemblage.

The revelers stood paralyzed, their mouths gaping stupidly, while wine slobbered from their lips and trickled down over their unbuttoned uniforms. The bronze giant seemed in their stimulated imaginations to be the very incarnation of horror.

Pandemonium broke loose and the air was rent by wails of utter and bestial fright like a haltered horse shrieking when stalked by a cougar. Red Lance's gleaming blade fell, flashed up red-hued, crashed down and rose again, while his shrill war whoop railed like the triumphant pæan of a fiend.

Standing in the doorway, Spurr aimed, fired, aimed, fired with a deadly accuracy that toppled figure after figure sprawling limply among the scattered ashes.

A terrible cry arose. "*Die Amerikaner! Die Amerikaner! Sind hier!*"

A stream of fugitives bolted for the door. Spurr grappled with a fleeing giant whose breath was rank with wine. With a quick twist the sergeant sent him reeling sidewise, with a jerky stream of blood pouring from his side.

Footsteps were racing about in the dark, while hoarse shouts sounded from all quarters. A shot rang out from the darkness as a bullet whacked against the stonework an inch above Spurr's topmost feather.

"Time to git," panted the sergeant to himself. "That posse'll be mountin' up *pronto*." Putting his fingers in his mouth he blew a shrill whistle which carried into the mael-

strom of sounds within. Listening anxiously, Spurr could hear the panting cries of fighting men, the pitiful whimpering of the women as they crouched along the wall, all mingled with curses and screams of the wounded as Red Lance's knife flickered to and fro.

Again Spurr whistled and ducked as a spurt of orange flame came from behind the shadowy ruins.

"Keerist!" he swore. "That skelp-hungry Injun 'll be the death o' us both."

Just as he was deciding to carry on the mission alone a dark shape glided out of the cellar and clutched the sergeant's arm.

"Three!" whispered the Indian exultantly as he crouched beside Spurr.

Putting his mouth close to his companion's ear, Spurr gave instructions and started off again with that peculiar gliding step which is so soundless. And a moment later a clump of pine trees hid them from the sight of the excited and frightened enemies, who pounded noisily about, firing at every fancied moving shadow.

Like the peal of triumphant bells the word "*Amerikaner! Amerikaner!*" resounded in Spurr's ear. Truly they had raised a storm, a storm which must surely engulf them ere they carried out their mission in full. Spurr was too old a soldier not to know that two men cannot attack and arouse an enemy army corps with impunity, no matter how skillful the two may be in the art of escape. Ten thousand against two are long odds, and bitterly the sergeant thought of the perilous miles that separated them from their lines.

Taking cover from tree to tree and ruin to ruin, they followed swiftly along the course indicated by the radium-lighted arrow of Spurr's compass.

"Shore now, Lance, I nigh left you back there," cautioned Spurr. "You better jump plenty *pronto* when I whistle."

Corporal Lance's voice was strangely thick as he replied: "Me get first chance to take un warpath. So easy kill these hostiles, no can stop."

Threateningly, the sergeant turned on his companion. "Now listen, son. I'm chief on this war party and I'll raze you fervent if you don't do as I say. Our lives is too durned important to-night to be frittered away for a frivolous lot o' skelps." His tone became serious. "Onderstand now, Lance, we've got a dummed small chance o' coming through with our ha'r as it is. Don't make it worse."

Red Lance only grunted and a new anxiety arose in Spurr's mind as he saw that blood lust inherent in the Indian's nature was pushing sense and obedience out of the red man's mind.

Their progress toward Touzai was unimpeded save for a halt at the edge of a road, while long, clattering columns of artillery and munitions moving up for the next day's advance caused them to lie doggo in the weeds of the roadside.

Finally the last bumping caisson, with its nodding driver, rumbled by, allowing the impatient Americans to dart over the rutted highway, lying white and dusty in the fading moonlight.

They had gone perhaps half a mile when they commenced to encounter numbers of infantry sleeping among the tall trees of a little wooded area,

There were hundreds and hundreds of them. Spurr estimated, with their limbs sprawled in all directions. Snore resounded from every side. Through the edge of the forest he caught a glimpse of Touzai standing white walled and apparently unharmed about a quarter of a mile distant.

Carefully recalling the map he had seen unfolded on General Kent's knees, Spurr meditated a moment.

"Look hyar, Lance," he said. "We'll give these hostiles another little scare, then we'll bulge to the left o' Touzee—they houses is still health-

ful and I allow they're full o' Germans."

The Osage drew his knife again, while a passing moonbeam revealed a look of savage anticipation on his features.

"Shall we use bombs this time?" queried the savage.

Spurr nodded so that the three feathers in his back hair seemed to stab the stars.

"Yep, we-all better wait till the moon comes out agin—then heave them bombs and screech!" He laid a horny hand on the corporal's shoulder. "Now mind what I said, don't get skelp loco or we'll be took—an' that means a pertickler introduction to a flock o' Mauser rifles. We can't get too gay this time. They's a sight too many o' the enemy about."

"Ugh!" replied Red Lance, and fished a couple of hand grenades from his medicine bag, meanwhile holding his bowie in his mouth.

With a heart which had not beat so wildly since the time he had been a green recruit watching Red Cloud's warriors galloping forward, Sergeant Spurr wrenched the pin from his grenade and held the lever tight with his fingers.

"You take that there covey over yonder," whispered he, and leveled a long forefinger at a clump of trees where the ground was black with sleeping forms.

Just then the moon peered out of a cloud, and glinted on the helmets, rifles, bayonets, and faces of the sleeping horde. With a long heave Spurr and his companion sent their grenades whistling among the men. When the missiles burst with a thunderous roar, spurting clouds of whistling fragments high in the air, the Americans lifted the war cry again and dashed among the sleepers, firing right and left.

Everywhere resounded cries, howls and confusion under the drifting wall of smoke.

Men seemed to rise from between

Spurr's feet as he rushed on, yelling at the top of his lungs. Faces loomed up from the ground, and shots rattled from all sides. In the distance, sentries fired into the air, giving the alarm and rousing company after company.

"*Die Amerikaner! Indianer! Amerikaner!*" rose the cry for the second time that night.

Spurr had a glimpse of Red Lance stooping and tugging at a scalp, then a swirl of men shut him from view. Frantically he whistled and bore off to the left among the shadowy tree trunks.

"Lance," he shouted as he dodged behind a trunk. "Fer God's sake, hurry! They'll git you in a minit!"

"E-e-yah! Yah!" came the distant war whoop of the Osage as he lingered to strike down yet another foe.

In agony, Spurr whistled again, conscious that he was being hemmed in by angry bareheaded men with bayoneted rifles.

"Gosh darn it! Now that's torn it fer fair," swore the sergeant as he slipped snakelike into the underbrush. A few yards he went, then flattened to the ground motionless, while heavy-footed infantry raged about. One man's heel missed the plainsman's hand by inches, yet he did not stir.

In the direction from which he had come, he could hear shouts of triumph, the banging of rifles mingled with the shouts of Red Lance as he fought for life. Slowly the tumult died. Though he strained his ears Spurr could catch no sound of Red Lance's voice. A few moments later, while he lay motionless, the sergeant caught sight of what appeared to be a German N. C. O. holding the Indian's war bonnet. Grouped around him was a mass of infantrymen, talking and gesticulating wildly.

"Poor Lance," murmured Spurr to himself. "He shore died game, but he worked his kyards too hard!"

It was with a heavy heart that Spurr watched the enemy abandon their search for him. He was more than

ordinarily fond of Red Lance, in whose dauntless and uncurled spirit he found a companion to his own. Something glittered in the moonlight and fell to a leaf beneath his face where it lay glistening. He passed a trembling hand over his eyes.

Arousing himself from his grief Spurr determined to go on to Rubescourt. There he would make his last bid for success in the capture of a high ranking officer. Kent must know what would happen in the morning.

CHAPTER VI.

AT GERMAN HEADQUARTERS.

IT was nearly three o'clock, Spurr judged, when at last the thoroughly alarmed and infuriated enemy gave up their clumsily persistent search for him. He realized he had gravely underestimated their doggedness. Another hour and a half would bring the first streaks of gray in the eastern sky—the daylight which would make escape impossible.

Finally the woods fell silent, save for the sleepy twittering of birds in the boughs of the black-outlined trees.

"Now, let's see, John Spurr," he said to himself as he rose to his feet and peered about. "I allow them hostiles will *buscar* plenty fer this hyar hombre between 'Touzee an' our lines. Accordin'ly, ef I passes behind that village and *pascars* toward the home corral considerable farther south, I stands a better bet o' gettin' thar."

He set off among the trees at a cautious trot, taking cover whenever an untoward sound reached his ear. Ere long, he skirted the rear of 'Touzai and smiled as he caught sounds of movement and noises in the apparently deserted village.

Two or three times he had unwillingly to swing out of his course in order to avoid troops bivouacked by the roadside, but at length he reached a territory which seemed practically

deserted. Troops had passed the day before, he quickly realized, from the cast-off dunnage which littered the ground at intervals. Here was a pair of worn-out boots, there a blood-soaked bandage sprawled on the ground like a crippled white snake, and yonder a helmet with a ragged black hole in its crown.

Spurr broke into a gentle run as he reached the unoccupied territory and swung in a wide circle back toward his own lines. The warm night wind rushed by his face and murmured in the rustling trees overhead.

Finally he halted as he heard a sputtering motor cycle not very far away.

"There must be a road over thar," he told himself.

Shortly afterward, the sounds of an auto traveling at top speed confirmed his conjectures.

"I allow the road's behind that wood yonder," he remarked. "Now I wonder where them sports is a goin' in such a all-fired jump?"

A few minutes later found him crouched beneath the sheltering foliage of a beech tree on the edge of the woods. In the midst of a little clearing stood a solitary stone farmhouse. He saw immediately that it was a place of some importance. An almost unbroken stream of messengers on foot, horseback, and motorcycle came up to the gate of a low wall completely surrounding the farmhouse, whose sharply gabled roof faintly reflected the last rays of the moon.

"Shore now," murmured the sergeant, "that's a headquarters of some kind. They shorely ought to be some high rankin' bucks in that wickieup."

Immediately he began to cast about for a means of approach, but as his eyes roved in search of an entrance his hopes fell. At all four corners of the wall stood sentries, pacing to and fro with fixed bayonets and, judging from their continual peering about, evidently very much on the alert. Besides these, in the courtyard was a silently hurrying

stream of orderlies, telegraphers, mechanics, and officers of all kinds. Undoubtedly it housed at least a divisional commander and his staff. A mouse could not hope to enter that forbidding, close-shuttered farmhouse undetected.

While he watched, a car drove up, discharged a cloaked passenger at the gate, then wheeled out and backed in, with its rear to the wall which encircled the ancient farmhouse. The germ of an idea was born in Spurr's mind, and as it gradually took shape he set off for the roadside through the woods.

He skirted the thoroughfare in the underbrush until he found a place which suited his purpose. A series of shell holes, roughly filled with loose stones, broke the surface of the otherwise smooth road with a triple row of "thank-you-marms."

With a grunt of satisfaction Spurr settled down to wait. It was hard waiting, too; each minute that passed in inaction brought him nearer to daylight and discovery. Discovery had but one meaning for Sergeant John Spurr. He shivered with more than the cold.

At last a faint purring sound reached the restless American's ears. His muscles tensed as the new leaves above his head glinted in the first feeble rays cast by a motor car's blue-lensed headlights.

Suddenly it swung into sight, a great high-sided open touring car traveling at a fast clip. For a moment Spurr feared that the driver would not see the shell holes and might speed by, but presently like music to his ears came the squeal of brakes suddenly applied.

The car lurched heavily as it lost momentum so that Spurr, who darted out as the hood flashed by, barely caught hold of the folded top. He managed, however, to retain his grip and deftly swung onto the rear, crouching above the two spare tires.

Reaching up he cautiously pulled down the folds of a much-worn top,

so that it flapped over his head and shoulders. But no matter how much he cramped and squeezed, his feet and ankles were exposed, so he sighed and resigned himself to his fate as the car gathered speed again.

Spurr knew very well that it was only a short drive to the farm, but it seemed æons that he perched on top of the spares with the cold iron studs of their surfaces digging into his bare skin. His heavily-weighted medicine bag tugged at his fringed belt and threatened to pull loose until he tucked it between the spare tires.

At last he felt the body of the car lean as it turned sharply to swing up the roadway toward the farm, and a moment later he detected the sound of voices challenging harshly. While the auto slowed down, he strained to hear the password above the roar of the engine and thought he heard the word "Wilhelmstadt" but he could not be sure.

Again the brakes squealed as the auto halted at the gate to the sound of rifles being snapped to "present arms." His heart beat wildly. What if the car should go on and not halt at the farm? The possibility had never occurred to him. He cursed the oversight. Then, again, an inquisitive guard might choose to peer under the top, sagging so sloppily behind.

Several voices could be heard in muttered conference, till with a crunching of gravel, one of the car's occupants got out, slammed the door behind him, and went through the gates to the farmhouse. Spurr's heart missed a beat as he waited for the car to be put into reverse, and a sickening sense of defeat overwhelmed him as he felt the car glide forward instead. It gathered speed and went on, perhaps twenty or thirty feet, then a voice shouted loudly from behind:

"*Nein, nein!*" it called in a penetrating bellow. "*Gehen Sie zuruck zur Wand!*" The auto halted.

Vastly relieved, Spurr was just con-

gratulating himself on his luck, when another car in the act of leaving, turned on its lights so that they shone squarely against the back of his machine. Never before had his feet felt so large. Deciding that the men at the gate could not help seeing him, Spurr fumbled in his medicine bag until his fingers closed over the friendly grip of his revolver.

"Wal, ef I takes the Big Jump I'll take five o' them Heinie sports along fer company," he breathed. "So yell, you stud buzzards, yell and see if you like it!"

Nearer came the other car, its lights exposing Spurr's moccasined feet with a strong blue ray, and at the same time there came a sudden outcry. Sweat broke out on the sergeant's face and chest while he waited for the first move on the part of the men at the gate, but the chauffeur of his car only laughed aloud and commenced to back. In a moment he was out of the fatal radius of light, and backing up to the wall he had looked at so longingly from the edge of the woods.

Like a black haven of refuge the ancient vine-grown bricks loomed near, until the outermost tire almost touched the masonry. Then the driver choked off his engine and got out to join other waiting chauffeurs.

Mingling as well as he could with the long leaves and tendrils of the vine, Spurr slipped to the ground, keeping the row of automobiles between him and the drivers. After a cautious reconnaissance, he peered over the wall which was slightly higher than his shoulders.

"Hum," he remarked to himself. "Thar's shorely a heap big pow-wow goin' on in thar. I seems to hear that *Amerikaner* word passin' around mucho."

A quick glance to the right and left showed him that the space between the wall and the house was empty save for farm carts and machinery. All he would have to do was to drop over and seek a place of entry.

With a quick twist of his body, accomplished while the arrival of a motor cycle drew the attention of the helmeted guards, Spurr vaulted over the wall and landed noiselessly on the turf inside the wall. At once he ran round the corner away from the gate, for men were continually passing between it and the house.

Once inside, he was not long in finding a side door which appeared to lead into what had once been a dairy shed. It seemed silent inside, so, with his heart thumping wildly, he lifted the crude latch on the point of his bowie knife and stepped in. Out of doors he had felt wholly sure of himself, but here in the confined space of four walls he felt a sudden sense of helplessness and he glanced apprehensively over his shoulder when a mouse, hidden in a heap of straw, squeaked shrilly.

He halted irresolutely in the darkness of the shed, and sought by listening to the tramp of boots echoing and reëchoing through the house to visualize a plan of the farm. Evidently the various rooms served as offices leading from the main corridor. Upstairs heavy footsteps made the boards above his head creak eerily.

"Wal, John Spurr," he breathed, "yore best bet is to drop on some officer in a hallway. Gag him and tie his hands—mebbe you kin chuck a bomb out front, so's you kin sneak the captive outn the back way. But fust, me lad, you've got to collect that high rankin' hombre."

He tiptoed forward and peered through a keyhole. He saw by the light of a guttering candle that the next room was tenanted by a great hulking private who was enjoying a sound sleep, his fat cheeks rising and falling with his breath. Resting beside him was his bayoneted rifle. Spurr set his jaw and returned his knife in favor of the revolver.

Inch by inch he noiselessly swung open the door until at last he was able to slip inside. His eyes riveted on the

sleeper's face, he watched the giant narrowly, then, clubbing the revolver, he stepped across the red-tiled floor.

Deliberately, he measured the distance from the sleeper. Softly, with featherlike touch, Spurr plucked off the German's little round cap. Then, with the full force of his sinewy arm he brought the walnut stock down on the sleeper's bare head so that he grunted softly and fell forward without a sound. Moving like a menacing shadow, Spurr lifted the German back onto the rush bottom chair again, setting the cap back on his head. Then Spurr tilted the body into the position in which he had first seen it.

"Sweet dreams, *perrito*," murmured the sergeant with a gaunt smile on his painted lips.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTIVE.

A DOORWAY back of the unconscious man was half open. Spurr tiptoed cautiously through it and along a dark, flagged hallway toward what must have been the dining room.

Beyond a door at the farther end a number of guttural voices were talking loudly. The speakers were evidently in a heated dispute, the nature of which the sergeant could not, of course, understand. His eyes were glued on a wide beam of yellow light where the door was slightly ajar. He went toward it holding his breath. With utmost caution he squinted through the narrow aperture. By getting very close to the door, he found to his satisfaction he could see rather more than half of the room.

A doubt as to the wisdom of lingering in the hallway entered his mind. His position was perilous in the extreme. At any moment this door into the council room might be opened wide, and there was no other doorway in the hall into which he might dodge. Again, any one of the soldiers who swarmed

about the farm might discover the unconscious man in the kitchen. Each second was fraught with a real and acute danger.

Perhaps it was curiosity that held Spurr in the hallway, but in any event, he drew a long breath, cocked his Colt and returned to peer through the lighted crack.

At a table standing at one side, sat three men, who, if one were to judge by their decorations and heavy gold shoulder straps, must be high ranking bucks indeed. At the far end of the long, paper-strewn table was set a lantern, its rays casting a yellow light on the faces of the three.

Spurr decided that the officer in the center seat must be at least a general. Like a forbidding, fierce bird of prey he sat with his pale eyes darting from one to the other of his companions. He held himself bolt upright, his thin body rigid in its beribboned, tight-fitting uniform. His lean, bloodless face flashed in the lamplight as he bent forward to consult the pile of documents before him.

At a remark from the monocled officer on his right, he pounded on the table to emphasize a retort, and sent the papers which littered its surface drifting to the floor. To the listening American each word seemed to be spat out from beneath a close-trimmed blond mustache.

Farthest away, on the general's right, was a gross, thick-bodied man with a full red mouth and a great double chin. A shiny roll of hairy fat neck bulged above his high military collar and in his right eye a monocle was almost buried in the folds holding it in place. As the fat man rolled his heavy head the bit of glass twinkled in the lamplight. He sat comfortably sprawled in a gilt Louis XV armchair, pillaged from some château. Its slender legs seemed ready to give way under the glutton's great weight.

The third man was a frosty-eyed old giant, whose narrow mouth seemed to

be set in a permanent sneer. Like a disdainful Viking he listened silently to the commander's tirade, meantime massaging the silvery beard which bristled on his wolfish jaw.

Spurr had selected the center man as his prospective victim, when there came a sharp rapping at the door.

The three officers halted their quarrels and faced the entrance.

"*Kommen Sie herein,*" bellowed the fat man, and thrust a frayed cigar stub into his mouth.

The door creaked open to admit two helmeted N. C. O's. With drawn pistols they clumped in and halted before the table, where they saluted with mechanical correctness.

The straight-backed officer looked up, nodded, then uttered a command which caused the men in the doorway to step back. There was a slight commotion in the hall beyond. Then the eavesdropping sergeant almost betrayed himself in a shout of surprise for through the door was pushed a grotesque figure. He marched with a haughty air that accorded strangely with his bound hands and wild array. It was Red Lance!

His wig, by some strange accident, was still in place, but the rest of his savage finery was sadly torn and stained. The yellow rays of the lamp glistened on a trickle of blood flowing unstanched from a long, shallow wound on his forehead. The Indian came to a halt before the German officers and stood looking silently. It was a curious tableau: the officers of an army half as old as Europe, staring curiously up at a bronzed, paint-smeared savage such as had haunted their childish midnight hours.

Outside in the little hallway, Spurr was jubilant that the Indian was still alive. He rocked on his heels in the darkness, a wide grin on his face. The sound of a voice speaking in English recalled his attention to the scene in the adjoining room.

"Do you speak English?" queried

the commander leaning far over the table.

"Pray God Lance's got sense enough to answer in Injun," thought Spurr.

But the Osage lifted his dark head proudly and with the light reflected in his glowing eyes, he made reply.

"Yes."

"Say, 'sir', you swine," thundered the fat officer. "You are speaking to General von Klagen."

Deliberately, Red Lance spat in the fat man's face, and reeled back as a guard dealt him a savage blow on the cheek with his revolver butt. The Osage swayed dizzily, but a contemptuous smile twisted his lips as the fat man heaved himself up, his face a livid mask of fury.

"Let him alone now, Hasling," snapped the general. "Time is very short to find out what we must know. You can have him later." He turned again on Red Lance, his white face set in rigid lines.

"Now, then, you." He measured the prisoner half admiringly with his eyes. "This is a clever piece of counter-propaganda—you and your damned friend have done great harm." His lips writhed back in a snarl. "I intend to make you pay for it."

A deep silence fell in the room, so that the squeak of Hasling's fragile chair sounded loud when he resumed his seat. Red Lance only stared vacantly and fixedly before him, as though he saw a vision on the wall behind his examiner.

"We officers," continued the general, "know what American troops really look like. Real Americans, not play-acting savages." The general broke off apparently meditating. Then suddenly he rose to his feet and placing his hands on the table brought his face within a foot of the Indian's.

"How many Americans are in the Mery sector?"

Scornfully, Red Lance laughed while the guards behind him stared in amazement.

"Go and find out. Red Lance no tell."

Speaking with a chill tone that made Spurr's fingers clench in apprehension, von Klagen straightened up.

"It would be well for you to answer, savage," he suggested. "We have ways of making you answer."

"Bah," grunted Lance contemptuously. "Osage squaw torture better than any. Not even *they* make Red Lance speak, if Red Lance not choose to."

It seemed to Spurr that Hasling's eyes abruptly narrowed with an idea. He bent over, to whisper in the general's ear while the gilt chair groaned dismally.

For a moment they spoke in a hurried whisper, then the general turned again to the prisoner.

"Now then, you," went on von Klagen. "Perhaps it's money you want. Or is it revenge—? We can give you all you want of either." He paused, then resumed. "Why should you love the Americans? They stole your land, ruined your people, broke their promises again and again. Why should you be loyal? They have done you nothing but ill. But we, we are different. I can make you rich beyond any in your tribe. I promise on my word. What do you say?"

Deeply anxious, Spurr studied the Indian's face, curious to see the effect of this new line of attack. He noted with alarm that Red Lance's expression had changed. The red man's eyes shifted.

"You are right. Indians no love American," he grunted. "Maybe Red Lance talk with you."

For a moment Spurr refused to credit his senses, then a sense of nausea seized his tired, overwrought body. Sick at heart, he shut his eyes to the scene of the Osage's treachery. Should he open the door and hurl his bomb before the faithless corporal had opportunity to give his damaging information?

Suddenly Red Lance's whole conduct became clear to him as he remembered how the Indian lingered behind at the ruined house almost inviting capture. Frontier proverbs rising from the past shook him as he recalled them. "Trust a rattler afore a Injun." "Only good Injun is dead Injun." "Truth and a Injun is strangers!"

Resolved at last, he reached into his dangling medicine bag, and drew out a hand grenade. Deliberately his forefinger bent around the wire pin, and his arm muscles set themselves to wrench it out, when the sound of Red Lance's voice halted him.

"What give?"

With a restrained eagerness von Klagen's precise tones came through the worn pine boards before Spurr's eyes. There was satisfaction in the German's voice as he made an offer.

"Say ten thousand dollars?"

"No," replied the Indian. "Red Lance not talk with hands tied."

With quick suspicion the old officer broke in.

"Have a care, Excellency," he warned. "I have read that these savages are very crafty. It may be a trick."

Firmly Red Lance shook his head. "Red Lance no talk."

A moment von Klagen wavered, then he signed to the guards to loosen the Indian's hands.

"He could not possibly escape," stated the general. "There is no danger."

Spurr, the grenade ready in his hand, peered through the keyhole in time to see one of the guards thrust his Luger into his broad leather belt and fumble over the cords that bound Red Lance's wrist.

"Gol darn it all," swore Spurr bitterly. "An' I allus allowed that buck wuz different. Since he were a naked papoose I knowed him—allowed he was like his ancestors who'd ruther die than break his word to a friend." A heavy sigh shook the sergeant's frame

and he suddenly felt quite 'old and tired.

"Now then," went on the German commander. "We'll give you fifty thousand marks—about ten thousand dollars in your money."

Obstinately the Osage blinked and shook his head. "No enough," was all he said.

Von Klagen settled back in his chair and crossed his meager legs before he went on. Hasling and the other officers peered up at the bronzed lithe figure with more than interest.

"Well," said the German, "shall it be fifty thousand dollars?"

A slow smile parted the captive's swollen lips so that his long white teeth glinted wolfishly.

"It is enough."

Again Spurr almost wrenched out the pin, but an overpowering curiosity to hear what the traitor would say stayed him. Whether the obliterating bomb were hurled at once or a moment later would make not a whit of difference. Not a man in the room beyond would survive.

General von Klagen passed a slender, well-kept hand over the scanty blond bristles that covered his egg-shaped head and reached for a pen and a sheet of yellow paper.

"Good. We understand each other. Now we can go ahead." With a quick movement, the Prussian leaned forward, his face a mask of lowering suspicion. "God help you if you lie to us. I'll have you skinned alive. My word of honor on it!"

The painted features of the Indian's face betrayed no sign that he had heard the threat. He only stood looking steadily at his gray-uniformed inquisitors from his dark, narrow eyes.

"How many Americans are before Mery?"

The prisoner seemed to ponder, while he slowly massaged his wrists.

"About forty thousand," he said at length.

Spurr suddenly replaced his grenade

in the medicine bag. He knew that there were not a thousand, let alone forty thousand, Americans in the area around Mery. Plainly the Osage was lying; whether to save his own skin or to mislead the enemy utterly he could not yet discover.

"What?" von Klagen's voice rang out in the low-ceilinged room like a hand clap. "Forty thousand men? Two divisions?" Von Klagen did not know that the American divisions were averaging 27,000 men.

In silence Red Lance nodded so that the long braids of his raven hair swayed forward on his blood-sprinkled breast. Hasling and the white-haired officer stared open-mouthed, their shadows mimicking them on the plaster behind.

"Yes. Forty thousand."

Quite perturbed, the German consulted a field notebook on the table. Spurr noted that his hand trembled as he turned the leaves.

"He lies!" bellowed Hasling, his double chin crimsoning with wrath. "There are not forty thousand *verdammte Amerikaner* north of Senlis. There are not that many available!"

Thoughtfully, von Klagen laid down the field notebook.

"You are wrong, Colonel," he said at length. "There are indeed that many in reserve, but we—we thought it impossible for them to be moved into the lines in time." With a weary gesture he passed his thin white hand over a face that had suddenly become creased with a myriad wrinkles. "These Americans accomplish the impossible—and they are many, so many."

But the silver haired veteran on the left laid his hand on the table and coolly waited for the general to finish.

"Your pardon, Excellency," said he in firm, measured tones, "but I know the savage lies."

"Yes?" Half convinced von Klagen faced him.

"Yes. We know there are only two roads along which troops coming to Mery could advance," he stated impressively. "Those two roads are overrun with retreating French. We had positive information that the American divisions he speaks of were no further than Compiègne at six last night. It is physically impossible for them to arrive before this barbarian must have left his lines, four or five hours ago, *nicht wahr?* No, it is only a piece of counter-propaganda. The offensive should be carried out as planned."

General von Klagen wearily shook his hairless head. "*Ach*, you do not yet understand the genius of these Americans." He hesitated. "Yet I have never known you to be wrong, Hassling. So I will order the attack as planned, but, mark my words"—he swung around in his chair to face the veteran, and spoke slowly—"if we feel an American counter attack early in the day, I will wait for the reinforcements to come up. Our men are too tired. And now"—he spoke in German to the sergeant guarding Red Lance—"we have learned what we want. Take this savage out and shoot him."

With these words, which, of course, Spurr could not understand, the Prussian deliberately turned his back on the silent Indian and picked up a field telephone. The guards stepped forward in a businesslike manner with the ropes in their hands, an action which left no doubt in the sergeant's mind.

Acting with frontier speed, he snatched out his familiar old Colt and filled his lungs. With his left hand he flung open the door and with a wild, piercing "Ee-e-Yah-Yah!" loomed in the doorway, a menacing figure.

Frozen with surprise, the Germans could only stare, their eyes bulging and their mouths open. Then, with uncanny swiftness, Spurr shot out the lantern.

"Lance!" he shrieked. "Lance, this way fer God's sake!"

Shots, deafening in that confined space, roared like field pieces, while the blackness was streaked with spurts of orange-red flame. Above the din the air resounded with curses, groans and bellowed orders. In an agony of suspense Spurr lingered on the threshold until a naked body brushed past his. With that contact he fired another shot through the door, wheeled and fled wildly down the corridor toward the dairy shed.

Red Lance was already peering out, a long-snouted Luger automatic in his hand.

It was a moment perilous in the extreme, as shrill cries rang out and running feet sounded in every direction. The walled farmhouse had become a bedlam.

"Over the back wall," gasped Spurr. "There's a guard there. Plug him first!"

As Spurr flung one leg over the top, a wild, shadowy stream of gray-coated figures came running along the space between the house and the wall. Some one fired at him, and he felt a burning pain in his right side as he dropped over.

Then things happened so quickly that Spurr had only disjointed impressions of the sequence of events. He remembered having a glimpse of Lance exchanging shots with a sentry and saw the soldier's dark bulk drop. Vaguely he recollected firing back at a row of heads which appeared at the top of the wall.

With the speed of those whose life rests with their flying feet, he and Red Lance raced for the shadowy haven of encircling woods looming up against the star-studded sky. All about them hissed whining bullets which missed by scant fractions of inches. Twenty, ten, five yards more, then with bursting lungs they plunged among the dew-moistened leaves.

"Keep a-goin'," panted Spurr as they dashed on, dodging among the tree trunks. "With what we knows, we-

alls just gotta get back, and they'll corral us ef we hides."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMANCHE TRICK.

ONWARD they sped, while the woods behind echoed with the crashing progress of their clumsy pursuers, who tripped and fell as they plunged blindly on in the fancied direction of the fugitives.

Once, to their right, came the sound of pounding hoofs which raced ahead and finally died in the distance. Spurr decided it was a patrol quickly dispatched to cut them off. Evidently the wood was a small one, giving the Germans hope of surrounding it ere the Americans could escape.

As the blur of foliage thinned before their eyes, Spurr reached out and pulled the Osage to a halt.

"Hold on, the road's jest ahead," he whispered. "We cain't outrun hosses, leastways I caint. I ain't so young as I uster be. We-all's in a hell of a fix."

Eagerly Red Lance put his face near Spurr's. "If can reach camp in time, Johnny Spurr, we warn the general make a raid, even a little raid. Johnny Spurr hear what Red Lance told hostile chief?"

A sudden sense of shame at having doubted the Indian made Spurr flush in the dark.

"I shore did," he said. "But it's nigh onter seven mile to camp, as I jedge distance. They's not half a hour to four o'clock, an' we-alls in hostile territory. An' we got to get thar. How are we goin' to make it?"

"Ride," suggested Lance laconically, his savage profile clearly seen as he glanced at the stars.

Ecstatically, the sergeant smote his bare thigh. "Now I allow you got oncommon brains fer an Injun. We'll work the old Comanche trick, but hurry's the high sign—the ain't a minute but counts."

Red Lance nodded. He retied the bandage on his wrist, and pulled the knot tight with his teeth. Spurr probed the wound in his side tentatively. It seemed to be bleeding steadily, but not strongly. Evidently the bullet in passing through the outer edge of his ribs had encountered a minor vein.

"Is Johnny Spurr hurt bad?"

"Not enough to lose time about. I aims to get myself a hoss. Come along now."

Without snapping a twig, they made their way to the roadside and peered along its course as far as they could see. Then they turned off down a plainly marked footpath for perhaps twenty yards to a place where the branches of a great beech tree swung low over the trail. In a moment they were crouching above the path with the thick sweet-smelling leaves hiding their outline.

In a wide circle about the wood the ringing cries of their pursuers were gradually closing in.

"Ef there's more than two in the posse, I'll let the first ones go by," directed Spurr. "You take the next to the last buck, Lance, and I'll raze the tail-ender."

"Um," grunted the Osage.

Pointing his revolver up in the air, Spurr fired two shots in rapid succession, then, while the echoes were still glancing from trunk to trunk, he calmly reloaded.

Almost instantly from far down the road came the steady drum of horses' feet advancing at top speed. Like the tapping of a skillful drummer's sticks, the flying hoofs sounded closer and closer. Then, on the road itself the riders reined in with a flurry of sparks and halted, apparently undecided as to what direction to follow.

Breathing a prayer that the patrol was not numerous, Spurr heaved a stone, which he had picked up for the purpose, into the underbrush along the footpath. Silence followed, during which the jangle of accouterment rang out loud. Then on all sides could be

heard the shouts of various patrols moving in toward the spot where the shots had sounded.

The cavalymen broke into a guttural shout and reined forward among the trees, with the starlight glinting on their long sabers as they loomed into sight. The muscles of Spurr's legs braced themselves for a spring.

By straining his eyes, he made out the outlines of three horsemen who were advancing at a slow trot, peering deliberately at the underbrush to either side. That an attack might materialize from above was furthest from their minds."

"*Es ist niemand hier,*" grumbled the leader hoarsely.

As the first rider bent his helmeted head to pass beneath the bough, Spurr drew his bowie and waited for Red Lance's spring. A sudden dizziness seized him which almost loosened his hold. He exerted his will power desperately with the realization that he must have lost more blood than he thought, and with beads of cold perspiration breaking out on his forehead he felt Red Lance brace himself. When the second rider was almost past the limb, the Indian launched himself into the air like a hungry cougar pouncing on a doe, and sprang to the horseman's shoulders, bearing him forward in the saddle. Spurr had not time to watch the struggle, for the last cavalryman had now halted beneath the tree in utter astonishment. Like a swooping kingfisher, the sergeant dropped to the broad back beneath him, the bowie gleaming brightly in his hand. There was a muffled scream as the horse reared in surprise, almost throwing Spurr from his back. Twice the sergeant's right arm flashed down.

Spurr caught the reins from the German's nerveless fingers and steadied the plunging animal until it stood stock-still and trembling. Not until then did he let the weight of the dead cavalryman slip to the ground with a faint jangle of his equipment. He glanced

ahead and saw that the leading German had evidently fled. There was no sign of him, and Lance was bending over the second rider, tugging at his waist belt.

Five minutes later, two helmeted Uhlans, complete with sabers and pistols and wearing closely buttoned overcoats, turned out onto the road as a file of panting infantry came crashing down the trail from the direction of the forest. The riders settled themselves low in the saddles and dug the spurs into the ribs of their mounts, which snorted wildly and set off down the road at a dead run.

With the wind rushing against his face, Spurr felt some of the faintness leaving, and prayed that the warm trickle which still meandered down his side might cease. How good it felt to be in the saddle again! After they had ridden perhaps fifteen minutes Red Lance drew in his horse until they rode abreast.

Happily, Spurr watched the whiteness of the road unwind before them and reveled in the strong stride of the powerful brute between his thighs. Every squeak of the leather, every rattle of flying pebble, played a symphony for him. Each foot they gained meant a greater chance of success. They would win! By God, they would win!

"Mebbe make it in time?" inquired Red Lance. "How far to go, Johnny Spurr?"

"I allow we can ride about two—three mile further," he said. "Then we'd better dismount and walk heap fast to get back on time."

Red Lance turned a face whose war paint was queerly incongruous with the scuttle-shaped helmet bouncing uncomfortably on his head at each stride of his mount.

"We have no time capture chief?"

Gone was Spurr's premature glow of triumph. In the excitement of the last half hour he had completely forgotten that phase of their assignment.

"Darn it all! Wal, it's too late now! Come on."

He touched his powerful gray troop horse with the spurs, and again rode a headlong gallop which sent the dimly-seen landscape rushing past. He felt dewy leaves brush against his face.

Onward they went over bare hills and mist-covered valleys, more than once passing straggling groups of infantry marching silently along the roadside. Once they overtook a battery of seventy-sevens clanking along. From the head of the column an officer hailed them sharply, but Spurr only uttered an unintelligible shout as they passed him with a clatter of hoofs. In a moment the clattering caissons were left far behind.

Five minutes later the riders caught sight of a low ridge which Spurr recognized as being immediately behind the railway embankment. At the same moment they heard a car coming from the opposite direction and caught the glimmer of its subdued blue lights.

It rolled up to the two Americans riding by the roadside, and ground to a halt while an officer occupying the back seat shouted an inquiry at them in German. That he and the chauffeur were the only men in the car Spurr saw at once, and with that realization he determined to risk capturing the occupant of the back seat. Surely it must be an important officer who would be riding about in such a high-powered, comfortably fitted touring car.

From the side of his mouth he whispered the words "Cover driver" to Lance, who walked his horse forward until he was within a few feet of the auto. Meanwhile Spurr dismounted and, feigning to misunderstand, shuffled forward.

"*Warum antworten Sie mir nicht?*" growled the passenger, leaning forward to get a better look at the trooper who did not salute his officer.

With a sudden movement, the sergeant jerked his revolver forward from the holster and thrust it under

the German's nose. He started back with a low cry of alarm, just as Lance presented his pistol at the driver's head. Wisely, the occupants of the car thrust their hands up towards the sky, which was commencing to lose the true somberness of night.

"Out, you," grated Spurr. Obediently, the passenger got out. He was so short he reached only to Spurr's shoulder. In spite of the uncertain light the German's outline showed him to be a fat, ruddy little man with dark sweeping mustaches and an imposing waist line.

Pressing his revolver point into the German's stomach, Spurr wrenched open the captive's coat, glanced at his shoulder straps, and heaved a sigh of relief. They were a welcome sight, enormous and twinkling richly with silver and gold mingled with white and crimson. Furthermore, a double row of ribbons stretched across the indignant prisoner's wildly heaving breast.

"You'll fill the bill," said Spurr aloud. "With them gobs of color you shore must be a heap big medicine man."

Swiftly he ran his hand over the captive's body and located his pistol. This he confiscated and thrust it into his own coat pocket. "All right, Lance," he called, "let the shuffer go. I aim for him to spread the nooze that the general's been took! It'll throw another scare into them thar hostiles."

Leering savagely over the thoroughly frightened chauffeur, Red Lance signed to him to proceed, spurring his horse alongside with the Luger leveled. The driver obeyed with comical eagerness, setting the car in gear with a wrench that made the dirt fly from beneath the tires.

A few hundred feet Lance galloped alongside until the machine gained speed, then as a gentle admonition sent a bullet smacking through the windshield. The gray-coated chauffeur ducked and almost drove off the road in his terror.

Wheeling his horse about on its haunches, the Osage galloped back to where Spurr stood, a soldierly figure in his camouflaged helmet and long-tailed cavalry overcoat. Unwaveringly his Colt menaced the prisoner, who stood with hands up-thrust and round blue eyes popping with anxiety.

"Down thar's the wheat field," said the sergeant and pointed off to the right. Lance caught sight of an area which seemed lighter than the rest of the undulating terrain on which they stood.

"Yes, and there railroad," added the Indian. "How we get across this time?"

A wide grin on his face, Spurr laid a hand on the prisoner's shoulder while the German snarled under his breath. "Hyars our Annie Oakley. D'ye see what's goin' on down thar?"

For an instant Red Lance stood, his head out-thrust, as he studied the right of way. "Um, hostile bucks getting up—"

"C'rect, Corporal Lance. Go the haid o' the class. Reckon we'd better dismount." Silently they swung to the ground and freed their mounts, giving them a sharp slap which sent them clattering back to the rear.

Spurr dug the barrel of his revolver into the prisoner's back and signed him to drop his hands. "Now be a good Mex, Heinie," he advised sibilantly, "an' you'll keep company with your hair. Be a bad greaser and that top-knot of yourn'll wave in the breezes frum the lodge pole o' Chief Red Lance's wickieup."

Unable to understand a word of the sergeant's speech, the prisoner nevertheless appeared to read the threat in Spurr's expression, and trudged meekly along through the morning mist with his head dejectedly tilted on his breast, the skirts of his *feldgrau* overcoat swishing against his bootlegs.

The dawn chill was in the air and both Americans welcomed the heavy thickness of their captured uniforms,

which warded off the icy dewdrops glistening on grass and leaves. Truly the gods were good.

Ten minutes' walk brought them to the foot of the long, wooded slope they had been descending and about fifty yards away from a company of infantry who were sleepily slinging their packs and answering a low-voiced roll call. Distinctly, the voice of the German sergeant carried to where the Americans and their prisoner watched among the trees.

"Now when they all goes forward," directed Spurr, "we'll jest tag along a few paces behind, like we belongs to 'em, and mebbe we kin get into that thar wheat agin."

Once, as a squad marched by their hiding place, the prisoner suddenly filled his lungs, but instantly Spurr pushed the muzzle into the German's back. Instead of shouting, the fat little officer only emitted a gasping sigh and turned sullenly away.

From the embankment rang a sudden shouted command, which sent the infantry scrambling up over the rails with rifles tossed skyward as they strove to keep their balance in the maze of tangled wreckage.

Gripping the German's wrist in his left hand and with his right carrying the revolver in plain sight, Spurr rose to his feet and signaled to Red Lance to follow after him.

CHAPTER IX.

NO MAN'S LAND.

WITH regular steps the trio emerged from the woods just as the last of the infantry were crawling over the embankment. They advanced boldly and were within a few feet of the railway when Red Lance hissed sharply to Spurr to glance back.

His heart skipped a beat as he caught sight of gray-uniformed figures advancing from their rear. They came on through the drifting white strata of

meadow mists like wraiths. There were hundreds and hundreds of them. Their serried ranks stretched back to the foggy limits of vision.

It seemed so unreal that Spurr thought it a mirage caused by his weakened condition. But every now and then came the clank of a bayonet scabbard against a metal gas-mask case, or the subdued curse of an infantryman as he tripped in the uncertain light.

About them were machine gunners staggering under their heavy Maxims and boxes of ammunition, telephonists lugging reels of wire, bombers with rows and rows of potato-masher grenades slung to their belts, and all the different kinds of troops needed for a sudden forward movement. Like a gray-green tide, the enemy forces flowed forward, carrying the trio with them.

A spasmodic sense of panic almost urged Spurr into a disastrous, head-long flight as he realized they were hemmed in on all sides and that any moment some sharp-eyed officer might halt to inquire what two dismounted cavalymen were doing there. But he conquered the impulse, and dug his toes into the side of the embankment as he commenced to climb, towing the prisoner along on unwilling feet. The fat little man's eyes stared whitely out from below the visor of his peaked cap when Spurr turned with a snarling "Come on."

Far ahead, a machine gun began to chatter, shattering the early morning stillness with its spiteful drumming rattle.

Another took up the challenge, then across the plain to the right, a field gun roared dully. Obviously the day's slaughter was about to commence, with General von Klagen moving forward his division preparatory to the first phase of a new offensive.

As Spurr tumbled down the far side of the right of way, he was frantically calculating the time left to them. Could they arrive in time and give their all-

important information before the gray-green hordes surged forward and crumpled up the decimated French? Spurr knew the American divisions could not possibly be in position so quickly. Only a bold demonstration by the American handful on the ridge could save a fatal and precipitate retreat which would leave the whole Allied flank exposed.

If they could only find General Kent in time! Spurr quickly saw that the German staff, realizing that their men were convinced of the presence of Americans, cinema creations though they had painted them, had given out the information that these yelling savages were only scouts sent far ahead of a main body which was still lingering near Paris.

Let the brave sons of the Fatherland charge boldly, they urged, and rout the perfidious French before the Americans could come to their assistance. Such was the nature of the information, Spurr felt, now being given out to the disheartened rank and file.

As he moved forward among the tramping infantry, which advanced boldly over the waving wheat fields, Spurr kept a sharp lookout for gaps and strove to oblique into them when any such appeared.

The eastern sky was now paling rapidly so that the bearded features of the men about them appeared in more detail. The troops in their vicinity were a striking mixture of youth and old age. Sad-eyed men of fifty and fifty-five tramped stiffly along with drooping shoulders beside pale-faced youths, whose cheeks scarce needed the attentions of a razor. These latter strove to appear jaunty. The effort was pitiful.

"They-all's powerful hard up for men," thought Spurr to himself, as he led off toward a wood-covered knoll which seemed to stand like an island above the mass of moving men.

With a swishing of grain about his feet Red Lance came up alongside.

Talking across the prisoner who marched hopelessly between the tall forms on either side, Lance spoke in a low voice:

"Hostiles ahead begin take the ground. Must be near front line," he murmured. "In a minute, Johnny Spurr, we safe. But first watch un chiefs to left."

Looking ahead, Spurr saw they would have to pass close by a group of men, evidently officers, who stood apart consulting maps.

There was nothing for it save to march brazenly by, and trust to luck that they would pay no attention. This was scarcely possible as the eastern horizon had already begun to take on the faintest tinge of red which glistened faintly from the deep, scuttle-shaped helmets of the group who looked up curiously at the approach of the three. They muttered among themselves as Spurr passed within a few yards of where they stood.

Smartly Spurr whipped up his hand in salute and was relieved to see that the prisoner at his side had the sense to follow his example. Red Lance, who had dropped a pace or two behind, did likewise.

The sergeant was just congratulating himself that their temerity had been rewarded, when one of the officers hailed them roughly. His voice sounded like a death knell to the anxious Americans.

"*Kommen Sie hier!*" shouted the officer. The prisoner turned half about and opened his mouth, but Spurr leveled the Colt at his stomach and broke into a run.

"*Warten!*" bellowed the officer, meanwhile jerking an automatic from the leather holster at his side. Others of the group dropping their field glasses and maps, prepared to give chase.

Spurr, seeing a thick growth of yellow grain ahead, rushed forward at top speed, while Red Lance, seizing the captive's other wrist, bounded on.

There was a sharp report from the

rear and something whistled by Spurr's head. The little man's short legs made him a bad runner. As the shots hummed about, he panted incoherent prayers and cries of fear. Then, just as it seemed that one of the bullets must inevitably strike him to earth, Spurr caught the boom of a field gun far up on the heights and realized that the French batteries were firing their early morning bursts. With the wail of a fire siren a shell screamed over the trio's heads and burst somewhere in the wheat behind. The firing from the group of officers stopped abruptly.

"Jest the luck o' seven devils," gasped Spurr as they crawled forward through the rustling wheat ears. "In another minute them bucks woulda drilled us heap plenty."

In the half light a deep depression loomed up ahead. "Make for that waller thar, Lance," he directed. "I'm kinder tuckered out."

A moment later they paused on the lip of a .210 shell crater and stared in wide-eyed amazement. A man was sitting at the bottom clad in very little but a gray overcoat. He was pointing a wabbling revolver in their direction.

"Stop vere you are," stammered a voice. "I don't vant I should have to shoot you. You're a nize fellers and I'm a nize guy myself. For vy should ve fight?"

"The Jew, by God," muttered Spurr. "Now I allow that beats the kyards. Hey thar, Shakin' Bull, put away that pepper box or you'll hurt yereself."

"Oi!" yelped the man in the gray coat. "Mein buddehs, by Jahveh! Vere haff you been?" He spread his palms wide and cocked his bullet head to one side. "Should I fight dis var all alone?"

Suspiciously, Red Lance sank back from the edge of the crater.

"Shakin' Bull got hostile in with him," whispered he. "Shoot um both!"

Spurr became more cautious and looked again. Sure enough, a long

figure sprawled limply behind the Hebrew.

"Who's that sport in thar with ye?"

"Oh, that?" Slafsky's voice rolled out importantly. "That's my prisoner. You shoulda been here. This *schlimiel* comes up to me and says I should surrender.

"'For vy?' says I.

"'Schwein,' says he in bed Yiddish, 'because I want you should.'

"'Make me an offer,' I says. And this guy tries to give me the bum's rush, but in a terrific hend-by-hend bettle, I geeve him the O K."

The prisoner stirred, groaned and stared dazedly at the ground.

"Wal, yore the candy kid even if you did capture only a corporal," said Spurr as he sank to the ground and tried to keep the earth from spinning about so violently. "Yore sport ain't got no epoolets, nohow, only that there funny braid on his collar. Too bad you couldn't hev took a general like us. Lance, show Shakin' Bull hyar our captive's epoolets."

Grinning widely, Red Lance stepped over to the fat prisoner and wrenched back his coat, so that his gorgeous epaulettes twinkled dazingly before Moe Slafsky's eyes. He shrugged carelessly. "Oh, vell," he sighed, "mine looks savager, ennyvays."

And there was no denying the fact that Slafsky's prisoner had an infinitely more warlike cast about him as he glared around the shell hole. His features were a picture of mingled hate and disgust. Even Spurr and Lance's dejected little officer seemed to shrink at the other's baleful stare.

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE RAID.

TWENTY minutes later, an American outpost was astonished at the sight of what appeared to be four German soldiers accompanied by a fiercely daubed Indian brave advancing

up the gully they were watching. The Indian in the group strode along, his hands weaving to and fro like a shuttle.

"Gee, Frank," said the private who first caught sight of the strange group, "dat von blink sure is potent. I—I—guess I got 'em again, or else I see an escaped member o' Buffalo Bill's show wid four Jerries."

His companion turned sleepily to look, then sat up with snort of surprise.

"Wal, may I be a long tall son—" he ejaculated, and snatched up his rifle. "It's a trick of some kind. Rush it to 'em, Steve." He shut the breech of his Springfield with a snap and cuddled the stock to his sunburned cheek.

Just then, however, one of the Germans, catching sight of the American outpost, stripped off his overcoat and stood almost naked, so that the weird painting which decorated his powerful limbs could be plainly seen.

"Hey, no shoot," he hailed, and urged forward one of his German companions at the point of an automatic.

Steve's jaw dropped and he lowered his rifle.

"Judas to Jenny and seven hands round! Now what in hell is this?"

"I ain't takin' no chances," grunted the man called Frank, and fired.

Like a falling log the shortest German threw up his hands and collapsed, while the naked men shouted imploringly to the outpost to hold their fire.

Throwing discretion to the winds, Red Lance chanced a bullet and came sprinting forward until the riflemen could glimpse his face.

"He's a real Injun—" said Steve in amazement.

In another moment Red Lance was in their midst raving with anger. "You gettum court martial," he growled. "Why you not hold fire when Red Lance yell?"

Together the three hastily made their way down the little ravine up which Spurr and his group had been advancing.

Spurr was bending over the officer he had captured, and was endeavoring to stanch the flow of blood from the German's chest, while Slafsky, shaking with excitement, covered his savage-faced prisoner.

The wounded man obviously had not long to live, and Spurr swore bitterly as he saw his cherished captive dying. He lifted a face livid with disappointed fury and vented the accumulation of thirty years' frontier profanity on the soldier who had fired the shot.

"You darned buzzard-born skunk," he raved. "Pick that man up and get him to General Kent ef you want to live. After all we've been through, to have it all torn at the last minute by a—" He was about to explode again into further flights of profanity, but he reeled and would have fallen had not the soldier called Steve caught him.

"Get us to General Kent," pleaded the sergeant, when at last he was able to speak. "An' for God's sake hurry!"

On a little knoll stood General Kent, surrounded by perhaps half a dozen officers and runners. His face, as he studied the rolling plain, was strained and haggard.

He turned to the officer who stood at his side. "It's too late, Hardy," he murmured. "There go the first German batteries laying down a barrage. They'll roll us up to-day."

A thunderous rumble from the distant range of hills set the birds overhead twittering in alarm. Puffs of gray smoke burst like corn popping over a fire.

Silently a gray-haired major nodded. "If only the rest of the division had been able to come up! The pity of it is they could be here by this afternoon—"

He broke off as a messenger panted up the slope and saluted,

"Well?"

"Sir, Sergeant Spurr has returned!"

Disbelief lingered a moment, then Kent caught his breath with a gasp.

"Bring him here as quick as you can move!" he snapped.

He rushed down the knoll with long, hasty strides in the direction from which the messenger had come.

Presently a familiar figure appeared around a clump of trees. It was leaning heavily on a khaki-clad doughboy. Quite forgetting all else the general ran forward, while Spurr straightened and saluted. His face bore a ghastly attempt at a smile.

"For God's sake, sir, attack at once!" he gasped. And, interrupted by spells of weakness, swiftly outlined what he had learned in the corridor of the walled farmhouse.

Silently the general listened, interrupting with a laconic question now and then. When Spurr's feeble voice died away at last the general gave a number of rapid orders to his staff. Runners snatched hastily written orders and went tearing off in all directions, while telephonists squatting in a clump of larches cranked their little handles with desperate energy, pleading in urgent tones to speak with "Harry," "John" and "Mortimer."

"Well, that's that, Hardy," said the general. "We'll make a demonstration and pray God, gentlemen, it works!" Glancing up, his weary, bleared eyes caught sight of a limp gray figure borne on a stretcher by two medical corps men. He beckoned them.

"Thar's yore prisoner, sir," said Spurr. "He's shore a high rankin' hombre, all right; but, sir, you'd better talk with him *pronto*. He's like to peg out any minute."

Kent's face changed and his eyes sought Spurr's. "What, you got a prisoner, too?" Spurr nodded, but a red mist was almost erasing the scene before his eyes. Doggedly he forced it to dissipate, but the effort left him weak.

"Sergeant, that's wonderful!" said the general, and strode over to the stretcher. Red Lance watched his face

expressionless. "Come on, Goodman," said Kent, "and work fast. The German's going fast and we need his information badly."

The chubby face of the man on the stretcher had assumed a greenish hue, and, though he still breathed, it was evident that he would live but a few minutes more.

While Spurr, sick with fatigue and disappointment, watched the interpreter bend over the stretcher, an officer ran from a group in the background and pointed to the dying man's epaulettes, glittering splendidly in the first rays of the sun.

"What's that?" rapped the general sharply. "What did you say?"

"That's no colonel," repeated the officer who had interrupted. "The poor devil's only a bandmaster!"

At those fateful words the whole scene wavered before the wounded sergeant's eyes. It seemed impossible to have risked all that for nothing! He was about to sink willingly into the red abyss which yawned so near when, as from a distance, he heard another voice.

"Mister General," it said in ingratiating tones, "wouldn't a corporal do? Vot a real, nasty, all-vool fierceness he's got. Oi! Such a tough feller!"

"I haven't much time to waste on a corporal," snapped Kent. "But search him and bring him up."

Spurr opened his eyes again as the other prisoner was led forward. The German stood very straight, with head held high. He saluted briskly, his hard mouth set in a straight, grim line.

One of the guards thrust his automatic into his belt and emptied the prisoner's pockets. Among other odds and ends he drew forth a pair of lustrous, glittering epaulettes. He turned and held them forth on the palm of his hand, while the officer who had recognized the bandmaster's rank stared open mouthed and then turned to General Kent, a perplexed look on his face.

"There's some mistake, sir; those

are colonel's epaulettes," said he. "This man is the colonel—not the other."

In cold, incisive tones the German spoke. "I am Colonel von Pomerantz," said he with a baleful glare at Slafsky, who stood gazing, his eyes almost popping out. "I protest! This is outrageous, sir. Savages should not be used in civilized warfare!"

While the interpreter undertook the prisoner's examination at the direction of the Intelligence officer, General Kent strode over to where the Osage tenderly bent above Spurr's white face.

"Only loss of blood, sir," said the medical officer who had examined Spurr's wound. "He'll be all right soon."

Seizing the opportunity, Slafsky sidled up before the general and saluted.

"Well?"

"Mister General, please," he begged, "couldn't I put on my pents yet?"

A half smile showed on that officer's lips as he nodded and hurried off, trailed by the members of his staff.

Then there came a ragged burst of artillery fire behind them, while over-

head screeched the first shell of the pitiful barrage the exhausted French batteries were attempting. Presently the firing stopped, and from the bottom of the heights came a deep-throated American cheer.

Hours later General Kent, hollow-eyed and tired out, but with a smile of satisfaction on his face, repassed the grove in which he had left the trio. They found Red Lance squatted beside Spurr's comfortably contrived couch of blankets and hay. A few feet away sat Slafsky, chastely clad in a cast-off pair of blue breeches which rose almost to his naked armpits.

General Kent halted while Lance and Slafsky rose to salute.

"Needless to say, men, you'll be rewarded," he said. "Your work has been of tremendous value. Not three men in a hundred thousand could have carried out the difficult, almost impossible, assignment you undertook. I congratulate you."

"Oh, that's all right, Mister General," said Moe Slafsky with superb modesty. "Don't mention it—that aindt noddinks. Any time you wants anythink done, just call on us Injuns!"

THE END



Dance Hall Mining

DAWSON CITY in 1898 was one of the richest towns of its size in the world. Wages were very high and every one carried a poke of gold dust. Money in any form was scarce, and dust was the current medium of exchange.

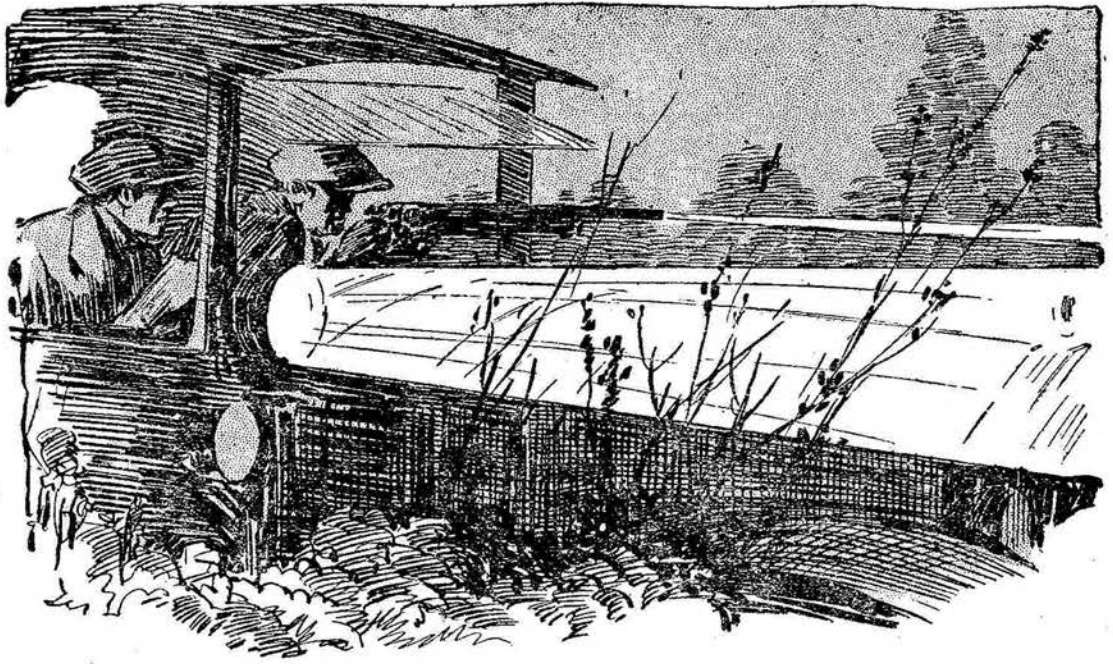
Out for a good time, hilarious miners, with full pokes carelessly measured the precious metal and spent it in the gambling saloons and dance halls.

Dawson City in 1928 is a quiet, conservative town. The dance halls are gone, wages are normal, and hilarious miners no longer do the double shuffle in the Flora Dora.

Gold is still plentiful, but it is now found in the banks, placed there by the corporations that own the enormous dredges working on the creeks. It is also found under the floors of the abandoned saloons and dance halls.

Several of the old-timers have bought in the pleasure resorts of '98, and are making an excellent living rocking out the gold from the dirt under the floors of the old buildings, shaken through the cracks by the dancing feet of the boys of '98.

Donald A. Cadzow.



"Instantly the darkness behind its glaring light was knifed by a stuttering stripe of red fire"

The Crime Circus

With every pressure being exerted to drive him from the bar, Gillian Hazeltine faced the crisis of his brilliant career—and a most exciting case

By GEORGE F. WORTS

CHAPTER I.

AN ULTIMATUM.

GILLIAN HAZELTINE considered the girl with immeasurable approval. She stood with one elbow on the mantel above the fireplace in which logs smartly crackled and dissolved in flame and smoke, her cheek pillowed on a forearm, her eyes closed or dreaming into the fire. Her tousled curly brown hair came to a downy point on her nape. It was a lovely neck, surmounting beautiful slim shoulders.

"It is better, Dorothy," said the great criminal lawyer, "that ninety-nine guilty men should escape than that one innocent man should be punished."

Dorothy Murphy, junior member of

the firm of Madeline Sœurs, said nothing. Gillian Hazeltine continued, in silence, to approve of her.

The cheek visible to him was bright with health. She wore a boy's heavy-blue sweater, khaki shirt, laced moccasins. She was slender, but her slenderness was that of a gracious maturity. Dorothy Murphy was, however, on the sunny side of thirty. Perhaps ten years yawned between them.

As she turned from the fireplace, Gillian Hazeltine knew that her answer was going to be no. Not a wavering, tone-qualified no, giving him grounds on which to base an appeal, but a no of distinctness and finality.

His years of practice in the criminal courts had taught him that trick of knowing a man's mind before the man

knew it himself. Women were more difficult; they were smooth liars, cleverer at the game of meaning one thing and saying another, of thinking one thing and saying just the opposite.

The girl's clear brown eyes considered him.

"No," she said distinctly—with finality. And he knew that she wasn't thinking the opposite, or teasing him, or merely being coquettish.

He blurted: "It's because I'm almost forty. If I were ten years younger—"

"Don't be silly," she stopped him.

"A man's age," he overrode her opposition, "has nothing to do with his years."

"Don't tell me, Gillian, that a man is only as old as he feels!"

"I won't!" he said sharply. "A man is as old as his energy. I have more energy than any man of twenty-four you can name! I do more work, require less sleep. Actually, by any kind of yardstick you want to use, I'm fifteen years younger than the average man of thirty-eight."

The girl's eyes again began to twinkle humorously.

"When I'm fifty, I won't be older than the average man of thirty-five," he asserted.

"If you had a shred of conscience, Gillian, you'd be seventy! What made you decide you'd rather marry me than Marguerite?"

"I love you," said the famous lawyer.

Dorothy Murphy laughed softly.

"I don't believe you know the meaning of the word. You're a cold, calculating machine, Gillian—that's all you are. We're both attractive girls. It's taken you a year to decide which one of us will be more of an ornament. Did you flip a coin, Gillian?"

"I thought you liked me," Gillian said with the petulance of a boy of twenty.

"Darling, I do like you," the girl laughed. "I'm really tremendously

fond of you. You're clever. You're amusing. I admire this marvelous energy that you're so proud of. But you're not my type, as the modern girl says. The old-fashioned girl would draw herself up haughtily and tell you she wouldn't have you if you were the last man on earth."

"Why," he persisted, "am I not your type?"

"Because," the girl answered, "you're a rascal. You were probably quite as much a rascal at twenty-four as you are at thirty-eight. The trouble is, I suppose—if we must analyze these things—I am hopelessly romantic. I must be able to idealize the man I love. Well, there aren't any ideals in you. You are grasping, greedy, calculating, a trickster. In short, you haven't any principles. You coldly figure out what you want; then you turn on this energy of yours—and get it.

"A year or so ago, or sometime after your second wife died, you began getting lonely; you began looking around for some nice pretty girl to share your nice house and your nice cars and your—yes, your nice millions with. Your choice seemed to narrow down to Marguerite and me. Somehow, you have eliminated Marguerite. You must have been awfully sure of me."

"I wasn't at all," the lawyer denied. "I only wanted you more than I ever wanted anything in my life. There wasn't any calculation about it. I do love you! Damn it, I do! I need you. I realize that I'm not by any means perfect. A girl with fine ideals, with lofty purposes—a girl like yourself, Dorothy—would be a guiding star for me."

"The defense rests?" Dorothy laughed.

"You're cruel," said the man.

"I know you so well," the girl told him. "Everything you say is so cleverly calculated, Gillian. You're so used to twisting facts to suit your ends; you're so used to swaying people by your logic—but I see clear through you, Gillian. You're too persuasive. You of-

fer to share your worldly all with me, and when I don't give in to that temptation, you attack every woman's weakness—by saying that you need me, that I am your shining ideal."

"It's true!" he proclaimed. "You are!"

"Rot!" said the girl. "You haven't a soul. You haven't, in the sentimental sense, a heart. You're cold, scheming, ruthless. You're where you are, my dear, because of what you are. Aren't most of us? You're the greatest criminal lawyer in the State—perhaps the greatest in America—because you have absolutely no soul.

"Time after time, you've defended murderers with the blood of the kill fairly reeking on their hands. You've got them off. You've made fools of stupid district attorneys. You've made fools of whole juries. You've bought juries. You've bought judges. And when you haven't bought them, you've taken the greatest pride in your ability to sway them with your words—in making them believe black was white. You've made yourself the shining hope of the underworld. Why do people call you the Silver Fox? Because you have a Christian soul and noble ideals?"

"People who aren't clever condemn cleverness," the Silver Fox grimly answered. "I do nothing worse than other lawyers. I only do it quicker."

Gillian Hazeltine was fighting as he had perhaps never fought in any courtroom. If he had deliberately gone about winning Dorothy Murphy, it was only because he wanted her so much. He loved her for her courage, her fine ideals; indeed, he loved her for the very qualities which made her despise him. What he lacked, she had. She was, he had known for a long time, a complement to his own brilliant personality. She wasn't brilliant; she was sound, square, fine.

"You might have become a corporation lawyer," she pointed out.

"Corporation law is no cleaner than criminal law," he retorted.

"It seems cleaner."

"But it isn't. Perhaps criminals appeal to me because they are under dogs."

"Murderers—" she murmured.

"Look here," said Gillian. "A man who commits a murder is usually justified. I mean, there is some good reason behind it. I don't try to make juries believe a murderer is innocent of the crime. I try to make them place themselves in the murderer's position, goaded as he was."

"You do?" breathed Dorothy Murphy with large round eyes of surprise.

"I do!"

"You do, you mean, when the evidence is against them. I've seen you get murderers off scot-free on tricky testimony."

Gillian Hazeltine sighed.

"You make me feel guilty as the devil."

"Angel, you are guilty as the devil!" she laughed.

"You know there is no justice in American criminal courts," he urgently went on. "A beautiful woman kills her husband with a hammer because she hates him—and the jury frees her. A homely man kills his wife because he hates her—and hangs. Is that justice?"

The girl made a little face at him.

"Are you really furious, Gillian, or is it merely your court room manner? I mean, have you an honest emotion in your system?"

"Court rooms," the lawyer declared, "are arenas. Lawyers are gladiators. The cleverest gladiator wins. The merits of the case have very little to do with the verdict. That situation existed when I was admitted to the bar."

"Did you try to reform it?"

"It took me a year or two to lose my illusions. A court room is no place for an idealist. So I became a realist. I adapted myself to the conditions I found. I made up my mind to win cases by every means at my disposal."

"Buying judges, bribing juries, using words as a smoke screen to hide the real issues," the beautiful girl stabbed at him. "You've summed up precisely the reasons why I can't love you, Gillian. You've chosen to walk with red-handed murderers. 'He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith,' or however it goes. You shouldn't have tossed your ideals overboard. You should have fought for them!"

"I should have starved."

"You are where you are because of what you are," the girl repeated. "The spokesman of the underworld, the defender of the crooks, the gunmen, the gamblers, the bootleggers—the little friend of the great moral unwashed. Why don't you tell me you will go your way and sin no more?"

Gillian Hazeltine, lounging on the arm of a chair with a cigar clamped in his teeth, looked at her dazedly. This slip of a girl had turned aside the shafts of his energetic intellect as masonry would turn aside darts of straw. A dozen women he knew would have jumped to possess him at a snap of his blunt fingers. This girl not only did not desire him, or his position, or his wealth; she defied and ridiculed him.

He seldom lost his temper. When a show of temper was called for, he could give an excellent imitation of that emotion without losing a shade of his superb mental calm. She had surprised him, baffled him so completely that he was now honestly mad clear through.

Her eyes, after her challenge, remained innocently round and provocative.

"I want you to go straight, Gillian," she added in a mockingly grim voice.

"Please stop being flippant!" he snapped.

Dorothy Murphy gravely attended him; eyes narrowed, lips apart, but no longer smiling.

"I'm close enough to being in love with you," she said quickly, "that, if

you stopped your criminal practice and went in for something I could admire or respect, I'd be tempted to reconsider you."

"Give up my criminal practice entirely?"

"And instantly! Decide between me and murderers! Now! And promise never to jilt me for a fascinating murderess!"

"You're asking me to throw overboard the biggest practice in five States?"

"I am! Sell it! I'm confident I can make you so happy you won't miss the murderers!"

"You are?"

"I am, Gillian!"

Gillian Hazeltine looked at her wildly as he came up from the arm of the chair. He had desired many other women. But he had never desired a woman to the point of such madness. Throw away his practice—the fruits of fifteen years of energetic toil!

It momentarily occurred to Gillian that he must be getting old. Men made fools of themselves over pretty women when they were no longer on the young side. Old fools! Was he at that age, or did the fighter in him merely demand her surrender on any terms?

He tried, in a space of seconds, to reason himself out of the dangerous mood. Give up his life's work in exchange for her slim, soft perfection! Admit he had been a knave, to banish that derision from her eyes! He discovered that he wanted her at any sacrifice.

"I'll do it, Dorothy!" he suddenly exclaimed.

With all the clumsy ardor of love at twenty, he caught her in his arms; pressed kiss after kiss upon her soft, moist, responsive mouth; thrilled to the clinging delight of her; heard himself saying foolish, romantic things.

"We'll pack up and go abroad! Darling, we'll cruise the Mediterranean! We'll go to the South Seas

and eat breadfruit under palm trees! You adorable!"

She was starry-eyed; radiant with exultation in this proof of her power over him.

Marguerite Murphy, tall, stately, statuesque blond girl in a negligee of black, trimmed with white lace, came down the stairs, eying them with wonder and amusement.

"Gillian," she observed in a liquid golden voice, "I adore this camp of yours. Roughing it *de luxe* is loads of fun. The swimming has been wonderful. Your Jap cook is perfect. I am grateful for the hours of leisure you two have given me—I really did want to catch up on my reading. I have enjoyed the pines and the hemlocks. But, thank Heaven—thank Heaven, Gillian, we can now pack up and go back to town."

One lovely white hand trailed along the banister as she descended, talking.

"I was beginning to think you two never would stop snarling. Gillian, I don't know whether to congratulate you or condone with you. I don't think Dorothy appreciates you. She will probably make you the worst wife the world has ever known. She is extravagant, lazy and fickle."

Gillian, laughed boisterously as Marguerite, senior member of the firm of Madeline Sœurs, moved swiftly across the room—her grace that of a tigress—and enfolded her sister in her arms. It had been, in truth, a most difficult choice to make. Even now, he wondered. Marguerite, in a black evening gown, with her white shoulders, her glorious golden hair, her pink delicate lips, was superb—elegant!

"Darling!" Dorothy was excitedly saying. "He's promised to give up his criminal practice! He's tried his last case! No more—ever!"

Amazed blue eyes questioned Gillian. He nodded affirmation.

"She wouldn't consider me on any other terms."

"Any woman," announced the beautiful golden-haired girl, "is biting off a large chunk when she bullies a man into giving up his lifework."

"He won't regret it," Dorothy confidently stated.

"But—so suddenly!"

"He promised," Dorothy added.

"But, Gillian, how can you get away with it?"

"I will!"

"You can't let people down!"

"It isn't necessary. I haven't a case on hand of any importance."

"Can you really pull all your chestnuts out of the fire?"

"Let them burn!" he cried recklessly.

Marguerite Murphy gravely shook her sleek golden head.

"I don't think you know what you're saying. I think you're drunk with love."

"If he can't, I won't have him," Dorothy declared. "That's the bargain—murderers or me—now or never!"

"All I can hear," said her sister, soberly, "is a monkey wrench falling into a lot of delicate machinery. Of course, I haven't your high ideals, Dorothy. I am a ruthless woman. Poor Gillian! I hope she finds a halo that fits you."

Dorothy, with her arm around Gillian's broad, muscular back, looked into his face and said, sweetly: "You won't be sorry."

A heavy-fisted clamor at the door forestalled Gillian's answer. The room, suddenly still, seemed to throb with the pommeling. A man's muffled, excited voice cried:

"Mr. Hazeltine! Mr. Hazeltine! Lemme in! It's Click!"

Frowning, Gillian strode to the door and unbolted it.

A man came plunging into the room with head down; a white-faced man with a flattened nose and wild black eyes.

He burst out:

"Dey bumped off Big Ben Lewis! Dey pinched the Dearing girl!"

CHAPTER II.

GANG VENGEANCE.

AS Gillian Hazeltine quickly closed the door, the two girls, looking with startled eyes from the intruder to him, saw that his face had suddenly gone white; that small pearls of sweat had promptly gathered on his judicial brow.

The famous criminal lawyer mopped his forehead with a large blue-bordered handkerchief and said:

"Pull yourself together, Click. Just what happened?"

"Fer gossakes, grab yer kelly, Mr. Hazeltine, an' come along wit' me! I'll spill it on de way back!"

"Spill it now," the lawyer curtly bade him.

"Not me," cried the excited young man. "Dey've been trailin' me since I pulled outa town."

"Who?"

"A carload. I dunno who. And I ain't talkin' to anybody but you, see?"

Gillian gave the two sisters a weary, gray smile.

"Ladies, may I present Mr. Click Gorner—one of our most picturesque underworld characters? He is known as Click because of an old habit of his of saying, 'Do you click wit' me?' If you don't click with Click, he generally wears a gun under his left armpit to help you make up your mind. What time was Lewis killed, Click?"

"Nine toity!"

"Where did it happen?"

"In his office."

"And they've arrested Violet Dearing?"

"Dey pinched her foist t'ing."

"Were there witnesses?"

"Mr. Hazeltine, I ain't sayin' nuttin'—not till we're in my sedan. I ain't talkin' to anybody but you personal—see? Will yuh grab yer kelly

and drive back wit' me? I'll spill it all while we're drivin'."

Gillian frowned. "You say you were followed?"

"I did better'n sixty all the way up. Dey stuck close behind all de way to Dexter. I shook 'em there, see? But dey know where yuh live."

"It may be a load of cops, Click."

"Bulls don't t'ink dat fast, Mr. Hazeltine. It's some of Rafferty's gang—dat's who. I'll wait fer yuh in my sedan, Mr. Hazeltine."

The gunman shot a hostile glance at the beautiful sisters, put his mouth close to Gillian's ear and whispered:

"There's a lot of people who want the Dearing dame railroaded fer this. But she didn't shoot him. I know who did the shootin'. I saw it. So did Nicky Anderson. It looks bad, Mr. Hazeltine. You gotta promise me absolute protection if I give my testimony."

"I'll meet you in the car," Gillian said.

Dorothy Murphy broke in: "Gillian, you're not going with this man!"

"I must find out what he knows, honey. This is much more serious than it appears on the surface. Big Ben Lewis was, in a way, the king of the underworld—a tremendous power politically. I'm not exaggerating when I say that his death will be felt in every corner of this State. Run along, Click, while I get a hat and coat."

He opened the door for the gunman and Click Gorner scuttled out into the night. Gillian hastened to a small closet under the stairs, secured a felt hat and a fall coat and started for the door.

Dorothy impulsively ran to him, as if to detain him by force, but he brushed past her to the doorway, where he paused.

He saw the lights of an approaching car swing around the last curve from the village of Dexter at the end of the lake. The lights now flooded the road and the narrow lawn which ran down

from the porch to the lake, sharply etching the lean figure of Click Gorner against the blackness of a pine thicket.

A more powerful beam flashed on. It played full and brilliantly upon the gunman, following him as a spotlight follows an actor on a darkened stage. He was running now, as if the light had frightened him.

The car came plunging on and Gillian held his breath, tingling with a sense of fatality. With a retching of brakes the car came to an abrupt halt.

Instantly the darkness behind its glaring lights was knifed by a stuttering stripe of red fire. This stabbing intermittent blade of red flame was accompanied by a ripping crash of sound.

Click Gorner was tossed and spun about in the white drench of radiance as if by violent, destructive hands.

It was the first time Gillian had been a witness to the swift and horrible effectiveness of a modern hand machine gun, and the shock of it suddenly sickened him. In his own way he was a fearless fighter, but the sight of death always filled him with a childlike terror.

The savage snarl of the machine gun ceased as abruptly as it had begun—and Click Gorner lay limp and torn and broken on the roadside.

A hand in the room behind Gillian flashed off the lights as a woman screamed once. The lawyer was energetically pulled back from that perilous threshold; he was turned about and firmly clasped in a woman's slender, strong arms.

Which woman?

Dazed and shaken by the brutal assassination of Click Gorner, he could only, for the moment, clasp the woman to save himself from toppling over.

The quickness with which it had happened. . . .

Dorothy or Marguerite?

As his eyes accustomed themselves to the dimness of the room—the red dimness of dying embers—he vaguely saw the form of a woman lying athwart the hearth.

One of them, he reasoned, had screamed and fainted. The other had leaped to the wall switch and pulled him from the doorway. This one was now in his arms.

Dorothy or her sister?

A glaring white beam flickered along the rafters as the death car backed, turned, and sped off with a roaring gust from its exhaust.

Out there in the darkness, under the trees, crumpled, bullet-ridden, lifeless, lay Click Gorner.

The woman in his arms released herself. The lights in the room flashed on.

He croaked, "Dorothy!" Even in his shocked state, he could be astonished that, in this acid test of character, the younger sister had proved braver and more resourceful.

She was white with excitement and fear, but her eyes were dark, tender with concern for him.

"I thought they might be planning to get you, too, Gillian."

He said: "Marguerite has fainted."

"She always does," Dorothy murmured. "I'll get her a drink. You'd better have one, too. You're as pale as a ghost."

"It was a terrific shock. I'll 'phone the sheriff at Dexter," he said.

The 'phone bell began ringing before he had crossed the room. Hazeltine picked up the receiver and shakily said, "Hello."

"Is this Gillian Hazeltine?" an unknown man's voice rasped.

"It is," said the lawyer.

"Did you know that Ben Lewis has been killed and that Violet Dearing has been collared?"

"I do. Yes. Who is this?"

"Never mind who this is," the harsh voice returned. "I'm just calling to give you a piece of warning, Hazeltine. *Keep your hands off this case!*"

"Is this Rafferty?" Gillian snapped.

"Never you mind who it is. I'm telling you to keep your hands off this case—or you're going to get yours."

Gillian snarled: "Who's going to give it to me?"

The unknown man answered: "Try and find out!"

He hung up. Gillian angrily jiggled the hook and presently secured the attention of Central. He instructed her to trace the call.

"I'll hold the 'phone," he added.

The report came, in a few seconds, that the call had originated in Burke's pool room, on Center Street, in Greenboro.

"Call that number," he said grimly.

A deep bass voice presently answered. Its owner confessed himself to be Tim Burke, the pool room's proprietor. Gillian knew him well; believed him to be trustworthy.

"I don't know who it could have been, Mr. Hazeltine," he said in answer to the lawyer's questions. "We've got three 'phone booths here. People are duckin' in and out from the street all the time, usin' them."

"Find out if Slim Rafferty has been seen by anyone there in the past fifteen minutes."

Tim Burke requested him to hold the line. He returned to the 'phone presently and said:

"Rafferty was in here all evening, but no one seems to've seen him in the past half hour, Mr. Hazeltine. Is anything wrong?"

"If you see Rafferty, tell him to get in touch with me any time after midnight. I'll be at my house. That's all, Tim. Good-by."

Gillian hung up and turned from the 'phone, to find Dorothy Murphy seated beside him. She asked bluntly:

"Who is going to give you what?"

"Some one," he gravely answered, "doesn't want me to mix into this case."

"Neither does some one else," said the girl. "You don't intend to, do you?"

"Not if it can be avoided," Gillian assured her.

"It must be avoided, Gillian. I sup-

posed that, sooner or later, this issue would have to be met—a murder involving a combination of circumstances that you would find simply irresistible; but I didn't expect to see it happen so soon."

"Honey, it hasn't happened."

"Then you aren't going to monkey with this case?"

He hesitated before answering her. "It isn't an ordinary murder case. It's the result of a political upheaval that will set the State by the ears. There isn't a politician in the State who won't turn white when he hears that Ben Lewis was killed—by the Dearing girl."

"Who is this Dearing girl?"

Gillian's gravity increased. "No one quite knows. She was a nice girl who recently decided, by all accounts, that the primrose path is the easiest."

"Was she Ben Lewis's mistress?"

"No, dear—nor anybody else's. She is Greenton's leading lady bootlegger. She turned to that because she didn't seem to be able to hold any respectable job. She's been making a great deal of money, and blowing it in on Ben Lewis's roulette wheel. She is a beautiful thing and I don't believe she killed Ben Lewis. I mean, putting together the things that I know—that I can't discuss with you just now."

"You're saying in so many words, Gillian, that you're interested in her case—you're tempted to defend her. And I am telling you—in so many words, Gillian—that if you defend this girl—" Dorothy stopped, as the telephone bell sharply began to ring.

A number of voices crowded in on the circuit when he said "Hello." Quiet was succeeded by a crisp masculine voice saying:

"Mr. Hazeltine? This is Governor Brundage's secretary. The Governor wants to talk with you."

"Very well," Gillian acquiesced.

The deep, rough voice of Governor Brundage came booming down the wire.

"Gillian?"

"Yes, Governor."

"Have you heard that Ben Lewis is dead?"

"I heard about it a short time ago."

"Have you heard any of the details?"

"Only that Violet Dearing has been arrested."

"I understand that two eyewitnesses saw the shooting. They have evidently a strong case against the girl."

Gillian said nothing. The Governor, after a wait, inquired impatiently:

"Are you still there, Gillian?"

"Yes, Governor, I'm here."

"It would be advisable, I think, if you came up here and had a conference with me as soon as you can make it, Gillian. If you are asked to handle this case, I would consider it a favor if you deferred decision until you had seen me."

"I will drive to the capital to-morrow or next day," was Gillian's answer.

"Thank you, Gillian. Good-by."

Gillian was frowning as he replaced the receiver. Dorothy exclaimed:

"That was Governor Brundage!"

Gillian nodded.

"He doesn't want you to touch the case!"

Gillian looked at her curiously.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"I don't know," he answered. "I'm going to find out. That's two people so far who don't want me to touch the case. It's getting more and more interesting!"

"If you let yourself be drawn into it—" Dorothy began warningly.

He reached forward and patted her hand. It was a slender, white, beautiful hand. He had fallen in love with Dorothy's hands long before he had fallen in love with Dorothy.

"Darling, I won't be drawn into it. Stop worrying. I love you. I don't intend to lose you."

She cried: "All this to-night proves just what I was saying. A dreadful murder occurs in the underworld—and

you are the first person every one turns to!"

He smiled. "The friend of the under dog, Dorothy!"

She did not return the smile. "The friend of gunmen and murderers!"

"The murderer hasn't so far called me up," he reminded her.

"How can she? She's in jail!"

Gillian had nothing to say to that. He lifted the receiver again and requested the Dexter operator to connect him with Sheriff Bolton. When the gruff, familiar voice of his old friend came on the wire, Gillian said:

"Pete, there's been a killing out at my camp here. A gang of Greenton gunmen drove out in a car and polished off Click Gerner."

"How long ago'd this happen?" Sheriff Bolton demanded.

"I'd say twenty minutes."

"Where'd the car go?"

"They seemed to be heading back toward Greenton."

"That means they've gone through Dexter!" the sheriff exploded. "Why didn't you phone me in time to head 'em off?"

"Because I didn't want you and your posse massacred," Gillian answered. "The gang in that car is armed with at least one machine gun. They are probably full of hop and and would mow their way through hell and high water. Big Ben Lewis was shot—killed—in his office at nine thirty. Click Gerner is no doubt the first of a number of victims."

There was a long silence at the sheriff's end of the wire. He presently said "Phew!" as if he were suddenly uncomfortably warm.

"I'll be right out with the coroner," he added weakly. "We'll hold the inquest immediately. The coroner will bring along enough men for the jury. We can count on you, can't we, Gil?"

"Not on a coroner's jury," Gillian said hastily. "I hate dead men. I won't look at a dead man. You'll conduct your inquest on the lawn where

the body is lying. You're not going to bring it into this house!"

"All right, Gil, all right. Who killed Ben Lewis?"

"They've arrested a girl named Violet Dearing."

"Never heard of her. Well, we'll be right out, Gil."

They arrived—a carload of men, including Sheriff Bolton and the coroner—in about half an hour. The inquest was held at the roadside, with Gillian standing on his front porch refusing to participate.

The coroner's jury, after counting thirty-two bullet holes in Click Gorner's body, gravely decided that the gunman had met his death in a violent manner.

Cause of death: Penetration of sundry vital organs, including heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, stomach and intestines by bullets fired with deliberation and premeditation. Assailant or assailants unknown.

The mortal remains of Click Gorner were lifted into the tonneau of the sheriff's car and driven away.

The telephone rang once more as Gillian, his Japanese servant and the Murphy sisters were making hasty preparations for departure.

At the end of the line was an old friend—or an old enemy—of Gillian's, his opponent in countless court room battles—Adelbert Yistle, the prosecuting attorney of Greenboro. He excitedly wanted to know if Gillian had heard of the death of Big Ben Lewis.

"I have," said Gillian.

"Then you know that Violet Dearing has been arrested, charged with killing him."

"I do."

"Are you going to handle her case?"

"I haven't decided. She hasn't asked me."

"Well, she will. She is referring all questions to you already. I'm simply warning you, Gillian, not to take that girl's case. It's a prima facie case of first degree murder, and you

can simplify matters for everybody by keeping out of it. If you have any sense of justice, you will. You've cost the State hundreds of thousands of dollars in the past couple of years for trials because of your damned tricky methods. Be a sport, keep out of this case and—well, give me a chance to win one."

"The only promise I can give," was Gillian's answer, "is that I haven't decided to take this case."

"You won't have a leg to stand on if you do take it," Mr. Yistle argued. "Two witnesses saw her fire the shot. The gun, with two cartridges discharged, was found concealed on her."

"I could find two hundred who didn't see her fire the shot," said the jocular Gillian.

"The newspapers," Mr. Yistle persisted, "will be unanimously against you. Everybody is sore at the way you've been wasting the taxpayers' money on these court room farces. Give me your word that you won't take this case, will you?"

"Who told you to call me up and ask me not to take this case?" Gillian demanded.

"Why—why—" the prosecuting attorney stammered. "Nobody. I—I'm asking you of my own volition."

"Good-by," said Gillian rudely.

The Silver Fox, replacing the receiver on its hook, was grave. He had, as a matter of fact, not the slightest intention of defending the Dearing girl, or of having any hand in the trial, yet the temptation to leap into the fray was strong. The request and threat he had received had fanned his interest to a blazing curiosity. Being a fighter born, he loved opposition.

When the girls came downstairs, announcing that they were packed and ready to start for the city, he sternly surveyed them.

"Did either of you, by any chance, hear what Click Gorner whispered to me just before he went out the door and was killed?"

The sisters shook their heads; hadn't heard a word of that whispering.

"What did he say?" Dorothy wanted to know.

"That the Dearing girl did not kill Ben Lewis."

"Who did?"

"Click didn't tell me. Some gang, as I see it, had orders to kill him so that he could not tell."

Dorothy asked anxiously: "You haven't decided to take that case?"

He shook his head. He did not know what to do. A personal responsibility had been, against his will, thrust upon him: to clear an innocent girl accused of murder. If he defended Violet Dearing, he would automatically lose Dorothy Murphy. If he did not defend Violet Dearing, she would in all probability go to the electric chair, "railroaded" by a sinister power whose influence he had felt twice to-night.

He decided, before making up his mind on the course to be pursued, to interview Nicky Anderson, who could tell him what Click Gorner had vainly tried to tell him.

CHAPTER III.

THE FRAME-UP.

GILLIAN said good night to the Murphy sisters at their apartment doorway and drove on to his house in the fashionable Riverdale section. He had built it during his brief romance with the second Mrs. Hazeltine; a mansion of fifteen rooms, one of the showplaces of Greenboro.

Its lonesomeness, as he let himself in, oppressed him. The rooms struck him suddenly as huge, over formal, unfriendly. He pictured Dorothy Murphy being here to greet him. It was a delightful picture. Her presence would fill this echoing solitude with brightness and warmth.

The lonely lawyer wandered upstairs to his office, which had been an

invention of the second Mrs. Hazeltine—now a permanent expatriate on the Riviera. He seated himself at the telephone and with a strong effort of will pulled his thoughts together.

Presently he lifted the receiver and called a number. A woman with a high whining voice answered. Gillian said very softly:

"This is Mr. Hazeltine, Gillian Hazeltine. I wonder if the mechanic who works on my cars is there?"

There was a silence. He hoped that she would understand and that any one who chanced to be listening in would be deceived. She whined: "I'll see."

Gillian waited a full five minutes. Then the woman's voice again:

"He don't want to come to the phone. He ain't feeling good."

"Did you tell him Mr. Hazeltine was calling?"

"I told him."

"Tell him again. Tell him it's very important."

"All right, but he ain't feeling good."

After another five minutes' wait, his patience was rewarded. A man's voice with a nasal twang came into his ear. It was so similar in intonation to the voice of Click Gorner that the two could hardly have been told apart.

Nicky Anderson said:

"What do you want?"

"I'm having ignition trouble on my Lincoln roadster," Gillian said, almost in a pur. "I wonder if you could come right out."

"Not a chance. I'm sick."

"The way you came last time would be shorter—and better," Gillian softly urged him. He was referring to a path through the woods back of his estate. Nicky could come through those woods and enter the door unseen by any one watching the front or sides of the house.

"This night air is bad for me," said the man who, according to the dead Click Gorner, was the only remaining witness to the murder.

"Indoor air is just as bad," Gillian pointed out as significantly.

"I've got a bad headache," protested Nicky Anderson.

"But you'll come up," said Gillian.

"I'll think it over," said Nicky.

The lawyer hung up the receiver and crossed the room to the large window facing south. It commanded a view of the immaculate lawn sloping off toward Maple Avenue. Even at night the Hazeltine grounds were fairly well illuminated because of the profusion of street lights in the Riverdale section.

He saw a man lounging under a young elm tree. The man seemed to be looking up at the window. Perhaps it was his imagination, but Gillian was certain he saw something glitter in the man's hand.

Gillian pulled down the shade and rang for his butler. When Toro appeared the lawyer said:

"I am expecting a man who will come to the back door and walk in without ringing or knocking. You are to wait in the kitchen and bring him directly to my office. Go through the house now and see that all windows are fastened, all doors locked, all shades pulled down."

Toro acknowledged these instructions and departed. The telephone bell began to ring. It would be, Gillian foresaw, a busy night for him.

The agitated voice of a man came into his ear.

"Is this Gillian Hazeltine?"

"It is."

"This is Wally Brundage, Mr. Hazeltine," the man said, and added: "Thank God, I've found you! Can I see you at once?"

"You can," said Gillian, wondering why the son of the Governor should want to see him.

"You know, don't you, that big Ben Lewis is dead?"

"Yes, I know."

"And that Violet Dearing has been arrested, charged with murdering him?"

"I heard that too; yes."

"I'll be right out, Mr. Hazeltine. Good-by."

Gillian heard a door close as he hung up the receiver. Then soft footsteps on the back stairs. Toro said in his precise English:

"The gentleman walked in the back door, sir."

Behind the Japanese towered the lanky figure of Nicky Anderson. He was unshaved. His blue-gray eyes had that brilliant gloss which comes from cocaine. His long, horselike face was pale and oily from much perspiring. His fingers at his side were twitching.

"Well," he said, "I got here."

"Sit down, Nicky," Gillian curtly instructed him.

Nicky glanced shrewdly about the room.

"No chance of this house bein' broken into, is there?" he anxiously wanted to know.

"All windows and doors are locked," Gillian assured him.

Nicky sat down on the edge of a chair, nervously lighted a cigarette, and asked huskily:

"Where's Click?"

Gillian looked at him thoughtfully.

"Click is dead. He drove out to my summer place immediately after Ben Lewis was bumped off. A gang followed him in a car."

Nicky turned a shade paler.

"What did Click tell yuh?"

"He told me you and he had seen the murder; he insisted that the Dearing girl didn't shoot Lewis. Who did?"

Nicky Anderson shook his head.

"Mr. Hazeltine," he said with husky-voiced gravity, "I don't know. The Dearing dame didn't do it. Click and me was standin' outside the door o' that room Lewis uses as his office. We was waitin' to go in an' brace him fer a loan, see? We was waitin' in that dark sort of alcove in the hall when we seen the Dearing dame come up the stairs to go into his office."

"The minute she put her hand on the doorknob we heard two shots inside. I mean, she had her hand on the knob when the first shot was fired and she had the door maybe a foot open when the second shot was fired.

"We rushed into the room after her and there was Big Ben sprawlin' over his desk top with blood comin' out o' two holes in his forehead."

"Wait a minute," the lawyer stopped him. "There's another door into that office, isn't there?"

"Yes, Mr. Hazeltine. There's a back door that leads into a hall goin' to a flight of stairs to the street that nobody but Ben Lewis himself ever used."

"Was the door closed when you went in?"

"Yes, sir; it was closed but not locked. Click and me took one look and breezed."

"You were afraid of being pinched?"

"Sure we was! Why not? Ain't both of us got records as long as your arm? You oughta know, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Go on with your story."

"There ain't much more to tell, Mr. Hazeltine. We beat it down them stairs to the street and a black sedan was just pullin' away from the curb."

"A sedan?"

"Yes, sir. I think it was an old twin-six Packard. We didn't get the license number and we couldn't make out who was inside. There wasn't anybody else in sight—I mean on the street. Click says you ought to know about it right away. I mean, we hung around while the wagon drove up and they took the Dearing dame down to the stir. And Click says he was gonna drive right out to your summer camp and tell yuh what we seen."

"In other words," Gillian took him up, "there were no other witnesses to the fact that the Dearing girl did *not* kill Lewis but you and Click."

"She's a nice kid," Nicky added. "I think it's a frame, cold as hell."

"Who would frame her?"

"I ain't in on that. Who bumped off Click? The Rafferty gang? He's in with the mayor, ain't he? I haven't even got a good guess. Who do you think would frame the kid?"

"I don't know," said Gillian.

"And what a hell of a witness I'd make, to testify for the Dearing kid!" Nicky muttered. "They'd laugh me out of court, with *my* record!"

"Your record spoils you as a witness," Gillian agreed. "No jury in the world would believe you after a prosecuting attorney finished asking you about your past. But you are, nevertheless, valuable, Nicky. I know you're telling me the truth, and whoever defends the Dearing girl will know that she is innocent."

"What do you want me to do, Mr. Hazeltine? I oughta be hittin' the grit. If the Rafferty gang got Click, they're gonna get me next. They knew we was like brothers."

"I've been thinking of that," said Gillian. He glanced at his watch. "It's one fifteen, Nicky. The Chicago Limited stops at Greenboro Junction to change engines in about forty minutes. Get aboard at the junction and go to Chicago. Go to the Weymouth Hotel and take a room under the name of—let me see—Jerry Conway. Stay in that room. Lay off booze and dope."

"I'll read the Gideon Bible," Nicky humorously suggested.

"It wouldn't do you a bit of harm. Lay low. Wait for instructions from me. Something may develop. If I wire I'll use code. If I send you a wire saying 'Buy cotton,' you'll know that I have no further use for you and you can fade. The other wire will be 'Sell cotton.' That will mean several things. It will mean that you are to round up a gang, come back to Greenboro, conceal yourselves and get in touch with me."

"Who you after—Rafferty?" the gunman grimly asked.

The Silver Fox said nothing.

"It'll cost you a pile of jack," Nicky hastened to add. "There's nothin' in the world I wouldn't do fer yuh, Mr. Hazeltine, after what you done fer me—but a Chicago gang will cost jack. Yuh want about seven good men besides me, don't yuh? That'll set yuh back about five grand, countin' railroad expenses and hop. Those guys don't work without hop. Do you wanna let me have the five grand now, in case the deal goes through?"

Gillian smiled.

"I'll wire money if it's necessary. It may not be necessary. I hope it won't be necessary. At present, a hundred will keep you going. Here's a hundred."

He gave Nicky Anderson five twenty-dollar bills.

"Have you got the code straight in your head?"

Nicky grimly nodded. "Buy cotton means yuh don't need me. Sell cotton means, round up a gang, bring 'em here and report to you."

"Good luck," said Gillian.

He didn't trust Nicky Anderson. He trusted no crook, although time after time he had saved some rogue from prison by impressing upon a sentimental jury the need of "giving this poor, misunderstood kid a chance to go straight." The reformation and the gratitude of crooks, he had found, were popular fairy tales. But he was sure Nicky would follow his instructions, not from gratitude, but because of certain specific things that Gillian knew about him; because he knew that Gillian was ruthless with double crossers.

The Silver Fox tiptoed to the south window and peeked out through a crack between shade and sash. The man under the elm tree had gone elsewhere.

Gillian waited, listening. He would have been pained, but not surprised to hear at any moment a snarling staccato of shots, meaning that Nicky Anderson had been violently sent to join his pal, Click. But there were no shots. The night continued peaceful.

Under the gentle light of a rising moon, Riverdale slept; Greenboro slept, happily unaware of ugly, sinister forces at work at its very civic core.

A lean gray roadster whispered into the Hazeltine crushed bluestone driveway like a monster lizard with incandescent eyes. Under the porte-cochère it stopped. The glaring eyes winked out, and in the bowels of the house a bell rang loudly and musically.

Toro was presently ushering up into Gillian's study a pale, agitated young man.

Wally Brundage slung a crumpled hat and a light overcoat into a chair and effusively shook Gillian's hand. He was of the athletic type; tall, broad-shouldered and graceful, with thick, curling, golden-blond hair, live, sparkling blue eyes; strong, excellent teeth. He might be the captain of a football team, or one of the new generation of gentlemanly pugilists.

Gillian knew him casually; he knew him only slightly better by reputation. An unruly young man, given to larks. Headstrong and a little wild, but decent.

"It's a damned outrage to come barging in on you like this, Mr. Hazeltine!" he gushed, as he squeezed and pumped Gillian's hand.

"People come to me at all hours when they're in trouble," Gillian said cordially.

"God knows I'm in trouble, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Sit down and collect yourself, Wally. We've got the whole night."

"But they're giving Vi the third degree!"

"They won't harm her. She's a smart girl."

"You'll take her case, won't you?" the boy cried.

"Wally, I don't think I can."

Governor Brundage's son leaped up and clutched his head. He was obviously in a state of tremendous tension.

"You've simply got to, Mr. Hazeltine! There's not another lawyer in this town—in this State—in the world

—who knows the political situation as you do. It isn't a straight murder case. I tell you it's politics."

He stopped. He glared, panting, at Gillian. He brought his big brown fist down with a smash on Gillian's desk.

"My father has told you not to!" he fairly shouted.

"There isn't a man in this State who can keep me away from a case if I want to take it," Gillian corrected him. "You may think my reason is foolish, but look here, Wally. You're in love, aren't you?"

"I am! I certainly am!"

"Well, so am I. And the girl I want won't have me unless I drop criminal practice—beginning now. If I take Miss Dearing's case, I lose the woman I want."

"If you don't take her case, they'll railroad her through to the chair."

"You're asking me to make too big a sacrifice. I'll get good counsel for you. I'll stay behind the scenes. I'll give them all the information, all the dope—"

"It won't work," the young man stopped him. "There's only one way to clear Vi. That's for you to go into court and do it. Mr. Hazeltine," he went on, in a lower tone, "you don't know what's been going on. Let me tell you just a little. I met Vi a little over a year ago, when I was first out of college. It may sound like kid stuff to you—but it was a case of love at first sight. We simply fell for each other like a ton of bricks.

"My father was mad enough about it to kill me. You know where he started in life—at the end of a pick on a railroad gang. He's always been sensitive about his lowly beginning, and he's wanted to make a dog-goned lounge-lizard out of me. He wanted me to marry 'way up in society. In fact, he picked the girl. You know her, Beulah Hemmingway; rich, homely and dumb."

Gillian nodded. He had heard this part of the story.

"When I told him I was crazy about Vi, he threw a fit and tried to knock me down. When he saw that that stuff wouldn't work, he got busy on Vi herself. At first, he tried five different times to frame her, compromise her some way. But she outsmarted him each time. Then he brought pressure to bear on her job. If you'll remember, she was assistant librarian at the main public library at the time. She lost that job and got one as a stenographer in the Whitley Construction Company. Dad got her fired out of there.

"In his time he has used mighty rough methods in smashing men who stood in his way, but I don't think he ever used meaner methods than he's used on that poor kid. He didn't realize how much spunk she has!"

"Too much spunk," said Gillian.

Wally Brundage stared at him.

"Too much spunk," Gillian repeated.

"'He that fights and runs away may live to fight another day,' as some old poet said. She should have run away. She's only made a bad name for herself by staying."

"Vi is red-headed and half Irish," the young man said sadly. "She wouldn't run away from a charging grizzly."

"Can you explain her conduct since the last job your father forced her out of?" Gillian asked.

"Her conduct?"

"She's a bootlegger, isn't she, Wally? It seems to me your father has proved his point. At least, he's made a bootlegger out of her."

"I'm not so sure he forced her into bootlegging," Wally Brundage demurred. "I'll swear there's some mystery connected with that. I know her principal reason for going into bootlegging wasn't the money, although she did need money. But she only grins at me when I ask what she is up to. She's ten thousand times smarter than I am. I know she's square and decent—"

"Even if she has gone down the scale

from assistant librarian to bootlegger?"

"I'll fight any man who insinuates she isn't square and decent!"

"You'll have plenty of fights on your hands in the next few days," Gillian assured him. "What was she doing in Big Ben's to-night?"

"We were playing roulette."

"You, too, eh?"

The athlete nodded.

"Why? I mean, has she honestly fallen for roulette?"

"She seems to enjoy it," the young man grunted. "She's been playing there night after night, always for small stakes, and neither winning nor losing." He added belligerently: "After all, nice people play roulette at Deauville and Monte Carlo and Biarritz, don't they?"

"Nice people don't play roulette in Big Ben's," Gillian answered, "unless they do it under the guise of slumming. Well, what happened, Wally?"

The young man stiffened. "We were playing when that pale fellow, Malone, I think his name is—Ben's man Friday—came and whispered in Vi's ear. She told me she'd be back in a minute and hustled out of the room. I'd never seen her so excited."

"Scared?"

"No! Excited. Pale and eyes snapping. You know. Well, she almost ran out of the room, and next thing I knew everybody was yelling that Ben had been shot—twice. You ought to 've seen the rats beat it out of that dive!"

"You stuck."

"Certainly I stuck!"

"Then the police came," Hazeltine prompted.

"Yes."

"How long did it take the police to get there?"

"I don't know. I was too excited. It may have been five minutes—or forty. About all I remember is seeing the place suddenly swarming with cops, and a big, red-faced man I never saw before in my life kept hollering, 'The girl shot

Ben! She killed Ben!' I knocked him down! I hit him as hard as I could in the mouth."

"He saw her shoot Ben?"

"He said he did."

"Did you find out his name?"

"It's Ezra Wallace. He's a dirty liar. He never saw her shoot Ben. She didn't shoot Ben."

"Who did?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows. Vi doesn't know—and she was first in Ben's office after the shooting. She says the smoke was still in the air—I mean, the smell of it. But there wasn't a soul in the office."

"Who arrested her?"

"Police Captain Sorrenson. His men herded us down into two patrol wagons to the police station. When they let me go, I tried to get you by phone. I kept trying till I got you."

"Did you talk to Miss Dearing?"

"I did. In the wagon. Sorrenson tried to push me in the other wagon, but I elbowed him out of the way and climbed in beside Vi."

"Was she scared?"

"At first she wasn't so much scared as dazed. Then, as she really realized what was happening, she became furious. About all she would say was that they had put banana peels under her at last. And she told me to get in touch with you immediately."

Gillian looked distressed.

"Wally, you will have to believe that I am being absolutely honest with you. I hate to let this girl of yours down. I would like to take her case. Everything I have heard about Miss Dearing, makes me interested in her. But in justice to myself, I cannot take her case. "I'll gladly go down and talk to her. I'll give her all the advice I can, all the help I can—but I will not touch this case!"

Wally Brundage had seized his coat and hat from the chair where he had slung them. Now he poked a stiff brown forefinger at Gillian as if it were a pistol.

He said in a thick, choked voice:

"I'm pretty dumb. I never did amount to much. I'm not very good at reading between the lines. But there's one thing I know as surely as God made little apples: this whole thing is a frame-up. Putting this murder on Vi caps the climax. It's a cold-blooded frame-up. My own father's back of it; *and you're in it too!*"

"We'll go down to the jail and talk to your fiancée," Gillian responded angrily. "What you said in the beginning covered the situation: You're pretty dumb."

CHAPTER IV.

RED HAIR.

HOWEVER faulty Wally Brundage's mental processes may have been, no criticism could be made of his taste in women. Specifically: Violet Dearing was not only beautiful, but she had brains.

Gillian Hazeltine made this discovery before he had talked to her through the bars of her door for three minutes. He was pleasantly shocked and stimulated. She was *petite*. Under her gleaming cap of bright red hair were large eyes of purest dark blue. She had flawless white skin and beautiful hands.

The Silver Fox, gazing into her cell, had greeted her:

"Redheads are born trouble makers!"

She had cried: "You are Gillian Hazeltine! I can't tell you how glad I am to see you! Did Wally get in touch with you?"

"He did. You may be less glad when I've finished telling you, in perfect confidence, why I can't possibly handle your case."

Her expression did not darken with despair, as had so many faces when Gillian refused to lend his assistance.

She said, directly:

"It's not because you think I'm guilty."

"I know," Gillian answered, "that you aren't guilty."

"How do you know?" she asked.

"A witness told me you didn't do the killing."

"Did he see the actual killing?"

"He did not. All he saw was that you did not do it."

The blue eyes glowed.

"That means the case against me is spiked!" she exclaimed.

"Unfortunately, Miss Dearing, it does not."

"But if a witness—"

"The witness, it happens, is not credible. He has a criminal record as long as your arm."

Even now, he saw no despair in her face. He wondered if she was the type of innocent who foolishly places unlimited trust in justice. If she were, he had overestimated her intelligence. She expelled his doubts with her next words.

"They won't electrocute me," Violet Dearing confidently declared. "I know too much."

"About whom?" Gillian promptly asked.

She gave him a wise little smile. "I'll tell that to the lawyer who defends me. I'm as innocent as a newborn lamb. Moreover, I was terribly fond of Big Ben Lewis. He was a great rascal, a really great rascal, with a heart of gold. From what I have heard of you, you and Big Ben must have been very similar."

Gillian's face was a poker face.

"We were old friends," he admitted.

"I know it," she told him. "That's one of the reasons why I wanted you to take my case. Then there would be, in addition to my innocence, a revenge motive. I am surprised that you would not go into the court room to avenge the death of an old friend. I am even more surprised that my case doesn't appeal to you."

"It appeals to me," Gillian corrected her; "but—"

"Listen," interrupted the beautiful

redhead; "I told Wally to tell you, in case you hemmed and hawed, that this whole proposition is political. The murder of Big Ben is only an incident; a big incident, but nothing to compare with the things that a smart lawyer like you can bring out in a properly conducted trial. Why do you suppose it took *two* patrol wagons less than five minutes to reach Big Ben's from the Seventh Precinct Station after he was found dead?"

"I smelled a rat there, too," Gillian agreed.

"I could show you loads and loads of smellier rats. Now, will you tell me what moral objection you have to handling my case. Has Governor Brundage scared you off? I thought you were too big to be afraid of *that* rat."

"I am," Gillian smiled.

"Too big or too afraid?"

"Big," he laughed.

"Then why won't you take my case?"

Gillian told her. Simply and briefly, he dwelled upon his love for Dorothy Murphy and of the condition that Dorothy had imposed upon her acceptance of him. Upon his conclusion, Violet Dearing sighed.

"I'll say," she said, "without bias or meanness, that that girl is nothing but a darned fool. She is toying with dynamite. You love her, so I won't say anything more. I'm sorry you won't take my case, because, in the past couple of hours, I've been looking forward to it with the greatest enthusiasm. I've been hearing about you for years. I've wanted to meet you. I thought this would be a wonderful chance to see your brilliant brain in action. I wanted to see it in action with mine. The two of us, I thought, could put on a show that would make this State stand up on the seats."

She considered him, half smiling.

"I mean a show, Mr. Hazeltine. Since I've been sitting here, with all sorts of ideas using my brain as a

race track, I've worked out a beautiful scheme for a—a crime circus."

"A crime circus?"

"You see," she eagerly went on, "murder trials in this country have become more and more spectacular, haven't they? A good, snappy murder trial is harder to get into nowadays than a king's coronation. Great squads of reporters come and report the doings. The whole country is on its tiptoes for Silly Willy to take the stand, or for Spineless Judd to tell his story. Why not do it properly?"

Gillian was smiling indulgently.

"What would you suggest?" he asked.

"I would suggest that the State hire, say, the Lincoln Stadium. It seats sixty thousand people. Have microphones over the judge, the witness stand and the lawyers, connected to loud speakers sprinkled all over the stadium, so every one of the sixty thousand could hear clearly. And let the lawyer for the defense and the state's attorney collaborate on publicity."

"Disgraceful," Gillian murmured, but she knew that he wasn't serious.

"For a popular murder trial, you need certain elements. First of all, the accused should be young and beautiful. Well, am I or am I not qualified?"

"You are touchingly young and distractingly beautiful," Gillian assured her.

"Second," went on the eager redhead, "the crime should have occurred in a sinister setting. Well, didn't it?"

"A gambling den is sufficiently sinister," Gillian agreed.

"Third, it must have an element of real mystery. Who killed Ben Lewis? Did I? If not, who did? A man who shot and ran? A woman who fired and fled? The smell of burned smokeless powder was in the air when I rushed in and saw Ben lying face down. Isn't that sufficiently mysterious?"

"It seems to me," was Gillian's comment, "that you are strangely light-

hearted for a girl accused of murder and about to suffer the degradation of a murder trial, the notoriety of the scandal sheets, the battering-ram of a powerful political machine, and the actual possibility of electrocution."

Violet Dearing looked up soberly into his face.

"I'm not a coward, Mr. Hazeltine. The past few months have taught me to mask my emotions, at least—thanks to the honored Governor of this State. For the first hour in this cell, I was frantic with terror. I don't deny it. I thought those bullying detectives would give me the third degree. I've heard they'll tear a woman's clothes off and insult her horribly if she doesn't confess to everything they want her to confess to.

"I think they intended to give me the third degree, but changed their minds when I told them you were my legal counsel. Of course I was scared! Then I took counsel with myself. I didn't tell myself that heaven will protect the poor working girl—I'm not such a sap as that! I merely told my-

self that Gillian Hazeltine would soon come to my rescue—a Saint George armed to slay the fire-spouting dragon, my persecutors."

She paused. "I'll admit now that your refusal to play Saint George is going to give me a sleepless night. Oh, why," she wailed, "did you have to fall in love with a girl who disapproves of criminal court practice?"

Gillian did not answer. Violet Dearing gazed up at him, then shook her head, as if baffled.

"You love a good fight. I love a good fight. What a fight we could have put up together!"

"What a fight!" Gillian murmured.

"And what a show!"

He chuckled.

"You might advise me what to do," Miss Dearing suggested.

"I'll have to think over the problem of legal counsel," Gillian said. "I can't help them or work with them—but I'll gladly answer all questions."

"You're a peach," said the red-headed prisoner. "And if I go to the electric chair, it'll be your fault!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The Valley of Ivory

THE legend of the "Valley of Ivory" has persisted in Africa for years. It is to the effect that somewhere in the heart of the dark continent lies a valley to which, since the beginning of time, the elephants have gone to die. It is very strange that the carcasses of elephants, dead from natural causes, are never found in the jungle. Study of this phenomenon leads men to believe that the giant beasts, sensing old age or disease, retire to some remote secret valley, there to die amid the whitened bones of their forbears.

It is believed that a very few of the native chieftains knew of the whereabouts of this mine of wealth, but they have never related it to any white man. Recently, however, a noted African outlaw who has tired of his life of crime, has offered to reveal the spot if he is granted amnesty and a reward, and it may soon be that the wealth of the "Valley of Ivory" will be scattered about the entire world in the form of bits of carving. *Oscar Aldrich.*



The mob showered them
with rice and old shoes

The Lie That Binds

Pistachio Crumb finds that his troubles come in installments

By **NELL MARTIN**

MR. PISTACHIO CRUMB stopped near the corner and gave himself a careful inspection; what of his raiment he could not see—such as the back of his coat and the point where a shave leaves off and a haircut begins—he visualized as he had last seen them in a friendly mirror.

Yes, he decided, he had done himself proud for his wedding. The suit, a soft silvery gray, was most bridal; the yellow fedora the last word in spring headgear; the two-tone silk shirt the bargain it was advertised at seven dollars forty-eight cents; the orange and green scarf a proper background for the flaming ruby scarf-pin; gloves of a lemon hue covered hands not so light, and, the *pièce de résistance*—such a stick! Lavender cloth peeped out

from above the patent leather vamps of varnished boots. Oh, there was no mistake, he looked the part!

Satisfied, he turned in at the bricked path and rang the doubtful bell at Mis' Shanks's boarding house, where Hyacinth Waters had the second floor front.

One glance told him he had not out-done Hyacinth. As if any one could! Hyacinth was, even as her namesake, a dream in pink and white; albeit a dark amber dream.

She had really wanted to wear orange blossoms and a veil, but it couldn't be done. What with the installments on the mechanical piano, the radio set, the furniture and the aluminium kitchen utensils, as well as the accident insurance she felt was necessary

upon entering the wedded state, and the lamp shade she just could not start housekeeping without, she was surprised she had got out as well as she had, and her lustrous juicy brown eyes sparkled with pleasure when she saw Pistachio's admiration dripping from his lambent orbs.

Since nine o'clock Hyacinth had been dressing for her wedding, aided by Mis' Shanks—an obliging person when one paid up in full, and more so when one was not asking any rebate for two days' overpay! But every time the doorbell had rung Hyacinth had had heart failure; particularly when the two installment collectors had called.

Grandly Mis' Shanks had told them they might call at Bunglo L in Clifton Court any time after two weeks and get their money. By that time she and her bridegroom—Hyacinth that is, not Mis' Shanks—would have returned from their honeymoon, and Pistachio could pay the bills.

Bunglo L was the residence she and Pistachio had signed their lives away to furnish, and yesterday they had sent to it all the product of their joint purchase—to be theirs in two years or so if lucky.

"Oooooo — Hyacinthus — honey—you sho' does look omnivorous!" said Pistachio, drowning any qualms which might have been in the bosom of his milk chocolate amoureuse.

"Yo' ain't lookin' so mercenary yo'se'f," she chuckled. "Lawd control us, man, yo' is shuh abstemious to observe." Coyly she laid her head on his silk striped bosom.

"I reckon we bettah take er taxi," said Pistachio, and Mis' Shanks, standing with her ear glued tightly to the crack of the parlor door, subconsciously telephoned the "Private Owned Limousine. Special Rates to Wedding Parties," owned by Spider Whinnery.

"After er justice gets er hitch made, we're off on ouah sugahmoon," sighed Pistachio, mentally recounting the wealth of his pockets. Hotel bill, boat

fare to Catalina for two—no reduction for married couples—by economy the two weeks might be stretched to three. Pistachio had asked for two weeks' vacation only, but it might be extended.

Grandly he spread his wealth upon the table, which held a copy of Booker T. Washington's speeches in the exact center of the burned leather table cover, with its border of flaming poinsettias intermingled with blazing yellow California poppies.

"There," he said grandly, "I got riches, gal. Don' that look lak a honeymoon an' some lef' over?"

"I'se got about fo' bones mase'f," announced Hyacinth proudly.

"Fo' bones!" Pistachio gasped. "An' you been gittin' sixteen bucks a week—all you got's fo' bones?"

"Ma goodness, boy, seems lak you-all's marryin' me foh ma money," giggled Hyacinth nervously. Her qualms were returning. She reasoned that this was not an auspicious time to mention that her trousseau had been so expensive—that she had been forced to forego the regular weekly installments on the portion of their future household goods which had been in her possession for these past few weeks awaiting the matrimonial venture, and upon which she had been valiantly "payin' in." After they were irrevocably tied would be a better time to speak of that.

"How you talk, honey," Pistachio retorted. "Marry you foh you money, baby chile? If I caint get 'nough money to take care o' ma lammie I hope I gits mashed 'tween them revolutin' doors at the hotel." He was, in point of service, the oldest and also, by far, the most resplendent doorman at a fashionable hostelry in the heart of the city. Hyacinth sighed with bliss. That was the kind of talk she wanted to hear.

"Shuah you can—Stachy. You's big and strong and got a fine job—an' the 'stallmints is all up," that is, most of them, she mentally reserved, wishing she hadn't bought that other hat.

Why hadn't she made those aluminium and lampshade payments, anyway, before she bought that other hat? But a lady just couldn't go to get married in a hat like one which Nasturtium Pickins had bloomed out in no later than yesterday.

A TERRIFIC shock assailed Pistachio at her words. Yesterday, when he had asked for leave of absence to get married, and had gone blithely to get his personal adornment, he had been flustered; true, when he brought out his money to pay for his outfit he *had* wondered where that extra twenty dollars had come from, but in his exalted state he had forgotten that Hyacinth had handed him that money, with the tender request to drop by and make the four payments on the furniture company, the radio store, the phonograph and the insurance policy, respectively.

It was right and proper that Hyacinth had been paying for these things. Didn't every lady of quality come to her husband dowered? Unused to the process, he had forgotten. But now he remembered, quite easily. Should he confess now?

He started guiltily—and the moment passed.

And then Mis' Shanks announced the taxi, shooed them toward the front door, showered them with rice and old shoes from beneath a capacious apron, her full set of ivories gleaming mirthfully, and they were off in the splended red and gold sedan designated as "Private Owned Limousine."

No honeymoon should be interrupted, and, most particularly, not by money matters; but the heartbreaking truth was that the end of the first week saw Hyacinth and Pistachio out of ready money. True, Pistachio had a swell position, but he was temporarily out of control of it. When the evening of the seventh day found them possessed of but Hyacinth's "fo' bones," they decided on a quick sally toward their

new home. They had stocked their larder when they sent their furniture there, and there they might hide from the world for another week, quite economically.

True, homecoming was slightly tinged with danger, as each well knew. Hyacinth couldn't help thinking that the payments were now two weeks behind on the aluminium, lampshade and piano; and Pistachio knew well that he owed a plenty on the rest of their lares and penates. However, with a flourish he inserted the key in the lock of Bunglo L, and welcomed his bride. The rent was paid, at least.

"Missis Crumb—" he said grandiloquently, favoring her with his entire set of teeth and—a good set it was, "make yo'se'f acquaintom with yo' future home, barrin' battles and fun'rals. I wishes you luck—"

"Ain't it grand!" sighed Hyacinth, who had intrusted the placing of her treasures to Stash. "'Tain't ev'body's got such internal decorations."

Pistachio started the phonograph to hide his temerity at her mention of their possessions. He was glad that a blush didn't show on him. And Hyacinth, bridelike, drew the blinds, closing out the neighbors in the court.

It was early the next morning, and the blinds were still lowered, that two callers came to Bunglo L, in rapid succession.

"You heah 'at, Stashy?" whispered Hyacinth.

"Heah it? Could I stop from heahin' it? Sound lak a clap o' doom," said Stashy, who was nearly right.

"Shell I go an' see whom it maht be?" she asked timorously. "It must be one of the installment men." Now trouble would engulf her.

"You shell sit wheah you am at—" hissed Stashy, which was at the breakfast table, and he shifted his knees under their burden!

"Who you reckon 'at is?" she quavered.

"Somebody 'thout no brains," he re-

plied. "Let him bang. We's still off on ouah honeymoon." It must be the piano or the furniture man. 'After awhile Stashy would go down to the hotel and make a touch, and slip around and pay those bills. On second thought—not to the hotel; there was a little matter of five bones to the head bellman—slightly overdue. Well—he'd go somewhere.

DEPARTING footsteps now came to their straining ears. Abruptly Hyacinth slipped from her lord's embrace and knelt by the front window.

"White pa'ty, stoppin' at the front bunglo," she reported.

The front bunglo was occupied by a person of some importance; deep dignity and a too-carrying voice distinguished Mr. Grimes, the overseer for the court, who bore the title agent with no little pride.

"Agent talkin' wid 'im," said Hyacinth—and then: "Agent's *comin'* wid 'im." Pistachio now knelt, in the purple and orange bathrobe, beside the sister Anne on watch. The agent pushed the bell heartily, and its peal echoed down the court.

"They taken this place some time ago, but 'ey ain't live heah—I suspect someping ain' just convenient yet—maybe they rent ain' up whah else they at," he said.

"They is, *too*, move in," came a voice from Bunglo J. "I sawn 'em lass night come sneakin' in late."

"'At so?" queried Mr. Grimes.

"An' they ain't nevah come out," shrilled the human newspaper.

Pistachio trembled and his bride was seized with a violent fit of shivering. "Git them eyes away from 'at crack. They bug out white as moons! See 'em shuah," she hissed.

Just then another caller made his way down the concrete walk.

"Mr. Crumb live here?" he inquired of the agent. "That your name?"

"I'se Mistah Grimes, suh," said that

dignitary, haughtily. "Agent foh de court. Mr. Crumb, I b'lieves and de cleahs, is a tenement which is converged into this heah residence, as a fack with which I is onfamiliah since I was pusson'ly engaged othehwhares yestiddy and last evenin'."

"Well, I'm looking for a Crumb," said the newcomer.

"So am I," said the first caller.

"Who you reckon they is and which they wants?" Hyacinth whispered.

Pistachio was breathing heavily now; he had recognized the collector for the furniture company, for he had come to the hotel to wrest late payments from another doorman.

"Oh," he replied shakily, "I reckon they's a book agent or some advertisin' man wants to sell us somethin', knowin' us is new ma'ried."

"Well, I haven't any time to hang around," said the second man. "But you tell him that the Moller Furniture Company collector was here, and for him to hustle down to the store and make his payments. There's three due."

"Moller—" gasped Hyacinth, who had firmly believed it was her own delinquency which was about to be shown up. "Moller—three payments—" Of course, there would have been one payment due—one week's—for they had been on their honeymoon. But she had given Pistachio the money to make two weeks' payments at that store the day before the wedding!

"Pistachio Crumb, ain' you made them payments?" she accused.

"The's some kin' mistake, honey—nobuddy been to ast me for no—"

"Is you yes or ain't you no?"

"Don' you make so much noise, 'member what a perpendicular position you's in. Is you threatenin' me?"

"Jes' you answer me, get it over and say so and then 'splain how come."

Pistachio was saved by another interference. It seemed that all the trouble in the world was coming at once. The honey hive was threatened of its sweetness.

"Miss Hyacinth Waters stoppin' here?" inquired a stranger.

"Ain' know such a pusson," replied the agent.

"Well, she done gib me this address." This third collector was a person of color. "She buy a set of alumum from me when she live—"

Through Stash's muddled brain pierced the word "alumum—" He glanced at his bride who had paled, but didn't show it.

"Wha's 'at? Ain' you paid them alumum moneys yo' ownse'f—an' now I s'pose you goin' say I wuz s'pose to tend to that—"

It bade fair to be a battle, but the sudden withdrawal of the callers cleared the air and restored peace and confessions, with the honeymoon atmosphere winning out. Midafternoon they quietly ventured forth and had a restaurant dinner and saw a movie, *after* the agent had gone out.

The next morning Pistachio agreed with Hyacinth that it was a prudent move not to raise the blinds; which was right, for by noon seven of the hated genus *collectorum* had visited the "Bunglo" and then the agent, and not appreciating the game he was generous with information.

"You get me a key," said one, "and I'll back up the van and get our stuff."

"At the hotel where he works they said he was on a vacation. If he can take vacations he can pay his phonograph payments—"

"We gotta get some money," said Pistachio. "They-all gettin' ha'd about it. How much we got in money, babe?" It appeared that little more than one lone dollar remained.

"Gimme it. I'll step down town and raise a little cash somewhere."

He recalled a nice quiet little game in the back of Hip Fillet's pool hall on Central Avenue, down in the heart of the colored district. Jefferson Avenue, where they were domiciled, was almost a suburb. It was the acme of colored aristocracy. So forth he fared,

to run that dollar up to a dozen, or more; if a bridegroom be not lucky, who is? But he did not share his idea with Hyacinth, who hopefully watched him depart; watched also the slick Mr. Grimes depart in his wake, and saw the agent come panting back! So he hadn't caught him.

BUT there was no game back of Hip Fillet's; there was little of anything. A strange quiet pervaded Central Avenue. Well, there was Joe Toombs, he owed him ten dollars this long while. He went to Joe's. Joe, from a window, laughed gleefully as he saw Stash approaching, glad of his immunity; for there was a small-pox scare abroad, and Joe's house was one with a quarantine sign upon its door! Stash stopped outside the fence and hailed the grinning Joe.

"Yup, I know what you wants. Too bad, Stash. Don' reckom we'll get outta heah soon."

"You got it?" yelled Stash.

"Nope, but old lady was ovah to Revrun' Ha'kness's house othah day an' they got it, so ol' lady's likely to git it now. If all us gets it we'll likely be in some time, seven of us livin' heah—" howled the wily Joe.

"But Joe—ain' you got some one as owes you money I can git it frum? I need it bad, 'count I just got ma'ied—"

"Ain' that too bad! No, nobody owes me nothin'. It's me what owes them," said Joe placidly.

"But we got to meet ou' stall—"

"Stall?" grinned Joe. "Mattermony always is, Stash, stall wid a halter round too many necks."

"Stallments—Joe. I got to meet 'em."

"So has I, Stash. I always has. Does I git me a nickel or dime? Stallmint men want a quarter."

"I ain't triflin' wid such sums as dime or quarter. I gotta pay two dollahs piano, fo' dollahs furnichure, two bucks radio set, buck an' a half pi-ano lamp—"

"Shet yo' mouth!" ejaculated Joe, with pleasure. "You certn'y highflyin', Stash. I considah it a honah to owe money to you stid o' to some niggah who owes dime and quarter and fo'-bits, like."

"Nemmine that honah. I wants ten bucks."

"Come on in and he'p me hunt fo' it, Stash. One thing, that sign on the do' keeps all the collectahs away from me—" He grinned brazenly.

The phrase rankled. Stash stood thinking for a minute; then as if he were going to take Joe's advice to come in and help hunt for it, he dashed up to the door, sheltered from Joe's eyes by the porch roof. A moment later he dashed out again, and Joe breathed easier. Stash had looked "kinda desprit"—he was glad he went away!

Stash next tried the hotel, but the manager was away on a little trip of his own, and the other doorman was universally bankrupt. He got a dollar from the head bellman, and went disconsolately back home.

"Well, heah I is, and lucky you is to get me," he said, spreading a little propaganda. "Smallpox nigh got me."

"You got no money?" his bride demanded.

"How could I get money? Walk in and snatch it from a corpse, which Joe Toombs's goin' to be befo' he gets well!"

"He got it?"

"No, but he say he goin' to get it. An' he say it keep 'stallmint men away. So I done the same for us."

"Got it, too?" she gasped in horror, backing away.

"Not smallpox—the sign which says it!" And he dragged from beneath his coat the offending sign which had been on Joe's door; now the 'stallmint men could pester Joe in peace! "We put 'is sign on our do', an' they leave us be, see, honey lamb?"

Hyacinth agreed that it was a grand idea. And after he had come back

from investing the dollar in staple groceries, they affixed the sign with wire and great glee. That would keep folks from bothering while Stash could get out to rustle some cash, or maybe go back to work. But that would be a last resort.

They could hardly wait for the morning to see the faces of the visitors who should come. And did it work? Their ringside seats were worth the money. One after another those men, white or colored, came, looked once, and went rapidly from that place. By noon the last one had come and gone. Then the agent, who had just got up, evidently, came out and saw the sign. He also departed thence speedily.

TALKING it over at breakfast the Crumbs had decided that Stash had better go back and tell the hotel he didn't want the rest of his leave of absence, that he was ready to work now; and they could leave the sign up until their first pay day.

Resplendent in her violet kimono and with a pink silk rose in her hair, Hyacinth stood in the doorway and saw her husband go swinging down the court. But he stopped swinging as the door of the first Bunglo opened. Stopped and threw his arms aloft. And then Mr. Grimes came into the areaway, in his hand something that looked suspiciously like a double-barreled shotgun. It was a double-barreled shotgun.

"I guess you 'at Mistah Crumb which ev'body wants—" he said nastily. "Wheah you-all goin'?"

"Just down to wo'k—" said Stash, hands still aloft. "What for 'at gun, mistah?"

"Reckom you-all bettah crawl back in yo' hole. 'At sign on yo' do' say you-all got smallpox an' gotta stay home, an' you goin' do it."

"Sign don't mean nothin'—" said Pistachio jauntily.

"Maybe you don't believe in 'em, but I does," said the hard-hearted Grimes.

"'Specially 'at kind. Track back, cul-lud man, or I jes' nacherally got to perpetrate you lak a sieve."

Faces, brown, yellow and ebon, appeared at windows along the line; voices sounded from within doors, and Pistachio backtracked reluctantly. When he had got inside and closed the door, Mr. Grimes disappeared.

"Don't show yo' face—" he cautioned.

"Look heah, Stashy Crumb, ain' you got no sense? Why'n you tell 'im 'at sign jus' a joke?"

"He ain' humorous," said Stashy sadly.

"Now what you goin' do?"

"I'm goin' think awhile. Don't you go blamin' 'is on me; which when 'at sign worked, you think it's a great little idea, an' now at the first little mistake which incurs, you staht bellerin'—" for Hyacinth had begun to whisper.

"Whut we goin' do, sta've?"

"'At's right—I s'pose you wish you'd married some rich man—"

Suddenly Hyacinth began to giggle.

"Stash!"

"Whut is it, lamb?" penitently.

"Hot dog!" she grinned. "You put 'at sign up!"

"You seen me"—wonderingly.

"Well—you take it down!"

"Funny, with me gen'rally the sma't one, you should think o' that—" Stashy grinned. And opening the door, he ripped the sign from the screen. Which started another ball rolling. Third Bunglo down the court had been watching, and a telephone call was on the wire before Stash could adjust the yellow fedora. Inside Bunglo L, however, there was only a confident farewell. Both felt happier now; Stashy was going down to get his job back. It was a lingering farewell. So, finally, as he tore himself from his wife's embrace, three white men came rushing up the court, leaving a motor running at the curb.

"What's this about a broken quarantine?" demanded one of the men of

Stash, who was the only person in sight. "Which house?"

"I ain't know no quarantime," said Stash modestly.

The curtain at the near-by window shook, and a shrill voice poured through a window's crack. "'At's him right there. He lives at the Bunglo at the back. Just tore 'at quarantime sign down hissself. I seen him."

"Was there a sign up on your house?" demanded the caller.

Stash began to get cold in the pit of his stomach. What was he going to do now? Would he have to admit that he stole the sign from Joe Toombs's house, thereby turning loose upon a helpless world the danger of the dread disease by contact with Joe's family—if Joe should happen to learn that the sign was gone—or must he meekly admit that there had been a sign on his own door and allow them to draw their own conclusions?

"Well—" Pistachio temporized. "Sign was—er—was a sign—"

"Who took it down? Quarantine officer?"

"I ain' just know about—"

"He did, too, take it down his ownse'f—" came the relentless voice from behind the curtain in Bunglo H.

"Did you?" demanded the officer.

"Oh—'at funny joke sign—oh, that—" Stash tried to be nonchalant.

"That's against the law, you know that, don't you?"

"I ain' heard 'bout no law, yes-sah—"

"You get inside there, fellow, and make it fast—" said another. "We'll just seal the doors this time and set a guard at the court entrance." Business-like sound, that had.

"I cain't go on in—"

"Just get back in there now, and nothing more about it," heavily. And Stashy got back in. "How we goin' eat?" he asked plaintively.

"Telephone your orders out and have the goods delivered to the guard we leave," said the other.

"We ain't got no telephone," sighed Stash.

MR. GRIMES was called to the conference about this time, and his shotgun was much in evidence. With Stash inside the officers closed and wired the screen doors tightly, produced another quarantine sign as if by magic, and departed, leaving starvation, vexation, desperation and separation in their wake; for now Hyacinth declared that if she ever got out of this house without having smallpox or being starved to death, she was "go-in' get a divo'ce fum any fool man that'd thought up sich a fool idea." Her tears flowed freely, drowning Pistachio's anger, making him more miserable.

"I got a idea—" he said brightly.

"Yeah. You had this'n'," sniffed Hyacinth. "Don't have no mo'. Nex' one land us in jail."

"But—" As if in answer to his thought, a small black boy rode into the court on a bicycle, stopping well down the walk at another unit.

"Black boy—" called Stash, coaxingly from the window. "Do somepin foh me?"

"I ain' comin' near no smallpox," the boy shouted rudely.

"Ain' got to come neah it—an' we ain' got it—" cried Stash. "Run down to—"

"Ain' runnin' down nowheah," cried the boy decisively.

"Dollah in it—" screamed Stash. As if by four-wheel brakes, the boy halted, and turned his head.

"Roll down the dollah—" he howled, risking that much contamination.

"I—'is house is quarantime—" replied Stash, inspired. "Cain't throw nothin' out. You run down to St. Regis Hotel an' tell her manager or head bellman Mr. Crumb said give you er dollah. An' tell him—"

"An' 'en run back an' tell you what he say for you to do?" jeered the boy, departing.

"'At was some idea—" said Hyacinth, taking up her weeping again in dead earnest. "Got any mo'?"

And then a ray of light shone through the clouds. From four doors down came a feminine voice. "Say—you up in L—" it rang clearly. "You want some telephonin' done? I got er phone."

"You blame tootin'," screamed Pistachio.

"I got er busted foot an' cain't come out, but I got er phone ri' heah. You holler what to say an' who to."

"Praise er Lawd, you's a dead game spoht—" howled Stash. Hyacinth stopped her weeping immediately. "I ain' think 'at las' paht was contumiously necessary—" she informed her elated bridegroom.

"Wait a minute—" he howled. "What was 'at, Cinthy deah?"

"Don't you heah me—" with dignity. "You watch yo' step, nigger—"

"Wha' for?" he asked. "What I done now?"

"You infohm this entire block what you thinkin' 'bout a strange wummun—'at's what."

"Well hell come Sunday—if 'at ain' good!" cried Stash. Then turning his back upon her, he shouted, "You phone the Regis Hotel an' tell ma boss 'at we's in trouble an' needs—"

"You ain't goin' to—" hissed Hyacinth, holding his mouth. "You ain' goin' tell the whole worl' yo' bizness. Holler down this co't that we broke on ou' honeymoon an' got us in 'is mess, too?"

"I got to—" Stash raved, rolling his eyes. "I'll tell him I wants to see him quick—" he said. And did.

"Hotel say he away on his vacation," came the voice after a moment.

"Ain' back—" moaned Stash. "You call Mose Hambly—at er Regis; ask him fo' 'at seven bones he owe me—"

"Unhunh—" Hyacinth ground her teeth at him. "I done know you been in a crap game 'ith 'at Mose Hambly."

"My lan', woman, I get you a job

broadcastin'. You got a good loud-speaker—"hissed Stash, and the voice down the court came then:

"Got 'im. He say he ain' know you. Only Crumb he know ain' married."

"I am, too," yelled Stash. "Tell him 'at's what I lain off for."

"He want to know what you wan' him to do, bus' out cryin'?"

"I'll bus' him out cryin' when I git him. I wan' my seven bones."

"He say come 'roun' a week frum Satiddy—an' he hang up. I'll len' you some, can you come git it."

"I reckon you' safe enuf offerin'," yelled Hyacinth. "You keep yo' money, cullud gal, an' shet yo' window an' mind yo' bizniss."

"Now you done it—" Stashy moaned, as Hyacinth slammed their window closed. "I kill me 'at black Mose when I see him."

"I reckon he ain' worryin'. An' you won't kill nothin'. After fo' days they dies from not eatin'."

"Ain't we got nothin'?"

"Yeah. We got flour, an' lard, an' salt."

Then they quit speaking. By mid afternoon Pistachio had discovered that if he pulled down the bedroom window from the top—the bedroom being at the back of the Bunglo—that he could crawl over the top of the high board fence which obstructed their view from that room, landing in the alley. He immediately put his discovery into practice. As regards marital conditions by this time, suffice it to say Hyacinth kissed him as he started out.

ACROSS the alley, a couple of numbers down, in the upper window of a two-story house, a lady of color who had been reading a hair-raising tale in a magazine reached for her telephone. A dark form had just vaulted a high fence and was coming down the alley, yes, sir. She thought of her red glass beads and her wrist watch. People had been killed for less. And blood would spoil her bedroom rug.

Miraculously, the colored patrolman on the beat was leaning against the pole which held his callbox, so that when Pistachio reached the extremity of the alley and was about to come out into civilization once more, he was met by this minion of the law.

"Goin' down town?" asked the dark-hued officer. This certainly was a strange nigger in this neighborhood. He had this beat two years and never had seen this bird before. "I'll just walk along with you. Mmmhmm. What you got business in this neighborhood for?"

"Live heah—" said Stashy, shivering. Did the officer know about the quarantine?

"Haven't seen you before, brother," said the cop.

"I'm just goin' down to the St. Regis to get some money," explained Pistachio naively.

"Likely to get it? Ain't the cops on to their jobs?" pleasantly.

"Say, what you mean?"

"Find any money back in the alley?"

"What? Say, I lives up this heah alley."

"Ain't no houses on that alley, nigger."

"I come out the back way."

"I notices that," said the officer. "Whyn't you go the front—if you live up here?"

"Front do' lock broke," said Stash, with inspiration. "But I wo'k down at the St. Regis—"

"Howcome you're home this time o' day then?"

"I'se on ma honeymoon."

"Leave the bride up the alley?"

"Say, gosh all fishhooks—niggah—"

"I'll just thank you to swallow that last word—" said the cop, getting hard. "You just come on down and tell the sergeant why you wah hangin' around that alley. I got a repo't on you already. You tell him you was goin' down to get the bridal sweet at the St. Regis for that honeymoon o' yours.

He'll furnish you a nice little place to spend your honeymoon, all right—" And willy-nilly, Pistachio went down!

Night fell, and back in Bunglo L an anguished bride lay upon her green plush couch weeping until eyelids were a rosy chocolate. No money, no food, and now no husband. Her wails rent the night air.

"Say, you stop hollerin' an' come to er window—" came a strange voice on her front porch.

She knelt by the window, raising it. "Is I home? Could I git me out—" she peered close in the lowering dusk to distinguish the dusky face not so far from her window frame. "Say, is that you, Thelma Pickins?"

"Why, 'cose it is. An' who you? That you, Cinthy Waters? What you doin' up in this neighborhood?"

"I'se Cinthy Crumb now—but I ain't shuah I'se goin' to be long. I got grounds aplenty I tell the worl' already. Sta'vin' me, an' fli'tin' with a flossy hussy down the Co't—"

"An' you done got married!" exclaimed Thelma, hand a-hip. "An' 'nen got smallpox. Serves you right. You been a fool."

"A fool, has I? An' for what"— Cinthy was in arms at once.

"Foh marryin' that doorman, lak I knowed you was ijit enough to do when you moughta got you one o' them Central Avnoo bootleggers wid coins in all pockets an' a swell car to ride in—"

"An a nice jail to sleep in—" grinned Hyacinth. "Pistachio is a good, steady, lovin' man—"

"That ain' sound like grounds—" said Thelma wickedly. "Did he give you smallpox too?"

"I ain' got no smallpox, nor neither ain' he. An' I ain' had no breakfas', nor no dinner, nor I ain' got no mo' husband, he's los'," sobbed Hyacinth, telling her story.

Before the story was over Thelma had wrenched off the wires which bound the screen door to its frame, and was inside, comforting Hyacinth. "I

oughta let you 'lone with your grief, 'cause you ain' nevah invited me to yo' weddin', but you come on down the Co'rt an' get some suppah wid me an' my sister Jezebel."

"At Mr. Grimes, he's got a shotgun," sighed Hyacinth.

But she followed Thelma down the Court, to meet a uniformed messenger halfway down with a special delivery letter for Pistachio. It was on hotel stationery. She thrust it in her gingham pocket; it was just one more trouble, no doubt. Pistachio had probably lost his job now. But she was going to have her supper, belated as it was, and she didn't care.

AS the coffee boiled, another commotion became apparent outside. And there was Pistachio's voice. She hastened to the front door. Mr. Grimes, before his own Bunglo, was holding his shotgun before him.

"No you don't," he shouted. "Stop right there. Is you two or is you somebody else? Man, is you locked up in 'at house or is you some othah man?"

"Shet yo' mouf an' git outta my way!" howled Pistachio. "I don't wan' none o' yo' lip, nigger. Open yo' mouf once mo' an' I'll chase you roun' a corner so hard yo' pocket goin' dip sand."

"Say, you—"

"Keep it shet!" yelled Stash. "I gonna turn 'at nose o' yours up so the sun'll shine in it. Git me? I says, git me? Outta ma way."

"I got the p'lice force back o' me—" began Mr. Grimes, but Thelma interfered.

"You ain't got nuthin'," she said scornfully. "An' you ain' got no sense either. Don't you know these here Crumbs just been made one loaf an' it ain't cooled off yit! An' ain't you know they friends put tha' sign up just fo' foolishness—an' if they's sma'pox it's you which is gonna have it. An' don't you get fresh foh I know how come so many swell dressers comes up

to yo' Bunglo on Satiddy aft'noons and I knows where you gits that nigger gin you's cha'gin' six bones a pint foh."

But Mr. Grimes didn't want to know what else she knew. He withdrew and slammed the door with a remark about "snoopin' wimmin—"

Hyacinth was in Pistachio's arms, and Pistachio had ten dollars; the head bell man had let him have it. And then he told his story; how he had to send for that dignitary from the precinct police station, and confess about the sign, and they let him off with a reprimand. Now they could eat.

"But he ain' nevah goin' get it back outta yo' salary. You's been fired, an' heah's the letter," she sighed. But when they opened it, it was a letter of con-

gratulation from the boss, written before he left, with a check for fifty dollars, a wedding present from the hotel, all delayed by a careless stenographer until this late sending. Its lateness didn't matter now; they had money.

"Now let 'em collectors come, 'at's all!" crowed Stash, and Thelma called them to supper.

"I done changed my mind about that divo'ce," said Hyacinth, severely. "So don't you get so fresh with thet Jezebel Pickins what is laid up from a sprained foot from dancin' huh haid off, an' you jes' han' me 'at check, Stash. I pays th' 'stallments frum now on—"

Pistachio handed over the check. And they went in to eat.

To eat!

THE END



Treasure from the Stars

OUT in Arizona, in the Cañon Diablo section, a new attempt is being started to unearth the treasures locked in a lost baby world, which thousands of years ago crashed into the earth, a huge, flaming meteor, burying itself deep in the ground and leaving above it on the surface as its monument a crater like an embryonic volcano.

Confident that they have located the mass of the meteor at last, Eastern interests have announced plans for sinking a shaft to about one thousand feet, at which depth a cross-cut will be driven to the mysterious lost body and its riches will be mined and recovered.

For more than a generation geologists and mining men have studied and prospected the queer crater which marks the grave of the meteor. Thousands of particles of meteoric matter scattered about the vicinity told them that here a tiny lost world had crashed down to its grave, but the meteor had struck at an angle and was not directly below the crater, so for a long time prospecting by drilling test holes was fruitless.

The lost meteor weighs thousands of tons, geologists confidently predict, and is expected to be composed mainly of iron, nickel and similar meteoric metals, expected to be worth at least sixty-five dollars a ton and probably a great deal more.

But here is where the fascination and lure of the venture comes in. Nobody has ever before cut into such a huge treasure trove of the infinite as this. Nobody knows just exactly what will be found when the drills and blasting penetrate into the lost baby world. In the tiny pieces cast off on the surface as the meteor plunged down to its fiery grave have been found traces of the precious metals, gold, silver, platinum, and even tiny diamonds! There is more than a possibility that inside the great meteor may be found gigantic diamonds and a treasure trove of precious metals that will stagger the imagination!

Foster-Harris.



Eagerly Benton plunged his hands inside

The Golden Traitor

A fortune in transit—while thieves and traitors hovered close and strove to enrich themselves at the government's expense, in those stirring days when Uncle Sam moved from Philadelphia to Washington

By R. de S. HORN

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

A YOUNG Kentuckian named Andrew King has just reached the city of Philadelphia, where his uncle has sent him to his friend, Thomas Calthorpe, to finish his education under Mr. Calthorpe's guidance.

Andrew has on backwoods clothes; so he stays at a lonely inn down near the Delaware River, so that people won't laugh at his suit of buckskin. He intends to buy city clothes the next day.

This is about the year 1800, when the government of the United States is engaged in moving its capital, its office records, its treasury, and the household effects of its members down to the new city of Washington, District of Columbia, on the shores of the Potomac River.

Andrew knows nothing of these governmental moving plans, but he has traveled enough in the wild territories beyond the Appalachian Mountains to

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know that the innkeeper he has put up with for the night did not want him for a guest, and that all the other guests of the inn are extremely evil-looking cutthroats.

One thin-lipped young man is an exception to this. He introduces himself to Andrew as "Stephen Matteson," seems agitated when he finds out Andrew is going to see Mr. Calthorpe, and suspects Andrew of knowing something about a shipload of household goods that "Matteson" says he knows is on the way, being moved for government attachés.

Mr. Calthorpe is one of these government attachés, by the way, Stephen adds, without telling Andrew in what capacity.

However, before Andrew has much time to think about whether Mr. Calthorpe is still in Philadelphia or not, all the rascals in the inn set upon two heavily cloaked travelers, who come in to wait while their coachman fixes their broken-down coach.

The one traveler, a stocky, quick man, stands off all the cutthroats with a sword for a long time, until his companion, apparently a slender youth, escapes by a window during the mêlée, and, still heavily cloaked, rides off on Andrew's fine Kentucky stallion, Satan.

Andrew mixes in the fray later, just after "Matteson" is called "Matthews" by the short, stout, quick stranger—and just before the stout man is knocked out by an enormous sea captain named Benton.

After disabling a couple of men, Andrew manages to get away on a saddled horse, which he later manages to exchange with an escaping girl for his own horse Satan, which she cannot handle.

Together they ride on, and just as they reach a group of men, among whom the girl calls for Lieutenant Wilberforce, they find they have really ridden into an ambush. Men pull the girl from her horse; and when Andrew

struggles against the same medicine, some of the men knock him down and out.

CHAPTER IV.

BOUND AND GAGGED.

THE first things I knew after that were a terrific headache and a discordant sound—*creak, crunch—creak, crack, crunch*. Then, as I felt a sudden violent lurch, I realized it was the noise of heavy cart-wheels over an uneven road, and that I was riding in one of the carts.

I tried to sit up, and found I could not. My hands and feet were tied, and also across my mouth a cloth was bound. The bonds were not painful in their tightness, yet when I tried to slip my wrists in them I found they held me securely.

Whose prisoner was I? Where were they taking me? I wondered what had become of my comrade, the girl in the boy's clothing.

Thinking, perchance, I might hear something to enlighten me from the men whom I could hear talking in low voices about me, I lay quiet, listening as keenly as I could. But all I could hear was talk of ships and soldiers.

But presently I heard the galloping of a distant horse, coming ever nearer. I felt the wagon I was in halt, heard the sounds of men running forward or scattering in the bushes roundabout, and then the faint click of firearms being reprimed.

As the clatter of hoofs beat loud and near, from ahead came a sharp challenge: "Halt! Who's there?"

"It's me, Hayes—you fool, Baptiste, you! Where is Barbary?"

From almost alongside me, then, called a deep bass voice, so nearly exactly that of the sea captain Benton that I almost jumped. "Here I am, Hayes. What is it? And how is everything at the Blue Anchor?"

The rider was by now so close that

I could even see the loom of his head and shoulders above the cart wherein I lay bound. His voice shrilled excitedly. "You got them, Barbary? You got them, then?"

The deep voice beside me laughed. "As right as a trivet! Walked right in among us, the lieutenant and all his hayfoots, and now they're tied up as tight as quill-pigs in Farmer Patterson's stable. The first whisper they'll be able to give will be when the stable boy finds them and cuts them loose tomorrow morning."

"But the chests? You've got the chests?" The horseman's voice was quivering with eagerness. "You've got them—in the wagons here?"

He rode closer and his shoulders loomed as though he were leaning over to make certain for himself. But suddenly I saw a great hand clap down on his shoulder so roughly as almost to unseat him.

"Avast there!" roared Barbary's bass voice. "Time enough, aboard the Saucy Mary! But what word brought you? Speak your message, man! Is the schooner ready? And Benton, and the rest?"

"Yes, everything's right," replied the other, though in very surly tones. "The schooner's ready at Black Cove, and all's waiting these four hours. Why didn't you send word?"

"Send word?" cried the man Barbary. "I did! A full hour ago! The minute we had the stuff safe I sent one of Benton's rascals, on horseback, to bring you word."

"Was your messenger a fair-sized, hook-nosed man, with an old scar from his ear to his gullet?" demanded Hayes.

"Aye, that's the rascal," responded Barbary. "Did he not tell you?"

"No, and for reasons enough," answered Hayes shortly. "The first we saw of him was when we found him a-sprawl in the stable, opening and shutting his mouth and gasping like a trout out of water, and knowing no more of what had fetched him the

great crack on the sponce than that same trout."

"You mean, some one bagged him, and got away to tell?" cried Barbary fiercely.

"Not one, but *two*," retorted the other, seemingly pleased at bringing some provocation to Barbary in return for the rough clap on the shoulder. "Spite o' all the money we had given the coachman to keep him away, who should come snooping but old Pokey-Nose himself. Not only comes snooping—"

The deep-voiced man interrupted with a roar of surprise and anger. "That rascal of a coachman let *him* come a-spying?"

"He claimed he could not stop him," responded Hayes. "Twice he fixes the wheel-pin to come out, and the second time Pokey-Nose threatens to crack his head if it happen again. So our prudent coachman brings him next to the Blue Anchor so we might fall on him and stop his spying for good.

"We went for Pokey-Nose all right, and he fights like a wildcat and slices half a dozen before Bully Benton gets him at last with a wood billet. But the boy that was with Pokey-Nose slips away out of the window, and neither hide nor hair have we been able to find of him since."

"Slipped away—got away from the whole dozen of you?" demanded Barbary furiously.

"Aye, and that's not the worst o' it," answered Hayes. "In the midst of the fight who should come butting in but a forest runner, who has the bad luck to be there a-stopping at the inn despite all old Grobel could do to prevent.

"Comes butting in, knives Benton through the arm, slashes Joris's face, and gets away on your messenger's horse—at least that's how we figured, finding your man kicking and his horse nowhere in sight."

Hayes gave a soulful curse. "Now by my belief they're turning out the

whole country, and we'll have trouble a-plenty before we sight blue water again!"

BUT all of a sudden the man Barbary began to chuckle—great, pleased chuckles that sounded in the dark like water tumbling over rocks. "Your forest fellow you all but laid hands on a moment since when you pried into this wagon. And the boy that escaped you through the window you'll find in the next wagon ahead, likewise bound hand and foot."

"In the wagons—*here?*" cried Hayes, amazed. Then, with comprehension: "They rode right toward you, thinking you were the soldiers?"

"Right into our hands," laughed Barbary, "yelling to us to turn back to the city straightaway. So if they're all that's to raise the country, we can take years to get back aboard the Saucy Mary."

"However, with dawn coming and no chests in sight, the men on the government ship will be getting curious; so we'd best be marching along. Hi, there! Stir yourselves, you lubbers. D'ye want to take all night to travel a few short miles?"

Then, having sent another messenger off to direct the party at the Blue Anchor to join him at the schooner itself, Barbary again took up the conversation with Hayes. "So the forest fellow actually stuck a knife into Bully Benton, did he?"

"Pinned his arm against the wall with a thrown knife at a dozen paces," grunted Hayes. "Myself, I don't fear any ordinary man in fair fight, but spare me from any of these wild half-Indians out of the woods! Cut your throat at a dozen paces' distance, and then scalp you, to boot—the bloody Dan'l Boones!"

Barbary seemed to find in the tale something of great humor. He chuckled again, more gleefully than ever. "And Benton is raging mad, I suppose?"

"He's fit to pull the fellow apart

with his bare hands if he could but lay them on him," responded Hayes. "He won't live long, that forest looper, after he gets aboard the Saucy Mary, that's certain."

Then their figures vanished out of my sight, and their voices died away under the *club* of their horses' hoofs, by which I judged they were riding forward toward the van of the party.

As the realization came that I would not be the only prisoner at Bully Benton's mercy, that she would be there, too—that mysterious, soft-voiced companion of my moonlight ride—I strained at my bonds until they cut deep into my arms and legs; but the deftness of the knots finally made me give over in despair.

At last with a lurch the wheels stopped. I was lifted from the wagon and carried along by two men as unceremoniously as if I had been a log. There were lanterns around, and by their flickering light I could see roughly clad men, mostly sailors, coming and going in the gloom.

Ahead I heard Barbary's great voice raised and saw the sailors leap to obey, hence I set him down as one of the ship's officers, probably second to Captain Benton himself.

A chest, borne carefully by two men, swung up a slanted plank ahead of me, and then I too was borne up this same narrow plank and onto the vessel that was moored to great trees close at the waterside.

Then I was carried through a narrow door and into a cabin, dimly lighted by candles in metal holders, where I was unceremoniously dumped down on the floor beside the chest that had come aboard ahead of me.

The cabin wherein I lay was strikingly different in size from the cabins of the trading vessels which I had seen at New Orleans. They had been built to carry as much goods as possible, and their cabins had been all tiny affairs, not high enough for a medium-sized man even to stand erect in.

But this was no cabin of a trader jealous for cargo space. In height the ceiling overhead was a good dozen feet above the deck beneath, and there were doors leading out into what I took to be smaller sleeping cabins on either side, with perhaps a storeroom or two.

There was a stout table in the center, and a pair of benches and a chair, a couple of cutlasses crossed on pins in the wall, and an arms rack with half a dozen muskets.

This much I saw before the men came again, bringing another chest like the one in the corner where I lay. This too they brought in and set down close alongside and went out again.

And then one of the side cabin doors opened and through it came the man whom at his first word I knew to be Barbary. He carefully fastened the side-cabin door with a bar that fell into cleats both on the door and the frames on either side, humming as he did so in an easy, jaunty manner.

Still humming he lighted two great candles which, with their candlesticks, he took from a cupboard on the wall, and placed them on the table. Quickly he examined each of the chests, and then, leaving them, he came and stood over me, his face smiling as with satisfaction.

"Ah-h-h, my horseback-riding Daniel Boone," said he cheerfully, "and how do you like your new life, now that you've quit your forest running and come to start a-sailing?"

The extra candles, not being in lanterns, shone brightly on his face. He was almost as big in body as Benton. But there the resemblance ended.

Barbary's chin was square, his lips firm, his eyes keen, and his full forehead rose to a great unruly mass of dark brown hair. The face was that of a strong man, one who recognized no master.

I rolled my eyes and worked my face to call his attention in hopes that he might remove the gag from my mouth, but he only smiled and shook his head.

"Nay, you'll have to put up with it a while longer. There are government ships in the river, and no telling how many other manner of boats about to hear a shout if one were raised. When we're once clear of the river maybe we'll free you of it. Meantime let's see that your knots are not too tight for reasonable comfort."

He knelt and examined my knots. Patting them he rose to his feet just as another chest was brought in. "Right enough they are, if you'll but lie quiet."

He was just turning away when another subdued clamor arose outside, the voices of men and the tramping of feet, and above all the voices a great roaring one, whose very first oath set me quivering.

"Ah-h, he comes!" exclaimed this strange man Barbary beside me. "The captain comes—Bully Benton, the captain!" And then, to my infinite surprise, he turned to me and gravely winked one eye at me. "But you can't always tell how bold a man is by the sound of his roaring, Daniel Boone!"

CHAPTER V.

DOWN THE RIVER.

WITH a grating of hinges the door that led out onto the open deck burst open and a swirl of cooler air came in, and the creak of tackle and the rustle of canvas sails, from which I knew the ship was unmoored and getting under way. Then the door closed again and there in the candlelight stood gross Captain Benton.

He was somewhat sobered, but the redness of liquor had given way to the ruddiness of anger and pain. Around his arm, where I had cut it, was wound a dirty bandage, and his face was twisted with brutal malevolence.

"Damn the plot that sent me to a madhouse inn to get my arm sliced while you ambush a few mollycoddles of soldiers!" he burst out furiously, glaring at Barbary the while he felt

tenderly of his bandage. "And damme if I haven't half a notion that you and Matteson knew it would be so!"

Barbary only laughed. "Fiddlesticks!" he said. "It was yourself that proposed the stopping at the Blue Anchor, in case of chance guards coming from the government ship. If you get sliced it was your own fault, I wager. However, there's that in the corner here that will cure all your injuries, I doubt not, eh?"

He waved a careless hand toward the chests packed around me.

The sight of those square box-like things in the shadows truly seemed to make Benton forget all about the pain of his wounds. He dropped his bandaged hand on the table without even wincing. "The chests?" he cried eagerly. "Smash them open! Fetch an ax and let's have a look at this fortune inside 'em—eh, Matteson?"

As he stumbled forward I saw that behind him was the mysterious man Matteson, or Matthews, as I had heard him called also. He came forward and dropped heavily onto the bench beside the table.

Not a glance did he give toward the chests. Instead he leaned forward with elbows on table and his head bowed in his hands, so that his voice sounded as muffled and lifeless as a voice from the tomb itself. "Open them an you choose," said he.

Barbary stared first at him and then at Benton in manifest surprise. "What is it that's troubling *him*?" he demanded of Benton. "He looks as if he'd seen a ghost."

Benton snorted in high impatience. "Leave him to his ghosts, and come give me a hand with these chests."

Still Barbary stood staring at Matteson, though. As if feeling the keen gaze, Matteson lifted his bowed head and let his hands fall heavily on the table. "Aye, I have seen a ghost this night," said he, nodding, "the ghost of my honor."

His voice and looks were even more

ghastly than they had been back in the Blue Anchor just before I ran from the tavern. It fairly sent shivers up and down my back.

Yet the hulking Benton only laughed coarsely and stumped forward to lay hands to the chests. For the first time he spied me lying bound there in the shadows. He stepped back in surprise, then "Body o' me!" he cried. "If it's not the same buckskin rascal with the throwing knife!"

Then with another great bellow Benton snatched at the pistol in his waist. "By the shin-bones of Satan, but I have him now! Bound hand and foot, all ready for the reckoning!"

Even as I closed my eyes against the inevitable flash and roar, I heard Barbary's cool voice break in: "'Vast there! Avast! He's not your prisoner, but mine. You've had your chance at him already, at the tavern, and made naught of it. Leave him alone, I tell you!"

Opening my eyes then, I saw Barbary grasping so tightly the lock of Benton's pistol that the flint could not fall onto the steel. And though Benton cursed and jerked to pull it loose, he quickly perceived that the thing was as like to go off while pointed toward himself as anywhere else, and so wisely gave over, though not without much swearing. "Body o' Davy Jones!" he cried. "But one would think it was you that was captain here and not me!"

"No," said Barbary humoringly, yet standing sturdily between myself and the furious captain, "I know my place as mate very well, aboard. But it's yourself that forgets sometimes who is *owner*, is it not?"

"Anyway, you know the agreement—each to his own booty, apart from the general scheme. The wagons and all they contained were fair spoil for general division, yes. But the lad here is separate booty, unforeseen and indivisible. If you are so anxious for your share of the prizes, you had best stick to the chests here."

With a kick and a snarl that told plainly enough that if he did give over his intentions against me, it was only for the time being, Benton laid hold with Barbary of one of the chests and hoisted it onto the table. There with knife and pistol they broke the lock open and lifted the lid. Eagerly Benton plunged his hands inside—and then seemed suddenly to become a raving maniac.

"Tricked!" he roared, jerking his hands out and holding them high. "Tricked! Some one has beaten us to it! There's naught here but worthless scraps of paper!"

While he danced and howled with madman fury, the fluttering pieces of paper he had grabbed out of the chest came whirling onto the table, the floor, and even onto my face.

Yet Barbary never altered his smile. As for Matteson, he did not even bother to glance up from his somber staring at the planks of the table top.

"You have but broached the first of the chests," said Barbary smoothly. "There are still two others left. Perhaps one of them will contain things more to your liking."

But the second chest proved to contain only similar blank papers.

WITH the third and last chest, though, I could see Benton's face come afire with excitement again. From amid a plenteous packing of cotton lint which overflowed onto the floor as he unpacked it, he drew forth a small but heavy box that gave forth a thrilling *clink* as he dropped it heavily on the table.

The top sticking even after he had pried at it with his knife, he upended the small box in an excess of impatience, and hammered it on the bottom so that the whole contents came out suddenly with a clank and clang of metal. And then once again Benton seemed to become a crazy man in his rage and fury.

All that I could see were several thick-

ish metal plates, glinting dully in the candlelight.

In truth no man outside of bedlam could have acted as Benton did then. He frothed wordless blasphemy, beating on the table with both fists, glaring alternately at both Barbary and Matteson.

Barbary only continued to smile. As for Matteson, he had not once glanced sidewise, or once changed expression during the whole of the unboxing. It was this utter indifference that seemed to center the captain's rage on him. Benton all at once whirled on him.

"I knew you were lying—you with your smooth ways and fancy graces!" he cried. "You've tricked us! You've fetched us on a wild-goose chase! And by the Eternal, Bully Benton is not the man to be tricked by any one!"

He had jerked out his pistol as he spoke, the weapon quivering in his rage-palsied hands. Swift death leered out from that black muzzle, yet Matteson never so much as flickered an eyelid.

"Why don't you shoot?" he demanded carelessly. "The bullet would be merciful. Only it had been luckier for me had you done this the first time I met you."

For a full half minute these two faced each other across the table, Matteson smiling his unconcerned smile while Benton's finger quivered on the trigger. Nor did Barbary interfere, either. He, too, sat, half disdainful, half smiling. And then suddenly Benton dropped his pistol on the table, covering his discomfiture under a great volley of oaths, and Barbary laughed outright.

"I knew he would outstare you, if you let him live the first ten seconds, Benton," he cried. "But it is better so—you would have been as foolish as the farmer oaf that killed his hen that laid the golden eggs. Put up your pistols, and let us three take counsel as to what we shall do toward getting away safe with our spoils."

"Spoils?" roared Benton. "Blacksmith's metal, and blank paper! And this fancy gentleman here"—indicating Matteson—"promised us the wealth of the Treasury!"

For another full minute Barbary stared at Benton, a cold glance of sheer disgust. "Fool!" said he at last. "Do you think then that wealth can only be in gold and silver? Look!"

Swiftly he brought forth a horn of ink from the wall cupboard, and with it he thoroughly daubed the surface of one of the plates on the table. This inked plate he then pressed down firmly atop one of the blank sheets of paper on the table. At the same time with his free hand he brought forth from his pocket a green-tinted bank note. Then as he flipped the plate aside and held up the two bits of paper for comparison, my heart almost skipped a beat in its excitement.

Save that the new printed sheet was black where the other was green, they might have been twin bank notes from the same press!

Even Benton was held spellbound at the sight. "You—you mean *these* are the printing plates from which the government prints these same bank notes?" he demanded at last.

"That, and naught else," said Barbary, nodding amiably. "Yet not the plates from which the notes themselves are printed, but the *master plates* from which those other printing plates are made. For a printing plate becomes worn-out in time from much printing and must be replaced with others exactly alike it. These master plates are the common model for them all, and they are *more real* even than the real printing plates."

The realization that the possessing of those innocent-looking plates was as good as possessing the national treasury itself, almost, set my eyes bulging from my head. But to my surprise Benton, fingering the real bank note and comparing it with the inky plate, seemed manifestly disappointed. "I

thought it was the actual money we were going to get," he grumbled, his mouth turning down sullenly.

Barbary sniffed. "Money?" said he. "And why should they be sending good money from the government's safe vaults here to the feeble protection of the half finished buildings in the new village of Washington, do you think?"

"Why, any drunken rabble on the road might hear of it—or, as for that matter, a soldier or two of the escort, with so much ready money in sight, might think the prospect of a fortune well worth the risk of hanging for treason, and so see to it themselves that it did not reach the vaults in Washington. No, the officials of the government, especially old Pokey-Nose, were too wise to risk any such results."

"But they sent these plates," argued Benton dully.

"Aye, but disguised as mere household goods of Pokey-Nose, and *not* as money or anything else worth the stealing. And I'll wager the escort, save the lieutenant in charge, were equally in ignorance that it was other than household goods they attended. Aye, and that they are even now kicking their heels in Patterson's barn with wonder as to why a lot of highwaymen should have so great a hankering for candlesticks and wool-cards and such."

BUT Benton's mentality was evidently not of a proportion to his gross bulk. His eyes blinked as he poked at the inky plate again, and then he carelessly picked up one of the blank sheets of paper that had come out of the other box.

"That may be all right for the plates," said he, "but why should they want to send two boxes of paper sheets along, too? The escort might better have been guarding two boxes of those same household folderols than these worthless scraps of paper."

"Worthless, eh?" repeated Barbary, regarding Benton queerly. He picked up the paper sheet Benton had been poking at, looked at it for a moment, then tore it squarely across and handed one torn portion over to the ship captain. "Does that seem no different to you from the bits of paper you buy in shops to scribble letters on?"

"It's narrower," responded Benton, examining it carelessly and casting it aside. "But otherwise, for all I can see, it's no different from that same paper for scribbling."

"Well, if you made a print with these plates on that scribbling paper of yours and then took it into a shop and tried to pass it as a good bank note, you'd soon learn the difference," said Barbary dryly. "These paper sheets for printing money are of a peculiar texture, and the lowest shopkeeper of the lot would see the difference.

"But with the plates and this paper, which I doubt not they were taking to Washington as standards, we will not be making counterfeits at all; we will be making bank notes as real as the government itself can make them."

Now Benton's sluggish brain began to work. His eyes lighted with satisfaction, only to grow dull again the next moment. "If there's special paper," he said grumblingly, "there's special ink too, most like. They'll have their own special ink made, no doubt, and as different from ordinary ink as this black stuff in the horn is from the green stuff that's on that bank note there."

"Ah, now you're beginning to think," cried Barbary approvingly. "But ink, especially when it's dry, isn't so hard to counterfeit as paper of a particular texture. I warrant you there are a half dozen chemists and apothecaries in England or France, given that bank note as a sample, could make up an ink so exactly identical that even old Pokey-Nose himself would not recognize the difference!"

The glow of satisfaction crept back

to Benton's eyes, a tinge of greediness came into his voice. "Then that's the plan, is it? We go somewhere to France or Spain or England, get the ink made, and then set up our own printing press with these plates and blank papers, and print as much money as we want. Is that it?"

"You've grasped the idea admirably," grinned Barbary. "And I already have in mind a chemist in Regent's Lane that will fix us to a duke's taste. But before we get to the Thames we will have to get clear of the Delaware here, and that's as full of twists and turns as a scalded snake.

"And as it was my part of the bargain to provide the ship and attend to the ambuscade ashore, so it is yours to pilot the Saucy Mary safe to sea. So up to your post, man, before the bo'sun runs her high and dry on a mud-bar."

At that the man Matteson, who had never once looked at the plates since they had first been dumped on the table nor, for that matter, looked at anything other than the table top under his very eyes, got up heavily and went out the cabin door onto the deck.

Benton started to follow, got as far as the cabin door and then suddenly halted and turned around. He came back, and standing by the table looked long and insolently at Barbary. "Those plates," he said, "for things so valuable, they're very small and easy to be gotten away with. And there's dark narrow places in the river here where a fellow could drop the gig overside and be gone with plates and papers before the rest of us could even suspect."

Barbary's eyes flashed. "Do you mean to say," he said sharply, "that you question the honesty of myself or Major Matteson? For none others, except yourself, are allowed in the cabin here."

But Benton stood his ground sullenly. "When it comes to money, I'm not trusting anybody," said he sulkily. "I've been tricked before. I bought this ship for you and hired this crew

and attended to things ashore, and, by Heaven, I'm going to make certain I get my share of the booty."

"Scoundrel!" cried Barbary, dropping a hand to his pistol butt. "Have a care what you say. I'm not the man to be bearded by a fellow on my own ship, be he captain or not. I've captained too many ships o' my own for that!"

"Aye, but you didn't sail 'em in as crooked and narrow a stream as this same Delaware," grinned Benton leeringly. "You may have plundered Spanish ships in the Gulf, as I've heard, but I have no fear of you. I'm the only man aboard can get this schooner out of the river before the government ships catch us, and you know it."

"Yes, and if they catch us, you'll hang just as high for piracy as I will myself, for all my work in the Cubas," retorted Barbary. "I don't fancy they will look too kindly on the stealing of those plates; we might just as well have sacked the Treasury itself. But if naught else will satisfy you I will padlock the precious plates in the chest in my sleeping cabin, and you may carry the key in your own pocket."

He placed the plates back in their box and was reaching for the bar-latch of the side-cabin door whence I had seen him emerge earlier, when suddenly he became aware that Benton was following close at his elbow. "How now?" he demanded. "What is it you want this time?"

Benton put one finger beside his nose in a knowing manner. "There are chests and chests, and keys and keys," said he. "But if I was right there to see, now, there wouldn't be no doubts that I'd be carrying the key to the chest that had the plates inside it, would there?"

So fast Barbary whirled on him then, and so black was the look in Barbary's eyes, that I in my corner expected blood spilled, and without another moment's delay. Even Benton,

surly as he was, stepped back a pace.

"No one enters that cabin but myself," cried Barbary. "And, by the gods, if you don't take yourself out of this cabin and out of my sight this moment, you swashbuckling fish-captain you, I'll pistol you where you stand and run the risk of grounding the ship in strange channels myself!"

His free hand was twitching so nervously at his pistol butt that the gross sea captain lingered not in his going. He went out through the little passage precipitately. Yet he was careful to let his parting sentence come mumbling audibly back to the ears of Barbary in the main cabin, and so perforce to mine also.

"Body o' me, if I don't believe there's some particular reason why you don't want me inside that cabin o' yours," he snarled. "And by your shin-bones o' Satan, if you've got more booty hidden there from a fair division you'll find Bully Benton is no easy man to cheat o' shares!"

CHAPTER VI.

A PROMISE.

FOR a second after Benton had gone Barbary stood looking after him, his mouth grim with anger. Then suddenly he laughed, tossed the plates back carelessly on the table and, seating himself, lighted his tobacco pipe.

For a little while the place was silent save for the creak of canvas and cordage outside, the tramp of sailors' feet forward and overhead, and the *swish swish* of water around and below.

In my corner I writhed with weariness, and striving to roll into an easier position I accidentally gave one of the chests a knock with my knee so that it sounded in the silence as loud as a drum.

Instantly Barbary was on his feet and whirled about, a cocked pistol ready in his hand. For a second he

peered about, then as if satisfying himself whence the noise had come he put away his pistol and came over to where I lay in the corner.

He stood staring down at me, as silent as a ghost, while his brow furrowed with thought. Then he bent down. And my eyes bulged and my heart for a moment ceased beating at sight of a long knife in his hand.

To my utter surprise, this peculiar man knelt beside me and slipped the gag out of my mouth, and stared narrowly into my eyes. And, "Daniel Boone," said he softly, "are you a man of honor?"

Slowly then I managed to answer, as well as my stiff lips would let me. "I have never—been doubted as such—yet," I mumbled.

"Then give me your word quickly," said Barbary, "that if I loose you now, you will say naught to any one of this ship or anything on it for—for thirty days."

"Do you mean," said I, "that you will turn me loose? That you will help me escape from this ship?"

"Yes," said he "This Benton is a—more treacherous and dangerous villain even than I had reckoned him. He will not touch you while I am here, but once out of my sight he would slay you and lay it to accident. And I have no reason to wish you murdered. But in fairness to myself, if I let you go, I must have your promise not to give information. Do you promise?"

"I promise," said I, without hesitation.

The next moment I felt the cords on my wrists loosen as they parted before the keen blade. Then as I rubbed my hands and fingers to get out the stiffness that was necessarily there even despite the kindly binding, this strange man sat beside me, and I noted with surprise that he was fraying the cut ends of the cord with his knife as he talked. "The shore is no more than a half mile away," said he. "You can swim that distance, can you not?"

"Five miles, an it were necessary," said I.

"Good," he nodded. "Now do you yourself untie the other cords with your fingers; they will think then that you frayed this in twain against the sharp edge of this chest's forced lock, and so untied the others and escaped unaided.

"Beyond that door there," and he indicated the small door in the end of the cabin, "is a storeroom in the very stern of the vessel. By opening the shuttered casement there you will be able to lower yourself into the river and so swim ashore.

"And now I must be getting back on deck to establish my innocence in the affair, and also to see that Benton does not skulk aft here inopportunistly. Remember your promise!"

He had gone before I even found words to thank him. So believing my best thanks would be shown by getting away as quickly as possible before any one should come to interfere with his well-planned scheme, I fell to work so zealously on the remaining knots that soon I had freed myself altogether.

Then leaving the cords lying, I opened the small end door, which was well up in the side of the cabin and scarcely wider than my shoulders, and squeezed myself into the compartment beyond.

It was as black as pitch there save for the small square of the door, and as stuffy as a closed oven. Smell and touch told me that this was the food storeroom as well as the container for sail cloth and other articles of ship's usage that required careful storage. Then I managed to find the tight-barred casement in the stern and after some little difficulty to get it open,

Immediately below me, almost, creaked and swung the great rudder, with the water gurgling and swishing past. Overhead the feeble morning stars still shone, and off toward a lightning patch of sky that betokened the coming dawn I thought I could see

the low irregular outlines of trees and hills.

It was not morning yet, and less than a dozen hours since I first provoked Benton in the tavern, and shortly afterward engaged in that fight that had resulted in my ride through the night with that strangely interesting girl—

I drew back within the storeroom that half of my body that was already dangling out of the casement. *She* was there—in that side cabin! She was that other “booty” Bully Benton had accused Barbary of hiding away from them!

And I, who had writhed in my bonds as I wondered and planned how I might aid her if I could find her, had just given my sacred promise that would stop me from the first move toward bringing assistance in pursuit!

As quickly as I had crept toward the casement I now crept back from it, toward the small door into the cabin. If she could swim even moderately well, the two of us could gain shore as easily as one. If she could not swim—well, there surely must be a loose plank or board somewhere at hand, or even the chests might do at a pinch.

But before I had thrust a leg out through the small square door, the noise of footsteps and the opening of the forward-cabin door made me hastily draw back into the full shadows of the storeroom's interior. Some one was entering the cabin from the deck forward. Swiftly and silently I closed and latched the storeroom door, behind which I lurked.

I could not see into the cabin, yet I dared not open the door the slightest crack lest its ajar condition be noticed. Then off to one side of the storeroom in the darkness I noticed a small beam of light as though the candlelight in the main cabin stole through a hole in the partition there.

Even so I found it. Behind a great heap of sail canvas I found a knothole the size of my thumb, just even with the top of the canvas. Crouching amid

the canvas I placed my eye to the opening.

I had thought the newcomer might be the murderous Benton, skulking back to wreak his vengeance on me or else to pry within that closed side-cabin, and I felt about for something to use for a weapon if he noticed my escape and suspected my hiding place. But it was not Benton after all; it was the silent, sad man Matteson.

NOW he was as silent as ever, and even more mysterious. Inside the cabin door he stood for several minutes motionless, merely looking about him and listening. Then carefully he stole to each side-cabin door and listened again. Particularly long he listened at the door I knew to be Benton's, and after that he turned ear toward the outer door again.

Then, as if satisfied, he swept up a candle from the table into his hands and came striding swiftly toward the shadowy corner where I had lain tied.

“King,” he called softly. “King! Andrew King?”

With my heart beating in my throat I crouched not two feet away from him, holding my breath lest he hear it as he stood just on the other side of the thin partition.

“Andrew King?” he called softly again. “Andrew King?”

Then suddenly I saw him stoop, saw what it was he picked up off the floor. It was one of the frayed cords that had bound my wrists. For a long minute he stared at it, his face expressionless. Then replacing it carefully where he had found it, he rose upright, and a moment later I could hear his footsteps softly retreating.

I was tense with waiting to hear him throw open the outer door and give the alarm of my escape. Yet a moment later I heard a bench scrape on the cabin floor and then he came into my range of vision, seated at the table.

And in his face was nothing that I could read as either surprise or fear or

anger that I had escaped. There was nothing there at all to be read, save the old hopeless look that I knew so well.

For a half hour, an hour, I waited for him to rise and be gone. But he did not move. So I sat. I felt the strain beginning to tell on me. I drooped forward, trying to find an easier posture among the canvas folds wherein I crouched. And before I was even aware of the temptation, I must have fallen asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

BENTON RANTS.

WHEN I awoke again, it was with loud cries and the stamp of hurrying feet ringing in my ears. Then from beyond the partition wall against which I leaned came a renewal of the clamor, and pressing my eye again to the knothole I peered into the cabin.

The candles no longer flickered in wall lantern or candlestick. But sufficient light to make things clear in the cabin came streaming through small grated openings in the cabin ceiling evidently cut for that particular purpose.

And in the daylit cabin beneath, Benton, slovenly, unwashed, was stamping violently up and down, snarling blasphemies at every step. Barbary was standing just inside the passageway to the deck, having evidently just entered, and he was yawning with fatigue and sleepiness, evidence of a long night spent on deck. Matteson was nowhere in sight.

"Gone! Gone! I tell you he's gone!" roared Benton, repeating the words that were yet ringing in my sleep-drugged mind. "He's got away and gone!"

"Who's gone?" inquired Barbary, yawning as he finished. "Who's got away and gone? Matteson?"

"No! The forest fellow!" howled Benton. "The fellow you wouldn't let me put an end to, last night! And now he's slipped away and ashore, and he'll

have ships and soldiers after us by the hundreds!"

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted Barbary. "Where could he have escaped to, along here, except into the woods? With the start we have we'll be far and away to sea before he can reach settlements and fetch ships and soldiers to lay us by the heels."

Nevertheless Benton, in his violent passion, was not ready to listen to reason. "If you hadn't interfered I'd ha' finished him last night and have had done with the danger altogether!" he cried, turning on Barbary furiously. "I would not put it beyond you to have had a hand in his going!" Ignoring him, Barbary came across the cabin to my corner, and picking up the bits of cord there, examined them lazily. Then he pitched them onto the table before the raging Benton. "There, look for yourself," said he. "Is that a clean-cut cord, or a frayed one?"

"Don't be a fool, Benton. Any one with half an eye could see what happened. The fellow sawed his wrist cords loose against the broken padlock of this chest here, untied his feet, and then slipped out on deck and overboard before daylight, and no one to see him. But what difference does it make, since he can't bring ships to stop us before we are safe and away?"

"Difference?" howled the raging sea captain. "Why, he dared me to my face, the jackanapes, and then slashed me in the arm! Is a chit of a woods-lopser to do that to Bully Benton and get clear away unscotched?"

Barbary, however, merely shrugged his shoulders. "Catch him then if you can," said he. "If you can lay hands on him, I promise you this time I won't interfere with whatever reckoning you can bring him to—though if it were myself that had been knifed once, I would be very wary of the same knife a second time."

With his pistol in hand, however, the hulking sea captain was searching about, looking for any signs that might

indicate where a prisoner might have passed. My heart thumped as I heard his fingers clawing at the latch on the square door into my storeroom, and again I felt frantically around for any weapon whatsoever to defend myself with.

Then to my amazement I saw what I had not before noticed. The storeroom casement behind me no longer yawned open as when I had last seen it. It was closed, and tightly, for not even a trickle of daylight came glinting around the shutter edge. While I slept Barbary must have crept in to close the casement after me and so destroy the evidence of my escape. I was trapped, weaponless, inside the narrow storeroom.

All I could do was try to conceal myself. Jerking the canvas over me I lay breathless, as Benton puffed and panted at the storeroom door. However the door had been built for ordinary men and not for one of his huge shoulders and girth. Moreover his heavy eating and drinking had not left him in condition to wriggle and twist as was necessary for easy entrance.

And while he still panted and cursed I heard Barbary's easy voice saying: "Tush, you but sweat yourself, man. No one would be fool enough to hide aboard here when he had the whole river and woods to escape to. Moreover, how would he have known of the casement inside there? And it is not left open, anyway, is it?"

"No, but it would have been as easy to close it behind him as it would have been to help him through it in the first place," snarled Benton suspiciously, yet to my infinite relief drawing back into the cabin again. "I don't trust either you or that pasty-faced Matteson! There's queer goings-on here that I'm being kept in the dark o'. But I tell you plain, if I but lay hands to that forest-loper anywhere again, I'll stop his loping for good and all."

"Hunt for him then, if nothing else will satisfy you," replied Barbary.

"Here comes Matteson. You might ask him if he has seen aught of your forest fellow anywhere."

BY twisting my eye at the hole then I saw Matteson just entering the cabin from the passage door. He was fresh-shaved and immaculate, with that unconscious air of elegance about him that I had noted in the tavern; yet his manner was still that of one who finds life little worth the living.

For a second Matteson stood somber, uninterested; then the fury of the captain's anger must have penetrated even his dull consciousness. He looked about with a faint wonder. "What is the matter?" he questioned. "Has aught happened?"

Benton answered. "Has aught happened?" he bellowed. "This forest-losing prisoner of Barbary's has gained free and by now is rousing the whole government forces, land and sea, to waylay us before we can work clear of the river mouth!"

Matteson glanced quickly at Barbary, but Barbary only smiled. "Tush!" said he. "Where else could he find ships and soldiers nearer than Philadelphia? And by that time we'll be safe out at sea, and the whole wide world to lose ourselves in. Friend Benton here takes the matter hardly because of some little reckoning he would have with the fellow over a knife slash, I believe."

The lightness of Barbary's mood seemed to infuriate Benton still further. "Shin-bones o' Satan," he cried, "but I'll be hey-diddled no longer! Before we go a fathom farther we'll see to a full settlement o' shares in the booty. And not only what's in the chests, but whatever else is hidden away in Barbary's cabin there!"

Barbary only laughed. But for the first time Matteson seemed to take a real interest in things. "What's that?" he demanded. "What's this about something hidden in Barbary's cabin?"

"Aye, well may you ask," snarled Benton. He turned leering on Barbary. "Oh, you're the smart one, aren't you, sneaking aboard ship ahead o' us? But you forgot that though the ship may be yours the men are mine! When you acted so queer last night I went forward to find out why. And what I want to know now is, what *else* have you got hid away in your cabin besides a woman prisoner?"

In truth the man Matteson seemed awake now at last. He turned sharp questioning eyes on Barbary. "What's this?" he said. "You brought a woman prisoner aboard? You broke the agreement that naught ashore was to be meddled with save the chests in the wagons of the escort?"

"I meddled with naught that did not meddle with me," retorted Barbary sturdily. "But I did catch and fetch along a pest of a woman that did come rushing along the road straight toward Philadelphia, crying like mad for the soldiers and that there was treason afoot. Aye, and if I had not fetched her along she would have had half the city after us before now."

"A fancy excuse," sneered Benton, "but I wager ye would not ha' troubled greatly to fetch her along had she not been young and pretty. Blast me if I ever knew an expedition yet that couldn't split itself to pieces over a woman."

"What I say is that we ought to get rid of her right away, before she gets away, too, like that forest fellow, or maybe screams her head off when just we're sneaking past a frigate sometime."

"Get rid of her?" queried Barbary. "And what is your idea of the best way to get rid of her?"

Benton laughed brutally. "There's plenty o' deep and wide places in the river here," he said. "Let her swim ashore if she can."

Barbary's hand dropped to his pistol butt. But Matteson paid no heed to Benton; his gaze was all for Barbary.

"You have a woman prisoner aboard here—seized and held against her will?" he asked.

"Aye," responded Barbary firmly. "And, by the gods, I shall keep her so! A prettier maid I never saw. Beauty, youth, spirit—she has them all! I have already a determined mind to wed her, and Heaven help the man aboard this ship that gives her not the same respect I give her myself!"

Matteson's hand, that had been on his own pistol butt, dropped to his side. For a moment he seemed to ponder. Then, "Captain Barbary," said he, "I have been a man of my word. I promised you a fortune for the trying, and I leave it to you whether I did not fulfill my promise."

"Now, in return I ask you one favor. Will you exchange this prisoner for my whole share in the gains of this expedition?" For a second even Barbary, self-controlled as he usually was, gaped in amazement. As for Benton, he seemed fairly dazed.

"What?" inquired Barbary. "You'd give me your full share in the money in exchange for a woman you've never even seen?"

"It matters not whether I've seen her or no," replied Matteson quietly. "All that matters is that she is a woman and held aboard here against her will. You heard my offer. Will you accept?"

For a moment Barbary continued to stare. Then suddenly he brought down one fist resoundingly against the palm of his other hand. "By the gods," he cried, "but I salute you as a gentleman! To exchange a fortune for a lady, face unseen! Aye, it takes a gentleman, and a man of spirit, to do that!"

"I fear me I can no longer lay claim to being a gentleman," responded Matteson somberly. "But I will be glad to strike the bargain with you if you will."

Barbary seemed still befuddled at the proposal. "A fortune! A sure fortune, for a chit with a pretty face!"

he repeated. Then all at once his eyes ceased staring, and his face tensed as with a sudden resolution. "No, by the saints! I'll show you that Black Barbary can be as sporting a gentleman as any man. You offer a fortune for a pretty girl. I *refuse* a fortune for a pretty girl!"

"You will not exchange with me?" asked Matteson, as if in bewilderment.

"No," returned Barbary, putting his chest out, "I will keep her to remind me what a fool even an old pirate may be! By the gods, whatever else old Pokey-Nose may say, he can never complain that his daughter lacked for proper valuation by her suitors!"

He laughed. And then suddenly in the midst of his laughter the guffaw stopped as short as though it had been chopped off with a knife. With my straining eyes I could see Barbary staring—staring at Matteson as if he were seeing a ghost. And Benton was staring likewise.

Matteson's face was white. No sheet could have been whiter than it, from his stock clear to his pallid temples. But his eyes were blazing, until no flash of lightning in the heavens could have been more fiery.

"Not *his* daughter! Not *his* daughter!" he cried in a choked voice. "Oh—it was not *her* you brought aboard here?"

"For a certainty it was her," said the staring Barbary. "I forget the name—Henrietta, or some such, I believe—but it was Pokey-Nose's girl for a certainty. Though what she was doing masquerading in boy's clothes is more than I can say."

But if he had cause to gape before, he had cause more than ever now. Matteson's eyes had become gleaming slits, his lips were so tightly drawn that the teeth showed through, and the big vein of his forehead bulged in a purplish cord.

"Captain Barbary, I have made you a fair proposition and you have refused it," he said metallicly. "Now I make

it to you again. You will either accept my offer of exchange for her—or you will fight me for her here and now! And I warn you that I will kill you as surely as I stand here!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A DUEL FOR A LADY.

IT was Benton who made the first sound to break the stillness after that surprising challenge of Matteson's. He laughed, a loud, sarcastic guffaw. Barbary was silent as if amazement had stolen his tongue.

"Ha-ha!" roared Benton. "Strike me dead if your little genteel friend isn't calling you to account, Barbary!"

Barbary could only stutter his reply. "Fight you—for her?" he gasped.

"Aye. Fight or exchange," snapped Matteson.

"By the Lord, but you're a spitfire—Matteson! Pity it is that I didn't have a few like you among my Brethren of the Caribees; more than one Cubano that got away safe would have gulped water, instead."

The uproarious Benton was all the while deriding Barbary's seeming hesitation.

"Why don't you accept his challenge, Barbary?" he guffawed. "You've always claimed to have been a gentleman yourself before you took the sea a-pirating. Here's your chance now to prove it!"

By then Barbary seemed to have recovered his poise. He turned on the hulking captain with words not lacking in fire. "Have done with you!" he cried. "It was never said **of** Black Barbary that he was afraid to meet any man in fair fight. I shall mourn you as a true-spirited gentleman, Matteson!"

"You had best wait till the thing's finished before you do any mourning," returned Matteson with the most asperity he had shown yet. "Which shall it be, sir—swords or pistols?"

"Make it pistols, and across the table," suggested Benton before Barbary could answer. And he threw the two pistols he carried in his waistband onto the table. "Here you are, gentlemen, already loaded."

"Did I not bid you keep out o' this?" snapped Barbary. And then, to Matteson: "No, I'll leave the choice to you—and, egad, you're going to need it!"

Matteson glanced at the weapons on the table. "You are the challenged party; the choice is yours," he insisted. "And I warn you that in the city I am rated well as a fencer. To make it more even, you had best choose the pistols."

"Nay, swords it is then," cried Barbary gayly. "Only not small swords, but good stout blades such as good seamen love. And though you may be well rated with the small sword of the fencing schools, you'll find the blade they use at sea quite a different sort of tool, I warrant you."

"Benton, hand us down those cutlasses from over the arms rack there."

So it was that I, from my hiding place in the storeroom, squinted through a knothole at such sight as few men of the Western settlements ever gazed on. When the table and benches were pushed back, Barbary and Matteson took their stands facing each other in the cleared space, cutlass in hand, while from the side the gross Benton looked on, pistol in hand, and made a great burlesque of conducting the duel in the fashion of the day.

It was at his suggestion that the pistols of the two duelists had been laid together on the table at the side, and the fighters had stripped themselves of coat and waistcoat.

As they stood facing each other thus, I had to shiver at the disparity between the two men. Barbary was a full half foot taller than Matteson, and his great shoulders bulged with shirt, while his fingers swung the heavy cutlass at arm's-length like a mere wheat straw.

Yet in Matteson's easy, almost indolent posture, and in the smoothness of his movements, there was something too that caught and held the eye. And though his arms and body looked amazingly slender, the weight of the heavy cutlass seemed no handicap.

The gross sea captain waved his pistol muzzle commandingly. "Are you ready, gentlemen?" he grinned. "Then stand to your guard. One—two—three. Heavy blows, gentlemen!"

The cabin rang with the clash and clang of steel meeting steel.

For the first few minutes of the fight it seemed that sheer strength and weight must overwhelm speed and agility. Barbary's blows fell like great hammers, till it seemed impossible that anything could stand before them.

Sparks flew from the clashing blades, and ever it seemed that the smaller man escaped destruction only by the slenderest margin. Lucky it was that the high poop deck above had been raised much more than the poops of any of the little cargo vessels I had seen at New Orleans, else Barbary had never found room to swing as he did.

Then I saw that Matteson was not trying to check the terrific blows directly, but, with agile blade, was canting them off to one side or the other so that the very force of the strokes helped to swerve them aside. Yet not all the blows could be so deftly turned, and twice I saw Barbary's blade tug at Matteson's shirt, and, after it, the red smudge of flowing blood.

In his dodging, too, Matteson was being pressed steadily back, ever back, toward the cabin corner behind him. And Benton squealed in bloodthirsty eagerness, "You've got him, Barbary! Coop him in the corner where he can't run!"

But Matteson seemed to take warning from the cry, and just in time. He stopped short and, for the first time in the fight, made a sudden thrust at Barbary.

The thrust did not land, but the puff-

ing Barbary had all he could do to avoid that licking blade. Then I became aware, for the first time, how violently Barbary had been exerting himself. His face was beaded with perspiration, his breath came short and fast through his open lips. And again Matteson thrust, and this time it was Barbary who gave back as he parried.

Differently from the giant Barbary, Matteson never once made a slashing stroke. Always it was the thrust, the darting point, now here, now there, drawing Barbary's parrying weapon to one place merely to stab out at another part of his huge body.

Not once did Matteson give Barbary time to set himself, to gather himself for another of those terrific strokes of the earlier moments. Time after time Barbary had to leap back to save himself from a darting thrust, and his earlier exertions had made him no faster on his feet.

Almost before any of us realized, Barbary's back was against the side of the cabin almost alongside Benton, who had to leap to get clear of the flying steel. And, for the first time, a faint smile seemed to curl at the corners of Matteson's lips.

"You have had your fun, Barbary," said he. "Now I shall have mine. I have a fancy for that uppermost button on your shirt. Watch it carefully if you would not lose it!"

And then, *clang*—before Barbary could guard himself, even had he been able, Matteson's blade shot out, deftly swept Barbary's blade aside, and tugged at the shirt beyond. The button did not come away, but both Benton and I saw the tiny rip just beneath, where the licking point had torn the cloth.

"Not high enough, that," said Matteson coolly. "Perhaps there will be better luck *this* time."

Again that clash of blades and twitching of cloth, and the rent this time was above the button.

Benton knew, I knew—Barbary knew—that Matteson was but playing with him. Skill such as he had was not to be opposed by all the strength in the world.

And then Matteson, for a second, held his busy blade, yet kept it pointing like a finger of death at Barbary's panting breast. "The next time," said he slowly, "I shall not stop with the button. It will be the heart beneath—or will you trade the girl to me, now?"

Barbary had not breath to make immediate answer. His lips moved wordlessly, his eyes glared, and then, all at once, he found his breath. "I'll trade!" he cried.

"Then drop your point," said Matteson. "Drop your point, or else I'll—"

He got no further. In the very midst of his sentence, his eyes seemed suddenly to start from his head. His sword arm flew up, driving the blade an inch into the wood before it rang clattering from his loosened fingers.

His knees crumpled under him even as I heard the thud of the treacherous blow. And then beyond, over his sprawling body, I saw the grinning Benton, the pistol with whose heavy butt he had struck still uplifted in his hand.

His face was fiendish with treachery and cunning. "I saved ye, Barbary!" he cried. "Another second, and he'd ha' pinked you through the wizend, for a certainty!"

His beady eyes were fixed like a ferret's on Barbary's cutlass, whose point was still thrust out defensively at breast height. Already that point, in its wielder's surprise, was drooping away from guard position.

Before I could even shout the warning at what I saw in Benton's feverish eyes, Barbary's cutlass point had sunk to knee height. And then, as coolly as if he were butchering hogs, full into the breast of Barbary Benton fired his pistol!

The Duchess and the Fight Racket

It was all set to put one over on the Duchess, but she had 'something to say about that—she was that way

By **THOMAS B. THOMSON**



"Get in there and fight!" somebody screeches in my ear

LET me introduce myself. Folks, meet Bill Hawkins, diplomat and fixer extraordinary. Of course, I ain't got no pen name, and, if I did have, it'd be a number. And as for my box-fightin' name—let's let bygones be bygones, sleepin' dogs lie, *et cetera*.

That's past and out, and I thought I was all washed up with the fight racket; then, just when I'd got me a swell job shoffin' for Mrs. Poindexter DeLancey, of the upper crust, I suddenly finds myself mixed up with Peep O'Day, the same what's preparin' to bust the championship aspersions o' one Gunner Sullivan.

The how of it is this:

The buzzer sounds one day, while

I'm shavin', and I don't answer it, not likin' to drill soapsuds into my ear. A minute or two and—B-z-z-z-z-z! It goes again, and I wonders and decides maybe I'd best find out why that ritzy secretary is so impatient.

I grabs up a towel, excavates a tunnel to my left ear, and dives for the phone.

"Say, Cutie!" I blurbles, "pull your thumb out o' that button and tell me what's worryin' your sweet little blond head now?"

"I presume you think you are addressing Miss Allison," comes back a dignified, throaty voice, ten degrees colder'n a loan shark's heart. "Kindly do not take so much for granted in the future!"

I gasps and drapes myself against the wall, but don't relinquish that receiver none whatsoever. It's the duchess herself, and it's my cue to listen and not shoot off my mouth none.

"Have the closed car at the door at two, sharp," she says. "We are to meet the Chieftain at Sylmar."

"The Chieftain! Two o'clock!" I gasps. "Why, the Chieftain pulls into Sylmar at two-thirty, and it's a good thirty-five mile drive!"

"When I desire information, Hawkins," the voice cuts in, colder'n ever, "I'll ask for it. Have the car at the door at two, sharp!"

And I hangs up the receiver, seein' myself doin' thirty-five miles of not too good road in thirty minutes or less. The duchess is that way. When she wants a thing done, it's done. Once she orders some delicate plants out o' the greenhouse, wants 'em outside the entrance, on account o' a big party she's throwin'. The gardener objects; says they'll freeze, even if we are livin' in sunny Sou. Cal., and please, ma'am, hadn't he best keep 'em inside? She just looks at him—you know—and says not to worry about the freezing, she'll take care o' that. And the frost never touched them plants.

She's got a swell place up on the Palisades, overlookin' a lot o' the Pacific Ocean; a gardener, a shoffer, which is me, a secretary, the same what I thinks I'm talkin' to when it's the duchess instead, and a whole kit o' other servants. An' she bosses 'em all, without no back talk from none of 'em. She's that way.

About the only thing she can't make say 'uncle' is her son. I ain't never saw him, me only bein' with the house for goin' on two weeks an' him gone constant—accordin' to report.

IT'S funny, too, how the duchess hates box-fightin'. When she hires me down to the employment agency she digs a lot o' information out o' me that's nobody's business—all about my previous condition o' servitude, personal habits, if any, *et cetera*, and when she's finished I feels ready for resurrection morn.

"I believe you'll do," she finally

says, resigned. Then, all of a sudden, "What was your occupation before becoming a shoffer?"

"Box-fighter, ma'am!" I says, pridefully. And it's the truth. I'd been a promisin' prelim boy until a guy named Gunner Sullivan jarred me loose from five teeth and my ambition with the same fell blow. Then I took up shoffin'.

"What?" she shrieks—like maybe I'd told her baby-slaughterin'.

"Yes'm," I says, modest.

She looks at me sort o' meditat'in', then glances back at the employment clerk. I'm the only driver on his lists, so I'm not worried. Either she hires me or does her own steerin'.

"Have you quit it?" she asks sharp.

"Yes'm," I replies with a shudder, thinkin' o' Gunner Sullivan and that curlin' left.

Suddenly she nods her head.

"In entering my employ, you understand, you are never so much as to mention prize fighting in my presence," she says, again givin' me the congealed eye; and, before I knows it, I hears myself tellin' her that I understands. And I does. She's that way.

Later, the cutie secretary, Miss Allison, informs me that the duchess is dead set against anything connected with the art o' the scrambled ear and the bashed pan. I asks why, but she just says for me to go to headquarters and find out; so I'm still in ignorance.

At two, sharp, I eases up to the side entrance. I has every nut and lock-washer shinin' like to put your eye out, and I hops down, swings open the door, and snaps into my niftiest salute.

"To Sylmar, Hawkins," says the duchess, as she eases her two hundred pounds into the tonneau. The springs don't do no groanin', me havin' give 'em an extra shot o' oil.

"Yes, ma'am!" I says, both respectful and impersonal.

"And be there by two-thirty!" she goes on, billowin' down into the cushions. "We're to meet my son."

So that's the how of it. The heir apparent is due to appear.

"Yes, ma'am!" I says again, my hand snappin' back to the visor o' my cap.

"And the next time you answer the house phone, please be more polite; it might be me," says a low, giggly voice in my ear, and Miss Katherine, the secretary, slips into the car, not disturbin' the springs none a-tall.

"Please go jump into the ocean!" I snibs in the same low manner.

We've shoved about five miles behind us when the dowager speaks.

"Have a care on these corners, Hawkins," she says, "and miss a few of these bumps."

"Yes, ma'am," I murmurs, and pulls a snappy salute with a foot o' steel body and cushion between us, and my back's turned to her besides. She's that way.

I figures maybe I'm sunk, but we eases into Sylmar two jumps and a pant ahead o' the Chieftain. I snaps open the door and the Duchess gains the ground in one lunge. My eyes bug out some at the spryness o' her, but I don't forget the salute while she's chargin' past.

I starts to unlimber, just as Miss Katherine does a follow-up.

"Hold it, James," she says, giggling. She's the easiest giggler I've ever saw.

"The procession isn't all by yet."

"No, but the elephants is!" I comes back snappy, regainin' my human form.

"So His Royal Nibs is comin' home for a square meal? Just what's this Ronnie boy good for, if anything?"

"You'd be awfully surprised," she says mysterious, followin' on.

"I'd be surprised if he's fit to kill, just from what I can guess about him."

I calls after her, sort o' nasty. I don't like the way her face lights up when she talks about him. Honest, as I watch her coastin' along in the wake o' the Duchess, her slim body sort o' swingin', athletic like, her curly boy-bob held up pert and independent, I

gets sentimental all over. There's one dame I could place among my souvenirs.

I collects Ronnie's luggage, and we's ready to depart. This Ronnie don't look just the way I'd him pictured. He ain't big; not that, but he carries hisself sort o' competent and easylike. But when I thinks how he held onto the secretary's hand when he met her, I decides he needs disciplinin'—bad. I've no claims there, but I'm hopin'.

WE puts from there, me in front drivin', and the three o' them settin' in behind. A little flurry o' rain blows up after awhile and the wind whips it in all over me, and when I thinks o' that sister settin' back in there, all comfortable, talkin' to Miss Katherine, I gets mad.

Then I reflects about my tough luck, *et cetera*, and I gets still madder, and I turns a corner, and a guy what should be herdin' sheep sideswipes me with his cheap tin-can. It don't damage him none to speak of, 'cause what's a fender worth on a wreck like that?

I gets out and tells him what I thinks, and he comes back with a lot o' hooey about me turnin' the corners too fast. I tells him how many kinds of a cock-eyed prevaricator he is, and he arms hisself with a tire-iron. I forgets they's frails present and gets ready to bust him one, when they's a interruption from the prodigal son.

"Cut that out!" he yipps. "You should know better than to turn corners at such speed on wet streets!"

I almost faints when he motions for me to get back in the bus. He goes over to the guy who's still wavin' the tire-iron and actin' savage.

"This is the DeLancey car," Ronnie says. "I'm sorry we damaged your machine. If you'll have the fender replaced and bring me the bill, your money will be refunded."

"Don't you do nothin' o' the kind!" I yells. "It's all his fault! He's the one run into us!"

"He's entitled to his half of the road," Ronnie comes back.

"Not when he takes it out o' the center!" I snibs.

"When I wish your advice, I'll inform you!" Ronnie says, sharp, and I shuts up.

I drives home sore. I've kissed my job good-by, me bein' in that accident and all. I don't like that guy.

When I puts up the car, I waits my chance and, pretty soon, Ronnie boy comes out, and I calls him to come see where the paint's scraped off the fender. Honest, I almost laughs at him, walkin' in there to get hisself a good shellackin'. I closes the door, soft, and comes over to where he's standin'.

"It will need touching up a bit," he says.

"So will you, you big palooka!" I comes back. "Soon's I get through workin' you over!"

He just stands and looks at me sort o' cool for awhile.

"Oh," he says, finally. "So that's it!"

"Yea, Funnyface!" I chirps. "I don't like your shape, nor your mug, nor nothin', and since I'm to get the gate, and all because o' you, I'll just leave you a little remembrance o' Bill Hawkins, one o' the best little prelim boys that ever drew on a glove."

He looks at me with new interest.

"Oh," he says again, "so you've had ring experience! In that case—I think I'll give you the chance to work me over—if you can."

He strips off his coat and silk shirt, and when I lamps the set o' his shoulders and the muscles playin' around under his skin I wonders what I've let myself in for. Then I laughs at myself and thinks this pink-tea sister's gettin' my goat.

"All right," he says, final. "I'm as ready for my lickin' as I'll ever be!"

That strikes me as funny and I'm chucklin' over it as I measures him for the first little jolt. I don't intend to finish him with a punch, not me. I

plans to tap him a few dozen times around the face, red him all up, and get him mad, then work up to what they call a smashin' climax.

But havin' my mind occupied has made me careless, or else I've misjudged this pink-cheeked mamma's joy. I starts to tap him, but musta hit a elbow. The next thing I knows I'm banged on the nose. That riles me up, me bein' particular about my nose, and I wades in—but not far.

Things happen all wrong; I keeps gettin' tapped on the nose, or in the eye, or on the chin. This sweet thing's evidently a Y. M. C. A. boxer and I decides to get busy. I fiddles around, waitin' for a chance, and when he's wide open as a mission's doors, I lets him have it.

Bingo! And somebody snaps out the lights.

WHEN I wakes up, the first thing I sees is Ronnie.

"How'd you come out of it so quick after I socked you?" I asks. "And what happened to me? Did the garage fall down?"

"I thought you were a fighter!" he says. "A fighter usually knows what it's like to be slapped down."

Good night! Does that Willie boy mean to tell me he's knocked me kickin'?

"But what's happened?" I insists.

"Nothing," he says, "only I baited a trap and you stepped into it!"

Now what do you think o' that? I hands myself a laugh.

"All right, Ronnie," I says biglike, "you win—this time! Only I'd like to stick around and sample that chance haymaker o' yourn again."

"What do you mean, stick around?" he comes back. "Your job's good here—as far as I know. But I don't care to chance any more bare-fisted work—can't risk it."

"Afraid o' spoilin' your pretty face?" I comes back nasty.

"Not that exactly," he yawns.

"The truth is, I got an important mill on in a few weeks."

"A what?" I yelps. "Who be you, anyhow, fella?"

"I'm the guy that's going to lick Gunner Sullivan, and win a chance at the champion," he comes back, modest. "The sporting world calls me Peep O'Day."

"Peep O'Day!" I screeches, and almost goes out for the second time. "You mean to tell me you're Peep O'Day?"

"The same," he says, "but keep it under your hat. The Mater'd faint if she knew it."

I whistles, long and low, but don't say nothin' a tall. I'm thinkin'. My brain's goin' around so fast I'm dizzy. I sees now, clear, the how o' me not makin' no more hit with the cutie secretary than I done. This bird's beat me to it.

"If you'll do me the honor o' shakin' hands," I says, "I'd like to help out—that is, if you'll forget how I been actin'."

"Sure!" he says. "You're a bunch of luck—I need practice. How about a few workouts here in the garage?"

That suits me, so we does the workouts, and how! I tells him I got jarred loose from my box-fightin' by this same Gunner Sullivan, explainin' that he ain't no navy man like his name sounds, but got that moniker through havin' a kick worse'n any sisteen-inch gun in Uncle Sam's scrap pile. I remembers the Gunner's style and shows Ronnie—excuse me, I mean Peep—all I knows about him; and Peep, he's a regular guy. I'm for him strong.

One day, he tells me he's leavin' the next mornin'. It sort o' got me, for he's the goods, clean through. He tells me I'm the best sparrin' partner he's ever got hold of and says I still got the ability to be a good box-fighter myself, but I feels my jaw and tells him I don't believe so, thanks just the same.

"I must have my mother in on this,"

he says. "I can't go on foolin' her this way. She's terribly set against fighting, and I must make her like it. Once let her learn the truth and she'll do a couple of fits and disinherit me. I could stand that, only—her happiness means a lot to me. I want you to help me put her wise to my game."

That's some order, but this guy's got me hiped, I guess.

"Sure, Ronnie!" I says. "I'm game to the core!"

"Say, cut out that Ronnie stuff, will you?" he snaps vicious. Then he relents. "I don't mean that," he says, "but I hate that name. Just call me Peep, or else don't call me."

"That goes with me, Peep," I agrees. "And what's your scheme for handlin' the Duchess?"

Gosh! I almost stops breathin' for a minute, me lettin' that name slip out, but Peep just grins.

"So that's what you call her, is it?" he asks. "Did you invent it?"

I disclaims the credit.

"I'll bet it was Katherine," he says. "Sounds like her. Say, she's some little girl; she'll help you hatch up some scheme to win the Mater over to the banner of Peep O'Day, middleweight champion. You listen to what she says—she's smart."

HE leaves next mornin', sayin' he's headed for the East; only Miss Katherine and me, we knows better. His destination's a big ranch up north o' Los Angeles, a place that's spelled O-j-a-i, and pronounced like a interrupted sneeze. He's goin' to train there for the Gunner.

"Listen, Bill," the cutie says to me that night. "We have to get the Duchess to Los Angeles the tenth of next month to see Peep fight."

"That's our death sentence," I comes back. "She'll have us both shot and put Peep in San Quentin for life."

"What for?" she asks.

"False pretenses," I snibs.

"False pretenses!" she echoes.

"Sure!" I says. "For claimin' to be a fighter, and this Gunner Sullivan goin' to make a palooka out o' him."

It works. I wants the low-down on her and Peep. I gets it. When she's through tellin' me off, I grins and does a back-up.

"Attaboy!" I says. "I'm for Peep, strong, and now let's hear your scheme for makin' the old dame embrace the fight racket."

"But I haven't any scheme," she wails. "You've got to help me think up something—something good."

Now ain't that just like a woman, I asks you?

"Listen, Cutie," I comes back. "My think-tank run dry about the time o' the Civil War. If you want thoughts, think 'em!"

"Look here, Mr. Bill Hawkins," she says, stompin' her size two foot. "Peep is depending on us. Think, and think hard!"

"You've got the wrong number, sister," I says. "Thinkin' perduces one o' two things, headaches or heartaches. With me, it's headaches."

About five days later, the cutie corners me again.

"Have you thought of anything yet?" she asks.

I admits a failure, and she'd did no better. It's a tough job, but Peep's dependin' on us.

"Listen!" I yelps a couple o' days later. "I got it!"

"What? Lung trouble?" she cuts in sweetly. "You yell like that, and you'll get the air! The dowager is asleep."

"I know how to work the old goat to go to that fight," I whispers, "I'll—"

"I suppose you're referring to Mrs. Poindexter DeLancey?" the cutie interrupts, sweetlike.

"The same," I admits. "I'll have Duke Malone telegraph the missus that Peep—I mean Ronald—is in a auto accident. He'll give the hospital's address, only it'll be the stadium, and

when she finds Peep's still all in one piece, she'll be so tickled—"

"You are certainly correct," she butts in.

"The idee is pretty hot," I admits, modest.

"I am referring to your statement about your lack of ability to think," she says. "The idea is—blah!"

"Then you think up a better one!" I remarks, and exits.

The sport news is full o' the comin' mill and the Gunner's favored to cop. They all like Peep, but mostly say he's bein' rushed to the scrap heap. Others give him a chance—a outside one.

We—the cutie secretary and me—absorbs the daily write-ups and wishes for more, and one day she reports a funny thing.

"You see, Bill," she says, "I didn't hear her coming, and she was right over me before I knew it—and I had the paper opened to the sporting news. I mumbled an apology and left the room. When I came back, what do you suppose she was doing? Reading the sport page herself. Now what do you think of that?"

The seventh comes along, and the big sock-and-slug party's billed for three days later, and they's still nothin' to our credit. We're about desperate, and then—can you beat it?—the duchess decides to go to Los Angeles, me to drive her down. Of course, the secretary's included. The cutie and me, we exchange glances and start gettin' ready. It ain't no time to talk.

WELL, to make a long story shorter, we's bunked up in a swell flop house the night before the big go, and I beats it down to Vernon, huntin' the boss o' the comin' show. I finds him and starts explainin' and he slips me the three ringside tickets he's been holdin'—and they's not the Rickard ringside kind, neither. "Hang on to 'em!" he says. "They're valuable. You couldn't buy another with a half-century note."

"And Peep, where's he?" I wants to know. "Is he all right?"

"He'll be here to-morrow mornin' from Ojai," he says, "ready to weigh in."

I returns and reports to Miss Katherine. All we has to do now is get the duchess to the slug-fest and see that she don't throw no fits nor nothin'.

The next day, I meets Peep and, boy, don't he look great? He gives my hand a grip that pulverizes about twelve different bones, and asks quick how is Miss Katherine. After I've relieved his mind on that score, he remembers he's got a mother, and asks how is our scheme comin'? I tells him great, and he's tickled pink.

"I knew Katherine would arrange it," he warbles. "She's a great girl."

I agrees that she is, and mosies back to the chop house to hear her elegant idee for the grand finals. I finds her throwin' one fit right after another.

"She's gone!" she moans, wringin' her little hands. "I can't find her anywhere!"

"Who's gone?" I blurts.

"Mrs. DeLancey, stupid!" she snaps. "Now don't stand there! Do something! She's entirely disappeared!"

"That's O K," I warbles. "The big battle don't start till around nine o'clock. She'll drift in for her chow."

"Don't be too sure!" she wails. "No one knows anything about her. Oh, I'm so afraid—"

She keeps this up for two solid hours, and I'm about nuts. Soon I'm worryin', myself. Honest I am. We got to get the duchess to Peep's fight; I promised Peep, and he's dependin' on Miss Katherine.

It comes six o'clock, and we ain't heard a thing. Seven o'clock, and still no Mrs. DeLancey, and Miss Katherine's threatenin' to call the police. She's phoned the family attorney no less than eight times, and we're both runnin' around in circles barkin' at each other.

Eight bells, and still no word from the dowager. Miss Allison is ready to faint on a minute's notice, and I ain't much better.

"Listen, Bill," she says, final. "Somebody must be there or Peep will worry. He'll be watching those seats, and you must be there to explain. If she comes in, I'll use your hospital idea—the one I laughed at. Afterward, if she tries to leave, I'll sit on her!"

She means it, too. I hands her two o' the pasteboards and sprints for a south-bound car.

Honest, I never see cars run so slow. Stops and delays o' every description—I'm ready to bite the ear off a traffic cop by the time we reaches the stadium. Almost nine! I elbows my way in and breathes a sigh o' relief. Two tough prelim boys is whangin' each other with everything they got.

I reaches my seat and begins to think what will I tell Peep. I'm composin' my little say and dead to all else when I hears some one over to my right, and it gradually sinks in that I've heard that voice before.

"My good man," says the voice, "I'm sure you're mistaken. The tickets I procured from one of your, ah, speculators was much further back than this."

"Take what you get, lady, and be happy!" pipes the bozo what's doin' the usherin'. "These is what yer tickets calls for."

I wonders am I dreamin'? It's the duchess, some flustered about the seats, but the cutie is shooin' her right along.

"It's all right," she says. "The doorman and usher wouldn't both make the same mistake."

She chevies the old girl in, and when the duchess sees me she just says she's surprised, and I agrees that it's mutual. She's nobody's fool, she knows she's been jobbed, but how? And that's exactly what I wants to know. Miss Katherine's over on the other side, and when I looks at her with a thousand

questions in my eyes, she just laughs and, when the duchess ain't lookin', throws me a kiss. Honest, that dame'd drive Mr. Volstead to home brew.

The duchess don't ask no questions a-tall, and, pretty soon, the preliminary ends in a draw and the ring's cleared for the main attraction.

"The next bout will be between Gunner Sullivan and Peep O'Day," sings out a leather-lunged bozo from the ring, "for the right to meet the middle-weight title-holder."

"This Peep O'Day," pipes the duchess. "Do you know him?"

"Do I!" I chirps. "Do I! Wait till you lamps him, ma'am!"

"Peep—Peep O'Day," the duchess muses. "That sounds so unusual—is it his real name?"

"I can't rightfully say, ma'am," I stutters. "Some fighters uses their own names and some don't."

She says for me to point him out as soon as he comes in. I agrees, but I don't think it'll be necessary. I'm wonderin' who'll enter the ring first. Peep, probably. The Gunner'd wait till the crack o' doom, but he'd make the other guy cool his heels out front, while the crowd looked him over and give him the razz. All of a sudden, from up back o' us, all the yellin' and whistlin' and feet-stompin' you ever heard breaks loose, and I know Peep's on his way.

"That's Peep comin' now," I says.

She jumps up to get a slant at him. Everybody else is doin' the same, includin' Miss Katherine, which is not surprisin'. But the duchess, think o' her troublin' to glimpse a prize fighter who, for all she knows, she's never even saw before. It's got me stopped.

On account o' everybody bein' up, we can't see the hero none whatsoever. The duchess stretches her neck in every direction, but it ain't no use and, finally, she climbs on to a chair.

"Can you see him?" Miss Katherine asks.

The duchess nods and climbs down,

and her face, somehow, looks disappointed.

"He's a perfect stranger," she remarks. "I'm sure I never saw him before."

Me and Cutie exchange glances. Is the old girl goin' to make out he's a stranger—and keep it up? She might. She's that way.

Then he climbs through the ropes—and it ain't Peep a-tall, it's the Gunner. He bows in all directions and shakes his own hands, and everybody yells theirselves black in the face. They're strong for him. Well, he's a good, willin' fighter, and that's what takes with a fight crowd.

THEN the yellin' starts on the far side o' the stadium, and this time it's got to be Peep, but the crowd's so thick I can't see him till he climbs through the ropes and looks right at where we're parked. He knows what he's lookin' for, all right, and how his face lights up!

But Mrs. DeLancey's map is a study. She gets halfway up and stands there for a minute just starin' at him. Then she settles back slow, like the seat might dissolve and let her down, and all the time she's lookin' holes right through him. But she never makes a single yipp. Soon she looks around at her secretary, then at me, then back at Miss Katherine again.

"Miss Allison," she says, and her voice sure sounds funny. "Will you please explain how you managed these ringside seats?"

"Peep got them for us," Cutie answers, never battin' a eye.

"Why didn't you tell me you had them? Then it wouldn't have been necessary for me to spend the day chasing a speculator all over the city for the privilege of paying an exorbitant price for those other seats."

So that was why we couldn't locate her! Mrs. Poindexter DeLancey, puttin' a whole day huntin' tickets to a prize fight. But why? There's some

things about it I don't understand so well.

The battle's about ready to start and I turns to sizin' up the fighters. The Gunner's all there; make no mistake about that. He's bigger and stronger'n ever. And he handles hisself sort o' free and easy, like all his grease cups is filled fresh, and everything's workin' smooth—you know.

But when I looks at Peep I cheers up. He's not so heavy, but he's taller; his hair is cut short and he's clean-shaved, which is too bad. Whiskers makes good sandpaper in the clinches. Peep looks so clean and fit he almost throws off sparks. His reach ain't so long as the Gunner's, but I'm bettin' he can snap 'em across lots quicker. He'll not land so hard, but oftener; and that might spell victory.

It's time to go and Peep shoots us a look that would melt reënforced concrete. Miss Katherine and me, we give him the big salute, but the Duchess just watches him, with lips set.

B-o-n-g! It's the bell and they're off. We gets a slant on their different styles right away. The Gunner tries to tear Peep's head off with the first punch. But Peep ain't asleep; his head rolls back and the punch lands as he's goin' away. It slaps loud, but don't do no damage. Peep lands on the Gunner's nose and dances out o' reach, grinnin', with the Gunner ploddin' after him.

And that's the way they go—Peep tappin' and dancin' away, and the Gunner flat-footin' after him, tryin' to land a real one. The round ends with Peep ahead easy.

The one-minute rest's over, and the second round ain't much different from the first—the Gunner borin' in, and Peep back-pedalin' and, ever so often, slammin' the Gunner where it'll do the most good. But the Gunner sheds wallops like a duck does rain, and trudges in for more. I'm worried. He's sure to get Peep in a corner before long, and then it'll be too bad; I know how that baby can sock.

A big, fat bozo right behind us, one o' them lollops with a yard o' chins and a bullfrog bellow, must have the whole bank roll on the Gunner. He's pannin' Peep for not stoppin' long enough to get hit, and beggin' the Gunner to kill the "yellow-livered kyoodle." He breathes most o' these tender wishes down the Duchess's neck in a fog-horn blat that can be heard outside the San Pedro breakwater, and I measures him up for a wallop, if she orders it.

Five rounds is gone forever and I breathes easier. Peep is fresh and 'way out in front on points. Only once has it looked bad. The Gunner corners him in the fourth and starts slammin', and his dukes is sinkin' out o' sight in Peep's body. I jumps up, wonderin' if Peep's goin' to get away. Everybody else is up, too, yellin' for a knockout, but Peep rips in a bird of a uppercut, follows it with two hooks to the body and slips out o' danger.

I slumps back and glances at the Duchess. Her face has lost its wooden look, like her mask has fell off, and I grins. If Peep makes a fight of it, she'll be his manager from now on. But, if he keeps on runnin' away and finally gets knocked kickin', she'll likely finish him with a meat ax. She's that way.

After seven rounds the fans has give up; they're tired beggin' Peep to fight. And the things they call him—oh, boy! And all this time the Duchess's face has got whiter and whiter and her mouth has closed up tighter and tighter. I'm a little disgusted with Peep, myself. It ain't that he can't fight; I've mixed with him; I know.

I SEE the Gunner's handlers is growin' desperate; they're tellin' him to bust Peep or he's sunk. But he's tired; he's slowed up almost to a crawl, and his arms is so heavy he can't hardly lift 'em. I'm figurin' this fight's as good as settled, barrin' a lucky punch, when the bell rings, and—blooey! Out comes the Gunner and proceeds to climb all over Peep.

He slides under Peep's chin and pumps 'em in with both hands. Good night! How that baby can sock! Peep's in distress; he can't break away. He tries to clinch, but can't—all he can do is stop 'em.

The gang is up again, yellin' for the finish. Suddenly, the Gunner slips back and starts one from his shoe laces. Wow! It sounds like somebody has smashed the roof in and Peep goes down with his feet trailin'. I gives a groan. It's all over but the funeral, I thinks. The Gunner's standin' back, and actin' proud over a good, workmanlike job.

The referee counts to five, and Peep never stirs. At seven, he rolls over and raises his head, like he's wonderin' what it's all about. At eight, he seems to hear for the first time. He's awake, all right, but can he get up? At nine, he pulls a leg under him and makes it to a upright. He tries to wobble away, but the Gunner is all over him.

Peep goes down again, but this time he struggles to a knee at the count o' five and stays there, restin' and wipin' the fog away. He's on his feet at nine and staggers into a lucky clinch. When the referee breaks 'em, he's on a bicycle, and stays there for the rest o' the round.

Whew! That's over with! I swallows my heart back and looks around at the rest o' the family. Miss Katherine has both hands clenched, and two tears is plowin' down her cheeks; if ever a girl suffered, she's doin' it now.

The Duchess is takin' it different. Her jaw is clamped hard and I can imagine how a she-grizzly'd look if she caught some one maulin' one o' her cubs. But the Dowager's not lookin' at Peep; she's gazin' at the Gunner, mostly. Just then the fat mess behind her breaks out again.

"You're gettin' him, Gunner!" he screeches. "He's out on his feet, right now! You'll kill him the next round!"

The Duchess whirls around and hands the fat stiff a dirty look.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" she snaps at him. "Any one can see that your Gunner is the one who is about to collapse, and I'll thank you to stop breathing down my neck!"

"No harm, lady; no harm done," the fatty stutters. He's took clean off his base. She's that way.

I LOOKS at the Gunner, and hanged if she ain't right. He's clean discouraged. Peep comes out for the ninth, still a little groggy, but confident. Dan Heenan, his handler, has shot something into him that they don't get out o' no needle-gun. Old Dan's managed fighters for years and knows his business.

They meet in the middle o' the ring and Peep don't run from the Gunner none a-tall. He sends a straight left to the jaw that turns the Gunner halfway around and clips him a right-handed beauty before the Gunner knows he's within reach. Then he pokes another left through the Gunner's guard and leans it against his nose—hard.

The Gunner's so surprised he almost backs up. Then he comes right back, swingin' his weary arms and tryin' hard to finish his little chore as instructed. Honest, he can't hardly lift his gloves no more.

I looks to see Peep step in and finish him, but does he do it? No, sir! He climbs back on his bicycle and the old game o' tag me, I'm a butterfly is on again. Gosh! It's enough to make you sick. Then I gets a jolt.

"Get in there and fight!" somebody screeches in my ear and I turns, wonderin' who's gone crazy. It's the Duchess. She's standin' up, swingin' her fists, and leanin' forward. "Ronnie, do you hear me? Get in and fight!" she shrieks.

Ronnie hears her. So does everybody else within five blocks. He stops like he's been shot, and turns, gazin' at the Mater—the Mater! That's a laugh!—with his mouth open. And,

of course, the Gunner hits him. Ronnie hits the canvas again and the Duchess goes clean dippy.

"Peep O'Day!" she howls. "Git up and fight! If ye disgrace yer father's name—the name of a real fighter—I'll disown ye!"

I just sets and stares. The Duchess is gone, disappeared. And, in her place, is a big, husky, loud-mouthed dame, who acts like she knows what it's all about. She's shakin' her fists and shriekin' bloody murder.

"Ye blitherin' race horse!" she yells, workin' toward the ringside. "Stand and fight! Ye've got everything! D'ye hear me? It's yer own mither talkin'! Peep, me bye! Peep! Up wid ye! Up an' at him!"

Peep hears. The sock hadn't been so hard, anyhow. At the count o' seven he's on his feet.

"That's the bye!" shrieks Mrs Poindexter DeLancey. "Punch him in the eye, baby! Knock him cold!"

She's up, brandishin' both fists, and, would you believe it?—the crowd's with her. They like the kid's game comebacks, and now they's chirpin' for him to win.

Peep ties into the Gunner like a new man and don't he paste him, though? And the Gunner—he don't know but one way to fight. That's to give and take, and right now he's on the receivin' end. That sort o' thing can't last; Peep's right snaps up to the jaw, and the Gunner's asleep before he hits the canvas.

The next thing I knows, Mrs. DeLancey is up in the ring, shakin' hands with Dan Heenan, and lovin' Peep at the same time and cryin' and talkin' Irish love to the kid and everything.

"Dan Heenan," she says finally. "Why didn't ye tell me? Why didn't ye say ye had anither Peep O'Day in the makin'?"

"I warn't sure, Maggie," he grins. "Not till jest now. I know now that he's his dad right over agin. Don't blame me, Maggie! I knowed you was dead agin the boy follerin' in his dad's footsteps—not even lettin' him know he was the son o' the original Peep O'Day; that you'd even changed his name. No, Maggie, you mustn't blame me!"

"Riches aren't everything, Dan," she says, and, all of a sudden, the Duchess is back again, only different. "If my boy wants to follow the ring, I want him to be the best man in his division."

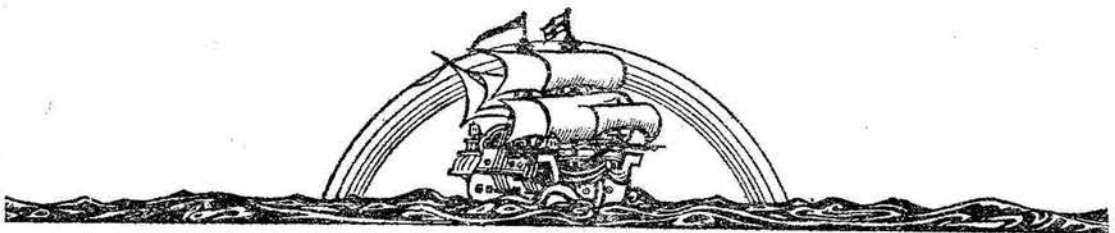
"Don't you worry, Maggie, he will be!" Dan says. "Here, I got to git that kid to the dressin' room," he breaks off sudden.

We locates Peep and he's in another clinch.

"And will ye look at that?" warbles Mrs. DeLancey. "See the pair of 'em! They think they've been pullin' the wool over me old eyes these many months, and me never lettin' on!"

And, right there, I knows she's wise to a lot o' things she's not supposed to see. She's that way.

THE END





"On your way, hombre"

Trouble Ranch

P. D. Q. makes some friends—and enemies who specialize in shots from the dark

By GEORGE M. JOHNSON

Author of "Squatters' Rights," "Tickets to Paradise," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

PETER DE QUINCY is a rambling cowboy who rides into the town of Cactus Springs, and finds it being run by a sort of unofficial boss named Spofford, whose occupation is that of banker.

In the Red Front saloon, Pete is happy to discover an old friend, Aleck Carmichael, tending bar. While they are still rejoicing over seeing each other after a long time, Peter De Quincy has his first altercation with one of the Spofford family.

Spofford, Jr., the banker's son, happens to be annoying a brand-new young

dance hall girl, while Pete is looking. Pete knocks him down, and then Mexican Charlie and Carl Davis, two of Banker Spofford's strong-arm men rush in. Right then, De Quincy gives an exhibition of the quickness which has gained him the nickname of P. D. Q.

Pete throws a chair at Mexican Charlie and knocks him out, leaps at Carl Davis, hitting and knocking him out with one solar plexus punch; then he gets the girl out of the dance hall, and sees her safely on to the early morning train which will take her to her home.

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As a result of that altercation, Spofford, Jr., offers Charlie and Davis one thousand dollars each to kill Pete. In view of P. D. Q.'s speed, the two bruisers take their time in considering the offer.

Meanwhile Banker Spofford is up to some devilry of his own: On an inside tip that a syndicate is planning an irrigation dam and lake on the Three Star Dot ranch, Spofford, Sr., determines to swindle beautiful young Peggy Winsome and her boy brother Newt out of the property so that he can make a big profit by selling the ranch to the irrigation syndicate, after he has wrongfully obtained it.

Banker Spofford's method of stealing the ranch is to be the following: He holds a mortgage, with a cutthroat foreclosure clause, on the Three Star Dot; he sends Carl Davis out to hold up Peggy and her brother when they will come to make the interest payment, so that it will be defaulted.

Peggy sprains her ankle on interest day, and young Newt rides toward town alone, with the money. When Davis holds him up, he gets only a bagful of iron washers, with which the boy has been wise enough to fill the leather bag the family usually uses as a gold pouch; and Peter De Quincy happens to meet Newt on the road, and protects him the rest of the distance into town.

Newt, insists that he does not want Peter to accompany him when he goes to pay Banker Spofford; so he goes alone into Spofford, Sr.'s office. The shady banker writes out a receipt for the money, but manages to take it away again from Newt by a sleight-of-hand trick.

A few days later, Spofford, Sr., rides out to the Three Star dot, and insists that he never received the interest payment on the mortgage, and that he will foreclose and take the ranch away from Peggy and Newt unless they pay back the six thousand dollars of the mortgage, within one month after the due date of the interest.

He then goes so far as to hint to Peggy that he will let her keep the ranch if she will marry and try to reform his worthless son, Spofford, Jr. At this, young Newt manfully opposes him, and insists that he leave the house.

However, when Banker Spofford has gone, Newt says, "Gee, I wish Pete would come!"

CHAPTER IX.

"GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS."

EB SANDERSON was a typical desert rat, as gaunt and gray and weather-beaten as some ancient granite ledge that has resisted the ceaseless attack of the elements through untold ages.

Wind-driven sand had pecked and scarred his leathern cheeks; his eyes, faded to a watery, colorless hue by the constant glare of a blazing sun on alkali, had acquired a peculiar sort of squint, so deeply sunken in their sockets that you almost doubted whether or not the old fellow really had eyes after all.

His hair was a grizzled, matted mass, not over clean. His fingers were skinny to an astonishing degree, and a manicurist would have emitted a piercing shriek and fainted at one glimpse of their nails.

The brain of the old prospector was perhaps a little warped, as is not altogether unusual with men of his type. A life of solitude, exposure, and hardship; the endless battle with the stark savagery of nature at her worst; the heat of a pitiless sun; the awe-inspiring grandeur of the forbidding scenes which surround him—all these conspire to influence the mental slant of one who seeks fortune in arid wastes. It is always taken for granted that the genuine desert rat is addle-pated to a greater or less extent.

At the present, Eb Sanderson had abandoned the desert in favor of Apache Cañon, where he had been industriously prospecting during the past

several years. No gold to speak of had ever been discovered in the immediate district, but this fact did not deter Sanderson nor dampen his faith.

"Gold is thar," was his motto. "All a feller's got to do is find it."

The assurance of this was based on a remarkable series of dreams which Eb had experienced. Now and then at irregular intervals—once on no less than three successive nights—a vision had appeared before him, a woman dressed in flowing robes of white, who disclosed to his eager eyes a handful of golden quartz, and beckoned mysteriously. Eb Sanderson followed her—in his dreams—but, exasperatingly enough, could not quite keep pace with the guide.

On up Apache Cañon she floated, looking back and beckoning encouragement, while poor Eb fell ever farther to the rear, despite his frantic efforts.

Each time the wraithlike figure disappeared from view, leaving Sanderson disconsolate over his failure, but firmly convinced that somewhere in Apache Cañon lay hidden a golden treasure. As time went on this idea became a fixed obsession.

"It's a pocket, like as not," he mused, when pondering over these startlingly realistic dreams. "Or mebber a quartz ledge, fair rotten with the yaller stuff. Anyway, I know the gold is thar. I'll find it, too, you bet."

Eb Sanderson, beneath his unattractive exterior, was a very likable old codger, due allowance being made for the little foibles and idiosyncrasies which dominated him. A stranger might have judged him gruff, taciturn, uncommunicative; but once you gained his confidence he proved to be an interesting conversationalist, with much to say that was well worth hearing.

Few if any friends did Sanderson possess—with the notable exception of Peggy and Newt Winsome. He had come to Apache Cañon only a few months after Frank Winsome's death, establishing himself in a ramshackle,

abandoned cabin some miles up from Apache Gap. Here he lived the life of a hermit, neither desiring nor seeking any contact with the outside world.

PEGGY, in the course of a morning's ride, happened upon the old prospector busily panning for gold in Apache Creek. Sanderson at first met the girl's friendly advances with ill-concealed apprehension and even distrust, but his diffident suspicion was no match for her disarming smile and the sympathetic understanding which lurked in her serene blue eyes.

Soon there was established between them an *entente cordiale* which later broadened to include Newt, and the hermit of Apache Cañon came to be a regular and always welcome visitor at the Three Star Dot ranch.

This was a fortunate circumstance for old Eb Sanderson, since his gold-seeking provided pitifully little in the way of substantial returns; less, in fact, than he needed for the bare necessities of life. He had secured a limited credit in Cactus Springs at the start, but this was presently exhausted, and things would have indeed gone hard with Eb save for the help he received from the Winsome ranch.

Peggy was not blind to the old fellow's destitute condition, and loading him up with supplies whenever he appeared, even though her own financial prospects were black enough to be a cause of constant worry.

A high order of diplomacy was required to carry this through, for Sanderson was prouder than Lucifer, and would have shrunk from the thought of accepting charity—especially from a woman; so Peggy's contributions were camouflaged under the conventional grub-stake agreement. Whatever mineral wealth he found was to be shared with her, fifty-fifty.

Peggy readily assented to this arrangement, though solely as a concession to Uncle Eb's strict sense of the proprieties, and with no idea of ever

profiting thereby. On a similar basis she induced the prospector to replace his ragged, worn-out garments with some old world clothes of her father's, hanging unused on nails in the toolshed rafters.

Peggy Winsome was the only person to whom Eb confided the secret of his mysterious visitor, and the hopes which centered about it.

"Her coming thataway proves they's gold thar," he asserted confidently one day when they were talking about his quest. "Trouble is I can't travel fast enough to foller. Gettin' too old and stiff in the laigs, I reckon. Wouldn't you think, now, Miss Peggy, thet she'd slow up a mite, 'count of a poor old cuss thet ain't what he uster be one way an' another?"

"Indeed I would!" Peggy declared warmly. "I don't think she's the least bit considerate."

"Now *thet's* a toler'ble strong statement, ma'am. She's well dispositioned, or she wouldn't be tryin' to tell me about the gold. P'raps she *can't* go slower."

"Have you seen her lately, Uncle Eb?" Peggy asked.

"No," he said, "not fer nigh a month. She's due to show up again most any time. I aim to stay with her, if I can only git my laigs to workin' brisk. But she sorter sails along easy like, above the stones and bresh, while I find the goin' powerful tough."

"Maybe next time you'll have better luck," Peggy predicted. "Can't you throw a rope around her, or something, Uncle Eb, and hold the lady back? She might take the hint."

"Why, now, thet's an idee, Miss Peggy," he chuckled. "Might be I'll try it."

OLD Eb Sanderson was taking inventory of the provisions in his humble shack. He investigated the coffee can, and found it empty; bottom showed in the flour container, and there was barely an inch left of what

had once been a noble slab of sow-belly. The ancient prospector shook his head lugubriously at this damaging evidence of famine.

"Corn in Egypt," he mused, "but dawgone little here. They's plenty o' salt left, an' we ain't no ways short o' pepper, but, hell's bells! a body can't be expected to struggle along on them two condiments. I might mebbly kill me a rabbit or a spruce grouse er something, only I ain't got no shells fer my gun."

"Got to git some grub; thet's sartin, and they's only one place where I'm sure o' gettin' it. Ain't a chance fer a grubstake in Cactus Springs, dawgone the luck! Lord knows I hate like sin to go moochin' around Miss Peggy's place, takin' advantage o' her kindness. But, shucks, I'll be payin' her back when I make my strike."

"It don't look no ways proper fer me to go down to the Three Star Dot without any excuse. Them wild plums in the cañon are a-gettin' ripe. I'll pick a snag and take 'em to Miss Peggy. She's allowed three, four times as how wild plums air a weakness o' hern."

It never occurred to simple old Eb that plums grew in abundance along the base of the hog-back ridge within pistol shot of the Winsome ranch, where Peggy and Newt could obtain all they wanted for the slight labor involved in gathering them. What he wanted was an excuse for visiting his neighbors, and the plums provided it.

LATER that same morning he emerged from Apache Gap, shortly afterward to appear at the door of the kitchen over which Peggy presided.

"Mornin', Miss Peggy," he called cheerily. "I brought you a batch o' ripe plums. They're a-gettin' right sweet and tasty now."

"Come in, Uncle Eb," Peggy called. "I'm awfully glad to see you." Then, reproachfully: "It's been an age since you paid us a visit. I'd begun to think you'd forgotten your old friends."

"Shucks, Miss Peggy!" he protested. "You oughter know better'n thet. Where'll I put these yer plums?"

"I'll take them. Oh, aren't they fine! Lots bigger than the ones growing around the ranch. I'm a thousand times obliged to you, Uncle Eb."

"Some folk claim wild plums should oughter be made into jam," Sanderson ventured, surrendering the basket to Peggy, "and some says preserve 'em whole. Me—I allow they hit the spot chawed down raw, especially when the sun's made 'em soft, an' sweet, an' juicy. What do you think, Miss Peggy?"

"Why, I like them all ways," she smiled.

"Well, thet's a safe answer," Eb grunted, lowering himself into a kitchen chair. Peggy passed him a platter of cookies, fresh from the oven.

"How's your lady friend, Uncle Eb?" she inquired. "Had any visits lately?"

He blinked at her mournfully, between copious mouthfuls.

"Thet thar scheme o' yourn never worked at all, Miss Peggy."

"What scheme?" Peggy demanded, mystified. She had quite forgotten their last conversation on the subject.

"Why, throwin' a rope around her, like she was a hoss on the range—er a steer. I don't guess she was keen about bein' treated thetaway. Anyhow, she went off, actin' kind o' mad. I ain't seen her sence. Mebbe she'll come back," Sanderson conceded dolefully, "an' mebbe she won't. Women air peculiar." You gathered that he considered himself an authority on the other sex.

"I'm sorry to have given you such miserable advice," Peggy said, her voice registering deep contrition though she dearly wanted to laugh. "But don't worry, Uncle Eb. She'll come back."

"You think so, Miss Peggy?"

"Of course. Women pretend to resent that caveman stuff, but secretly they all like a little of it now and then.

What does she look like, Uncle Eb? You never told me."

"Her face is sorter sad an' dreamy," Sanderson responded. "But it's awful hard to describe. Guess thet's because she ain't earthly."

"I think it's the most romantic thing I ever heard of," Peggy declared. "Perhaps she's your boyhood sweetheart, come to bring you good luck."

"Might be," he answered with a dry chuckle, "except I never had no sweetheart, an' she ain't brought me any luck to speak of—not yit. How be things going by you, Miss Peggy?" He glanced shrewdly at Peggy's face as he asked.

"All right. I was thinking about you yesterday, Uncle Eb. That last grubstake must be more than gone. The ranch larder's pretty well stocked up now, and I want you to have some of my supplies."

"Why, now, you hadn't oughter do thet," Sanderson protested, though feebly. "It ain't right fer me to be grubbin' offen you all the time. Howsomer, it ain't like you was *givin'* me truck," he added. "It 'll all be paid back when you git the split on thet strike I aim to make."

"Why, of course!" Peggy assented. "That's all understood. This is nothing but a business arrangement between us."

"I wouldn't take your help no other way," Sanderson maintained, "as you likely know, Miss Peggy. I ain't a guy thet would sponge offen his friends."

PEGGY bustled around the kitchen, contributing a generous portion of sugar, flour, coffee, and other staples. She gave ungrudgingly, and even gladly, her heart filled to overflowing with pity for the pathetic old wreck cast up at her feet by the stormy sea of life.

Peggy even found time to wonder what would become of Eb Sanderson after the unprincipled banker of Cactus Springs had wound up his sorry

business of taking the Three Star Dot ranch from Newt and herself.

"Sure you kin spare all this plunder, Miss Peggy?" Eb asked. "They's a powerful lot o' room in thet thar basket you're a-fillin'."

"Not so much, Uncle Eb," Peggy insisted. "I'm sure you'll find use for it."

Eb glanced at her doubtfully. In a vague sort of way he sensed that something was wrong with Peggy. On the surface she appeared her usual light-hearted, spontaneous, sunny self; but Uncle Eb was, after his fashion, a canny old soul, and Peggy's attitude struck him as being forced, as if she were laboring under a burden that she valiantly tried to conceal.

"Everything all right, is it?" he asked for the second time.

"Why, of course it is, Uncle Eb," she told him, but Peggy's blue eyes failed to meet his as she answered. "I baked a cake this morning, and I want you to have half of it."

Sanderson made suitable acknowledgment of this splendid gift, adding to himself: "If she don't want to tell me she don't have to; but I'll find out what's wrong just the same." Aloud he innocently inquired: "Newt to hum?"

"He's somewhere around the place," Peggy replied unsuspectingly. "I know he'd be glad to see you."

SO Uncle Eb scouted about until he located Newt. Without delay he came directly to the point.

"What's gone wrong, Newt? I just ast yer sister, only she put me off. She acts worried like."

Newt was perfectly willing to pour the tale of their difficulties into a sympathetic ear.

"That dad-burned crook down at Cactus Springs is sure choking us plenty. We're up against it, Peg and I are. Looks like we'd lose the Three Star Dot."

"Tell me all about it, son," old Eb

Sanderson ordered sternly. "Don't leave out nothing."

So Newt told him, beginning with the mortgage, and continuing right on down through the whole shabby business.

"That old shorthorn's got us where the hair is short, see?" the boy concluded. "I paid him the interest money when it was due, but he switched the papers on me when I wasn't looking, so we ain't got proof that it was paid."

"Spofford claims I never come near him that day, and bein's nobody saw me go in his office, we're just out of luck. Now unless Peg and I dig up six thousand three hundred before the first of the month, he puts us off. Then we're through!"

"Why the cross-eyed son of a knock-kneed jassack!" Uncle Eb ejaculated piously—or words to that general effect. For some minutes Uncle Eb dwelt luridly on Banker Spofford.

"Gee, Uncle Eb!" was Newt's awe-struck comment, when the flow of oratory at length subsided to a feeble mutter. "You sure can sling a mean tongue!"

The desert rat looked sheepish and somewhat ashamed of himself.

"I'm a dodderin' old fool to talk thetaway—with you around, Newt. Your pretty sister 'd scold me plenty fer settin' you this yer sort o' example. Some gent ought to bend a good heavy boot on me, an' thet's no lie."

"H-m!" Newt grunted. "Guess I've heard cow-punchers swear enough times." To which he naively added: "But, gee, Uncle Eb, I bet not many riders could touch you when you get to going. You're an artist!"

Sanderson accepted this tribute with befitting modesty, at once coming back to the interrupted talk.

"I ain't well posted on law and sech like truck, Newt," he confessed, "but from what I've heard tell o' Spofford he's a bad actor. An' I bet the law's on his side, same as he states."

"That's about what I think," Newt

agreed. "And Peggy too. We ain't got a Chinaman's chance bucking Spofford in a lawsuit. He'd have everything fixed up beforehand, because he's got slathers of dough. Only way out I can see is for us to get hold of the cash in time to beat out Spofford.

"But gee, Uncle Eb, we need a lot of luck to do that. The three hundred Spofford stole off me cleaned Peg out; we got to pay that over again and six thousand to boot."

"We ain't got much time to work in, have we?" Sanderson ruminated. Instinctively he allied himself with his friends in this time of need. "If it was a year from now, Newt, things would be different a heap. I aim to have my strike by then, but that wouldn't do you and Miss Peggy no good a-tall."

"You really think you're going to make a strike, Uncle Eb?" Newt asked.

"Think!" Sanderson echoed. "I know it, boy! They's gold in them thar hills!"

HIS very earnestness impressed Newt.

"It would be a wonderful thing for Peg if you could only show speed in this business, Uncle Eb," he suggested. "If you're going to make a strike, you better do it while Peggy can get the benefit 'fore it's too late. Six thousand dollars means a lot to her right now."

"You've sartinly got the correct idee, Newt," Sanderson applauded, clapping Newt on the back. "I been sorter putterin' along, lazy like, takin' things easy. From now on I aim to hipper. I'll have that strike 'fore Spofford gets Peggy's ranch. It's a promise, Newt."

"Bully for you, Uncle Eb!" Newt cried enthusiastically. "I'm betting on you."

"Don't copper the play, son," was old Eb's sober advice. "She's a plumb safe bet."

Thereupon he picked up the basket

of provisions, striking for the rough trail which led through Apache Gap and on up the cañon.

CHAPTER X.

TWO VISITORS.

THE next day or two produced small material change in the troubled waters that threatened to submerge the Three Star Dot ranch. On Newt's account Peggy tried to act as if nothing serious was the matter, but at times it was hard to keep the look of weary discouragement from showing in her face.

For the time being she contemplated no active steps aimed at foiling Spofford's plot, feeling that there was really nothing definite to be done. The only lawyer in Cactus Springs who possessed any ability—an unscrupulous individual named Martin Laurie—was closely associated with Spofford, and Peggy could see scant hope in that direction.

"Uncle Eb says he's dead sure to make a big strike," Newt informed Peggy one morning when she found things looking especially black. "Right away, too. He promised to have the cash you need before Spofford can do a thing to kick us off."

"Did you tell Uncle Eb?" Peggy cried reproachfully. "You shouldn't have done that, Newt!"

"Why not? I don't see any reason to keep it dark. I'd tell anybody I figured might be able to help us out. What we need is help—and a lot, too."

"But poor old Uncle Eb! He has troubles enough of his own without having to worry over ours. I don't believe there's gold in Apache Cañon anyhow, and if he did find a little I wouldn't feel right about taking part of it."

"Huh!" Newt grunted. "You'd have to, or Uncle Eb would throw a flock of fits. You've grub-staked him enough, so you ought to get something

back." Newt regarded his sister anxiously. "Don't you believe he'll make a strike, Peggy? Gee! He promised me he would!"

"I know Uncle Eb would love to save the ranch for us, Newt," she replied, "but it takes more than wishes to find the magic pot of gold under the end of the rainbow."

"Anyway," Newt maintained, "fellows do make strikes. All a chap needs is some luck, and Uncle Eb is due. So are we, if anybody asked you. And I ain't asking; I'm telling you."

Newt's thoughts here wandered on into other channels.

"I'd like to know what's happened to Peter De Quincy; he ought to be showing up, seems as if. I counted on his blowing in quite a spell back."

"I dare say you'll see that puncher one of these days," Peggy remarked. "It hasn't been very long since you met him—only a trifle over a week. But if Mr. De Quincy should visit us, I certainly hope you'll have enough family pride to keep still about Spofford's threat. We ought to show a little discretion in such matters."

"Aw, they wouldn't be any need of telling *him*," Newt declared wisely. "Peter's the kind of a guy to find things out for himself. See? Wait till you get a chance to know Peter like I do." In rather a lofty fashion Newt succeeded in conveying the impression that he and Peter De Quincy were bosom friends,

PETER DE QUINCY'S visit to the Three Star Dot was unavoidably delayed by a hurried trip he took out of the country on some mysterious business.

Peter had continued his sleuthing activities in Cactus Springs and with gratifying success. He picked up a good many stray and significant facts regarding Banker Spofford and the latter's associates from time to time through judicious use of eyes and ears.

In fact, he found affairs in town so intriguing that he sincerely regretted the necessity of a departure, even though his absence was to be only temporary.

Had Newt been aware of all this it would have spared him a large amount of wholly useless worry. Unfortunately he did not know.

EARLY one fine morning Peggy received a call from John Marlborough Spofford, Jr.

Young Spofford rode up quite jauntily, with the air of one assured that his arrival will be greeted by loud and lusty cheers. He was looking considerably better than usual, the marks of punishment left by Peter De Quincy's fists having wholly disappeared.

"Hello, Peg!" was his greeting. "Come on and take a ride." He bestowed on Peggy what he conceived to be an ingratiating smile, but achieved only a sort of second-grade smirk.

"Thanks!" the young lady rejoined shortly. "But I don't feel like riding this morning."

Spofford's show of good nature refused to be dashed by this lack of cordiality on the part of his fair hostess. He was in a jovial, expansive mood, and withal not disposed to cavil at small matters.

"Oh, well; all the same to me. Why don't you say you're glad to see a fellow?"

"Because," Peggy informed him, "I'm handicapped by a certain amount of respect for the truth."

Spofford laughed, dismounting from his horse.

"Going to ask me in?"

"I don't imagine that's necessary, is it?" she replied. "You'd come in anyway—whether I asked you or not."

He laughed again.

"Of course, I would—that is, unless you stayed out. Wherever you are, little girl, there's where I want to be. After you, my dear!" Gallantly Spofford held the door open, with a sweeping bow.

Peggy flushed, a tart response on the tip of her tongue; but decided to let the remark go unsaid. Spofford hooked his arm through hers in a familiar, proprietary way that any girl would have resented, pointedly steering toward the living room sofa.

With a sudden, lithe twist she slipped from him, selecting for herself a chair which had no close neighbors. Spofford accepted the rebuff without protest, sitting down at a respectable distance. Conversation threatened to die a slow death.

Peggy's caller eyed her appraisingly, while rolling a smoke. He scratched a match on his boot-sole, and applied its flame to the tip of the cigarette, inhaling deeply.

"A couple of pennies for your thoughts, Peggy," said he at length, when the silence became oppressive.

"You'd regret paying so much for them," she responded. "They're rather unflattering."

"Oh, come on, Peg!" Spofford protested. "Unbend a little, can't you? Give a fellow a chance!"

Peggy's shapely hand ostentatiously went to her lips, covering a little yawn. She ventured no verbal response.

"A pleasant time was had by all," the visitor murmured ruefully. "I've been to funerals that were more cheerful than this."

THIS was the first effort of Spofford's that won any approval from his hostess; in spite of herself she smiled—only a little, but enough for that ravishing dimple to flash momentarily into view.

"That's better!" Spofford declared gratefully. "Now I feel more at home." For a moment he remained silent, glancing at Peggy with no attempt to conceal the admiration he felt. Then: "I told my dad the glad news the other day. He was tickled pink."

"News?" Peggy asked unguardedly. "What news?" She should have known better.

"Why, that I expect to marry you."

"How extremely interesting!" Peggy said dryly. "That is news, isn't it? Strange I hadn't heard! And gossip usually travels fast."

Spofford's glance reflected a shade less of confident self-assurance. He had expected a more or less violent denial; had been prepared for indignation, stormy reproaches, or even anger. But the cool note of cynically mocking amusement in Peggy's voice had an unpleasant sound. He didn't quite know what to make of it, but none the less plunged onward with reckless disregard of consequences.

"The old gent thinks a lot of you, Peg. Guess there's no one he'd rather have for a daughter. I want you two to be good friends."

Peggy failed to comment on this hopeful assertion, but the expression on her pretty face held a world of doubts as to the possibility of her ever accepting Banker Spofford on terms even approaching friendship.

"You can't be blind to my feelings," Spofford continued, rashly refusing to heed the danger signals, which were plain enough had he cared to see them. "I've been loving you for so long it's got to be second nature with me."

His voice took on a more tender strain. "What do you say, Peg? I'm not such a bad sort," he added in fatuous complacency. "I'd make a mighty fine husband for you. I'm crazy about you, Peg. I think you're the sweetest, finest girl that ever lived. Won't you say yes, and make me happy?"

"There are just two reasons why I would never marry you," Peggy rejoined coldly, "though either alone would be sufficient. Your father is one—and you yourself are the other."

Spofford tried to speak, but she gave him no chance.

"This worthy father of yours, by a contemptible trick, stole three hundred dollars from me, and is now in a position to steal our ranch—our home, that is—as well. Newt and I have only the

rest of the month to stay here. I suppose this was done in the vain hope of forcing me to marry you; in fact, Mr. Spofford practically admitted as much when he was—”

“Has my dad been out here to see you?” Spofford exclaimed, at last managing to get in a word. “I swear I didn’t know it, Peggy. And I don’t get what you’re talking about. You believe me when I say that, don’t you, Peggy? You must believe me!”

“I find it difficult to believe anything a Spofford tells me,” she rejoined frigidly. “Experience is a dear teacher, but the lessons learned are valuable.”

Spofford’s face went livid, but whether from surprise or anger it was not easy to say. Impetuously he jumped from his chair. Peggy also rose, facing him, pale, but cool and determined.

“See here,” he snapped. “I’m going to get to the bottom of this. If dad butted in it wasn’t my fault, and you can’t hold me responsible for what he did or said. The governor meant well, mebby, but it strikes me he made a botch of the whole business. I’ll fix things up so you don’t lose the ranch, Peggy. That’s a promise. You won’t turn me down cold, will you?”

“Yes,” said Peggy firmly, “that’s just what I’m doing. I didn’t ask you to come here, and I wish you’d go away. It’s the only favor I want from you.”

“Hell!” Spofford muttered under his breath. His features took on an ugly, sullen look. “Guess you want to lose your ranch, after all, don’t you?”

“I know too much to expect a Spofford to save it for me,” she declared.

“You owe something to your kid brother, Peg. Be tough for him to fight his way without the help this ranch will give him. Forgetting Newt, ain’t you?”

“Win Newt over to your side, and I’d marry you in a minute. What you’ve just said is an insult to him. If

he was as old as you, you’d never dare hint even at such a vile bargain!”

SPOFFORD approached her, angry and threatening, but the girl refused to yield an inch, and slowly his anger was replaced by a sinister, covetous gleam yet more threatening.

“Gad!” he breathed. “You’re the most beautiful creature on earth, Peg! Mad at me or not, I want you! I can’t help it!”

“I don’t want your love,” Peggy flared. “Leave my house. At once!”

“What’s the hurry?” Spofford grunted, while Peggy, beginning at last to be frightened, watched the play of expression in his evil eyes. The man’s very soul was unbarred before her.

In spite of her bold front, Peggy shuddered at what she could see—lurking there beneath his eyes. She retreated a step, not daring to look away, as one who, unarmed, faces a wild beast about to spring.

“So you won’t marry me, eh, pretty Peggy!” Spofford muttered, wetting coarse, thick lips with his tongue. “I’m to go, am I? Well, I’ll have a kiss—and a good one—before I leave.”

With a movement indescribably swift he seized her, just as Newt tore into the room.

“Hey, you!” the boy screamed. “Let my sister alone!” And Newt, in a blind fury, launched himself headlong at the intruder.

FOR a girl of perhaps less than average height, Peggy Winsome certainly deserved to rank as far from a weakling. She was slight in build, to be sure, but her slimness masked a deceptive amount of sheer physical prowess.

Yet the bewildering speed Spofford displayed in his sudden attack had taken her completely by surprise; before Peggy realized what to expect, he had seized her in a grasp which girlish muscles could not break.

Desperately she twisted and strug-

gled, arms pinned to her sides, absolutely no match for the man whose arms circled her like steel bands. His hot breath fanned her face, and Peggy shuddered, nauseated at his nearness, filled with loathing and disgust at the physical contact she had to endure.

Newt's hasty arrival on the scene of conflict created a momentary diversion in her favor. From the corner of one eye Spofford glimpsed this counter attack.

"Keep away, damn you! Keep away!" he growled, and aimed a vicious kick at Newt, as the boy fearlessly closed in, eager to help his hard-pressed sister.

Spofford's boot caught Newt full in the pit of his stomach, completely knocking all his breath out of him. Newt struck the floor half a dozen feet from the combat, gasping and all but unconscious.

"Now," Spofford cried, bending over to reach Peggy's face, "I'm going to help myself to that kiss. All hell can't stop me!"

Peggy said nothing, saving her efforts for a more effective form of response. Spofford's flushed face came yet the closer to hers, bestial in its triumphant leer.

A heavy, substantial tread sounded at the door, spurs jingled musically. Newt, sobbing from sheer helplessness, glanced up as his ears caught the welcome sound. Spofford also heard it; he, too, looked toward the door as it opened, and remained petrified into immobility at the sight which met his terrified gaze. It was his Nemesis, Peter De Quincy!

"Sock him, Peter!" Newt cried frantically. "Sock him—quick!"

The final word in Newt's injunction was, to tell the strict truth, quite superfluous. Peter *socked*, with right good will and all the speed the occasion demanded.

"I don't know just what all this is about," Peter remarked, voicing the serene satisfaction that comes from the

consciousness of a good job well done, "but I'm sure glad I happened along."

FOR a moment the room was in more or less confusion. Peggy, inclined to be hysterical, struggled between tears and laughter. Newt, grunting and holding fast to his stomach, but grinning from ear to ear, emerged from under the table where Spofford's brutal kick had flung him.

John Marlborough, Jr., lay prone on the floor and gazed blankly up. Peter eyed the recumbent form with every evidence of distaste.

"First thing this place needs," he opined, "is house cleaning."

Stooping, he seized John Marlborough Spofford, Jr., by the collar, snapping the no longer jaunty Lothario to an upright position with a brisk jerk.

"When you've apologized to the young lady," said he, "you can straddle your cayuse and ride out of the picture."

Spofford goggled at his captor, sadly dazed. Peter shook him vigorously, until the teeth rattled, in an attempt at resuscitation; then repeated his command with an emphasis that carried the unmistakable threat of additional punishment.

Spofford mumbled an indistinct something to Peggy, which Peter was generous enough to accept as an apology. Still gripping the demoralized youth by the coat collar, he escorted him to the door, completing the bouncing act with a none too gentle shove.

"On your way, hombre," said he. "And stay away!"

Then Peter turned back into the living room.

"Hurt, Newt?" he asked solicitously.

"Naw!" Newt disclaimed, grinning in huge delight that his hero had finally appeared. "I ain't hurt any. He kicked me one in the belly, and it sort of knocked the wind out for a minute. I'm all right now, Peter."

"I'm glad to hear it, old timer. That

being the case, suppose you do the honors. How 'bout making me acquainted with your sister?"

Newt's grin broadened, if possible.

"This is Peter, Peg," he said proudly, with a gesture toward his friend. "Peter, I'd like you to shake hands with my sister Peggy."

THE brief colloquy between Newt and the cowboy gave Peggy opportunity to take a firm grip on things. She was a very self-possessed young person, anyway, and her attack of nerves and near-hysterics passed as quickly as it came. She now smiled at the rescuer—a demure little smile, with the dimple working.

She extended a slim, brown hand. "I've heard such wonderful reports of Pete, I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr. De Quincy."

"The pleasure, ma'am, is mine," Peter responded, bowing.

"I kinda hoped you'd be along before now, Peter," Newt ventured.

"Why, now, that's too bad, Newt," said he. "I wanted to come sooner, but part of the time I've been away from Cactus Springs."

"You sure picked a good time to blow in, at that," Newt conceded.

"Indeed you did!" Peggy echoed warmly. "I can't thank you enough, Mr. De Quincy. That unspeakable cad—" She flushed, overcome by anger at thought of what had so recently passed. "If you hadn't come—when you did—"

"That's all right, Miss Winsome," Peter said soothingly. "Riff-raff like Spofford ain't worth getting upset over. Socking him is something I sure do enjoy."

Newt pricked up his ears in sudden interest.

"Have you ever socked him before, Peter?" he demanded.

Peter's eyes twinkled mischievously as he glanced at the boy.

"Once," he confessed. "No—twice. This makes three times altogether."

"My goodness!" Peggy gasped in mock consternation. "Is—er—socking folks a habit with you, Mr. De Quincy?"

"Not generally," he grinned. "Only folks like Spofford. Then it's not only a duty, ma'am, but a pleasure as well. But let's don't talk about him any more."

"I've one other thing to thank you for," Peggy said. "Helping my brother that day he rode to Cactus Springs. You won my gratitude and Newt's undying affection."

"I didn't do a thing, ma'am," Peter cried. "Only ride along with the boy. He made mighty good company for me, too."

"Did you find that guy that stuck me up?" Newt demanded eagerly. "Or the cayuse with the moon-shaped scar on his back?"

"I managed to find 'em both," Peter told him. "First the bronc, and then the rider. Also his false whiskers. He wan't quite so old as you figured him, Newt."

"Hurray!" the boy yelped. "What'd you do about it, Peter?"

"Nothing," said Peter. "He don't even know I found him."

"Nothing?" Newt repeated blankly.

"Yet," Peter amended his statement. "I'm letting the play ride awhile." He turned to Peggy, obviously anxious to include her in the conversation. "I think it's a bad policy to pick green fruit," said Peter. "What's your ideas on that subject, Miss Winsome, ma'am?"

PEGGY laughed, already feeling at home in Pete's presence. She could quite understand how he had captured Newt's heart in so short a time. Besides, he was so terribly good-looking, with that quizzically humorous way he had of twinkling his eyes.

"Green fruit," she told him, "is something I never had the least use for."

"Me either," Peter agreed. "It ought to stay on the tree till it gets good and ripe."

"By all means!" Peggy's blue eyes smiled into his gray ones in complete understanding. Newt glanced from one to the other, mystified, and feeling a little out of it all."

"Aw, gee," he grumbled. "Talk sense, can't you! I wasn't mentioning anything about fruit—ripe or green."

"It's like this, old timer," Peter said, taking pity on him. "The lad that tried to hold you up might be regarded as a green persimmon. We aim to let him struggle along for a spell, and see if he don't get ripe enough to fall off the tree. Then he'll be tastier."

"Oh!" Newt remarked, mollified as he gained an insight into the complications of this affair. "You want to get something more on the hombre, do you, Peter?"

"It's a good deal like that," Peter admitted.

"Think you will?"

"I hope so," young Mr. De Quincy answered, venturing to wink at Peggy. "Shot off all those .45's you bought in town last week, old timer?"

"I didn't buy any," Newt said. "Changed my mind when I got to the store."

"Why don't you tell Mr. De Quincy the whole story?" Peggy put in. "I will. Newt," she informed Peter, "bought me a beautiful box of candy with the money, instead of pistol cartridges for himself. What do you think of a boy who would do that, Mr. De Quincy?"

"I'd say he was a regular guy," Peter declared positively. "Yes, Miss Peggy, ma'am, I'd be bold to remark that it was a plumb noble and unselfish deed, especially for a lad that hankered to feel the kick of a .45 in his fist."

"Aw, gee!" Newt muttered, considerably flustered, but none the less delighted at Peter's outspoken praise. It was indeed pleasant thus to win the

approval of one he admired so cordially.

"I thought mebby you might have shot 'em all away," Peter went on. "So I brought along three, four extra boxes with me. They're in the saddlebags on my bronc. Like for us to see if they're any good, old timer?"

"Gosh, that's dandy!" Newt enthused. "I'm sure obliged to you, Peter."

"Don't mention it, son," was the reply. Newt lost no time in starting for the door; Peter cast a significant glance at Peggy. "Wouldn't you like to be a spectator at the obsequies of a few tomato cans, ma'am?" he suggested hopefully.

"I was going to beg an invitation if you hadn't asked me," Peggy laughed. "Though, of course—I don't wish to intrude."

"Intrude!" P. D. Q. echoed reproachfully. "Why, Miss Peggy, ma'am! Your presence would make the affair a howling success; your absence would shroud it with gobs of dark gloom."

Peggy pretended to be altogether overcome at this flowery outburst, but, secretly, rather liked it; Mr. De Quincy had the subtle knack of making a girl believe what he said, however extravagant. So the three of them went outdoors.

FROM his capacious saddlebags Peter, like a benevolent magician, produced the boxes of shells for Newt; also a package which he tendered to Peggy.

"Do I get something too!" she exclaimed. "Now aren't you the nice young man!"

"I was well brought up," Peter modestly admitted.

Peggy's gift proved to be candy, another one of those nifty boxes tied with silk ribbon such as Newt had bought her, and she generously shared it with the two marksmen during their target practice. Newt was in the

seventh heaven, with Peter De Quincy there to supervise his pistol shooting and give a few much needed pointers on the finer technique of gun-slinging.

Dinner time came eventually, and, naturally, the guest was urged to stay; naturally he accepted. After the meal was over, dishes washed, and put neatly away, Peter said something about the possibilities of a ride out on the range.

Now it was not so many hours since John Marlborough Spofford, Jr., had made that same suggestion, with most discouraging results, but Peggy's ideas concerning a ride on the range had somehow changed.

Here was where Newt showed himself to be a youth of rare discernment. Newt saw how the prospects loomed up, grinned wisely, and drifted off, leaving Peter to entertain his sister—a little matter that Peter noted with full appreciation.

Horses were presently saddled.

"Where do we ride?" the cowpuncher asked. "I'm a stranger, sort of, to most parts of this country hereabouts, Miss Peggy, so you're better able to pick out the high spots."

"I like it up Apache Cañon," Peggy told him, "and often ride there. It's quite worth seeing, really."

"Then that's where we go," Peter responded.

LAUGHING and chatting together just like old friends, the two rode in through the gap and on up Apache Cañon. Peggy found it easy to laugh, spontaneously and naturally, in Peter's society. He was so different in every way from young Spofford.

For the time she managed to forget the trouble that lurked, like a sable cloud, close to the near horizon, to ignore the sinister Banker Spofford and his shady schemes. They got on astonishingly well, did Peter De Quincy and Peggy, and it must be confessed that the scenic beauties of Apache

Cañon were rather neglected, though once or twice Peggy did make perfunctory efforts to call her companion's attention to the landscape.

Without Peggy's realizing it, the ride at length took them up to the region where Eb Sanderson had his headquarters. Peter glanced questioningly at the shack.

"My nearest neighbor lives here," she told him. "He's a very nice man," demurely, with a mischievous side glance to see how Peter took it. "I like him a lot."

"Better'n you like Spofford, eh?" Peter grinned, and Peggy blushed.

"Very much better," was her response.

"Like him better'n you do me, I wonder?" Peter inquired pointedly.

Peggy appeared to give this mature consideration, secretly questioning if Peter might so soon be beginning to show evidence of jealousy. The symptoms were quite encouraging.

"Do you think that's a fair question?" she countered.

"Sure," Peter declared boldly. "Everything's fair in love and war—and this ain't war." They sat on their horses, not far from the humble cabin Sanderson had preëmpted, as a hermit crab seizes the cast-off shell of some neighbor.

"Oh, I'm glad it isn't war," Peggy said mockingly. "You have such an efficient way of carrying on hostilities, Mr. De Quincy. I think you'd be a dangerous enemy."

"I'd rather make love to a pretty girl than make war on a man any time," Peter stated.

"And I bet you've had lots and lots of practice at both," she told him, her eyes dancing with merriment.

"Why, Miss Peggy, ma'am! Whatever makes you think that?"

"Oh, it's easy enough to see," she replied airily. "You're so very adept, which ever line you follow up. I know!" And Peggy gave her pretty head a wise little toss.

"But about this friend of yours," Peter remarked. "Likely he squatted down here so he'd be near you. I wouldn't blame him if he did."

"It's nice of you to say that, but I think the lure was something quite different. You see, my friend is an old desert prospector named Eb Sanderson, and he has a hunch that there's gold in Apache Cañon."

"And he wastes his time hunting for gold—when you're within reach!" Peter exclaimed. "He must be old, Miss Peggy; mighty old—or else stone blind."

Peggy blushed engagingly at this expression of opinion.

"That's just some more proof of what I said, Mr. De Quincy. A man couldn't do as well as you unless he'd had endless practice. Why, it would be simply impossible. But I'm sorry Uncle Eb doesn't seem to be at home. You'd enjoy meeting him. He's quite a character, really."

"These old desert rats most always are," Peter asserted. "I bet he figures pretty positive that he's due to make a strike some of these days."

"So he says," Peggy smiled, though a little worried at the way this conversation seemed to be shaping itself. She hoped Peter would not be too curious as to Uncle Eb and his possible strikes. A savage sort of pride—a foolish pride, perhaps—made Peggy desire to keep this new friend in ignorance of the trouble she was facing.

They lingered there for a few minutes talking; then continued their ride.

HOW are things going with the Three Star Dot these days, Miss Peggy?" Peter presently asked. His tone sounded innocent enough, but she flashed him a swift, inquiring glance.

"Why do you ask that?" she murmured.

"Newt told me, that day I met him, how you'd been up against it, sort of, since Mr. Winsome was killed. I was

mighty sorry—about it all. He let drop one or two other facts to-day—when you weren't around."

Peggy looked startled, wondering how much Peter knew after all.

"It has been a struggle," she admitted, trying to keep her tone light-hearted, "but I always believe in making the best of things. Newt, I'm afraid, told you more than he should."

De Quincy ignored this.

"I'm sure hoping you'll forgive me for butting in, Miss Peggy. But you're in a pretty tight jam with the ranch, ain't you?"

"Please!" Peggy begged. "It's been too beautiful a day to talk of such things. I've had a delightful time, and I hate to spoil it."

"I hope you won't be mad at what I'm going to say, Miss Peggy," and Peter's voice was tense in his earnestness. "We've been joshing along, talking this and that, but some of my remarks that mebbe you took for fooling were anything else but."

"I think you're the finest, loveliest girl I ever met, and the pluckiest. I want to be your friend; I'd be proud to help you a little—if I could and you'd allow me."

Peggy hesitated, hardly knowing how to reply. She was in such desperate need of help and friendly counsel—just the sort of help, it seemed to her, that a man like Peter De Quincy might bring.

"It's very kind of you to say that," she faltered, blaming the weakness that made her want to yield, and yet dearly wishing to yield at the same time.

"Kind!" he echoed. "Shucks, Miss Peggy! It ain't *kindness* that makes me eager to help you out. You *have* picked up a fresh batch of trouble lately. Ain't that the truth?"

Peggy nodded, unable to hold out longer.

"Newt's been calling our place Trouble Ranch," she whispered. "It seems a very appropriate name."

"I guess that's no lie," Peter added

grimly. "Don't you want to tell me about it, Miss Peggy? Some of the most important part, leastwise? A little I've already guessed at."

PEGGY could not resist his friendly insistence. So she told Peter the story of what happened after Newt left him in Cactus Springs, and Banker Spofford's visit to the ranch. Of course, she did not mention the alternative Spofford had offered her; but Peter was no fool, and easily enough put two and two together.

"A man that would put over a trick like that on a boy," said he, "is so low he could crawl under a side winder's belly and never scrape the top of his head. I might have crimped the play if I'd trailed along with Newt when he paid the money. It's my fault, partly, Miss Peggy."

"Indeed it is not!" she maintained heatedly. "It's foolish to blame yourself for that, Pe—Mr. De Quincy."

"Shucks, Miss Peggy!" he drawled whimsically, grinning at her. "Whatever did you have to go and spoil it for? I don't like to be mistered—by my best friends. It sounds too daw-goned formal."

"It was a slip, though," Peggy confessed. "Not what I meant to say at all."

"Yes, you did, and you're going to say it again—lots of times," he assured her. "But I'm not disposed to argue with you now. The trouble you're in is one of the reasons why Sanderson hopes to strike it rich, isn't it?"

Peggy smiled, though rather tremulously.

"You seem to know everything without my telling you, Mr. De Quincy. Newt, as you've already seen, will tell all there is to tell if given the least bit of encouragement. He told Uncle Eb about how I needed six thousand dollars to save the ranch.

"Poor old Uncle Eb is really quite destitute, and I've helped him a little

from time to time, though he would only accept my aid on a grubstake basis. I've given him food and some old clothes—coats and so on—of dad's, which he needed badly.

"Now the poor old man thinks he's going to make a wonderful strike and return the favor. I'm awfully sorry for him."

"That's a right noble ambition he's cherishing, Miss Peggy, but I wouldn't bank very heavy on it."

"Of course, I'm not so foolish," Peggy insisted. "Newt took Uncle Eb's promise seriously, however. He was quite downcast when I tried to show him how utterly hopeless it all was."

"Things aren't so hopeless at that," Peter remarked quietly.

"What do you mean?"

Peter De Quincy seemed so calmly sure of himself that a new hope began to dawn in Peggy's breast.

"Why, I mean," Peter said, "that they's a chance Banker Spofford's bitten off more than he can swallow—and be comfortable in the process. I've been following that hombre's trail like a hound dog ever since the time Newt and I bumped into each other, and I'm finding out things.

"I haven't found out everything yet, not by a long shot; but if Spofford knew what I have learned he'd be plenty worried." He paused to chuckle reminiscently. "I was just wondering, Miss Peggy, how much you'd be inclined to trust me in this business."

"How much I'd trust you?" she repeated, puzzled.

"Prezactly that. Would you be willing to let me go ahead, handling your affairs pretty much like they was my own? That degree of confidence is a lot to expect, especially when mebbly I wouldn't tell you all of what I was aiming to do and how I counted on working it."

"I know of only one person I could trust that far," Peggy smiled. "His

name is Peter De Quincy. I—I don't quite know what to say. I ought not to let you do this, but—I can't refuse, even though I told Newt that we mustn't let you know of our difficulties. You've done so much already—for Newt and me that it seems like an imposition on your good nature."

"I consider that you're granting me a favor, Miss Peggy," Peter stated. "Now about this mortgage your dad signed. It seems funny he'd agree to anything so unfair and foolish. The deal was all in Spofford's favor."

"I've thought of that, but poor dad was careless in some ways. Also too ready to trust the word of others. His name was on the paper, and everything seemed to be regular."

"He'd likely had a copy somewhere," Peter suggested.

"Of course, he must have had one originally, but we never succeeded in finding it among his other private papers."

"That detail can't be helped then," said Peter. "But I'm making you a promise, here and now: Spofford won't get your ranch."

"Are you sure of that, Peter?" Peggy cried, not realizing that unconsciously she had used his first name.

"Yes, ma'am," Peter rejoined. "I'm plumb sure of it, even if all the parts ain't quite worked out so they fit."

"I'll leave it all to you," Peggy said softly, her blue eyes glowing with happiness. All of a sudden everything seemed rosy once more, the threatening storm clouds already disappearing.

"Even if I don't keep you posted on everything?" he insisted. "And s'pose I come to you and ask for something that sounds like a lot—something that might give me a chance to do what Spofford's trying to put over against you? Do you figure you could keep on trusting me?"

"Yes," Peggy whispered. "I'll trust you—Peter." And that time she

used his first name intentionally and with full knowledge of what she did.

PETER grinned contentedly at her. "Good!" said he. "Now we're through talking business. I'm certainly pleased to see how well you remember my first name. Speaking of names, it just occurred to me they's something queer with yours. It's wrong end to."

"Just what do you mean by saying that my name's queer, *Mister De Quincy*," she demanded roguishly.

"Why, they call you Peggy Winsome. Me—I think it ought to be the other way round—winsome Peggy. See?"

CHAPTER XI.

YOUNG MR. SPOFFORD AND HIS PALS.

JOHN MARLBOROUGH SPOFFORD, JR., departed from the Three Star Dot ranch in a truly pitiable condition. His head still ached as a result of its forceful contact with P. D. Q.'s muscular fist, but mentally he was even worse off.

Spofford possessed his full share of personal pride, and it is indeed a trying experience for any man to be beaten up in the presence of a girl—especially one to whom he has just proposed marriage. A cold fury seethed through J. M., Jr.'s brain at the thought of what a miserable showing he had made before Peggy.

"Likely I played the fool with her," he mused, "letting myself go that way, but there wasn't any occasion for the damned broncho-forker to horn in. I'm getting tired of being a punching bag for him. He's tapped me the last time!"

But even in his rage Spofford was not wholly blind to self-interest, not enough so that he cared to wait at the Winsome ranch for a chance to shoot things out with his enemy. Spofford carried a gun, which he would not have

hesitated to use under favorable circumstances; he was brave—if the other man wasn't looking.

"Trouble is that range rider's liable to be chain lightning with his iron," Spofford muttered. "I'm going to collect pay for what he's done me, but I'll play her safe. I don't want any forty-fives messing up my gizzard."

Yet he spoke wistfully, yearning to see De Quincy wilt through a haze of pistol smoke; eager for the boundless satisfaction of killing this enemy with his own hand. The wish, however, was futile, as Spofford well knew; he was too yellow to risk his skin.

His father's method of hiring some one else to do the dirty work offered a safer and easier mode of removing an undesirable person.

Spofford's rage included Peggy as well as her rescuer.

"She'll be begging me to marry her, 'fore I'm through with this business, and when the time comes I'm damned if I do it. She can go to hell!"

Spofford thus beguiled the tedium of his trip into town by anticipating in advance the pleasures of revenge against the two persons who had punished him.

"I'll settle with the cow-puncher first," he told himself. "Then when he's pushing up the prairie flowers I'll be ready to show Peg Winsome where she gets off. Nobody's going to make a fool out of me—man or woman."

ARRIVING at length in Cactus Springs, Spofford started on the trail of Carl Davis and Mexican Charlie, the chosen instruments of his vengeance against Peter. Neither of these worthies was he able to locate, and finally Spofford asked Sid Varney, proprietor of the Red Front.

"They ain't around," Varney explained, answering Spofford's query. "Some folks give a *baile* over to the French Creek schoolhouse last night, and the boys aimed to take in the festivities."

"When they coming back, do you know, Sid?" Spofford asked, trying to conceal his impatience at this threatened setback to the program he had outlined.

"I expect they'll likely show up here this afternoon. Why, what's doing, anyway, J. M.?"

"Nothing much," Spofford replied. "Only a little matter of private business I'd like to talk over."

"Guess it ought to be arranged easy. Suppose I fix things so you can meet Carl and Mex up in No. 7 to-night—at any time you say? I know Carl's coming to see me, and if Mex isn't along he'll get the word to him."

Spofford pondered this proposal, finding it good.

"Make it nine thirty sharp, Sid. And you might have some cards and poker chips up in seven; also whisky, and a box of cigars, so we can make a party of it."

"Just the three of you?" Varney asked.

"That's all, Sid. I'll count on you for the arrangements. Keep it dark, of course."

The two thereupon separated, Spofford going his way well content that an auspicious start had been made. Unknown to either him or Varney, however, Aleck Carmichael had chanced to overhear the major portion of their conversation. Aleck said nothing, but he did a certain amount of sober thinking.

About time when things were beginning to liven up for the evening, Peter De Quincy dropped in at the Red Front. Carmichael was on duty behind the bar, and Peter approached, smiling cheerfully, still mellow from the inspiration of a glorious afternoon spent in Peggy Winsome's society.

Under cover of pouring the customer a drink Aleck whispered:

"Been pulling Spofford's tail again lately, P. D. Q.?"

"How'd you guess it?" Peter chuckled.

"A hunch, P. D. Q. Spofford's arranged a pow-wow with a couple of tough birds in Room 7 upstairs. Nine thirty's the time. I think your case is to be settled." Peter suddenly stiffened. "Take it easy, or you'll give the thing away, in case any one's watching." Thus warned, Peter relaxed.

"That's the best one I've heard in a long time, Aleck!" he laughed, as if the bartender had just cracked a rare jest. "I'll spring it myself when I get a chance. Slip me a fistful of cigars, will you? Those will do," and he indicated a box."

Aleck passed over several, and buried among them was a key, which Peter accepted without comment.

"Number seven's at the end of the hall, on the left," the bartender said, *sotto voce*. "If you's in six, this side, you can hear what goes on. The key'll take you in, and I'd be there if I was you. Might hear something worth learning."

Peter bit the end from a smoke, lighting it. Negligently he glanced around the room, with a casual show of interest in what went on.

"How can I get up there—without making it too prominent?" he whispered, lips hardly moving as they formed the words.

"By the outside stairway's best. They ain't due for awhile yet, but you'd better shake a leg."

Peter showed by a glance that he understood, and after a brief interval left the bar, puffing at his cigar.

THE second floor of Varney's establishment could be gained by two routes, one flight of stairs leading up directly from the gambling room and saloon. For obvious reasons this was undesirable, and Peter followed Aleck's advice, making a swift but silent ascent by way of outdoors.

He found himself in a dark hall, rooms on each side, but no signs of life anywhere about. Underneath could

be heard a subdued murmur of conversation, the occasional clinking of glasses and bottles, the rattle of poker chips, the monotonous voice of the croupier at Varney's roulette wheel.

Moving with considerable caution, Peter slowly worked a passage down the hard hallway.

"End room—on the left," he grunted, stopping before the last door. This he explored with the tips of his fingers. "Check!" Peter muttered, recognizing number seven by touch.

Next he retraced his steps to the adjacent room, assuring himself by a similar process that it was number six. The door was locked, but Peter's key fitted. Noiselessly he entered, locking the door from the inside and putting the key in his pocket. His fingers encountered a sliding bolt, but he did not use it.

"Wonder what sort of a hole this is?" Peter thought. "Guess I'm early enough so a match won't queer the game. Might be a wise hunch to get an idea of the lay-out ahead of time."

A match flared, instantly to be extinguished as Peter's hasty glance registered the details of the room. At one side was a bed; close to it a bureau. A curtain draped across one corner former a sort of clothes closet. Between this room and number seven was a door secured by a bolt similar to the one Peter had already found.

"Nothing to do now but wait," he thought. "Ho, hum! I hope they show speed a-coming. I hate hanging around."

He sat on the bed, resigned to the inevitable. Presently the orchestra began playing downstairs, accompanied by the scraping feet of dancers. Half an hour thus dragged by; then three-quarters.

"Most time now," Peter mused hopefully.

Ten minutes later he heard the sound of footsteps in the hall outside. They stopped at his door, and for a minute Peter experienced a small panic

thinking Aleck might have picked the wrong room.

"Anybody in here, I wonder?" It was Spofford's voice.

"Not likely," some one assured him. "But you got a pass key. Open her up and take a look."

Peter left the bed, making a hasty, noiseless dive for the shelter of the curtain, congratulating himself on the forethought he had displayed in removing his key and not bolting the door on the inside, either of which would have proved that the room was occupied. The door opened, and several men stepped in.

"Gosh, I'm glad this curtain comes plumb to the floor," Peter thought, as one of the intruders struck a match. "It would be plenty embarrassing if my boot-heels showed."

"What the hell!" Peter did not recognize the voice, but inferred that it belonged to Mr. Davis. "We're wasting time. This place is empty as a church. Let's go!"

"No harm in playing safe," Spofford said.

The match died out, and Peter's visitors departed, locking the door behind them.

"Whew!" Peter breathed his relief. "That's too close to being caught for comfort. After taking all this trouble I'd sure hate to miss hearing what those hombres are aiming to talk about."

He removed his boots, to lessen chances of discovery, and then took up a position by the door between the two rooms, on his knees, one eye glued to the keyhole. A lamp was presently lighted in the next room, and Peter managed to identify Spofford's two companions.

"I thought those might be the guys," he mused. "What next?"

CHAIRS were pulled up at a table, and the trio sat down. Spofford filled three glasses from a quart whisky bottle.

"How about that business?" he de-

manded. "You fellows ready to tackle it right away?"

"What's the hurry?" Mexican Charlie inquired.

"That's what you said before," Spofford told him angrily. "I'm tired of waiting. What I want now is action, and I want it pronto. That fellow took another crack at me to-day, and he's got to be settled."

Carl Davis and Mexican Charlie regarded each other thoughtfully, but ventured no response. Spofford grew impatient.

"Well?" he insisted. "Say something!"

"It's worth a thousand apiece to us? That's the ante, is it?" Davis demanded.

"A thousand is what I promised Mex, and I always stick to my bargains. It's a lot of money for one killing, though, and if you guys don't want the job, just say so. They's other men would jump at the chance to pick up some soft money."

"Who's saying we don't want it?" Davis grumbled.

"You don't act very keen. You both afraid of that red-head?" Spofford replied cuttingly.

"Of course Señor Spofford ees not afraid of heem?" Charlie put in, with an ill-concealed sneer.

"That'll do from you!" Spofford snapped. "We're here to settle the business definitely, not start a crabbing party. I've had too much talk and too little action already."

"We ain't been idle," Davis told him. "Fact is, we've got the thing all lined up."

"Good enough!" Spofford approved. "That's something like! What's the scheme?"

Davis glanced inquiringly at Mexican Charlie, as if to ask, "Shall we tell him?" Charlie nodded, with an indifferent shrug of his spare shoulders.

"It's like this," Davis went on. "The fellow you want has a front room on the second floor at the Phoenix

House, see? We've been watching, and most every night he sits in a chair for awhile and reads a newspaper or something before hitting the hay.

"The window shade's down, but the lamp is on a table behind him, and throws the hombre's shadow onto the shade, plain as daylight.

"Opposite, across the street, is an empty room. Me and Mex have a key to that room: also we got a rifle with one of them new-fangled silencers fitted to it. We're ready to touch him off any time you say. How's that for a plot?"

"All right," Spofford admitted grudgingly. "But I'd say you were taking an awful lot of trouble."

"You're crazy!" Davis exclaimed. "The beauty of this scheme is that it ain't no trouble a-tall. Nor any chance of a come-back, either. Nobody hears a gun shot, see? 'Count the silencer muffles it down to a little puff."

"Sure you could get him—shooting at his shadow?" Spofford objected.

"Sa-ay! Why, man, it's a cinch! If we don't get him, you don't pay us. Ain't that fair enough?"

Spofford was forced to acknowledge the reasonableness of this arrangement.

"Who fires the rifle?" he asked.

"We ain't decided that yet," Davis replied, "but either of us is willing to. How about it, Mex?" he appealed to his associate, who nodded, while drinking. Mexican Charlie seemed content to let Mr. Davis act as spokesman. "When do you want the job pulled?" Carl went on, addressing Spofford.

"Right away. To-night!"

Davis hesitated.

"That's crowding her some, strikes me. And we might not have the chance. Some evenings when we've watched, the guy don't sit so his shadow's on the window shade. We can try her out, though. No harm in that."

"To-morrow night, anyway," Spofford insisted. "I won't be downright

happy till that broncho-forker's planted."

"Don't love him any, do you?" Davis said with a chuckle.

"No!" and Spofford swore viciously. "And I shouldn't think you would. He didn't handle either of you fellows any too gently—that time down in the room below."

"Right you are!" Davis said, with a flash of temper. "I'll be just as tickled as you to see him go under for keeps. You can count on to-morrow, if we don't get the job done to-night."

"Fair enough!" Spofford told him. "I'll have the cash ready when you've earned it."

AS might be supposed, De Quincy took all this in with no little gratification, though he was not particularly surprised. Peter had rather expected something in the way of a come-back from Spofford & Company, and now realized that in all probability he owed his life to Aleck's timely warning.

"I was figuring on something, but not just this," he mused. "Looks like I was treading closer to the Big Divide than I imagined. But now I know what their play is, I can act according. That's a big debt I owe Aleck."

The party next door was on the point of breaking up. Spofford poured a final round of drinks, and they presently left, going down to the lower floor by the inside stairs, the cards and poker chips provided by Varney being unused. As a matter of fact, Spofford had made the suggestion of a card game mainly as a blind to the real purpose of the conference.

Peter gave them plenty of time to get out of the way, and finally pulled on his boots. He went out by the same route he had entered.

An hour later Peter again appeared—unobtrusively—within the Red Front, stopping at the bar for a drink. His glance told Aleck Carmichael that all was serene.

"Dirty work in the air?" Aleck muttered, as he poured Peter a glass of liquor.

De Quincy nodded.

"I might need your help, Aleck. Can you get off to-morrow night and come to my room at about eleven?"

Carmichael nodded, almost imperceptibly.

"Keep the business under your hat. Use the back entrance at the Phoenix." Then Peter paid for the liquor and moved on.

It was approaching midnight when he strolled into the hotel and went upstairs to his room. Before lighting the lamp, Peter carefully placed it to one side, taking pains that his shadow did *not* fall on the lowered shade.

"If that lad across the way expects to pot me to-night, he's liable to be disappointed," Peter chuckled grimly. "I don't want to be potted to-night. To-morrow's much better. By then I'll have things all fixed to give him a nice

little surprise. I think, kind of, he's due for a decided shock to his nervous system."

Peter felt quite pleased with himself, and justly so, for the day had been both enjoyable and profitable.

"I got acquainted with Miss Peggy," he mused, "who is certainly one fine girl. I won her around so she's willing for me to help her, and that's a big step in the right direction. And, finally, thanks to good old Aleck, I'm going to have a hold on some of these bad actors right where the hair grows short and tender. Business is sure booming."

Whereupon young Mr. De Quincy blew out his light and tumbled into bed, wholly unworried by the knowledge that a would-be assassin lurked across the street, waiting for a chance to send a bullet through the window. Peter De Quincy was the sort of individual who preferred to let other gentlemen do his worrying for him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Modernism Invades the Ozarks

EVEN the Ozark Mountain country is feeling the effects of modernism in thought and industry, and a plea to its people to preserve some remnants of the old era has been made by the Missouri State Historical Society.

Residents of the Ozark Mountains are asked to retain some of the old water mills and the Virginia worm rail fences, for it is these things that lead tourists to visit the country and not the fine dairy herds and modern farms. It is the Ozarks made famous by Rose Wilder Lane, Harold Bell Wright, and Sara Teasdale that the historical society wants to preserve in part at least.

Then there are the old Ozark ballads and songs peculiar to the mountain folk, which are now in danger of being lost forever unless efforts are made to hand them down as they have been for generations. The art of the old-time fiddler, too, is in danger of passing with the waning popularity of the square dances. Even the preservation of some moonshiner's still which has ceased to function would add a touch pleasing in the eyes of the members of the historical society, not to mention the many tourists seeking local color.

Harold J. Ashe.

Out of the Sky

Dink wanted to be a real reporter, not just a sob-sister; but that's a tough assignment for any girl

By **JACK WOODFORD**

DINK brought her ancient "Lizzie" to a stop beside the curb before an old, brownstone residence in what had once been the better quarter of town.

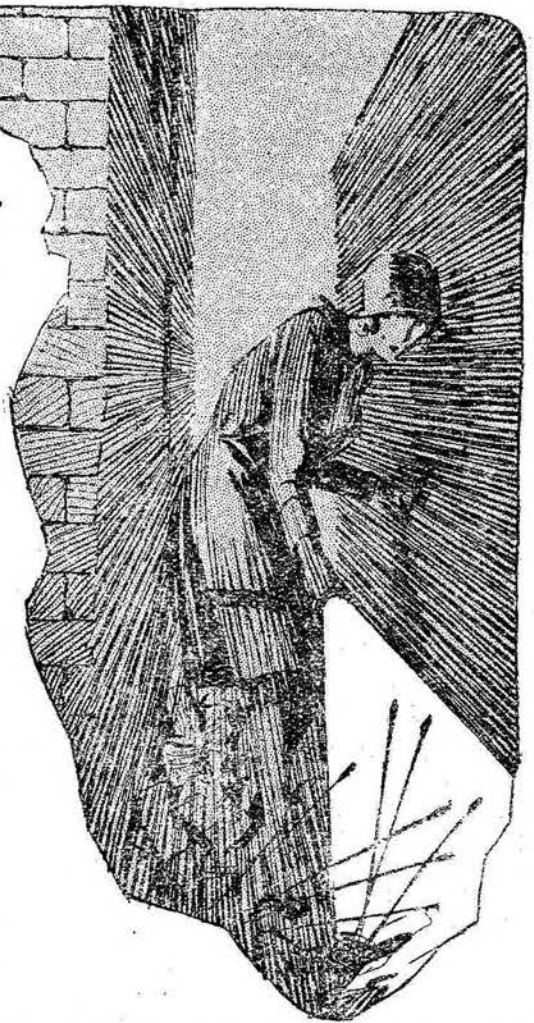
Though it was but a few minutes after 4 A.M. there was a small crowd around the gates leading to the stone steps of the mansion.

A patrol wagon stood at the curb and behind it the big Cadillac, with a gong mounted upon the running board, that belonged to the police department's homicide squad.

Dink was unnoticed as she wriggled her way through the crowd. She was slight of build. There was nothing at all distinctive about her. Very plain and inconspicuous she looked in her blue serge suit and small, tight black hat. Her features were plain and she affected no cosmetics beyond the dash of white powder on her nose which decency demanded.

Reaching the door of the mansion she showed her press card and was admitted.

In the hall subdued cresset lights politely rebuked the unusual disturbance which had come to the staid old mansion. It was a residence that would have been thought decidedly *recherché* in the early nineties, but it was a distinct anachronism in the neighborhood now. On both sides it was flanked by



Her flash light glanced upon some long sticks

high apartment buildings that seemed to strive impatiently to push it out of the path of progress.

In an upstairs room, impressive with priceless original Chippendale, Dink found gathered a knot of men. She recognized Billings, an assistant coroner. There were several other reporters, an assistant State's attorney, and half a dozen officers, two of them in uniform, the rest in plain clothes. Dink looked resolutely down at the floor, guiltily conscious that she was a little afraid to.

Stretched out, a red stain upon his white shirt front, was the figure of an old man.

Hughson, the assistant State's attorney, was saying:

"He was always bringing some of his stuff home with him. Ought to have known better in this day and age. What good is a safe nowadays?" As he finished speaking two men, whom Dink recognized as detective bureau plain clothes men, came out of a door in the room, leading a servant between them. The old fellow was badly upset. One of the detectives said disgustedly:

"Nothing on him. He's O. K. Been working for Thornton darn near half a century. Says he was the only servant in the house last night. Cook went to stay with her daughter. Chauffeur off duty."

The old servant stood in the center of the floor nervously wringing his hands.

"These men said I did it, sir?" he mourned, addressing Hughson, who brushed the remark aside and ignored the servant.

Dink worked her way to the old fellow's side and laid a hand gently upon his arm. He jumped and looked down at her fearfully.

"That's just a way they have of trying to trap people into making remarks that will help to clear up cases," she explained; "they don't think you had anything to do with it. If they did they'd have acted very differently. I'm a reporter," she added, almost apologetically, as if by way of explaining the reason for her especial knowledge of such things.

FOR the first time one of the men reporters present consciously noticed Dink.

"Hello, Dink," he called out. "Did you come over to clear up the case?" The other reporters laughed. The police officers grinned. Even the State's attorney allowed his frown to relax a little.

Dink did not reply and she tried hard to smile, though she paled a little. She knew well that these other newspaper men, one of whom was from the

Star, her own paper, considered her nothing but a pensioner.

Presently two more plain-clothes officers entered and attention was withdrawn from Dink. She listened eagerly to what the newcomers said.

"Not a thing to go on, chief," one of them began, addressing Grieb, the lieutenant of police in charge of the homicide squad. "Watchman says he wasn't away from the place a minute all night, because he knew most of the servants were out.

"The dogs, down in the yard, are all O. K. Haven't been doped or anything. Every window and door in the place is intact. Burglar alarms all in working order—haven't been tapped or cut anywhere. It's impossible anybody could of got to the house past the watchman, the dogs and the electric alarms."

"Well, somebody *did* get in, that's rather obvious, isn't it?" snapped Grieb, angrily. "And out again, too—that's rather *more* obvious. We don't know that they may not have been hiding inside for some time previous to last night; but we certainly *do* know that they're not inside now."

One of the reporters said:

"There'll be hell raised about this, after all the other rough work pulled this month. The town's biggest jeweler bumped off—and no clues—as usual!"

Grieb was plainly irritated at the implied criticism; he returned:

"Well, what am I to do? Nobody could have got in. Nobody got out. Nobody near him that could have knocked him off, except old half dead, over there in the corner. No jury 'd ever believe *he* did it, even if I did get him to say he did.

"What am I going to do? Am I a fortune teller, or a magician? You wise-cracking press fellows are always yelling for action—why don't some of you find out who bumped off Thornton and make a nice 'clusive out of it? That's the way they used to do in the

days when they had newspaper men in this town, instead of 'journalists.'"

DURING this exchange of compliments the Homicide Squad left to hunt for the missing servants, and the reporters started after them, leaving a City News Association man on the ground.

"Coming along, Dink?" one of the reporters called. She shook her head and blushed.

"No, I'm going to stick around and see if I can't turn up something." The other reporters laughed jeeringly. She winced, but squared a firm little jaw and compressed her lips.

"What gets me," the coroner complained, "is the fact that this house is one of the best protected places in town, so far as automatic devices go. What's the use of automatic protection if—" Just then more detectives came in from searches of the premises.

"Not a thing," they reported. "The old guy had an alarm on everything in the place. None of the alarms been tampered with. He ought to of had that old safe wired, too—but I suppose he figured that was no use, since any kid with a can opener could crack it. There's only one place whoever done it could of come from—and that's the sky."

Dink pricked up her ears at this and, without thinking, blurted out:

"Well, let's go up and look in the attic, then."

The officers roared. The City News Association drudge who had remained to pick up dribbles of news joined in the laugh, adding:

"You're a great kid, Dink. Your old man ought to of heard *that!*" His expression was not unkindly, but Dink flushed under his glance, for she knew that he, too, considered her a sort of charity patient on the pay roll of her paper. To cover up her chagrin she went out into the hall and mounted the stairs to the third floor.

During the eighteen months, after

her father's death, that she had worked for his old paper, she had seldom worked on assignment. The editors had very little faith in her ability to develop a story.

She had been permitted to wander around much as she liked, since her salary was small. Not that any one was ever deliberately unkind to her. They all "gave her the breaks," but it was on account of her father, and the reverence they bore for his memory. Besides being a marvelously good newspaper man, he had been, as some of them phrased it, a "damn fine scout!"

Several years before her father's death, Dink's mother had died, leaving her with no near relatives in the city. When her father's old employers had offered her a position she had taken it gratefully.

In vain had she thrown herself vigorously into her work, working longer hours than the other reporters, besides attending a school of journalism in the evening.

It was impossible, it seemed, for her to get any one to take her seriously. Everywhere she was just "Dink." It seemed to her that she had never, since leaving school, heard herself called by her last name, or been treated as though she were a woman of twenty-four and not an urchin of fourteen.

BECAUSE of her longing to make good she had made one of the night copy boys promise to phone her at her boarding house whenever anything big developed during the time she grudgingly devoted to sleep. It was the copy boy's call that had brought her to the Thornton home this morning. And now that she was here, she reflected bitterly, it was the same old story.

On the third floor she searched about for an opening that might lead to the attic and at last found one in the roof of the huge, ophite-lined bathroom.

A table had been pulled into the room and a chair placed upon it where, evi-

dently, some detective had mounted to inspect the attic.

Dink climbed upon the table, mounted to the chair, caught hold of the edge of the opening, and swung herself up with an agility that would have amazed the officers below, could they have seen it.

She was glad that they were not there to see, for they would have roared as usual. Flash light in hand, she quickly discovered a door which led out upon the roof. It was, indeed, protected by a burglar alarm device which had not been disturbed; and, too, dust around the edge of the door showed that it hadn't been opened for months.

After a thorough search of the attic she was about to depart when she felt a strand of her hair blow against her face.

There were no windows in the attic. No discernible opening accounted for the draft. Her heart hammering, she again searched the big, gloomy place, this time traversing every inch of it.

Suddenly, in one corner, she felt a distinct draft. Looking about her in all directions she could see no possible source of a draft. And then, on impulse, she looked straight up. There, in the side of a hollow, ornamental architrave was a hexagonal opening, large enough to admit a boy or small man.

Some one had apparently pulled off a few slate shingles, from the outside, and cut through the old wood beneath. Without a moment's delay she rushed downstairs.

When she reached the room where the body lay, the men there were still chatting and smoking. Dink said, with quiet intensity:

"The murderer came from the sky, all right. I found the hole in the roof, freshly made, where he got in and out."

"W-h-a-a-a-t!" It was the City News Association man who spoke. "What do you know about *that!* And all you guys missed it!" But nobody was listening to him. There was a

general exodus from the room, toward the stairs.

For several hours Dink remained in the house, looking for further clues; but none developed. Finally she went to the office to report to the city editor, which she was supposed to do at nine o'clock each morning.

THE minute she got into the city room a boy told her that she was wanted in the managing editor's office.

With a confident step she approached the holy of holies, where the "Big Squeeze" sat incased grandly in frosted glass, the only editor in the office to be so protected from the general bedlam in the editorial rooms. Entering, she stood by Mr. Muldoon's desk silently. Without looking up at her he said:

"Say, Dink! I'm not riding you, or anything like that, but when you *do* get something, you ought to give us a break on it. I understand you discovered that hole in the roof that gave the cops their only clew, on the Thornton case.

"Every paper in town had it through the City News Association, as soon as we had it; we ought to have had 'sclusive on that. You ought to turn in a *little something* for your dough, old kid, when you *do* get it. S'all!"

Dink knew that when Muldoon said "S'all!" the interview was definitely ended, and to prolong it, particularly with excuses, was disastrous, especially as his "S'all!" was an admonition to himself not to let his quick temper get the better of him, as much as it was a warning to his listener.

She could not have spoken anyway. Her throat was tight and her eyes hot. She walked from the room silently.

But, though she was near to tears, she was more determined than ever to make good. Other new reporters were not expected to make good for a year or two after they were hired—but they had all looked for something wonder-

ful from her, right from the start; and, when she didn't produce immediate visible pyrotechnics of some kind, they had decided that she hadn't inherited her father's "nose for news" which had led him to unravel many a baffling case which stumped the police.

All too well she knew that if she lost her job, it would mean curtains in the newspaper business in that town for her, for the rest of the editors would all say:

"Muldoon knows his business. If he couldn't put you over, you better get into some other game—the newspaper game is no place for a lady anyway."

"S'matter, Dink? Get bawled out?" the copy boys and rewrite men wanted to know, as she walked out of the office.

"Hey, Dink! Where you going to work next week?" sang out a sob sister from across the room.

With her head up, Dink hurried out and, going back to her decrepit car at the curb, returned to the vicinity of the Thornton residence.

This time, however, she did not enter the Thornton place. For some time she sat at the curb in her car, looking at the sky above the squat building, in between two high apartment buildings.

She was thinking of the yard containing several alert police dogs, the watchman, the burglar alarms everywhere. And that hole in the roof! The sky was clear and blue, as though it were saying: "Look! There's nothing up my sleeve!" The area above the three-story residence was utterly guiltless of anything that might have aided the murderer in alighting upon the roof.

DINK got down out of the car and entered the apartment building to the left of the Thornton home. It was a brand new, rococo building, having a lobby vile with pargetted walls and imitation, anæmic-looking Heppelwhite chairs.

"Any one move out of here this morning?" she asked. The clerk eyed her superciliously, until she showed him her police "courtesy" card. After that he admitted that a tenant had left early in the morning and gave Dink a key to the recently vacated apartment.

Going upstairs alone she entered the apartment and went directly to the window. Looking out, she found herself looking down upon the Thornton residence that had been so perfectly guarded on all sides, but which had been successfully attacked from the sky!

It was a fifth-floor apartment that she was in. She could see almost all of the roof of the old residence, including the cupola that had revealed its secret to her.

The lot was spacious, so that the residence was not directly beneath the window at which she now stood. It would have been impossible for any one to let himself down upon the roof, with a rope ladder or anything of that sort, from either one of the apartment buildings.

She sympathized with the puzzlement of the officers and their decision, according to the late morning editions of the papers, to try the old reliable "questioning" of suspects. They had probably, she surmised, found and arrested the other servants and were now "questioning" them. She shuddered in disgust, recalling unpleasant scenes she had witnessed.

As she turned from the window, she happened to glance at the fingers of the cotton gloves she wore. They were covered with what looked like fine wood splinters. The wall was of painted cement, and the window frame was of steel.

Looking closely she saw that there was, on each side of the window frame, an almost imperceptible line of tiny wood splinters like those upon her glove. She called down to the clerk, over the room telephone.

"Tell me," she said, "did that man who moved out of this apartment have any unusual luggage?"

"Yes," came the prompt reply. "A long, especially constructed trunk, such as theatrical people carry, 'specially vaudeville people, for their own props.'"

Dink hung up the receiver and stood very still. For the first time in months she was thoroughly happy, though tired almost to the point of exhaustion from hunger and lack of sleep. She knew now why her father had often come home dog-tired, but with a happy, triumphant grin on his face.

Impatiently she hopped into her car and headed for the near-by business section to get a bite to eat. Like the sudden discovery of an artist's child of a feeling for the æsthetic, beyond what other children have, Dink felt stirring within her a strange something that she knew was of her and dormant until now.

Like an intricate but efficient machine her mind tore at the problem before her with amazing new vitality. She knew, with ecstatic certainty, that it was the awakening within her of her father's strange faculties of deduction.

WITH a new confidence and a feeling of delightful elation she hastily swallowed her lunch.

"Oh! If I can only put this over," she breathed to herself, "and find something the rest can't, and get my name in the 'Scoop Book' and maybe convince Mr. Muldoon that I *have* got the stuff in me—so he'll trust me on big assignments!"

A little wistfully, in what might have been called a *sotto voce* thought, she added to herself: "And maybe get somebody once in awhile to call me Miss Richards, as though I were a *real person*, like dad!" "Dink," it had always seemed to her, was rather a cruel nickname, in that it was so apropos!

After luncheon she returned to the investigation, trying the apartment

building to the left of the Thornton residence. To her delight, she found that an apartment, directly opposite the one she had investigated previously, had been vacated that morning.

Peering out of the window of this apartment, she saw that there was a small space between the apartment building and the high brick fence that surrounded the Thornton residence.

When she came out to the street again, it was well along in the afternoon. She started to walk around the block, in order to enter the alley behind the buildings, when she discovered, upon turning the corner, that Wyatt, a reporter from the *Daily Clarion*, a rival paper, was following her about half a block behind.

Her heart almost stopped dead. He was, she knew, a new man in the city, who had not known her father. Other reporters said that Wyatt was the "new type" of newspaper man, to whom the old traditions meant nothing. In a panic she wondered if he had followed her into the apartment building and ascertained from the clerk what she had been doing.

She decided that he must not know where she was going. Instead of entering the alley, she walked around the block, got into her flivver and drove away. Before Wyatt could hail a taxi to follow her, she had twisted in and out of several blocks and completely eluded him.

Not until dark did she again return to the vicinity of the murder. Wyatt, she supposed, having heard about the finding of the hole in the roof, had decided to follow her, on the theory, possibly that one good clew deserves another and that in all likelihood the second might be found by the person smart enough to have located the first.

About nine o'clock she parked her car at the entrance to the alley and, with her electric torch, entered the narrow aperture between the apartment building and brick wall.

It was pitch dark in the narrow

opening, and there was barely room for her, small as she was, to squeeze along. She stepped over tin cans, bricks and impedimenta doubtless thrown from the apartment building windows at lyric cats.

When she was near the middle of the passage, between the wall and building, her flash light glanced upon some long sticks, obviously new and strikingly in contrast with the other debris which was blackened and weather-beaten and covered with dust.

She picked up one of the long, thin sticks and examined it. At one end was a little weight of lead, and at the other end a short length of heavy thread.

Stooping, she reached to gather up the other similar sticks that lay about; and then blackness fell on her. There was a tremendous crashing in her brain—bright lights—a moment of sinking through this crashing, sparkling darkness—then unconsciousness!

AFTER what seemed like an eternity she heard a voice calling her:

"Hey! Dink! Dink! Dink!" She wished that the insistent voice would stop. Tried to lapse into unconsciousness again. But the voice grew louder.

"*Dink! Dink!*" And then: "God! The kid's hurt bad! Can't you guys find a rope or something?"

Dink sat up. Her head throbbed violently. Her cheeks was sore where she had bruised it in falling. She called up: "I'm all right now."

The man above, on the top of the brick fence, flashed his light down into the crevice; she saw other faces beside his on the fence top.

Remembering the sticks, she used her own flash light to look for them—but they were gone!

"See if you can reach my hands," the man on the fence called down.

Dink, looking up, saw that he was a plainclothes man she had often met while working on other cases. The

crevice she was in was too narrow for any of them to get down into. She stood on tiptoe and, reaching up, could just barely grasp his hands as he leaned over the edge of the fence, other officers holding him from behind.

Without difficulty, once he had grasped her hands, the detective pulled her to the top of the fence.

Dink could hardly hold her head up. The cool night air, atop the fence, was reviving; but not half so reviving as what one of the older officers was saying:

"By God, Dink! You sure inherited your old man's guts!"

"But what became of my sticks?" she asked.

The officers laughed.

"We got your sticks and your man. They rushed him off to an outlying station, where a habeas corpus writ can't reach him until they get something out of him."

As Dink rushed in her flivver to the West Side police station, where the officers had hidden their prisoner, the officers who had volunteered to accompany her to see that they let her in, explained:

"We was watching all around the house. Saw you go into that slit between the building; then this bird came from across the alley and followed in after you. We lined up along the top of the fence, as soon as we could, to watch what was going on.

"Seen you find them sticks with your flash light, and then this bird hit you before we could yell; but we nailed him right afterward, pulled him out, and made him bring his sticks with him. You was only out for a minute. We'll get to the station almost as soon as the prisoner does—the way you're driving—that is, if we don't get killed—I got a wife and eight kids home."

"And none of the other reporters have wind of any of this?" she persisted anxiously.

"Nope. They been down at Central Detail, watching the boys sweat the

servants. They won't be able to find out where we took the bird for some time yet; we only let you know because you really nailed him."

"Wasn't even the City News Association man there?"

"Nope. They all give it up, I guess, except you. You're like your old man, that way, I guess; you'd find him poking around on a case, long after everybody else gave it up as hopeless."

"*Like your old man!*" The words were balm to Dink's soul.

ARRIVING before an old frame police station on the West Side, the officer conducted Dink downstairs into the squad room by a back door; several officers had locked themselves in the room with the prisoner, but the officer that accompanied Dink saw that she was admitted.

The prisoner, a thin, short, rather anæmic little man of forty-five or fifty, did not look like a criminal. He looked like a cornered marmoset determined to die with as great expense to his captors as possible.

Evidently he had been there for but a few minutes. As the officers questioned him he uttered not a sound. The kind who wouldn't say anything at all were more difficult, Dink knew, than the kind who talked and tangled themselves up in a tissue of lies.

Of course, the man would eventually confess, there was no question about that, all things considered; but if he did not do so very shortly it would decidedly interfere with the gorgeous story Dink was seeing in her mind's eye, all spread on the first page.

"Perhaps if I jog the prisoner's memory a bit," Dink suggested; and, knowing that her outlining of his activities would surely shake his confidence, dismay him and convince him, probably, that there was little use to hold on, she went on:

"You rented a room in the Alcazar Apartments. You also rented an apartment directly across the way, in the

Druder Apartments, on the same floor as the apartment in the Alcazar.

"In one of the apartments you had stored a quantity of rope. In both you had provided a heavy, short timber, to brace across the steel window frames, in order to secure your rope.

"Last night, some time after the advertising signs in the neighborhood were turned off, you shot an arrow, with a thread upon it, across from one window into the corresponding window in the opposite apartment.

"Several times you missed and pulled back the thread, having tied a short length of weaker thread to each arrow, so that it would break close to the arrow, if you missed, and leave the arrow out of sight, down between the brick fence and the apartment building.

"When you finally did land an arrow in the window, you went across and pulled a heavier string between the buildings—then your rope. You secured the rope to the timbers, at each end, and then climbed out on the rope to the center. It sagged down upon the roof of the Thornton mansion. You got upon the roof noiselessly, cut a hole in the architraves of the cupola, and then—"

"Aw, shut up!" the prisoner broke in. "If I'd only walloped you harder when I had you back there between the building and the apartment house—or if I'd had a chance to get those arrows earlier—a frying is what I'm due for—I know it—I'll plead and take my only chance. But I haven't got any dough, so it's probably all up with me. Let's have it over with as soon as possible."

From that point on it was merely a matter of fast stenographic copying. The man told everything, willingly. He had been a vaudeville actor. Had taken quarters at the Alcazar. Years before he had been in an act where archery was featured, and not all of his old skill was gone.

He couldn't explain his descent to crime after years of rectitude, but he "guessed he was worrying over the

fact that old age was coming on and he hadn't saved anything."

Reaching the newspaper office at 2 A.M., Dink sat down and wrote her story, carefully and beautifully, hoping that it would be so flawless that the re-write men would not hack it to pieces. If she wrote right up to the minute when it would be necessary to slap the story onto the linos, in order to make the morning edition, she only did what her father had often chuckled over doing.

THE following morning Dink woke up with a splitting head. There was a lump as large as an egg to testify to the fact that she had not dreamed about her scoop.

She sprang out of bed and dressed hurriedly. She had had only five hours' sleep, but she would lie abed no longer. What, she asked herself in panic, if, after all, she had bungled somewhere, and the other papers had got the story too! Then, probably, Muldoon would fire her for not having told him what was going on, so he could have it properly covered by a veteran.

After dressing speedily she hurried to the corner and bought an early edition of her paper. There was her story, word for word as she had written it, under the streamer and head:

REPORTER SOLVES MURDER MYSTERY

**Thornton Killed by Actor He Surprised
Rifling Jewel Safe**

Though she was almost afraid to look at them, she bought all the other morning papers. There was no word in them concerning the clearing up of the crime.

Somehow she still couldn't believe that it had all worked out so beautifully. Something whispered to her that even yet there would prove to be a fly in the ointment.

Getting her flivver from the garage, she drove down to the office.

When she entered, the doorman greeted her with a respectful:

"Morning, Miss Richards—*some story!*"

An awed copy boy said, as she passed him:

"H'lo, Din—ah—Miss Richards. Muldoon wansta see you."

With a sinking heart she hurried into Muldoon's office. As usual that individual let her stand silently beside his desk for a length of time sufficient to squelch her completely. Finally he said:

"Why didn't you hand that story to a rewrite man, to be written up properly? Think you're a *writer?*" Dink quavered:

"No, sir—but, you see, there wasn't time to get—"

"Oh! For Heaven's sake don't pull *that* on an old timer like me! I know where you learned that stunt all right, all right. You deliberately delayed your copy to the deadline, so it *couldn't* be rewritten."

Dink blushed. There was a moment's silence as he scowled at her guilty flush, and then:

"Hereafter write *all* your own stuff, whenever there's time—if you don't have to phone it in against a deadline—*unnerstan'?* But be careful—if you make 'em all like that story was, you'll make the rest of the staff around here look sick. You evidently got your father's feel for slinging words, as well as his gall about doing the police department's work for them, on the paper's time.

"And hereafter, don't go butting your head around where you'll get it knocked off. Get your assignments direct from me."

"Yes, sir," she squealed meekly, as was proper before the mighty Muldoon.

"S'all!" he finished ferociously, feeling the impulse within him to say more and trying to stop himself. "Take the day off to rest up."

She started for the door, but sud-

denly he called her back against all of his better judgment:

"How much are you getting now, Din—ah, Miss Richards?"

"Forty a week, sir; but it's all right. If you'll just call me Miss Richards, once in awhile, as though I were a real person, and give me honest-to-goodness assignments, whether I get my head broken or not, I don't care if you give me no more increase in wages for the present."

"Who said I was going to give you

any more?" he growled at her, frowning hideously. "S'all!"

Again she started for the door. Muldoon fought a mighty battle with himself, but he was licked. He called her back again, wrote upon a slip of paper, handed it to her.

"Timekeeper with it!" he snapped.

On the way to the timekeeper with the slip Miss Richards read:

"Increase this chip off the old block to sixty dollars week.

MULDOON."

THE END



The Foe of the Ants

THE common ant-eating toad of the arid portions of the Southwest is gradually retreating before the advent of man. Curiously enough the chief agency of this decimation is the automobile. The toad had a chance to scurry out from under the wagon wheels of the old days, but the auto is too swift and its wheels take a heavy toll on the desert roads. In a single mile an auto may slay half a dozen of these harmless and useful reptiles. Being very clumsy, the toad eagerly seeks smooth surfaces, as the dry ruts of roads, and they are consequently slain by the thousands.

One unfortunate result of the passing of the toad is the increase of ants, which are its chief food. Not only the ubiquitous red ant, but what is worse, a species of the soldier ant, which is actually dangerous to human life. The red ant is sufficiently well known, particularly by picnickers. It is annoying, but not dangerous. The soldier ant is a different creature altogether, and, although it is not so formidable as its cousin in the Amazon basin, it is well to steer clear of it, as it knows only one kind of tactics: to attack anything and everything without ever giving up.

Some years ago a young couple went on a camping trip by way of a honeymoon. After a long trek they came to a dry arroyo on the west side of the San Joaquin, and being tired they decided to camp and rest. Shortly they were asleep, ignorant of the fact that they were lying next door to a big hive of soldier ants.

Not long after a cowboy, after strays, happened along. He might have passed on, attending strictly to his own business, but for some incoherent moanings that issued from the campers' tent. Fearing that something was wrong he decided to investigate. The young people were literally covered with the black and ferocious soldier ants, which were already well started eating away the tender tissue around mouths, eyes, noses and ears. The victims moaned and made feeble signs of distress, but seemed unable to awaken. Nor could the cowboy awaken them. They were got to a hospital, where it took days to restore them to full consciousness. Nobody has fully explained how the ants go about chloroforming their victims, but it is clear they are dangerous.

Harold Ramslie.



The runt flushed, and the big hombre grew pale

Will Power in Packsaddle

The cow-poke who made a lucky strike in a field that had nothing whatever to do with cattle on the hoof

By A. T. LOCKE

A MAN," asserted Snoozer Teagle impressively, "kin be anything that he sets out to be, providin' that he knows what he wants 'nd that he keeps 'is mind on it. Take me, fer instance.

"When I was a kid I was herdin' sheep fer my ol' man up in Idaho. I heerd that some one hed struck gold down in Nevada. I reckoned right then 'nd thar that I'd quit chasin' woolly fleeces 'nd start out 'nd gather in some of them golden ones I hed heerd tell of.

"I walked acrost a coupl'a States 'nd found myself in Goldfield, which, bein' a new 'nd boomin' camp, I didn't

hev no trouble gettin' work in. My job was diggin' in a underground alley 'nd pickin' out quartz that was jest chuck full of yeller gold. I was a reasonable feller, though, 'nd I never glommed more'n five or six ounces a shift.

"I got plumb tired, after awhile, of grubbin' in th' dirt like a ground-hawg," continued Mr. Teagle, "'nd, besides, th' mine owners 'nd the leasers got pernicky 'nd wouldn't stand fer no more high gradin'. So I got ambitious to be a rancher 'nd, with a big stake in my jeans, I wandered over Kansas way 'nd bought some land 'nd some stock.

"I found out a little later, though,

thet I didn't hev no water rights 'nd I figgered thet it warn't no use a'tall to try to raise dried beef on th' hoof. I decided, then, thet what I wanted next was a job without no responsibilities attached to it, 'nd I become a cow-poke 'nd I've been one ever since, gettin' my forty per 'nd all found.

"Yes, sir! A man kin shape his own destiny, as th' feller says, if he uses 'is mind. Thet is," added Mr. Teagle, "if he keeps away from th' influence of wimmin."

Mr. Teagle, when he had concluded his peroration, looked at me challengingly from under the rim of his battered sombrero, and, not wishing to disappoint him, I asked the question that he expected.

"Why must an ambitious man keep away from the influence of women if he wishes to be successful?" I queried. "I always supposed, Snoozer, that a man could find his greatest inspiration in a woman. I have always heard that a woman could be a man's greatest help in climbing up the steep path that leads to the bright and shining goal of success."

Mr. Teagle, stoop-shouldered and weather-beaten, looked at me with contempt in his pale-blue eyes as though he were pitying my deplorable lack of knowledge of the ways of women.

"It ain't so," he said positively, "'nd I kin prove it conclloosively.

"Why," he added, "I've seen men change thar very natures 'nd then—"

He shook his head dubiously.

"Th' feller I'm talkin' about," he continued. "'is name was Sorrel Simmons 'nd he used to ride range with me up in Idaho. He was out follerin' some strays wunst, up in th' hills, 'nd he picked up a funny lookin' piece of rock thet was heavy 'nd gray 'nd shiny. He brought it back to th' ranch house 'nd showed it around 'nd some one told 'im it was galena or somethin' 'nd thet he ought to locate a mining claim. So Sorrel put up 'is stakes 'nd up 'nd sells his lead prospect fer ten thousand

dollars, which, to 'im, was a good-size fortune.

"With all of thet money in th' bank, of co'se, Sorrel quit 'is job 'nd settled in Packsaddle, which was a town near the Cross Y-X, th' range we hed been workin' on. Sorrel hed been to school wunst or, maybe, twict 'nd he hed a hankerin' fer what he called th' finer things of life. So he buys 'imself a accordeon, a mail order suit, a pair of bright yeller shoes with bulldog toes, a correspondence co'se in 'How to Be a Detective,' 'nd a lot of little five cent books called classics.

"After he put on th' suit 'nd th' shoes he sat down 'nd tried to learn to play th' accordeon. Th' coyotes come from miles around whenever he tried to play, thinkin' thet one of thar long-lost brethern was a'callin' to them fer help.

"Sorrel, after awhile, quit tryin' to be a musician 'nd he found out, too," continued Mr. Teagle, "thet he couldn't be a detective in Packsaddle, because thar warn't nothin' thar to detect. 'Nd, besides, even when he hed his false whiskers on, everybody knew 'im by 'is yeller shoes.

"Then, I reckon, he looked over th' little books thet he hed ordered 'nd out of all of 'em he only found one thet int'rested him. He must 'a' fixed 'is undivided attention, as th' feller says, on thet thar book, because he shore absorbed it plenty. I used to ride into town once in awhile to pass th' time of day with Sorrel 'nd, on one of these occasions, I found 'im in 'is cabin readin' it 'nd lookin' thoughtful-like.

"'Yo' look, Sorrel,' says I, 'as though yo'd come acrost a monstrous two-syllable word in thet thar pond'rous tome. If yo'll spell out th' letters fer me, I'll tell you what it means.'

"'Do yo' know, Snoozer,' he says in a solemn voice, 'thet th' human mind is a wonderful thing 'nd thet a feller what ropes 'nd breaks it 'nd what rides it proper kin go gallopin' on it into fame 'nd fortune. All yo' got to do is

to use yore will-power,' he says, enthusiasticlike. 'Yo' jest hev to concentrate on what yo'd like to be. Yo' got'a sort'a picture how yo'd like to be like 'nd then jest keep on thinkin' thet yo're like it. After awhile, without yo' ever knowin' it, yo' git thet way. Jest by usin' yore will-power, Snoozer, yo' kin come to domineer other people what don't use thar intellects. Yo' kin make money, win th' love 'nd affections of females, 'nd even git to be sales manager,' he says.

"Sales manager of what?' I asks.

"Why, of anything, I reckon,' he tells me. 'What's th' diff'rence, anyway?' he asks irritatedlike. 'A sales manager's a sales manager, ain't he, no matter what he's of? Thet ain't th' idee, nohow,' he tells me. 'Yo' don't hev to be no sales manager if yo' don't want'a. Yo' kin be anythin' a'tall. 'Nd it all comes out'a th' sub-rosa mind which, accordin' to this hyar book, is plumb full of power 'nd magnetics. Now me,' says Sorrel, who was a runty, bow-legged, watery-eyed, little gent, 'I've got plenty of fame 'nd fortune, but I shore would like to git more nery an' scrappylike. I'd like to git so's I could stand up to Hard Rock McMulligan 'nd look 'im straight in 'is ugly mug 'nd call 'im a wall-eyed hawse-thief.'

"If yo' ever do thet,' I says to Sorrel, 'yo' won't hev no haid left to keep yore sub-rosa brains in.'

"Oh, I don't know about thet,' says Sorrel, pertlike. 'Onless yo've read this hyar book yo' can't never realize th' amazin' power of the mind.'

"I snickered to myself, when I was ridin' back thet evenin' towa'd th' Cross Y-X, at th' thought of little Sorrel Simmons standin' up 'nd callin' names to Hard Rock McMulligan because Hard Rock was a gent thet didn't let nobody cast no aspersions nor nothin' else on 'im. He was ridin' range at thet time, but he had got 'is muscles drivin' back holes with a sixteen pound double-jack 'nd carryin'

twelve-by-twelve stulls up ladderways in mines.

"He wasn't a bad feller, Hard Rock wasn't, but neither is a grizzly b'ar if yo' don't rile 'im up. I reckon thet McMulligan was even sorry, at times, thet he was so strong, and that he stirred up so much trouble when he went on a jamboree. I guess, too, thet he was afraid thet some day he might lay some one out cold without ever meanin' to do it.

"Anyway, th' next time I rode into Packsaddle I found thet th' whole town was int'rested in this hyar will-power bus'ness 'nd thet Sorrel Simmons 'nd Hard Rock McMulligan was crazier about it than all of th' others put together. Sorrel, I learned, hed been spreadin' th' glad tidin's of how any gent could be whatever sort'a hombre he'd like to be 'nd, accordin' to th' talk thet was goin' on in th' Water Hole Saloon, most of th' people in th' town hed a yearnin' to make themselves all over.

"I was plumb surprised to see Sorrel 'nd Hard Rock leanin' ag'in' th' bar together like two ol' pardners, because, usually, McMulligan didn't do nothin' but pester Sorrel nigh to death.

"I'm right glad thet I happened to know yo', Sorrel,' I heered Hard Rock sayin' as I walked up to th' bar, 'nd I shore appreciate yo' makin' me acquainted with this hyar will-power stuff. I git too plumb riotous now 'nd then, but I never knowed jest how to git around it.

"I kin see easy, though, thet all I've got'a do is to think all th' time thet I'm a quiet 'nd peaceful gent in order to git all of thet cantankerousness out'a my system. It's jest as easy to do as it is to fall off'en a hawse thet's sun-fishin'.

"I've been thinkin' already fer a coupl'a days 'nd I kin feel a change creepin' over me even now. I reckon thet I'm through struttin' around lookin' fer trouble like I used to do in by-gone days.'

"'I reckon,' says Sorrel, sort'a straightenin' up, 'thet I'm goin' to change some, too. I'm figgerin', I am, on makin' myself into a gent thet don't take nothin' from no one. Thar ain't no reason why I cain't,' he says. 'I've got kind'a tired of bein' picked on 'nd made a monkey out'a jest because I was ignerent of th' power of th' mind.

"'I've been thinkin', too, fer a few days, Hard Rock 'nd I kin feel strength and power jest oozin' into me. I'm a tough he-man, I am, but th' trouble has been thet I haven't realized it. I know it now, though, 'nd it won't be long before I know it even better. It's a marvelous thing, this will-power stuff,' he says.

"'It is thet,' agreed Hard Rock, gentle-like. 'Yo're a good feller, Sorrel, 'nd I'm proud to be one of yore friends.'

"I sat around with Sorrel in 'is cabin thet afternoon fer a little while 'nd he asked me if I could make up some little verse for 'im to keep repeatin' to 'imself. He knew thet I had a kind'a talent fer rhymin', because I used to write little poems about th' fellers in th' outfit.

"He wanted to keep on tellin' 'imself thet he was a tough gent, 'nd he said he needed a coupl'a lines of verse thet would keep runnin' through 'is mind automaticlike. I made up a lot of 'em fer Sorrel, but none of 'em seemed to suit 'im but th' last one I struck, which went somethin' like this:

"I'm a gent what people fears,
If I hit a guy he disappears.

"I didn't like thet one as well as I did some of th' others, but Sorrel said thet it jest suited 'im. He was mumblin' it to 'imself when I left 'im 'nd started back to th' ranch. I went to town in about another week 'nd Hard Rock McMulligan gets me in a corner.

"'I'm doin' fine,' says he, 'with th' will-power stuff, but I wish, Mr. Teagle, please, thet yo'd make me up a little verse like yo' did fer Sorrel.'

"I could see thet Hard Rock was progressin' all right, because, as far as I knowed, he never in 'is life before said please to no one nor never called no one mister.

"'Shore I'll make up a little verse for yo', Hard Rock,' I says, 'nd I sat down in th' Water Hole Saloon and, after scratchin' my haid fer a minute, I got jest what I wanted. 'How's thet, Hard Rock?' I asked him when I handed it to 'im when it was all written down. He picked it up 'nd read it sort'a slow-like:

"I am humble, meek, and mild,
Like a gentle little child.

"'Thet's jest th' thing,' he told me, 'nd with thet he picked a twenty-dollar gold piece out'a 'is pocket 'nd handed it to me. I didn't want'a take it, but he wouldn't hev it no other way. 'Thet's real po'try, Snoozer,' he says, 'nd I reckon thet I know what it's wuth. I am humble, meek and mild, like a gentle little child. Thet's me, Snoozer,' he asseverates. 'Thet's jest what I want'a be. Yo' won't see me fracasin' around no mo'e.'

"It seemed then," continued Mr. Teagle, "thet everybody in Packsaddle wanted a verse so's they could go around a'talkin' to themselves 'nd I sat in th' Water Hole Saloon all th' afternoon makin' 'em up 'nd collectin' twenty bucks apiece for 'em. I've forgotten most of 'em, it bein' a long time ago, but I do recollect one or two of them verses.

"I did one fer Bill Mongrain, th' grocer, 'nd it went this way:

"When I'm weighin' spuds or nails
I keep my fingers off th' scales.

"'Nd I wrote one fer Pat Hurley who owned the Water Hole. It went this way:

"Maybe sometimes I git frisky,
But I don't put water in my whisky.

"When I went ridin' back to th' ranch thet night I hed nearly three hun-

dred dollars in my pockets 'nd I was thinkin' serious of takin' up po'try fer a perfession.

II.

"It was a coupla weeks before I got into Packsaddle agin, but when I did, I saw a sight thet I'd never thought I'd live to see. I was ridin' into town when I sees Sorrel walkin' down th' street 'nd I pulls in my hawse 'nd hails 'im: 'Hi, thar, Sorrel,' I hollers, 'how's yore ol' bow laigs?'

"He looks around 'nd glares at me, 'nd I'll swear thet I hardly knowed 'im when he come swaggerin' in my direction. 'Listen, Snoozer,' he says to me outa one corner of 'is mouth when he gits close to me. 'I'm Mr. Simmons now to most of th' people in this hyar town, but, seein' thet we've knowed each other fer a consid'erable length of time, I reckon yo' kin call me Sorrel.

"'But it ain't healthy no more fer people around hyar to mention my laigs onless I bring th' subject up fust. D'ye understand, cow-poke?'

"Sorrel looked as mad as a rattler jest ready to strike but, at fust, I thought thet he was jest makin' believe.

"'Shore, Mr. Simmons, I savvy,' I tells 'im, soberlike. 'But, jest fer ol' times' sake,' I says, 'I kin look at yore laigs once in awhile, cain't I, 'nd try to figger out if a freight train reely could run between 'em?'

"'Th' next minute I shore was a'-sweatin'," went on Snoozer Teagle, "because I was lookin' plumb down the centers of two gun-barrels. 'I'd drill yo', Snoozer,' Sorrel tells me coldly, 'only I'm sorry fer yo' 'nd I reckon yo' ain't been warned thet I'm through with all th' nonsense of yo' fellers.

"'Yo' ain't been in town fer two weeks, Snoozer, 'nd yo' don't know thet thar has been consid'erable of a change around hyar. I ain't afraid of no man on earth no more, Snoozer, 'nd I'm layin' down th' law in Packsaddle.

I'm a gent what people fears, Snoozer; if I hit a guy he disappears.'

"I still thought thet Sorrel was funnin' me, but I hed heerd tell of gents goin' crazy 'nd I wasn't goin' to take no chances. 'I know thet yo're a bad hombre, Sorrel,' I says, tryin' to keep from laffin', 'nd, bein' a peaceful sorta feller myself, I ain't honin' fer no trouble. I'll never mention laigs agin, Sorrel, onless I'm speakin' about centipedes or somethin' like thet.'

"Sorrel puts 'is guns back in 'is holsters. 'I thought yo'd listen to reason, Snoozer,' he says, 'because yo' ain't a bad feller a'tall in spite of th' fact thet your inverted sense of humor is li'ble to git yo' into trouble. Come 'nd hev a drink with me,' he orders, 'nd we'll fergit this little temperory unpleasantness.'

"So we went to the Water Hole 'nd I took notice thet every one thar treated Sorrel with due respect 'nd deference, as th' feller says. Th' bar was sorta crowded, but two or three gents, seein' Sorrel, stepped outa th' line 'nd went 'nd set at a table 'nd let us take thar places. 'What 'll it be, Mr. Simmons?' asked Pat Hurley. 'Th' same as always,' says Sorrel. 'Nd Hard Rock hyar is goin' to hev one with me, too.'

"Hard Rock McMulligan was standin' right next to Sorrel with a sorta meek grin on 'is face. 'Thanks a lot, Sorrel,' he says. 'I'll be proud to drink with yo' 'nd yore friend, Mr. Teagle.'

"Th' drinks was served," continued Snoozer Teagle, "'nd I was about to h'ist mine down when, all of a sudden, I hear Sorrel speak up sharp 'nd irritable-like. 'What d'ye mean by jiggling my elbow, Hard Rock?' he asks. 'Yo' nigh made me spill my liquor.' Hard Rock sorta flushed as Sorrel glared at 'im. 'I'm sorry, Sorrel,' he says. 'I shore didn't mean to shove yo' like I did. I was lookin' th' other way 'nd I didn't see what I was doin'.'

"But Sorrel kept on lookin' at 'im with fire in 'is eyes. 'I reckon yo'd better be sorry, McMulligan,' he said fi-

nally, 'because thar'd be trouble if yo' wasn't.' I was lookin' fer trouble, 'nd plenty of it, right then," continued Snoozer, "'nd I reckon thar would 'a' been if thet will-power stuff hadn't been workin' strong."

"'Wal, I said I was sorry, didn't I?" asked Hard Rock lookin' a little impatientlike. 'What more kin I do, Sorrel?"

"Little Sorrel was quiet fer a minute 'nd he jest stood thar lookin' contemptuous at Hard Rock. 'What more kin yo' do?' he asks after awhile. 'Yo' kin keep yore ugly, clumsy carcass outa my way, yo' wall-eyed hawse-thief,' he sorta snarled. 'I ain't takin' no truck from no one, leastwise no lil pink-eyed rabbit like yo'."

"I thought thet Sorrel was as good as dead right then," asserted Snoozer, "but nothin' happened except thet Hard Rock got kinda white 'nd scared-lookin'. 'Thet's no way to talk to a man, Sorrel,' he then says, mildlike, "'nd if I wasn't a nice, mild feller I wouldn't take it so easy."

"'Maybe it ain't no way to talk to a man,' says Sorrel, 'but whoever said thet yo' was a man."

"Then," continued Snoozer Teagle, "little Sorrel tossed down 'is drink 'nd turned to me. 'Let's go somewhar else,' he says. 'Thar's some people thet I object to standin' at th' same bar with.' So Sorrel strutted outa th' Water Hole lookin' as straight 'nd proud as th' First Tail Feather of th' Loyal Order of Peacocks 'nd I walk with 'im filled with wonder 'nd, as th' feller says, dire forebodin's."

"'What's all this I'm seein'?' I asks. 'Is it some sorta new game yo' gents in Packsaddle is playin'? Why, one of Hard Rock Mulligan's hard looks 'u'd go through yo' like a cannon ball 'nd yet yo've got th' nerve to stand up to 'im 'nd call 'im a hawse thief. 'Nd he don't even crook one of 'is little fingers around yo' 'nd squeeze yo' to death."

"'He don't dare as much as touch

me,' says Sorrel, 'because he knows thet I'd turn 'im clean inside out if he did. I'm in tune with the infinitive, I am,' says Sorrel, 'nd I'm hooked up to th' vast 'nd unsuspected powers thet are dormant in th' sub-rosa mind."

"'I feel strength surgin' through me, I hev th' desire to achieve. I'm a gent what people fears, if I hit a guy he disappears. I'm no longer a weakling, Snoozer,' he boasts. 'I've seen th' light 'nd I'm travelin' towa'd it. I'm goin' onward 'nd upward, my friend. I know now thet I kin be anything I wanta be 'nd I'll be it when I decide what I wanta be."

III.

"I RODE back to th' Cross Y-Z thet evenin'," said Snoozer Teagle, "ponderin' on what I hed seen with my own eyes 'nd doin' a powerful lotta wonderin' about it. I was busy fer th' next few weeks in th' round-up 'nd I didn't git into Packsaddle a'tall. I heerd tell, though, thet Sorrel Simmons was ridin' th' town like a buster rides a bronc 'nd thet Hard Rock McMulligan was gettin' so peaceful-like thet he was scared when he met up with a jack-rabbit. 'Nd I heerd, also rumors concernin' a new school-teacher thet hed come to Packsaddle to teach th' young idee to shoot. I got to reckonin', too, thet this Sally Lovering person must be considerable of a looker because th' fellers thet hed seen her couldn't agree no-how as to what she looked like."

"One gent comes back to th' Cross Y-Z 'nd swears thet she is a tall blonde with eyes like azurite, while another asseverates thet she is a little dark-eyed brunette. Another hombre said thet she hed hair th' color of native copper 'nd thet she wasn't neither tall nor short, but jest about medium. But they all sighed deep 'nd frequent when they mentioned 'er so I finally reckoned thet I'd ride into Packsaddle 'nd see 'er myself."

"So, one day, I did go lopin' into

town 'nd, when I was ridin' past the schoolhouse, she was out playin' with th' kids. She looked up at me 'nd smiled 'nd I raised my hat 'nd bowed 'nd said: 'Good afternoon, ma'am.' It was only th' middle of th' mawnin', too, but I didn't think of thet until afterward.

"I sorta hung around Packsaddle th' rest of th' day, tryin' to git another look at th' school-ma'rm, but th' only people I saw was everybody else but her. I met up with Sorrel Simmons, of co'se, 'nd he looked jest like this hyar pitcher of Napoleon whar he has 'is hand stuck in th' front of 'is coat.

"I saw Hard Rock McMulligan, too, 'nd he greets me as Mr. Teagle 'nd bows to me perlitelike. I heerd thet every one in town was still exercisin' great will power 'nd thet all of th' hombies were in love with this Sally Lovering gal, but thet none of them but Sorrel Simmons would admit it. Sorrel made up fer all th' rest, because he went around sayin' thet he was goin' to win 'er 'nd marry 'er in no time a'tall.

"When I got into th' bunk house thet night th' fust thing th' boys asked me was whether I hed seen 'er 'nd jest what she looked like.

"'Of co'se I seen 'er,' I told 'em, 'nd I know jest what she looks like. She has,' I says, 'a very nice smile 'nd her eyes are—well, her eyes are most salubrious to look at. 'Nd 'er hair,' I says, 'is a shade somewhere right between a golden color 'nd black 'nd it has, I reckon, a tinge of copper in it when th' sun shines on it.

"'Her figger,' I says, 'would do credit to any man's assets 'nd, as fer 'er height, she's a little bit taller than she is short when she's wearin' shoes with high heels on 'em. If yo' hombies was observin' like I am,' I says, 'I wouldn't hev to be tellin' yo' all of these hyar things.' 'Nd then I walked out on 'em, tryin' to remember jest what thet Sally gal did look like.

"I didn't rightly find out, though," continued Snoozer Teagle, "ontil I

went to th' dance thet was given in Packsaddle after th' round-ups tharabouts were all over 'nd th' cattle shipments hed been made. Th' jamboree was held in th' hall over th' Water Hole 'nd every one was thar from miles around. Thet included me, too, because I liked to dance in them days 'nd I was some two-stepper, I was. I was dressed up proper fer th' affair, too, with new chaps, silver-inlaid spurs 'nd a red silk bandanna thet cost me three bucks 'nd six bits. I hed a new Stetson, too, 'nd th' only thing thet I regretted was thet I couldn't wear thet hat when I was dancin'.

"Thet Sally Lovering person was th' belle of th' ball all right 'nd, after I hed been thar a little while, I got myself introdooced to 'er. Jest as I was makin' a low bow, th' music strikes up. 'Shall we shake a laig in this hyar dance, ma'am?' I asks. She kinda smiled a little and then held out 'er arms 'nd we started to gallivant around.

"'Didn't I see yo' ridin' past th' schoolhouse a few weeks ago?' she asks me, after a bit. 'Yo' did, ma'am,' I admitted. 'But I didn't wanta ride past, ma'am,' I told her. 'When I saw yo', I wanted to git right offen my hawse 'nd play with yo' 'nd th' rest of th' kids.' She blushed a little 'nd called me a flatterer 'nd I sorta felt right then thet she likes me.

"'Hev yo' been usin' yore mind 'nd tryin' to make yoreself over by will-power like th' rest of th' men in Packsaddle?' she asks me, after awhile, with a pretty little giggle. 'Ma'am,' says I, 'fer th' last few weeks I've only been usin' my mind fer one thing.'

"She looks kinda disappointed. 'What hev yo' been usin' it fer?' she asks. 'I've been usin' it, ma'am,' I tells 'er, 'to think about yo' with 'nd not fer nothin' else a'tall.'

"She blushed agin 'nd laughed a little 'nd looked at me with sorta wonderin' eyes. 'I ain't no apostle of peace, ma'am,' I says, thinkin' of Hard Rock McMulligan 'nd Sorrel Simmons,

‘nd I don’t reckon I want to be one. Likewise,’ I adds, ‘I ain’t got no desire to be no John L. Sullivan. Jest at present I’m jest plain Snoozer Teagle, cowpoke, ’nd that’s all.’

“‘They make me laugh, most of these men in Packsaddle,’ she said, ‘with all of this will-power stuff. That little red-haired fellow with th’ bow laigs that every one calls Sorrel walks around town as if he was a whole army. He don’t look any more like a fighter than a canary bird looks like a cannon, but every one seems to be afraid of ’im.

“‘Nd that McMulligan person,’ she sniffs. ‘He’s as big ’nd as hard as th’ side of a mesa ’nd he goes around lookin’ ’nd talkin’ like a parson. I’d like to bet somethin’ pretty that those gents ain’t changed permanent,’ she tells me in that soft voice of ’ers. ‘Ma’am,’ I replies, ‘I’d take up yore bet only I ain’t got nothin’ that’s wuth even the prettiness of yore little finger, not to speak of all th’ rest of yo’.’

“Th’ music stopped jest then,” related Snoozer Teagle, “’nd, while we were applaudin’ fer an oncore, I saw Sorrel standin’ in a corner of th’ hall glarin’ at me.

“‘Weren’t yo’ th’ one, Mr. Teagle,’ she says, when we were dancin’ agin, ‘thet wrote th’ po’try that all of these people in Packsaddle go around recitin’ to themselves.’ She smiled at me as sweet as sweet ’nd I started in throwin’ in a double-shuffle with my left foot once in awhile. ‘I was, Miss Lovering,’ I tells ’er ’nd then I got sorta bold-like all of a sudden.

“‘What would yo’ do, ma’am,’ I asks ’er, ‘if I was to call yo’ Sally?’ She jest looked at me ’nd smiled a little. ‘Why,’ she says, ‘I believe that I would call yo’ Snoozer, although I cain’t figger whar yo’ got sich a name. Yo’ don’t seem to be half as much asleep as lots of men I’ve met in Packsaddle. I like po’try, Snoozer,’ she then tells me, ‘’nd I shore do admire them gifted people who kin turn it out like yo’ do.’

“‘It’s a payin’ perfession,’ I told ’er. ‘I made three hundred dollars in one afternoon by writin’ them verses.’

“‘I wish, Snoozer,’ she says, ‘thet I was goin’ to hev th’ next dance with yo’, but I promised it to that thar little Sorrel feller or—let’s see—was it to that Hard Rock McMulligan person.’ She frowned a little as she tried to remember which of them two hombres hed roped ’er in fer the next trot.

“‘Why,’ she says, ‘I do believe that I promised it to both of ’em. I was lookin’ at yo’ so much, Snoozer, ’nd wonderin’ so much if yo’ was goin’ to ever come and ask me to dance with yo’ that I guess I must ’a’ got sorta confused about th’ other men.

“Right then I wanted to hev every dance with ’er,” asserted Snoozer Teagle, “but I knowed that that warn’t possible. ‘Wal,’ I says, with a sorta sigh, ‘yo’ll hev to keep yore promise ’nd let one of th’ two of ’em hev th’ next dance, but don’t fergit me after that, Sally. Especially when th’ band starts playin’ “Home, Sweet Home.”’

“‘I won’t, Snoozer,’ she says with a smile, squeezin’ my arm a little. Then th’ music stops, ’nd I takes ’er over to whar th’ chairs are ’nd I sits down with ’er to wait until ’er next pardner comes for her.

“It warn’t long,” continued Snoozer, “before both Sorrel Simmons ’nd Hard Rock McMulligan come walkin’ over ’nd they both stop in front of Sally Lovering ’nd bow to ’er. ‘I reckon th’ next dance with yo’ is mine, ma’am,’ says Sorrel to Sally. ‘The next dance, I believe, is mine, Miss Lovering,’ remarks Hard Rock right after ’im.

“Th’ gal seemed kinda flustered,” said Snoozer, “with them two gents standin’ in front of ’er ’nd both of ’em claimin’ th’ same dance. ‘I’m sorry,’ she tells ’em, ‘thet I got confused ’nd promised each of yo’ th’ next dance. It was all my fault,’ she admits, ‘’nd I don’t know what to do about it. Th’ best thing, I guess, is for yo’ to decide

between yo' which one will be my pardner. I'm agreeable to dance with either of yo'.'

"'Thank yo', Miss Lovering,' says Sorrel with a grin, 'fer leavin' it up to us two hombres to settle. Yo' kin figger thet I'll be yore next pardner.

"'This Hard Rock gent hyar is a no-account sick coyote 'nd he'll admit thet to yo' 'imself. He ain't fitten to shuffle with no lady. If yo' want to give 'im a dance fer th' sake of sweet charity, Miss Lovering, I s'pose it 'll be all right. But if he hangs around whar he ain't wanted, 'nd pesters or annoys yo', I'll drop on 'im like a wildcat.'

"'Why, I'm sure,' says Sally Lovering, 'thet I don't want yo' to start no trouble, Mr. Simmons.'

"'He won't, ma'am,' I heerd Hard Rock McMulligan sorta growl, 'nd, lookin' at 'im, I got plumb scared. All th' gentleness 'nd mildness thet hed been in 'is face fer so many weeks, hed disappeared 'nd he looked jest like th' same ugly mug, only even worsen, then he hed been before he hed commenced to practice thet thar will power stuff.

"I saw thet Sorrel Simmons was lookin' at Hard Rock, too, 'nd I kept my eyes on Sorrel, kinda fascinated-like, because he seemed to be changin' 'is whole appearance right in front of me. He hed been struttin' around fer a long time, as straight up 'nd down as a royal flush, but, with McMulligan glarin' at 'im in 'is old way, Sorrel seemed to cave in around th' middle.

"He got kinda limp, like a b'iled shirt bein' rained on," explained Snoozer Teagle. "All of thet cocksureness seemed to be leakin' outa 'is face 'nd he stood thar lookin' as if he was seein' a ghost. But, even then, he didn't lose all of 'is faith in 'is will power 'nd he perks up fer a minute 'nd looks insolent-like at Hard Rock. 'Say, yo',' he commenced, 'I'll—'

"'Shet up, yo' pussy cat!' says McMulligan, 'nd he says it in sich a voice thet Sorrel gits so scared thet he jest cain't talk no more. 'I feel sorta sick,

I do,' goes on Hard Rock, speakin' to Sorrel, 'when I figger what I've been tryin' to make outa myself. Hyar I've been goin' around convincin' myself thet I was a meek and mild sorta gent what didn't wanta fight 'nd what couldn't fight if he did.

"'I've been kotowin' to an insignificant little runt with red hair 'nd bow laigs. Why, I even let yo' call me a wall-eyed hawse thief,' says Hard Rock, turnin' sorta red at th' memory 'nd seemin' to git madder every minute. 'Nd I might 'a' kept on bein' thet way,' he sorta moaned, 'if it hadn't been fer my regard fer a lady—'

IV.

SNOOZER TEAGLE paused, sighed dolefully and then cleared his throat.

"Wal, thet's what happens to a man," he continued, "when he gits 'is aims 'nd ambitions mixed up with a dame. If Sorrel Simmons hed been able to use 'is will power a little longer, without losin' faith in it all of a sudden, he might hev become a real fighter. Why, he might even hev become President of these hyar United States.

"If Hard Rock McMulligan hed kept on believin' thet he was a weak 'nd inoffensive little feller he might 'ave died of measles or whoopin' cough instead of passin' out with a skin full of bullets down in Tonopah. I always hev to laugh, though," added Snoozer, "when I think of how Hard Rock took after Sorrel thet night of th' dance 'nd nearly chased 'im clean outa th' State of Idaho."

"What became of Sally Lovering, Snoozer?" I asked.

"Thet's jest what I was goin' to tell yo'," replied Mr. Teagle. "I'd been readin' consid'able lit'rachoor them days about th' raisin' of mushrooms 'nd when I got thet three hundred dollars fer writin' verses I figgered thet I'd quit cow-punchin' 'nd start a little mushroom ranch somewhere.

"I hed it all worked out, 'nd down

on paper, thet it wouldn't be long before I'd be makin' a fortune every y'ar. I'd 'ave been a rich man long ago if I'd 'ave done as I hed wanted to," went on Snoozer, somewhat morosely. "But Sally told me thet I didn't know th' diff'rence between a mushroom 'nd a toadstool 'nd if I could make three hundred dollars a afternoon writin' po'try, I ought to do thet fer a livin'.

"Thet was twenty y'ar ago," sighed Snoozer, 'nd I ain't made a penny writin' po'try sence, but I notice thet folks

is still eatin' mushrooms on thar steaks."

"But what did Sally Lovering have to do with it, Snoozer?" I asked. "You didn't have to do what she told you."

"Oh, yes, I did," asserted Snoozer grimly, "because I went 'nd got married to 'er. Thet's what I say," he concluded. "Dames 'nd destinies don't mix nohow 'nd if a man wants to make 'imself into somethin' thet he ain't he's got to keep plumb away from th' influence of wimmin."

THE END



The Stampede

THE prairie rocks to the thunder
 O' the poundin' hoofs o' the herd,
 An' a livin' sea flows onward
 Like the flight of a startled bird;
 A forest o' horns gleams palely
 In the wanin' moon's cold light,
 An' the frightened bawlin' o' cattle
 Fills the dome o' the starlit night.

"Up! To the saddle, an' ride!" is the order,
 For we've got to stop the stampede,
 An' we know what it means, for we're *cowmen*
 O' the old-time Western breed;
 It 'll mean all night in the saddle,
 Above us, the cold, gray sky;
 We'll be gallopin' hell-fer-leather—
 An' some of us, maybe, will *die!*

But we shove our guns in the holsters,
 An' ride like hell for the pass
 That opens out o' the mesa,
 For it's there we must stop this mass
 O' beef, that the round-up's gathered
 From hundreds o' miles o' range,
 An' if some o' us punchers cashes in,
 I reckon it won't be strange.

It's the *herd* that we give our lives to,
 An' a *man* or two don't count;
 It's the same as it is in a *battle*;
 We're a-thinkin' o' that, as we mount,
 But there ain't a man of us weakens,
 As we ride out to keep our trust,
 For the *ol' man's dependin' on us*,
 An' we'll stop the stampede—or *bust!*

Will Thomas Withrow.



'A snappy little man started along the platform to look at the pump'

Horse Sense

"For want of a nail the shoe was lost"—and for want of a pump cylinder head at a dinky little desert stop a busy railroad's entire freight schedule faced a tie-up

By LEO LEE

IT was out on that part of the line called the "Ash Pan Division," where the road cuts across Dusty Desert, as you know.

Some call it the "Hundred Mile Drink," for it is exactly one hundred miles and nine inches between natural watering stations. So a clerk in the engineer's department told me one day when we smuggled him into the tail end of the fast freight on his fishing vacation and slowed down to three miles an hour so that he could get his duffle between Red Horse and Yelling Woman, where the best trout bit.

But that was not on the Dusty Desert, I want you to understand right here.

Dusty Desert? Why, stranger, that place is some dry. As I just remarked,

it is several Indian sleeps and nine inches between engine drinks.

But an engine, like a Kentuckian, has to have water once in awhile, so we rigged up a tank at Mallard, drilled a hole in the dryness, and somehow got a feeling of wetness down nearer Hades than Mallard is, or rather was, for Mallard is no more.

How in thunder they came to name a place out in that dust flat after a duck is one too many for me, but Mallard she was, and she was the only water to be had for many a turn of the wheel.

Now that was an important station, Mallard was. You see, if anything happened to the pump works at Mallard then the road had to haul the water in tank cars, run it onto a side track,

and then pump those engine chasers from the tanks on the track to the big iron tank on legs up above. Some job, that.

They used to have a wooden tank at Mallard, but after it went dry for two whole days once and fell to pieces, the Great Wisdom concealed about headquarters erected a special flask of boiler iron at Mallard.

As I said before, Mallard was a mighty important point on the line. I was there. And it got mighty lonesome sometimes.

I used to josh over the wire with a fair-haired maiden over at Rock Cross, even if it was against orders, for a man cannot talk to himself and the looking-glass all the time, can he? I forgot the office cat, but she eloped in the maw of a Mr. Coyote one moonlit night, and I did not have even her to chat with.

So I opened up a tick-tack conversation with the girl up the line, but I quit that after I found "she" smoked a corn-cob pipe, wore red whiskers, and was overburdened with a trifling disposition.

I risked it, after pumping the tank full to the top, and got into the baggage car and went up the line to lick that hybrid good and plenty, but he was six feet three into the clouds and shut off about a yard of the horizon with his shoulders, so I did not tell him who I was, and came back on the next train.

And to think I had talked three solid evenings with that over whether he should wear baby blue or salmon pink for his wedding dress. I tell you, there are some mighty hard things to bear in this world, and red whiskers on your promised bride are catalogued among the flints of Fate.

So I went back to tending bar for engines at Mallard, and hunted cockroaches with the office ruler and a wet sock between pumps and trains.

Then something happened. The cylinder head of the pump broke

square in two, and she squirted water in great shape, but not one drop could she lift into the iron tank.

I had water enough to last throughout the day, but I left that broken-hearted—I mean headed—pump strictly alone and wired into the Great Wisdom. And you should have seen what I drew.

A pure white filler in a poker game, even if there were two dollars on the table, was nothing to it! Lace boots. Real engineer. Just got loose out of college. He examined that pump like a broken leg and pronounced it out of action.

I knew that before I sent for him, but how was that to get wetness up above? Besides, he sprained my only monkey wrench taking off the broken cylinder head, and ran away with it when Pat Jorden pulled in with the California freight.

THERE I was with a perfectly good pump, except its cylinder head was attached to a person with a diploma, and I was just a common short-horn, ossified upstairs, kept in solitary confinement at Mallard in charge of dampening the top of locomotive fire-boxes.

I looked at it and wondered. President's wife's second cousin, probably. Anyway, there he sat with that pump head and my job in a sack at his feet, and I wanted them both out.

The only virtue I could see in that fellow was that he doubled the population of Mallard; so, as I had a report to fill out on the increase of settlers along the road, I went in and filled it out accordingly.

It was the best chance I would have, probably, so I took it before he got away.

Anyway, Mr. Diploma finally pulled out on Number Seven, with about one-third the water I had left. That left me alone on the Dusty Desert without even a pump to love, and I have never spoken to Red Whiskers since I was up

there, and I let him pound his key till his engagement finger got tired.

Pretty soon I heard an order go over the wire to hitch tank cars to all trains crossing Dusty Desert, and I knew what that meant.

The road had a scheme so that they could pump water from a tank car right behind the tender into the tender itself, and these traveling water tanks were held in reserve at Smith's Center in case anything went wrong with the desert pumps.

There were other dry stations besides mine, remember, for Mallard was not the only dewless city on the map by any means.

Then I heard some more wire conversation about changing train time, and the grouch away off somewheres above High Pine sent in an awful roar about having some engines grabbed from his division. Mallard was sure some important station, it seems.

And I was the whole citizenship of that highly discussed burg, yet no one so far had sent me even a whisper.

Then a click-click went by to a pump company somewhere in Ohio. I went out and looked at the lettering on my pump, and I knew that wire was about my pump head, sure enough.

Same size, and they were to hurry it along by express P. D. Q., as the lack of that pump head was raising Cain with the road, evidently.

Pretty soon, in an hour or two, came back the answer from that Ohio concern, saying that they had none in stock, had discontinued that size pump, it was a special order anyway, and they would have to cast one; could deliver in about two weeks.

I can see at this point where the Big Think in the central office laid right down on the carpet and had a fit.

That pump head was going to cost the road some thousands of dollars, for we were short of tank cars with those extra load-while-you-run pumps on them, and it was right in the middle of the big haul, too, with grain pouring

in on the road like a hundred rivers of threshed yellow.

SO I went out to look, for the last time, at the pump, for I knew what would come traveling over the wire for me soon as those ivory nobs in headquarters got around to it. Number Three stopped at midnight, and I expected to take it; also the last of our water in the big tank.

The pump was all right, except it would not pump. Cousin had left the bolts and nuts and even the wrench on the floor for me to do with as I pleased.

So I took the ax and a clinch bar and pried up a plank from the platform. I hacked the plank into four pieces, about two feet long each. They were eight-inch plank, by the way.

Then I put the poker in the office stove and fired up, and as soon as that poker was red hot I burned a hole through one end of one of those short planks.

The poker cooled off before I got even halfway through, but I kept playing at my little game of solitaire and finally, about sunset, had all four pieces of planking nicely drilled through.

And somehow the holes in them, when the planks were put two cross-wise and two up-and-down over the open end of that pump cylinder, somehow those burned holes were just in line with the bolt holes in the pump itself. Then I put in a piece or two of rubber blanket between the wood and the iron, and screwed her up fairly tight.

I had a head to my pump cylinder, even if it was of wood. I turned on the power slowly, and she leaked a good deal, but I got some water up into the tank all right—about a barrel or so, maybe.

But the pump just kept on leaking, so I unscrewed her and took a good-sized hole out of that rubber blanket inner sheet. That let the water through right into the wood, I figured, and she would swell tight in time. So

I screwed her up again, and began to pump slowly.

Water spurted like there was a fire company 'round somewhere, but in about an hour she began only to drizzle, and pretty soon stopped entirely, except for a drop now and then from the wet wood.

I filled the big tank, shut down the pump, piled a wet comforter and a rubber blanket over the wooden head of the pump, and sat down for a smoke.

PRETTY soon it came. I was to take the midnight back to the big town, and was laid off for two weeks.

"What for?" I ticks back.

"Pump out of commission, you idiot. You no good there." And I knew Red Whiskers was cutting in, listening till he would split an ear. So it was with satisfaction I wired back:

"Pump fixed. Tank full. Plenty of water."

"Pump can't be fixed. Cylinder head here in office. You fired. Come in." And I knew they thought I was either drunk or was guying them, and you know what that means up in railroad heaven.

So I did not answer, but went to bed. Along in the night, she was late, I guess, I heard the midnight stop for a drink, and later toot as she rounded Sand Drift, two miles away. Her voice was not a bit husky, either.

Two more trains had their chasers out of the officially empty tank, and about noon next day, when our crack passenger stopped, a snappy, sawed-off little bear of a man crawled off the rear car, and started along the platform, to look at the pump, I guess.

Anyway, he never got there, for he put his leg through that hole in the platform where I got my plank.

There was an awful row, and the whole train crew strained themselves getting him back on the cars, and picking up his things. I found his eye-

glasses and a piece of his watch chain under the platform, but that was after the crack passenger had gone.

Next train or two, off hops a sour-faced chap, and he wants to see that pump, too. So I started her up for the gentleman. He said nothing, but handed me two fine cigars, and got back on the train, and off they went.

It was lonesome some more on Dusty Desert, and I was doing some thinking, for I had seen the Sourface stop and grin over that open place in the platform.

Then I was in trouble sure enough. The train that brought me some eggs and a water melon also dumped two letters that would cause any man to ponder, and that were especially difficult for a lonesome tank tender in Mallard.

One letter was from up near the throne, saying that I was to appear P. D. Q. for promotion, and the other was a few slighting remarks to the effect that I was fired bodily for neglecting the company's property, and for wantonly destroying the same with an ax for the purpose of creating kindling wood, and also for barking the general manager's shins.

But meanwhile all those unnecessary orders about changing train time, tank cars, and other foolishness were countermanded soon as Sourface had ticked something into headquarters, and the road did not miss a train, nor did an engine miss a drink, and, as I said, it was our busy season, too.

So I was promoted and fired at the same time, and both letters were signed with the same rubber stamp signature, but were evidently written on different typewriters, so I did not know what to do about it. But the tank was full.

So I just wired "Haw, haw!" to Red Whiskers and went to bed, for I knew that to-morrow Mallard was going to change her population, and that the general manager thought more of his road than he did of his shins.



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



ANOTHER FAVORITE

ALTHOUGH it is more than two years since we published "The Radio Planet," by Ralph Milne Farley, we still receive letters complimenting it and its two predecessors, "The Radio Man" and "The Radio Beasts."

Many of you have been demanding to know when another of these stories will appear. Good news for you! Mr. Farley has just completed "The Radio Flyers"—and it will come to you through the columns of ARGOSY. It will necessarily be several months before we can publish it—but, anyway, it is on the way!

BROTHERS IN RED

WHERE do stories come from? Do writers just pick them out of the air? Are they all simply "made up"? Are they based on actual happenings?

Different writers have different methods, but the genesis of a story is often as interesting as the finished product. Certainly, any one who reads "Brothers in Red," by F. V. W. Mason, in this issue, will feel that the author "knows his stuff"—that he was there and that in all probability the story is founded on more than a germ of truth.

Right. Hear what Mr. Mason has to say about it:

One evening during the latter part of 1918, I had joined the Intelligence Officers of our brigade in a quiet game of poker. As we paused after a particularly expensive hand, we fell to talking about one of the German counterattacks which threatened.

One of the officers made mention of the fact that the Germans refused to believe that we were Americans. I asked him what they thought we were, and he replied that the German general staff had disseminated the information that we were English and Canadians

dressed up in American uniforms. He went so far as to show us a handbill which had been widely distributed among the German troops at the front. It showed the picture of a wildly painted and feathered Indian and had the caption, "Until you see one of these, believe that there are no Americans in front of you."

This little incident gave me the original idea of the story, "Brothers in Red."

It is a well-known fact that the majority of Europeans looked upon us as savages—that is, the uneducated classes who rely on the movies for their information. It seemed incredible that soldiers, no matter how uneducated or unintelligent, could believe these lies, but the power of propaganda has indeed been realized since the close of the war and since various facts as opposed to propaganda have been revealed.

F. V. W. MASON.

WELCOME!

ANOTHER newcomer joins our ARGOSY family this week—Thomas Barclay Thomson, with "The Duchess and the Fight Racket." In response to our request Mr. Thomson stands up to introduce himself:

I was born in western Kentucky—not far from where Irvin S. Cobb first saw the light of day, but seriously doubt if he knows a thing about it. My present home is in Azusa, California, twenty-five miles east of Los Angeles, in the heart of the orange belt and nine miles below the San Gabriel Cañon Dam, which, when completed, will be the largest dam in the world. (There, that squares me with the local Chamber of Commerce.) I came to Azusa twenty-seven years ago, so am fully entitled to a native son rating since we're all native sons after the tenth year. My family consists of one wife, three overactive, voracious sons, and two Dodges with excellent gasoline appetites.

I have never been in jail, which is possibly an oversight on the part of some one, but have engaged in the real estate game—as a good, orthodox Californian should do. For a number of years I have engaged in post office work. I am not crazy about it, but like the pay very much—what there is of it. Unlike Zane Grey, I care nothing for the ocean and can't catch a fish on a bet. However, I do love the mountains and like nothing better than a real deer hunt in the high Sierras with a few good friends, and I like to walk in—up, rather—behind a string of pack burros. That is life.

I should like to tell you that I am simply wild about writing, but the honest truth is, I found, a few years ago, after intensive introspection, that I wasn't fit for a single other thing on earth, so turned to writing. After graduating from high school, I planned to attend Stanford University—with the idea of making a civil engineer out of myself. I got married, instead, and civil engineering and I are both ahead of the game, but it's hard on Stanford. Married a school-teacher, one who has specialized in English and the languages, and who has plenty of will power; expressed a preference for the writing game—and let nature take its course.

THOMAS BARCLAY THOMSON.

THOSE COUPONS

INASMUCH as some of our readers seem confused in regard to our offer of original drawings for ten Your Choice Coupons, let us restate the offer here.

For each ten Your Choice Coupons from different issues of the magazine filled in and mailed to us we shall send you an original pen and ink drawing of one of the headings appearing at the beginning of each story in the magazine.

These drawings, approximately eleven by fourteen inches, are well suited for framing. They are the original drawings from which the engravings used in the magazine are made. As we are receiving hundreds of these coupons daily, it will be impossible to promise any definite heading to any one. However, if you would like some particular drawing, let us know when you send in your tenth coupon, and perhaps we can favor you with it.

This offer does not apply to cover paintings or to prints of these paintings.

AND NOW—

AS usual, Fred MacIsaac rang the bell neatly with "World Brigands." Of the many letters praising it now on hand, there is room for this one, anyway:

New York, N. Y.

It was about six years ago that I started reading the ARGOSY, being attracted by the first installment of "Tarzan and the Golden Lion," by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Since then I have been a fairly regular reader of the magazine. Occasionally I would lose

interest in the stories, and drop the magazine for a time; but I would always return to it when I noticed the start of some new serial which appealed to me. Among the stories which have brought me back whenever I strayed from the fold of ARGOSY readers were "Tarzan and the Ant-Men," "The Moon Maiden," and "The Moon Men," by Burroughs; the Venus tales of Ralph Milne Farley; "The Ship of Ishtar" and "Seven Footprints to Satan," by A. Merritt; "The Man Who Mastered Time," by Ray Cummings; and George Worts's unforgettable story, "The Return of George Washington."

From this list it may be correctly deduced that my favorite form of fiction is the fantastic; and I hope to see more of this type in the magazine.

At present I am reading "World Brigands," by Fred MacIsaac, and I believe it is his best story since "The Vanishing Professor," nor am I forgetting "The Great Commander" or "The Seal of Satan," either. Whatever may be said of MacIsaac's style and technique, it cannot be denied that his stories are vivid, forceful and decidedly original in plot. "World Brigands" is not only a deeply interesting narrative, but it is based, in a measure, on facts. Even now the United States is intensely disliked in some parts of Europe, and there is no telling to what lengths this hatred and envy may go. Who knows but that MacIsaac's story may prove prophetic?

A. L. GLASSER.

CERTAINLY there is no reason why Long Island should not be represented in Argonotes—especially when a Long Islander sends in as interesting a letter as this:

Kings Park, N. Y.

What's the matter with hearing from Long Island in your Argonotes? I am located at Kings Park, just forty-five miles from Broadway, where ARGOSY, the best magazine that ever was, is, or ever will be, is printed. I have just finished reading "Now We're Rich," by Edgar Franklin, and I'll say it hit me right between the eyes as a story that is interesting, amusing and with a good moral.

I got to reading ARGOSY in rather a peculiar way. It was a trick the publishers played on us old *Railroad Man's Magazine* readers, as I used to be a railroad man, and when ARGOSY absorbed *Railroad Man's Magazine* and *All-Story Weekly* I followed the crowd. That was several years ago, and I have missed but few numbers since. I got tired of being disappointed at the news-stands occasionally, so now I subscribe for it regularly.

I will say one thing for ARGOSY, it is getting bigger and better right along. Not bigger in the sense of more reading matter perhaps, but bigger in the value of the reading.

Now there is just one thing I wish to air my views on that has made me grit my teeth more than once while reading Readers' Viewpoint, and that is panning out the Westerns

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