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JANUARY 1924

THE BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE



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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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The fascinating chronicle of a hobo's progress—of his strange life and companions on the road, and of the events which impressed him so profoundly: a most unusual and interesting novel.

The Sands of Oro By Beatrice Grimshaw 92

This absorbing narrative of South Seas adventure here comes to its climax through a series of vividly picturesque and exciting episodes.

Twelve Exceptional Short Stories

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Here we have what is perhaps the best of the remarkable group of stories which Mr. Miller brought back from his recent journey to certain remote jungles of the Far East.

Upon the Lion and Adder By John M. Oskison 30

There is a clear ring of reality to this memorable story of a wronged man's gallant triumph that makes it one of the most impressive things we have ever printed.

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 42

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Captain Bill Comes Home By George F. Worts 61

The noted author of "South of Shanghai," "The Girl in the Blue Sarong" and "Trial by Jungle" here contributes a thrilling little drama that takes place in a New York apartment.

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DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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There's a lot of fun in this story, which has to do with a timid gentleman who faces painful difficulties, armed with a bottle and an umbrella.

Old Rex Retires By Austin Hall 76

The best yet of Mr. Hall's delightful stories about an animal well worth knowing—a California sheep-dog with a lot of brains.

The Ragged Moment By William P. Dudley 84

The man who wrote "The Crooked Knife" and "Mammon Misjudges" offers a still more attractive story in this tale of a moving-picture workshop.

A Dull Day By George L. Knapp 126

Dr. Knapp knows boys, and understands the fine art of fiction. The combination here results in something specially amusing.

Fifty Cans of Opium By Dris Deming 133

Into the brief compass of this swift-moving story has been packed more action than one usually finds in narratives twice its length.

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"On the Trail of a Platinum Mine" here leads us to a kidnaping in San Francisco and to an extraordinary series of curious events.

A Novelette to Be Remembered

Cactus and Rattlers By H. Bedford-Jones 156

The Far West takes the place of Mr. Bedford-Jones' beloved Far East in this full-of-action novelette and most effectively demonstrates the power and versatility of its noted author.

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Advertising forms close three weeks prior to the time of issue. Advertising rates on application.

How do your last two years compare with his?

THERE ARE two kinds of managers. (Just as there are two kinds of superintendents, engineers, salesmen and accountants.)

One says: "I am so busy that I cannot possibly do any outside reading." He does none.

The other says: "I am so busy that I do not see how I can possibly find time for outside reading, *but I must.*" He does.

T. F. Peirce, manager of the Pacific Desk Company, was very busy. "Altho I know that the Alexander Hamilton Institute's Course must have great merit, because of its national reputation, I am not in a particularly receptive mood," he wrote. "My work is quite engrossing; I do not consider that I have time. . . ."

But there is a difference between having a *busy mind* and having a *closed mind*. Mr. Peirce was not afraid to face the facts about himself. He sent for "Forging Ahead in Business" as a kind of test—to see just wherein his own training fell short. "I very quickly discovered one thing," he wrote frankly, "and that was how little I actually knew about the science of business."

Within a few weeks Mr. Peirce had found information in the Institute Course which had an immediate cash value to him. A few months later he had persuaded twenty-five of his principal associates to enrol with the Institute.



Mr. T. F. PEIRCE, President of the Pacific Desk Company, writes: "When a man clips a coupon from one of your advertisements he puts himself in touch with the strongest lifting power in modern business."

In one of the advertisements of his company in the Los Angeles papers Mr. Peirce announced these enrolments as evidence that the Pacific Desk Company was in a position to give better service to business men by having, in its organization, men thoroly trained in business.

The next step follows naturally and inevitably.

On October 31, 1922, Mr. Peirce wrote: "I want you to be the first to know the good news, and that is that I have been elected to the presidency of the Pacific Desk

Company and have taken over the entire control of its stock. . . . I believe your Course has had much to do with making me ready to grasp this wonderful opportunity when presented to me, and I desire to give full credit where credit is due."

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Where will you be five years from now?

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In many respects this is the most remarkable novel *The Blue Book Magazine* has ever published. Incidentally, it is its author's first serialized long story. Its original title was "The Clear Pane," the significance of which will be apparent to the reader when he takes up the third and last installment in the March issue. What Mr. Horn has tried to show in his vivid, realistic work is the exact status, with himself, of a private in that vast army of floaters in America, the men who work when work is absolutely necessary, but only then—who at other times are tramps. The Florida Kid in this story is a personality of such dominance in the world he inhabits that it has been deemed best to let the story carry as its title his trampdom "monaker." You will remember him and recall portions of his philosophy and incidents in his lurid life long after most stories are forgotten. It is this quality of reality and authority that adapts the story so admirably to *The Blue Book Magazine*.



The Florida Kid

By CHARLES HORN

SEVENTEEN wanderers sprawled or crouched in an open freight-car, a gondola. The car was loaded with iron pipe, each piece fifteen feet long and nearly two feet in diameter, that was being carried to St. Louis in the middle of a long train. The pipe was pyramided at one end, filling one-half of the car; the men

were distributed in the other half. They had been riding since midnight, when they left Cincinnati, and with the coming of morning were nearing an Indiana town that was reported hostile to floaters. Tentative plans were in the making to leave the train at a water-tank east of the town, walk around the place and catch another

train, later in the morning, on a grade to the west.

The sun lifted over straggling low hills, and the seventeen rose to greet its coming. Leaning out over the side of the car, stretching their necks beyond the ends of the pipe, they ventured recklessly to gather warmth into their bodies. They knew nothing, for the moment, except that warmth was in this coming of light. Sunlight! Heat! They were drunk with its coming. They were sun-worshippers.

"Br-r-r!" One man's teeth clicked as he spoke through clenched jaws. "I'm s-stiff with cold!"

"Gawd! That night's past!" was the thanksgiving of another.

BODIES stretching gratefully and painfully, pinched faces uplifting to the red sun, these worshippers devoutly greeted the new day—warmth. Gone was the fear of being seen by others—the wanderer is a silent, slinking creature; gone was the impulse to crouch, to peer watchfully. All other sensations of life were subordinate to this reveling in the coming of comfort. The *lip-lip-lip* of the wheels on the rail-joints, the burring of the rails, the rumbling of the heavy train—all these sounds were dead to their ears. They knew nothing, felt nothing, had no sensations—but heat. Heat! The steam that rose from the dew-soaked grass, the thin wisps of smoke that ribboned from chimneys, all added to this illusion of comfort. Heat! Literally their bodies bathed in it. Warmed was their imagination, marvelously renewed to meet another day, following a night of suffering.

To awaken their sluggish veins, two or three of the riders started a halting, stiff-legged circuit of the car. Others fell into line back of them in a movement of a strange, serpentine dance. Still others jumped stiffly up and down, cursing when a cramp struck their toes and insteps. Activity thus came. They had been bugs, worms, slugs frozen for months, now suddenly enlivened with this coming of sunlight. No one in the world but themselves, they believed, knew how great is this boon of a clear, warm day.

As their bodies relaxed from the torpor, thoughts turned to the next creature comfort.

"Gawd, I'm hongry!" exclaimed one.

"So'm I," another agreed. "So's every 'bo. All the time, everywhere. Fourteen meals a day wouldn't fill a hobo. I eat

more in a day of bummin' than in a week of workin'. I—"

"Wonder if this burg'll be good for a meal?" another cut in.

"Hell, no! Not with this bunch. They's fifty of us if they's one. We'll git nawthin' here."

"Well, it's a—"

A head, poking itself above the top of the next forward car, brought interruption. A body followed the head, and legs the body. Turning, feet felt for the ladder on the car's end.

"There's the shack," a wanderer whispered.

Necks craned. Some eyes showed fright. Others held fight.

The brakeman came down the ladder, stepped to the wall of the gondola, poised an instant and dropped among the riders. He grinned, but his eyes were cold and shrewd, roaming over the group, sizing it up—on his morning round, gathering enforced payment for the privilege of riding. He stopped before a tall, narrow-chested youngster.

"Well, well!" he called jocularly. "Quite a mob—quite a mob! This bunch oughta be good for breakfast, dinner an' supper for the whole crew. Whatcha got on yuh, buddy?"

Narrow-chest hesitated, turned to the others, saw no evidence of assistance from them.

"Whatcha got to pay your ride?" Shack insisted.

"Not a jit. I'm busted."

"Come on—come on! None o' that old tripe! Stick up y'r mitts f'r a frisk."

Narrow-chest obeyed, and Shack went efficiently to his work. In a trouser pocket his fingers encountered something hard, and he drew it forth—a penknife. Expertly he pulled out the three blades, inspecting them. He dropped it into a pocket.

"That'll do," he announced. "Worth a quarter, mebbe."

Still grinning coldly, he turned to another of the group. Quietly, quickly, efficiently he made his morning round until after he had collected two pocketknives, a pair of cuff-links and a safety razor, in addition to several dimes, nickels and quarters, something in the attitude of those about him gave warning. In his next words he sought reinforcements.

"Any union men among you?" he asked. A medley of answers came.

"Mister, I'm a molder."

"I'm a machinist, Cap'."

"Look at my card. I'm a barber."

Hands quickly sought in pockets; dingy leather and leatherette folders were brought forth and displayed to Shack, who nodded agreeably. He felt safer, now—was certain of a split in the ranks, should trouble come.

"You fellas with the cards are all right," he announced. "Ride to helangone." He turned. "You—over there. Whatcha got on you?"

He called to a man of tremendous size, one who stood at the extreme end of the open space, leaning against the pile of pipe.

"I'm a heavy structural-steel worker, Cap'."

"Got a card?"

"Yeah." Structural Steel displayed it.

Shack's sweeping gaze moved over the group and settled on an old man, an umbrella-mender, seated in a corner. A small satchel was between his knees, a bundle of steel ribs, bound tightly together with the covering of an umbrella, lay on the floor at his side.

"Hey, Gran'pa—what you say?" Shack roared. "You aint said nothin', yet. Kick in! You old guys is allus heavy wit' jack."

Gran'pa lifted watery eyes, shivered, peered up to the great bulk of Structural Steel, and made two or three faltering attempts at speech before he quavered, in a voice palsied with extreme age:

"Please, Mister, I'm a structural-steel worker too. A light structural-steel worker." He held up the bundle of ribs as evidence of his words.

He waited, fearful of the frisking—waited, peered about until a crackle of mirth struck the men, and until the brakeman doubled over in heavy laughter. Waving his hand in dismissal, Shack turned away.

"Too good, Gran'pa! You're a fast thinker. Ride on." Then, to the others: "Well, guess I've made you all. Anybody else—wait! Here's two live ones I nearly missed."

ALERTLY he moved toward two youngsters who stood aside in a corner. One of these was a towhead, a tight-shouldered, smiling-eyed fellow, small of frame, wiry, nineteen or twenty years old, apparently. The other was older, taller, heavy of frame, perhaps twenty-five; six feet, one inch, one would reckon his height; his eyes were gray, cold, calm, with a hard, calculating,

weighing light in them; he had square jaws, massive jaws, cleft chin. In every way he was indescribably, completely different from any other man in the car. His overalls seemed to fit him more snugly than the garments of the others fit them; his actions and manner, even as he stood at ease, coldly watching the brakeman approach, spelled preparedness, just as the actions of the other wanderers were heavy with indecision. One got the impression that here was a ready man—ready to meet the world, ready of thought, capable.

The tall man's red hair straggled from beneath the edges of his broken cap. His broad, heavy hands were roughened by wind and weather, broken seams on them filled with grime. His body needed the complete attention that only soap and water—warm water and plenty of soap—will give. And yet, with all of this disheveled appearance, there was nothing repulsive about the man. He had the appearance, somehow, of the workman, the thoughtful, capable workman, who was temporarily at an unpleasant task.

While the brakeman had been making his morning call, this man—called "the Kid" by his solitary companion—lounged in the corner, leaning against the side of the car, hands deep in his pockets. His hard eyes followed the activity of Shack; his upper lip curled once or twice in disdain at this "shaking down" of those who had little. Yet the scene was an old one to him. Now, with the brakeman drawing near to him, his elbows lifted to the side of the car, his body at ease, and in that simple movement came another evidence—peculiar this evidence, too, rather startling when one is not accustomed to it—of the man's semblance of power. He had merely drawn his hands from his pockets, and leaned backward at his ease; yet one sensed the immediate focusing of the faculties of his mind and body.

Towhead grinned nervously, peering up at the red-haired man.

"He's going to work us over, Kid," Towhead muttered.

The other smiled, his hard gaze not waver- ing from the eyes of the brakeman, who stood before him.

"Well-well-well!"—heartily from Shack. "Nearly missed you two, eh?"

No answer. Still the waiting, nervous grin from Towhead, and the cold smile from the tall man.

"Well, whatcha got on yuh!" Shack

barked. "Don't look s'prised. Make it snappy!"

Shack's hand went out, a grasping gesture. The Kid moved one arm ever so slightly, pushing away the advancing fingers—merely a quick, capable motion, with no lost movement.

"None o' that!" Shack snarled. "Hand me somepin! Pay your—"

"I'll hand you a bat in the teeth," the Kid said quietly. He did not move from his easeful position, his two arms still V'd against the wall of the car; he spoke the words calmly yet with full meaning. No mistaking his meaning.

"That's what I'll hand *you*," he added after a pause.

Shack spluttered futilely.

"Go on away and leave us alone." The Kid turned his back to the man, leaned against the steel sides of the car, watched the flitting landscape. Towhead stood eager, nervous, ready to leap should the occasion come. But it did not come. After an instant of wavering the brakeman turned away, cursed heavily, climbed from the pipe-car to the ladder of the box-car in front, looked down from his perch, snarled and disappeared.

"Well, that's *that*," Towhead murmured, and smiled in relief.

"Yes, that's that, Dake," the big man agreed.

Silently watchful through this, the others now awakened to life. Rising jeers follow the brakeman. Menacing eyes glared after him.

"Wonder how much he got?" Narrow-chest questioned.

"More'n two dollars," Structural Steel volunteered. "I watched him as he tuk it."

"Aw, Gawd, I on'y hope I meet that bird out alone, some dark night!" Narrow-chest was a vindictive creature. "Aw, Gawd, I hope I meet that guy out alone! I'll take that knife away from him an' rip his guts out with it. That's what I'll do."

A ripple of laughter swept the men. One, called "Swede," scoffed.

"That's nothin'. Wait'll you've been on the road's long's me. I've had 'em take razors an' knives an' buttonhooks. A shack on the damned S. P. took the buttonhook, one time, an' I had a hell of a time keepin' my shoes on, all one morning, till I bummed another pair o' dog-houses, that laced up."

"It's cheap, at that," another averred.

"Sure it is. Take the U. P., now. It's

a hard road to ride. I'd rather pay a little fare, like this, than git croaked wit' a blackjack."

"Sure. Any guy would."

The train was slowing up. The seventeen dropped from the pipe-car, joining other wanderers who dropped from other cars until half a hundred men shuffled along the right-of-way toward the water-tank. At the first north-and-south road, stopping to read a sign that gave directions, the group split. Several looked thoughtfully over the thin array of houses that dotted the crossroads. Visions of possible breakfasts were in their eyes.

CHAPTER II

SOMEWHAT after this fashion had passed four years of the Florida Kid's life. Nearly seven hundred more or less colorful days had been spent in France (where he was Sergeant Carlton), days that had been somewhat as the meat in a sandwich, and as the spices on the meat; but on both the top and bottom layers of this scope of years were the months of wandering. Those of his friends and neighbors who, four years and more before, had known Thomas Noyes Carlton, in Hilltop, Florida, would have never recognized in him the hobo who faced down the brakeman, on that morning as the Indiana town was approached.

In Hilltop—so named because at high tide the gallery of the largest house is twenty-nine feet above sea-level—the Florida Kid was "Daddy" Carlton to a small circle of friends, made up almost exclusively of the male sex, and even more exclusively of those men who came from inland cities to lure from the blue and green waters the battling tarpon, the gamey sea-trout, the blackfish, the redfish and other members of the finny tribe. Daddy, he was called, and the term was in recognition of the young man's quiet demeanor, his self-effacement, his habit of slow, sparse speech. In the opinion of this small circle of friends he was aged greatly beyond his years. He was one who pored over books, who dreamed daydreams, who gave his idle hours to the perfection of new tackle—lighter and more efficient, which nevertheless gave the fish a greater chance against the fisherman; one who studiously sought out new fishing-grounds for the men who hired him with his boat, the *Pensacola Gal*.

Forsaking the water for a brief season, he had entered the service of Hillson Brothers, who kept the general store. This was during one July, August and September, when the green-flies swarmed and when the storms, threatening, kept away the fishing men. After that brief trial, twelve to fourteen hours a day back of the counters, Daddy Carlton definitely decided that a life of mercantile endeavor was not to be in his scheme of things, and he went back to his boats, his tackle, his books and to the further accumulation of wisdom that made him the best boatman on the Sound.

CARLTON'S father, an archeologist and writer, had come to the Florida coast to study, for the book he then was writing, certain Indian mounds on the shores near Hilltop. This was when Thomas Noyes was seven years old. The following September, when the boy was eight, a gale upset the boat that carried his father, two miles out in the Gulf. The body was washed ashore with the next incoming tide, washed to the long white bar that divided mainland from Gulf, and was buried close to the father's beloved mounds.

With the small resources at her command, the widow chose to remain in the village. First of reasons for this was that there a family of two could live comfortably on ten dollars a week; the second was that she was convinced the community was a clean one in which to rear her son.

At the age of thirteen the boy was within three-fifths of a second of the world's record in one or two swimming events; at fourteen he had perfected two minnows, a sinker and a floater, that on four-foot casting rods were supreme lures to the speckled trout; at fifteen he was credited with being one of the most knowing boatmen on the Sound, which covered a distance of about thirty miles, east and west, by several miles north and south.

With the aid of his spring and summer earnings from the *Gal* he contrived to enter the high school in Pensacola. On each Saturday and Sunday, and in the short vacations, he added to these earnings.

So the years went on—dreamy, quiet years without the spur of actual necessity; dreamy, quiet days on the broad waters of Cholococo Bay; dreamy, quiet nights when, his boat anchored at the mouth of the bay, above the pile of bricks that marked the place where a barge had sunk, he watched

and aided while some city fisherman landed his catch; dreamy, quiet hours when it rained and when he read, or worked over the boats pulled up in a shed.

It was in his seventeenth year that his mother was laid away at the side of his father. Following that, the son grew into greater quietness, continued his senior term in high school, finished the year and kept the house, with its acre of earth, exactly as his mother had kept it.

AS Thomas Noyes grew out of his youth, thoughts of the future years began to beat into the quiet hours. Men from the North, and from the cities of Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi, came down to fish, became his regular customers and grew fond of the boy. Yet they brought freely of the discontent the world had brought to them. Many began to offer freely of their advice (undoubtedly very sincere in the belief that he was wasting his time in this place), and spoke largely of a young man's opportunities, hinting of the marvelous fortunes that awaited in the world outside, to the boy who was content and happy, the boy who knew real happiness, not the vagrant pleasure that with so many passes for the genuine.

Dimly he began to envision this outside world as it was arrayed in the newspapers he read; idly, at first, he began to picture it as the place where men fought steadily, fought against everything and for anything; vaguely, after a little time, he began to arrive at the conclusion that adventure lay in this great outside space, adventure to be sought, confronted and overcome, through which deeds one must win to great reward. These men from the outside were right: nothing ever happened in Hilltop; the maze of days was an endless stream of the commonplace; the alarms and adventures, the wealth and power, the position and tense moments that all this strangeness brought with it, must be sought outside the place where he was happiest, the place where, he believed, he most truly fitted.

An old doctor, retired after many hard years, brought most of this discontent, and brought it unknowingly—though some of it, also, came from books, for youth possesses the power to live in the scenes of the pages. But the doctor furnished most of the argument against the way of life on the Sound, furnished it unknowingly and by force of contrast.

Nearly blind, I was," the doctor would explain, time upon time. He seemed to like to dwell on his rise in the world. He was born in England, and a long residence in the United States had not dissipated a slight accent. Thomas Noyes knew his voice as agreeable, and appreciated the half-confidences it brought.

"Studied until I was nearly blind," the doctor would go on. "Came to the United States, and was about broke when I hit the land. Punched cattle—was an officer. Got back my sight, came down here and married. Different people, then—not the chances you have now. You've got to go out and get it, though—got to fight for it. It wont come to you, holed up here month after month. You've got to go after it! Any man can get rich if he goes out to get it."

"Any man?" the boy would inquire, for already he had the delving mind. "Aren't some men peculiarly fitted to get wealth, while others are not so fitted?"

"Bunk! It's what you go after. You get the thing you drive for."

CAME discontent to Thomas Noyes. Came the time when the people of Hilltop, for whom he had cared greatly and had respected fully, began to appear as futile, aimless, drifting. Came the time when the great pull to go out and battle and win began to strive against his love for the water, for his books, for the quiet hours. It was a time of disturbance, discontent striving with content, the unknown laughing at and deriding the known.

Came the increasing discontent when he began to look upon himself as an idler in a life that called to men of deeds; came the quickening belief that he had but to go forth, grasp, cling to and win; came the poring over the literature of discontent, the books and magazines that feature the great success, the absorbing tales of success that must come, that would come, irrespective of the capabilities, brain, liking, power, mental or physical fitness for the end sought.

Anything is possible that is gone after! One has but to go forth, determine, seek the goal and receive the reward. Stick-to-it-iveness—guts, determination, spine, will! All became heavily exclamatory virtues that spelled success. One had but to advance, stick to it, determine and win. The recipe was simple.

And simple it appeared to Thomas

Noyes, in his questioning time. Except for the questions! What if one desires not a success of the sort set forth in the books? What if one asked for but happiness, a quiet life, doing that which appealed as best to that person, irrespective whether the doing made for the "greatest efficiency" or merely had to do with heart-pulling urges? Just happiness, whether in overalls, broadcloth, cottage or mansion, with a bank-account or without a bank-account? Just happiness—pure, plain, unworrying happiness. Not pleasure, not the evanescent element that comes for an instant like the taste of a sweet and is followed by the indigestion of discontent. Not this, but happiness, the joy of a well-fed way of life. It was little to ask, he believed. Yet the world cared not for those that asked little, he reminded himself; the world was waiting for those that fought and won. Failure? There was no failure when one was girded with the armor of determination, spine, and guts!

"But," Thomas Noyes objected, in an hour when the doctor had been especially emphatic, "don't you believe that many of these others, these failures, are as happy as those whose success stories we hear? These people in Hilltop—take Jim Plummer, who fishes and carries the mail and who has been to Pensacola but three times in two years: how would you line out Jim? He has his house, his boats, a little education and three or four children. He's a dead one, perfectly contented with everything, doesn't worry about anything. But isn't he happy? That's the big question that comes to me. Do the Jim Plummers—and I may be one of them—ask that—"

"Don't let yourself get that idea!" the doctor interrupted. "I reckon the Jim Plummers are content, as you call it. But are they valuable? To life?"

"I don't know," the youth worried. "Jim's a producer, in a way. He does his little bit for life. Not much, but as much as he's capable—"

"That's the thought! What would he have been capable of doing had he put himself in the way of being capable? What might he have done? How rich, powerful might he have become?" Thus the fertilizing of the germ of discontent. "He's fossilized. Why, boy, it must be torture for you to think of passing your life in this sort of way! You can't even think of it. Get out! Find out what you can do. Give your capabilities their op-

portunity. You owe it to yourself—to your nation! Every man must be a producer to his greatest ability. Get the idea?”

“Yes-s. . . . To his greatest ability.”

BY little and little the questions fell away until, overborne by this urge from the outside, and by the new, mysterious call from within, his course became suddenly quite plain. He called David Higgins into the yard of the home place and pointed to the house.

“Pay the rent to Hillson,” Carlton told him. “I’m going outside. Hillson will keep up the taxes and repairs.” Hillson Brothers were by way of being bankers to the little community. “I’m going to look around. Come here!” He led the way to various places in the yard. “Keep these roses as they are,” he indicated. “Trim this vine as it’s now trimmed. Keep this walk from the house to the mounds free from weeds. Put some shells on it, when it needs them. Understand?”

Higgins nodded. He had known Carlton’s mother and felt the unspoken reasons back of the careful requests.

“When’ll you be back?” he asked.

“I don’t know. When I— Take care of my books. The *Gal* should be calked. That green skiff needs a new painter. If you run short of ready money, and a big repair is necessary, see John Hillson. I’ll arrange that. We’ll settle when I come back.”

Carlton left Hilltop that night.

He was then nearing his twentieth year, a man in stature, a quiet, plodding, thinking man who felt he had in some way missed his boyhood. He believed he now was seeking it, to be followed by a successful, resounding manhood.

CAME the intermittent labor that falls to the lot of the wanderer, the labor that somehow kept his body together. Came the war; and Thomas Noyes, then in the state of New York, felt the call to arms. It promised new adventure, and he was not disappointed. Came the days in France, and afterward the wandering again. But success, the quick battles and great rewards of his dreams, came not. He became the itinerant workman, a capable workman while he labored, but one afflicted with the germ of unrest, who felt that he was pursuing false calls or no calls at all. He was afloat. Strange places,

new scenes, harbors without anchor and the spacious pastures over the next hill filled the days of his quest. Success—he had never even glimpsed it.

And now credulity would have reached the breaking-point had these quiet people of Hilltop seen the quiet, plodding boy who had left them, become this hobo who battled with and for the other road-rats—who mooched his chuck with the other stiffs of the long road, who rode trains without the formality of buying tickets, on decks, blinds, bumpers and rods—who had made four complete circuits of the country, Lakes to Gulf and coast to coast, who knew the secrets of many jungles, the desirability of innumerable “flops,” and the insides of a dozen jails and lockups—who was, in fine, a dyed-in-the-wool stiff, an itinerant workman, one of the country’s average crop of half-million hoboese. To the people of Hilltop all this would have verged on the impossible.

Yet they would have found Thomas Noyes Carlton in some ways the same, though in others greatly changed. The one-time gravity had been polished to a needle sharpness, refined in the unceasing contact with the diamond-hard surface of the world; the tall, stoop-shouldered frame had knitted into a body wide of shoulder and deep of chest; the red hair was darker and usually now more tousled; the calm gray eyes had become cold gray eyes, unwavering, weighing, merciless at times. The nerve that had sometimes questioned, in the Hilltop days, now hesitated at no normal or abnormal hazard in the wanderer’s life. From the quiet, studious boy of twenty had evolved the quiet, hard-boiled man of twenty-five—a leader of hoboese, fully accepted by them, and worshiped by one at least, the boy Duke.

In all this change was also an exchange of a sort. For every element taken by life from Thomas Noyes, another element had been given to the Florida Kid. For cleanliness had come disorder; for content, discontent; for timidity had come hard nerve; for innocence of a sort, wisdom of the deepest; for a steady belief, a steady disbelief. When the world takes, it also gives. It is a way of the world.

Out of this boiling mess was coming, however, a resolve, born of a belief, a restraining thought that was a dressing to the Kid’s salad of life. The ingredients of this salad were unknown to him, but this he did know: he was drifting; the drifting

took him nowhere; the success that had been painted and held up to him—where was Success?

The Kid was questioning as he roamed.

CHAPTER III

UNCEASING change marked the months of wandering, change that brought the men nothing to further their lives, change that grew wearisome in its very monotony of variety. They knew, to a daily certainty, that they would awaken to the ob-scenity of the "jungle-up" breakfast or to the stench of the flop-house; the day would be passed, they knew, largely in evading the eyes of the law, or the eyes of those that passed, looking askance on the hoboes. They knew that night would draw near to compel again the dirt of another flop-house, or the terrible chill of the out-doors, or the muck of some shed or out-building. Stench, always stench. And they called this adventure! At times these wanderers worked, perhaps a day, a week, a month; then on again, at the call of the itching foot. Always they were pariahs, outcasts, objects beyond the law, lawless by very truth of their wandering. Mothers frightened children with the words, "I'll give you to the tramps." Officers cursed them on, beat them on, prodded them on—always on, always on.

Unceasing change, peculiar happenings, but all tinged with the unclean, the destructive, the unavailing.

THE KID sat at his campfire, in a "jungle" beside a railroad-track, singeing strips of bologna held in the flames on the end of a pointed stick, and tending a can of coffee that boiled in the hot ashes. Dake, at his side, also had the pointed stick and the bologna. It was the day on which the Kid had met Dake, at Fifth and Vine streets, near the fountain. Following an afternoon of rambling over the city, hastily turning corners when a uniformed man or "plain-clothes dick" drew near,—the wanderer acquires an instinct that recognizes all men of the law,—they had turned their steps to the railroad. Now they sat at their meat.

From a second fire, five or six feet away, came the voice of an aged wanderer. Both Dake and the Kid, as their foreheads fried in the heat, listened to this voice.

"Some old-timer, eh?" Dake grinned.

Half a dozen boys ringed the old-timer's fire, hearkening to his words, receiving instructions in the art of begging. Old-timer's speech was that of a man from the Isles, perhaps, with a burr over the r's. It is impossible to reconstruct it with type.

"There's always places in every town," he was saying, "that's good for battering. Nuns' houses, and those places where you'll find the Fathers and preachers, homes of the workingmen and the like. Now, supposing you was battering a tenement house,"—he called it "tinnimint 'ouse,"—"how would you go at it?"

A period of thought. Then, from one lad:

"Well, I'd go in, knock on a door and give 'em a good spiel."

"Which door?" Old-timer insisted.

"The first one I hit. I b'lieve in tak-in'—"

Old-timer snorted in great disgust.

"Sure you would! You'd gallop in, batter a door and get nothing. Here's the way to work it: Go to the top floor and work down. They can't see you coming, then. Never start at the bottom, never work the first door you see. If you do, when you knock, every woman in the dump will poke her head over the railing and say to herself, 'It's one of them darn tramps,' and when you reach her door she wont be to home. Go to the top and work down! Keep that in mind. They can't see you coming; they'll think you're a friend come for a visit."

While this bit of wisdom was soaking in, the group was silent. Old-timer continued:

"About flops: work the light plants. They're warm, and the night man may let you sleep over the boilers. In most towns you can find flop-houses, where they'll bed you down for a jitney or two. There's the station-houses, too, where they'll let you sleep, at times; but the hell of them is that there may be city drunks in them, and you, can't sleep. Watch out for horstile towns. Talk with the lads on the road; they'll wise you up."

"Don't go to looking for signs on fences and water-tanks that'll tell you where to batter. That's all bunk. There may be mobs of yeggs that has such signs, but I've been on the road for twenty-three years, and I'm damned if I know anything about 'em."

Old-timer poked a stick into the fire, adjusted the can in which coffee was boiling, laboriously stretched his creaking joints.

"Let me tell you about places to batter," he offered. "Don't go into the swell residence part, except in very little towns. Don't go into the places that is all new. Keep away from the houses that is trimmed up with vines and has a little dog running around after his tail in the back yard, and a fancy thing to hang clothes on. Keep away! The people that lives in them houses is paying for them by the month, and whatever they have left over, the dog gets it.

"Go down to the other part of town, where the old woman is washing in the back yard, where there's six or seven kids around her. She'll cuss you, but she'll feed you."

He lifted an impressive forefinger, coated with grime.

"Now, get this: I've been hitting the road for twenty-three years, and I know my stuff. Get this: I work sometimes in the winter, when I can't get to the Coast or New Orleans. And get this: I know my stuff!"

He went on with his instructing. Dake grinned across at the Kid.

"I'll say he knows his stuff, eh. A real old bundle stiff, I guess. There aint many of them left."

A note of admiration was in Dake's words.

Nodding slowly, thoughtfully, the Kid made no answer. Squatting before his fire, narrowly watching Old-timer, a hint of question crept into the Kid's eyes. This old bundle stiff—of which few were left—who spread his teaching of beggary and idleness to the willing circle of boys: was there in this old stiff the picture of what he, the Kid, was to be in the years to come? Would he too sit in a jungle, his body covered with lice and rags, filthy with the scales of uncleanness? Would he too sit beside a beggar's fire, in some far-distant vista down the years, and out of his experience proclaim the teachings of the parasite? Was this to be his portion of life? Was he, through his actions of today, preparing this condition for the morrow?

Somehow, in the weeks that had dipped themselves into the near past, these and other similar questions had beaten at the Kid.

LABOR DAY in Charleston, West Virginia. The Kid and Dake, with three other wanderers, had been chased off an

east-bound train on the C. & O., in the early hours of the morning, and were forced to drop off in South Charleston. They were on their way to the Coast, intending to work down into the warmer States for the winter. Daylight crept above the mountains as the five men crouched above a tiny fire.

"Ever made this place before?" one asked.

Dake gave answer. "Yeah. Town's over there." He pointed to the north, across a long bridge. "There's a jungle over there, along the K. & M."

Seeking breakfast with the coming of daylight, the five paid their tolls and crossed the long bridge. Dake, by virtue of his superior knowledge of the possibilities of the city, became leader.

"We'll batter the west side," he directed. "It's across another bridge. Lots of workmen over there, and the mooching should be good."

Breakfast supplied by the residents of the district on the west side of Elk River, the five men loafed in the jungles until nearly noon. The three strangers then announced their intention to turn back on their journey, going north on the K. & M.

"Too much mine war down here," they said. "A guy don't know when he's goin' to get bumped off or have something hung on him. Nobody gives a damn for a hobo, anyhow. We're goin' to take the B. & O., an' go over that way."

WATCHING them depart, Dake and the Kid found no pangs in the leavetaking. The five had met in Cincinnati on the noon of the previous day, and had traveled together merely because it was easier than avoiding each other.

Calls of hunger making themselves felt again after the three men had left, the Kid and Dake started out to "batter the residence stem."

It was a day of rest for the workingmen, each front porch holding its quota of occupants, the wife sewing or reading, the husband with his feet on the railing, smoking, idling. With practiced eye Dake looked over the houses in one block.

"That green one, over there," he decided at last. The Kid nodded in agreement.

Now, in the eyes of Dake there lurked an appealing light, a humorous mark of fellowship that he had found went well with the women of the houses. For this reason, equipped with the better artillery

for the attack, Dake had willingly taken upon himself the getting of food. He now advanced, his slender body held carefully erect, his battered cap in one hand, his eyes smiling upon the fat woman who rocked on the porch of the green house. The Kid waited at the gate.

"Madam," Dake began, "we're two boys that's down here hunting work, and we can't find it till tomorrow. We have had nothing to eat since yesterday morning. We don't like to moo—beg our meals, but we're hungry. That's all there is to it," he finished earnestly; "we're hungry as dogs."

It was the pearl of an appeal, backed as it was by Dake's appearance, his frank countenance. It should have caused the veriest dyspeptic to look upon the world with happier eyes. But it made no apparent impression upon the woman—or on her man, who went calmly on with his reading.

"I aint got a thing," she said firmly.

"Madam," Dake continued, "you wouldn't turn away two hungry men. I know you wouldn't. You aint that—"

"I aint got a thing," she reiterated, this time more forcefully.

"Madam, aint you even got a piece of bread and meat?"

"Not a thing, I told you." Her body straightened aggressively. Her man went on with his reading.

"Not even a piece of bread?" Dake's voice was heaved with misery. "Just a piece of dry bread, even."

"I've told you for the last time," she snapped, "that I aint got nothing! Now, get out!"

Dake's head waggled sorrowfully; his tongue clicked in commiseration. However, his active thoughts were weighing the means of his sudden flight, that would be certain to follow upon his next words.

"Madam," he said gravely, "you're worse off than I thought. Ts-ts-ts! I'll get out, but I want to make this offer: I'm the best little moocher in the world, and if you'll just give me a big basket, I'll go out and get you more chuck than you've seen in a month!"

Dake was halfway to the front gate when the sound of the heavy laughter of the man on the porch halted him. The youngster turned, wondering. Neighbors craned their necks to ascertain the cause of the man's uncontrollable mirth.

"Kate!" The workman roared his

command to his wife. "That's too good! Come on in, boy. You eat here. Come on in!" he called to the Kid. "Your buddy has won you a meal!"

And, as Dake would have said, that was that.

THUS it went, the unknown mingling with the unexpected, always the unexpected. In one instant danger that leaped into laughter, into horseplay, into tears, into flight, into the edge-places of crime. And on and on and on. Always the unexpected; and that had been a part of the lure, at first. But there had come the knowledge of unprofitable days, days that reached no goal. Never the opportunity to hesitate, to weigh, plan, lay lines for the future. Naught but change, change, change that led nowhere; unceasingly running in circles that beat back upon each other, and carried down to old age, down to poverty, beggary—down to what? What?

To what did it lead? Where were the years going? To what advantage were the Kid and Dake spending their wealth of days and youth, the months that were their portion of riches?

These were the questions that were coming to the Kid.

CHAPTER IV

FOLLOWED weeks of aimless wandering, weeks in which questions of the future were forgotten, after the trip into Florida failed to materialize. Wanderers met in a junction near Baltimore told of terrific living- and labor-conditions in the States of the South. A drive was on against hoboes. Florida was gathering them in and shipping them to the turpentine camps; Alabama was working them on roads; Georgia also believed road work should be the drifters' portions.

With these conditions reported, Dake and the Kid turned back, and with the loss of objective it seemed that all definiteness had mysteriously vanished. The two youngsters merely fell into the current, figuratively turned their backs and allowed the winds of chance to carry them about. Once, in a futile way, the Kid mentioned this to Dake.

"This is getting us nowhere," he said, breaking into a long silence.

"Eh? What?" Dake came out of a half-doze. They were in central Tennessee,

and it was extremely warm fall weather. Both men were stretched in the shade of a haystack. Dake's arms were locked beneath his head; his eyes were closed. "What's getting us nowhere?" he asked.

"What's roaming about."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Everything. Can't you see—feel the changing of yourself? Last night, for instance, you were attracted to that bunch of wobblies. You've sneered at them, before. Now you're falling for their bunk."

"Oh, they aint so bad," Dake believed. "There's some good fellows with them. They're—"

"Fellows like yourself," the Kid said seriously. "They've fallen for the bunk—organized idleness. The I. W. W. bunch are getting at the wrong end of the handle—the hot end. Sixty per cent of them wouldn't work if they got the opportunity; thirty per cent are radicals that have been thrown out of other organizations; ten per cent are just plain fools. They are creat—"

"Well," Dake said with a grin, "you get us a job of work that we'll both like, and I'll stay on it till the devil skates on hell. What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Nothing, except I've been wondering what we're drifting to—what we'll be, ten years from now?"

"You go a long way into the future to find your trouble," Dake grunted. "Forget it. When we get ready to stop, we'll stop. We'll stick some place and get married and raise us a family. Then everything'll be jake. This is pretty soft, right now, I think."

"We're wasting," the Kid mused. "We're cheating—"

"Aw, what do you want to do? Get a job on a sewer-gang, or down in some coalmine, or on the streets? Think that'd lay up shekels for the old age? That's the work we hoboes capture—the stuff the home boy wont do. That's our speed."

Dake turned over, shielding his face from the creeping sun. "You're a funny bird," he added, and grinned.

The Kid made no reply. And it was this that he was beginning to feel—that it was becoming increasingly hard to carry his end of the argument, or even the thoughts, that had risen so valiantly within him before. By little and little he found himself falling into the grooves of thought of the other drifters he met in his wanderings. Once or twice, to his unmeasured surprise, he found

himself even railing at the Fates that seemed to surround him, tie him, oppress him. He knew these arguments were all fallacious. But where before he had laughed, or sneered at the mouthy ravings of the malcontents, he was beginning to find himself agreeing with them.

And this frightened him, when he allowed himself to think of it.

THUS the Kid and Dake drifted through the States. Dake felt no fear of the future; Dake dreamed no dreams; Dake knew no impulses beyond those of the flesh, daily. One day he explained something of his condition and aspirations.

"I'm doing just the thing I've always wanted to do," he said. "When I was at home, in Harristown, Pennsy, my old man beat hell out of me every day as long as I can remember. On Sunday he fought me to Sunday-school—I think I'd have liked the Old Testament lessons, if he hadn't pounded them into me. I hated Sunday-school. I'm not very good at figures, and he tried to teach them to me by beating me.

"I always said I was going to have a good time when I got old enough to be my own boss," he continued, "and I'm doing it. I'm just having the time of my life, now. I'm not giving one damn what happens. Ever feel that way?"

"Sometimes," the Kid acknowledged.

"I guess you had a better time than I did," Dake mused. "That's why this hobo stuff don't set so well with you."

The two drifted on, passing through a hundred cities and hamlets, slinking through them, watchful for the eyes of authority, growing increasingly careless, as the weather increased its chill, of their personal and bodily appearance. In the warm months it was no trick to shave beside a stream, or even to dip one's body into the water and to wash one's garments, after a fashion. But with the approach of winter, this changed. Working during a week in Kentucky, the two men found themselves possessed of money sufficient to purchase extra shirts, which they donned over two other shirts, and extra trousers, slipped on over overalls. They began to assume a choked, bundled appearance; they found they must exert unusual agility in catching the trains, hampered as they were with the multiplicity of garments.

And it seemed that the chill of coming winter congealed the spark of ambition

that had burned in the Kid in the summer and fall months. Rapidly and more rapidly he allowed himself to accept each hour as it came; with increasing ease he slept through the days, after filling his stomach at the back door of some house; and he rose with the sunset, prepared to catch a train that would carry him somewhere—somewhere.

Dake and the Kid came to a Middle Western State. It was a dismal day, a steady rain falling, and chill winds cutting: November. In a box-car, in which the two men were passing the daylight hours, the Kid came upon a week-old newspaper, and after reading it he sat long in silence, gazing out the opened car door, watching a light wagon, drawn by a pair of mules, drag through the mud of the road that bordered the tracks.

"We'll ride into town, tonight," he said at last, and a trace of jubilation was in his tones. "We'll ride north."

"North!" Dake objected. "We'll freeze to death. We'd better keep on down through Oklahoma and Texas, as we laid out to do."

"No, it's north. About fifty miles. Were you in the war, buddy?"

"Seven months in a training-camp. Limited service. I got a bum left eye."

"This is a gathering of the boys, in the city we'll make," the Kid explained. "It starts tomorrow, this paper says. This is Sunday, isn't it?"

"Sunday? No, Wednesday."

"You're crazy. This is Sunday."

"Mebbe it is. A guy can't keep the days, rambling."

"There's a gathering—a convention. We'll make it. There'll be times, there."

"Oh, well," Dake agreed, "if that's it, we'll make it."

THIS was one of the advantages of the wandering life, the Kid exulted; destination could be changed at will. No strings hampered; no burdens obligated; no tasks chafed. Merely it was a matter of decision. The Kid grinned as this thought came with Dake's easy acquiescence, and the grin lifted into a light that warmed his body, as he also thought of the gathering he was determined to attend.

For a week, he exulted, he would not be the Kid, a wanderer, but he would be a personality—he would be Sergeant Carlton of the 91st—"Devil" Carlton, should he meet any of his old buddies. Undoubtedly

he would meet them, and there would be days of jollification that would bring back the days of France, all the hell of them with the lure of them. Man-talk, there'd be, light music, laughter. For seven days he would walk again in a man's clean image.

Speculatively he glanced down at the jeans trousers that clad his lower body and at the grease-marked, rumpled coat that covered his shoulders. His fingers touched the four-day growth of whiskers on his chin and cheek. For months, after coming from France, he had managed to shave each day; then he had skipped a day; gradually he fell into the habit of allowing seven days to pass. He knew this to be a breaking of his mental fiber, but it gave him no active concern. A week's growth of beard, he knew, was not as serious as a week's propagation of lice on his body. And this propagation was present and active.

Now, in the seven days to come, he would be Sergeant Carlton. He would find a uniform—his chevrons and the shoulder insignia of his division were safe in his pocket with his discharge papers.

While he was seated in the car on a rain-soaked sidetrack, waiting for the whistling of a night train, he mused over the possibilities—wondered if he would see or meet women at the gathering he was determined to attend, wondered if they would be as gracious as those of his training-camp days.

Remembrance of the old days, and nights, coming back, he felt himself filling with a sudden hunger for women's society. And as he crouched in the door of the car, just without the circle of rain, a girl came into view, picking her path along the muddy crossing, a hundred feet away. At first, as the Kid watched her, he thought her outrageously fat, but as she went slowly from island to island in the sea of mud, he began to believe she bore some measure of attraction.

Watching her, he wondered if her lips were hot, as that girl's in Brest had been hot, the long-waisted girl in Brest. He wondered whether this plump girl—she had gone from outrageously fat merely to plump, now—would close her eyes when kissed, her head relaxing, drawing the man's head back with hers, forcing his lips to follow her lips.

Unheeding of the eyes that watched her, the girl negotiated the crossing and went stolidly on her way. As she passed out of

sight, the Kid breathed deeply, a breath heavy with pent emotion, and leaped to his feet.

"Let's get out of this!" he snarled. "Let's give this town the once-over."

"Out in this rain?" Dake moaned.

"Sure, out in this rain. Out anywhere!"

"You're a funny bird," Dake gave opinion. "We'll be pinched, sure."

"No, we wont. They don't pinch ex-service men who are on their way to a convention of the buddies. Got your discharge papers?"

"I'll say so. I keep *them*."

"Let's go, then. We're all right."

CHAPTER V

TRANSPORTATION was obtained that night by virtue of the discharge papers. Climbing aboard a through freight that had stopped at the tank, Dake and the Kid dodged between two cars and clambered to the bumpers. A brakeman saw them and approached silently, quickly flashing his lantern upon them.

"Get the hell offa this," he snarled. "Beat it!"

"Listen, Cap," the Kid said quickly. "Let us ride, tonight. We want to get to the city. We want to make that convention. We haven't seen any of the boys since we came back, and—"

"You over?" the shack asked, eying them narrowly.

"I was," the Kid explained. "My buddy was hooked up in a training-camp—limited service. "We've—"

"Don't hang on outside, then," the shack snapped. "Get back to the caboose. The con's all right. He had a boy over there. Duck, now! Grab the front end of the dog-house when she starts out."

Dake and the Kid obeyed.

The brakeman sat in the caboose with them, when the train was under way.

"My name's Kelly," he said. "I was over with a machine-gun company."

He looked up from the discharge papers Dake and the Kid had given him.

"A sergeant, eh?" he said, and there was a measure of new respect in his voice. "Gee, you're a lucky bird. In some ways I'd rather be a sergeant than colonel. It's a sign you probably have more guts. First-class private was best I got."

As they whistled for the yards, Kelly sprang to his feet.

"Listen," he said, reaching for the lantern, "you go up to the yard office when we pull in. Wait for me. I live at the other end of my run, but I got a room here. Got any jack?"

Dake nodded. "Fourteen dollars," the Kid replied.

"We're settin' pretty," Kelly observed. "I'll see you at the yard office. Tell 'em you're waiting for Kelly, if they ask—and that you came with the other boys. That'll make it all right. This burg belongs to us guys, for the second time in our lives—this week and when we left for camp. I've got me a four-day layoff, and I'm going out among 'em. Wait for me."

This Kelly was a dynamic individual. His words were shot from hard jaws, and battered on the ears of listeners; his body continually was in action. He seemed built on springs. The Kid, more deliberate in action and speech, watched with a grin as the brakeman jumped for the door, tore it open and, aided by the motion of the train, slammed it back of him. Dake sighed.

"Some good boy, that bird," he said.

"He's all right. Bet he had a good time in the war."

Dake laughed. "He's all right, though," he insisted.

"Sure he is," the Kid agreed. "Bet he ran after every shell as it blew up, to see what made it go. He's great."

"I'll say he is. We'll stick with him."

"We will that. I need some one to show me this village."

There was a quality in the last words that brought Dake's head around. He looked the Kid over speculatively.

"Hell!" Dake breathed. "We'll sure take the lid off of this old town!"

"Watch me," the Kid promised.

"Now, me," Dake went on, after a little pause, "I want whisky—real whisky. I'm going to get drunk—for once in my life I'm going to get drunk as a dog, and I'll be sure I wont get snagged for thirty or sixty days for it. And, I'm—"

"Better lay off that stuff," the Kid advised.

"It aint as bad as wild women," Dake defended his appetites. "I love booze."

The Kid shook his head slowly. "No virtue in me keeping away from it," he acknowledged. "Just that I don't care for the taste of it. I get sick before I get drunk, and I don't like to get sick. That's all there is to keeping sober, with me. If I liked it, I reckon I'd drink it."

"Save your share for me," Dake grinned.

Kelly's sharp voice cut into the words. The train was slowing up, the whistle cutting the air in short blasts. They had reached a crossing.

"Snap out of it, you guys!" Kelly barked. "Drop off here. The yard office is over there where you see those lights." He leaned to the window and pointed out the glow that spread itself upon the wet pane. "Wait for me." And he was gone—eyes, arms, body, voice moving.

"He barks like a first sergeant," Dake laughed as they picked their way to the yard office, entered and sat at one side on a long bench.

IN half an hour Kelly hurried in, looked about and beckoned to them.

"Let's go. Let's get this next car uptown."

He was out, striding on ahead. Dake and the Kid followed him over a network of tracks, up a flight of iron steps and on to a viaduct. Kelly ran forward, flagging a car that approached, and calling back to the two men. The three climbed aboard, and the car labored and whined up a long hill.

"Here we are," Kelly called again, after five minutes had passed. "This is our corner."

Outside, the rain had changed to a drizzle. Kelly and his charges stood upon a corner, as the car toiled up the hill, and watched the crowds that milled about them. Khaki was everywhere; hilarity was heavy on the night. Voices were lifting, or quavering, or croaking in song, as the vocal endowment of the singer made possible. Khaki-clad forms passed in twos and threes, in groups and singly, and everyone of these was attempting to lift his voice above his neighbor's.

"Looks like the night in France when the Armistice was signed," the Kid said.

"Sure does, don't it?" Kelly agreed. "Come on, you guys! Let's go and get cleaned up. Then we'll get out and mingle."

Following Kelly into the furnished room that was his stopping place at the western end of his run, the Kid bethought himself of the acquisition of uniforms for Dake and himself. There was absolutely no chance for a fellow, he mused, unless that fellow covered his frame with khaki, and then every opportunity would fall at that fellow's feet. No possibility there seemed,

either, of begging, borrowing or stealing a suit of tan; every garment in the possession of anyone already clothed some figure. No chance there was—but, hold! The trinity of possibilities of possession brought the inkling of an idea. Perhaps the uniforms could not be begged or borrowed; but about this third possibility? This bore the glimmer of a hope.

Talking volubly, ceaselessly, arms threshing over his head as he bent above the washbowl in his bathroom, soapsuds bubbling from his mouth in his eagerness for speech, Kelly filled his little room with sound. The Kid paced the floor, looking thoughtfully into the street below. At times in his pacing he halted at the window, watching those tan-clad men who traveled in pairs or singly. The plan held possibilities. He turned to Kelly.

"Will you wait here for me?" he asked hurriedly. "Half-hour?"

"What's the idea?"

"I've got to get our uniforms. I know a guy down the street that has two suits. He's—he's one of my pals. I want—"

"Wait'll I dress. We'll go with you," Kelly offered.

"I can get them while you're dressing. Save time."

He hurried away.

AS they had stepped from the car, the lines of a tall fence had caught his eye, and he was now making for it. It had had all the appearance of the fence surrounding a junkyard, and seemed to offer ideal conditions to his mission. Men had passed before it, men clad in khaki. The lights about it were scattered, throwing great stretches of the fence in deep shadow. That would be the place, he decided, for the acquiring of two suits. He moved away.

And then, above him, a sign caught his attention and brought another inspiration. The sign told of furnished lodgings; the building before which it swayed was tall and old and weatherbeaten; the very place that should house a number of men. A hag of a woman answered the finger he placed on the bell-button, and looked him over critically.

"I'm here at this convention," he told her. "My uniform is being pressed. I want a place to sleep. How are your rooms filled?"

She grunted. "I've got everything except two rooms filled with you fellers. You can have one of them."

"Good! I'm glad the boys are sleeping here," he said, striving for a rustic simplicity. "How many with you?"

"Oh, about forty," she growled. "I got one vacant room. It's four bits, in advance, baggage or no baggage."

The Kid laughed joyously.

The Kid exulted in the line-up of affairs. Things were shaping themselves better than he had dared hope. Forty men, more or less asleep. Forty men would certainly mean a considerable number of unlocked doors. He would be out of the place well within the half-hour, he believed.

And he was. There was no interruption to his search. The first room into which he crept held two occupants: he determined that by the split volume and syncopation of their snores—and this room yielded a suit of tan that would, the Kid believed, conveniently cover Dake's body. Carrying it away, after carefully going through the pockets and leaving their contents on a chair by the sleepers' bed, the Kid pressed a harkening ear to the crack of his door before venturing forth to accumulate another suit that would fit his own frame.

This time, after trying five doors and finding them locked, he entered the sixth room, stood in darkness long enough to accustom his eyes to the objects faintly visible in the light that filtered from the street, and harkened to the snores. They came, regular though subdued. Creeping to the bed, the Kid saw the dim bulk of clothing piled upon a chair, lifted the breeches he found, held them against his waist, and beheld in them a miraculous affinity.

Quickly going through the pockets, he found a great roll of bills, secured with an elastic band; a handful of silver was in a hip pocket of the breeches; a watch ticked in the pocket under the belt. These he laid carefully upon the chair, together with a notebook found in the blouse, and with the garments tucked under his arm and the cap perched jauntily upon one side of his head, he peered through the crack of the door. All was clear. He slipped back to his room.

EASY money, he exulted; it was duck-soup! Stripping off his battered clothing, he slipped arms and legs into the khaki. Leaning over to put on the leggings, a symbol on the sleeve of the blouse caught his eye. Twisting about, he inspected it in the light from the street, and found a sergeant's chevrons!

Rolling his body on the bed, muffling his laughter, he wondered why God had been so good to him!

Three minutes later he opened the door of the sergeant's room, poked inside the bundle of soiled clothing and closed the door. Five minutes later he was again in the street, the suit for Dake carefully folded, carried under one arm.

Outside, he had a qualm. He wished it might be possible to carry Dake's outfit back to the first room he had frisked—it was rough on a guy, the Kid felt, to deprive him of all clothing except his underwear, and in November, too. It might be, after Dake had changed, a way could be found to furnish that first guy with a change of clothing.

As he hurried back to Kelly's room, the Kid determined there would be a way. He wouldn't act like a dog with a buddy who was in town for a good time.

CHAPTER VI

IN the after years, when the Kid remembered the movements of that night, the picture outstanding above all others was that of the bath. Not that it was a bath strange in any way, except perhaps for the length of time intervening between it and the preceding one, but it assumed definite place in his memory that made it stand out with the distinctness of a mental semaphore above all the other events of the ensuing ten or twelve hours. And this was most remarkable when one takes into account that it was a wild night, almost an incredibly wild night.

The bath followed the Kid's return to Kelly's room. Dumping Dake's outfit of khaki on the bed, he winked warningly to Dake.

"My friends were at home," he said. "They rustled this stuff, right off the bat."

"You're lucky," Kelly grunted, busy with the appearance of his leg-wraps. "I didn't think they was two outfits to be had in this man's town." He nodded toward a door. "There's the bathroom. Make it snappy. We want to get uptown before the sleeping sickness hits everybody."

And that is how the Kid's bath came about. Perhaps the quality that caused it to linger in his memory lay in its unexpectedness, much after the fashion of meeting a pleasant, loved old friend after a long absence. At any rate, as he turned on the

taps and felt his body permeating with the steam that filled the little room, he knew for the first time in many moons the fullness of the epicure's satisfaction.

The Kid loved cleanliness, loved the feel of a clear, clean, glowing skin; loved the texture of it, the satisfaction, the knowledge, the tingling flesh, the air of buoyancy, everything that went with the cleansing of his body. For months he had been kept away from this experience; therefore his unmeasured pleasure in the unexpected bestowal of the moment.

As he stepped into the tub, he wished the minutes could be increased into hours—hours in which he might lie in the tub, sleep in the tub, with the water soaking, soaking, soaking into his pores. He felt his skin drinking greedily of it as he lowered his body slowly into the water, slowly, that he might the longer continue the luxury of it; he could almost feel his skin expand, stretch, taking in more of the cleansing, creamy, warm, soapy suds. Closing his eyes, he lay back, luxuriating in the minutes as they passed, until Kelly's rasping voice broke into the spell.

"Make it snappy!" Kelly barked. "It's almost midnight. We want to be out among 'em in half an hour. Make it snappy!"

The Kid grinned. Soaping his body leisurely, he took his full delight in the touch of the cleansing element on his neck, shoulders, back. The little trickles of water that ran from his fingers down his chest carried, too, their touch of delight.

"Take a dollar out of my pants," he called to Dake. "There's a place open around the corner. Hurry down and get me a union suit—forty-two's. Don't get any of that sticky stuff. And a pair of socks—elevens."

Came the clink of silver as Dake went through the pockets. Kelly was cursing and fuming, eager to be gone.

Dake returned with the inner garments, and the Kid stepped from the tub, standing in the middle of the bathroom, luxuriating in the new silkiness of his flesh as he polished with the rough towel his legs, chest, arms and shoulders. Stepping into the sleeping room, he glanced at the clock on the mantel. Fifteen minutes since he had started into the bathroom. Fifteen minutes!

He had believed it an hour or more.

A WILD night followed. The three men stood at Main and H streets, in the midst of a hurrying, laughing, milling

throng, and looked upon strange proceedings. A sailor stood on the manhole in the center of the intersection with a toy balloon in hand, directing traffic. One in the uniform of a soldier, jealous of the brief authority of the man in bell-bottomed trousers, came forth to do battle. Around and about the two went, in the midst of the crowd that quickly gathered and cheered them to fresh endeavors. From a corner a policeman watched, and laughed, as the battle proceeded. In a brace of minutes, reinforcements coming to the soldier, the sailor was carried away, still kicking, and the manhole felt the weight of a new director of traffic.

"He'll get his in a minute," Kelly remarked. "Come on—let's go 'way from here. This is kid's stuff. I'm lookin' for action, myself."

Halfway down the block, before a hotel, another mass of men crouched, stretched and elbowed their way to a central point. Kelly hesitated, turned aside and made for this point of interest, with Dake and the Kid at his heels. Voices came from the center of the group.

"Phebe! If you love me, win for me!"

Came the click of ivory as the dice rattled about in the speaker's hand; a tense instant, a following expletive; an exclamation.

"Hell, I knew I'd Phebe! I always Phebe. Phebe's mah mother's name. It's good to me. Shoot the twenty bucks. Who's down on me?"

A hundred men were gathered about the crap-shooters, and the tenseness of their actions told that this was no make-believe affair. It was real—as real as the silver and bills spread out on the pavement in the center of the ring. Kelly wormed his way through the mass, stretched to his toes and turned to the Kid.

"Gawd! There's fi' hundred bucks in that game. Let's set in it. This is my kind of stuff. Let's—"

The Kid shook his head. "I don't feel lucky. Tomorrow—I'll feel lucky, then."

The flash of color at a corner caught his eye. Several girls, laughing hilariously, were racing across the street, pursued by a band of roaring men.

"Let's go down there," the Kid suggested.

"When do I get my drink?" Dake worried, as the three made for the corner. "I want some honest-to-God whisky. I'm as—"

"Come on," Kelly commanded. "I'll show you. There's seven places in the next block."

As he led the way, Kelly explained the method of purchasing the liquor.

"You don't want no drink," he told Dake. "What we want is a bottle—a quart. It'll cost fifteen dollars, but if you buy it by the drink, it'll cost fifty bucks. We'll buy a quart and split the cost three ways."

MOUNTING broad stairs, after he had led Dake and the Kid off the street, Kelly entered a long room on the second floor of a building. An orchestra played in one end of the hall; little tables were strung about the sides and other end; Japanese decorations hung from walls and ceiling. There was the reek of closely packed bodies; the uproar of loosened tongues.

"My favorite bootlegger hangs out here," Kelly grinned as he twisted through the crowd. "Set at this table. Order a soft drink while I look for him. When he's gone, he leaves a kid here to take orders for him."

As they seated themselves, and as Dake's eyes greedily followed the sinuous twisting of the dancers, the Kid felt hands clutching at his shoulders and voices crying into his ears.

"At last!" he made out the words from the babel of sound. "Here's our three soldier boys! Come on, girls! Here's the three we've been looking for."

Dake and Kelly were grinning. The Kid turned and met the glances from three pairs of eyes, flashing eyes, and saw painted lips, cheeks heaved with carmine. Eyes and lips gathered close. A bold blonde—or one who now was blonde—was the apparent leader of the three.

"I told you I'd get me a sergeant, didn't I?" She turned to her companions, her hands on the Kid's arm. "My sweetie was a sergeant, an' I told you nothing else would do, didn't I?"

Her eyes and voice were tipsy; the Kid studied her speculatively, his eyes gradually narrowing appraisingly. She drew closer to him, slipping an arm over his shoulder, and lifted her full lips close to him.

"You aint dated up, are you?" she purred.

The Kid shook his head, and Blonde laughed uproariously.

"You jus' think you aint," she told him.

"You've been dated up since first I saw you, Sarge."

Chorus of answering laughter came from the other girls. Dake and Kelly continued grinning; then Kelly remembered the duties to guests.

"Set down," he invited cordially. His voice lowered confidentially as the three obeyed. "We've just ordered a bunch of soft stuff, but I know a bootlegger that hangs out here, and I'll get a bottle of Scotch, and—"

Blonde interrupted. "Yes, you will!" she cried. "We don't drink Scotch, do we, girls? Show him what you've got under your coat, Bess." She turned to the tall, dark-haired member of the trio. Giggling, Bess brought forth a newspaper-wrapped parcel.

Dake's hands leaped to it, clutched it, hid it beneath the table.

"Oh, you needn't to be scared," Blonde scoffed. "Anything goes with you fellows, this week. Drink it right up on the table, as long as you keep it wrapped up."

"Let's dance," Dake suggested, after the soft drinks had arrived and vigorously were spiked from the contents of the bundle Bess carried. "I used to be a swell dancer, back in Harristown. Main kick in a dancing club. Let's go, gal."

Dake and the black-haired girl whirled their way through the throng. The Kid, speculative eyes upon Blonde, was conscious of Dake for a few minutes. Then the crowd swallowed the boy.

"What's your other partner's name?" Blonde asked, aside, of the Kid.

"Kelly. He's a railroad man."

Blonde turned to Kelly, lifting the bottle over his glass and pouring liberally.

"Have a li'l drink, Kelly," she invited. "Have a li'l drink an' get in a good humor. Thass a good boy, Kelly."

Kelly grinned, laughed suddenly and joyously at some vagrant thought that came. The girl moved close to him, edging her chair around the table. The fingers of her left hand, on one of which glowed a stone that would have been worth five thousand dollars had it been real, tapped Kelly's arm, tapped it persuasively, possessively.

The crowd in the hall was thinning. Waiters scoured at table tops near the Kid and his companions, glancing meaningly as they scoured.

Catching that look, the Kid rose and made a circuit of the room, looked into various booths, but he did not find Dake.

CHAPTER VII

SERGEANT CARLTON stood on a corner, somewhat before the noon hour of the following day, and watched for Dake. He had been walking the streets for more than three hours, saluting mechanically as he noted the approach of leather leggings or shoulder bars, looking carefully into each face, and over the crowd into other faces, seeking Dake. And in the hours when he sought for Dake, he felt the growth within him of a great disgust for the depravity of the hours, and for the coarseness of those women of the night. Yet, even above this, and greater, was a deep disgust with himself.

Leaving the district of the shops, he mounted a hill that led to the south, out toward the residence district, and after hours, as the tramping brought weariness to his body, he found himself resting in shaded places, and loitering before objects of interest. His mental scourging had reached its apex. He found tranquillity coming.

Coming upon a great new passenger station, he marveled at its length and breadth, and moved about in its great halls, gazing into the shops of different sorts that lined its passageways. A fellow, he decided, could live within its walls indefinitely without being forced outside for any necessity. A moving-picture show, he believed, was all it lacked. He wished he could find a picture-show; felt moved toward a viewing of the capering of the screen. The shows were all downtown, however, and he was disinclined to the walk. He would ramble over the station. Perhaps Dake would be found somewhere in the great building. Dozens of men in khaki were in sight.

ALTHOUGH Carlton had been in the city several times in the last several months, he had never seen the new station before. His point of debarkation, on those other trips, had been the railroad-yards, in the bottoms; his place of stay had been the slums and jungles, down near the river. On those other passings through the city there had been the eyes of the law to evade—"the bulls to slip;" but now the Sergeant steadily held the glances of each officer he met. They saluted him; a friendly finger touched the tips of their caps. As Kelly had promised, for a little time the city was the property of the buddies.

Sergeant Carlton lounged outside the great building, basking in the sun that warmed the wide cement parkway. Many persons were about him. An aged woman smiled, stopped, asked a cheerful question and passed on. An old man, on his black hat an entwined cord of gold and silver, and on his sunken chest a copper medal hanging on a tricolored bow, approached nervously, returned Sergeant Carlton's quick salute, and clasped the tall man's biceps in trembling fingers.

"Ah," the old man quavered, "as tall as you are, when I come back from Gettysburg, my laddybuck—as tall as you are."

Chuckling senilely, his head, arms, body jerking in his palsy, the man from Gettysburg limped away.

A peace was coming into the tall red-haired man; he was beginning to know the touch of an unmeasured content. He found his thoughts could wing direct to any subject that came to them, and that he had lost the mental equivocation that had been his, in the last several weeks. He felt exceptionally young—coltish, almost. Were he in the vicinity of trees, he believed he could run and swing from the branches, so jubilant was the youth within him.

Basking in the sun's heat, his shoulders lifted, squared, his great chest filled deeply with the clear air of autumn. He felt greatly at peace, at rest after some strife that had shaken him in the days that had gone. Ah, he had it! It had been the necessity for evading the eyes of the passers, in those days of the jungle gangs; it had been that quality within him that caused him to slink up back streets, to remain hidden, so many times, when a group of clean men and women, those about his own age, passed, chatting and laughing. He had felt so keenly their curious eyes; there had been a deep shame at his unworthiness, his uncleanness. And this had passed.

His great chest filled with the lifting of this burden; his nostrils expanded; his eyes cleared, and he became in all ways, for the hour at least, Sergeant Carlton of the 91st. The Kid was gone, fallen away as falls unclean husk under the gleaner's hand.

AND in this moment, the moment of his great enchantment, as Sergeant Carlton stood in the sunlight, with the glow of a conqueror burning in his eyes, and with his blood leaping and firing with the touch

of the promise of something—some great, unnamable possession!—a woman's hand touched his coat-sleeve, and a woman's voice came to his ears. Turning quickly, he smiled into the eyes of the one who had approached him.

Her head reached well above the Sergeant's shoulder; the hair that peeped beneath the ring of the wide hat was black; her eyes were brown—great pools of eyes; her lips were full, colored with the red, healthy blood that touched them, and were curved, with twinkling, tremulous corners.

"Pardon me," she said hurriedly. "I am of a— a committee; and we are seeking out lonesome men—soldiers and sailors—and trying to keep them from being lonesome. Are you—are you lonesome?" A pathetic nervousness was in her voice.

"Very," Carlton answered, and grinned.

"Well—well, I have been given a car, and I'm to take some one I find, out for a ride if they—if they wish to go. Or a walk, or a talk, or anything, just so we—I keep them amused."

She forced a smile. Quietly Carlton stood looking at her, his eyes narrowing; then the suspicious light left them.

"Is the car at your command, any time?" he asked.

"Any time," she told him.

"I suggest, then," he said easily, and so deeply was the Kid lost that it was entirely the old Sergeant Carlton who spoke, "that you allow me to take you to lunch. It's past that hour. If you'll be so good. And the ride can come afterward, if you'll again be so good."

For the moment she stood hesitant.

"I don't see why—" she began. "There's nothing—"

The Sergeant interrupted quickly. Turning, he guided her to the entrance to the rotunda and to the door of the restaurant. She stopped, turned to him.

"Remember," she said, "this is on—on the committee."

"Not at all. There's nothing doing."

"But," she expostulated, "I—"

"Of course," he said quietly, and there was a steadiness in his gaze that brought a flush to her cheeks, "if there—if you object. But I'd like to—it would be a great pleasure to have you as my guest. We could—"

Her gay laugh cut into the words. Taking his arm again, she turned from the door, out toward the street.

"Come on," she said laughingly. "Of

course I'll be your guest. Let's don't stand and argue like a couple of millionaires buying a drink. I know the dandiest place, two or three blocks down the street, that's quiet. I don't care to *hear* people eat, do you?"

CHAPTER VIII

SOME few events were mirrored in Carlton's life with a million-candle-power brilliancy. And among these his hours with this girl engraved themselves indelibly on his memory.

He could not have told, afterward, of the manner of their speech, he could not have repeated their words in that first hour. He merely knew that she spoke, he answered, and that there was laughter in her voice and in his ears. He knew she found a table in the restaurant, well to the rear, and that an old woman who limped came to wait on them.

When the girl had removed her hat with a gesture of relief, as they seated themselves, he saw that her hair carried a strange mark: above the middle of her forehead, dividing the black locks, was a width of white, glistening white, a white that seemed alive, so different was it from the rest of her hair, so unexpected was the sight of it. Seeing his eyes upon it, she smiled.

"Daddy used to call it my lovelock," she said. "Whew! I'm glad to get my hat off. I bought it a day or two ago in—the words were clipped back—and I'm afraid it doesn't fit."

"It's very beautiful."

"Thank you. I liked its shape, but—"

"I mean the strange lock of hair in—"

"Oh, *that!*" She was confused. "Thank you. It worried me, when I was little. Anything unusual worries a child, I think. I hated the thought of anything unusual being in my appearance. I cut it out, once, but it grew back. Now, well—"

"It's beautiful—striking," Carlton said again.

"Thank you so much—so much."

Other charms he found in her. Clear eyes, for instance, eyes that mirrored clean thoughts, eyes that looked into his calmly, with girlish candor, that drooped, at other times, wavering and faltering.

"I'm Sergeant Carlton," he introduced himself.

"I am Helen Proctor," she said.

They sat side by side at the small table, and a thought came to Carlton of the dance-hall of the night previous. He shuddered, whipping the thought away. As the meal progressed, and as they lingered at its close, he fancied in the girl's manner a nervousness that rose and fell, that brought quick breaks to her words and rambling inconsequences to her sentences. Pushing back the untouched dessert, she rose quickly.

"I'll phone for the car. We'll go for our ride," she said. Carlton stood beside his chair as she turned away, hurried to the front of the restaurant, and bent to the phone.

A GLAD, golden-red sunset. The long rays sent their red streamers wavering, billowing across the ripples of a little lake in a great park of the city. Carlton and the girl were strolling through the paths, passing deserted booths,—the afternoon crowd had left for its supper,—idling along, greatly content in the silence that had come after the hours of broken, illogical conversation. The afternoon had, in some strange way, brought the two marvelously close to each other. It seemed they had known one another for months, for years. Timidly Carlton indicated a stand piled high with ice-cream cones and confections. The girl, laughingly, shook her head.

"Not that," she said. "I'd much rather have one of those." She pointed to where a fat man perspired back of a fire on which "hot dogs" simmered.

"If it's all right?" Carlton questioned.

"Why, foolish, of course it's all right. Everybody eats them, at parks."

"I was just thinking, though—"

"I'll always be a kid, I reckon," she laughed, "where hot dogs are concerned. Let's sit over here and watch the sunset."

And after they were seated on a bench at the water's edge: "Some of this brings back home—the sunset, for instance. And these hot dogs, too. There's a peak back of the ranch—I live in the San Bernardino Mountains—where so many picnic parties have gathered that we have named it Hot Dog Hill. It is—"

"Do you live in the San Bernardino Mountains?" Carlton asked.

"Yes. Do you know where they are?"

"California. I've been over them several times."

"How fine! Then you know my State."

"A little," he confessed. "Just going over it, stopping and going on."

"The mountains border the desert," she continued dreamily, "and the valleys. On the north is the great desert, hundreds of miles across, and on the south are valleys upon valleys, filled with fruits and flowers, and people. They are all very beautiful—the flowers and fruits. I am hungry for it all—homesick. I was never homesick before in my life, because I was never so far from home, I believe."

THERE was a long silence. Carlton had not caught the significance of her words. Then:

"That—that story about the committee, and everything, was untrue," she said in a small voice. "It was—"

Startled, Carlton straightened up.

"It was a lie," she went on evenly. "I am a school-teacher—that is, I taught last year. Then I came East on a trip, the school ma'am's regular trip. I had no appointment for this term, and just kept on traveling. I can get on again, though, if I care to."

Still Carlton was silent; his eyes held a startled glow. It had been a matter that lay wholly with herself, then, this singling him out!

"I have been in this city three days," she went on. "I ate my breakfast in that little restaurant where we had lunch. And oh, I was desperately lonely. That was all. . . . My brother—was across; and—well, it got him."

Her quiet tones ceased. The shadows drew closer; the evening became more intimate, it seemed. Suddenly the lights flashed on around the lake and up and down the paths of the park. The girl sighed.

"Ben had written of the way the people treated the boys—dinner parties, rides and all, you know; and—well, I was just a kid when the war was on. . . . At least, there was little I could do—actively do, you know."

Carlton nodded. With a stick he had picked up he traced little patterns in the sand, leaning over, his elbows on his knees.

"Then, when I saw you so desperately alone, as I was, I just—well, I became suddenly brave," she finished with a crooked little smile. "Do you think it so awfully terrible, the lying and everything?"

Carlton drew a deep breath—leaned back

and looked into her eyes, his own glowing, softened.

"I think it a most beautiful evasion."

She laughed, and a half-sobbing catch was in it. "I was lonely. A fat man had been following me. I walked to the station, hoping to lose him. I had—"

"I saw him," Carlton interrupted.

"And then I saw you. I knew you were a stranger, and I knew how terrible is the lonesomeness of one among a crowd of strangers. Sometimes I have almost cried out for some one to speak to me, to be nice to me, to say, 'Howdy,' and smile. I'll never take another long trip, alone."

A little silence. Then:

"I am on my way to California," Carlton said. "Perhaps I may—"

"Good! Why, how dandy! Will you tour out?"

The Sergeant grinned aside, nodded. "I'll be a tourist, all right," he replied.

"You must stop to see us." She glowed with the invitation. "I'll have—I think I'll have the ranch, with chickens on it, by the time you're in the State. It'll be a month or two, anyway. Wont it?"

"Yes," he replied soberly, "it'll be a month or two—at least."

"I'm thinking of the chicken business," she went on seriously. "Dad left me a ranch, up in a cañon. There's plenty of land, plenty of water and enough tillable acreage to grow feed for the fowls and some stock. I've been looking up the chicken business, on this trip, and there'll be little competition, right around my place. I believe it will be a money-maker. I'm sure it will beat teaching, and it will be outdoors, too. I hate the inside of a house. You must stop and see my ranch, when you come into the State. I'll be expecting you."

The Sergeant mused, again tracing little patterns with the pointed stick. He turned to her, squarely.

"When I come to the State," he said, "I'll probably be looking for work. I wont be broke, but—"

"That needn't bother you. Most of those who come are looking for work of one sort or other, since the automobile has been bringing so many flivver gypsies. Then you're not a rich man in disguise or anything like that?" she asked gayly.

Carlton grinned. The tinkle of the girl's tones mingled with his clipped, short laughter.

"Good!" she cried. "It's so much better

to tell each other our real first names and telephone-numbers and everything, isn't it?"

"And when you come out to California," she told him, lapsing again into seriousness, "you'll make your fortune. Dad came out years ago, and while he didn't make his fortune, he was ever so much better off than in the Kentucky days. And he was broke when he arrived in the State. In fact, I've come to believe that the success of the West has been built up of people who were broke. That is one of the reasons they made good—it was a case of *must*. The majority of them were too far from home to call for help, and it was dig in or starve. They dug in and made good. You'll do the same."

"I hope so."

"You mustn't only hope—you must believe, sincerely," she continued. "That was Dad's great philosophy: That what a man believes can be done, will be done. In a measure he was an example of his belief. He had two mules, a rickety wagon, a wife and two children when he came over Cajon Pass, fifteen years ago. He fought against lack of education, fought against sickness that took my mother and him. He died last year—broken-hearted over Ben's death. It came so close, too, to Mother's being taken away. Just two years. Ben was shell-shocked, and for a year was—well, not right, you know."

Carlton nodded comprehendingly.

"Dad left his ranch in the hills. It's not much of a place, as California ranches go, though there's the beauty of the cañon around it and the mountains back of it; but it's ours—mine, now.

"I'm going to try to make it go—no, I'm going to *make* it go!" she said determinedly. "I'm going to make a real ranch out of it—mortgage it to stock it. I'll follow Dad's teaching: I'll seek the objective I want, go after it and determine to get it. I'll *make* it go! It's as much a woman's work as anything else. I hate teaching. I want to be out of doors, out where I've lived all my life."

WATCHING her, studying her, Carlton marveled at the lines of character that developed suddenly in her features. Her face hardened; her eyes narrowed. This was no shrinking, giggling girl, Carlton knew; this was a specimen of the women the West had built. Some of the bulldog determination that must have been her father's, had descended to the daughter.

When full darkness had come, the girl lifted to her feet.

"The make-believe is over," she said lightly. "Let's go out and tell the driver of that hired car to hit the grit. He's—"

Instant contrition came into the Sergeant.

"You shouldn't," he began. "It was all so—it was such an expense, and—"

Her gay laugh interrupted.

"You foolish! Why, I've had thousands of dollars worth of fun, this afternoon. Just imagine, pretending I'm a committee and everything—just doing something I shouldn't, I reckon." Her hand fell again to his arm as they threaded their way through the throngs that were beginning to fill the park. "A red-haired sergeant," she said, "and a big car with a chauffeur and playing the dignified lady. Why, it was worth thousands! Don't be foolish, now."

"But," he still objected, "we could have—"

"It was wonderful!" Then, quickly: "But let's do this: we'll go to a picture-show. We'll go down in the street-car. Will that be all right?"

Carlton nodded. . . .

It was nearing midnight. Carlton and Helen Proctor sat in the woman's lobby of a small family hotel on the East Side. Plans for the morrow were in the making.

"I'll meet you at nine," the girl said. "We'll have the whole day."

"The whole day," Carlton murmured. Bells were ringing in his ears.

IT was the afternoon of the following day. Carlton and the girl were again in the great park in the southern part of the city. It appealed to them as a homey place, with nooks, hidden by bushes, where two persons could sit quietly, talking and dreaming.

"Only a few hours," she said, and sighed. "And when you get near the Pass, —you'll come over Cajon Pass, of course,—ask anyone the way to Proctor's ranch. They'll know. It isn't far from the railroad. And you must come out."

A lingering quality was in her words, and in the manner of both man and woman.

"You're sure," she asked, "that you'll be out to see me?"

"As certainly as I live!"

She sighed again. He imagined a tinge of rebellion in her manner. . . .

It was half after eleven, that night. They stood at the gates to the track, and the last coach of her train stood back of the grating, across a little space.

"I must go now," she said. "Good-by, Sergeant—Red-haired Sergeant." The heaviness in her tones she attempted to lighten with jocular words. "When a bright light comes up the trail, day or night, I'll know it is the Red-haired Sergeant, come to me. You're not sensitive about it?" she asked quickly. A timidity had come to her. Carlton laughed gayly.

"Good-by, girl." He took her two hands. "You've been—been wonderful! Thanks for the great time. And I'll be out. Good-by." Hungrily, he hung to the bars of the grating.

After a minute she came out upon the platform of the last car, called to him, and they talked nervously, hurriedly, until the train started. As the long line of coaches snaked their way out of the shed, and as the last car dimmed out of sight, Carlton stood with his eyes hungrily seeking the last sight of her, his hard hands gripping the bars, clenching them, while she waved to him—waved and waved and waved to him.

FOR hours afterward he walked the streets, aimlessly turning corners, stopping, standing at times uncovered, then on again. She—she had believed! That was the miracle of it. She had believed! Of the future she had spoken—indefinitely and casually, it is true; but in this future she had traced glorious heights to be reached, glorious deeds to be done, glorious rewards that would follow. The man whom she limned, in the hours they had been together, was completely abstract; but Carlton felt, now, the entering of the spark she had awakened for this other man.

A fellow could work, she had said, and study; law, and architecture, and drawing, and bookkeeping—these she had mentioned as open to those who strove. Glorious gates of promise she had held ajar for him. A fellow could do anything! That was the burden of her belief. And once, in a still, wavering little voice, she had ventured the opinion that, in a way, all this was easier after marriage than before. Not so many outside pleasures, recreations and things to pull on a fellow. Quieter, in his home, and all that.

The ensuing chapters in this remarkable story of a Hobo's Progress are extremely interesting. Watch for them in our forthcoming February issue.



Babi Itam Besar

A well-known Blue Book writer who has recently returned from a remarkable trip through little known parts of the Far East here contributes a fascinating and authentic story of jungle adventure.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

IF a man slander you, invite him on a dangerous big-game hunt, along with the man whose good opinion of you he is undermining. Then he will have to either make good or shut up.

Gene Barr achieved this bit of philosophy all by himself, after much worrying about Douke, the Dutch engineer, of Sumatra fame and viper tongue. Douke was a pest, the kind of man who considered every brother engineer in the East a faker, and was always telling people that such-and-such a man, and so forth. But Gene felt that his idea was the medicine that would fix him; and now was the time, too, for he had a new and particularly dangerous kind of big game in hand to try it out with.

He sat in a long-armed India cane chair, sprawled out under a waving punkah within his Borneo bungalow, turning over the idea judicially in his mind, his wide mouth curled in a thin-lipped smile as he twisted a thoughtful chin between thumb and forefinger. Gene felt that even though

Solomon had beaten him to it with the original of his idea, he should have gone into the law instead of engineering in his youth. The idea had such soul-satisfying possibilities for justice and retribution! And Douke, the great, the mighty, for all his Palembang oil-refinery reputation, was such an exasperating liar! Gene had known the pudgy and florid little Hollander for some time, knew also those pale blue eyes of his, which gave you instinctive warning of the treachery behind them, knew furthermore the wry sneer which always sat on his lip, another give-away, a warning to the wise, even when Douke was obviously trying to say something pleasant. Every human being save himself was a faker, on Douke's acid tongue. This trait of unconscious slander was altogether exasperating because so hard to combat.

Douke's rapacious instinct for pushing everyone else down, so as somehow to advance himself, was probably at the bottom of it. The man, perhaps, never slandered others with willful and deliberate purpose

—it seemed hard to accuse him as far as that, Gene reasoned; but still, there was his sarcastic and unbridled tongue; just a hint or a word, maybe, but every engineer all over the East suffered from it. It used to make Gene shudder to hear some friend of his, who had made some small and recent success, referred to by Douke as "dot tam faker." Without any rhyme or reason at all, either; it generally turned out that Douke did not even *know* his victim, personally! Enough for him that the man had gained a small measure of reputation, which somehow might in some way detract from his own. And engineering reputation, particularly oil engineering, refinery experience, was what counted, these days, among the British oil magnates. For, out here, in the wide and far-flung Archipelago, from Burma to Borneo, what oil engineers there were were well scattered, and opportunities to know them personally were few. You had only their reputations to go on.

GENE'S judicial mind went on enlarging on the idea of inviting *both* Douke and Mr. Fretcher, the English oil magnate, on this big-game trip. Fate, it seemed, had put the cards right in his hand. He grinned more widely, and his long frame hunched up with delight, as the idea grew. Gene was never a handsome person to look at. His face was tanned and seamed and hard-bitten from years of tropical engineering work. His hair was scanty and grayish, inclined to baldness above his temples. The whole face was that of the hard and serious thinker, the man whose livelihood depended upon straight thinking, and also something more, in the tropics, the ability to think quickly and right in a crisis. Yet here was Douke, with his everlasting "Faker," his conceit of the Palembang refinery achievement making him odious; here was Douke already at Mr. Fretcher with those little casual innuendoes of his, which would soon send glimmering any chances Gene might have at the new Balikpapan refinery which the British Oil Corporation proposed for Borneo.

It was exasperating because there had been no way to head Douke off and show him up. Yet Gene smiled to himself with judicial calmness, for now—the man who had placed the solution of the whole matter in his hands had just left the bungalow. He was only a Dyak hunter, named Migi Bulieng, but he had just brought news of

Babi Itam Besar, the Giant Black Boar of Borneo, located up near Kong Beng some two days march back in the jungle.

NOW, ordinarily Babi Itam Besar would be simply an interesting scientific curiosity. All Borneo had been waiting to hear more of him, since the explorer Lumholtz's book had come out in 1920. At that time all that was known of this the largest of the world's boars had been conjectured from a single skull in the museum at Berlin. The tusches were wanting from that skull, but judging from its size, Babi must be as big as a Jersey cow and exceedingly formidable. Lumholtz had heard of it alive, in regions where no Dyak dared to hunt, and he had published his opinion that the creature was none other than the fabulous Neduma of the Dyaks, an animal which they were vague about describing but very definite in being afraid of. Lumholtz did not succeed in coming up with the creature himself, but from 1920 on, every big-game hunter in Borneo, from Banjermassin to Samarinda, had standing orders out with the natives to report the first one located.

On receipt of the news from Migi, Gene had first thought of merely inviting Mr. Fretcher alone. It would be a graceful bit of friendship, without too much the air of currying favor professionally. Fretcher's hobby was big game. His big place out in the suburbs of Calcutta was a veritable museum of game heads. India, Burma, Africa, Canada—there was nowhere he had not gone during recreational periods in pursuit of his favorite hobby. To give him, then, the first chance at Babi Itam Besar, an entirely new species, new even to science, would please the oil magnate immensely. Besides, Gene knew something of the British psychology, which was to accept a man *in toto*, provided he made good in any specialty of the outdoors—whether athletics, big-game hunting or salmon fishing. If you were sound there, your reputation professionally would carry you, so far as business was concerned. This point of view was an obsession with Mr. Fretcher. Rarely had Gene heard of him taking on a man without first trying him out on a big-game trip. There his courage and resourcefulness in a crisis would be tried out, and these things were much more important in Mr. Fretcher's eyes than mere technical ability. Any professor could have that—but what good

was he, when floods came and washed away an entire new plant, or cholera abolished the whole personnel, or landslides overwhelmed your months of labor? Catastrophes, these, that Nature was always providing to try out a man's soul in the unregenerate tropics!

Yes, at first it had been a mere generous impulse on Gene's part to invite Mr. Fretcher to share the excitements of tackling this unknown giant boar with him. Then came the dazzling idea—why not invite Douke, the slanderer, too! Gene had heard, *ad nauseam*, of a certain tiger that Douke had shot in Sumatra. If big-game men were foregathered in some Oriental hotel over their Scotch and soda, and Douke happened to be among them, he was sure to bring up that tiger. All others were mere kittens compared to this brute! Your Bengal may have been all right—but you ought to have seen this Sumatra terror! To Gene it was all of a piece with his habit of calling every other engineer in the East a faker—there was a bottomless abyss of personal incompetence in it somewhere, or else the man would have been content to live and let others live. All he needed was showing up—and that would be the last of Slanderer Douke! Oh, it was a ripping idea! Gene felt at that moment that the law should really have been his profession!

HE got up out of the India chair and put on his white military blouse with stiff starched collar, worn over a net undershirt and nothing else down here under the Equator. The sun beat down like a cannonade of fire upon Gene's topee as he stalked down into the town of the little oil port of Balikpapan, keeping to the shady side of the road under the huge waringen trees, on his way to the wireless station where he wrote out an aërogram:

Babi Itam Besar located. Come at once if possible. Bring Douke, my compliments.
BARR.

That last was a masterstroke! Douke was now with Fretcher, somewhere up in Tennasserim in Burma, on an oil-exploring party. Not that Douke was at all needed up there, but he had a way of fastening himself to the powers that be, and had done so with Fretcher the moment he got wind of the proposed new refinery at Balikpapan. What he was saying about *him*, now that they were both rivals for

the job, Gene could well imagine! Not so very much—a contemptuous laugh here, a veiled reference to some one of Barr's early mistakes out East at the next opportunity; Douke was subtle enough. Gene had watched his method with other engineers whose jobs Douke wanted, or perhaps did not even have a chance at—but a bit of slander thrown at them might do him some possible good, sometime.

Such men are exasperatingly hard to shut up, Gene knew from personal experience with Douke in defense of his friends, and he sensed his danger uneasily. Inviting Douke *with* Fretcher was the winning trick, for the Dutchman could not back out, as he surely would have if Gene had invited him separately. As it was, Fretcher would simply cart him down here on the next B. E. I. steamer, willy-nilly! Good business, all around, too, Gene reflected as he turned away from the cable station to arrange about dogs and Dyak bearers. Instead of Fretcher inviting *him*, as a sort of test, he had turned the tables on the genial magnate and provided the big game himself!

FIVE days later Gene stood at early dawn looking down from the veranda of his bungalow on the hill, down into the blue and placid little harbor of Balikpapan, East Borneo. The Java-Pacific mail-boat, outward bound from Sourabaya for San Francisco, was nosing her way in past the nests of oil-tanks which jutted out on a slender point into the deeper water. Gene eyed the boat with his usual judicial air, figuring that if Fretcher had acted promptly, he could have caught her via Singapore by taking the next B. E. I. from Rangoon immediately upon receipt of his cable. He was presently reassured by the sight of two white-clad figures in white, and bowl-shaped India topees, waving to him from the distant rail of the steamer far below. The tall one was Fretcher, without a doubt; the short man, Douke. So he had brought the swine along, against his will or not; Gene smiled grimly.

An hour later the three were sitting at a rattan table out on Gene's veranda awaiting Migi and his dogs. Coolies brought something that tinkled with ice in tall glasses. Fretcher was his usual urbane self, with his characteristic iron smile—handsome, tall, keen-visaged, his high and tanned forehead surmounted by

thick, curly, iron-gray locks, brushed back in a perpetual pompadour that made him look even taller than he was.

"I say, jolly decent of you, Barr, to think of us in the matter of this pig, y'know," he was remarking urbanely while his gray eyes took in Gene's whole self with an unfathomable expression, which might mean that Fretcher was pleased over Gene's generosity or might mean that his mind may have been already poisoned by some innuendo of Douke's that this whole affair smacked somewhat of the Greek bearing gifts. Douke himself was saying nothing and looking unhappy. His eyes met both of theirs shiftily, and for once they heard nothing of that Sumatran tiger of his.

Gene caught another idea from that uneasy half-scared expression on Douke's face. The man had been dragged here, by reason of his own boasting tongue. He had not dared back out, or plead excessive engagements, with bluff and genial old Fretcher around—who wouldn't take no! O slanderer, your chicks are coming home to roost, thought Gene as he poised the lampoon:

"To tell the truth, Fretcher," he answered, "in my judgment this Babi Itam Besar is a bit too much of a brute for any one man to tackle alone. You know what that Berlin skull tells us—a boar as big as a cow. Hide on him, no doubt, thick as a rhino. Tushes ten inches long. He'll take a lot of killing!"

MR. FRETCHER eyed Gene keenly. This remarkable hesitancy in wiry old Barr, who had stood by his side and shot like a fiend when the two of them had bagged a six-hundred-pound Siberian tiger up in the Himalayas! These Yanks were cagy, his expression seemed to say, and they generally had a double meaning in most of their—to the English—cryptic remarks. A side-glance at Douke settled it. Barr was ragging him, pulling a long bow on the terrors of Babi, for the Dutch boaster's benefit. Mr. Fretcher smiled his grim iron smile and helped, with that subtle humor the Briton also possesses:

"No end of a swine, what!" he replied with the utmost cheerfulness. "What rifle, Barr, old thing?"

Gene pointed to an American .45 rifle standing in one corner of the veranda. "Good enough for this Yank! I want something that will shoot and keep right

on shooting when Babi makes his charge."

He glanced at Douke, who was looking uneasily at the American rifle and thinking very little himself about any Sumatran tiger he may have once shot. Mr. Fretcher purred amiably:

"Not a hope, my boy! You want something that will knock him down to stay, y'know. If you cawn't do it in two shots, you're no good. Something like this!"

He fished out of a breeches pocket a cartridge that looked as if it fitted in some piece of naval ordnance. Douke, at sight of it, cheered up, taking his cue from what he considered the magnate's disapproval of the American rifle.

"Der man dot takes a sheap Yankee gun after dangerous beeg game iss a tam fool," he declared gracefully.

Gene eyed him casually. The usual clumsy Dutch insult, embracing one's nationality, oneself and one's weapon, all in one sentence! No use arguing with him: "That so? You watch my smoke!" he contented himself with replying.

Mr. Fretcher purred on them both, with the calm superiority of the Briton, ruler of all the earth: "Really, Barr old cock, my word! It's not gun enough for Babi, is it? Better take one of my double Rigbys and crash into the jolly old pig with both barrels, hadn't you?"

Douke pushed in most eagerly, pressing his advantage in making out Gene in the wrong, or at least pig-headed about it: "Yah, dot's rightd," he agreed. "If you vas fool enough to go near dot peeg with dot toy of a Yankee gun, he takes it away from you vit hees tushes and shpanks you vit it."

Mr. Fretcher cut him short.

"Don't be a silly ass, Douke. Let's get on with it, gentlemen!" he suggested, rising to go within the bungalow and shift into jungle kit. He carted Douke off with him, laying a masterful hand on that irate little Hollander's shoulder and propelling him off the veranda. Gene was left to himself for a while, to reflect judicially upon the situation as regards his chances of getting the Balikpapan refinery. So far, not the least hint of his attitude in that matter had come from Fretcher. That was not the English way. After the hunt there would be cigars over the campfire, and something would be said, once for all and finally. Gene did not even know whether he and Douke were still rivals for the position. There might already be an

In many respects this is the most remarkable novel *The Blue Book Magazine* has ever published. Incidentally, it is its author's first serialized long story. Its original title was "The Clear Pane," the significance of which will be apparent to the reader when he takes up the third and last installment in the March issue. What Mr. Horn has tried to show in his vivid, realistic work is the exact status, with himself, of a private in that vast army of floaters in America, the men who work when work is absolutely necessary, but only then—who at other times are tramps. The Florida Kid in this story is a personality of such dominance in the world he inhabits that it has been deemed best to let the story carry as its title his trampdom "monaker." You will remember him and recall portions of his philosophy and incidents in his lurid life long after most stories are forgotten. It is this quality of reality and authority that adapts the story so admirably to *The Blue Book Magazine*.



The Florida Kid

By CHARLES HORN

SEVENTEEN wanderers sprawled or crouched in an open freight-car, a gondola. The car was loaded with iron pipe, each piece fifteen feet long and nearly two feet in diameter, that was being carried to St. Louis in the middle of a long train. The pipe was pyramided at one end, filling one-half of the car; the men

were distributed in the other half. They had been riding since midnight, when they left Cincinnati, and with the coming of morning were nearing an Indiana town that was reported hostile to floaters. Tentative plans were in the making to leave the train at a water-tank east of the town, walk around the place and catch another

deep in the tough soil, yet not so large as one would expect from a boar weighing seven hundred pounds and as big as a Jersey cow. A totally unknown creature—never shot before.

Fretcher had bagged wart-hog in Africa and babirusa on Celebes; and pig-sticking in his own India had become a tame sport to him. Yet now he shook his head. This, the largest of the world's boars, would be formidable enough, as formidable as wild buffalo or rogue elephant, not to mention Stripes and the lion! What would be his method of attack? Where place your bullet? Would *any* rifle have stopping power enough to prevent him doing damage on the charge? One thing was certain, the dogs were useless. They would have to walk him up themselves. Sufi cringed away, unmindful of the blows and encouragements which Migi showered on him in mixed doses. The rest of the pack hung back, taking their cue from him.

"Well, let's get on with it!" exclaimed Fretcher exasperatedly after the dogs had been reasoned with in vain. "We'll have to walk the blighter up."

HE set off along the line of tracks. Douke opened his rifle slyly, to take a peep within and assure himself that each barrel had its cartridge. Barr left him thumbing his safety, apparently setting it off regardless of whom that might endanger. He hurried to catch up with Fretcher, who walked like a moose. He paid no attention to his own rifle. He knew it was loaded and had a cartridge in its chamber. All that was left to do was to cock the hammer.

The tracks led up toward that hot spring. They were easy to follow, for the deep shade of the tapangs had killed off most of the usual jungle undergrowth. No one said much as they followed along that sinister line of tracks. The dogs had stayed back with Migi, who would not budge a foot after them, declaring that these were the tracks of that fabulous animal Nedumah, greatly feared by the Dyaks. There were whole tracts in east Borneo where neither Penihing nor Penyabong nor Kenyah would hunt, because of him.

Fretcher stopped once or twice to point out enormous rootings, scarred and slashed with tushes that must have been at least ten inches long. He nodded at them

grimly, while Gene looked down, silent and solemn.

"The swine's like to jump us without warning any moment now," whispered Fretcher, bending aside a vine to peer through the jungle toward the mist of the hot spring ahead. "I fawncy he'll be wallowing somewhere in this warm mud. He'll take some shooting, my word!"

Barr moved off to the right, gun-muzzle up and poised in both hands, so as to push along ready to shoot on the instant, his eyes watching ahead for a place to plant a foot without treading on a cobra. A huge and gloomy cave of foliage this! The sun never penetrated here, save in isolated slanting rays of golden haze. Birds were so far overhead that even the sharp call of the minah did not disturb the silence. A place to meet the dreaded hamadryad cobra, fourteen feet long and aggressively deadly, if not Babi Itam Besar himself.

And then there was a sudden flurry of grunts, a loud and prolonged squeal of rage, a crash in the bushes, a flying shower of water and mud. Thump of heavy hoofs! Something huge and black was standing in a dense glade of begonia ahead of him, formless, shapeless, watching him perhaps for his next step. Barr's rifle half rose as he peered intently into the thicket. Whatever it was, it was not twenty yards off. How long would it take a boar to charge twenty yards? About three seconds, Gene figured after a moment's reflection. Interesting. Rather!

Then Fretcher's double Rigby bellowed out. "Mark! Your way, Yank!" came the shout of his voice from out a thin cloud of smoke over to the right.

Babi Itam Besar had raised a squall like a factory whistle, an intolerable din, filling all the forest with his pain and rage. Then he grunted fiercely as he spied Barr, standing still as death in the jungle and looking for him. Barr caught a glimpse of a nest of long white tushes tossing up and down, of a huge black and hairy snout, of little pig eyes that gleamed diabolically from under shaggy wire bristles. Then his repeater ripped out, a less powerful roar than the cannonlike report of the Rigby, but spiteful. A yell, a trumpet-blast of rage came from Babi Itam Besar, and with it Fretcher's shout: "Cawn't see him, Yank! Your brute!"

There was a terrific uproar in the vines, smashing, tearing and trampling. Barr perceived that he had hit him above the

foreleg, smashing it, and that Babi was spinning around and around on it, bellowing like a hurt bear. He waited coolly for a good shot to present itself, then, acting on a sudden hunch, circled around into a clear glade, whipping out his pocket camera as he ran.

"For—God's—*sake!*" protested Fretcher as he came out into view. "Don't try it, Yank! —Look *out!*"

"Hold still a minute. . . . He's busy with that leg and I'll get a picture," said Barr, hurriedly opening and focusing the instrument. "Wait up!"

"Not in a thousand years!" yelled Fretcher, bursting wrathfully out of a tangle of vines. "He's dangerous, man! Cut it!"

He raised the heavy rifle to shoot, but at the moment Babi Itam Besar rocked up on three legs, spied Barr, his most evident enemy, and charged home. The finder showed a great black bristling creature, bearing down upon him with tushes lowered malignantly. Barr snapped the shutter and flung the camera into the bush, leaping in the opposite direction himself. Babi swerved after him, boring murderously, intent and purposeful after him through the undergrowth. Gene felt that it was going to be a close call, but he kept his head. Another frantic side-leap, and Babi had passed him, a great, shaggy, roached-back thing, his tushes slashing savagely in a side-swing of his long head. Barr whirled and fired at close range into his side. He himself was breathing hoarsely from the intense exertion, the fierce play of life and death in it, but his brain was cool, immensely interested in how long he was going to keep alive before this brute.

A shot from Fretcher coming up behind raked Babi as he turned to seek Barr again. He grunted hoarsely, frothy blood from that first lung shot of Fretcher's dripping from his jaws. He swung his head from side to side, then stopped, eyeing Barr fixedly and with murderous desire burning in his eyes. The repeater spoke—a heart shot this time, right in between the two shaggy front forepaws and under the chin. Still Babi stood, swaying slightly, bent on another charge.

"Damn the brute!" barked Fretcher wrathfully. "Did you ever see such a thick-skinned pachyderm! I'll ruin him, if I fire again."

"Don't shoot, sir! In my opinion he's

done for," said Barr, watching him keenly.

Slowly Babi Itam Besar sank down. His grunts became hoarse sighs, gradually changing into comfortable little pig noises as if he thought all was well with him and he was falling asleep—which he was.

"AND now, sir—*now!*" spoke up Fretcher with rising tones of curiosity in his voice. "Man, de-arr!" he purred, "will you tell me just *when* and *how* you came to think of that camera stunt? Man, it'll be the prize of the whole trip if that picture comes out! I have scientific friends who will value that above even the skin and the skeleton. But I had no thought of trying to photograph Babi Itam Besar myself, I assure you!"

"Why, I didn't think of it at all—just came to me; that's all," said Gene. "There was the chance, while he was down on a broken foreleg, and I took it."

"Quite so!" smiled Fretcher grimly. "We are looking for that kind of man, y'know—I say, where's Douke?" he asked, the association of ideas suddenly recalling him to memory.

"Search me!" grinned Gene. "Now, in my judgment—"

"Bosh!" cut in Fretcher. "You haven't got any judgment!" he smiled good-humoredly. "Only what you Americans call hunch, which is better. Any man that would face a wounded boar with a camera, y'know! . . . Now, *where*—"

Just then Douke put in his appearance, waddling through the foliage, a complacent smile on his face. The Lord knows where he had been lurking during all this, but apparently he expected words to carry him along still. "Me, I got lost—tam goot lost, in diss *verflüchter* yungle," he explained fatuously, barefacedly. "Dot's a goot peeg! Mr. Fretcher, I congratshulates you!" he added, ignoring Gene as he looked over the fallen Babi Itam Besar, whose tushes, ten inches long and eleven spread, lay over on one side like gory white daggers.

Mr. Fretcher looked at him long and fixedly.

"Humph!" he snorted. "Ah yes, Douke; I see—lost! Quite so—*rather!* You have, my word, y'know!"

And he looked over at Gene, and there was that in his eyes that told Barr that something very definite would be said over the cigars that night concerning the engineering position.



Upon the Lion and Adder

The saga of a young man who ventured far and fought hard for his own: one of the most powerful stories this or any other magazine ever published, with a unique and deeply impressive climax.

By JOHN M. OSKISON

THAT Miller should be robbed of his share was first suggested by Kuhns, a clay-stained practical psychologist who spoke fretfully, because little creatures under the filthy gray flannel shirt he wore, annoyed him.

"After all is said, Miller is no use to the world; he makes no difference in the scheme of things—no more than a clod. He is a clod! If I step on the clod or not, it does not matter. Soon the rain come, and the vind—pouf! Dust to dust.

"You have made an argument, Dempsey, that is piffle. All that runs in your head is—humanity! All very fine; but I ask you—I ask you also, Fonda, and you, Rogers,"—he jabbed a gnarled, broken-nailed forefinger at each in turn,—"if it is vorth to me and you, and you, and you, eight thousand dollars apiece, to satisfy this appetite for humanity? Is it so great a hunger? No!" He laughed, and spat tobacco-juice across the trail of a myriad of marching, burdened ants. He pointed to the wreckage caused, to the scurrying about of threatened survivors, their quickly dis-

covered detour, the prompt resumption of their march.

"Again, here is Miller, a blind vorker, like one of these ants. Take his treasure from him, and he vill go around like this for a moment,"—Kuhns raised his thick arms skyward, closed his eyes and wriggled his fingers in eloquent pantomime,—“and then he go to vork again to find more. No?” He looked round upon the three, sitting cross-legged about the fire in front of the dilapidated log bunkhouse that abutted upon a disordered heap of crumbling blue dirt, red rock and rusting tins. His eyes questioned them. Dempsey stirred, pushed a broken felt hat nervously back on a sweat-stained forehead.

"Just the same, Fritz, it's plain robbery ye're proposin'." It was, however, scarcely a protest.

"Oh, the vord! Fonda?"

The Mexican turned the palms of his hands upward swiftly and raised his shoulders.

"So! Rogers?"

"I'm listenin'." He was half the age of

Kuhns; a scattering of fair stubble beard nearly hid a pointed chin; the edges of a great sore on the back of his right hand itched, and he gave his attention to that.

"All right, I speak again."

DRAWING his knees up, Kuhns clasped his powerful hands across his shins, and went on patiently:

"Tomorrow comes the lawyer for Hagen, from Cripple, with the papers and the cash for our mine—a hundred and sixty thousand. We all sign the papers, and in the presence of the lawyer we divide the money into five equal parts—thirty-two thousand dollars apiece—and each of us pockets his, including Miller of course.

"We stay here tomorrow night; we turn in to sleep, but for the first three hours Dempsey and I do not sleep. Then we wake Fonda and Rogers, who will watch if Miller sleeps while they pretend to sleep. Sometime in the night—we hope—Miller goes sound asleep, and we take his money. Anyway, we take his money! We hide it, in a place we must now decide upon. Miller wakes in the morning; no money; some one has robbed him; we are sorry—that is all!" His eyes flashed, and he released a hand to gesture stabbingly.

"Why not! Is this Miller a pal of ours? I ask you! He comes to us, broke, with a story about a mine—not this mine, you will remember. He will not drink, play cards, see the girls. He comes with us from Denver; he only vorks, eats, sleeps, says nothing. Such is Miller.

"We are different; our world is full of life, and the hunger we have for"—he was about to say "joy and adventure," but checked the words—"good times is the hunger that forty thousand dollars will satisfy better than thirty-two thousand!"

"Wont Miller raise hell?" queried young Rogers, open-eyed.

"What if he does? Four against one!" Dempsey was, at any rate, logical.

"We will give him one hundred pesos," promised Fonda highly, happy now in the firm grip of avarice, "and run him out of camp."

"Not more!" warned Kuhns. "He would be better with nothing, so that he get to vork again soon—and forget."

AS Miller, the reticent, took the long, twisting trail up from the lonely dingy-red section-house on the railroad,—a knobby, canvas-wrapped package of canned

goods, chewing tobacco, cigarette "mak-in's" and two new packs of playing-cards on his back,—he resumed a daydream that was rooted far back in his boyhood:

Hens fluffing their feathers in the hot, powdery dust of a rented Texas farm; a skinny, tow-headed little scarecrow in patched blue overalls, barefoot, staggering under the weight of a chopping hoe in a weedy, muggy cotton-field; eternal, sickening diet of bacon, beans, boiled potatoes, heavy biscuits, sour molasses; flitting, restless—heavenly restful!—intervals of country school, when a languid teacher fought unconvincingly to force his tired mind to study; his apathetic, beaten father dead of malaria; the farm given up, his sister married, himself working out as a hired "man" at scrawny seventeen. Then his drifting from job to job—up to Tarrant County; for a time at Denison; helping to grade the railway-line north through the Indian country (driving a scraper team), and hearing vague tales of buried treasure; more realistic tales of gold in Colorado, and his first adventure as a tramp beating his way to Denver; his disappointing toil as a novice pick-miner; work in the steaming mud of irrigated fields in the valley of the Arkansas; his return—robust, if still undersized, now—to Texas and the scenes of his boyhood, to gain touch again with his sister and her family and spend his accumulated two hundred dollars.

SLOW moves, these—dragging across twelve years since he had left "home." His sister he had found with a brood of six children, undernourished, sun-bleached of hair, shy—himself as a boy all over again! He had "loaned" his brother-in-law all but fifty dollars of his savings to buy clothes for his wife and children, a double-shovel cultivator, a new cook-stove. He had re-explored the Bird Creek woods, gone swimming in the old water-holes with Elbert Cobbett, his eleven-year-old nephew, but had failed to recapture the old sense of adventure.

But then, to reward him for this effort to reestablish family ties, he had met Sue Shady—dear, puzzling little Sue! Young, silent, wise, with deep, deep blue eyes, a sensitive face, cream-tinted and changeful as a mountain dawn, and a smile that wasn't for what you said or did, but came from some stimulus of your personality—the way you had of smoothing the "cow-lick" of hair behind your right ear, for in

stance. He had seen her first at a Sunday afternoon "singing," to which he had taken Nellie, his sister's ten-year-old girl. Nellie had cuddled up to Sue, had swung from her hand as they left, had appealed to him:

"Kin I walk part way home with Teacher, Uncle Jack?"

Sue had held out her white little hand gravely and said:

"I reckon you're Uncle Jack Miller, from Colorado?" She had smiled only after he had taken her hymn-book, and saw him fluttering its leaves, embarrassed.

She boarded with Mrs. Andrews, a mile from Cobbetts'; she had come from Dallas to teach the small Bird Creek school; her mother had died a year before; her father was a locomotive engineer on the T. P.; and she was eighteen—a simple history, uncomplicated as the gaze she turned upon him when she became interested in his talk. She had a trick of listening, absorbedly and noncommittally, to his stories, provoking him to continue only by quick upward glances that seemed to say: "Go on; surely there was a sequel!"

IT had been a glorious month, the one which followed their meeting. Late afternoons, Saturdays and Sundays, they had watched together a year's ripening amidst nipping frosts, languid sunshine, falling red-and-gold of pointed sumach leaves, squirrels busy in the hickory trees, hackberries blackening, pecan-nut husks opening to spill their smooth brown treasures. The death of a year, but the conception, rapid gestation and birth of love!

"Why, Jack! You want to kiss me, sure enough?" Sue had held his coat-lapels and looked long, searchingly into his eyes. Satisfied, she had lowered her head, and a lovely tide of color had flooded her cheeks. The kiss had sealed her vow: "Jack, I will be yours as long as the light that is now in your eyes shall endure!"

They had planned. He had boasted:

"I bet I can strike it rich out there in Colorado! A man I know wants me to throw in with him next spring an' go prospectin' over into the San Juan Mountains. We'd hit for the gulches early, an' stay till snow flies—if we didn't strike it. . . . But, say, there's gold in them mountains, an' we can find it!"

"Yes," she had agreed, "there is gold. . . . And you wouldn't want to be a tenant-farmer, would you, Jack?"

"Look at Bill Cobbett, an' Sister May!"

"Yes. . . . Folks are different, have different dreams, don't they, Jack?"

"That's it, Sue; you've hit it! Now, I've got to range them gold hills."

"I couldn't go with you, Jack?" She had laid her hand on his arm and lifted her challenging blue eyes to his.

"You!" He had described the prospector's existence in a man's world of grinding toil, scant rations, hard living. In giving up the dream, she had smiled.

"I'd love to see you mixing what you call sour-dough bread, Jack!" Presently she had asked:

"When do you expect—but, of course, you can't tell. . . . Well, never mind; you'll come for me when you can." Simply, trustfully said, expressing Sue.

"God, I wish I *could* take you! You *will* wait, Sue?" Useless, frantic query.

"Yes. I can, you see—I can go right along teaching."

HE had gone away, returned to Colorado to raise the necessary stake before joining his friend in the spring; he had fed alfalfa and beet-pulp to cattle brought down from mountain ranges to winter in the Arkansas Valley.

Sue's letters had nourished his love: news of his sister's family; flashes of school life—"Johnny Hicks found a hen's nest under the schoolhouse, Wednesday, with six eggs, and we boiled them in a tomato can on the heating stove. . . . Mrs. Andrews' bachelor brother is staying at the house for a while—he's been on a ranch out in Fannin County. . . . Oh, Jack, I wish—don't let any of those wild cows chew a finger off while you're feeding them! . . . I love you—God keep you, Jack!"

Spring—and ten months of isolation. Maddening gaps between letters, three lost to one received. Ten months of unrewarded toil, then back to steady work and wages and regular mail at Rocky Ford. Sue had secured a bigger school and better pay at Willow Grove; she had heard from Mrs. Andrews, who had sent news of Jack's sister; and as always, the serene assurance of her unwavering love, her implicit faith in his own loyalty, her belief in his golden dream.

Another long spring and summer in the mountains followed, with a partner who sought a specific mine—the lost Jaybird. Snow had driven them forth as the indications grew more and more promising. His gold-crazed partner had ventured to return

in the winter, alone, and had been hauled out by a State snow-observer frozen and at the point of death. Jack had got work in Denver in order to be near him, in hospital. He had died in February, with some last muttered words about the Jaybird. Hard times had struck Denver; Jack was put on part time. Lonely, discouraged, he had been ready to go back to his old cattle-feeding job when he met Kuhns. They had spent afternoons and evenings in talk—curious, discursive, up-and-down-the-highways-and-byways sort of talk; he had moved to Kuhns' boarding-house, met Dempsey, the Mexican and young Rogers—all men who worked sometimes, gambled steadily, loafed, drank and "raised Old Harry" in the city's sin-patches.

WEEK by week, under Kuhns' careful questioning, Jack's story of the quest of the Jaybird grew more alluring. Spring past, the four men had got together an outfit and agreed to follow his leadership. They had worked over the ground eagerly, up and down the short cañon; nothing worth while had turned up. They had topped the ridge, and were working down the other slope when they went into camp at Aspen Spring, an old trappers' rendezvous.

A mile below the crumbling cabin Dempsey had found a bit of "float;" they had traced its course back, and had found its source in the very back yard of their camp! Pay dirt, at last! They had worked happily, strenuously opening their tunnel into the hillside; they had bought much powder—a fact that Hagen's agent, Lon Casey, had soon learned.

Casey had come, secretly, to talk; he had come again, to make an offer for the claim—ten thousand dollars. Kuhns had laughed, jeeringly. Casey had come again; and on his third visit Hagen himself accompanied him.

"If you boys are sports," the heavy-shouldered, shaggy and be-diamonded old mine-owner proposed, "get together and write on a piece of paper what you think you ought to get; I'll put down on another paper what I honestly think your prospect's worth—and we'll see about splitting the difference." Kuhns had held out for fifty thousand dollars apiece, while Hagen offered fourteen thousand dollars; and after much discussion thirty-two thousand dollars had been agreed upon.

Miller had suggested that they should

retain an interest, but Hagen's terms were "all or none," and Kuhns had said:

"Send the cash and papers; we'll be waiting." And now—

NOW he was on his last trip up the trail from the section-house, with a letter from Sue in his pocket—dear, funny Sue! She had written:

"About this time you ought to be getting your second hair-cut of the season! Don't let them spoil that cowlick." In the brief reply he had penciled and sent, he had said nothing about the sale of the claim; he would save the news until he could lay the money in Sue's lap, cry, "How's that for a starter!" and taste the joy of her joy. He had only dropped a hint:

"How's the pecan-crop this year; I may show up down there before they're all gone."

He had justified Sue's sure faith in his star; now he would leave these men with whom he could have nothing in common; he would bank his money at Rocky Ford, and look around for an alfalfa ranch on the Arkansas River; he would raise cattle—he liked working with cattle! Sue should live in a new house, keep a hired girl, drive a car—"dogged if I don't think it's goin' to be like the song says about that beautiful land 'where no storms ever beat on the glittering strand!'"

HAGEN'S lawyer, with Casey and two trusted guards, came with the papers and the money—five compact packages of yellow-backed treasury notes neatly wrapped in waterproof covers (thirty-one thousand dollars in each), and five small bags of gold, each containing fifty twenty-dollar pieces—"for expenses till you can get out to the bank," the lawyer explained. The money was paid over, counted and apportioned; the good fairies stayed for dinner, then departed to catch the afternoon train. Kuhns, Dempsey, Fonda and Rogers broke out a new deck of cards and started a poker game—a surprisingly moderate game, Miller reflected idly, when, at supper-time, the heaviest loser was able to settle with a five-dollar bill. After cards, the four sat in a row against the cabin and shot at a mark—target practice intended for psychological effect on Miller, who heard Dempsey call out:

"Throw one of them cans up an' let me take a crack at it in the air!" He heard Kuhns' loud comment:

"I bet you twenty you can't hit it again!" Dempsey's gun barked, and Kuhns acknowledged disgustedly: "All right, you win." They were kidding Kuhns as they came into the cabin in response to Miller's call and sat down to supper.

At sunrise next morning Miller woke with the impression that though he had awakened later than usual, he had really only slept a brief hour. Not suspicion of his partners, however, had made him wakeful; it was the surging sense of anticipated happiness that had delayed slumber until after one o'clock in the morning.

He had then sunk deep into unconsciousness; Kuhns had held a lighted candle close to his eyes before gently shifting his shoulders in order to open the vest into the inside pocket of which Miller had stuffed the currency package. The little bag of gold was under the coat that served as pillow.

Miller woke to find the others up, facing him, yawning, scratching, pulling on boots—and each with pistol belted under vest. They watched Miller intently as he rose to a sitting position in the bunk; they saw him grin sleepily, saw his hand lift to the vest pocket, saw the swift signal of alarm in his eyes, saw his hand fumble about in the blankets, saw him lift and shake out his coat, and saw his eyes come round to their faces.

"Y-y-ou b-boys—" Miller's voice stut-tered. "S-say, d-d-did you do it for a j-j-joke?"

"What's matter, Miller?" Kuhns grinned insolently across at him.

"M-m-my m-m-money—it's g-g-gone!"

"Ah, quit yer kiddin'—how the hell could yer money git lost?" jeered Dempsey.

MILLER settled to a frantic, prolonged study of the others' faces; all too plainly, presently, the truth showed in Dempsey's exaggerated grin, in young Rogers' sudden lowering of his eyes and nervous gesture toward his pistol.

"Say, was it a joke?" Miller's voice had steadied, hardened. "Don't keep it up, boys—it's too damned hard on a fellow!" Kuhns rose threateningly.

"Look here, Miller, don't make any ugly cracks at us; we aint got your money. If you've been robbed, it was by somebody else—go and find him. We don't play jokes!"

Miller's eyes went red from the sudden

rush of blood driven by hot anger. He whirled to grab his pistol, fumbled for it unsuccessfully, and turned with a snarl to the others, a pallor of despair graying his cheeks.

"Scared of me, was you?" he taunted. Kuhns laughed, and tossed his own pistol on Miller's bunk, as Dempsey surreptitiously loosed the handle of his weapon in its holster. Miller's eyes caught the subtle play, and he handed back the pistol.

"Not today!" he jeered, and then addressed them deliberately:

"Boys, I know you took my money. If you're goin' to give it back, all right—there wont be no hard feelin's. If you aint—" He hesitated, and then cried shrilly: "Are you?"

"Haven't I told you, we aint got it!" Kuhns reiterated menacingly.

"Well," Miller finished, speaking with a steady effort at concentration and calm emphasis, "I'm up against it now; but I'll get that money back or I'll get every damn one of you! I mean that!"

"Phut—torrero!" Fonda laughed, rose and went to make a fire in the rusty camp stove, as Kuhns and Rogers passed out of the cabin to go and splash water from the little stream on their faces. Miller heard the youth swear whiningly as he accidentally raked his sore hand across a stone. Dempsey sat quite still, the holster of his pistol cuddled in his lap—the attitude of a willing executioner. Miller thought:

"They got my money, and they'd get me, too, at the slightest excuse; but not today, my bullies!" He got up from his bunk deliberately, and followed to the brook; Dempsey trailed him, squatting ten feet away to worry a shock of tousled iron-gray hair with dripping fingers. At Fonda's call, "Come an' get eet—eet is hot!" Miller went in and took his accustomed place.

He finished his breakfast in silence and rose. Kuhns said, in the tone of one offering charity:

"Miller, here's a hundred dollars—we don't like to see you leave broke." He shoved five gold-pieces across the table toward him. Miller shoved the money back to Kuhns and started for the door. "Better take it, Miller," Kuhns urged. He laughed. "Take it as the first installment of what you think we owe you, an' come back any time for the rest!"

"All or none, Kuhns—an' some day it'll be all!" Miller's words came back over his shoulder as he set off down the trail to

the section-house; out of his sight and hearing, the others followed, to see him climb into the caboose of a flagged freight train before they returned to divide the stolen thirty-two thousand dollars amongst themselves.

MILLER'S was a memory that retained appropriate fragments of sentences, expressive words and phrases; he liked to repeat such to himself, savor their meanings, their connotations, without troubling himself about their origins and the contexts out of which they had been pried. One of these—a sonorous phrase—crowded to his lips as he plodded slowly down the trail; its syllables adjusted themselves to the deliberate rhythm of his marching:

One—two—three—four: “Ven—geance—is—mine; ven—geance—is—mine; ven—geance—is—mine!” And on and on! In the caboose he heard it again, in quicker rhythm, in the thumping click of wheels passing over rail-joints. A brakeman, who had talked in a desultory way, found Miller on the back platform as the sun went behind the mountains. He offered to share the contents of a lunch-bucket, but Miller looked at him and shook his head—he was too completely absorbed by the song of the wheels, the quick and cheerful promise of iron on iron: “Ven—geance—is—mine; ven—geance—is—mine!”

And then, strangely, Miller felt the rhythm incomplete; after the four expected beats, he tried to fit something else—and couldn't. The train pulled in to a siding; the brakeman got off, and Miller lay prone upon the bench along the side of the caboose; he must try to fill in the hiatus. Oh, yes, he must begin to consider the future, too. The sound of the engine's slow panting came to him through the overhead cupola:

“*Chuf—chuf—chuf—chuf.*” It fell into the measure of “Ven—geance—is—mine—*chuf—chuf—*” Oh, hell, it didn't make sense; Miller rose, went to the back platform; he dropped to the cinders beside the track and looked round. On one side, a water-tank, a section-house, with a narrow strip of garden and two boxes of geraniums in the windows. Two hundred yards away, across an irrigating ditch on the other side of the track, a man was cutting alfalfa. The rapid chatter of the mowing-machine came to his ears. He listened intently. . . . No, it wasn't saying “Ven—geance—is—mine; ven—geance

—is—mine!” Its clatter was unintelligible, cheerful, offering no suspended rhythms. Good!

“Here's where I quit you,” Miller said suddenly to the brakeman, who had come back to stand beside him. He swung up the steps, seized his bed-roll and climbed down.

“Hey, your fare's paid to Tres Bocas—what about it?”

“Tell the conductor to keep the change!” Miller called as he tramped off toward the hay-field. To himself he muttered:

“I expect I can get work here; I wouldn't wonder if I could.” Anyway, he added in his thoughts, he would get away from that maddening, unfinished and hammering phrase and win a chance to think and plan.

“Sure,” agreed the farmer, “glad to see you. You bet, I'll give you a job. Go on over to the house. I'll be quittin' in a few minutes, an' we'll have supper.” After supper, Miller went down to the track to watch a train go by; if possible, he wanted to make sure that his despoilers went back to Denver—where he guessed they would go. But it was not until next morning that they passed; as he lay in a ditch near the track, Miller saw Kuhns on the platform of the caboose of a cattle-train eastbound, smoking a cigarette, his vest buttoned, perfunctorily rubbing his back against a brake-post.

“Denver bound; all right, bullies, I'll be along soon!”

THAT night, in his blankets beside a new stack of hay, Miller set his memory to work reconstructing the fabric of his life with Kuhns and the others, recalling the substance and color of Kuhns' conversations and reminiscences—for he was certain that the man would hold Dempsey, Fonda and Rogers under his leadership until their money was gone. At least that long! He'd probably allow a brief fling in Denver, after the necessary preliminary scouting to make certain that Miller had not preceded them; and then, prudently, he would head them toward some other field. Where? What clues to Kuhns' interests, his dreams had he ever let escape?

Kuhns had told surprisingly little about his life; before Miller yielded himself to sleep, he had recalled only scattered fragments of the other's self-revelations. Next day, in the hay, he dismissed the search from his mind, working steadily and intelligently to accumulate the little stake he

must have before he could formulate any sort of plan. At night, as he faced the stars and felt the cool singing wind on his face, he resumed the search for any remembered significant speech that would indicate Kuhns' probable next move.

Not until the third night, when he had carried his methodical memory-researches up to the moment when Dempsey had lumbered hastily up the creek with the rich fragment of ore, did Miller catch a gleam. Then he recalled Kuhns' intent study of the bit of rock, his deliberate look round upon them, his vehement warning, "Not a word about this, boys!" and the following moment of expansiveness.

"When we clean up here, boys,"—Miller could recall the exultant tone of his voice,—"I want you to come with me! I know where to go for more—a long ways from here." Kuhns had seemed to lose himself in a pleasing vision, had said no more—at that time. But later? Miller plodded on; and on the fourth evening of his researches, he came to the time when they had all sat against the wall of the cabin after supper and somebody had said:

"I wish to hell them piñons would get ripe *pronto!*" Probably it had been Fonda. After a little while, Kuhns had said:

"You don't see piñons down on the Spavinaw. Plenty of pines, but not piñons; aint that funny!" Then again, weeks later, when a batch of bread had disgusted his taste: "Cornbread's what I hanker for, made out of white corn ground by a water-mill and baked by a good-looking Cherokee Indian woman. I'm goin' to have it some day, in a neat little old log cabin on the banks of the Spavinaw—one of the clearest, sweetest streams God ever set running!"

MILLER knew of the Spavinaw, had heard a good bit about it from some of the boys on the grading job, years ago, who had fished its waters. Their chief interest, however, had been in the half-whispered stories of buried treasure somewhere on its banks—gold from old Texas, when it was part of Spanish Mexico, buried by a closely pursued party of raiders from Missouri just before a fight with Mexican troops in which all but one of the raiders were killed. This survivor, wounded in the head, had told of the treasure, but had died before he could lead the way to its location.

If Kuhns knew the Spavinaw, he would

also know about the buried-treasure story. He might even believe it, and have worked out in his mind some plan for recovering the gold with the help of Dempsey, Fonda and Rogers. Miller remembered that the Indians of the Spavinaw country had run various treasure hunters out of the neighborhood; they took no stock in the story, and suspected prying whites who came to dig of a design to rob them of their homes.

Perhaps Kuhns would rent a farm; the four would work it, live quietly, hunt, fish and make friends among the Indians—at any rate, it was what Miller thought a logical procedure. "It's the best lead I can figure out," he said to himself; and when the haying job was over, he drew his wages and went on. He wrote to Sue:

"Well, dear, I'm held up here in Denver for a while. I expect I wont get down for any pecans; maybe I'll be in time for the barbecue next Fourth."

He found that the boys had, indeed, celebrated for two weeks, spending recklessly and leaving broad traces of having "painted the town red," and then disappeared. Miller secured a daytime job as a drayman, and worked at odd jobs in saloons in the evenings in order to gather as many clues as to Kuhns' plans as he could. He found the woman with whom Kuhns had lived during his brief stay, and evenings he acquired the habit of ending up at Josie's, buying beer and gossiping with her about his experiences and her acquaintances. Josie developed an interest in Miller as a new type—"a feller from the hills that don't try to git fresh;" his coolness piqued her; and from wondering what his game was, she began to plan little pleasures for Miller. From casual words dropped in planned sequence, Josie came to know that he wanted to find Kuhns—and destroy him. Knowing, she brought him an old folded newspaper.

"Dutchy' left that here," she said carelessly. "He used to study these here a good deal." She put her finger on a smeared column advertising farms for sale. "Maybe that'll give you a lead; he aint never wrote to me."

It was the Delaware County *Item*. Among the advertisements were such as: "Sixty acres in cultivation; double log house, tight barn; one mi. w. of Eucha on the Spavinaw;" "Forty acres; good spring; peach orchard; half mi. from Spavinaw P. O."

"Thanks," said Miller, pinching her arm

playfully. "What do you say to some more beer?" He drank, and as he left, queried facetiously: "Want to send a message to Dutchy?"

"Come early tomorrow!" she urged, ignoring the question; but he never saw her again.

BEFORE he dropped down into Oklahoma on a haying job late in June, he had worn out a winter and spring in Denver, down on the Arkansas River (in feedlots and beet-fields) and in the young corn-fields of Kansas; he timed his arrival in the neighborhood of the Spavinaw to jibe with the season of slack farm-work and leisure for hunting—squirrels or buried treasure!

As Miller crossed the line from Kansas into Oklahoma, the sense of his approach to his reckoning with Kuhns—for he had a serene faith that he should find him on the Spavinaw—set going again the long-stilled refrain: "Ven—geance—is—mine; ven—geance—is—mine!" Now, however, it neither confused nor troubled him; rather, it was as a song on his lips, the pleasant flexing of the muscles before striking. . . .

THERE had been an interchange of telegrams, and Sue was at the little Willow Grove station in her trim new two-seater as Miller descended from the train and looked round like a man bewildered.

"This way, Mister!" she called joyously. He turned his head to gape at her—a deliciously cool defiance of the early July heat, in her drooping wide straw hat, white lawn, her bare brown forearms stretched across the steering wheel. Carrying a new yellow valise, he stumbled forward, and before he reached her, he had succeeded in breaking the rigid lines of strain that had distorted his face.

"Gosh, Sue!" He offered her a twisted grin, shifted the valise to his left hand and held out his right.

"Oh, Jack!" She gave him both of her hands—cool, sweet, possessive. "Get in, my dear," she whispered. "I want to kiss—oh, you've had another hair-cut!" As she leaned impulsively to touch the line of white under his ear between the deep tan of his neck and his black hair, she looked closely into his face, his eyes—and a sharp pain went through her heart. It was lined, set, ashen under the sun-tan. His eyes had lost the old warm gray serenity; they

seemed overlarge, too rounded, with a false brilliancy, shifting involuntarily; their sockets had sunk, and dark patches showed underneath.

"Get in, quick, my dear; we'll take a little drive." Sue spoke as calmly as she could, watching him settle awkwardly into the seat and draw the yellow valise onto his lap. She started the little car and soon swung into a road that flowed under the cool shade of sycamores edging Willow Branch. In an open space under the trees, she pulled up. With an obvious effort, Miller swung his head round, blinked the set stare out of his eyes and unclenched his jaws. He reached across the valise to take Sue's cheeks into the parenthesis of his rough palms.

"God, Sue, *it is you!* My dear, my dear!" Pure melodrama, thought Sue—real melodrama, spoken in an overvibrant voice that was resisting the break that should end some frightful tension. It terrified her, but quickly she gave her lips, and her arms went round his neck. Her lips to his ear, she whispered:

"Of course, Jack, my dear! And happy to have you—at last. Jack, you wont ever leave me again?"

"No; by God, you're mine! They can't—you're mine, Sue, you're mine! Aint you, Sue?" This was approaching hysteria; and Sue tried lowering the key by raillery as she twisted her hands caressingly in his grasp.

"Why did you tarry so long, Jack? I'm an old maid—almost; do you realize I'll be twenty-one tomorrow!" He looked at her curiously, broke into a harsh laugh.

"Huh, I'm already thirty-one. Celebrated my birthday ten days ago." He turned his head from her suddenly, as if to gather courage for his next strident laugh and challenge:

"Say, Sue, I can't marry an old maid!" Sue took his rough hands, drew them to the tender curve of her throat and looked searchingly into his face, compelling his darting eyes to come to rest in her own.

"I don't know what it is, Jack," she whispered, "but I believe you need me very desperately. Do you?" He nodded, and let the mask settle over his face. "Do you think," Sue went on softly, "this would be all right for a wedding-dress, Jack?"

"What! Today? Now? Oh, can you, Sue?"

"Of course, Jack." She laughed. "After all, it isn't so sudden, is it?"

ALL through the day, Miller moved and spoke as an automaton, while Sue in growing alarm at her powerlessness to break through the numbing crust of him, carried him over the ceremony, the dinner at her boarding-house and the adieus to her friends as she drove north to Sherman. As he took up the pen to sign the hotel register, she pressed his arm and whispered:

"Mr. and Mrs. Jackson Miller, Rocky Ford, Colorado." He wrote it slowly.

At bedtime, as Sue laid out her night-things under the steady if uncomprehending stare of her new husband, she challenged gayly:

"What treasures have you in *your* bag, Jack?" He turned abruptly to draw the yellow valise up on his knees.

"Oh—well, I'll show you." He drew two heavy pistols out first and laid them carefully on the floor beside his chair. Sue touched them gingerly with her foot.

"Jack, are they loaded?"

"Sure; now, look here!" He held out a bulging parcel, in stained oilcloth cover, and a buckskin bag. Sue put out her hands.

"Look out; that one's heavy!" The bag fell from her grasp, clinked dully on the carpet; and Sue cried:

"Gold?" Miller nodded. She unwrapped the parcel slowly, stared at the banded packages of currency, fluttered a sheaf of loose notes, handed it back.

"Oh, Jack! All this—riches! Why, I had no idea— How much is it?"

"Thirty thousand in bills; twenty-six hundred in gold." He turned burning eyes upon her and spoke vehemently:

"It's what I went for, Sue! It's enough—it's yours! I got it for that mine I wrote you about—just got it ten days ago, on my birthday. Wasn't that a birthday present! Didn't tell you before—a surprise." His voice trailed off into surprising accents of misery; he rose, took up the money and pistols and went to turn back a pillow.

"I'll sleep on this side," he announced dully, replacing the pillow.

SUE woke with a shock, terror contracting her heart, paralyzing her limbs. Miller was sitting upright in bed, a pistol in each hand, seeming to search the obscurity of the room with swinging glance. Savagely, almost incoherently, he cried between clenched teeth:

"There they are! There they are!" He

raised both pistols; Sue closed her eyes and shrank gaspingly. But there was no shot, and Sue opened her eyes to see him put down the pistols and cover his face with his hands. His voice came broken, tragic:

"That's it—that's it. . . . Oh, God, I didn't know. . . . 'Saith the Lord—saith the Lord'—that's it: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' . . . Oh, oh!"

He sat rocking back and forth slowly, muttering unintelligible laments. Trembling, with infinite caution, Sue got out of bed and lifted the heavy pistols carefully from the sheet and put them on the floor. She knelt on the bed beside him, took his hands and quieted the convulsive working of his fingers against the velvet of her cheeks. When he became quiet, she shook him and called insistently:

"Jack! Jack, dear, wake up!"

"All right, Sue." He stared sleepily, wonderingly as she went to snap on the light over the rickety black writing-table. She came back to sit on the edge of the bed, where she could study the lines of his dream-tortured face.

"Jack, I want to talk to you—help you, if I can." She captured one of his hands, to hold the nervous fingers to her cheek. "You have been horribly frightened by a nightmare. I was scared terribly—when you sat up with the pistols. I took them away. . . . You swore, seemed frightened, and suffering."

"Yes, I know," Miller interrupted dismally. "It's a regular performance; this is the tenth night. . . . God, I'm wore out with it, Sue!"

"What is it, Jack? What brings it on? Will you tell me, and let me help?"

He sat for a long time, eyes down, his free fingers twisting and pleating the sheet. His other hand held caressingly on her knee, Sue waited. At length he lifted his eyes and began to talk; and as he talked, she sat immobile—except that her fingers went on caressing his hand.

MILLER told then, coherently, quietly, the story of the mine, of the robbery by his companions, his despair, and the pursuit, threading through the narrative that insistent, reiterated phrase which had hammered away at his consciousness.

"Seemed like I couldn't get it out of my head—'Vengeance is mine!' Reckon I didn't want to, Sue, for it suited my case. . . . I intended to take vengeance on them that had robbed me. . . .

"So I followed 'em into Oklahoma, and got a job at a hay-camp near Grove. I found out where they had rented a farm close to the Spavinaw, west of Eucha, and I moved on to Beatty's Prairie. Ten days ago I quit my job an' went in to the little town of Jay. It was a Saturday afternoon, an' nearly everybody from around there had come to town. I dodged here an' there, an' finally I spotted Kuhns, loafin' on a corner—didn't seem to have anything to say to anybody, just waitin' around. I thought that was kind o' funny. After a while I saw Dempsey an' Rogers together—Rogers had a white rag tied around his hand; it'd been sore for a long time. I spotted the Mexican, too—wearin' spurs. I waited, an' nearly sundown, Kuhns an' Dempsey an' Rogers went to hitch up a team,—they'd brought a load of stovewood in an' sold it,—and Fonda got on his horse. I jumped into a wagon that pulled out behind them—bummed a ride from a big fat Indian. Pretty soon he told me—I didn't ask any questions—about Kuhns an' the other fellows; said he thought they was fixin' to pull out, hadn't done very well; an' the old fat rascal kind o' winked at me as if he thought I understood why they'd come to the Spavinaw!

"I quit the Indian at a side road—told him I was headin' for Chloeta. I trailed into Eucha after dark, got my bearin's an' pushed on across the hills. I waded the Spavinaw, an' struck a dim wood-road up through the timber to a clearin'. The moon was out, an' I saw a light in the window of the log cabin that stood in the middle of the clearin'. I waited till the lamp went out before I sneaked up in the shadow of the wagon that was settin' out maybe twenty yards from the cabin. I was afraid there'd be a dog—I wonder why they didn't have a dog?" Miller hesitated, rubbed his free hand across his eyes. He went on at Sue's pressure of his fingers:

"Well, anyhow—I made sure of the place by lookin' the wagon over, an' I sat there with my back against a wheel tryin' to think an' plan what to do. I sat there a long time. Maybe it was till midnight—the moon was gettin' pretty well over to the west—an' yet I didn't have any plan worked out for gettin' them; an' then I saw the door of the cabin open. I dropped flat—lucky I was in the shadow of the wagon. It was Kuhns that came out, an' he started sneakin' across the clearin' toward the east. He'd got nearly to the

timber, an' I was about to get up an' follow, when Fonda came out an' started off on Kuhns' track. Before he'd got out of sight, here came Dempsey an' Rogers, together—I could see the white rag plain on Rogers' hand.

"I begun to figure then, an' figure fast; an' I hit the facts! They'd hid what money they had—what they had left from sellin' the mine an' robbin' me—over there in the woods somewhere, an' Kuhns had made up his mind to sneak out an' take it, hopin' he could make his get-away. Maybe Fonda had the same idea, an' Dempsey an' Rogers had stayed awake to keep tabs on them two—nobody trustin' anybody any more, nobody able to get a night's sleep; wasn't that a hell of a mess!

"Looked to me like there'd be some grand mix-up mighty soon if I'd figured right, an' it was up to me to get into it. So I got up, loosened the gun in my holster an' started out to trail Dempsey an' Rogers. When I got to the woods, I had to go awful slow, but I finally made out the white rag on Rogers' hand—it was his right hand—an' I got up pretty close by keepin' trees between them an' me. They got to the edge of a little open space an' stopped; so I laid down an' got to a place from where I could look across that moonlit open space. A little ways out from the trees, I saw a sort of dark bump that moved just a little bit—Fonda crawlin' forward. Maybe fifty feet in front of him was a big rock with a patch of brush close beside it, an' somethin' was stirrin' the tops of the bushes. 'That's Kuhns,' I said to myself; an' pretty soon he stood up, clear of the bushes, sort of hunched over as if he had both hands full of somethin'.

"**T**HEN there was a spurt of fire," pursued Miller, "from the black hump in the grass. Fonda had taken good aim, an' Kuhns slumped down. The Mexican waited a few seconds, listenin', an' then run to the rock, stooped over, gathered somethin' into his hands an' stood up. He looked round, then started off—away from the cabin. I could wait for the next move, I figured; an' sure enough I saw Dempsey step out into the moonlight an' drop to one knee. He called out to Fonda, 'Hey, Mex!' An' as the fellow stopped for a second, he let him have it—a clean, cool shot from a rest over his knee. Fonda fell down on his face, an' Dempsey got up to his feet slowlike, to walk forward.

"Next I saw Rogers—his white, rag-wrapped hand dodgin' about—tryin' to get a bead on Dempsey. 'A-ha!' I said to myself. 'It's a case of the last man alive takin' the pot, I reckon.' But I didn't have any confidence in Rogers' marksmanship, so I took aim from where I lay, an' cracked down on Dempsey. It was passin' through my mind, 'Vengeance is mine.' An' I said to myself: 'It'll be mine, too, sure as hell!'

"Dempsey spun around, cussin'. 'Damn you, Rogers!' he yelled. Of course, he thought Rogers had got him; an' then he fired at Rogers before he tumbled. But Rogers had jumped behind a tree at my shot, an' was tryin' to make out where I was layin'. I didn't make another move or sound, but just lay watchin' the white bandage on Rogers' hand—I expect he'd forgot he had it on his hand.

"He dropped down to the ground, an' I saw that little patch of white sort of creep out an' come to rest. I knew he was listenin'—an' wonderin'; do you reckon he thought about me then? Kind o' looks to me like he might." Miller looked up hopefully at Sue; she nodded and pressed his fingers.

"Well," he continued, "I figured how he was layin', an' fired; the bullet he sent in answer went well over my head. . . . Everything was still in a minute, an' I got up an' walked on past Rogers an' Dempsey to the rock. . . . Fonda's death-grip on the money was hard to break. . . . Kuhns lay all huddled up, hands on his stomach, like. . . ."

"I walked off through the timber with what Kuhns had dug out from under a flat stone in the bushes, got to the bank of the Spavinaw an' stopped to rest—an' see what I'd got; I could just make out to count it in the moonlight. Just six hundred dollars more than they'd robbed me of—gosh, maybe you think I wasn't pleased, at that! 'Mine, plus interest,' I thought to myself. I was thinkin', 'Now I've got to make tracks out of here darn soon!' when all of a sudden—all of a sudden, that old Bible sayin' came into my mind an' blotted everything else out. It kept on an' on: 'Vengeance is mine; vengeance is mine!'

"'Well, all right,' I tried to say to myself, 'it *is* mine!' An' then the strain, I reckon, was too much; I fell over—fainted, I reckon. I woke up, I don't know how much later, an' above the noise of the Spavinaw water rushin' along over the

rocks, it seemed like somebody was shoutin' in my ear: 'Vengeance is mine, *saith the Lord!*' See? 'Saith the Lord'—like that, over an' over, hammerin' it into my ears. Then came the rest, 'I will repay.' It's been like that ever since, Sue; them words that I can't get out of my head: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; I will repay!'

"I've been through hell, Sue! Why?"

"Go on, Jack," she whispered.

"I tried to sleep there in the woods, to get back my nerve; I laid down under a pine tree close to Spavinaw water an' shut my eyes. I reckon I went to sleep, an' I saw them four—the white rag on Rogers' hand as plain as anything—come walkin' across the water right at me. No sound, no splashin'—right at me!

"SEEMED to me like I emptied my pistol at 'em, an' they faded away. I woke up with the pistol in my hand, four loads still in it, an' knew I hadn't fired. For fear I might, I threw the pistol into the water; I wrapped the money in my coat, made a roll of the coat an' plodded off west to hit the railroad at Salina. Early in the mornin' I hopped a train for Muskogee, went an' got somethin' to eat an' took a room at a roomin'-house. I hid the money under the mattress, an' went out to walk the streets till bedtime. . . . Next mornin' a fellow that had the next room caught me in the hall an' said, 'Say, friend, you sure raised hell in there last night—don't you know these partitions are mighty thin?' I reckon I did make a fuss, too—seemed like bein' without a gun laid me open to them—spirits, or ghosts, or whatever 'they' are!

"I changed to another roomin'-house, hopin' I could get rid of 'them' an' get a chance to think an' plan—think what I was goin' to do about the money—an' about you, Sue. There was a piece in the paper about Kuhns an' the rest bein' found shot, an' the other paper, next day, came out with the story that they'd been killed in a midnight battle amongst themselves—told how they'd been known as buried-treasure hunters, how Kuhns had evidently thought he'd found the place beside the big rock an' had begun to dig when the battle started, how Fonda had shot Kuhns, Dempsey had shot Fonda an' how Rogers had got Dempsey, who'd managed to get Rogers with a dyin' snap-shot. People were flockin' from all around to dig up the ground for a hundred yards on every side of the big rock.

"Looked like I was clean free, but I couldn't sleep, just the same, without 'they'd' come marchin' in—not sayin' anything, but solemn an' pointin' to me. Next day, I bought these two guns, an' moved on down to McAlester, to another roomin'-house. I put the guns under my pillow. . . . Time after time, 'they'd' come in through the door, an' I'd dream I was shootin' 'em down; but I'd wake up an' find my guns still loaded all around. . . . I changed roomin'-houses again; an' then I went on to Krebs an' stayed there two days. No good! I was gettin' desperate, without any proper sleep, with 'them' comin' in regular, an' with that everlastin' sayin' out of the Bible hammerin' an' hammerin' away inside of my head. . . .

"It got so that I could hardly think—even of you, Sue. So at Durant I sent off that telegram before I'd lost my mind, an'—well, here we are!

"I reckon I figured if I could get to you, Sue, I could explain it to you, an' you could help me get rid of 'them.' But when I saw you at the depot in the hot sunshine lookin' so happy an' sweet an' real, it just seemed like I couldn't talk about 'them.' I said to myself: 'If I can keep Sue by me, 'they' wont dare to come, an' I can get some sleep again—sleep without havin' 'them' come at me. I wont need to say anything to Sue.' But—

"They came tonight the same as they've been comin'; an', same as ever, that old Bible sayin' kept on tormentin' me—kept on repeatin' itself: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'"

MILLER turned a stricken face to Sue, and put out his other hand toward her, his voice becoming utterly tragic:

"I know why they come, an' why that sayin' keeps on poundin' on my brain—ah, I know, Sue: when I made up my mind to kill them fellows, I was undertakin' to do the Lord's work; when I shot Dempsey an' Rogers—an' I'd have shot Kuhns an' Fonda, too, if I'd had the chance!—I did what the Lord had promised to do, there in the Bible. An' I'm bein' punished, Sue.

"Look how the Lord dealt with Kuhns an' Fonda; He'd have done the same with the other two if I hadn't.

"Oh, what'll I do, Sue? Go up there an' tell the sheriff, give up to the law?" In the dim glow of the light from the writing-table, Miller's eyes seemed to Sue like flaming interrogation marks.

With a terrific effort—a literal heave of her aching shoulders—Sue threw off the weight of binding horror that had held her immobile. She leaned to press her cheek against Miller's, then got off the bed. She stood for a minute, hands over her eyes, thinking, striving to recall something that she had once heard—where? At last it came back to her, and she sat down on the edge of the bed again.

"Jack," she said quietly, "let's see just where you stand"—her voice dropped almost to a whisper—"with the Lord: You shot the man Dempsey, who was a murderer; you shot Rogers, who had murder in his heart—who tried to kill Dempsey; and you got back what belonged to you." She sat silent for a little while.

"I'm a Christian, Jack," she went on. "At least, I believe I am. I know the Lord's promise to repay, and I believe it. . . . It would torment you, dear—horribly. But I want you to pay close attention to this, Jack. . . . Wait!" She walked swiftly to the writing-table and took up the Gideon Bible; under the light she flipped its pages rapidly, found what she sought. She returned to the bed, put the book down, and holding one of Miller's hands to her breast, cried softly:

"Listen, my dear!" And she read:

"'Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the serpent shalt thou trample under foot.' You see, Jack!" Sue raised her eyes, exultant, and whispered: "He meant you to do it!" She crushed the captive hand fiercely against the round softness of her flesh.

"And listen, again:

"'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night.' Don't you see, Jack? Truly, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' But *He must have an instrument!* See, my dear, you were His instrument."

Miller fingered the Book, which she had given opened into his hands, awkwardly. Presently he smiled; and then the hard lines of terror, the deep scars of self-torture, seemed to break and disappear. . . . And then a sleepy, boyish face was laid against Sue's shoulder. He muttered apologetically:

"I reckon I never did read enough of that Book, Sue." His head fell forward; he recovered with a faint, happy grin, and said contentedly: "Glad I came to you, Sue—my dear. . . ."

She lowered his head to the pillow; and he slept—a profound, dreamless sleep.



Free Lances in Diplomacy

The reader dines in state with the King of England in this fine story "The Windsor Castle Plot," one of the most remarkable of this long-sustained and authoritative series.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

ST. JAMES' CLUB rarely gives the impression of being overcrowded; yet there are evenings in every year when, for no apparent reason, it seems as if the full membership must be largely represented, with a fair sprinkling of guests besides. When the Court is at Buckingham and all of the Embassy suites in the city, there is naturally more of a luncheon and dinner attendance than at other times in this diplomatic club; but there are other evenings when the rooms are filled with members who seem to have happened in by chance. It was during one of this sort when three celebrated men dropped in for a late supper after leaving a reception in Belgravia—no longer, by the way, the exclusive section it was.

Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint, Earl Lammerford of St. Ives and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, G. C. S. I. are possibly among the hundred best known and best liked men in Europe. Yet a curious thing is noticeable in the case of each one, whether he is by himself or with the other two. With most celebrities, there is a general turning of heads, a focusing of attention upon

them as they enter a room filled with other people. They attract, and desire, instant recognition. They relax, and bask in it, as their right. With the men above-mentioned, however, it always seems as if they had been among the guests in a room for some time before they are recognized—and at that, the recognition is neither instantaneous nor general. The reason for this, of course, is the fact that, being masters of the art of disguise, because of their many unsuspected activities, they deliberately cultivate the ability to make themselves inconspicuous—in some such way as this:

A person who has never given any attention to that sort of thing is recognizable even more by the unconscious movements of his head, body and limbs—with his back turned—than by a square front view of his face. An unaccustomed expression of surprise, rage, annoyance, extreme pleasure, mirth, will often change the features sufficiently to make them unfamiliar to those who know the person very well. But the shrug of a shoulder which has become by long habit a definite mannerism, the twitch of a limb or hand, the unconscious uplift-

ing of eyebrows while talking, until the person literally can't talk without doing it, rubbing the upper lip with one's forefinger, or sticking a thumb in the armhole of a waistcoat, or two fingers in a waistcoat pocket, or hands in the trousers pockets—you catch the idea? There are thousands of these unconsciously habitual motions. Well, in the case of the two earls and their Afghan friend, each has accentuated certain mannerisms which go with his normal, everyday appearance until he doesn't look natural without them. So complete avoidance of them is mystifying at the start, and the use of totally unfamiliar mannerisms during an occasional moment or so clinches the deception.

Take, for example, the case of some friend whose marked characteristic is erect, soldierly bearing whether standing or walking, whose hands are usually at his side or one of them resting easily with the thumb hooked in a lower waistcoat pocket, whose expression is almost invariably animated. Now, suppose that same person enters a crowded room with bent head, stooped shoulders, forefinger rubbing his mustache in a thoughtful manner—preoccupied, rather slouchy? Would you instantly recognize him at first glance? Or even second? On your life, you would not! Try it and see. As many times as both Trevor and Lammerford have entered St. James' Club, there have been frequent occasions when the footmen or pages who took their sticks and topcoats in the hall haven't realized until it came to them with a start, sometime later, just who the members were.

ON the evening referred to, they had seated themselves at a table in the grill and ordered a light supper, when Lammerford recalled something he wished to ask a fellow-member, if he happened to be in the club, and went off to look for him while their order was being prepared. In ten or fifteen minutes he returned and sat down again, with the remark:

"I fancy there'll be a bit of high play in the card-room this evening. The Spanish Ambassador is a capital sport an' all that—plays very fair bridge an' pedro. Plays good poker, too, with any ord'n'ry person. But there's a chap who's been trillin' about with him of late who completely outclasses him at poker—has the type of cold, deadly nerve which doesn't go with the Ambassador's temperam'nt at

all. In other words, Don Pablo plays any game like the gentleman he is—while his friend Goldman plays to win, every time. Goldman is a wealthy Cuban-American, I understand—a tobacco-planter, with a hacienda in the Pinar del Rio district and an expensive house in New York."

"You say he's a friend of Don Pablo's?"

"Well, the Ambassador put him up for a month, at the club. The man is frequently at the Embassy an' appears to be interested in some of the Don's business affairs. But when they sit down for a game of draw, I fancy most of the friendship is cut out until the game is over. One hears that Goldman has won over ten thousand pounds from his 'friend' durin' the last week. Of course I don't know how wealthy a man the Don is—it's supposed, vaguely, that he's in comfortable circumstances; but ten thousand quid is a good bit of money to drop in a week—for amusement. From the way they were startin' in a few minutes ago, I fancy the game will be a stiff one this evening!"

"Anyone else playing?"

"Naturally! Two-handed poker is quite sad as a pastime. There are another Spaniard, a Hungarian and a German, playing with them. Not playing to lose, either."

AFTER finishing their supper, they went into the card-room to look on for a while at the game of poker. It appeared that the Ambassador, who had been a heavy loser, was beginning to recoup somewhat. He had taken in several good-sized pots from his fellow-Spaniard and the Hungarian—which seemed to make Goldman even more determined to get these winnings for his own pile. He was playing his cards so close to his chest that it was difficult for the onlookers to judge what he really held—but during one deal Trevor spotted three kings and a pair of deuces in his hand, naturally expecting to see him raise the ante until all of the smaller fry were frozen out. Don Pablo had passed, after one glance at the cards dealt him—the German and Hungarian staying, with what they evidently considered strong hands. After they had raised the pot once or twice, Goldman threw his full house into the discard and dropped out, apparently having no further interest in that deal. The Hungarian won the pot—on three nines. A few minutes later Don Pablo filled a straight and began to raise a little. Goldman in-

stantly came back at him and ran the betting up until the others dropped out—winning with a flush which he had apparently filled, as he had drawn one card against his friend's pat hand.

In half an hour Trevor was positive that Goldman was out to win every cent the Ambassador had, if he could—and was repeatedly throwing away good hands rather than buck against the others, even with good chances of winning. This in itself was puzzling, as the two men were presumably good friends—and when anything began puzzling Trevor to that extent, he rarely let the matter drop until he had found an explanation which satisfied him. So he began watching the play of the other men to see if there were any evidence of conspiracy.

So far as he could judge, the game was perfectly straight—as far as collusion or signaling between any two of the players was concerned; *but* he presently caught both the German and the Hungarian laying down good hands also, at times when there was a tilt between the Ambassador and Goldman. It is difficult even to infer anything suspicious from such a fact, however, when the hands have been running to as high percentages as they had upon this particular evening. A man may hold a low full, and yet chuck it away after a few raises upon the conviction that there are higher hands out against him. But—why did such cases of “cold feet” or premonition always occur when the Ambassador and his friend were doing the heaviest betting? And why didn't Goldman invariably win in such cases if he had the cards? Upon one occasion he held a high flush when Don Pablo was raising with more or less confidence and simply “called” at the second round. The Don won with a low full—a pot too small to be very encouraging. Yet upon other occasions Goldman had kept raising upon a high flush until there were nearly a thousand pounds in the pot—and won with it. Why should he have been more confident at one time than another?

From Goldman's handling of the cards, there was little question but that he could have dealt them any way he wished—if he cared to risk disgrace which would have driven him out of England. If one or two of the others were actually confederates, either of them could have dealt the Don a good hand and Goldman a slightly better one. But watch as closely as they

might, neither Trevor nor his friends were able to discover actual trickery. By this time, however, all of them were convinced that the tobacco-planter was out to break his friend, financially, for some obscure reason of his own—and instead of going home as they had intended, sat watching the game until half-past three in the morning, at which time the Cuban held Don Pablo's I-O-U's for nearly fifty thousand pounds—the Don having become desperate and plunged when the luck steadily held against him. As Lammerford had said, he was a good sport—smilingly getting up from the table with congratulations to Goldman upon his luck. But his face was several shades whiter, and his manner preoccupied, as he motored back to the Embassy just before daybreak.

WHEN leaving the club, shortly before the players, Trevor was somewhat of a mind to shadow Goldman when he left, but Lammerford said:

“He's stoppin' at the Carlton—and he's sleepy enough to go there direct. We might be loafin' about the lobby just before noon, and follow him then, if you like, when he goes out. I'm in doubt as to whether we'd be wastin' our time or not—but it's certain that the chap has some object in ruining our good Don Pablo. It's like enough to be some old vendetta which the Don has forgotten long since—some affair over a woman, perhaps, in the years gone by. *Au contraire*—Goldman *could* prove a better friend than we think him, an' be merely teaching the Don a lesson not to play games of chance with men who have a natural gift for 'em—to put it politely. Eh? What? Still—I'm sufficiently intrigued over that game to probe a bit an' see if anything turns up. Suppose we three are loafin' about the Carlton between eleven an' twelve—eh? Seemingly to be Americans, just over—seein' the sights? What?”

IT was past noon when Goldman came down, and breakfasted in the morning-room. Two men who appeared to know him sauntered in while he was eating and took a near-by table. They all left the room together—sat in the lounge for half an hour, smoking after-breakfast cigars and discussing the stock-market. Then one of them left for an appointment he had, and the other made some proposition to which the Cuban assented—calling a taxi and

driving away with him. Another taxi with three men followed it, casually, as if bound in a similar direction, but there was something about it which puzzled one or two other drivers as they passed. It was quite evidently one belonging to a well-known company, by the colors in which it was painted and the name on it—but the number was the highest any of the other drivers remembered as belonging to that particular company, and its chauffeur was several shades darker than any they knew to be driving those cabs. However, these points were but momentary bits of curiosity—forgotten within the hour. And so cleverly did the man handle his cab, dodging around this square or that to get into the same street ahead of the one he had been following, or accurately guessing what turns the other chauffeur was almost certain to make, that he was just out of sight around the next corner when his quarry stopped before a quite respectable house in Chelsea.

Goldman and his friend went in as if they were quite at home—walking through to a small study in the rear which overlooked a garden and was evidently out of earshot from the rest of the house. Each of the three who had been following knew some of the squares in that section of the city; between them, with the large-scale insurance-maps which were always available in Trevor's library, they knew almost positively what the rear of the house was like—which gardens had doors giving upon alleys that ran out through the near-by mews. And they decided that an attempt to overhear the conversation between the two men, in broad daylight, was practically out of the question. Data as to the house and its occupants were easily available. Beyond that, they were likely to pick up circumstantial evidence by having Goldman and the supposed house-owner shadowed for a few weeks—and by fitting the various bits together, dig out pretty definite information concerning them. So they drove away upon their own affairs, while the conversation in the little study was drifting from generalities to serious discussion.

GOLDMAN was evidently getting all the assurance he could as to what was solid ground under his feet, and what steps might be too risky.

"We've now reached the point, Heubel, where I can make my arrangements almost

any time. Don Pablo hasn't slept much this morning; he's beginning to realize how much money he lost at the club last night, and wonder how it will be possible for him to pay it. I happen to know that he can't readily put his hand upon any such sum even by mortgaging his property. By stripping himself down to his pelt, he could pay it—and he owns real estate which he could afterward sell in order to live. But he's in a devilish uncomfortable position; I think he'd almost go on his knees to me if I proved it all nothing but an ugly dream!"

"Y-e-s—your reasoning is perfectly sound, Goldman; I know the man well enough to compliment you upon the scheme. But there's another angle with all those Latins which we've got to consider—their idea of personal honor, particularly among those before the public. Oh, we both know that some of them can give the edge to a Tammany grafter, but it'll be pretty deep under the rose. Suppose that what you ask of Don Pablo appears to him slightly dishonorable, reflecting upon his official reputation? Eh? He'll submit to being absolutely ruined before he'll agree to it—unless you can coat the suggestion so plausibly with apparent harmlessness that there will seem to be nothing really prohibitive against it."

"Precisely what I intend to do—and can do! All that sort of thing was discounted in the beginning. But I won't make a move until you give me satisfactory assurance that the combination we're figuring upon will be at Windsor on a certain specified date. Because—the scheme can't be worked a second time. We *might* think up something else which looked possible, but it's very doubtful. This idea will work, and we can't afford to waste it by having the rest of the combination incomplete."

"I see your point—you're quite right, of course! Well—let's do a bit of checking up, and see. A royal invitation to Windsor while the Court is in residence is a command. One may disregard it if he or she chooses—naturally. It wouldn't be a criminal offense. But considering that no such invitation is issued without the fact being previously ascertained that the prospective guest not only is otherwise disengaged but thoroughly appreciative of the honor and compliment, refusal would be a direct and flagrant insult to royalty. There have been cases where persons really too ill to leave their homes have taken the risk

rather than seem discourteous—and have had the best possible care while in the royal households. A refusal in the case of a person in good health would ostracize him socially—no doubt about it! Unless, of course, it were a question where political complications, unexpectedly, were self-evident.

“Very well! Baron Kalycksy, of Budapest, has been invited to Windsor from the 20th to the 25th, inclusive—it being hinted in diplomatic circles that he is secretly affiliated with the party which holds the real balance of power in Germany and Austria, that he has the confidence of certain men in Moscow and Petrograd, and that he carries upon his person a certain document, signed with initials only, which may form the basis of a general European understanding. That is—he will *have* that document with him at Windsor. At other times he keeps it in one of the Bank of England vaults, by courtesy of His Majesty’s Government. Kalycksy will be there if he has to be carried on a stretcher. Another guest will be a Mr. Selwyn Bradburn—an American financier who is understood to represent the views of a dozen or more influential Senators in Washington, and by means of his banking affiliations throughout the world, to understand European conditions better than any other American. His wife is quite a celebrated woman in the States, on account of her beauty and influence among the women’s organizations. *They* will be there from the 20th to the 25th.

“During the war, certain nations were neutral—their interests not being vitally affected to the extent of dragging them in. And they occupy a similar position of aloofness during this period of reconstruction. For this reason the accredited envoy of such a state, if it be one of the more or less influential nations, is desirable, as representing general outside opinion in any discussion of European politics—and Don Pablo is quite naturally the one who would be chosen in such capacity, on account of his fine old family, his exhaustive knowledge of diplomatic affairs, and the individual popularity of both his daughter and himself. *He* has accepted an invitation from the 18th to the 25th. There will be half a dozen Government men—some of the Continental princes. But the secret organization which has probably more widespread political influence than any other party in existence will have no representative at Windsor during a time

when there may be conferences likely to change the map of Europe if not that of the world. And your contention has been that, at any cost, this organization *must* have a representative on the ground, even though he hasn’t been invited and has no prospect of being so. Does all this remove your doubts?”

GOLDMAN smoked a moment or two in deep thought.

“H-m-m—I can’t seem to think of anything you’ve left out. Probably I never quite realized before how imperative a royal invitation is. They joke occasionally in the United States about some boor declining a Presidential invitation—laugh at the idea of its being a command. But, now I think of it, I can’t remember a case where any excuse was accepted. The invited party went to the White House when he was asked to go, and behaved himself as well as he could while there. All of this, of course, materially strengthens my scheme. Think I’d better drive in and see Don Pablo at the Embassy before he has time to do anything foolish.”

“Hmph! That hadn’t occurred to me, but it’s entirely possible! If he *should* happen to shoot himself—eh? That would make your whole scheme impossible, and I’m beginning to believe it’s something which should be put through at all risks! We may lose more than we can recover if it isn’t. Here! I’ll telephone for a taxi at once! Get in there to the Embassy as quickly as you can!”

Now, being the man of unimpeachable honor he was, it must be admitted that Don Pablo had gotten out his army pistols after breakfast in bed, that noon—and after thoughtfully fingering them over, had given them to his valet to clean. He had courage, of that by no means common type which calmly faces trouble, disgrace or death—and keeps persistently hammering away at the solution until one is figured out. He was very much let down, with the worst case of blues he ever remembered. Tried to recall how much he’d had to drink the night before, and whether his recklessness could be laid to that. But he’d been always a temperate drinker, because of his liver. As nearly as he could decide, he was at one time nearly ten thousand pounds ahead of the game—which recouped all of his previous losses; and when he had felt himself slipping back again, he had simply plunged with the conviction that

luck, having favored him before, was certain to do so again. When Goldman's card was brought up to him, it seemed an evidence of wretched taste. Why couldn't the man let him alone for a day or two—he'd get his money, somehow! Don Pablo refused to see the visitor.

But his former supposed friend scribbled upon a leaf from his notebook:

You've merely had a bad dream, my friend. I bring you some very good news. Let me come up, if you're not dressed.

This Goldman put in an envelope and sealed. When the Ambassador read it, he suspected a trick, an excuse to dun him in person, but he faced that possibility like the gentleman he was, and had the man fetched up. As soon as the valet had left the room, Goldman hunted about for an ash-tray, which he placed upon a table by the Don's bedside. Then, taking from his pocket the bunch of easily recognizable I-O-U's, he calmly struck a match and lighted them, letting the ashes fall into the tray until they were entirely consumed.

"There, my friend! You wrote but three which were not given to me, and I took those up this morning—as I could well afford to with my other winnings, aside from your money. I'm still five thousand pounds ahead on poker since I came to London—which isn't bad at all!"

"But—I cannot see how your burning those obligations makes the slightest difference in my indebtedness! I was sober enough to remember the total amount due you, very clearly—have been figuring over the payment ever since I woke up this morning. Your having nothing tangible to prove it makes my obligation all the more a debt of honor!"

"My dear friend, would you feel badly if I hurt your feelings, as long as I saved your honor, absolutely? Listen, please! Certain men are born with what we term 'card-sense' for want of a better name—though it should be called the sense of risk and chance, since it applies to every other game as well. The majority of men lack this gift entirely, even though they play many games very fairly. When you add to it the sort of nerve one acquires by living in such countries as Cuba and Mexico, where quick-shooting ability is much better protection than such law as there is, the result is a poker-player—who can win at all games, anywhere in the world, save when he runs up against other men

of the same type. Frankly, seriously, you hadn't a chance in playing poker against me. So—the only honorable thing I can do is to destroy your obligations. Can't you see my position—and accept it?"

"But my good Goldman—several other men saw you win that money from me! They are as certain as I am that the game was perfectly straight! What position does it put me in before them when they learn that I didn't take up my obligations?"

"How are they ever going to know you didn't? I certainly won't tell! You certainly won't! They know nothing as to your resources! In fact, it is quite likely to help your credit if it's hinted about that you paid such a sum without being inconvenienced! Drive out to Richmond for tea with me, as soon as you're dressed. You'll forget all this by the time we get there—and you assuredly won't *look* like a man who is seriously cramped by a heavy loss."

"But my friend, can't you see that this unlooked for courtesy upon your part leaves me still under very heavy obligations to you? There is no question whatever that my indebtedness was perfectly valid—or that a less generous man would have collected the money without a thought!"

"Oh, well, if that's bothering you, we can easily think up some little thing you can do for me which I'll gladly accept as canceling the obligation entirely. That shouldn't be difficult!"

"Have you anything in mind?"

"Why—no. I didn't suppose you'd take this so seriously after I'd explained that I frequently play poker with Texans—and win money from them. A man has to have his nerve right with him to do that! But if it's going to make you any more comfortable in mind, I'll see what I can figure out—after we've had our tea."

THERE was no getting around the fact that Don Pablo *was* feeling easier in mind; and yet, with his Castilian ideas upon personal honor, he was uneasy in a different way. His I-O-U's were no longer in existence—he was certainly in position to say they would be paid when presented or that he had offered to pay without such presentation. But that didn't get around the fact that he was very deeply obligated to his friend Goldman for an unnecessarily generous act. It was uppermost in his mind all the time they were having their

tea and chatting with three or four acquaintances who happened to be at the Star & Garter at the moment. When these had left for town and they were idling over their cigarettes, he again asked Goldman to think up some particular favor or service which might be done for him. Presently the supposed Cuban laughed:

"You'll be much amused at my childishness, Excelencia. Something has just occurred to me which has been really a strong desire for many years. You know a good many of us in Cuba are still royalists at heart—loyal to the old régime and the once powerful crown of Spain. As a mere citizen with no pretensions to noble blood, I have always admired royalty not only in Spain, but in England—Italy—Austria—and wished it were possible for me to see how it lived, from the inside. I know that commoners are frequently received as guests in the royal palaces if there is any good reason for it, and I've often stood on the street looking in at palace windows in Madrid, Rome or London—wondering what it was really like, inside, how royalty got through its days and evenings, what went on in the palaces—trying to get the picture from newspaper and magazine accounts, but never getting much satisfaction.

"Old Windsor, down there, for example? I'm told that you're to be one of the King's guests for a week—as much in a personal capacity as an official one. And from what I've picked up as to the customary usage in such cases, I infer that a suite of several persons will accompany you—maids for Doña Ysobella—valets, secretaries and aides for yourself. So—your insistence upon this question of obligation has rather set me wondering whether it might be possible for me to accompany you to Windsor in some official or semiofficial capacity—assistant secretary, financial adviser to the Embassy—even valet, if necessary—no, that wouldn't do! There might be some one there who knew me. But the other capacities might be plausible enough. Eh?"

DISTRESS and regret began to appear in Don Pablo's face.

"My friend, you should have allowed me to pay my losses! It would be easier to do that than what you suggest. I am personally responsible for everyone who accompanies me—must give a list of their names to Sir Derek, Master of the Household, and to Colonel Stiles, Inspector of

Windsor Castle. The slightest false representation concerning any one of them would be a very serious breach of etiquette even if merely an oversight upon my part—might cause my recall from the Embassy."

"Oh, well—let us say no more about it, then! I had no thought of embarrassing you by the suggestion. It was merely something I'd dreamed of all my life and seemed quite harmless when I thought of it. I supposed you were authorized to appoint desirable men to a few of the official positions in the Embassy—"

"That is quite true; but I must submit such appointments to our Foreign Office in Madrid—have the names approved by the Secretary."

"Who happens to be my very good friend Don Felipe Alvarazo—"

"You know him! He is really your friend? You think he would approve your appointment to an official position in the London Embassy?"

"Cable him—and see. Suggest me as temporary financial adviser. As it happens, I am not without some influence in the Cortes. Some of the senators and grantees are under obligations to me."

"Why—but—then— I knew nothing of this, of course! Why—then—what you suggest may not be altogether impossible, after all! My list need not be sent down until the end of the week, though I would prefer it should go a little sooner."

"I'm afraid that, without in the least understanding your delicate official position, I just happened to think of something which might somehow prove embarrassing to you. Let's forget it! Some other time, I'll think up another foolish desire which may be more easily gratified."

"Not so, my good friend! Not so! I would risk much official embarrassment to please you after your great courtesy to me! Here is something which you say has been a lifelong desire—I do not consider it foolish; I can understand your feeling in the matter, perfectly. It is something which in a monarchical country might be impossible for you to do, unless you had rendered some brilliant service to the crown. In some ways, you will be disappointed—because royalty lives, these days, much like other people. But on the whole, I think it will prove even beyond your expectations, because there is a good deal of ceremonial—the costumes and decorations are brilliant—the state banquets something

you would never see elsewhere upon the same scale of magnificence. *Si! Si!* It will be an experience which you will remember—and value!

“At first—the idea is impossible—as you saw! But then—your friendship with Don Felipe is of another complexion altogether—it makes the thing practical if you are quite sure he will endorse you. It might have occurred to me, I suppose, that you were much the man-of-affairs in New York and Cuba, and were likely to have strong connections over here, but I did not see—the idea was startling to me. It seemed that it might touch my personal and official reputation too closely. Now—let us go about the business at once. Your suggestion as to ‘financial adviser’ is not so bad. I am supposed to learn what I can and report upon various English bond-issues, particularly those sponsored by the Government—also openings for the investment of Spanish funds. It might seem quite necessary that I should secure a man of experience in such matters to advise our Embassy. I will cable Don Felipe at once, upon our return—suggesting you. Do not, however, overlook the fact that one cannot have too much influence in Madrid for anything he may wish to obtain—if you can pull a few wires there, by cable, it may prove just the difference between approval and rejection.”

Goldman smiled behind the hand which was caressing his mustache. With the Ambassador’s consent to the scheme, the thing was as good as done. He had no fear of adverse action in Madrid—certain men there being dangerously in his power.

ALL this of course was byplay and detail of which Trevor and his friends couldn’t possibly obtain knowledge except by the merest fluke of luck—and one must not depend upon that sort of thing. What most endangered Goldman’s scheme in their case was no incautious word dropped where they might have overheard it, or even occasional association with some one who might be under their suspicion. It was simply that he and his poker-game at St. James’ Club had thoroughly aroused their curiosity—and their logical minds didn’t permit them to dismiss as of no consequence an occurrence which intrigued them to that extent. While the Don and his friend were at Richmond, the Free Lances were having their own tea with Countess Nan in Park Lane and discussing

the matter with her. Five days later, it just happened that Sir Derek was dining with them—being a very old friend who partly owed his appointment to Her Ladyship. The Court was going down to Windsor the following week. And as they were smoking in the big Jacobean library after dinner, before official duties compelled Sir Derek to hurry away, he casually made some comment upon the friendship between Don Pablo and the man who was said to have won a perfectly staggering sum from him the week before.

“There is, of course, one explanation of what seemed a deliberate attempt upon Mr. Goldman’s part to break his friend, irretrievably. I am assuming that I got the story correctly, from an eyewitness—just as it happened—an explanation which puts Mr. Goldman in a really very creditable light. That is—a belief upon his part that Don Pablo has an occasional weakness for plunging in pretty high play, and the wish to give him a practical demonstration of how easily he might be rooked out of every penny he has, by sharpers, or even men who play a much stronger though perfectly honorable game. If this supposition is correct, Goldman presumably returned his I-O-U’s—which would account for the Don’s having no appearance of one who has met with a serious financial loss—also for continued evidence of friendship between the two, even to the extent of appointing Mr. Goldman financial adviser to the Embassy—a position which, I’m told, he is entirely capable of filling satisfactorily.”

“What’s that, Sir Derek! Has Goldman really been appointed to such a position? He’d have to be confirmed at Madrid, you know!”

“He appears to stand very well at Madrid—quite to my surprise. His endorsement came back without the slightest question. You see, his name is on Don Pablo’s list for Windsor, next week, in this official capacity. Having heard considerable gossip about that poker-game at St. James’, it was naturally my duty to cable both Havana and New York for reports concerning him. The man doesn’t appear to be very widely known over there, but those who do know him say there is absolutely nothing to his discredit, the impression being that he purposely keeps out of the limelight but has rather extensive influence under the surface. This left no excuse for me to withhold approval as a guest of

Their Majesties—and strengthens the supposition that he was merely teaching his friend a lesson in the danger of high play. But I must confess the man gave me an opposite impression upon the single occasion when we met. A physiognomist would deny any generous quality in him, or the possibility of cultivating one—which shows how easy it is for science to be misleading in some cases.”

“Me for the scientific verdict all the same, old chap! And I’ll wager you a hundred quid that it’s not wrong in Goldman’s case, either—proof to be forthcoming within three months, or you take the money.”

“But—deuce take it! What reason have I for refusing to receive him at Windsor? Though I’ll book your wager, merely as a sporting gamble.”

“**NONE** whatever! There probably is none that the British public will ever hear of. And such a refusal might be the most serious mistake of your career, my friend. Let the man come to Windsor, by all means! Otherwise we’ll never know just what’s up—or whether there’s anything in this affair at all. . . . Just a moment! I know you’re due at Buckingham—but we’ve got to have a bit more data before you go. Isn’t Baron Kalycksy of Hungary to be there at the same time? . . . Yes? I’d heard so. And Mr. Selwyn Bradburn, the American banker? Léon Rochemain, of Paris? And four or five of the Cabinet? You see? There will be discussions in off hours that certain under-world interests would give practically anything to overhear—discussions which may reshape Europe. This is all pure conjecture, of course—but I’ll wager it’s not so far out.

“Look here, old chap! We four haven’t been in one of the royal houses for several months—been out of England upon various affairs of our own, as far as anybody knows. So we should be welcome enough just at this time—and I’ve the conviction that if we’re not among the guests at Windsor from the 18th to the 25th, or perhaps a bit longer, something may happen which will be a serious matter for His Majesty’s Government. Can you manage it—so that Their Majesties will see no ulterior object in the invitation?”

“Why—I fancy it shouldn’t be difficult in *your* cases; but frankly, you know they don’t care about too large a house-party at any one time.”

“Hmph! They might better dispense with some one else, in the circumstances! But of course we can’t tell them that—”

“Oh, they’ll want you—as soon as I make the suggestion! I know too well how you four stand with them to question that. The only point I had in mind was how to put the suggestion in such a way as to appear casual—an invitation which might be extended some other time as well, and yet be sure of having you down *this* time, with no slip-up on it?”

“Tell ’em we’re leaving for the Orient almost immediately, but that you happen to know we have this particular time more or less open. That ought to settle it! The one thing we don’t want to do if it can be avoided is to let them get the impression that something dangerous is underfoot within the walls of old Windsor. It would be difficult to keep some trace of it from showing in their manner; they’d be haunted by suspicion of this guest or that one, when those suspicions wouldn’t hit the mark at all—be doing grave injustice to loyal friends. When one thinks of what has actually occurred at Windsor during past centuries, the wonder is that there hasn’t been a good deal more intrigue since Victoria ascended the throne!”

“Er—aside from the fact that there are possibly no four persons in England whom Their Majesties would prefer as guests, next week, if room can be made for you, there’s no question, as I understand it, that you really anticipate some occurrence down yonder which must be prevented at almost any cost—or that you feel yourselves able to forestall it if you are in the Castle?”

“That covers the condition exactly, old chap! If you can’t get us there in the obvious way, our only recourse is to run down and ask for a private interview with the King—which may spill the beans and make the whole affair a fiasco, to be more successfully carried out at some other time. Understand me clearly, please! *If* Mr. Goldman is what we suspect him to be,—which is no reflection upon the delightful and unsuspecting Don Pablo,—*if* we catch him in the act, as seems quite possible, it’ll head off further trouble from him and his associates for some years. We will make sure of that! On the other hand, if he is permitted to mix freely with the other guests, be present at informal conversations, he *might* pick up enough confidential information to flop England upside-down,

politically. We're putting considerable responsibility upon you, of course—but you owe your present appointment to your un-failing tact, and you'll manage, somehow."

WHEN the King heard the suggestion that it might be a favorable opportunity for including the Trevors, Earl Lammerford and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan among his guests at Windsor, his immediate exclamation was one of surprise that they had not been among the first on the list, if they were in England, and available at the time. Her Majesty, overhearing this, promptly agreed with him—though she instinctively felt that the Trevors' attitude in her case was one of un-failing courtesy and respect rather than the personal liking she would have preferred. It was one of those cases where three people with every reason to be friends—continually doing little friendly acts for each other—are temperamentally repelled. Nobody is to blame for this sort of thing, it just happens.

When the party arrived at Windsor, they were met by Sir Derek as Master of the Household, and lodged with their servants in one of the towers. He said that dinner was at eight-forty-five, as in King Edward's time, and that the party assembled in the red drawing-room at eight-thirty. As this was at some distance from their quarters, through the Long Gallery, Sir Derek offered to send a page for them just before the hour, but knowing the Castle rather better than he did, if that were possible, they assured him this would be unnecessary.

It occurred to Lammerford, however, that it would serve more than one purpose if Goldman could be lodged at some little distance from the others of Don Pablo's suite, who were just arriving by another train. Their friend looked at the Earl in considerable surprise at this suggestion—having actually assigned the man and his valet to rooms in their wing of the Visitors' Apartments, from lack of space with the rest of the suite unless they were doubled up uncomfortably. A few moments later, Goldman expressed himself as very much pleased with the location of his room, as he preferred quiet when he had work to do. Actually, nothing could have suited him better than this opportunity for exploring certain parts of the Castle by himself without being seen by his companions of the Embassy suite. He was shown the

shortest cut to Don Pablo's chamber, of course—and availed himself of it to be with the Ambassador in off hours, with the excuse of desiring some coaching as to Court etiquette. He proved himself so apt a pupil that the trusting Don Pablo was amazed—the man might have lived at Court for half his life, as far as his perfect manner and correctness in little details were concerned. He confided to his friend and patron that he had done a good bit of reading on the subject and tried to profit by what he had learned. With an affable manner and enough surface polish to pass for much more than he had, he attracted several of the other guests—to such an extent, in fact, that the second day saw him entirely at his ease, upon pleasant speaking terms with everybody. Sir Derek was convinced by this time that he and the Trevors had done the man a great injustice, but Lammerford whispered to him, when he found occasion, that they were quite willing to double their wagers if he cared about taking them on. That night, Baron Kalycksy arrived.

AT eight-thirty, the house-party were assembled in the red drawing-room, where most of them found old acquaintances and were standing about, chatting, when Sir Derek announced that the royal party were coming—arranging the guests in two rows, men on one side and women on the other. Then the doors leading to the Royal Apartments opened, and the King appeared with the Duchess of York, the Queen following with the Prince of Wales, and then the Duke of York with one of the visiting princesses. There were several royal relatives in the party who had been lodged in the State Apartments on the north side of the quadrangle.

The scene was a brilliant one—the men being in court breeches with such orders as they possessed pinned to their dress coats. Several were in striking uniforms, with patent-leather boots, and fully half were in the Windsor uniform of black with scarlet facings. The women were in beautiful gowns, with their jewels flashing from throat, coiffure and arms. His Majesty wore the gold Garter over his black silk stocking and the broad blue cordon of the order across his chest. As host, in his own castle, he had a dignity in bearing which seemingly added several inches to his medium height, but his expression was animated as he chatted with one or another

old friend among the guests, and in spite of malicious gossip to the contrary, he proved himself a most excellent conversationalist with a wide range of topics. The Queen—a tall woman whose good looks improve with maturity—made a very striking figure, her gown and jewels being really magnificent.

Promptly at eight-forty-five, the doors were opened and the party marched into the large banqueting-room, with *Détaille's* picture of King Edward and the Duke of Connaught covering one entire end. His Majesty had the Duchess of York on his right and Countess Nan of Dyvnaint on his left; the Queen sat between Wales and Baron Kalycksy. The table presented an appearance not often seen except under similar conditions, with its gold service and dark blue *Sèvres*, its crimson and white flowers. A Highlander in full costume stood behind the King's chair; a perfectly drilled staff of servants noiselessly and promptly served the courses. In one of the ante-rooms the Castle orchestra played various classic selections, interspersed now and then with some popular hit of the day—this, it was said, upon a hint from the Prince of Wales, who goes in for all the democracy he considers safe.

Goldman had figured that with his persistently cultivated acquaintance among the other guests and the pleasant impression he had so carefully produced, he would be rather well placed at the formal dinners—but the seating arrangements were in the hands of a secretary acting under the orders of Sir Derek, and the supposed Cuban had been very carefully placed where he could do the least possible harm and where he was under constant espionage, even though he was by virtue of his official position the only one of Don Pablo's suite permitted to appear at the guests' table with Their Majesties.

NEITHER the King nor the Queen had the vaguest suspicion that the Trevors, Earl Lammerford or Sir Abdool were in the Castle for any other reason than a courteous and appreciative acceptance of the royal invitation. His Majesty had two or three times expressed his satisfaction to Sir Derek for reminding him that the four were in London at the moment and would probably be at liberty to run down if the invitation came to them—for the King, more thoroughly than any of his statesmen, perhaps, knew what the British

Crown—and two or three other Governments as well—owed to them.

It might, however, have been noticed, had anyone in the secret been watching them closely, that the Free Lances were quietly at their old trick of effacing themselves from any prominence among the other guests. While talking with this or that celebrity in the center of a surrounding group, their well-known personal mannerisms were as much in evidence as usual. A moment later, when they had walked a few paces away, the mannerisms disappeared—totally different ones took their places. Three different times when both Trevor and Lammerford were standing with others but a short distance from him, some prominent guest asked: "Where have the Trevors and Lammerford gone to? I'm positive I saw them here in this room a little while ago!" Once, the King asked the same question—and overhearing it, Earl Lammerford stepped from a small group within eight feet of him. In two such groups, during the evening, some one said: "I fancy Trevor has something on his mind tonight—he doesn't seem to be himself at all! In fact, at a little distance, I doubt if I should have recognized him!"

All of this sort of thing made it much easier to watch Goldman for indications of what he might have in mind—what plan or system he might be following to accomplish whatever he wished to accomplish. Presently, Sir Abdool noticed that he was cultivating the acquaintance of Mr. Selwyn Bradburn, as a fellow-banker—evidently displaying a sufficient grasp of European affairs to hold that gentleman's interest. A few moments later they stopped Baron Kalycksy as he was passing and drew him into the conversation. If Trevor had been right in his surmise as to what the fellow might be after, Lammerford decided that he had established a pretty good footing right at the start.

King Edward had been an inveterate card-player, and while at Windsor, almost invariably sat down for an hour at bridge, after dinner, in one of the adjoining rooms. But King George, on this particular evening, had discovered in Mr. Selwyn Bradburn a fellow stamp-enthusiast, and was quite eager to have him inspect his famous collection, which had been sent down to the Honorable John Fortescue, Librarian of Windsor, for rearrangement in a more systematic way. On second thought, however, His Majesty decided they would need a

whole afternoon at least even to glance at the specimens, and made the appointment for the following day—then took half a dozen of the men and women interested in arms and hunting around into the Guard Chamber, where one of the world's finest collections is installed. Incidentally, King George is admitted to be one of the first shots in the Kingdom.

THE Trevors had been given one of the suites in the Victoria Tower, overlooking both the South Terrace and the East Terrace gardens—one of the most desirable in the entire Castle. Lammerford and Sir Abdool, with their valets, were near by in a suite overlooking the quadrangle of the Upper Ward, with the State Apartments opposite, on the north side of the quadrangle. When Their Majesties retired with their royal guests at the entrance of the Private Apartments, just before midnight,—a shooting-party for the men being arranged for the following morning, with a luncheon rendezvous for the ladies at Virginia Water,—the four old friends went into Lammerford's suite and stood at one of his windows as they speculated upon what might be afoot in the Castle. Below them, there seemed to be a good deal of activity in the quadrangle for that time of night, though—owing to the thickness of the walls—the place was almost oppressively still. The guard was changed at midnight, and there were evidently officers or messengers arriving by way of the Lower Ward—but the way they seemed to move about with a total absence of noise save for the occasional clink of a saber or scrape of a spur on the stones was a mystery. While they were discussing the events of the evening, a muttered exclamation from Sir Abdool stopped them:

"Look! That servant in livery—crossing the quadrangle! Examine his face in the moonlight if he turns it this way again! Ah! Now look—closely! Something familiar—eh? That man was one of the extras in the banqueting room this evening—carrying out the dishes after each course. His face was hauntingly familiar, even then—but I couldn't place him. Can *you*, Lammy?"

"Just a moment! It will come to me, I fancy. Ah! I have it! The man Heubel—who was at home with himself at the little house in Chelsea! Well—a Chelsea house-owner, or even lessee, as one of the Windsor servants is a bit unusual—what?"

"Point is—the fellow presumably has the run of the Visitors' Apartments in this wing, at least—may be even permitted to go and come in several of the Private Apartments. And there'd be much less difficulty in his getting such a berth than for Goldman to come here as a guest. . . . Watch him! He's heading for the quadrangle-door of the South Turret, where both Goldman and Baron Kalycksy happen to be lodged! If we hurry, we can reach a dark corner in that passage as he comes up the stairs—if he does come up! *Allons!*"

THEY just managed to reach a place in the pitch-dark shadow, when Heubel noiselessly appeared at the top of the stair and went directly along the passage to Goldman's door, where, after a couple of peculiar knocks, he was promptly admitted. (That settled the status of both men in Windsor as soon as the Master of the Household and the Inspector heard of it.) In a few moments Goldman came out, casually, and walked down the corridor to the door of Baron Kalycksy's suite, where he was presently admitted as if expected. The watchers in the corridor could think of no plausible excuse for following him in; so, just to occupy themselves, they returned to Goldman's room, knocked in the same peculiar way—and were admitted by the supposed servant Heubel. They bound and gagged him, the walls completely deadening his one or two shouts—and stowed him in a closet of Lammerford's suite pending further developments.

What happened in the Baron's rooms was this—though nobody ever heard or even suspected the details. His bedroom, drawing-room and bath were separated from the rooms above, where his personal aide and valet were lodged, by a narrow winding stair in the wall—and when they had admitted his nocturnal visitor, he dismissed them. He and the supposed Cuban then talked for half an hour concerning a realignment of the European states—after which he became completely unconscious from some drug in the heavenly cigar which Goldman had given him, and that enterprising crook systematically went through not only the clothes he wore, but all the others in the suite, and four large portmanteaus as well. Eventually he located a document upon heavy parchment-bond paper with a number of initials scrawled at the foot of it—and his face registered deep satisfaction. It had taken all the

nerve he had to work methodically against the possibility of interruption at any moment; so, restoring some appearance of order, he slipped out into the corridor and back to his own room without caring whether he had securely closed the Baron's door or not.

Once in his own quarters, Goldman was quietly bound and gagged as Heubel had been—then searched. The initialed document and three others were taken from an inside pocket. He was then stowed in a closet of Countess Nan's suite,—where his mere presence would be against him if he made a row,—while Trevor and Sir Abdool stole along to the Baron's rooms and went in, fastening the door against interruption. The Baron lay sprawled across a divan—his clothes and dressing-robe in disorder as Goldman had left him. He was still completely unconscious, but his pulse was regular and there was no indication that he would not recover in a short time. Looking about the room, Trevor muttered:

"What we've to do, Abdool, is guess where he'd been keeping these documents and put everything so nearly in order that he'll not suspect his belongings have been meddled with. By his manner and way of wearing his clothes, he's a bit careless—disorderly about everything—which makes the job a bit easier, though his aide may be more systematic. . . . Stop a bit! Here's a portmanteau with a lot of papers and correspondence in one side of it—"

"The very place he would *not* be likely to keep documents as important as these! My idea would be in the deep pocket under this soiled clothing in this other portmanteau. Ah! See? Here is a document, deep in, which Goldman apparently overlooked!"

"Faith, I believe you're right, Abdool! Little question of it, in fact! We'll just place the papers back there—lock the portmanteaus—straighten things up a bit, and get out of here before we have to explain how we happen to be here at all! Eh?"

In the early days of their friendship, back in India, Sir Abdool, as evidence of gratitude toward the man who had saved him from being torn apart by a tiger, had acted for a year or two as his personal valet—becoming familiar with all a valet's ways of packing and keeping clothing. So when the two had rearranged the Baron's personal belongings, neither he nor his at-

tendants could have suspected that they had been disturbed. Then they turned the key in the door from the outside and went back to join the others.

NEXT afternoon Sir Derek took an opportune moment for the explanation to His Majesty that a financial question concerning the Embassy made it almost imperative that the Honorable Mr. Goldman return to London at once,—greatly to his regret,—and that he most respectfully asked the King's permission to leave the Castle. It was an unusual request, and yet plausible enough in the case of a person who was one of a suite—a royal guest only by courtesy. Conceivably, a man in Goldman's official position might be urgently needed at the Embassy. So His Majesty kindly expressed regret for the necessity and said that, if possible, Mr. Goldman should return before the expiration of Don Pablo's visit at Windsor—which had been extended until the following week.

As for the Don himself, he got the same story after Goldman was supposed to have left the Castle—being a good deal upset by it until Lammerford told him in confidence that the man had really committed a slight breach of Court etiquette—through ignorance, it was thought—and that Sir Derek had decided upon this as the best way of getting him out of the Castle without arousing gossip which might reach the King, presenting his apology to the Ambassador for interfering with one of his suite because of an act which in no possible way reflected upon Don Pablo himself.

When Goldman and Heubel actually did leave the Castle at two A. M., they were in a limousine, partly doped—and found themselves next day upon one of the Navy destroyers bound for an island in the Indian Ocean, where they are now spending a few monotonous though not altogether idle years.

In paying his sporting bets to Trevor, Lammerford and Sir Abdool, Sir Derek expressed the opinion that the service they had rendered would have been cheap at a hundred times the amount. It had almost unquestionably prevented most serious complications for the Government, and an occurrence in the palace which would have necessitated his resignation. For—as it happened—certain conversations did take place at Windsor which are likely to have far-reaching effects.



When the Kid Napped

The joyous saga of a four-cornered mix-up wherein a brawny sea-captain, a Mexican bandit, four cowboys and a railroad train-crew took active parts—to say nothing of a U. S. marshal and the captain of a warship. Things happen in this story.

By CARL CLAUSEN

WHEN Black McTurk of the bark *Albatross* put into the little sleepy seaport of San Matéo, Lower California, for repairs, and if possible to replenish his crew, he stepped into a peck of trouble. *Trouble*, up to that time, had been McTurk's middle name. He had hunted it and run it down in fifty-seven different varieties and climes, and nearly always had gotten the best of it; but the brand he was confronted with when he walked into Stuttering Mac's gin-emporium on the waterfront was of a new species.

"Lying" Bill Porter and his three cowpunchers having just delivered a bunch of shorthorns to the San Matéo Packing Company for shipment north, were lined up against Stuttering Mac's mahogany.

McTurk stared at the four pairs of sheepskin chaps, and the four pairs of silver mounted spurs. Never having seen a cowman in full regalia before, his first impulse was to emit a loud guffaw and get his

blackjack ready for the consequences. But remembering suddenly his urgent need for sailors, he restrained the impulse and with a spurious smile of affability ordered a round of drinks for the four roosters.

The four roosters grinned their approbation and retaliated with four more rounds, Stuttering Mac had a busy hour. McTurk kept his weather eye peeled for a chance to convert four cowpunchers into A. B.'s, but the opportunity never presented itself.

FINALLY, in desperation, he invited his four friends aboard the *Albatross* with the cheerful intention of clapping down the hatches on them. They declined profusely. McTurk grew insistent. He asserted, with tears in his voice, that his sea hospitality was being disdained. He sulked. It took five more rounds to dispose of the sulk. His sailor's honor was being insulted by their refusal to pay his ship a visit. He grew sentimental about it.

Lying Bill drew a deep breath. He was something of a sentimentalist himself. Once after leading a lynching posse he had insisted upon cutting the dead cattle-rustler down and giving him a fair trial. He would fain have visited McTurk's Argosy, but the four of them were due on the dry side of the Rio Grande to meet a second bunch of steers at daylight the following morning. Their webfooted friend was getting to be a pest and must be disposed of diplomatically. Casting his eye over his shoulder, he noted that the freight train for Pajaro Valley via the Caliente Desert was just being made up beyond Stuttering Mac's swinging doors. Tipping his three companions the wink, he agreed to accompany McTurk aboard the bark. As they passed down the long line of shunting cars on their way to the jetty, four pairs of arms descended upon McTurk, lifted him off his feet and tossed him through the open door of a passing box-car. The next moment the door was slammed shut and bolted behind him.

To the conductor, Lying Bill said, as the gang saddled up:

"Let it out after we get across the line, Chris."

Ten minutes later when Chris, the conductor, went down the track to obey Lying Bill's instructions, he was greeted by a fusillade of forty-five-caliber bullets, and box-car splinters that made him jump ten feet in the air and land on the cowcatcher of a passing yard engine. The string of burning adjectives which followed the fusillade through the punctured car door would have taken Chris' train halfway up the six per cent grade of the Rockies if applied in the proper place. Being a family man, and behind on his life-insurance, he stepped gingerly off the cowcatcher and deferred opening the door of the box-car until the occupant ran out of cartridges.

TO speed up our action, as they say in the movies, we will now cut to a long shot of a tank station on the Pajaro and San Matéo Railway, in the middle of the Caliente Desert, at eight A. M. In the shade of the aforesaid tank we pick up the Vaca Kid lighting a cigarette. Under ordinary circumstances the Kid would not think of sticking up a freight, but he had been down on his luck of late, and he knew where he could dispose of Chris' and the engineer's twenty-two-jewel movements for fifteen dollars, Mex, apiece.

Thus it happened that when the freight pulled in for water and the fireman reached for the hose, his hands stayed in the air, and so did the hose. The engineer reached for a monkey-wrench. The Kid's gun spat fire. The wrench went south, and the engineer clapped his empty hand to his cheek where the bullet had grazed it as it knocked the wrench out of his hand, then raised both mitts on a level with his fireman's.

The Kid removed his forty-dollar sombrero and placed it on the step of the locomotive.

"The señores will please observe that my lid is in the ring," he remarked pleasantly. "A little contribution will obviate the necessity of an inquest. In other words, shell out or be shelled."

He was a polite guy, this Vaca Kid. He had been a general during the Huerta régime and a section boss on the Southern Pacific in Arizona. The Mexican Federal Government had never quite forgiven him for politely walking off with the funds of the subtreasury at Chihuahua. The engineer and his fireman sighed and parted with their watches and loose change.

Attracted by the noise of the shot, Chris, the conductor, came loping up the line of cars from the caboose to investigate. His curiosity cost him his watch, turquoise stickpin and eight dollars and thirty-two cents.

The Kid was dismissing the three with a gentle reminder of what happened to Lot's wife when she looked back, when the thunder of McTurk's number twelve boot shook the door of the box-car. The three men exchanged glances. The Kid intercepted the glances and translated them into coin of the realm. He smacked his lips. An express messenger with a sack of negotiables was undoubtedly hidden in the box-car.

Herding the three men abreast of the car, he commanded Chris to open the door. The conductor did so. The next thing the Kid knew, two hundred and ten pounds of brine-soaked brawn leaped at him from the open door. His gun exploded prematurely, the bullet going wild and striking the bottom of the watertank. Being dum-dummed, the bullet tore a four-inch hole in the tank, from which the water spurted in a graceful arch of twenty feet.

CHRIS and his crew took advantage of the situation by hastily sorting out their belongings from the sombrero and

stepping on the gas. While the freight went thundering across the desert and the water in the tank ebbed low, the two combatants plowed up a quarter section of virgin desert land in the futile endeavor to tear each other's windpipes out by the roots. At the end of that time McTurk pried his thumb loose from the Kid's back molars with a jerk, and sat down heavily on a prickly pear. The howl he let loose fractured the welkin in seven townships. The Kid spat out two teeth and a thumbnail and reached for his lost gun. McTurk removed the prickly pear from his hind-quarters and heaved it amain. It caught the Kid neatly in the back of the neck, and his gun went clattering down the right of way and landed in a thicket of cactus.

The two men sat up and glared at each other. For the nonce thoughts of murder were abandoned. McTurk plucked twenty-nine burning darts from his rear elevation, each pluck being followed by a stream of exquisite profanity. The Kid performed a similar operation to his neck. The Latin exhortations which flowed from his swollen lips would have furnished an excellent theme for operatic exploitation.

McTURK scowled at the bandit's chaparajo-incased extremities.

"Wait until I get my hands on the rest of your fuzzy-legged gang," he howled. He glanced after the speeding freight. "Why in blazes did they leave you behind?" he demanded suddenly.

"I am wondering the same about you, señor," the Kid replied, wearily.

"This is kidnaping!" the skipper thundered. "The Government of Mexico'll pay for this."

The Kid smiled, sadly.

"The Government of Mexico never pays for anything, señor. I've been six years collecting my back pay as a general of the Federal Army."

"General debility!" McTurk scoffed, as he yanked out the last thorn with a groan.

"Brigadier general," the Kid corrected. He glanced at McTurk's gold-braided cap. "Your rank, señor?" he asked.

"You look pretty sick, yourself," McTurk leered savagely.

"I mean, what is your position, señor?" the bandit explained.

"I'll give it to you when I take my observations at noon," McTurk replied with some heat, as his eyes traveled up and down the right of way.

A SHADOW passed across the Kid's rapidly swelling face. Some months earlier he had been indiscreet enough to cross the border and stick up a small bank in southern Arizona, leaving the cashier and two peaceful citizens with lilies in their hands. For this exploit the United States Government had placed a bounty upon his scalp so big that the Kid had come near surrendering himself to keep anyone else from collecting it.

"The señor is a seafaring man?" he asked casually.

"How did you guess it, Sherlock Holmes?" McTurk gibed.

The Kid drew a long breath. A gold-braided cap on a seafaring man meant to him but one thing—a gunboat; and the presence of a gunboat in San Matéo meant that the Caliente Desert would henceforth be too hot for him. He had had a slight brush with United States Marines once on the Gulf, and the memory still sent chills up and down his sanguine spine.

He chose his next words carefully.

"The Lieutenant is here on an important mission, I take it?" he ventured as he rolled a cigarette with an elaborate show of carelessness.

"How d'you get that way?" the skipper growled. "Lieutenant nothing! I'm Captain McTurk of the *Albatross*. My mission is important, all right!" he added as he contemplated the opportunity for revenge and physical calisthenics with the Kid as a deck-hand on the *Albatross*.

The Kid's hand trembled slightly as he lit the cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke skyward. To him the presence of the commander of a gunboat in the middle of the Caliente Desert indicated that a goodly company of marines were not far away. He glanced sadly at the thicket of cactus where his gun reposed, irretrievably lost. Never before had so excellent an excuse for murder presented itself with so poor an opportunity.

He turned his head at a slight sound behind him. It was the punctured water-tank giving up its last pint to the desert. The Kid's face grew serious. As a crow flies, it was fifty miles to the nearest water; and neither of them were crows.

All things considered, the moment seemed propitious for a little fifty-mile stroll toward the mountain fastnesses of the State of Sonora.

Suddenly the Kid's troubled face was illumined by an inspiration.

"Señor Capitan remarked that he was anxious to return to his ship," he said pleasantly.

"The sooner the quicker," McTurk replied tersely. "When does the next train for San Matéo stop here?"

"Tomorrow evening at sundown," the Kid informed him, acutely aware that a train loaded with deputies would break the thirty-six-hour schedule of the Pajaro and San Matéo Railway when Chris and his crew brought in the glad news of the miscarried holdup. "Tomorrow evening one will *pass* here," he repeated with the accent on the word *pass*. "There'll be nothing for it to stop for, now that the tank is empty. For the same reason there'll be nothing to keep us." He paused. "It gets very warm here along toward noon, señor," he added, as the skipper drew his handkerchief from his pocket and began wiping the perspiration and dust from his thick red neck.

McTurk's hand paused in midair.

"Meaning that there's no more water here?" he asked, sucking his dry lips.

"Oh, yes, señor, lots of it, about two thousand feet down. It would take quite some time, however, to dig a well that deep with our bare hands."

McTurk's face changed color.

"What hell-hole is this?" he demanded thickly.

"The Caliente Desert," the Kid replied. He pointed to a low range of rocky mountains, blue and indistinct in the shimmering haze off to the south. "Lots of water there," he remarked casually.

McTurk pocketed his handkerchief with a snarl. As he did so, his hand came in contact with the empty gun. Jerking it out, he balanced it on his knee.

"Lead me to it and make it snappy!" he growled.

The Kid glanced at the weapon. His practiced eye noticed that it was unloaded. With an air of resignation he arose.

"Very well, señor," he sighed. As he led the way across the burning sands with McTurk lumbering, pistol in hand, in his trail, he smiled inscrutably.

WE will now fade in, three days later, upon a small guardhouse on the north side of the Rio Grande and a close-up to Spike Sanderson, United States marshal, seated at his desk reading a letter. Marshal Sanderson was a large, loosely built man. On his rugged features rode the

puzzled expression of an Airedale who has encountered a porcupine for the first time and is doubtful about their relationship. Placing the letter in the wire tray at his elbow, after having read it over three times, he reached for the telephone and asked Long Distance to connect him with headquarters. The commandant at San Pablo answered the call himself.

"Station K., Sanderson talking, Major! Has Washington got a gunboat at San Matéo?" he asked.

"No such information came through here," the commandant replied. "What's up, Sandy? Yaquis on the warpath?"

"No. Nothing's up. I was just wondering. G'-by."

Hanging up the receiver, he pressed the button on his desk. To the uniformed deputy who answered the ring, he said:

"Any reports on the movements of the Vaca Kid lately, Jim?"

"He stuck up a freight on the Pajaro and San Matéo Railway at a tank station in the Caliente Desert, three or four days ago. Bungled the job. Nobody hurt. The Kid got into a scrap with a bum stealing a ride in a box-car."

This was Chris' version to his company to square himself for having McTurk aboard his train without the fare to show for it

SANDERSON picked up the letter from the wire tray.

"I found this sticking under the door when I came in this morning," he said. "Read it."

The deputy ran his eyes down the letter and read the following:

For twenty-five thousand dollars gold, and immunity from arrest, I will reveal the whereabouts of Captain McTurk of the gunboat *Albatross*. If not—well, you know me.

THE VACA KID.

Below were instructions where to leave the money, with a crude map of the location, and a gentle reminder that if more than one man came to the spot indicated, McTurk's name would henceforth be Dennis.

"What d'you make of it, Jim?" Sanderson asked.

The deputy turned the letter over, then handed it back to his superior.

"Somebody's spoofing you, Captain," he grinned.

"Hm!" said Sanderson. "It's the Kid's signature. I verified it from the files."

"There's no such gunboat as the *Albatross* on the Pacific," the deputy objected.

"I have never heard of one by that name," Sanderson confessed. "I guess it's a hoax, all right. Just the same, you'd better double the guard for a few nights. The Kid's up to some sort of deviltry."

"Very well, sir."

WE will now cut back to our old friends Lying Bill Porter and his three cowboys, guiding their second herd of contented cows from their blistering pastures to the cooler realms of the San Matéo Packing Company's refrigerators. While the herd, to a cow, buried its noses in the yellow water of the Rio Grande at the San Francisquito Ford, two uniformed horsemen hailed Bill from the bank.

"You fellows better keep your shooting irons unlimbered," one of the men called out. "The Vaca Kid's on the rampage again. Stuck up a freight on the Caliente last Tuesday morning. That bunch of cattle'd look good to him."

Bill threw back his head and laughed.

"I'd like to see the greaser who could swipe my cows. What train was it?"

"The five P. M. from San Matéo," the man replied.

"Why, that's old Chris' string of boxes," Lying Bill exclaimed. "Anybody get hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"Nope—nobody but a stiff who was stealing a ride in a box-car. Guess he got hurt. The Kid and him mixed up some, I hear."

Bill Porter and his men exchanged glances.

"I wonder—well, I wonder," the cattleman mused as he spurred up his horse and followed his stock across the ford.

Four hours later, when the four men strolled into Stuttering Mac's, after having delivered the cattle to the Packing Company, the saloonkeeper drew Lying Bill aside. Chris had left a message—an important message. It took Stuttering Mac twenty minutes to deliver it. The gist of it, Lying Bill gathered, was that their web-footed friend was at this moment consorting with horny toads and rattlesnakes somewhere in the fastnesses of the Sonora Mountains, a prisoner of the Vaca Kid.

The four cowmen looked at one another thoughtfully. Their little joke seemed to have assumed serious proportions. After buying a round of drinks, they unlimbered their artillery, vaulted into their saddles

and rode off toward said fastnesses at a brisk clip.

WHILE the rescuing party thunders across the desert, we will go to a medium shot of the Cañon of Los Tres Enchiladas, a cavernous gash in the rugged Tortilla Mountains of northern Sonora. In the shade of a giant boulder sat Black McTurk, fanning himself with a mesquite branch. Stretched full length on the ground beside him lay the Vaca Kid, his sombrero pulled down over his inscrutable eyes, and a stem of sage between his strong white teeth.

"The señor might try making it on foot," he remarked cheerfully.

The señor glanced out over the desert and shuddered as he remembered the fifty-mile hike, five days earlier, since when no food but bitter acorns and the roots of wild parsnips had passed his lips. He groaned. Arising, he buried his cracked lips in the cool waters of a small spring, the only one within a radius of eighty-odd miles.

The Kid turned over on his side and permitted himself a smile. For four days he had led his victim about the maze of blistering cañons in search of food. He had fed him acorns that puckered his lips, and roots that set his teeth on edge and blistered his throat.

After four days of this, the skipper's helpless rage had simmered down to a concentrated essence of deadly fury. The Kid, mistaking this Anglo-Saxon trait for defeat, chuckled up his sleeve. Had he known what was going on in the deep, dark recesses of McTurk's harassed soul, he would have stepped softly.

It was along toward evening of the sixth day when the thunder of hoofbeats broke the stillness of the cañon. The Kid drew a sigh of deep content. Uncle Sam's messenger with his twenty-five thousand dollars! Telling the skipper to stay quiet, unless he wanted to run the risk of having his throat slit by a band of marauding Yaquis, the Kid started down the trail.

HE did not get far. At a turn in the trail four determined-looking horsemen with drawn guns barred the way. In his amazement the Kid swallowed the butt end of his cigarette as his brown hands went up at the sharp insistence of the foremost of the riders.

"Where is Captain McTurk, Greaser?" the man barked out as he dismounted and

jammed the muzzle of his pistol into the Kid's floating rib. The three other horse-men climbed out of their saddles and stretched their long legs luxuriously.

"Why, it's me old friend the Vaca Kid," said one of them whom the Kid recognized as Shorty, the partner of a man he had shot to death in a running fight on the border a year earlier. "This is shore a sight for sore eyes," he added, patting his lariat suggestively.

"Where is Captain McTurk?" Lying Bill repeated grimly. As if in answer to his question, a bellowing roar rent the cañon walls and reverberated deep down in the ancient granite foundations. From behind a boulder leaped a mighty form, followed by an avalanche of rocks. The four men sidestepped the flying stones as Black McTurk landed in their midst. The Kid, having his back turned, was not so fortunate. A five-pound chunk of granite caught him behind the ear. He crumpled up without a sound, as McTurk's hamlike fist caught Lying Bill on the point of his mendacious jaw, and caused that gentleman to do a backward handspring to a ledge twenty feet below, with a fractured collar-bone.

"You dirty, skulking bunch of cow-wallopers!" the skipper roared as his mighty fists sawed the air. "I'll show you what happens when you monkey with a sailor."

He showed them. The Kid, being *hors de combat*, missed the briskest little scrap of his career. When it was over, four badly battered cowmen slid to the bottom of the cañon and immersed their aching faces, to the ears, in the cool waters of the spring.

"This is a hell of a rescuing-party," spluttered Shorty as he dug the sand out of his ears. "If he had had a gun, I'd of plugged him."

TWO days later Lying Bill Porter's pinto staggered into San Matéo, but Lying Bill was not astraddle him. In the saddle sat Black McTurk, Bill's gun in one hand, and his lariat in the other. The loop of the lariat was thrown about the neck of a small, discouraged-looking Mexican, who trudged along in the dust before the pinto, his hands tied behind his back.

Stuttering Mac stared hard when the skipper dismounted, herded his quarry up to the mahogany, and ordered six fingers of gin.

"Holy mackerel! The Vaca Kid," the

saloonkeeper chattered as he threw his bar towel into the air and submerged.

McTurk leaned over the bar and jammed the gun into his ear.

"Six fingers, I said, and make it snappy," he growled.

"Y-y-yes sir," Mac stuttered.

While McTurk was pouring himself a third drink, the saloonkeeper hazarded a question.

"Wha-what are you g-going to d-do with him?" he asked with a scared nod at the Kid.

"Oh, him?" said the skipper. "I'm going to make a sailor out of him or skin him alive—maybe both." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the pinto tied to the hitching-post outside. "When your hard-boiled friend Porter, and his gang, comes in, give him back his horse. I'll send the gun and this rope ashore by one of the boys."

SIX days out of San Matéo, in ballast, the *Albatross* was hailed by the United States Cruiser *Monterey*.

"*Albatross*, ahoy!" a megaphoned figure called out from the bridge. "Heave to! I'm going to board you."

Five minutes later, a smallboat from the cruiser, with twelve marines and an officer, hove alongside. To McTurk, scowling down at them from the after-deck of the bark, the officer said:

"It has been reported, Captain, that you are harboring a dangerous criminal, the Vaca Kid, aboard your ship."

"Dangerous, me foot!" McTurk snorted. "If he is dangerous, a jellyfish is a man-eater. Come aboard and take a look at him."

It was a very sick bandit, indeed, which the marines dragged from the fo'c'stle of the *Albatross*. His brown face had taken on a delicate ashen gray shade, and his lips were blue with the ravages of *mal-demer*. The officer slipped unnecessary handcuffs about his limp wrists and said:

"There is a reward of ten thousand dollars coming to you, Captain."

The skipper drew a long breath.

"You're a poor business man, sir. Five minutes ago I'd have sold him to you for sixty cents and thrown in a bottle of rum."

The officer glanced at the long, low shoreline of California, faint in the distance.

"We are outside the three-mile limit, I believe, Captain," he said wistfully.

McTurk grinned and led the way aft.



Captain Bill Comes Home

A vividly dramatic episode described by the gifted author of "South of Shanghai," "The Panther of One Claw" and other noted stories.

By GEORGE F. WORTS

THE frosty blur pouring from the lens of the electric pocket lamp in the girl's hand drifted with keen flashes across the cut-glass bowls and plates on the mahogany sideboard. She dared not risk turning on the dining-room lights; it might frighten the man away.

She deposited the nicked tube on the rug, so that its white beam lighted up the faces of the sideboard drawers, and went about her task with certitude and grace, removing from the lower drawer a heavy linen tablecloth, and decanting into this the musical contents of the two upper ones. The crude bundle she laid in the center of the table. It would serve to arouse his curiosity, to stimulate inquiry, and at the same time to dismiss his suspicions. This was her own idea; and it was the completing detail. She had devoted a final touch to her person before the dressing-table mirror in the rear bedroom; she longed for another peek, to reassure herself, but the time for that was past.

The girl moved on velvety soles into the hallway and listened. Heartbeats were noisy in her throat. She was trembling, perspiring a little. Her thoughts, her fixed plan, were dissembled and scattered time and again by the prodding of sharp fear. He might have seen her before, and recognize her! He might penetrate her pose instantly! He might kill her! He might—oh, anything might happen!

A solemn golden tongue in another room voiced twelve sweet notes.

She concentrated on the street sounds. An automobile had stopped in front, coughing hysterically, with an absurd squealing of brakes. He was coming! A taxicab—the daring of him!

To quiet her thrilling nerves, the girl endeavored to rehearse her part, clutching moist palms fiercely to her breast. She was enfolded by incomplete blackness; ghostly light from the theatrical district was reflected by the low layer of cloud into the apartment windows. It was a glow

that brightened and waned as the clouds moved, as her eyes tired of the impression and found it again.

The taxicab was coughing madly. She heard it rattle down the cobbled street. He would be here immediately. She had never seen this man; yet she readily pictured him crossing the sidewalk, confidently entering the marble foyer, with its attendant lights burning luxuriously in the hearts of enormous glass pearls.

What insolence—what courage—what magnificent audacity!

She heard the rattle of the elevator and the groan of cables as it paused at her floor, the click and bang of the steel gate. A moment later the tumblers in the door-lock clinked as the key was introduced. On quaking toes she crept forward. He would discover her at once. That was called for. She repressed a scream of sheer nervous anticipation.

The door opened. A photographic silhouette of a large man was thrown toward her, was removed with a cushioned thud. The door was closed.

She heard his smooth, unexcited breathing, the scraping of his fingernails on the wallpaper. A sudden pause occurred in his activity. The girl no longer heard sound, yet imagined she could hear, through the mad rhythm of her own heart, the quickened pumping of his.

He was standing perfectly still now, as if aware of her, searching the blackness for the thing which his refined senses had detected.

A gloveless hand descended upon and gripped her nearest shoulder. She gave a little shriek, wrenched herself free, and ran panting into the dining-room, crowding herself into a small closet, previously prepared for this. She shut the door, and locked it with the key. A grunt, a heavy footfall, the flicker of yellow light, were impressions cut off when she closed the door upon herself.

THE man had ignited a match. Its flare introduced to him a doorway yielding upon the flowered walls of a luxuriously equipped dining-room, occupied in the center by a round, lustrous mahogany table over which hung from strong bronze links a huge inverted bowl of dull but indistinguishable color. Little oil paintings, seascapes for the most part, furnished the walls with dabs of bright relief.

He pressed the switch, filling the room,

staining the very air, with suave, ruby glow from the red-shaded lamp.

Closing the window which opposed a fire-escape landing, he lowered all three shades and searched the room smilingly. Whatever impulse he was preparing to act upon, was sidetracked by a discovery. The grin lost its certainty, flickered, vanished. In the center of the table he saw the table-cloth folded into a rough bundle. Beside it lay a curved cold-chisel and a pocket flash-lamp. He poked the sinister bundle with an exploratory forefinger and fetched forth a metallic tinkle. Quickly unfolding the linen, he exposed at its heart a compact mass of table-silver. His glance drifted to the cold-chisel, darted to the fire-escape window. He went unhesitatingly to the girl's hiding-place.

"Come out of there," he said in a clear, firm voice.

"Aint—aint going to have me pinched, Mister?" a wail of despair sprang from the closet.

"Unlock that door if you don't want me to shoot through it," he said sternly.

The door burst open. With head hanging, her dark blue toque concealing all but the lower portion of her white face, the girl stumbled past him, lifted her arms and dropped them limply, flung herself into a chair and crossed her feet. Her attitude was wretchedly defiant.

"You're a bull!" she muttered.

"Do I look like a—bull?" the man replied pleasantly.

She lifted her head with a sullen pout, seemed to lose some of her terror, and inspected him shrewdly.

He was a rugged, cleanly built young man in the uniform of a United States infantry captain. His skin was richly sunburnt. He wore tortoise-framed spectacles upon clear bright blue eyes. A neatly trimmed little dark mustache hovered upon his upper lip. His hands and feet were large and good-looking.

"What an unspeakable cad!" she said to herself. Aloud: "A bull in a uniform," she decided surlily.

"Guess again," he came back with slight impatience. "Stop worrying about bulls. What are you doing here?"

"What does it look like I'm doing here?" "A person with fixed opinions," he said dryly, "might accuse you of being a burglar."

"Well, why don't you have me pulled—if you aint a bull?"

"It hadn't entered my head," he replied in his cheery voice. "But since you've brought it up, I'd really hate to see such a beautiful burglar rot in jail. If you were a man—" He paused with amusement in his blue eyes. "I don't see why I shouldn't let you go, *if*—" He stopped.

"If what?" she cried, springing up with dusky eyes angrily sparkling.

"You *are* a mighty pretty girl," he said. "Stop pouting!"

She stopped pouting, and noticed upon each of his sleeves a gold chevron, indicating one wound, and service overseas. It took all of her ability to keep out of her expression the contempt that the sight of the wound-chevron induced in her.

"Unspeaking cad!" she again commented to herself.

"What you expect me to tell you—the story of my life?" she said sarcastically.

The captain had a splendid grin. It momentarily disarmed her. Such a wholesome, old-fashioned grin set in a face of such strength—could it be possible?

"What else can I do?" she added petulantly.

"You're not pretty when you pout. Sure! Carry on! *Allez!* I'd rather hear the story of your life than tell you the story of my own, and that's some concession! You're a blessing in disguise!"

"Am I? Why?" The girl seemed to be recovering her courage, or masking her fright behind impertinence.

"One hasn't the pleasure of meeting genuine lady burglars more than ten or twelve times in a lifetime, you know; and my early studies were restricted by very stern parents."

"Oh," she said, in a voice of enlightenment.

"What are you doing this for?" he asked. "You don't look poor. Is there a man back of it?"

"Not if I see him first!" she snapped. "A girl has to get her bread and beans some way. One's got to live, don't they?"

"What was it the philosopher said? 'We are born—to eat and sleep!' Fascinating!" he murmured.

"What?" she asked with a frown.

"You," he said with his grin.

"H-h!"

"Shall we romp into the library?"

"Shall we?"

"If you don't object strenuously," he said, bowing ironically. He strode into the hall and flung aside red curtains.

He grinned as she scurried under his arm. She wanted to laugh. She was bursting with hysterical relief. It was working out beautifully—magically! He had actually *commanded* her to talk about herself!

It was a luxurious room, with Oriental rugs underfoot, ancient mahogany pieces, and a touch here and there of wicker. A desk lamp with a yellow shade of silk squatted upon a low Colonial table near a brick fireplace. A telephone stood beside it.

The officer jerked a brass chain; the reading-lamp emerged from the darkness as a fat and golden Oriental moon.

"How long you going to keep me?" the girl asked sullenly, moving about the table to the chair nearest the telephone.

"Oh, an hour perhaps. Sit down, please."

"Honest, aint you going to turn me over to the bulls?"

"Have I said so?"

"Haven't said you weren't!"—piteously. "Are you?"

"Not if you can hold my interest for an hour."

"What with?" She sat down.

"With an account of yourself, of course! But first tell me how you happen to be dressed so well for a—burglar."

THE question seemed to arouse her interest exceedingly. She bent toward him with an air of confidence; and in so doing, her entire face under the blue toque was displayed in the pure white rays streaming downward from the golden shade.

It gave him the opportunity to see that she was true to type. She was really strikingly pretty—that is to say, a study in sharp contrasts, with curling dark hair, amazingly dark brows and lashes and pupils, opposing a white satiny skin upon which deep and shallow feelings were being translated constantly. Her expression seemed to change on the instant, drifting from one delicate shade to another at an alarming and fascinating pace. Excepting this sensitiveness, her voice, her very attitude, stamped her as the by-product of the larger American city—the high-keyed, astute, sophisticated, impertinent little cockney. She talked nasally.

"Listen here, fellow," she said: "to make good at anything you tackle in this man's village, you got to look a part. See? New York don't savvy rag dolls. You got to look the part of a doll with coin."

"You do," he murmured admiringly.

"Do I ree-ally?" She was sarcastic. "Gee! Aint you regular! Do you think of those nice things to say all the time?"

"You're not being kidded," he said.

She moistened her lips. The region about them displayed a surprising amount of strength. "Here's how it works. Yeah! Week b'fore last I 'plied for a chorus job in the Summer Palace show; and b'lieve me, old-timer, I was some little raggedy doll. Just blew in from Chi. That director, he took one squint, and he says to me: 'Girlie, you wait outside, and we'll talk things all over.' Say! Maybe you don't think I hissed in that mutt's face! I beat it right home, and I dug up—" She stopped with a look of fright. "You aint a bull, are you, honest, Cap'n?"

The officer wagged his head.

"Is this your apartment?"

"For tonight," he said.

"Aint the owner coming?"

"No. What was it you dug up?"

She studied him anxiously, folded in her lower lip, expelled it, finished: "Dug up dad's old kit-bag; and I pulled a *job!*"

"You did?" he exclaimed. "Without practice?"

The girl nodded slyly. "Not exactly without practice, Johnny. Dad was about as good as the old-timers ever got, an' I guess I know. One of the first in the game to use the oxy-gas torch on the new kind of steel that was coming in." She produced a sigh of weariness. "Well, they landed the old man. Up the river. The old stuff. . . . Quicklime!"

SHE wiggled her shoulders, and became silent, moodily inspecting the tips of her little russet boots.

"Left nothing?" the captain put in, clearing his throat.

Her dusky eyes leaped up. "Oh, my, yes! His kit-bag. Was I a little crook after they planted Dad? Hell, I did everything! The smoothest old dame in the world—lived in our tenement—wised me up shoplifting. Say, did you ever suspect that shoplifting is more of a science than plumbing?"

"Is that a fact?" her audience breathed.

"I'll say it is! Say—did you say something about a skag?"

"You bet!" The captain opened an engraved silver case. "Cork-tip or plain?"

"Well, you sure are some thoughtful little guy! Get 'em in Paree?"

He grinned. "No."

"C'n I see it?"

He gave her the case. She examined both sides. There were no initials.

"Pretty." She handed it back, leaned outward with the cigarette clamped between her white teeth to meet the extended flame, inhaled deeply, blew smoke at him playfully, and closed her lids. They were faintly blue.

"Somehow, you're awful sympathetic," she whispered.

"You've never told this stuff to anybody before, have you?" he asked.

The dusky eyes blinked and fixed themselves upon his with curious intensity. "That's what I call a funny question! What's the little idea?"

"I was wondering. That's all. If you intend sticking to this business, you can hardly afford to tell many folks. Might blab, don't you think?"

She nodded eagerly, but not too eagerly.

"Now you said something! You got to have somebody to talk to in this game. It's too dam' exciting. You get loaded up with it. Got to spill over to somebody. The crook game is for pals or sweethearts—not solitaire-players. I'll whisper something in your ear. You're the first bird I ever talked to who seems to get the idea."

"Trust me to the limit!" he grinned. "What happened next?"

"Oh—got tired. It seemed sort of shabby, like beaming some poor old lunkhead with a sandbag. Thrill aint there. This is—different. Say, I want you distinctly to understand I kissed good-by to a sealskin cape when you took my mind off that silverware!"

He looked grieved. "Maybe we can find some other way of getting that sealskin cape."

"Hurray! Yes, yes, go on!"

"Finish your story."

She settled back. "Well, then I did some frisking, working in a crowded 'L' train gen'rally. Gee, but that was exciting—for a while! I used to pick out some rich-looking sucker and flirt with him till he got all excited; and then the boys would close in and go through him. By the time he started feeling around for his poke, we'd be on an uptown train divvying the loot! But—aw, that got on my nerves."

SHE shut her eyes and endeavored nervously to blow rings, wondering if her audience was suspicious or merely prudent.

Her pale lids opened part way. He was watching her expectantly, with the ghost of something swimming about in his eyes. Was it suspicion? Mirth? Admiration? She looked more sharply. It fled.

"After that, some of the gang began getting fresh," she plunged on. "I was growing up then. I left them to fight it out. Went to Chi. Oh, they know I'm back. But—hands off! Waiting! They'll wait for a thing they want till hell grows icicles, that bunch! So I landed me a nice soft little snap in a shirt-factory in Chi. I was out for the reform stuff. Say, it was rich! About eighteen hours a day and forty insults a minute for twenty a week! I decided the narrow path wasn't ever built for Lillian. Feet are too broad!"

"What did you say your name was?" he interrupted.

"Lillian de Vere."

"Good stage-name," he commented. "Mine's Bill."

She tried not to reveal her triumph. He was not even trying to conceal his name!

"Shall I spill some more?" she asked excitedly. "You got me all wound up!"

"If you will," Captain Bill murmured.

"Gee! You cert'n'y do have the nicest way of saying things! Well, so I piled on board a train and streaked it back to the happy hunting-grounds. You can imagine how sweet and lovely I looked applying for a chorus job after sleeping all those hours on the red plush and cinders! It was noth-ing did-ding for li'l Lil. So, as I was telling you, I went and dug up Dad's old kit, and—well, cashed in enough to fit myself out like the Queen o' Sheba, if I do say it myself! Lookit! These silk stockings cost fourteen berries a pair. This dress cost ninety. Like it? The bad news for this hat was sixty-five. These kicks—seventeen. That sable coat out there—three fifty on the hoof. Now—all together!"

Her mouth was a scarlet O. "Good taste? You know what good taste is."

"Perfect," Captain Bill assured her.

She puffed contentedly at the cigarette, crushed it in a red lacquer tray, pressed her fingertips together, smiled. "I ambled back to the Summer Palace last week, all dolled up like this! Gee, Billy—all the confidence in the world!"

"Sure!" he grinned. "And now, how about this? Through? *Fini?*"

"Aw, Billyum, do I look through?"

"Really like it, eh?"

"Hate it. But money don't grow on bushes, not this season."

"That's very true," he said thoughtfully.

"What I want to do more than anything," she added, trying not to watch him too expectantly, "is to tie up with a top-notch crook. We could pull lots of real classy jobs—big stuff. I don't care how good a man is, a girl can help him in this game a million ways."

Captain Bill was nodding indifferently. She felt exasperated. Why, the man was a Gibraltar!

"Gee, I can't help but think," she went on pensively, "what a fast team a fellow like you and I could make! Think of the tricks I could teach you! And maybe I just wouldn't like to learn to spill the English language the way you do! I need polish! I'm rough!"

"Nonsense!" he said. "You're a wonderfully clever girl—"

She disregarded him: "Oh, golly, Billyum; why aren't you in the burgling business too?"

Her remarkable eyes were shining, addressing upon him their most alluring glow.

THERE followed a pause of sharp confusion. He had gotten up from his chair, was bending over her, with warm, moist palms resting lightly on her knuckles. His expression was serious, although that former baffling spark had come into his eyes, and the corners of his red mouth and his little dark mustache were twirking.

"Something is in the breeze," she whispered, smiling up at him shyly but fearlessly. "You're the most changeable man I ever knew. What's up?"

"I am going to kiss you," Captain Bill announced. "Do you mind?"

"You—aw, you're impossible! D'you s'pose I let every Tom, Dick and Harry that blows along have my kisses? Bill, you—you *are* sorta sweet. But what's the use? You know how this little party's going to—"

The ultimate word was smothered. How dry and hot his lips were! Her hands fugitively pressed the back of his neck, almost caressingly, came together upon his chest, pushed him back stiffly. She was guiltily aware that the emotion stirred in her breast by that contact was not the one she had been prepared for. She was not filled with loathing at all, but something entirely different. Perhaps the boyish cordiality of his grin had undermined her dis-

taste for Captain Bill. Perhaps—but even a clever woman sometimes has a difficult time explaining herself to herself.

“That was because you are a gentleman,” she informed him, getting back into her rôle. “You have a way of understanding a girl. What did you say was your line, Bill, before you became a—a—soldier?”

His cheeks were flushed; his air had become restless. He seemed at last on the point of breaking down and coming across.

“Stockbroker,” he said with gravity. “Wall Street?”

Captain Bill nodded. “I don’t want you to be offended at what I say next.”

She headed him off sweetly: “Burglar, aren’t you, Bill?” Her attitude was lazily indifferent, but every nerve in her body was singing.

He considered this a long while, puffing dreamily at his cigarette. He puckered his lips. He smiled at her through the drifting smoke. *He nodded!*

She could have screamed with relief! Her eyes strayed jealously to the telephone beside her. She had merely to lift the receiver a fraction of an inch. Downstairs were detectives, captained by Jimmy Evans from the Central Station, patiently waiting for that flash. But there was detailed data to be secured before that.

“Tell me *all* about it!” she cried. “Why, Billikens, you don’t know how grand it makes me feel! Why can’t we be pals?”

CAPTAIN BILL seemed momentarily uncertain. She felt sorry for him. He had such a fine, good old-fashioned grin!

He leaned toward her sternly. She felt his tenseness, was confused by the ardent determination in his expression.

“See here, young woman,” Captain Bill began in an intense, ringing voice, “I intend to take you in hand. You don’t realize it yourself, but you are a genius! You have the stuff in you for the making of a marvelous emotional actress. Why, you’re immense! You’re wonderful! I’m not exaggerating. You’ve the knack, or ability, of arousing sympathy more deeply than any woman I have seen on any stage. You’ve made me fall in love with you—without even trying!” His expression was as hard as granite. “You’re going to stop being a crook. Understand? You’re going to become a respectable citizen—right now! I’m going to see that you become the most famous woman on the American stage—as you deserve to be!”

She was so bewildered, so utterly flabbergasted, that she could only open her mouth and make a faint hissing sound in her throat.

Captain Bill’s eyes were flashing like sapphires.

“Went to see a new play tonight—‘Bridges Uncrossed.’ *Ingénue* was the image of you. Wonderful! Wonderful sympathy! But you’re ten hundred times better than June Auburn was tonight! If I have to go to prison for life, I’m going to have the satisfaction of doing that one thing—making you the greatest actress in this country! That’s what I think of you!”

The girl’s bewilderment turned to acid bitterness. She wanted to cry. All of her contempt for this crook masquerading in a uniform, with a wound chevron, was smothered. A man who would offer to sacrifice himself for a woman as this man had offered himself for her could not be bad at heart. She could not, positively would not, allow them to arrest this man.

With misty eyes, in a strange, choking voice, she said: “Broadway Bill, you’re a rotter, but I intend letting you escape. I won’t have a hand in this! If they can catch you when you get outside—that’s not my business.”

“What d’you mean?” he snapped, springing up.

“This is a frame-up!” she whispered.

“A frame-up! Good God!”

“Sit down, Bill Armstrong—”

“Go on!” he said sternly.

“I *am* an actress! I *am* June Auburn—the *ingénue* in ‘Bridges Uncrossed.’ Before I went on the stage, I was on the force for a while. And tonight, before the show, Jimmy Evans, from the Central Station, came to my dressing-room, and begged me to help frame you! He only suspected you—of a long string of burglaries. I promised I’d try to make you blab. Well, I haven’t heard a word you’ve said. If you haven’t destroyed it already, let me have that correspondence-card the bellboy handed you in the Bellmore lobby.”

In amazement the man extracted from an inner pocket an oblong of folded gray cardboard, with a Morningside Drive apartment address engraved in deep blue across the top—the address of June Auburn’s apartment. A firm, businesslike hand had composed the message:

DEAR OLD DOC:

Bully for you, old stick-in-the-mud! By

all means try out my new apartment whenever you hit town. You'll find plenty of pre-war Scotch and rye under the silverware drawer in the sideboard. Everything to read in the library. Come up and use my apartment any night, whether I'm in town or not. Key is enclosed. Am still keeping that rotten schedule—Pittsburgh conferences every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. Make it Monday or Tuesday if you can, but plan to use the apartment whenever you come.

Yours to a cinder,

BOB HALE.

The card was dated Tuesday, April fifteenth; and tonight was Wednesday, April twenty-third.

MISS AUBURN tore up the card and dropped the gray fragments into the red tray. "No such persons as Doc or Bob Hale exist. Jim Evans wrote that himself. This is my apartment. We were sure you'd read that card and try for the silver," she added tearfully, "just as we were sure that if I laid on that cooked-up story thick enough, you'd confess!"

She rose wearily. "Now I want you to get out of here. Slip out of that dining-room window and up the fire-escape to the roof. I'm letting you go, Armstrong, even if you are contemptible enough to hide in the uniform of heroes, because you've shown me that you—can be a man! Wont you brace up—if you're not caught? Wont you?" The tears were spilling out of her eyes. "Wont you take off that uniform and be—decent—for me?"

"Miss Auburn, I—I hardly—" he stammered with lowered head.

The ringing of the telephone cut him off. In the ring the girl put the receiver to her left ear, her free hand over the mouth-piece.

"Hurry!" she whispered. "You can cross the roofs!"

"'Lo, June; Jimmy talking," announced a lazy, cheerful man's voice. "Sorry that frame wasn't necessary. Armstrong's girl squealed, and we landed both of 'em. Just finished the squeegee process. She got patriotism all of a sudden, and boiled over about his wearing that uniform, an'—"

June Auburn sank back in her chair, limp. "Wait a minute, Jim Evans! Are you *positive*? Has he an infantry captain's uniform on?"

"Sure thing! Slick boy! Looked like the regular article! Wound stripe an' everything! Hope you haven't been waiting up. Tell you all about it t'morrow. Gotta run along. Much obliged. G'by!"

The receiver landed upon the hook only by accident. June Auburn turned two wild eyes and one circular mouth upon her guest.

"Who in the world are you?" she demanded hysterically. "And where did you come from?"

The young man looked embarrassed. "Why, I'm Bill Whalen, of H. R. Whalen & Son, down on Wall Street. I'm 'Son.' Just got back from the reunion—"

Miss Auburn gulped. "Where did you find that note?"

Captain Bill Whalen's embarrassment increased. "A man in uniform—a captain—slipped it into my hand in the Times Square subway station while I was trying to figure out that funny green line, and told me I'd dropped it, and winked. I thought it was a joke. You see, some of my friends are practical jokers, and I—always bite to keep them contented!"

"You didn't think *this* was a joke!" Miss Auburn said indignantly.

"Sure!" he grinned. "But it isn't, is it?"

She fell back again, as if her very soul had been run over, by a tank, perhaps. "Why didn't you—say something?"

"I was waiting for you to spring it!"

"How dared you tell me you'd keep on being a burglar—for me?" she said severely.

Captain Bill blushed. "I was willing," he explained haltingly, "to be a burglar. You—that is—I meant what I said about intending to make you a famous actress. I thought you were wonderful in 'Bridges Uncrossed' tonight—"

"Gracious!" Miss Auburn bounced up from the chair. "You *didn't* recognize me when you came into the dining-room!"

He grinned foolishly. "Sure! There's no one like you in the world! I *did* have a deuce of a time trying to figure it all—"

The girl stopped him. She had made a belated discovery. "Why, you're real!" she cried, clapping her hands. "That wound chevron is genuine! It's true!" She was mixing her tears with smiles—and only great actresses dare try that. "You poor boy! Where were you wounded? How? When? Dear!"

"A curved chunk of H. E.—Argonne," he told her in a voice of heroic modesty. "I'll show it to you." He was pulling up the sleeve of his left arm.

Miss Auburn clutched his fingers and stared pityingly. There it was, an inch or so below his elbow joint on the white side of his muscular forearm. The scar was of a curved shape, the shape of a grin.



The Bumbershoot

A writer endowed with a lively sense of humor here tells the joyous story of what befell a timid gentleman at large on a dark night in the company of a bottle and an umbrella.

By EVERETT RHODES CASTLE

MR. ALFRED GOSNEY stood on the stoop of the residence of his brother-in-law, Mr. Thomas Lint, in Aspinwall Road, and uttered the conventional farewell words of gratification incidental to the end of a pleasant evening. He grasped his heavy old-fashioned umbrella in one hand and held a heavy package, wrapped loosely in newspaper, under the other elbow. Thus he found it difficult to clasp the extended hand of his host. It was a trivial thing, and yet Mr. Gosney blushed awkwardly in the confusion caused by the necessity of shifting the old-fashioned umbrella to his left hand.

"Gosh, Alf! Guess you'll never get over being all thumbs." His host laughed loudly.

Mrs. Lint, from her position in the doorway, tittered pleasantly.

Mr. Gosney agreed, with a weak little laugh. He did not relish being called "Alf." It sounded like a comical tramp or some other humorous variety of roadside ruffian.

"Sorry about the other, Alf," Mr. Lint continued. "But you know how it is."

"Just like children," Mrs. Lint appended;

"when you want them to, they wont; and when you don't care, they do it beautifully."

"Why, nights when we are here alone," Mr. Lint continued enthusiastically, "we get California clear as a bell. Don't we, Stella?"

"Clearer," said Mrs. Lint. "You can hear that announcer say 'Station KZP, San Francisco,' as clear as if he was right in the next room instead of being hundreds of thousands of miles away."

"Of course the difference in time makes it kind of awkward if you have guests." Mr. Lint smiled tolerantly. "Twelve o'clock here is only eight o'clock out there. Funny, aint it?"

Mr. Gosney did not think so, but he managed to smile feebly. He wished, for the moment at least, that he was in California. He would just be finishing the evening paper there. In an hour he would be comfortably in bed.

"But not as funny as radio," his host persisted. "Why, Alf, think of it! Five thousand miles away is just like being in your own comfortable little home."

Mr. Gosney thought of his own comfortable little home only two miles away, and groaned inwardly.

"Well," he muttered, "guess I'll be going."

"Sorry our car is laid up, Alf. I'd run you over. Pretty late. And with all this crime-talk about. Too bad!"

Mr. Gosney shuddered gently. He tried to think how long it had been since he was out this late at night, alone. Lint made him tired. He couldn't remember. Besides, he would hurry. In the meantime it was getting later—earlier, rather. Mr. Gosney shuddered again.

"Good night," he said quickly.

Mrs. Lint crowded to the fore. "Give my love to Agnes," she called. "Tell her we were so sorry she couldn't come. But you both must come again soon. Maybe we'll have better luck getting California."

Mr. Gosney nodded mechanically. A street-lamp near by had sputtered and died out, leaving the surrounding territory in absolute blackness.

"Tell her," said Mr. Lint with brotherly indifference, "that summer colds don't amount to anything if you get right after them. That wine of Stella's will fix her up."

"Be careful," warned his wife. "The paper is full of holdups. Walk in the middle of the street."

"Alf is all right. Who'd dare to stop him with that bumbershoot in his hand?" Mr. Lint laughed.

Mr. Gosney laughed too—a shrill, nervous little bit of laugh which did not indicate that the confidence so loudly expressed by Mr. Lint in the old-fashioned umbrella had any foundation in fact—as far as Mr. Alfred Gosney was concerned.

He stepped down into the night. The front door of the Lint residence closed with a resounding whang.

MR. GOSNEY was alone in the darkness with his bottle of Stella's elderberry wine, and what her husband was pleased to term a bumbershoot. The combination was not particularly reassuring.

Mr. Gosney shivered. Presently he shifted the heavy package to a more secure position under his left arm and returned the umbrella to his right hand, grasping the stout shaft firmly through the heavy folds of cloth.

Through beetling clouds, a pale sliver of moon was visible for the moment. A mere handful of stars were scattered ineffectually

about the sky like Japanese lanterns at a church lawn-fête.

Under the first twittering arc-light Mr. Gosney produced his watch, and by careful shifting of the quart bottle of elderberry contrived to snap open the cover. It was ten minutes to one! And Bolton Road was a good two miles—nearer three, Mr. Gosney decided gloomily. The heavy gold case of the old-fashioned hunter gleamed rather richly in the flickering light. Men had been murdered—without number—for considerably less. Big men! Some of them born fighters, probably, but caught from behind without warning. Disregarding the safety of the elderberry, in his haste, Mr. Gosney managed to stow the glittering token of robbery and sudden death in the upper pocket of his natty silk vest. As far as he could see down the lonely street, no person was visible—only a patch of yellow light here and there to denote some householder burning the midnight oil. Mr. Gosney began to hurry as fast as his short little legs permitted. And as he hurried, he cursed.

He muttered first against summer colds. Why did people have them? And Agnes, of all people! It showed a lack of something. Mr. Gosney thought it was judgment. With a little of that, Agnes would be puffing along at his side, her generous girth a buckler, her vigorous voice a shield. Mr. Gosney laughed bitterly. Instead, where was she? At least three miles away, maybe more, in a soft, comfortable bed. Most likely snoring like a grampus! Or was it a wampus? Mr. Gosney did not know. He became wistful. If he was only there to hear her snore and utter the harmless little noises which sounded like a recitation of the vowels.

He gave consideration to the Lints. A family singularly devoid of all common sense. A male relative with the habit of giving his name—a plain, decent name—a suggestion of small beer and trouser patches. Radio imbeciles! Why in the name of thunder hadn't he spoken up at ten-thirty? What did he care about California being as clear as a bell? *Bell* rhymed with what he really thought about it. They were all alike, anyway—like a pair of cats in a barrel. KZP indeed! At eleven-thirty he should have shouted for PDQ.

Mr. Gosney smiled grimly at that. It was rather clever. He would tell it to Agnes.

SUDDENLY from an adjacent back yard a wail of mortal anguish fell upon the stillness of the night. Mr. Gosney felt his neck swell and his lungs contract. His feet gripped the flagging as if the stone were lode instead of sand. The wail was repeated. It died in a hissing, gurgling fashion, as a cry for help might die in the grasp of pressing fingers. Murderous fingers! A bolt of black dashed out of the driveway. Mr. Gosney found his feet capable of sudden locomotion. He began to run. Whipped by the breeze of his sudden flight, the newspaper covering of the elderberry bottle fluttered to the rear. For nearly a block Mr. Gosney continued his mad race before the thing was clear. Cats! He stopped, out of breath and sweating.

"Heck!" he swore.

The cold neck of the bottle was unfamiliar. Mr. Gosney brought it slowly into view. Slowly it dawned upon him that the shining piece of purple glass placed him clearly without the pale of law. As the confidential clerk for going on to fifteen years in the legal offices of Trant, Miller, Trant & Queeley, Mr. Gosney knew exactly where he stood. He was no longer a law-abiding citizen returning from a gathering at an advanced hour and entitled as a taxpayer to the full protection of every policeman in the city. In the eyes of every bluecoat he was a criminal skulking through the night with the merchandise of crime grasped firmly under his arm. Exhibit A!

Mr. Gosney stared back into the gloom with quivering lips. The newspaper was nowhere in sight.

"Shucks!" he wailed.

He began to hurry again. To go back and search was doubly dangerous. The darn cats had probably aroused the neighborhood. To hurry might also be dangerous. Suspicious! An idea presented itself. Mr. Gosney placed the bottle, seemingly grown heavier, under his coat and clasped it against the natty waistcoat with his free hand. But the length of the bottle—it had originally contained a full quart of Imperia Vinegar—bunched the front of his coat and tilted the rear in such fashion that even a child in arms would have scented crime. Mr. Gosney took the bottle out and swung it by the neck, as he walked along. No one was in sight.

"Gosney," he told himself, "don't be a fool. Maybe you wont meet anybody. Be calm."

Words! Weak, futile things! Suppose he did meet a policeman or an innocent-looking plain-clothes man? What good was calmness in the face of a bottle of purple fluid being conveyed through the night—or rather morning?

BUT there was another way out! A toss into the gloom, and he was a citizen and a taxpayer again, entitled to the protection and benefits of law and order. The stuff might stain the landscape if the bottle broke, which was unlikely because of its thickness, but the Gosney reputation would remain unblemished. . . . Probably injurious, too! What did the Lints know about making wine—or anything else, for that matter?

"Nothing!" Mr. Gosney assured the night—or morning. "Positively nothing!"

Thrown into the gutter or a convenient field, no damage could possibly result to anyone. It was logical. It fitted the emergency. It safeguarded health and morals.

On the other hand, Agnes had said: "Tell Stella to send me a bottle of her elderberry wine. I need the strengthening."

Mr. Gosney gripped the neck of the bottle tighter. That was that.

At the corner of Aspinwall Road and Clermont Avenue, Mr. Gosney turned to the right. To the left gleaming car-rails sped into the distance, curving around from the upper end of Aspinwall Road. If they only curved the other way, and a brightly illuminated street car would appear! Mr. Gosney consoled himself with the meager comfort that wishing never got anybody anywhere.

Clermont Avenue was a much older development. The frame houses with their picket fences were rapidly giving way to slattern flats and brick buildings devoted to light manufacturing. Dark alleys began to peep out from unexpected angles. Caution suggested the middle of the road. But the bottle of Stella's elderberry wine suggested the comforting shadows which cloaked the inner edge of the sidewalk. Behind him a night-owl car turned the corner and clanged eastward. Mr. Gosney turned for a moment and eyed the departing radiance wistfully. Clermont Avenue became darker and more sinister. He esayed a cheery whistle.

At his best in the comfortable legal atmosphere of Trant, Miller, Trant & Queeley, Mr. Alfred Gosney was a timid,

apologetic little man. He had the partially bald head, the wistful eye and the straw-gray mustache of our old friend, "Common People" of the daily cartoon. He was precise without being pury. He upheld the dignity of the firm without treading on anyone's toes—even the bustling, important young Blackstones fresh from their examinations. He affected a terseness of expression and a compression of words as being crisp and executive. He possessed a high regard for peace at any price, and a deep-seated horror of all things involving loud talk, loud clothes, loud laughter and actions of any kind which might be construed as coming under the same adjective.

He did not care for baseball, even as a young man, or any of the various sports which involved violent exercise. Sometimes of a Sunday he and Agnes would visit one of the city parks and watch a game of roque. But not often; Agnes did not care to walk.

In his reading Mr. Gosney preferred the same quiet. Lurid stories of crime which Agnes devoured, he ignored entirely—or as completely as possible. Agnes at times had a way of forcing his attention by reading aloud some particularly sanguinary bit of current news.

Mr. Gosney strove to forget the last few which Agnes had been pleased to read aloud. One story in particular seemed to vie with the menace of Stella's bottle of elderberry wine in his mind. An old man had been tied to a chair by thugs who thrust needles under his nails in a futile effort to obtain a supposed hidden store of wealth.

A BELATED automobile turned a corner a few blocks ahead and winked its little red eye derisively. Upon reaching that block, Mr. Gosney calculated, with slightly rising spirits, that he would be practically half-way home.

And then, hardly a hundred feet away, a blue-coated figure stepped from the darkness to the bleary light of a street-lamp and moved majestically forward. The light gleamed for a moment on the buttons of his coat and the polished nightstick.

Mr. Gosney stopped dead.

Despite his long connection with the law, Mr. Gosney did not feel the contempt usually associated with such intimacy. He leaned against the projecting wall of a laundry and sought to think. Behind the advancing bluecoat stalked Fort Leaven-

worth with frowning battlements and khaki-clad guards. And the publicity! Even when moments were infinitely precious, Mr. Gosney devoted several to contemplating the full horror of four-column photographs. To his disordered brain no news-event would loom larger.

Large drops of perspiration stood out on the little man's forehead. His little round cloth hat seemed to grip his head like a band of steel.

He thought of running. But the nearest alley was back beyond a street-light. A man with a large quart bottle was bad enough—but—but a man with a large quart bottle running, spelled disaster in screaming characters.

It was velvet blackness in the sheltering lee of the laundry. Mr. Gosney was sure that as yet he had escaped notice from the advancing guardian of the peace. In a moment of madness he thought of hurling the thing far across the street into shattering oblivion. But there was the noise!

With a trembling hand Mr. Gosney endeavored to wipe the moisture from his clammy brow. The motion brought the curved handle of the ancient umbrella in sharp contact with the little cloth hat. It was almost as if the umbrella itself had sought to whisper the words of inspiration.

With hands which trembled perilously close to the point of uselessness Mr. Gosney tried the idea out. Carefully he lowered Stella's bottle of elderberry into the capacious folds of the umbrella. With eager care he held the bottle in position while he grasped the neck and the shaft from without. The thing was possible. The weight in his hand bore heavily on his wrist, but the effect, as far as he could judge in the gloom, was entirely plausible.

He stepped forward again.

THE minion of the law was almost upon him now. He could hear the heavy breathing as well as the paddle of the heavy feet. Mr. Gosney wondered if he should start to whistle? Something light and unconcerned!

The unaccustomed weight supported only by wrist and fingers already seemed insupportable. Because of its shape, designed to display to the best advantage the amber beauty of Imperia Vinegar, the handle of the umbrella could not be made to hug the sides of the bottle. In a few seconds this, combined with the necessity of keeping the bottle within the folds of the

umbrella, brought added strain. Mr. Gosney set his little jaw grimly. But on second thought he smoothed the grimness away. It was replaced by a wooden effort of jovial unconcern.

"Evening, Officer!" Mr. Gosney wished he had said "Captain."

"Evenin'." He was a great big lump of a man, and under ordinary circumstances Mr. Gosney would have thought him a rather friendly-looking chap, in a lumpish sort of way.

"Nice evening, eh?"

"Yes sir-r." The policeman saw a frightened little man whose face was thinly masked by a sickly smile. But an honest little face—a little man with a big umbrella. "You'r-re out late," he finished.

Mr. Gosney nodded.

"Live around-d here?"

"Over on Belmont Street."

The policeman nodded and swung his nightstick idly. Mr. Gosney wondered if it would look suspicious to hurry on. His wrist seemed filled with hot lead.

The representative of the law wondered why the little man lingered, unless— He smiled indulgently. He would reassure the little man.

"Some bumbershoot you have there."

Mr. Gosney held himself erect by main force of will. He tried desperately to speak, but the words would not disentangle themselves. His legs trembled violently.

"A bad wallop-p you could give a crook with that."

"Yes," managed Mr. Gosney.

"Not that any will be met with on this beat. Just like a rest-cure, it is." That ought to help the little man.

Apparently it did. He smiled wanly. "G-good night, Officer."

"Good night, sir-r. Only be mindful of the alleys."

Mr. Gosney said he would—in tones not to be doubted. The bluecoat smiled and passed on. Little men like that were like children. The law should keep them in after nine o'clock.

MR. GOSNEY hurried. After a block he eased the burning wrist by shifting the burden to a position under his left arm and clutching it firmly to his side. Once more he sought the gleaming hunter.

The hands pointed to one thirty-five.

He moved along more cheerfully, almost with bravado. The man was probably right. In the gloom a crook might take the

umbrella for almost any sort of a weapon—maybe a rifle.

At the corner of Clermont and Duane streets he turned north into Duane. Duane Street would presently flow into Belmont Avenue, and he, Mr. Gosney, would be home again. He thought of Stella's parting words. Come again soon!

The more he thought about it, the more the humor of the thing appealed. He forgot all about the irony of Stella's words in considering how he would polish the thing up in the form of a neat little anecdote beginning: "Well, one night I was coming home pretty late with a bottle of contraband under my arm when I run straight into a policeman." And ending up: "And I walked right out from under his nose, and him with his eyes glued to my umbrella practically all the time."

Mr. Gosney began to whistle. Not a false note of courage or a touch of camouflage, but the light-hearted effort of a man who sees the worst in a fading perspective. Duane Street was a narrow, rather ill-kept street filled with makeshift stores and garages whose narrow drives were filled with rusted and battered skeletons of automobiles long past the stage of pep and class. Numerous alleys intersected it also, forming tubes of impenetrable blackness against the half-light of the street.

But Mr. Gosney moved jauntily forward. The fears which beset the early part of his homeward journey seemed—well, perhaps not so much foolish, as unwarranted. After all, a bottle of elderberry wine was a mighty small thing, especially when made by the righteous wife of a stanch citizen and taxpayer. Thus, Mr. Gosney, in the bigness of his heart, came to forgive the Lints for their unwarranted insistence in his waiting for California to come in clear as a bell. They meant well.

PERHAPS in a few more strides Mr. Gosney might have forgiven summer colds. But the weight under his left arm asserted itself. Mr. Gosney moved the umbrella back to its original position and grasped the bottle as he had grasped it before—only for the moment, just to get the effect again.

He was studying the cleverness of it with a complacent little smile of approbation, for the hair-trigger brain which had conceived it, when a sudden shadow fell across his path—a shadow which moved with the agile litheness of some giant cat.

Only Mr. Gosney knew, without looking up, that this was no animal.

"Brother," said a silken voice, "pass me the time."

Mr. Gosney slowly brought his head around to the base of the shadow. He found himself staring at a man not so much taller than himself, but immeasurably broad. Never had Mr. Gosney seen such shoulders or such a neck as was vouchsafed him in that twinkling moment of time. A giant gorilla with a lowered cloth cap and the familiar sweater popularly associated with thugdom.

"Well, brother?" The voice was still soft, but its caress was full of menace.

Mr. Gosney tugged the hunter free with a trembling left hand. The right held the ancient umbrella and its cargo—forgotten.

"T-ten m-minutes t-to t-two."

The other grinned. Mr. Gosney never recalled such terrifying merriment.

"I don't believe it. Let me see it, brother."

Trembling, without thought of concealment, Mr. Gosney sought to free the chain and its walrus-tooth charm. The walrus tooth, perhaps because of the close association of years, clung tenaciously to the natty vesting.

With a genial grin and the quickness and strength of the aforementioned kitten, the other reached out and tore the watch and a generous portion of the natty vesting from the stricken grasp of the confidential clerk of Trant, Miller, Trant & Queeley.

"Step on it," he said.

Mr. Gosney watched the other slip the watch into the side pocket of his coat with a sigh of regret. The hunter had been a present from Agnes on the occasion of their tenth anniversary. He dropped his hand.

"None of that!" The apelike figure was instantly suspicious and alert. "Put 'em up. Up an' hold 'em up!" The voice was a snarl now.

BREATHING as one winded from running, with the perspiration again dripping from his brow, Mr. Gosney mechanically elevated his hands. The effort to raise the ancient umbrella with its liquid contents was nothing compared to the fright and fear of mortal injury which the other inspired. The little man was a pathetic spectacle with his trembling, reed-like arms upright, one supporting an ancient umbrella held rigidly erect. The gentleman grinned in good-natured contempt.

He felt like saying "Boo!" to see if the little man would faint dead away. But business before pleasure.

Mr. Gosney felt the other go through his coat with expert lightness. From nothing, the weight in his right hand became unbearable. With clenched teeth he sought to keep the quivering wrist rigid and the fingers to their grip. He opened his mouth to say—to explain—

"Shut up," said the other curtly. "I'll be through in a minute."

Mr. Gosney made one more supreme effort. He took the person at his word and counted off the necessary sixty seconds. But the other was still busy going through the papers of an inner pocket, bending forward until the cloth cap almost came in contact with the remnants of the natty vesting for quicker and more accurate work.

Something snapped within Mr. Alfred Gosney. To this day he cannot quite explain it. Without thinking—almost without knowing—he brought the umbrella with its heavy quart burden down on the capped head just at the base of the massive corded neck. The blow was delivered with astonishing vigor. The figure dropped like a sack of meal cast from a freight-car—inert and apparently without articulation.

For a moment Mr. Gosney could only stare, with the umbrella sagging in his twitching hand.

Suddenly from the head of Duane Street came the shrill call of a police whistle and the sound of pounding feet. Mr. Gosney thought fast. If the man was dead, and he looked very dead, the thing was bound to be unpleasant. At best the publicity would be terrible—terrific! And there was the bottle. Always there was the bottle. Mr. Gosney peered down the street. Again the whistle sounded. The man lay without moving. Mr. Gosney fumbled with his chin. From the direction of Clermont Avenue came an answering blast.

Quickly Mr. Gosney stooped over and picked up his wallet from the ground. He grabbed a stray paper which had fluttered from the man's hand. He turned to run—anywhere—only to remember his watch. The pounding feet grew nearer. He bent and placed his hand in the side pocket of the man's coat and drew the watch out. The piece of natty vesting was still attached to the walrus tooth. He stood erect and gazed wildly into darkness.

Across the street an alley skirted a two-story brick garage. Hugging the umbrella to his breast, Mr. Gosney ran as fast as his little legs permitted toward its narrow shelter.

A hoarse voice called upon him to halt. But Mr. Gosney was definitely committed to a policy of flight. It was useless to stop now. He—he—

From behind him came a report like a bursting automobile tire. Mr. Gosney leaped forward like a stricken doe. Instinctively he felt that the patrolman had fired his revolver. He stumbled through the unfamiliar darkness at a surprising rate of speed. From behind he heard men exchanging shouts. The umbrella in some way crept between his legs and threw him heavily into the dirt.

AS he stood up, he heard the patrolman enter the alley behind him, running heavily. He began to run again, thinking of the wildest things! He felt the sensations of a drowning man who sees the events of his past life pass in review before he goes down for the last time. He thought of Agnes in her comfortable bed, uttering her somnambulist vowels; he thought of the Lints and California, which came in as clear as a bell when guests were absent. Lastly he thought of the quart bottle of Stella's elderberry wine clutched to his breast in the protecting folds of the umbrella.

From behind came another command to stop. It was followed almost immediately by another explosion. Mr. Gosney heard the bullet whistle in the air. Unused to violent exercise, his heart was beginning to pound. He breathed heavily through the nose. But still he held the umbrella clutched to his breast.

Strangely enough, he was not so frightened now as he was back on Clermont Street under the friendly eye of the other policeman—doubtless the cop of the answering whistle. Mr. Gosney found himself thinking of his pursuer as a cop—of all police officers as cops. He thought of himself as a sublime martyr to a bottle of elderberry wine done up in an umbrella. A grim determination seized him. He would deliver the bottle to Agnes or die in the attempt. He tried to set his jaw on the determination, but his bursting lungs would not permit. The pounding footsteps kept on behind.

Without warning, the alley ended in

what was evidently the storage yard of a blacksmith shop. A high board fence, old and rickety but still erect, blocked a narrow passage which evidently led to the street beyond. Mr. Gosney thought of hiding in a broken-down dump-wagon. But the thing was too obvious. The footsteps grew nearer.

Mr. Gosney found an old wagon-wheel lying up against the fence. Still clutching the umbrella, he managed to clamber to the hub. With one knee safely over, the wheel began to roll. It rolled far enough to leave Mr. Gosney suspended precariously on the creaking boards. With a mighty effort he managed to pull himself erect, but the effort allowed no chance of balance, and he fell heavily into a collection of empty cans and packing boxes which lined the fence on the other side.

FOR a moment he lay stunned amid the unsavory collection. When he managed to stand erect, something warm was trickling down his hand. But the bottle was safe! Mr. Gosney smiled triumphantly. As he moved away, being careful to do so noiselessly, he heard the other—the cop—run heavily into the yard. He came to a concrete passage which led into the street.

Mr. Gosney knew the street well. It was Payne Avenue. He was within two blocks of home. Home! Mr. Gosney sighed. The street was well lighted—too well lighted except for the extremely righteous, perhaps. In the illumination Mr. Gosney discovered a long triangular tear in the left leg of his best trousers. For the moment the catastrophe halted him in his tracks. Agnes! Mr. Gosney shivered in spite of the sweat which streamed from under his jammed cloth hat.

The noise of a heavy body straining behind him substituted fear for terror in the little watery blue eyes. Sternly, Mr. Gosney told himself that this was not the moment to think of haberdashery.

He limped rather than ran across the street, where a vacant lot provided a thoroughfare to another alley which paralleled Belmont Avenue to the rear. Once more in the shadows of a continuous line of high board fences, Mr. Gosney broke into a halting combination of lope and trot. Three hundred feet eastward lay the back fence of the Gosney domicile. Three hundred more steps, and he would be at the little door which was used for ashes and rubbish. Three hundred more feet!

He passed the freshly painted portion of the fence belonging to one Paul O'Reilly, his next door neighbor. Behind him came another blast of a cop's whistle. With desperate energy he tugged at the rusty latch. It opened with a loud protesting squeak. Mr. Gosney fell through the opening.

He followed the walk around to the front of the house, tiptoed up the front steps and cautiously inserted his key into the lock. The door opened with gratifying smoothness. Mr. Gosney closed it the same way. From above came the resonant somnambulistic vowels. Mr. Gosney leaned back against the door.

He was home!

Presently he moved carefully across the room. It was dark but familiar territory. At the foot of the stairs, where a door opened into the kitchen, he stepped warily. A large jardinière used as an umbrella-receptacle was close at hand. He endeavored to disengage the bottle of elderberry in order to place it on the kitchen table. But something happened. Something slipped. With a crash like low-flung thunder, Mr. Gosney went down, taking with him the jardinière and Stella's bottle. A liquid began to spread itself over Mr. Gosney's person. It was warm and sticky.

Mr. Gosney was home.

MR. GOSNEY came down to breakfast with a propitiatory smile on his trembling lips. Mrs. Agnes Gosney was presiding over the breakfast service with majestic calm.

"Good morning, m'dear."

Mrs. Gosney nodded. "Alfred," she said, "now that you have had a calm night of rest, I want you to tell me what resulted in your terrible state?"

"I—I slipped," murmured Mr. Gosney weakly. "That's—that's all I know, Agnes."

"H-m!"

"In—in fact, m'dear, I was trying so hard not to wake you."

"Wake me?" Mrs. Gosney pursed her lips sadly. "Why, I never slept a wink until long after you had gone to bed."

Mr. Gosney forgot the vowels and nodded softly.

"In fact," his spouse went on, "I might have known something would happen to you when I told you to bring me the bottle from Stella's—being all thumbs the way you are, Alfred."

Mr. Gosney gulped hastily at his cereal. "Yes, m'dear," he said.

Mrs. Gosney picked up the morning paper and perused it over her ample bosom. "Well," she cried presently, "of all terrible things!"

"How, m'dear?"

"Just listen to this, Alfred. And right close to home, too!" Mrs. Gosney clucked her tongue at the horror of it.

"What, m'dear?"

"A person's life is no longer safe on the street after dark. And can you imagine it. And right on Duane Street, too!"

Mr. Alfred Gosney dropped his spoon and coughed into his napkin. "What—what—" he stammered.

"Alfred! Just listen to this! Why, just to think it might have happened to you. Why, it is terrible! Why don't the police do something?"

"A-a-a-another robbery, m'dear?"

"Another robbery? Well, just listen to this. And right on Duane Street, remember, Alfred." Mrs. Gosney adjusted her glasses the better to do full justice to the horror of it. "'Brutal Assault to Rob in Duane Street,'" she read slowly.

"'Early this morning a man giving his name as James, 'Biff,' McGline, 1242 Cornhill Avenue, formerly a well-known figure in the boxing world and later prominent in East Ward politics, was found lying unconscious in Duane Street, S. W. The man had been felled by a vicious blow from some heavy instrument wrapped in cloth.

"'According to McGline's story, he was stopped by a man and asked for the time. As McGline was reaching for his watch, the assailant struck. Patrolman Halloran saw a man standing over the prostrate figure, and blowing his whistle for help, ran toward the scene of the crime. The assailant, hearing the whistle, fled through an adjacent alley closely pursued by Halloran, who discharged his revolver several times apparently without effect.

"'Flying squadrons have been dispatched to all portions of the underworld, and an arrest is confidently expected.'"

Mrs. Gosney tossed her head with vigorous approval. "I certainly hope they get him," she averred. "Of all the brutal things! The poor man! A wretch like that ought to be sent up for life. Don't you think so, Alfred?"

"Yes, m'dear," said Mr. Gosney. "Certainly. Absolutely."



Old Rex Retires

You can't keep a good man—or a good dog—down, as Rex clearly demonstrates in this fine story of a wonderful dog whose acquaintance our readers have already made.

By AUSTIN HALL

“OH, you! *Oui, oui!* Zat one fine tam dog. Zat tam dog Rex! See! *Ou, la la!*”

Jean la Jennette, American through choice, but stamped by a hundred generations of Basque ancestors, curled his stub legs around the second rail of the fence and chanted a pæan of springtime exultation.

Before him five thousand sheep, packed into a vibrating mass, hugged the fence of the shearing-pens, feeding into the inclosure behind the bell burro, spilling through the gates like sand through an inverted hour-glass. From the flanks and from behind came the sharp *whoofs* of the sheep-dog. Then, of a sudden, the vibrating mass relaxed, jammed, and the flow through the gates choked back into the sheep-pack. The long-eared burro leading the way had forgotten his bell-call function and had stopped to consider a pesky fly and to mull his troubles into a burro slumber. The sun was good this morning—and what was better than sleep?

“*Ou, la la!*” sang the proud Jean la Jennette. “Now you watch zat tam dog Rex!”

At the instant a brownish-black shepherd trotted about the edge of the flock, sniffed significantly and looked quizzically at the gates. The pack was immobile, jammed; the tinkle of the bell ahead had ceased, and the bleating of the flock had lapsed into a diminishing monotone. Jean la Jennette rolled a cigarette and said not a word; but when the dog reached the gates and stood up with his forepaws upon the nearest sheep, he turned his attention to the burro. The dog was looking across the fleecy carpet with a sort of now-I-wonder-what's-the-matter-with-that-darned-burro expression, his head bent sidewise and one ear cocked. Then he leaped upon the packed backs and trotted over the sheep to the slumbering one. Next instant his teeth had sunk into the hocks; and the burro, his tail jammed between his legs, was scoting across the pen. Whereupon Rex leaped upon the sheep

backs and trotted across the moving carpet to his stand outside.

"*Ou, la la!*" sang Jean la Jennette. "Never you beat zat tam dog!"

THREE minutes later, the flock in the pen, Rex had curled up in proud dignity beneath the feet of the glowing Jean la Jennette. The other herders—those who went with the sheep, and who had gathered about while the dog worked the flock—crowded in. Jean la Jennette lapsed into his favorite Basque, pouring out the poetical lingo that every one of his ancestors, from the day of the uncrossed Iberian down, has sung to his favorite sheep-dog. Never was there a dog like Rex; never was there his equal; nowhere was there a dog that was so like a man; nor was there one in the country that could approach him in value. Had not Baptiste Pischotté offered Jean's boss, Bob Arnold, five thousand dollars in piled gold for the bob-tailed Rex? Ah, zat bob-tail! *Ou, la!* In every litter of thoroughbred sheep-dogs there should be two or three. And the hairs under the chin! *Ou, la,* again! After you passed three, every hair was worth a thousand dollars. Rex had seven! Baptiste had counted them, and he knew; but Bob had counted them too, and not for all his sheep would he sell zat tam dog.

The herders, clad in blue overalls that never came to the tops of their brogans, and capped in weird-colored, side-cocked tam-o'-shanters, harkened to the tale that each spring flowed out of the lips of the voluble Jean la Jennette. As long as the shearing lasted, Jean and his dog would reign supreme. No other herder would think of using his own dogs while Jennette sat upon the fence; and there was none who even entertained the wish. Accustomed as they were to all grades of sheep-dog intelligence, these Basques relished the marvel of the old dog's intuition. Once a year they came, and once a year Jean and his dog put on a little world series of herding, with Jean singing during the intervals of the flocks:

"*Oui, oui! La la! Zat tam dog! Ze pups out of heem bring ze five hundred dollar'. From California to Montana, ze big sheep-man she write to Bob Arnold to say zat she want one pup. And Bob Arnold, she write and say zat only one dog can carry ze pup from zat tam dog. Oui, oui! Just you watch zat tam Rex!*"

And there was reason for all of old Jean's exultation. Rex was all that was claimed of him. No dog in western America had a greater reputation, and none had such a value. Wherever the sheep-shearers camped on their great annual circle, and the sheep-men gathered, there were sure to be tales of Arnold's Rex. And as the stories had spread, many a great sheep-grower had thrust a string-spreading thumb into his heavy wallet. But it seldom availed, because, as Jean put it, only one dog was allowed to mother the pups of the famous sire.

The master of Rex, Bob Arnold, was, next to Miller & Lux, the greatest sheep-grower in the San Joaquin Valley, with a range that ran over one hundred thousand acres, and sheep that were counted in high digits of five figures. Bob had inherited the business from his father and had been born and reared in the hot lands; but he had married a pretty sprig from the coast, who, having discovered that she could not withstand the rigors of the interior climate, had taken up her home in the beautiful town of San José, just beyond the mountains. Wherefore Bob Arnold had become a half-absentee proprietor, and the guidance of old Rex had devolved wholly upon Jean la Jennette. It was a suitable arrangement to the dog and to the herder, and all would have been well had Bob allowed matters to stand as they were. But there were children, and the children wanted the dog. Wherefore, Bob Arnold, indulgent father that he was, easily persuaded himself that it was no more than his duty to retire the old fellow to a life of tender morsels. Rex was getting old, and of late Bob had noticed that, whatever the dog's sagacity, he had been showing signs of fagging snap and vitality. The old fellow was his dearest possession, and as he had worked well, he had surely earned the right to live well.

ONE morning, when Bob Arnold arrived at the ranch, he found Jean and Rex, or rather Jean and Rex and a goat, loading freight-cars. The sun was burning out of a copper sky; and the mutton flock, dun-colored and dusty, was packed against the fence. Stretched along the track, the long line of cars awaited the cargo of sheep. Jean la Jennette had just opened the door of another car, and without a word of bidding, the old dog, proud as a peacock, his stub tail up, had marched to the side

of the sheep-pack. Behind him came the educated bell goat, munching one of Jean's discarded tobacco sacks in the nonchalant fashion of his treacherous caste. The sheep milled under the rising dust-cloud and watched out of their flat-slitted eyes. Then, with the precision of an expert, the dog cut out his cargo of mutton and stood back to appraise the number—following which, the traitor goat placed himself at the head and led the way back to the shute. With the dog behind and the bell in front, the sheep had perforce to follow. That is the way of sheep. Up the way, chewing the sack, went the goat, and through the door; then he turned to his left and followed along the wall until he had made the circuit of the car and had come back to the entrance. The stupid sheep followed. When the last one had entered, the good-natured Basque let out the goat and closed the door.

"*Ou, la la!*" the beaming Jean called to his boss. "It ees w'at you call ze team-play zat do ze work."

Many times had Bob Arnold stood witness to the near-human intelligence of his marvelous sheep-dog, but never had he been more interested. Had he a right to separate the dog from the sheep-herder?

NEVERTHELESS, next day, when the mutton had been loaded and the slack season was on, he whistled to Rex and called him into the seat of his expensive roadster. He had purposely delayed his explanation to Jean la Jennette—purposefully, because he knew that there was no explanation possible. Had he told his whole plan, he would have lost the best sheep-man west of the Rockies. And even as it was, he did not get away from old Jean. Bob had hardly settled the old dog into the seat before Jean la Jennette came out, waving his battered tam-o'-shanter:

"Ah, Monsieur! W'at you do wiz zat tam dog? Where you go, eh?"

Bob would have given anything to avoid that moment. He loved old Jean. Wherefore his prevarication may be forgiven.

"I am just taking him over to the kiddies, Jean—for a few days only. Old Rex is getting old. I'm going to take him over and feed him up." Then with a smile: "Mebbe I'll retire him."

Old Jean's hands went into the air.

"*Sapristi!*" he said. "W'at you say! *Mil demonios!* You retire heem! W'at will Jean la Jennette do wiz ze sheep?"

You retire zat tam dog, you kill heem sure. You kill ze good Jean la Jennette also. Zat dog, he boss ze dogs and ze sheep. Jean la Jennette, he boss ze man. Jean la Jennette an' zat tam dog make tam goot team."

Bob laughed. But old Jean would have to do without his dog; so he lied again.

"Just for a few days, Jean."

Nevertheless, when the old dog shifted his splendid brown-black body on the seat, holding up his paw and lapping the tears from the sheep-herder's cheek, Bob wondered whether, after all, the man might not be right. What would old Rex be without Jean and the sheep? Then he remembered the kids—and stepped on the starter. When he looked back, old Jean was standing disconsolately in the roadway.

Old Rex loved sheep; but next to sheep he loved to ride in the big roadster. Many times had Bob Arnold called him into the seat and whizzed him into the mountains, where, at the end of every ride, there had always been sheep—a flock to be herded from the plateau pastures out onto the dusty plains, or again some herder who had had trouble with a younger dog and had sent in for the experienced Rex. It was always good to crouch upon the seat where he could watch the whizzing road out of his tan-brown eyes, and where he could feel the touch of his master beside him. So, on this day when they came to the mountains, he sat upon his haunches and scented the breeze that drifted down the gulches—looking for sheep. When he turned his old eyes up at his master, Bob Arnold seemed to understand.

"Old fellow," said Bob Arnold, "you are looking for sheep, aren't you? But this time you are not going to find them. We are going over to dog heaven, where an old dog like you will have nothing to do but sleep."

Rex felt his ear being pulled, and he knew by the tone of his master's voice that there was something new in the wind; they had come to the summit of the mountains, and as he scented the air, he was aware of a strange vacancy. The soft scent of the desert had given way to a faint tang of salt. And there were no sheep—nothing but a rolling vista of hills that ran down into the blue-bordered distance. Nevertheless he was satisfied because Bob sat at the wheel, and he knew that after while they must come to the flocks. They

always did—all the world was centered about sheep. So he curled up in the seat and watched out of one wise eye while they speeded down into the valley.

But there were no flocks; and as there were none, he could not understand. Instead he came out into a valley such as he had never seen, full of farms and people and cur dogs whose reason for being had always been a puzzle to his aristocratic understanding. Two hours later, when they speeded into San José through the maze of houses, he lifted his muzzle toward his master. The sweet aroma of the desert was gone; there was no scent of sheep, and the tang of salt air had become an oppression. What sort of a place was this? Bob Arnold patted him on the head:

"You don't understand, old fellow. Do you? But you'll get used to it. Wait till we see the kiddies!"

Bob Arnold's children were waiting on the lawn. Two minutes after his arrival they had the dog on the grass and were putting him through his antics, with the neighbor's children looking on, and the more blasé parents giving him their critical inspection—critical because, as one fat real-estate broker put it, they could not understand how any man could allow five thousand dollars to repose in a hunk of dog-flesh. And had the man been able to read the dog's mind, he would have been far from flattered—because Rex had his own idea of well-dressed fat men.

THAT night Rex got his first taste of the super-nicety of suburban civilization. When the family retired, he was carefully bedded in the kitchen, where, with the ill-smelling varnish in his nostrils and the plastered ceiling over his head, he brooded and catnapped through the long dark hours. It was his first night away from the open places, and he could not understand this choice of a dark cubby-hole instead of the sweet comfort of the starlit sky and the smell of sheep. Nevertheless his dreams brought him solace and lifted him through the night—dreams of sheep and Jean la Jennette, wherein he followed in the rising dust-cloud behind the flocks, with the old Basque singing his Iberian lays and pinching his ears while he poured out the endearment of his caressing curses.

But morning came at last, and with it a strange Bob Arnold—pajama clad—to

let him out into the open air. Outside was a strange world, with houses on either side, trees parked all around, and only a small place left for the open sky. The lawn in front attracted him because it suggested sheep, so he trotted out for inspection. The air was cold and a chill gray fog was swirling up the street. He could not understand the long line of houses, the hard sidewalks and the stretch of pavement out in front; nor could he understand the people who kept continually coming out of the houses—they reminded him of the squirrels he had known in the desert, each with his own private hole out of which he scooted on his own particular little business. He had always regarded men as superior creatures, beings of untold wisdom, who knew all things and who had the choice of the whole world to live in. But these men were different. They were all dressed like the fat man; and they all had the same exaggerated air—there was not a one who measured up to the easy grace of his singing sheep-herders.

One of them walked by and called him puppy; and when, out of pure defense, Rex showed his teeth, he sidestepped gingerly.

"Why," said the man, "you vicious brute! I shall speak to Mr. Arnold about this—or to the pound man. Such a nuisance in the neighborhood is not to be tolerated!"

The man's vocabulary was a little beyond Rex's reach; but he understood the intonation. The old dog crouched down upon the grass to think things over. But his contemplation was again interrupted—this time by a ball of fluff that rushed out of a neighboring house and scooted after him across the lawn. Rex leaped to his feet. The ball was a Pomeranian lap-dog, clean as snow, and decorated by a broad pink ribbon tied about its neck. From its pink little mouth came the challenge of battle. Rex was interested; he had seen many dogs, curs and otherwise, but never before had he seen anything like this. Or was it a dog? When the Pomeranian had come quite close, the old fellow made a quick bound and caught it under his paw. The poor pet went down on its back, squirming and squealing pitifully. Very deliberately did the old sheep-dog roll it over; and then when he had determined that it was really a dog, he started to play. But his good

intentions were interrupted by a young lady rushing out of the door.

"Oh, Mr. Arnold!" she called. "Your horrid sheep-dog is killing my Fifi!"

And at the call, Bob Arnold, smoking his morning pipe, came out on the porch.

"What's the matter?" he laughed. "Oh, I see. Oh, he isn't going to hurt Fifi. He just wants to examine him. What do you think about him, Rex? Some dog, eh? Mebbe he thinks it's a young cat, Miss Williams?"

Whereat the young lady stuck up her nose saucily; and Bob Arnold whistled Rex to a plentiful breakfast on the back porch.

THAT day was destined to live in the old dog's memory. He could not understand such a place and so many people; neither could he understand why, with so much grass, there was not so much as a single sheep. When the children were gone to school, he took up his station on the lawn to think things over. And then he had another adventure.

Up the street two horses hitched to a wagon were coming toward him. All that morning he had seen nary a horse. Here, at least, was something that was worth looking at. On the box were two men, one driving the horses, and the other coiling the rope. When they were abreast of the Arnold residence, they drew up; one of the men spoke:

"Here he is, Bill—right where the man said he would be. Some dog, too. Better be easy."

The man on the box alighted and continued coiling his rope. Rex was interested. Here were horses and men. These men were not dressed like the fat men; their common jeans and swinging gait stamped them as cowboys. He was not afraid. Then he saw dogs in the wagon, all of them crouching dejectedly in the corner. He was interested, and he ran out. Then for the first time in his life he suffered the indignity of the lasso. Before he knew it, the rope was about his neck and feet, and he was being lifted into the box. So it happened that in less than twenty-four hours after he had come to civilization, Arnold's Rex, five-thousand-dollar sheep-dog, sire of the most famous of all utility strains, had fallen into the pandemonium of dog hell. But even here his great beauty and the speaking power of his tan-brown eyes enabled him to score

an approximate victory. At the pound, the head man singled out the old aristocrat crouching aloof at the back of the receiving pen; and when he caught the dog's reproachful eyes, he spoke to his helper:

"That old fellow back there aint no common cur. You kin tell it by them eyes. Look how he scorns the rabble. Better take him out. Put a tag on him for five dollars. If nobody calls, we can sell him."

TWO hours later, when the irate Bob Arnold burst into the pound, he found a humbled and chastened dog chained to a post upon which was tacked the disgraceful legend of five dollars. Five dollars for Rex! Insult and indignity! Were it not for the look on the old dog's face, Bob would have burst out laughing; but as it was, he stepped up gently and loosened him from the tether. What would old Jean la Jennette say, if he should learn that a mere pound man had put a price of five dollars upon the dog of his heart? Nevertheless Bob received a certain satisfaction when he told the dog-catchers just what they had done.

But that was not the end of the adventure. Bob's wife was the neatest house-keeper in the San José Willows. When she learned that Rex had been in the pound—which of course must be full of fleas and vermin—nothing would do but that the old fellow should have a bath. Wherefore Rex found himself in a luxurious bathtub with his eyes full of tar soap. And that was not the worst. After a half-hour's scrubbing, he had to undergo the humiliation of a turkish-towel rub-down. And to add still more, the children came home just as he was well dried and insisted on a broad pink ribbon that would make him look just like Fifi, which was just exactly the way that Rex did not want to look. The pink ribbon was a disgrace to his dignity. Rex may not have had any great reasoning power, but he was possessed of his own psychology. That ribbon was the last straw. Yet all would have been well had he not run across the innocent Fifi on the front lawn. He had his own notion of where the ribbon idea had come from. The next minute was a blur, with the pretty Miss Williams protecting the little Pomeranian between her legs, and Bob Arnold holding Rex. But Bob understood. Never again did he allow them to disgrace Rex's royalty with the badge of Pomeranian frippery.

The days that followed were not to Rex's liking. He was not a city dog; and the Arnolds were soon to find it out. He had been reared for a life of action; and now he had nothing to do but play with the children and loll upon the front lawn. He longed for the sheep and the open desert and Jean la Jennette. His only solace was his dreams—dreams of the woolly packs, of the days at the shearing-pens and the ringing pæan of the triumphant Basque; and as he dreamed, his legs would twitch to the intensity of his vision; then when he awoke, there would be the same monotony of passing automobiles and the unending procession of fat men. How he hated these well-dressed fat men. He became surly, and he began to lose flesh. Then one day he suddenly disappeared and was gone until nightfall. The same thing happened for several days, and was not explained until one day a blue-jeaned Italian knocked at the door of the Arnold residence.

"You sella the dog?" he asked of Mrs. Arnold. "You wanta sell, I giva one dollar. That fina dog."

Thus was the mystery explained. The Italian had a small place about twelve blocks distant, and was the keeper of half a dozen milch goats. In some way, perhaps through the wind, Rex had located them, and had proceeded to herd them, much to the delight of the busy Italian.

"He know the goat just lika the man. He savvy the lady goat that giva the milk; and he savvy the man goat. Smarta dog. Take care of the goat alla day. Fina dog for Tony Galluci. I give to you one dollar."

Tony did not get the dog. When he was told of Rex's real value, his hands went into the air. But from that day on, Rex became the show wonder of the Italian colony, and Tony became another Jean la Jennette. Rex had to have sheep, or at least something that approximated thereto. Wherefore Mrs. Arnold did not object to his recreation of a few goats.

BUT over on the ranch Bob Arnold was having his troubles. Jean la Jennette had become cross-grained and had lost half his efficiency. The insistence of his question was ever the same.

"Ah, monsieur, w'at you do wiz zat tam dog? You kill heem sure. Zat dog, he want ze sheep and ze good Jean la Jennette. And ze sheep, zey go to hell sure

wizout zat tam dog. Ze good Jean la Jennette try, but he no can do. Ah, monsieur!"

Wherewith he would stomp out into the pens to do what he could, but his efforts were always half-hearted. It hurt Bob Arnold to see the tears in the old man's eyes. At home he spoke to his wife:

"I think that I'll have to take the old dog back. Old Jean simply can't stand it. He's got to have zat tam dog."

And at the sound of the caressing curse, the dog woke out of his slumber; he came over to Bob Arnold. The look in his eyes was just as appealing as had been the words of Jean la Jennette.

AS it happened, however, Bob Arnold was spared the decision. August came, and with it the gentle winds that swept from the south, winds that came down from the mountains and carried a call that no sheep-dog could withstand. One morning the old dog left his place on the lawn and headed for the highway. The breeze was drifting in, and his sensitive nostrils had scented sheep. All that day he trotted along the road, dodging automobiles, bound south on his worthy quest; nor did he stop until he had reached the mountains that form the barrier of the San Joaquin. Here he dined on a careless rabbit and lay down in the coolness of a long cañon. Once again he was in the wild, where life was free and where there was no contamination of fat men. The winds blew down from the top of the mountains, and he scented sheep. Sheep, sheep! A thousand generations quivered to that call. Beyond the mountains were the flocks and Jean la Jennette. He dreamed, and his dream was still the same; for months he had dreamed of Jean la Jennette. He could hear him call; and his stub tail fluttered to the caressing curse of "zat tam dog."

When the moon came up and the pine trees were silhouetted along the ridges, he resumed his journey. His old heart bounded to the joy of freedom. Here were the mountains, the sounds of his own world, and the scents of the wilderness. All was music—even the yipping of the coyotes.

But on this night there were more coyotes than usual. By the time he had reached the summit, their calls had become bedlam. And he knew what it meant—sheep! Some flock was being driven through the mountains. Either that, or

the coyotes had stolen the sheep. From far and away and from over the moonlit ridges came the blood-call. And at that call Rex bristled with inherited defiance. It was the way of the wolves to bear down on the helpless, even as it was his own nature to protect them. He stood still. Out of the night he caught the panicky clatter of a sheep-bell. Then there were other sounds, muffled and terrible, but clear. He could hear the wild, heading in to the kill.

The kill! Every fiber of his old body snapped to the call. His heart surged to the wild joy of his hate; here was what he was for—to protect the lowly. With his nose to the ground, he took the long slope, heading straight for the scent of the sheep-pack. He had seen sheep stolen before, and he knew how it was done. Young dogs who did not know their business let themselves be fooled by the cunning coyotes. The coyotes would rush up and lead the dogs behind them. Then the outer coyotes would sneak in and steal the sheep. Jean la Jennette! Never had he and Jean lost a single sheep. But he had killed many a coyote under the light of the moon. That was the most exciting thrill of all—to throttle the wolves and to feel their death-gurgle under his teeth.

The flock was packed in a death-trap—six hundred sheep milling and blatting under the carnage. Along the edges raced the bloodthirsty coyotes, tearing down the sheep with indiscriminate slaughter. Blood was riot, and the hideous outcry went up to the watching moon. The old dog rushed in. His sharp *whoofs* mingled with the death-call. No thought of numbers, no fear! A coyote went down—another. The old call of the dog pitted against the wild. A thousand generations fought on Rex's side, just as a thousand generations fled before him. The sheep rushed down the cañon, and the coyotes took to the hills. When he had accounted for the last coyote, Rex rounded up the flock. Here was the life! Then he headed down the cañon for the plains and Jean la Jennette.

JEAN la JENNETTE was going through his morning expostulation.

"Ah," he said, "Misteer Superintendente, ze monsieur has made w'at you call ze big meestake. Ze sheep, she go to hell now, for sure. Ze ranch, she go to hell also. For why he no bring back zat tam

dog for Jean la Jennette? For one more *centime*, I throw up ze job and go back to France. *Mon Dieu!*"

Wherewith he thrust his battered tam-o'-shanter on his head and strode out to the rickety Ford that sputtered in the dooryard. Charley Yerring, Bob Arnold's ranch superintendent, followed with a jug of wine and a hunk of cheese. When it had been safely deposited beside the keg of water, the old herder slid into his seat.

"Ah," he said by way of adieu, "you wait. You see. Zat young Portugee, he no savvy the sheep. Ze young dog, she no understand, also. *Non!* It ees w'at ze American say 'w'at ze hell!'"

Half an hour later he drove the old Ford across the road that bordered the foothills. It was his duty to supply the herders with food and water and to superintend the herding of the various flocks. Usually he was very efficient but this morning he was disgruntled and unhappy. His surliness increased when he approached the white tent and saw no sign of the unpopular Manuel. Then he beheld that which made him sit up in self-justified wrath—a dead sheep. One of the dogs was huddled asleep beside the flap of the tent. There was no sound. The other dog was watching the sheep close by. The experienced Basque knew at one look that something had happened. Fully eight hundred sheep were missing. That meant—*mon Dieu!* Where was Manuel!

With a quick step, he alighted and thrust his head into the tent, and he needed no one to tell him what had happened. Upon the battered cot, huddled among the crumpled blankets, lay the herder, eyes rolling, flushed, deliriously babbling his fevered crescendo. Sick! Jean la Jennette had seen stricken sheep-herders before. The whole story was there on the cot. The man was helpless and the young dogs without guidance. The coyotes had come, and the sheep had either strayed or been stolen. Those were the facts. In face of them, the old fellow lost all his resentment. Very tenderly he stepped over to the cot, threw back the blankets and felt of the man's face. Then he picked up the fevered form and carried it to the Ford and drove gently back to camp.

"Ah," he said when he reached the ranchhouse, "w'at I say? Eight hundred sheep have zis morning gone to ze hell. Jean la Jennette must now go up to ze mountain wiz ze young dog. No can do!

Monsieur Bob, he laugh w'en Jean la Jennette say zat he want zat tam dog. Now he lose ze five thousand dollar. See. *Mon Dieu!*"

NEVERTHELESS he hurried at his work. In no time he had a relief herder, plus two dogs, in the machine and was scurrying across the desert. The sun was high now; and as he drove, he cursed the fate that had befallen. Somewhere up in the dim blue mountains to the west were the sheep—and now he must go after them with the young dogs. The Monsieur was to blame. "Ah, ze Monsieur had made ze one grand meestake."

As soon as he had deposited the herder, he turned the old Ford toward the big cañon that led into the heart of the mountains. But the machine was old and rickety; besides, Jean was perturbed and overly anxious,—so much so that when he was about a mile from the cañon's mouth he killed the engine. And just at that moment a dun-colored pack, streaking a veil of dust, came around the bend of the foothills. But Jean did not see it; neither did he see the brown-black object that was running the flock out onto the plain. He was excited and angry; the barking of his young dogs made him more so; and perhaps that was why he forgot his spark and left it unretarded. Everything was going wrong this morning, thought Jean la Jennette—even the Ford. Now he must get out and spin the engine. *Mon Dieu!* Ze Monsieur; he was to blame! He took hold of the crank and stooped his stub body over to get a purchase, when *spat*—the crank kicked back and hit him on the head. Jean la Jennette went down like a log.

But the pack had come closer. The old dog had spotted the automobile and had caught the familiar scent. While the old Basque was lying unconscious, the dog of his heart was coming in with the sheep. Ah, zat dog! Jean did not know; but the old dog was not to be deceived. He

smelled blood, and he smelled Jean la Jennette. When the sheep were close, the dog left them and came up to the prostrate body. Here was his old Jean—his man-thing—his god! Nowhere in all the world was there a man-thing like this one! And he was not dead. The old dog smelled of his face and touched him with his paw. Then he sat down. Jean la Jennette! Here was his master—the lord of his dreams and the king of his heart. It was good to snuggle up close and to scent the breath of the loved one. The old dog wagged his tail. Then he whined softly and began to lap the face of his master.

TWO days had passed, and Rex had not returned to his home in the San José Willows. Bob became alarmed and started a hunt in the Italian quarter; but Tony Galluci had "no see"—so there was nothing to do but hop in the roadster and head for the big ranch in the San Joaquin. But when he arrived at headquarters, there was no sign of the dog. Instead, he received the dire news of the missing sheep. Wherefore, without ado, he loaded Charley Yerring, the ranch superintendent, into the car and headed across the desert after Jean la Jennette. An hour later he found the flock beside the stalled Ford.

Jean la Jennette was sitting on the ground with the dog in his lap—a happy Jean, crooning an Iberian chantey while the old dog lapped the tears from his swarthy cheek.

"Ah, monsieur," he said, "see! He has found ze sheep. Every night Jean he dream and he see zat Rex, and he say 'Come.' And zat dog, she wag his tail in his dream and say 'Yes,' also. But ze sheep go, and zat dog she do not come. But ah, monsieur, Jean la Jennette had forgotten *le bon Dieu!* He know, an' He tell zat tam dog. *Ou la! Oui, oui!* An' zat dog, she bring ze sheep to ze good Jean la Jennette.

"Ah, monsieur," added the good Jean la Jennette, "never you beat zat tam dog!"

"Flood Courage," another of Austin Hall's fine stories of the great sheep-dog Rex, will appear in an early issue. You will find that it will well repay watching for.



The Ragged Moment

A powerful story laid in a moving-picture studio, by the gifted author of "The Crooked Knife" and "Mammon Misjudges."

By WILLIAM P. DUDLEY

I SAT with Von Oppen, the movie director, in the Times Square office of Cameo Pictures, Inc. We were planning the sets for Clara Hope Benedict's latest production, "The Ragged Moment." Paragraphing our argument came the sudden purr of Von Oppen's telephone. The call was for me.

"Colonel Douglas speaking, William," I heard when I had responded. "Understand you're starting the old camera next week on a big prison feature with Miss Benedict."

I confirmed the Colonel's information.

"Listen then, William! If you want the inside dope on some real prison stuff, I've got just the bird who can steer you flawlessly. He's a chap I've taken a sort of personal interest in. I want to help him back to the straight and narrow."

"What's he done?" I asked in movie parlance. But the altruistic old stage-manager misunderstood me.

"He tried to make away with fifty thousand in bonds five years ago when he held a confidential position with Julius Morgan-

feldt. Perhaps you remember. He's been up the river for it and recently got paroled. To keep you straight on your prison technique, he ought to prove a cuckoo!"

I conferred with Von Oppen, then turned again to the telephone.

"Send him up," I invited. "We'll look him over. How much money buys him?"

"Anything he can live on, honestly. He's making a desperate stab to go on the level. If I could get him a job in the movies, I thought he might cash in on his handicap."

I made a facetious remark about motion pictures being the dumping-ground for most of the freaks and cripples in creation anyhow; one more couldn't make such a difference.

"It was his first indiscretion, William," the old Colonel pleaded. "Be as broad-minded as you can, as a favor to me. And tell Von Oppen to clamp on the soft pedal if the chap doesn't hop around like an experienced studio man the first ten hours."

I laughed the Colonel off the wire and returned to the sets for the picture. And just after lunch the jailbird appeared.

AS usually happens in real life, he didn't look like a jailbird. He had no prison pallor; he was neatly and soberly dressed. Half a million young men of similiar type, drawing thirty to sixty dollars a week, go to work in Manhattan every morning. The only individualistic thing about him was a hideous scar—a startling scar—which ran from the corner of his left eye diagonally down to his jaw. Subsequently I learned he had received it while a trusty in prison. He went down permanently branded before the attack of two escaping gunmen, rather than betray the warden's confidence by assisting them.

"What's your name?" demanded Von Oppen with an aggravating sneer. He appraised the ex-convict with the eye of the hard-boiled director.

"Archibald J. Knox," returned the fellow, nervously fumbling his cap.

"By the look of your mug I'd say you'd got the proper moniker—Archibald J. Knocks is right. So you think you can steer me on my prison atmosphere. Well, show me!"

It was Chinese cruelty, the way Von Oppen said it. But that was the director's idea of humor. No man in the business was more cordially hated by those who had to work under him. As continuity and estimate man for Cameo Pictures, I was spared that misfortune.

"I don't know that I can show you—in the abstract," Knock answered civilly enough. "But if you'll give me the concrete chance in the studio, I'll try to make myself valuable."

"For how much money?"

"Colonel Douglas said I ought to be worth at least fifty."

"Well, Colonel Douglas isn't running my business. I'll be taking chance enough having a bird with your record around the rest of the cast, anyhow; probably I'll have to pay another man to watch you. If you want to work on props for twenty-five a week during the life of the picture, I'll use you as long as I think you're worth it."

The fellow appealed to me in a broken, helpless sort of way and tried to smile.

"All right," he answered philosophically.

Von Oppen scribbled a message and handed it to him.

"Take this over to the Cameo studio in Fort Grant, New Jersey. Give it to Bert Masgon, the art director. He'll put you to work until we know you can qualify as a prison expert."

Knox took the slip and folded it with lean fingers that trembled. At the door he paused. Eyes downcast, he spoke:

"I know I'm under a big handicap, and I'm not bidding for any sob-stuff while putting up a scrap to come back. But is it asking too much—if you'll sort of keep mum about—what I've been—so as not to prejudice the others too much against me. It wont cost you anything, and it'll help me—a lot. I'll be a thousand times obliged if you would."

It was the most pathetic request I have ever heard one man make of another in thirty-five years of living.

"I'll think about it," parried Von Oppen. "It'll all depend on how you behave yourself." And when the door had closed, the director turned to me with a smirk and winked.

"For the love of Mike!" I protested. "Can't you see the poor fellow is all raw inside? Have a heart!"

"Is that my funeral?" the fellow demanded.

That was Von Oppen all over—selfish, no breeding, viewing life from the angle of a sewer. A coward at heart, he took a grim pleasure in bullying the marionettes with whom he made his pictures—pictures which kept him in work because he knew exactly how much salacious material would get past the censors. As a director, his type is passing.

I DON'T know that I ever saw a man try harder to please an employer than Knox in the weeks which followed. A score of times he kept Von Oppen from making an ass of himself among those who knew anything about our modern penal system. He was one step ahead of all the camera shooting. He was the first in the studio in the morning, and the last to leave it at night. He had a natural eye for the artistic, in so far as the term can be applied to the production of boiler-plate program pictures, and his supply of practical suggestions was inexhaustible. No mechanic on the set wanted a tool that Knox did not produce instantly. No prop was ever misplaced that Knox did not recover. From Monday morning until Saturday night he stood between Von Oppen and a thousand distracting details even better than the assistant director, who drew ten thousand a year. He hadn't been in the studio three days before Von Oppen saw his worth and mentally gave him credit. But that was

the only place in which Knox got credit—in Von Oppen's mind. In practice the director used Knox as a mat on which to wipe his feet.

How the victim stood it is beyond me. But he stood it—with a sort of dumb desperation. Many times when the director was especially cruel, I overheard the electricians remark: "Von must know where Archie's got a body buried, he mops him around so."

I think what especially riled Von Oppen was the way the jailbird ingratiated himself with Miss Benedict. He did it unwittingly; yet it back-fired on him none the less harshly. He was the only chap in the studio who consistently called her *Miss Benedict*, even behind her back. He always removed his cap when addressing her, no matter how trivial the business. He was uncannily at hand with her mirror and make-up box when the hot Kleigs injured her "war-paint." At heart he was a gentleman, which Von Oppen was not.

All that a man could humanly do to live down a shady past and hold an honest job, young Archie did in those weeks which followed. Yet Von Oppen turned to me one night and snarled:

"I'll get that bird one of these days, and I'll get him good."

"What for?" I demanded angrily.

"He makes too many damned suggestions. He goes around here as if he was as good as the rest of us. He forgets what he is, and needs to be showed his place."

I had a hunch that Von Oppen was beginning to worry because he had annexed an indispensable who had more of a "picture mind" than himself. Such men are dangerous. Sometimes they work their own directors out of jobs.

"Well," I returned stiffly, "then why don't you fire him?"

"None of your damned business," grunted Von Oppen phlegmatically. He turned abruptly away. He wanted to fire the fellow, but couldn't afford it. And Archie couldn't afford to fire himself. Which accounted for about seven weeks of inhuman abuse before things came to an adjustment.

WE had been shooting a ballroom scene that afternoon. Word was supposed to arrive for Miss Benedict during the peak of the party that she must hurry to Sing Sing, where the hero must be saved from electrocution in the morning. As a wealthy

young society matron, Miss Benedict wore a pearl necklace that had figured prominently in the film's advance publicity. Miss Benedict had purchased it the previous season in Paris; it really cost twenty-five thousand dollars. She had to leave a palatial residence in ballroom attire, come out into a misty street scene and hurry into a taxicab.

Now, the effect of mist in the movies is secured by stretching taut fly-screening over the front of the entire set between the camera and the action, in as many thicknesses as the density of the mist may require. In the preceding shot inside the ballroom, the pearls had been prominently "planted" around Miss Benedict's throat. But just before we shot the mist scene, the clasp that held the string together refused to stay snapped. Fearing she might drop the necklace and injure it, the star removed it altogether and pulled her chin-chilla coat up high to her chin.

"Mr. Knox!" she called. "Can you come here, please?"

With a quick jump from the wings, Archie was at her side as usual.

"Please take these up to my dressing-room and give them to my maid," she requested. She dropped the milky gems in his palm without question. Then from behind the false front of the residence where she had retired, she called to Von Oppen that she was ready.

It was then that Knox finally committed the unpardonable studio sin. In his eagerness to get off the set before the camera started, he darted forward without taking care whether he was headed.

There came a warning cry, a wail of despair, a shrieking of nails, a sickening rip! Tragedy.

Knox had darted squarely through the center of a ninety-dollar screen which had taken an entire afternoon to train the lights on properly.

One great ragged rent not only obliterated half a day's work; it also stopped Von Oppen from doing any more shooting until the following morning.

Poor Knox! It was a human error, because from where he had started in the set, the screen had been almost invisible. Von Oppen had probably walked through dozens of such screens. So had others. No one can count himself a dyed-in-the-wool movie person until he has walked once through a mist screen or passed inadvertently before the lens while the camera is

turning. But that availed Knox nothing. He had done it, and he was—a jailbird.

The fellow picked himself from the floor and began stammering a chagrined apology. Von Oppen leaped forward and his face was a thing unholy. He tore his hair, started cursing.

Cursing? It was blasphemy of the foulest kind. He grabbed Knox by the shirt-front.

Watching the result, scarcely daring to draw breath, were half a dozen electricians, eight or ten carpenters, the camera-crew, a score or more of actors and extras—ranging from the distressed Miss Benedict and the rest of the regular cast, down to one frail little street-girl with painted face, red wrists and sleazy stockings, who had been brought into the studio by one of the assistant directors on the promise that "if she was good to him," she might get a chance to become a second Pickford.

All Von Oppen's pent-up animosity of weeks exploded then in one grand volcano of bestial temper. The word-lashing the big director administered took no thought of adjectives, expletives, metaphors, fellow-feeling or human decency. And the arraignment, ripping open and exposing all the man's sordid past, scalded like molten lead on the jailbird's naked flesh.

"And now, you sniveling, hatchet-faced bond-thief, *get out of this studio!*" concluded the director. "And don't you ever dare set foot in the State of Jersey again. For five weeks I've overlooked that you came here straight from Sing Sing. But now is the time you walk. And believe me, if anyone wants to know anything about you—a low-lived stock-crook—I'll tell 'em an earful that'll hound you from hell to Harlem. Get!"

Knox's face was ashen. He failed to move quickly enough. So Von Oppen pushed him—a vicious, backward push. Knox tried to catch himself, tripped, went over backward against a hot Kleig. Light and standard went over with a crash of broken glass. Before Knox could untangle himself from the cables along the floor, further enraged by the demolished Kleig, Von Oppen kicked him—and kept on kicking him until Knox rolled over beyond his reach and somehow regained his feet.

And through the studio permeated the sickish reek of singed human flesh.

I do not recall that any more shooting took place the afternoon that Archie Knox was "canned." The electricians set about

righting the overturned. Kleig, the carpenters substituting another screen. But Knox slunk off into the boss carpenter's room in the dark. His hat and coat were hung in there. Over the washstand was a cabinet where medicines might be procured to assuage the searing pain of the burn up his arm.

But Knox did not get his hat and coat at once. Nor did he turn on the lights and search for the antiseptic. He simply moved across to a rude work-table covered with blue-prints. There he sank in a chair and buried his scarred face in his good right arm. No one followed him in. No one came near him. It was as good as one's job was worth for Von Oppen to catch anyone consoling an employee he had discharged.

THE time was nearing five-thirty of a January afternoon. Darkness had fallen early. An arc-lamp shining through the double windows from a distant street-corner showed the jail-bird only in silhouette, bent over the table. And though the pain in his arm was excruciating, it was not half so unendurable as the pain in his heart—the pain of realizing that just when he felt he was making progress toward living down the nightmare past, he was never to live it down. Always there would be some one to find out and expose him. It was to rise up and mock and wreck him forever.

Jailbird! How Von Oppen had chewed it! Crook! Convict! Bond-thief! Regardless of the provocation which had impelled him in a moment of weakness to try using his employer's securities for a purpose of which the world could never know—it was to be his Nemesis! There could be no such thing as living down the past.

The milk of human kindness curdled in the man during the quarter-hour which followed. He finally straightened, his features the hue of white paper. He straightened—to find, clasped in his hand so tightly that he had forgotten, Clara Hope Benedict's twenty-five thousand-dollar necklace.

He stared dry-eyed at the wealth the string represented. He coiled it down slowly in the center of a dusty blue-print before him. It was incredible that the rope of baubles could be worth so much, forty-eight globules as hard as glass, as light as egg-shell, as white and pure as congealed polar light.

Over in New York—lower New York—

Knox knew a man who would give him money for these milky globules, a small fortune of money—and ask no questions. He had worked side by side with one of the man's henchmen in the factory of the prison.

The jailbird looked at the coil of gems, fascinated in spite of his mental and physical suffering. Evil good-luck had played into his hand—had given the rope of gems into his possession just when he needed big money most. There was no one to care what became of him, no sweetheart, no wife, no mother. He was alone, terribly alone. It was his hand played against the hand of all society. Why be maudlin? Clara Hope Benedict might not think of her pearls for hours. By nine o'clock he could have the trick turned and be aboard one of those fruit-steamers for South America. The way was open. Nothing hindered.

True, he could never return to America, to New York. But why should he ever want to return to New York? What had New York ever done for him except ask for references he couldn't give, reward incentive and honesty and resolute purpose with a wink and a sneer and a thrashing.

Some one finally came down the outer corridor.

Knox pocketed the pearls with a sweep, leaped for hat and coat, slipped temporarily through a side door into an adjacent storeroom.

THE soft pummeling of a limousine engine sounded below, outside. Voices—the soft slam of a door. Knox looked out a narrow slit behind some scenery piled against the window. Miss Benedict was quitting the place for the day.

Other people of the organization left the building while Knox hid there, his right hand gripping the globules of wealth in his pocket. The boss carpenter came into the room adjoining, discussing Knox, the accident, the exposure, with a joke and a regret.

"It does beat hell how a guy can put one over," he heard the carpenter declare above the swash of a faucet. "He was the last gink on earth you'd take for a jailbird, now, wasn't he!"

The hiding man's face burned. For the first time in weeks he ground his teeth in impotent rage at the injustice with which they accepted Von Oppen's estimate of him. It was as much the comment of the

carpenters as it had been Von Oppen's arraignment, which crystallized Knox's determination to throw maudlin scruple overboard, to look out for himself and his future while the devil gave him his chance. The carpenters got into their coats, picked up pails in which empty dishes tinkled, went out.

After a time, when he assumed the way was clear, Knox slipped from his hiding-place.

A drop-light was burning down the empty corridor. He paced swiftly for the door at the end, on the balls of his feet. He was about to open it, slip out, cut across the south lot, board a car over on a back-street that would carry him to the Forty-second Street ferry, when—his heart somersaulted. In the shadows beside the door he saw a girl was standing.

Knox did not know the girl; yet he realized New York was filled with types like her—little, thin, painted faces, shabby-genteel apparel that was sleazy to the point of pathos, red wrists, holes in the heels of their artificial silk stockings. Where they came from, how they lived, why there were so many, what became of them, God alone knew.

The jailbird halted abruptly. Conscience admitted he was a felon already. He hesitated. He might not have recognized the girl, but she recognized him. There came an awkward pause. The girl surveyed him, spoke first—impulsively:

"Oh, you're the feller that big brute pushed into the light. Somebody said you got burned. You oughta have him arrested."

There was something about her of back alleys and lean living, of life that was hard and experience caustic. There was something about her also of that indomitable tenacity of those who live—somehow—on life's outskirts, and retain always a desperate resentment against those in power who use that power to hurt the ill-favored—who admit there is justice to be had if one would only fight back with enough spirit. But more than these, there was something about her, too; perhaps the lilt of her voice, the challenge of her words, that expressed just feminine sympathy. And in that instant young Archie needed it sorely.

"A fat chance I'd have to get him arrested!" And Knox laughed. It was not a pretty laugh. It was bitter. There was something diabolical about it.

"Why not? He beat you up, didn't he?"

And he kicked you while you was down."

"But he was right about me being a jailbird. I haven't got a chance."

"What if you was? You can be proud of that, can't you—'stead of bein' ashamed and lettin' a big stiff like him boot and knock you all over the place?"

"Proud of it? Yeah! Oh, sure, I'm proud of it. I'm so proud of it I could climb on top of the studio right this minute and shout it all over the State."

"But you served your time, didn't you? You didn't break jail or nothin'?"

"No. I didn't break jail. I even got paroled for good behavior."

"Then what the hell! It's somethin' to be proud of, aint it? I heard an old Salvation Army gink say so to a bum one night. 'If you done wrong and was sent up,' says he, 'but served your time like a man, you're square with the world and have paid your bill,' he says. 'The ones to be ashamed is them that is still uncaught—who know they've did wrong and wont pay up—honestly. A spell up the river is always set as long as the wrong you done was worth. And when it's over, you're square.' When a gink looks at you and says: 'You're a dam' jailbird,' hold up your head real Ritzy and say back: 'Yeah! I paid my debt like Honest John. Have you paid yours?' I've always remembered that. I got a couple o' gentleman friends up the river right now, squaring themselves."

Squaring themselves!

Knox dropped his eyes. His emotions were chaotic. He had never thought of it so before. Always he had felt that instead of squaring himself with society by suffering his incarceration, he had been the hapless victim of society's retribution.

The girl must have understood the abrupt conflict that was boiling in his heart. She put out a hand and laid it on his arm. Ethics were swept by the board as she said simply:

"Don't let it get yer goat, kiddo. I know it's a raw deal, but don't let it get yer goat. I feel sorry for you. Honest, I do. I know it don't mean much whether I'm sorry or not. But I seen him baste you and I'm sorry, because you was down. But play the game, kiddo. You're square with the world now, if you done your time. Stay square. And don't let the big stiff get away with it."

It was all that she could express. She was no hand at making soft speeches. She

lived her life in the raw—cheaply. She simply spoke what she felt, and her sincerity rang in her voice. Knox felt her skinny little fingers press his arm. Then she left him, went out into the cold of the night.

He never set eyes on her again.

KNOX backed against the corridor wall. Unconsciously from his pocket he pulled Miss Benedict's pearls. He held up the string, coiled it down slowly in his palm. But his eyes did not see it wholly. He was looking instead through a great rent in the Veil of Life, seeing things suddenly at a terrific reevaluation.

There is such a ragged moment in the life of every man when he may go up or go down—it is for him to choose. Those who choose to go up, may see before them steepes and thunder-heads, tortuous windings, jagged ledges, clawing brambles, dizzy precipices. But on the heights the road smooths out, and a glorious light shines everywhere.

But for those who choose to go down—below is only a morass of abandon, lost self-respect, mental and moral chaos.

Knox groaned in that moment of Gethsemane while he debated.

There was still ample time to get out with the pearls, to realize a small fortune on them, to be aboard a South American steamer before midnight. But the moment he passed this studio door and emerged with them in his possession, he had deliberately elected to give up the fight, to surrender, to turn his steps downward to blackness. He had elected to renig on old Colonel Douglas, who had trusted him and found him a job; on Warden Bates, who had been responsible for his parole; on every person in the studio who had treated him decently, taken him at his face value, believed in him. To turn up missing with the morning was fulfillment that he was all Von Oppen had expected of him and charged him with being. He was the jailbird indeed, running true to type.

Knox suddenly ran his fingers up across his forehead into his hair, displacing his cap. It was as though he swept something away from his eyes. The next instant everything came clear. He whirled and strode back down the studio.

HE strode back down the studio, taking off his overcoat as he went. He passed through the entire length of the corridor,

out into the big atelier again, where Von Oppen was angrily superintending the location of new lights against the fresh screen the carpenters had erected. Knox walked up to him.

"I've got some business to settle with you, you big stiff!" he announced.

Von Oppen's face paled, but only for an instant. A leer marked his beefy features.

"I told you to get out," he snarled. "I'm done with you."

"But I'm not done with *you!* Take off your coat."

"Take off my coat! What the—"

"Take off your coat. I'm giving you a better chance than you gave me. You kicked *me* while I was down."

"I'll take off nothing."

"All right. I warned you. Have it as you please. I'm here to give you the beating up of your life, before I quit. You've had it coming for a long time."

"You beat *me* up? You go to—"

He didn't finish. Knox crouched and whipped a blow squarely into the center of Von Oppen's hate-flushed face. The man spun around and grabbed a studio girder. He shook himself to get his reeling senses, spitting out a tooth. With a roar of rage he rushed upon Knox then—and the jailbird settled grimly to the business of giving Von Oppen the most terrific whipping that had ever taken place on the property of Cameo Pictures, before the camera or otherwise.

Workmen who had remained, and extras, came running back into the atelier. Electricians appeared over the tops of sets; wood-turners came running from the lathe-room; scene-painters dropped overcoats and empty dinner-pails; actors ran half-clad from the dressing-rooms. From vantage-points of safety they watched that struggle—a shouting, hooting, whistling, applauding audience. And not one of them attempted to interfere.

Knox drove the larger man back into a bank of Cooper-Hewitts, and the glass of the tubes slashed his scalp. Then he knocked him against a great wall of compo that went down in a shower of débris and dust. Von Oppen fought free, grasped and hurled a property statuette. It would have brained the lad, but he dodged cleverly. The deadly thing shot through the window of a Fifth Avenue drawing-room into an East Indian rajah's palace, bringing up finally on the floor of a small-town grocery store next door to a London opium-joint.

Kleig-lights went over. Furniture flattened. A second mist-screen was ripped to rags. Von Oppen caromed through it twice.

There is something eminently fine and fair about an American crowd. They like to see the under dog get the best of it. And the measure with which this crowd coached on the bantam was the measure of their hatred for Von Oppen as well. He was getting the thrashing all of them would have liked to administer, had they dared.

Roaring like a bull, again and again the director charged. He had his prestige to maintain, his pride to uphold. Likewise he had his big soft body to keep from the hospital. He saw red a dozen times. His eyes were awash with it. But he could not get the wiry young man to stay in one place and receive his punishment.

All over the lighted portion of the studio the younger man drove him, Knox's elbows close to his body, torso bending only at the hips, head back, legs firmly planted. With short, quick, powerful jabs, with hooks and uppercuts, he hammered his opponent. Von Oppen shouted to his employees for assistance, but the only thing that responded was a final right hook to the chin. It assisted Von Oppen all the way down to the floor. He stayed there, quivered a moment, then rolled over on his face.

PANDEMONIUM broke. The spectators hooted, whistled, stamped on the floor. But Knox turned away, not showing that he heard. He ran his fingers through his rumpled hair, picked up his cap, hooked together his right shirt-sleeve where the stud had become unfastened, swung into his overcoat.

He never glanced at the battered figure on the floor. He buttoned his coat and walked from the studio. The pearls were still in his left pocket.

He went out into the alley and down to the corner of the street. Twenty minutes later he was crossing the North River on the ferry for New York.

But instead of heading for lower Manhattan, he headed for Morningside. He alighted from a bus before a palatial apartment near Grant's Tomb. Miss Benedict's maid admitted him when he rang the bell on the fifth floor.

The actress had barely finished dressing for dinner when Archie Knox was shown into a reception room. She entered with puzzled frown.

"I came to return your pearls, Miss Benedict," he apologized. "You remember you gave them to me tonight just before I stepped through the mist screen. You left the studio before I could deliver them to your maid in your dressing-room."

HE produced the beautiful string of gems that glowed resplendent in the shaded lighting. The woman's face cleared. In a voice a bit relieved she declared:

"You needn't have brought them up here tonight. It would have been all right to have given them back at the studio in the morning."

"But I'm not going back to the studio in the morning. Neither will Von Oppen. I pounded the stuffings out of him half an hour ago for calling me a jailbird."

Clara Hope Benedict raised her million-dollar eyebrows.

"Are you a jailbird, or are you not?"

"I have been a jailbird. But I've come to feel that I've paid in full for what I've done—that I'm not a jailbird now."

"You've been a thief and a convict, and yet you brought back my necklace without attempting to dispose of it! Why?"

"Because I consider I've squared myself with society by serving the sentence that was handed me—and I wouldn't let a fellow like Von Oppen whip me into believing I hadn't."

"What's that got to do with returning my necklace?"

"If I've squared my debt, I'm as good as any other man. I wouldn't steal your pearls any more than anybody else. I brought them up here so that if anything happened to me before morning, I couldn't be accused of doing something I hadn't the least intention of doing."

"Thank you, Knox. If you beat up Von Oppen, I consider you were justified. But that means you've lost your job. Now what will you do?"

"I'm going to South America on a fruit steamer before twelve o'clock."

He said it so positively that Clara Hope Benedict was startled. Then she eyed him narrowly. A moment later she spoke:

"You're not going to do anything of the sort. You're going back to the Cameo as assistant under a new director. Mr. Moriss, the president, knows everything. He's in the next room; I'm going to dinner with him in a few minutes. Von Oppen gets his year's salary and his contract torn up in the morning. I choose to work with gentlemen, Mr. Knox. Never mind what you've done mistakenly in the past; I consider that you're one of the best now."

THERE are people who from time to time have said harsh things about Cameo's leading woman. They have called her mercenary, hard-boiled, calloused, blasé, inflated in her own conceit, a typical moving-picture actress from the crown of her henna coiffure to the tips of her satin pumps. I have often wondered if they, like lots of us in similiar cases, have not missed the real Clara Hope Benedict.

Archibald J. Knox got out of her apartment somehow, down the five floors to the street, out upon Riverside Drive. There were tears upon his scarred face and a lump in his throat that he could not down. But in his heart was singing—an anthem!

To my humble way of thinking, however, the finest part of the episode remains to be told:

Not to this day has she ever let her high-salaried assistant director know that if he had elected to cut and run with her pearls that night, he would have sold his soul and his future and the faith that others had in him for a mess of rubbish. She never risked her twenty-five-thousand-dollar string to the perils of studio work. The necklace Knox returned so faithfully was a synthetic replica, worth about \$15.75.

"The Riddle of the Rangeland"

FORBES PARKHILL, who wrote "The Ken-Caryl Case" and many other specially attractive stories, will contribute a fine novelette of Western adventure, "The Riddle of the Rangeland," to our forthcoming February issue. You will find it very well worth reading.

By
BEATRICE
GRIMSHAW



THE SANDS

(What Has Already Happened:)

PAPUA is still a sinister wilderness, informed with the spirit of evil. And pretty Stacy Rowan, newcome on the *Morinda*, sensed this clearly; as many a bride has asked before, she asked herself with dismay: "How ever am I to live here?"

The answer proved even more difficult than she imagined. Because she was getting on,—she was twenty-six,—and the right man had not appeared, and because she had met Charley Holliday at a time and place when he showed to best advantage, she had agreed to marry him. And next day she carried out the bargain, and went with him to live on the lonely island of Siai, where he was stationed. But Stacy soon realized that she had made a mistake. And soon all the island world knew it, for Holliday was discharged from his post for smuggling poached bird-of-paradise plumes; and there had been an affair with a native woman.

One Rainsforth was sent to take Holliday's place; and traveling with him came Mark Plummer, a lean and competent sailor of fortune in the South Seas, who felt perhaps more than pity for Stacy Holliday, and whom she trusted instinctively. And presently it came about that the Hollidays gladly accepted Plummer's offer to

join an expedition to the island of Oro, to which he had acquired title and on which a quantity of poached pearl-shell was believed to be cached.

There were five white people in the party that landed on this island: Plummer, who owned it; the Hollidays, who furnished the food-stores they had had at Siai; Tom Blazes (or Tombazis), a swash-buckling Irish-Greek shipmaster, who provided the schooner; and Nydia Leven, an Australian girl-friend of Stacy's, who had contributed needed moneys.

The first night on the supposed uninhabited island an unknown prowler cut through the wall of Stacy's hut—touched her hand. Next night Plummer shifted the men's quarters with the women's; and a stealthy attempt of raiding Malays to carry off the women was defeated. They left one dead man behind them—and Holliday suffering from a serious kriss-stab. When next day a British cruiser passed, they signaled her with a rocket and a surgeon was landed. The physician ordered Holliday taken aboard the ship, for an operation was necessary; and as the vessel could not delay, it steamed away with Holliday in the sick-bay, and those remaining on the island uncertain whether he would live or die.

Troubles never come singly. Captain Tombazis had fallen in love with Nydia



Climax follows climax in swift and enthralling succession in the concluding chapters of this already widely discussed novel of adventure in the remote South Seas. The author's long residence in New Guinea makes her an authority on the region; and her proven skill as a fiction-writer gives the story special charm.

O F O R O

Leven and was absurdly jealous of Plummer's misinterpreted attention to her. It had been decided that Blazes was to return to Thursday Island for a diving-suit and other needed supplies. And under a pretext he decoyed Nydia aboard the schooner and sailed off with her, determined to force her to marry him. Mark Plummer and Holliday's wife were left alone on the island of Oro. (*The story continues in detail:*)

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Tombazis and Nydia arrived at Thursday Island, there was no news at all for them.

They sighted the bright red roofs and bright green hills of "T. I." early in the forenoon of the third day. Tombazis took the *Kikenni* boldly in through the reefs that have picked the bones of so many brave ships in their time, and brought up in the anchorage, waiting for pratique. He had to wait some while; Thursday is, above all others, the island of "no hurry," and it does not, in any case, think very much of the needs and wishes of little auxiliary schooners. Great Japanese and Chinese liners with crazy names, big Dutch boats that are the last word in luxury and comfort, Australian steamers, manned by

mutinous crews, Borneo boats, Singapore boats, Philippine boats, and more, run through "T. I." as through a Clapham Junction of the seas. Squatted on the tip of Australia, Thursday Island—which once was, and now is not, a little queen of the seas—peers out through bleary aging eyes at the proud steamers as they trample by, chews over and over the cud of long past glories. Drink- and opium-sodden, strangely perfumed with the hot reek of sandalwood, she sits there soaking in the torrid suns, her hideous iron houses hideously ruined, her grassy streets given over to the true inhabitants and rulers of the island—goats. Nothing is active in Thursday but the goats; no one is civilized but the savage blacks. The steamers call in, drop and take up pilots, drink a little water, and hurry on again. Thursday is, they seem to think, an excellent place to go away from.

Nydia, during the last two days of her forced trip, had had time to make up her mind, and lay her plan of campaign, and when the *Kikenni* cast anchor in quarantine, and began to blow trumpet-shells for a doctor, she knew just what she was, and was not, going to do. There was no use making a fuss about the fact that she was an unwilling passenger to "T. I." The less said about that, the better—with a view to the preservation of the highest possible

market value of her spotless "character." After all, in the island world, plenty of women—even young lovely women like herself—had to make passages alone in ships captained by queer characters. If she held her tongue, nobody would see anything astonishing about the trip. She could trust Tombazis to hold his.

BY and by the doctor's launch came out, and the doctor of the year—a fat, elderly person with an ingrained hatred of ships—reluctantly permitted them to come alongside the wharf. Nydia had made the best of herself, by dint of starch and irons commandeered aboard, and a gay green sash of Tombazis', eagerly presented her by that infatuated sailor. Thursday Island, she knew, was inhabited by something very like white savages, but she meant to look her best before them. Nydia would have wanted to look her best if one had been leading her out to instant execution, or drowning her with her heels and thumbs tied, like a witch of old. . . .

Blazes, once alongside, lost a little of his conquering demeanor, but nevertheless he was determined to make the best of the situation, even as Nydia, from her point of view, was determined.

"Well, my lovely lady," he accosted her as the *Kikenni* sidled nearer and nearer in to the wharf, "how soon can you be ready to come up to the parson's with me?"

Nydia smiled her sweetest smile. She had no intention of making any such visit, but she thought it was safest—on this tiny island—to temporize with the impulsive Blazes until such time as she should be able to find out the fate of Charley Holliday. She did not disguise from herself that his death, if unhappily it had occurred, would make a difference. And if events ever drove her to think of marrying Blazes, why, two shares in the treasure of Oro Island, if it existed,—and shrewd Nydia thought it did,—would certainly be better than one, in return for her precious hundred pounds. Perhaps if she played her hand skillfully, she might get Tombazis' share out of him without the necessity of marrying him in return. "He'd do anything for me," she thought complacently. "And after all, I'm not in his power now."

In which, as she was to find later, she had reckoned without her Tombazis.

"I don't know about parsons," was her answer to his question. "I'll have to think a little about that. And anyhow, I must get some clothes. Do you realize, you

dreadful man, that I haven't a rag to wear?"

"There's some quite decent shops here, if you can wake them up enough to attend to you," answered Blazes. "Never been here before, have you?"

He cocked an eye at her, as if the answer were of some importance.

"No, never," she answered carelessly. "And by the look of it, I don't much care if I never see it again."

"Come on, and we'll put the dredge through their dear, delightful shops," offered Blazes amiably. "Name anything in the town, and it's yours. My treat!"

"I can go to the bank, thanks," replied Nydia proudly.

TOMBAZIS threw her a queer look, and then glanced slyly at one of his crew, a cunning Hanuabada boy, who was trotting down the length of the wharf, apparently bent on some kind of business. Nydia, occupied with the awkward, tilted gangway, did not notice.

Once landed on the wharf, among the Thursday Island crowd of idlers,—Japs, Chinese, Malays, black Queensland aborigines, Europeans with queer pole-jawed faces and skins of fish-belly white,—she drew herself up, patted her hair and set off along the tramline, between squared piles of deliciously smelling sandalwood, to the town. Blazes, without by-your-leave or with-your-leave, accompanied her.

"You know," said Nydia coldly, pausing to look up at his lumbering height, from underneath her parasol, "that I've only to appeal to the Resident or the police, to be free of you at once."

"Yes, darling lady, but I know you wont," replied the big man calmly. "Because they would tell tales all over Thursday Island—and that means all over the coast of Australia—about the lovely young woman who was run away with by that villain Tombazis. And I haven't quite the best character in the islands, dear lady—though they aren't particular in the islands. No, I don't think you'll tell."

Nydia was furious with him for having so correctly read her thoughts.

"Well, I can tell you," she snapped, "that, Resident or none, I mean to take the first boat that goes south to Sydney from here."

"Yes?" said Blazes, smiling a little, and busying himself with the lighting up of one of his big cigars. "Come in and buy some pretties first."

They entered a gloomy, unpromising looking den, guarded by a sort of dirty human spider, more or less white, who—reluctantly, it seemed—began, at Tombazis' order, to unpack and unroll wonders in the way of silken and gauze blouses, kimonos, skirt-lengths. Nydia was ravished; this sort of Oriental luxury was exactly what appealed to her. It was always with an unwilling hand that she spent money on the simple tailor-mades and linens that she knew to be good form, in Sydney.

She chose underthings; she chose silks, satins, gauzes, and gave orders to have the bundle sent to the ship.

"They'll be paid for on delivery," she said. "Or perhaps, you might send them to the hotel. I shall be going ashore."

Tombazis, who had been waiting, with an odd gleam of amusement in his eyes, remarked: "You'd like to take your room, perhaps?"

"Yes, I should," answered Nydia promptly. She left Tombazis, and made her way to a gorgeous, gingerbread building, nearly all artificial front, where a supercilious, tired woman in a silk dress, patent-leather shoes with holes in them, and bare legs, received her with a silent stare.

"I want a room for the night," began Nydia.

"Gentleman too?"

"No. I'm by myself."

"Where's your luggage?"

"Unfortunately, it was left behind," allowed Nydia, growing uncomfortable beneath the stare of the gorgeous slattern.

"Pay in advance, then."

"Of course," said Nydia, putting on her duchess air, which called forth an unashamed giggle from the barelegged lady. "I'm just going down to the bank." She walked out of the hotel, scarlet with annoyance. There was a branch of the New Victorian Banking Company in Thursday Island—her bankers. They would attend to her.

TEN minutes later she was leaving the bank building, amazement and terror in her heart. The bank did not know her, and refused to cash checks for an unknown young woman.

"You can radio to Sydney," Nydia said loftily.

"I can't identify you by radio, madam," replied the clerk. "Did you come in by the schooner this morning? Captain Tombazis' boat? Yes? Well, we would take

his identification; no doubt he will give it."

"No doubt," replied Nydia, with the overdone certainty that, in banks, does not carry conviction. She went down the steps, raging. She now saw what the wily Greek-Irishman had seen long ago—that a strange young woman in a strange town must usually depend upon her friends for money. And where were her friends?

She did not know that the clerk might have bestirred himself a little more in her interest—might even have wired to Sydney, where his firm had many dealings with the Leven family and their relatives, if he had not, an hour earlier, received a brief line from Tombazis reading:

Lady passenger on my boat from Port Moresby claims to be Miss Nydia Leven of Sydney. Cannot identify.

"Another of 'em," was his brief comment, as he dropped off again into the long daydream that envelops Thursday Island and its strangely unoccupied inhabitants. There had not been a caller at the Bank of New Victoria, for three days, previous to Nydia's visit. The last caller had been a remittance-man with red eyes, who wanted to cash a check torn from some one else's book, for a sum that neither he nor the possessor of the check-book had ever owned in their respective lives.

Up the endless, tumbledown street, full of grass and goats, Nydia Leven walked quickly, her hands tight-gripped on her parasol. What to do next? She could have telegraphed, asking for an immediate remittance by wire, to her bankers in Sydney, or to the married sister with whom she lived when at home, had she had the necessary shillings. It would take four or five, she calculated; at "T. I." one has to use the radio to get the mainland and then send on by land line. It might as well have been four or five pounds—or four or five hundred. When one has no money, one has neither pounds nor shillings. Nydia had never struck her head against this elementary fact before; she found it bruising.

Pawnshops? She had a ring or two, a bracelet. There was no sign of any such place. One might ask. . . . She turned into a shop; a strange mixed sort of place displaying odd sets of china, of the patterns that no one buys; ironmongery; dirty tables where, it was conceivable, tea might, disgustingly, be served. There was no one in the place. She stamped and

knocked. A small, malevolent eye surveyed her through a hole in a door curtain—and went away again. Nydia waited, absolutely without result.

“WHAT a damned place!” she said to herself, and went out to the goats and the grass and the sun again. A Chinaman, loafing along in blue torn jeans and straw slippers, paused at her imperious: “Here!

“Is there a—a shop where they buy things here?” she asked him, finding the words come hard. The Chinaman looked at her with glittering black-glass eyes; she was certain, somehow, that he understood her, but he replied in an unknown tongue, hunched his shoulders, and went on. Nydia said “Damn,” to herself again.

“I wish I knew some worse words,” she said to herself. “Now I know why men swear; it would do one good, if one knew how. Damn! Blast!”

A dried-up, leather-colored white woman, dressed in the fashions of 1898, emerged from an alleyway, looked at her hard, and scuttled away, glancing back over her lean shoulder.

“This isn’t real; it’s a bad dream,” said Nydia to herself, slapping her parasol at a tall black goat with devil’s eyes, that stood in the middle of the sidewalk, and declined to move. She had to walk round him.

The goat, or the 1898 woman, she did not know which, drove her to desperation. She stopped the next person she met, a slack, half-asleep-looking, blue-aproned butcher with a leg of mutton trailing from one hand, and a piece of steak hugged under his arm. He seemed, in some mysterious way, to have lost his shop.

“Where’s there a pawnbroker’s?” she plumped out. “I want to sell something.”

“Nowhere,” said the butcher, staring fishily. Nydia knew he was lying. She was certain, by this time, that everybody in “T. I.” lied, by habit and preference.

“What do you want to sell?” he asked her cunningly. (“No one” thought Nydia madly, “should be a butcher, who looks so much like a fish.”)

“A bracelet,” she answered.

“What about a kiss?” said the fish-faced butcher.

“Oh, God!” said Nydia, and turned down an alleyway, at the end of which, to put the cap on the climax, she ran unexpectedly into Tombazis. The Captain, very big, very white-and-gold, was lounging on a broken little bridge that led to

nowhere; his demeanor was so carefully absent-minded that Nydia felt sure he had been following her the whole morning.

“My lady,” said Blazes, sweeping off his cap, “this is a pleasure I didn’t expect. Come with me, and I’ll show you a Chinese place where there is tea that is—ah!” he sighed. “And cakes. You never dreamed.”

Of course he knew that the eleven o’clock tea of the island world was due, and that Nydia wanted hers. She gave in, tired out, and followed Blazes.

THEY came to a queer, sandalwood-smelling little place behind a collection of laundries and cake-shops, hideously intermixed. It was cool, after the furious sun of the street; the Chinaman was swift and polite; the food carried out Tombazis’ promises. Nydia’s greediness was one of her weak spots; in this, as in other small vices, she and Tombazis were one. Stacy would not have made friends with a man who had violently abducted her, for the sake of a dainty meal—nor for the sake of a crust to keep her from starvation. Mark Plummer, who contentedly fed on “tin and biscuit” for months, when nothing else was to be had, would have liked Nydia even less than he did, if he could have seen her in the Chinaman’s green-shaded shop, daintily, quickly nibbling into cake after cake, crunching one new, delicious sweet-meat after another, an expression of perfect happiness gradually overspreading her face—for indeed, Ah Sing was a master of his craft. But Tombazis understood.

“You will be fat, begosh you will, my lady, after forty,” he thought, handing her another dish of cream-cakes. “But I like them fat.”

Unthinkingly, he said the last words aloud.

“What do you like fat?” asked Nydia.

“Cream-cakes,” answered Tombazis with a languishing look that carried his meaning home. Nydia was not, in these lazy days, growing slimmer.

She bethought her, bursting a cake skillfully, that Blazes was a very comfortable companion. If there had been no Mark Plummer in the world—

Over the shoulder of Tombazis, above his thick, red features, rose like a mirage the lean, bronze-pale, Crusader-face of Mark, and Nydia’s heart leaped within her, so that she let loose the short, sharp sighing breath all lovers know. Her love for Mark Plummer was the strongest, the

least selfish thing in her weak and selfish nature. It was to her credit that she saw his fineness of soul, as well as the clean, strong beauty of feature that had first attracted her. There was no particular fineness in Tombazis' soul; between her and him, the attraction was surely that of like to like. For all her superficial advantages of birth and education, Tombazis was on her level, and Mark was above it. If she did not actually know these things, she felt them. The months she had passed in Papua—that strange land where, class for class, "the best is like the worst," had taught her something.

If they had all met together in Sydney, she would instinctively, have set down the weak and vicious Holliday as unquestionably superior to all; Stacy next—because Stacy too came of "good people;" herself, of course, not below Stacy—she couldn't quite have said why; then Mark, who certainly had manners, but didn't display them in the only proper place, society; last Tombazis, because he was a small merchant captain, and so far as one knew, not rich.

As it was, things—to her view—had got hopelessly and absurdly mixed. But she wasn't going to marry Tombazis. Certainly not—if ever—while Holliday's fate remained doubtful. For if he were dead, would not Stacy marry Mark Plummer just as quickly as she could catch him?

SO Nydia to herself; and Tombazis, who followed her thoughts pretty accurately, watched her, pulled his huge mustache, and told himself that events were going quite as well as he could expect.

He had had a brief word aside with the Chinaman, as he entered. Ah Sing had shaken his head and bowed, hands extended. He was thinking of this, when he suggested to Nydia, by and by, that she should ring up the hospital and find out if Holliday was there. It sounded magnanimous, and cost him nothing.

"Of course I will," said Nydia, rising, and shaking out her silks and laces. "I'm sure we'll hear he was put in there all right. Where's the number?"

But the hospital had never heard of Holliday, had not had any such accident case brought in.

The Resident, furthermore, when rung up, assured her that the *Aulis* had not called at Thursday Island—was not, so far as the official knew, even in that part of the world.

Nydia turned a little pale. She had been relying, more than she knew, on meeting with Holliday. She could have borrowed money from him, got him to help her somehow. For she was beginning to realize that she needed help. She imagined—and correctly—that it was not the first time Blazes had run off with a girl, though she was reasonably sure that no girl, previously, had been treated with so much consideration as she had, by that under-study of Bully Hayes.

But now—

No money, no friends, no way of getting out of Blazes' reach, except by creating a scandal about herself, from which she still shrank. How could any girl expect to make a good match—even a love-match, which wasn't generally a good one—if she "posted herself" all over the Pacific as the girl that Blazes had abducted in his boat?

Of course, if she absolutely had to, she would throw herself on the mercy of some respectable resident; no doubt there were such to be found if one looked long enough and hard enough. She would not in any case go back with Blazes. But things were black enough, as it was, any way one looked at it.

Her face was clouded, as she drew on her gloves, and walked out, leaving Tombazis to pay. With her native shrewdness about money matters, she realized, now, that he had concealed the truth, when he represented himself to Plummer as penniless, and obtained a share in the expedition for the use of his boat. She guessed that he had resources of his own, somewhere or other. It made her think more of him, but also fear him more.

Tombazis let her get ahead, and then followed at some distance. She knew he was there, and it irked her. She could not think what to do next, and she knew he knew it. Every time she stopped to look into a shop window—there was nothing in any of the windows to look at, but pearl-shells and inferior groceries—she saw him, about the same distance behind, a dazzle of white and gold under the green of the trees that shaded the footpath—strolling, smoking, completely at his ease, silently, amusedly watching her.

NYDIA at last began to lose a little of her nerve. She felt she had underestimated Tombazis. What on earth was one to do? She found herself at the commencement of the jetty again. A boy from

the silk-shop was walking back to the town.

"Have you been down to the *Kikenni*?" asked Nydia.

The boy, a yellow-brown mixed-breed creature with stupid eyes, nodded.

"Did you bring my things?"

He looked over his shoulder, shouted "Yes!" and ran away.

Nydia cast a quick glance behind. Tombazis was nowhere to be seen.

In a moment she had made her plans. She must secure her "things"—the thought of deserting that bundle of splendors was unendurable. But she would not stop a moment longer on the ship than was necessary. She would bundle up the goods, carry them away herself—what did it matter, here where no one knew who she was?—and find some one on the island to take her in. If there was going to be a scandal, well, then there was going to be. Something had to be done; she was getting frightened. She hoped Blazes wouldn't meet her, but if he did, he could not stop her in public. And for the moment, he was certainly not to be seen.

She scurried down the wharf, looking right and left. Nothing, but the blue flame of the water, the white flame of the sky, the little pearling-luggers, with thin penciled masts, riding at anchor, a boat or two drifting lazily seaward. She was safe enough. A little laugh bubbled up to her lips at the thought of that bundle of Oriental splendors for which Tombazis must undoubtedly have paid, or they would not have been delivered. It was a good joke against him. Well, serve him right; it was only one small item of repayment in the long account he owed her.

The *Kikenni* lay against the wharf, white-decked, green-painted, neat and clean. Blazes was a good sailor; his ship never went short of anything necessary to her looks.

"Missus, you wantem something?" asked a tallish, trousered Kiwai, whom she recognized as the uncivil engineer.

"One boy he bring parcel belong me?" asked Nydia, looking about her. It was quiet and peaceful on the *Kikenni*; a boy or two lay sleeping upon the hatch; the shadows of the naked, varnished masts swung lazily back and forth across the deck, marking its sanded white with blue. Out in the anchorage, the pearling-luggers, colored jade and ivory, rolled to the powerful Thursday Island tides; they seemed deserted, unpeopled. The red-roofed, ruin-

ous town dozed at the end of the long jetty, beneath a white hot sun. There was a persistent scent of sandalwood, sun-warmed and very sweet; underneath, as it were, flowed another and less pleasant odor, that of rotting shell.

"You look very pretty," said Nydia to the town, "but I don't think I'm going to enjoy myself very much staying here." Wherein, as people sometimes do, she spoke truths as yet unknown to her.

The Kiwai, who had been staring at her rather unpleasantly, said something quick in native to another Papuan.

"Oibe," (it is so) answered the other.

"Altogether somethings belong you," said the engineer to Nydia. "Stop along you cabin."

"Bring them up," ordered Nydia.

"You go get 'em," was the Kiwai's insolent answer. He turned swaggeringly away, and spat a quid of betel-nut, blood-red, into the green of the sea.

"By-an'-by," promised Nydia sharply, "I tellem you boss altogether knockem off head belong you, my boy."

"All right," said the Kiwai, watching her out of the tail of his savage eye. He also watched the sea. Something he saw there caused him to speak again to the other Papuan. The two stood waiting, Nydia supposed, for her to go down and get her things.

SHE swallowed her anger, knowing, as she did, that the Western Papuan is always inclined to be insolent to women, and resentful of taking orders from them, when no white man is about. Anyhow, she had no time to waste. It was just luck that Tombazis had not followed her to the jetty. She could not help wondering a little, but her own eyes informed her that no such tall, stout figure as the Captain's was visible anywhere along the whole quarter-mile of wharfing. Even if he were hidden among some of the piles of sandalwood at the far end,—a thing not very likely,—still, she would have ample time to go down into the cabin, get her finery and reach the wharf again, long before Tombazis could cover half the distance.

There was not a sound as she went down the companion, but the regular, sharp slap of the incoming tide against the *Kikenni*'s counter, and the dull snoring of the boy asleep on the main hatch. The confined smell of paint and carpeting, kerosene and stored apples, struck her with a suggestion

of discomfort, almost fear. It made her feel shut up. But there was no possibility of that, again.

Here were the silks, a large and heavy bundle, put away on one of the lockers. She did not mind carrying it, at least as far as the wharf. One could probably find an aboriginal, to help one with it up town—whither? Well, that had still to be found out. But one thing was certain; she wasn't going back, or anywhere, in the *Kikenni*.

Musing thus, she twisted the string tightly round the big parcel, with the view of compressing it as much as possible, tried its weight, and tucked it under her arm. She was standing with her back to the hatchway, through which most of the light in the little cabin fell. She had not taken more than a minute over the parcel; there was no sound behind her; but—suddenly, the light in the cabin lessened. Nydia dropped the parcel, and flung round. Quick as she was, she was too late. Some one had come up, without sound, and slid the doors shut.

An unexplained instinct made her glance sharply up at the coop-shaped skylight. One leaf was open. Through it there looked a wide red face, decorated with a cigar and a grin.

"You ought," said the owner of the face, "to have come down alongside the wharf with me, in the boat. It was much cooler, my lady."

"Let me out," said Nydia, breathing sharply.

"Why, darling?" asked Tombazis, as if he really wanted to know. He took the cigar out of his mouth for a moment, and beamed down at her with a Father-Christmas sort of expression.

"Because, if you don't," said Nydia succinctly, "I'll scream the place down."

"No, dear lady, don't," answered Blazes. "You'd give me the trouble of coming down and stopping you, and I don't want to do that, because I've done most of my business,—got the diving-gear and a bit more stores,—and I want to take her out with the tide in our favor. Don't interrupt me, please, my beautiful lady."

"I'm not coming back with you!"

"Why?"

"I'm not. Open that door at once." Nydia was in a fury; her face was geranium-colored; her hands quivered with an evident desire to claw some one. To be trapped like this—again! It was unbearable.

"Now just tell me why," persisted Tombazis. "I've a reason for asking."

"Because I won't travel alone with you—you're nothing better than a pirate."

"I thought it was something of that kind," declared Blazes, with an expression of innocent surprise. "Wait till you've seen the other passenger. He isn't the sort who would travel with pirates."

"He? What do you mean?"

The boys were getting up sail; the Kiwai had gone down to the engine-room; vague clankings were heard. It was the flight from Oro over again. Nydia became nearly frantic. Was she destined, forever, to lead this nightmare, Flying-Dutchman sort of existence, scouring the seas in company with Tombazis?

"You wouldn't come with me this morning when I wanted you to go to church—naughty!" declared Tombazis indulgently, with fat uplifted forefinger. "So I had to bring the church to you."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Hemingways," said Tombazis, "would you mind just coming here and looking down the skylight?"

The scanty light in the cabin was diminished somewhat further, and the space beside Tombazis filled up by another head. Nydia stared at it, amazed. It was the head of an elderly, skinny man, with a loose mouth and reddish eyes. The man was, vaguely, refined-looking, and at the same time vaguely repulsive. He wore a worn black coat, with a clerical collar.

UNDERSTANDING came to Nydia. She saw that Blazes had indeed got the best of her. He had bought—for money, or for drink—one of the derelict parsons that may be found here and there along Australia's northern coasts, as it were, in the waste-bins of the continent—and had brought him along for the voyage.

She saw the whole plan. Tombazis was at the end of his patience. That humorous, amiable manner of his, if she knew men, was not more than skin deep, and it was about worn through. He meant to deal fairly with her, according to his lights, but he did not mean to let her go. During the voyage, she would be persuaded, teased, frightened—who knew what?—into marrying Tombazis.

And Holliday was dead—she was certain of it. And Stacy would be free to marry Mark Plummer, Mark, with the clear Crusader-face, and the noble manner;

Mark, who could find gold-fields, but couldn't keep them; who ought to have had a wife like her, to manage him and make him rich! Oh, it was unbearable; the world was falling to pieces.

She must scream—she would scream, even if Tombazis came down next minute and "stopped her" as he had, amiably, threatened to do. He couldn't kill her, anyhow. Now!

Nydia was something of a singer; she knew how to place her voice. The shout she uttered went through the skylight like a rocket, and resounded clearly down the wharf. It happened to be dinner-time now; there was scarcely a human being left about the jetty end. One man, a white man carrying a suitcase, and seeming to be in a hurry, heard the cry, and paused, with a puzzled expression on his face. Then he swung his suitcase up on his shoulder, and walked a little faster.

Tombazis, looking down through the skylight, shook his finger again at Nydia, and said to her amiably: "Don't, dear lady; I assure you you've no cause to worry. Tell her she hasn't, Hemingways."

The red-eyed parson looked over his shoulder, and repeated, obediently: "You haven't any cause to worry." Then he added, on his own account: "I am a fully ordained clergyman of the Anglican Church, only temporarily—temporarily—out of a parish. Captain Tombazis, who is a very worthy man, has kindly offered to give me this interesting voyage. I suffer from weak health. It will be a blessing to me."

"Yes, but what about me?" asked Nydia loudly and rudely.

"You—" began the clergyman out of a parish; but he was cut short in whatever he might have been going to say. The skylight darkened still further. A man shoved himself alongside of Hemingways—a third man, who took no notice of him at all, but stared down into the cabin and called out amazedly: "Hallo, Miss Leven, what on earth brings you here?"

"Mr. Holliday!" cried Nydia.

CHAPTER XV

NYDIA LEVEN, if not specially gifted, or highly educated, in general, was clever—brilliant, even—on one point. Any circumstance, or chain of circumstances, affecting herself, she could sum up with

amazing quickness. She saw, in the moment following Holliday's exclamation, what her game was, and played it, without hesitation.

"Why, Mr. Holliday, I am delighted to see you!" she said, casting a fascinating glance up at the skylight. It was true; she was extremely glad, for more reasons than one. "Those stupid boys," she went on, "have shut me in, and Captain Tombazis was just coming down to let me out; I suppose you heard me call to him."

"I did; you squealed like a good one," was Holliday's reply, which, for some occult reason, he appeared to think witty; at all events, he laughed. His high-nosed, staring-eyed face looked grinningly down the skylight. Nydia's apparent plight amused him. It had clearly not occurred to him that there was anything behind appearances.

Nydia felt her heart lift with relief. She had argued, in the one swift moment given her for thought, that Holliday was plainly coming back with them, that it would be all right, with him on board, that no one, therefore, need know anything if she didn't tell. She noted that the derelict parson had already slipped away to his cabin. "He went yap," she thought gladly, using a phrase of Mark Plummer's for sheer delight in thinking or talking like him. Was he not a hundred times nearer to her now, with Holliday recovered, and going back to Stacy, on board?

"Marry Tombazis!" thought Nydia scornfully. "Not likely—now."

Whatever Tombazis felt or thought, no one could say, at this juncture, that he did not behave like a good loser. Quick as Nydia herself, he saw that for the moment the game was up. With a courtly bow he stepped to the companion hatch, unbarred it and handed Nydia out, remarking gravely that the boys got more and more careless every day, and that what they wanted, one and all, was a good hammering with the tail of a stingaree.

Nydia, still clutching her precious bundle, emerged and made for the cabin she had quitted only a few hours before.

Holliday was engaging the Captain in close talk, and did not take any particular notice of her. She put down her treasures in the berth, and set to smooth her splendid hair, to wash the red dust of Thursday Island from her face and hands, and by and by, to select a delightful negligee of gold-colored silk, embroidered in sea-blue, and

tie and twist herself into it. "One must look one's best," she said. Mark Plummer was hundreds of long sea-miles away—but after all, three men were three men.

OUTSIDE, as the *Kikenni* edged away from her moorings, and began to breast the seas, Holliday was relating to the Captain, at great length, his many adventures on board the *Aulis* and afterward. It did not appear that anything of special note had happened to him. The doctor had decided against operating; Holliday had recovered under careful treatment, very quickly; he had been put ashore at Darwin, spent a couple of weeks in hospital there, and gone down to Thursday Island, by the *Tai-Yuen*, which had arrived, and left, only the day before.

"All the same, mind you," he was saying when Nydia came out again, "it was touch and go with me. Touch and go. If the *Aulis* hadn't come along, I should have snuffed out. Like a candle—whoof! That's what the doctor said. He said to me, 'Holliday,' said he, 'but for your marvelous constitution, you'd be lying at the bottom of the Arafura Sea.' And he said that never in all his professional practice had he met with such wonderfully healing flesh. I've got very healing flesh, always had, like a little child!" He opened his eyes wide, and stared solemnly at Tombazis, who was jumping to get away to the helm.

"Wonderful!" agreed Blazes, hanging on one foot.

"And the officers—I never met such a chatty pleasant lot; they recognized me at once for one of themselves—they said—Good Lord, who's that?"

"Reverend Mr. Hemingways," barked Tombazis. "See you again; wonder you aren't dead." He looked, with his mustache drawn up over an ugly grin, as though some regret were added to the wonder.

The jaws of the islands were opening out. Tombazis, first and last a sailor, when on his ship, left, without any ceremony, his passengers to amuse themselves, and took the wheel from the hands of the impassive Yassi-Yassi boy who was holding it.

They pay pilots high, about Thursday Island, for knowledge of the reefs, than which there are no crueller, no more treacherous, in the Seven Seas of the world. It was Tombazis' boast that no pilot had ever set foot upon the planking of the *Kikenni*. "Or ever will," he would add,

"as long as Davy Jones' locker and I are strangers."

It was nearly an hour before he thought fit to give over the wheel to a colored quartermaster, and see about his dinner. Nydia, tired out, and piqued at the small amount of notice shown to herself and her finery, had retreated to her cabin for the two-to-four sleep customary among passengers at sea. Holliday, who had shown something like dismay at first sight of the derelict parson, seemed to have thought better of it, and was "yarning" with him, up in the eyes of the ship—quietest place, as Blazes did not fail to remember, for a private talk. He wondered what they could be so busy over, up there. That dam'fool Holliday (why in heaven's name hadn't he died, when everyone wanted him to?) hadn't moved since they cleared the harbor; he must have taken a mighty fancy to the parson—or maybe they were old friends.

It was nothing more than curiosity—of which he had his full share—that moved Tombazis, while the boy was laying his dinner, to stroll carelessly toward the bows of the *Kikenni* and lean over her side, as if estimating the depth of water underneath her shearing keel. He knew what the downrush of wind, from the bows could do sometimes, in the way of carrying talk.

HOLLIDAY did not know—which was why he did not lower his voice more than a trifle. One had to speak clearly, to be heard above the noises of the ship. The *Kikenni*, well out at sea now, was "carrying a bone in her teeth" and growling over it. The engine had been shut off as soon as they were out of the Straits; above their heads, the great foresail and mainsail sang in the tearing breeze; the booms creaked, as the schooner lay ever more and more to leeward. It was a glorious afternoon, a true sailor's day.

Something in the day, the wind, the pace of the little ship, may have pleased Tombazis. He came aft again, head thrown back, hands swinging, lips humming gayly, as he went down to dinner:

Soon beyond yon harbor bar,
Shall my bark be sailing far,
O'er the world I wander lone,
Sweet Belle Mahone!

O'er thy grave I weep good-by,
Hear, oh, hear my bitter cry,
Oh without thee, what am I,
Sweet Belle Mahone!

He paused beside the shut door of Nydia's cabin, to repeat the last two lines, with expression. There was no movement inside. Tombazis grinned, very cheerfully, considering the graveyard tone of his song, and went down the companion, expressing in music his desire that Belle, *videlicet* Nydia, should "wait for him at heaven's gate."

Nydia, who was beginning to know her Tombazis by now, sat up in the berth listening. Her face took on a certain uneasiness. Blazes was altogether too cheerful, it seemed to her, for a defeated suitor.

"I wish I was well out of this," was her conclusion. She made up her mind that she would seek Holliday's company as much as possible, during the trip to Oro. She judged, by the run of the wind, that it would take them a good four days. Tombazis wouldn't hurry.

BUT Tombazis did. The little engine, commonly kept for emergencies, was put into commission almost directly after leaving Thursday Island, and at an appalling cost of gasoline, beat out its steady six knots an hour against a wind that was, if not a foul one, certainly not fair. With the engine, and a favoring slant now and then, they made way rapidly. On the second day out it became plain that the next evening would see them back at Oro. Whatever his reason, Blazes was in a hurry.

Nydia found that he troubled her surprisingly little. He was busy with the running of the ship, having no white officers, and seemed to spend most of his time at the wheel. Now and again, when he stepped off the wheel-grating to let a native take his place, he would pause beside her deck-chair and stand smiling down at her. But he never had anything in particular to say. He seemed reserving something. Nydia wondered.

"I don't care, I *don't*," she thought. "Holliday's alive, and he can't change that!"

As they ran over seas of dark gentian laced with foam, by islands and islands, exceeding fair, exceeding lonely, where the trade-wind-beaten sands were marked by the thin feet of gulls and bo'sun birds, the trailing flippers of the turtle, the shaky, winding tracks of hermit crabs, and by these alone—Nydia watched, with astonishment, strange things taking place on the ship. Holliday, whom she had marked down as her especial cavalier for the voy-

age, appeared to prefer the company of the derelict Hemingways, to any other; and Blazes, still more oddly, seemed fond of his society too. But neither of them wanted the other about, when talking with the parson. Holliday would lure him away into his old place in the bows of the ship, and there converse quickly, eagerly, while Hemingways sat on an upended meat-case, and stared at him with inexpressive eyes. It seemed at times as if the one were trying to persuade the other, and failing.

Blazes, on the other hand, made himself agreeable to the parson in a general, open way, but Nydia noticed that he only did so when Holliday happened to be out of hearing. He seemed to wish, on the whole, that she should see how friendly he was with Hemingways. He used to bring him along to her, and sit on the hatch beside the two, drawing them into mutual conversation.

"You know he isn't a bad chap," he explained to Nydia, privately. "Only the one thing keeps him from being just like anyone else."

"As if that wasn't enough!" said Nydia contemptuously.

"You're never very sorry for the underdog, are you, my beautiful lady?" asked Tombazis, twisting his big cigar into one corner of his mouth, and looking at her with staring pug-eyes.

"When people get down so low, it's their own fault," was Nydia's verdict.

"Nothing's ever anyone's own fault altogether, dear lady," commented Blazes.

"What awful nonsense!"

"Not quite," maintained the fat man, calmly smoking. "Ever look at Hemingways' complexion?"

"Why should I?"

"Do look at it, next time you talk. And look at his hands. Hemingways has been dying, in nasty ways, for nine years."

"What!"

"True, Sinabada. That's what made him take to drink, and lost him his parish in England. It's all facts that he tells you—all about the parsonage with the ivy and the roses, and the pony-carriage, and the dear countess up at the castle asking him to dinner. Something got him, and it had claws, and he had to try and forget the claws, and he tried a bit too hard. So he had to come out to this beautiful country, where none of his delightful friends were. And he went down, and he's going downer. Has a bit of a remittance—not

much—and works it out marrying people. When he marries us—”

“He never will!” bit Nydia.

“When he marries us, beautiful lady with the golden hair, it’ll be as legal as if the Archbishop of Canterbury did it. Hemingways has just got that one bit of beautiful pride left in his delightful soul. His marriages hold tight. He’s properly licensed, and never marries in any diocese where it doesn’t carry.”

THE *Kikenni*, running under sail this afternoon, leaned hard to the stress of the singing wind. Along her keel the waters of the lonely, reef-pricked Coral Sea, hated by shipmasters, fled in furrows of snow. Nydia, wearied a little by the sight of the empty, streaming seas, tired out with Tombazis’ long pursuit, found herself wondering, uncomfortably, why he told her all this. Surely he could not think she was worrying about the legality of a marriage that she had again and again declared should not take place! She looked vindictively at him, as he walked away with the curious theatrical swagger that seemed to be part of himself. Blazes always piled up that swagger a little higher than usual when he was feeling good. What had he to feel good about, now?

Lying back in her deck-chair, she tried to find, again, her mood of happy musing. But Tombazis had effectively broken up the dream. She wished the voyage was over. She wished she had never come to Oro, never come to New Guinea. The schooner rolled abominably; the wind was sickly warm. What a country! What a fool she was!

Up in the bows, Holliday and the derelict parson sat perched together, dark against the thin blue tropic sky. They were talking again.

CHAPTER XVI

NOT on the evening of the third day, after all, did Tombazis sight the island. An engine breakdown, followed by contrary winds, kept him back, so that it was the morning of the fourth day out, just after sunrise, that saw the *Kikenni* at last beating up to Oro.

On this there followed the longest day of Stacy Holliday’s life—a day that she will not forget, till that day when all things are forgotten.

The schooner could not make the island.

Island dwellers know these days; to some lives they have added years. The sailing-ship, white in the offing, big with her freight of news long waited for, hopes long deferred, the cruel wind, that beats her back and back, so that she seems to flutter, wildly, in the same place, like a bird trapped on a windowpane—the anxious hearts in the iron-roofed beach houses, weary to see her, hour by hour, tack uselessly, again and again! There is but one day that is a worse day for Island folk, and that is the day on which birds gather, crying strangely, underneath the trees, and leaves blow upward and turn white, and there comes a shield of livid brass upon the face of the sky, and men say, looking white-faced into the falling weatherglass, that the hurricane is near.

Stacy had gone into her house and dressed, had ordered breakfast, waited, vainly, and taken her meal alone with Mark; had seen the sun climb up the sky, and start on the homeward slope; had prepared and left untouched another meal; had gone, fifty times, down to the beach to look and see if the boat were coming nearer. And still the *Kikenni* hovered, as if bewitched by some cruel enchantment, just outside the reefs; still the steady, unfriendly wind blew up, and the blue was ridged with foam-white horses, away out at sea, galloping and galloping, always away from Oro.

And she did not know her fate.

As that endless day went on, it seemed to her as if her heart were being torn out by the roots. Today must settle all—whether she was to be free, and to marry the man she loved, or whether life, to the very end, would mean a stumbling on a stony road, a chain. Stacy was normal; if most women were not, marriage, as an institution, would fall. She, like the average decent woman, knew only one way out, and that was the way that had opened when the Malay had crept to Holliday’s bed and thrust the knife into his side. She was past pretending; the fierce trial of this waiting day had burned away pretense. She knew that she wanted Holliday to die.

Mark, the man of iron, showed no feeling outwardly, whatever may have been taking place beneath his stoic calm. He busied himself all morning finishing off the outside supper-table that he and Stacy had begun some days before. They had found it pleasant, to take the last meal under

the casuarina trees near the beach, with stars beginning to silver the dusky blue, and the wind humming sweetly, mournfully, as it hums in the casuarina and the casuarina only, over their heads.

The table was made of split black palm; it was a good piece of work, and wanted only a last touch or two to be complete. With hammer, saw and plane, Mark kept at work, looked seldom at the beating, wearied sail, and spoke scarce at all.

Yet all the time, all the day, he was watching the woman he loved, and there was light of hope in his eyes.

SO sweet she looked, so fine! *Fine* was the word that came instinctively to one's mind, seeing Stacy. There seemed to be some necessary link between the swiftness of her mind, the bright courage of her character, and the clear drawing of ankle and of wrist, the spring of figure, the upward tilt of beautifully cut lips. One felt that just so must finest silky hair, indefinitely waving, part softly above the forehead of a woman who was true as well as fair; in just that manner must her hands be shaped, her head set, proudly, on a little neck. Stacy's looks were Stacy. She was a prize. And she might be his—now.

The face of the pioneer told no tales. But nevertheless, beneath its mask, the soul of the man was full of joy. Mark trusted his luck.

Stacy did not trust hers—perhaps because she felt to blame in counting on a fellow-creature's death, perhaps because she (like you, and like myself), tried to cheat the Dark Gods by feebly pretending that she did not really want what she did want. In any case, fear, as that heart-wringing day went on, took closer hold of her. She could not, at the last, have told if she were glad or sorry when Mark, raising himself erect and sheltering his eyes with his hand from the glare of the lagoon, called out to her:

"Look—I think he's got the engine going at last."

"So he has!" called Stacy in reply. She ran for the glass, and turned it on the visibly nearing ship. . . . Pins, white pins walking on the tiny deck—black pins; those were natives. How many white pins were there? A thick one—that was Nydia. A big one—that was Tombazis. Who else, O Gods of luck and fate! Who else?

The glass jumped, the ring of blue sky and white-decked ship within it, jumped

and reeled, with her reeling heart. . . . Her heart slowed down—down. She sucked at her suddenly dried lips. . . . There were two more white pins.

"Give me the glass a minute," said Mark's voice, with the deep, masculine burr in it that she knew and liked.

"There are four," she heard her own voice saying quite calmly. Mark looked through the glass. It did not shake, as he focused it and held it on the ship.

In a minute he handed it back to her. She saw that his face seemed, suddenly, to cry out its age: "Forty years—forty years!" But there was actually a smile on it, placed there heaven knew how, when he looked at her as he gave her back the glass.

"So it's the long trail," he said.

It was almost too much for Stacy. They had been used to pass away some of the evenings singing, under the hurricane lamp, outside the palm-leaf house. Neither had much voice, but they had taken pleasure, now and then, in joining, Mark's rather toneless bass, and Stacy's patchy mezzo, in various popular songs, such as go well in outdoor life, when folk are of simple tastes, and easily pleased. "The Long, Long Trail" was one.

There's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams. . . .
There's a long, long night of waiting,
Until my dreams all come true.

It was the long, long trail, indeed!

NEITHER of the two doubted for a moment that one of the white figures, now growing clearer in the low afternoon sun, as the schooner came straight ahead, was that of Holliday. Who the other might be, they knew not, nor cared. It was enough that the dead had arisen, that the man who should have been in his grave was out of it. Stacy was not free.

Yet if anything could have made Mark like her better than he did, it would have been her hurried exclamation, as the boat left the schooner's side, and began to glide across the lagoon, Holliday visibly in the stern with the rest:

"Oh, don't let's grudge him life! It's so good to be alive, no matter what happens. Poor Charley, I hope I never really *wanted* him to die!"

"Maybe you didn't," answered Mark, a trifle more gruffly than usual. "But I did."

There was no time for more.

Out of the boat, as she ran her nose up

the shingly beach, sprang, like a jumping-jack, Tombazis first of all.

"Well, and how are all yer beautiful selves?" he asked with the trace of Irish accent that generally came uppermost when he wished to be ingratiating.

"I'm going to have a talk with you pretty dashed soon," was Mark's far from hospitable reply. "You want the thrashing of your life."

"What for?" asked Blazes innocently.

"Yes, what for?" echoed Nydia, leaning on Blazes' outstretched hand as she jumped off the boat. She was not minded to have anyone take up her battles in just that fashion. The trip to Thursday Island was labeled, now, as a pleasure-trip only.

But Mark was not very much concerned about Nydia; nor did he mean to be downed, with Holliday glooming in the background, and looking at Stacy as if he could have struck her.

"For going off and leaving Mrs. Holliday with no lady on the island. It's been horribly dull for her, and she's not too pleased with you," he maintained.

"You can punch my head any time you like, and can," asserted Blazes with the utmost cheerfulness. "But it wont be for any reason that I know of. Can't Miss Nydia go down to 'T. I.' to buy a few pretties, without asking your leave or Mrs. Holliday's?"

"Of course I can," declared Nydia. "Stacy didn't mind—did you, Anastasia, de-ear?" She knew that Stacy hated nothing more than the full sound of her absurdly formal name.

Stacy glanced hurriedly at her husband—the look of the slave, as Mark, bitterly, thought.

"Oh, no. I—that is, it would have been more—less lonely, if you'd been here," she said, somewhat lamely. She wondered why Charley had not yet spoken. He was climbing out of the boat, taking considerable care of a pair of new white shoes, and after that first unpleasant glance, he had scarcely looked at her.

The other man came next, and was introduced by Tombazis, with the Irish accent turned full on, as "Me friend the Reverend Mr. Hemingways, come with me for his health."

"I'd like to know," demanded Mark, who seemed in no lamblike mood, "what business you have to bring anyone on a trip of this kind, without my permission? Does the place belong to you or to me?"

The Reverend Mr. Hemingways, standing, an odd black figure, on the sun-whitened beach, seemed not at all annoyed by this uncivil address. He looked hard at Mark, as if he were summing him up, and found the count not unpleasing.

"I don't think you'll find me in the way," he offered in a low, refined voice, somewhat thickened by habitual drinking. "There was, unless I mistake, a question of a wedding—"

"You do mistake," came from Nydia determinedly.

"Perhaps, perhaps," he said, without looking at her. He seemed to abstract himself, and fall away into a kind of dream. Stacy wondered what Charley was going to say to her, and when he would begin. She knew him too well to suppose for an instant that he would take calmly the idea of her staying alone with any man, under any circumstances whatever. Charley was no cultivator of the "charity that thinketh no evil."

There was a moment's silence among the reunited party. Above their heads, the palm trees rattled like a thousand silken dresses, shaken in the wind. The westering sun, behind the hills of Oro, peered at them red-eyed. "So you've come back; we didn't want you, and we wish you'd go away," the spirits of the island seemed, almost audibly, to say.

IT was Holliday who broke the silence. Looking sidewise at the parson, he took a step toward Stacy. The parson, from the midst of his dream, seemed to keep watch, to note what Holliday was doing, what he might say.

"Well!" was Holliday's weak remark. "Well!"

"Well, Charley!" was all that Stacy found to say. She would not voice the obvious, "I'm glad you're better." She knew she was not glad.

Holliday looked at her in a cross-eyed sort of way, with his hands in his pockets. She wondered why he did not kiss her. She had made up her mind to that. Expecting it, she half shut her eyes.

There was a movement, a sudden quiet. Stacy opened her eyes full stare. Charley had gone.

It was incredible, but he had. He was walking toward the house with his hands still in his pockets, and his shoulders hunched up in the way that always told of sulkiness. Yet, through some curious

intuition, Stacy understood that his sulks had not to do with her. Something—it must be a big thing indeed—was occupying his mind almost to the exclusion of herself and Plummer. If that was so, there was a chance of justice. Only when Holliday lost his head in one of his silly, quick rages, was he really unreasonable.

She felt her heart lighten, without much reason—did not the “long, long trail” even yet, stretch before her and Mark—the trail that was as long as life itself? Still she began to take an interest in what was happening among the other people.

“Don’t be a nasty crab, Plummer,” Tombazis was saying, while the rusty-black-clad parson sat on a palm log, and looked at them all with incurious eyes. “Mr. Hemingways wont get in the way of anybody’s delightful business. He’s sick, and he’ll be all the better for a stay in a nice healthy island like yours, if you choose to let him.”

But Plummer’s hard obstinacy was awake.

“This isn’t a hospital,” he declared with narrowing eyes. “You can take your patient elsewhere.”

“Where, my darling fellow?” demanded Tombazis, curving his hands, and bending down to shelter the cigar he was lighting. It was certainly a windy evening; the sun was going down fast, and the breeze getting stiffer, as day declined.

“Thursday Island,” stated Mark, is three days away. Daru is—”

“Oh!” exclaimed Stacy. The Reverend Mr. Hemingways had punctuated the discussion by falling back from his log on the ground, displaying the soles of two worn boots, and a pair of thin bare ankles, above wrinkled socks.

MARK laughed shortly. “Dashed appropriate!” he said.

Stacy turned on him like a little tigress. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” she said. “He’s really sick.” She was down on her knees in an instant, lifting Hemingways’ head, and placing his thin legs on the grass, so that he lay easily. Mark, more concerned about her than about the parson, bent down to help.

“The fellow is sick,” he allowed. Hemingways’ face had turned an ugly greenish yellow; his eyes were rolled upward. He seemed trying to say something, one hand feebly pointed to his pocket.

Stacy felt in the pocket, and pulled out

a hypodermic syringe, ready filled. Hemingways tried to nod his head.

“Do you understand it?” asked Mark. Seeing by her face that she did not, he took the instrument, twisted back shirt and coat sleeves from Hemingways’ arm, and slipped the syringe underneath the skin, driving the piston neatly home. Stacy watched with dilated eyes.

Almost immediately the greenish hue left the man’s face; his eyes became normal, and he attempted to sit up.

“Wait a bit,” temporized Stacy.

The sun was nearly down now; it was beginning to grow dusk. Tombazis, smoking, regarded the whole scene with a sort of kindly toleration. Nydia looked frankly disgusted. “I hate sickness, I am so sensitive,” she volunteered.

“Hush!” warned Stacy. “He’ll hear.” She was sitting on the grass, with the head of the semi-unconscious man pillowed in her lap, one arm, as she leaned sideways, supporting his shoulder. There was something strangely motherly in her look, as she half nursed the derelict creature. Plummer looking at her, felt his heart grow warm. He remembered, with fierce exultation, that there was no child of hers and Holliday’s.

“There’ll be others—some day,” he said to himself. In that moment his belief in his luck came back.

The man was reviving now. He looked up, and through the growing dusk caught a glimpse of a head bent over him, felt a soft arm about him, holding, protecting.

Nydia, aloof, her sparkling face expressive of cold disgust, stood looking on, and waiting till the unpleasant incident should end.

With sudden completeness, Hemingways found himself. He sat up.

“You’re a good girl—a kind girl, my dear,” he said, blinking at Stacy with his drink-reddened eyes. “I had a girl once—ah!”

He rose, unsteadily, to his feet.

“Gimme your arm, my dear, to help me to that house,” he said. There was an odd tone of authority about him. “Thank you—thank you. I’m d— No, I’m not—mustn’t forget the cloth; but I’m blessed, as Tombazis says, if anyone shall do you any harm.”

“I certainly hope no one will,” was Mark’s quiet comment. He looked at the melancholy wreck of a man, as though he were minded to ask questions. But Stacy would not have it.

"Don't bother the poor thing," she said. "Let's get him away to bed."

Mark walked with her, holding up Hemingways on the other side. As they went through the casuarinas toward the house, they met with Holliday. He eyed them evilly, in the falling gloom.

"Good night," said Hemingways, suddenly and very loudly. Holliday looked at him, as if he would have liked to wish him something much less pleasant. But he answered after some hesitation, "Good night," and went off in the direction of the men's house.

Alone there, sulking, apparently, he ate his supper. Alone he stayed the night. Mark's new house was occupied by the other men. Stacy and Nydia, in the women's house, exchanged such confidences as each saw fit to give. They turned to sleep, not without some lingering distrust, one of another. As each of them said, silently, to herself: "Who knew?"

In the morning, it seemed settled that Hemingways should stay.

WITH the next day, business began.

The tale of the giant octopus had been told on the first evening, drawing screams of horror from Nydia, looks of concern and of jealous anger mingled, from Holliday; and from Tombazis a few sea oaths, less gentle than his usual bowdlerizations. It was agreed on all hands that the octopus must die. A charge of gelignite was one of the requisites that the *Kikenni* had brought back from Thursday Island.

The diving dress, too, was brought to the long beach, and the pump belonging to the outfit. Hemingways stayed in camp; the rest of the party joined forces and went off looking like a picnic. Nydia had, as usual, "made a toilet." Stacy looked bright in her long smock of workmanlike blue linen; Tombazis was resplendent in new socks and tie. There was talking, and laughing. A stranger, joining the party for the first time, would have thought it the most light-hearted band of holiday-makers he had met in a year.

Yet underneath the talk, the brightness, flowed fierce currents. Holliday had scarce spoken to his wife since he landed. Stacy was growing momentarily more and more uneasy as to what he could possibly mean by this determined silence, so unlike his usual character. Mark Plummer was sick at heart with jealous rage. Nydia was angry because Plummer did not notice her

much; Tombazis was chafing because he noticed her at all. They trod the coral sands of Oro; they passed beside the fair, blue-crystal bays; and under the low hills, green as parrots' feathers, they went from end to end of the little land that was free of all sorrow, all bitter care and cruel rivalry; and everywhere they went, they sowed these things, thick as invisible weed-seeds, in the spiritual atmosphere that had until their coming, remained pure. . . .

Will those who sail to Oro in future years, feel as these men and women felt on landing, the wonder of an unflawed, crystal peace? One cannot tell; one thinks it may not be so.

THEY had reached the reef; the tide was low today, but not an octopus showed anywhere about the runnels and pools. It appeared that Tombazis and Holliday had both "gone down" in diver's dress before, but that Mark Plummer had not. Tombazis, nowadays could get into no ordinary sized dress. The honor, therefore, of making the first descent, devolved on Holliday, or would as soon as the octopus was settled.

Charley, at this, began to boast.

"I like going down," he said. "Done it four times before. Did it at Broome, years ago, and once in 'T. I.' and once at Samarai. I've got what you call a natural talent for it. Never bothered me from the first. They put me down—whoof!—and I knew the whole thing. Managed my air like an old hand, didn't tumble on my head. And I never was afraid. Lots of people are. They're very brave while you're getting them into the dress and putting on the helmet, but when you tell them to get over the side of the ship, and they see the water coming up their legs, why, most of the beggars chuck it, and beg to be taken back. Fact! I've seen it. But not I! I showed them from the first."

"That was very nice of you," commented Tombazis, so gently that Nydia felt sure there was mischief coming. "You're a wonderful man; now, I remember you were never sick on board the *Kikenni*. Were you sick anywhere else?"

"Never," lied Holliday cheerfully. "Don't know what it is."

"You do all your throwing off on land, don't you, my darling chap?" asked Tombazis. Stacy, who knew the Australianism, and understood what a crass insult was conveyed by the accusation of "throwing

off,"—namely, bragging,—felt uneasy for a moment. But Blazes had judged his man better. Holliday missed the implication, and went on telling of his wonderful deeds. Plummer, who had avoided speaking to Holliday, now began to look at him in a way that made Stacy uneasy.

"Oh, aren't we going to get at the octopus?" she asked, hurriedly. The Papuan diving-boys, who had been brought with the party, were standing about in the coral pools, staring at nothing; the sun was getting high. Outside the reef, where the giant octopus had its lair, there was not a sign to show that only two nights before those terrible steel arms had been cast far and wide into the harbor of the lagoon. It might not be the safest place in the world for hanging about in, but nobody remembered that, or would have troubled about it, if anyone had remembered.

PLUMMER let no man do the handling of the gelignite but himself.

"Too many one-armed men in Papua already," he explained briefly. Stacy, who knew his utter recklessness where only he was concerned, smiled a little as she saw him trimming his fuse with meticulous care,—neither too long nor too short,—cutting it in halves, and lighting the spare half to test its burning, before he put the first into the package of gelignite. It was like Mark to consider others. . . . Charley would have cut the fuse to a couple of inches, and used it untested, just to show his pluck.

"All of you get out of the way," ordered Mark, taking his stand on the edge of the reef. "No, farther than that. . . . That'll do. Keep there." He lit a match.

Stacy had a bad moment, when she realized just why Mark had planted the rest of the party so well out of the way. She, of all people alive, had reason to know how long the terrible steel arms were; how far into the lagoon they might reach. Mark had put everyone well out of danger—except himself.

There was a tense moment of expectancy. No one moved. The sound of the tide, licking slowly out among the reef pools, was like the last breaths of a dying man.

The package flashed up and fell. There was a huge, thumping explosion. Almost in the same moment Mark stepped actively off the reef edge, and half walked, half ran, back through the lagoon toward the rest of the party.

A shriek from Nydia followed the explosion. Something long—very long, dark, and whiplike—had flung itself out of the water, within a yard of Mark, and swept past him, like a cable-end sweeping the wharf when it breaks on the bollard, and scatters death around. The thing shone wetly in the sun; it had white spots—one could not tell where. It began to whip about, furiously.

"Oh run, run!" said Stacy's lips, silently. It was almost a prayer.

Mark threw a look over his shoulder.

"Don't worry; it's done," he called. In the moment of his speaking, the thing sank down and began to wriggle, like a cut worm, among the coral pools. Then it slid—back, back. Like a snake going home, it slipped across the edge of the reef, yard by yard. Weight only was dragging it back; the life had gone.

"Grappling irons!" ordered Mark, following the coils as they slipped.

"Right!" said Tombazis, who was close on his heels. "Those lovely things, they don't float once they're dead. Give me the grappling iron; I've harpooned whales in my time."

HE stood on the edge, an immense, bulky figure beside the tall leanness of Mark, and cast the grappling-iron with a practiced hand. It was touch and go; the octopus, lead-heavy, was already well under water, and sinking, but the iron caught the flesh of a long tentacle, and held. Drooping downward, awash in the tide, the horror of the seas swung helpless, dead.

Mark, leaning over, stared at it, fascinated. Not often, he knew, did man have a chance to see such a sight, and live to tell it after. The dead thing had been badly shattered by the gelignite, which had at the same time blown a great lump out of the reef. Its body, big as one of the giant buoys that roll in harbor tides, was a mere mass of gray tatters; two or three arms were severed. The saucer-like sucker-plates showed as the feelers swayed about. The thing was splashed and spotted with its own ink; an eye, that had escaped, floated loose on the surface of the water, black and white, big as a dinner-plate.

"By gosh," asserted Blazes, "she was a lovely one! You've bust her up, all right. Must have been dead when the feeler came thrashing about."

"Yes—muscular action, like the tail of a lizard when the lizard sheds it, and

leaves it kicking about like a worm. They're hard to kill. But this one is done. Boys, you can have him to eat."

Howls of joy accompanied the securing of the food; the natives, who had been keeping well away, rushed in and hacked the terrible arms to pieces with their knives, loading themselves with lumps of whitish-gray, semitransparent meat.

"Miss Nydia," said Tombazis as the women began, cautiously, to approach, "you shall have something good—you can't think how good!—for supper tonight." He reached down, and hooked a lump of meat.

"Shall I?" said Nydia with interest. "I've heard of it."

"Do you want any?" asked Plummer of Stacy.

She shuddered.

"I can't bear even to look at it," she said. "I feel it all over me again, holding me—dragging—ah!"

"Well, I don't much like eating crawly-bugs of any kind, myself; so here goes!" He drew the iron out. The rest of the huge, shattered mass of body and tentacles sank heavily, waving as it went like coils of giant seaweed. Before it was out of sight, black shark-fins began to show near the reef. In a minute, looking down, the human watchers saw long, yellowish bodies, horribly flexible, darting at the dead monster, and tearing into it as it sank.

"That stops diving for today," was Mark's comment.

"Surely no one means going down in such a place?" demanded Stacy.

"I shouldn't mind a bit," loudly proclaimed her husband. "I'm not afraid of sharks. Once in 'T. I.'—"

"Tomorrow will be reasonably safe," went on Mark, as if he had not spoken. "I'll take the first trip—"

"You? Why, you haven't—"

"No, but everyone has to begin sometime. And I may as well say—since we're all in it—that I've been pretty certain ever since those Malays were done for crossing the reef just here, that the old Jap put his stuff somewhere in the neighborhood. It was a queer, grotesque sort of idea, just what you'd expect from a Jap. You can all have a look at this." He produced the shell, and passed it round.

"Ah, I've seen that!" said Nydia with superiority.

Stacy wanted to add, "So have I," but restrained herself. The men put their heads together, and handled the shell.

"By ginks, but this is interesting," commented Blazes. "What do you suppose this line of dots means? Are they dots, or—" Mark gave him a quick look.

"I think they might be 'or,' myself," he said. "It does seem a big lot of fuss to make over a smallish thing, doesn't it?"

Holliday looked from one to the other.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

"When you go down, my darling man," said Blazes pleasantly, "you're liable to find out."

STACY looked from one to another. She understood, too clearly for her pride, just how they classed the man who was her portion, out of a world of men. Men, among themselves, can be brutally plain.

Charley, of course, did not see. He never did see, when people wanted to snub him. His vanity was armor.

"I shall go down," he said, "the first thing in the morning. I'll—"

Plummer and Tombazis were clearly not listening. The big man, spreading himself about in wide Greek gestures, and talking, excitedly, in an Irish accent, was telling Mark just where he thought search ought to be made.

"Ye see, me dear man," he was declaring, "the beautiful reef, just here, goes in in places, like the fingers of a blessed hand. See that sort of breakwater shticking out? If it hadn't been there, the octopus couldn't have stopped. I know them, the beautiful darlings, and they don't like the open sea hitting them too hard. Well, there it was, the lovely thing, in its hole, hanging on to the reef wall, and sheltered by the bit that was a breakwater, and alongside of it—see!"

The reef, as Blazes said, did, in this place, somewhat resemble a hand, fingers being represented by long tongues of coral, and spaces between by greenish-blue shallows, filled with rocks of silver.

"In there, me darling man—in there, where it's shallowish, and where the big deep's alongside—"

"And where the octopus sat like a guardian devil—I see, I see! A dashed ingenious beggar, that old Jap!" Mark bent over the reef-edge, and stared. To left of him, depths unplumbed, black-blue went starkly down. To right, a little way, ran out the coral fingers, guarding shallower channels that were colored turquoise green.

The sharks, between the green and the blue, went nosing about, tearing the last

of the great octopus' savory flesh. It was blood-chilling to see them so near, not stiff like other fish, but horribly flexible, hideously intelligent, looking up with cold green eyes—to watch them moving at their hateful work, yet hear no sound.

"Well," said Mark, straightening up. "For tomorrow! Boys, bring back the dress to the house, I'll have the first try in the morning."

"Oh, no, you wont," laughed Holliday maliciously.

Mark paid no attention to him at all. He walked on across the shallows, leaving the rest to follow.

"Plummer wont go down tomorrow," maintained Holliday, addressing Tombazis now.

"Why wont he?" asked the latter, shortly.

"Because the dress is too small for anyone but myself."

"The Helen of Troy it is! Who says so? I ordered it full size from Harry Kiriko, and I saw it sent on board just before we cast off!"

"Yes, so did I, and I saw it was small, You were too busy getting up the—"

"Why, you beautiful, blessed—you—why didn't you let me know?"

"Wasn't my business," said Holliday mulishly.

Tombazis looked at him, swelled and gasped once or twice, as if about to blow up from the pressure of violent language contained within, and then, with a frantic gesture of his large hands, strode off behind Mark Plummer. Nydia and Stacy were already well away, but not quite out of earshot.

MARK, fortunately, was not with the women of the party when Tombazis found him, and he had therefore no difficulty in expressing just what he felt when he found out that the only member of the party qualified to use the dress was Holliday.

"I don't trust him as far as I can throw him," he said, at the end of a brief but effective commination service.

"Nor do I," agreed Tombazis. There were no frills on his speech now; alone with men, he was a different Tombazis. "And what's more, I believe he knows something you and I don't."

"How could he?"

"I don't know, but he's as cunning as a basket of weasels. There's something up

between him and the parson that I don't quite get aboard of, though I've guessed quite a lot of it."

"By the way, why did you bring that parson, honestly?"

"Honestly, Mark, old son, I brought him to marry that little et cetera of a Nydia, and me."

"Marry her! Marry a wildcat!"

"Cats have their points," persisted Tombazis. "I like cats. Always have one or two about the *Kikenni*."

"She wont have you," said Mark, twisting his mustache thoughtfully. Though the least vain of men, he was not minded to deny an obvious conquest.

"Make your mind easy," replied Tombazis. "She will."

"Bet you five pounds."

"Done. It'll buy me two new white suits in 'T. I.'"

"You seem jolly certain of winning."

"It's so much a certainty," said Blazes, "that I don't like the idea of taking your money. I'd even venture another bet but—"

"What?"

"You're an impulsive sort of a cow at times; you might knock my head off."

Mark suddenly blushed scarlet.

"I haven't the least idea what you mean," he declared hurriedly. "Don't you think it must be time to turn in?"

THEY were strolling under the casuarina trees, in the cool night wind that drew up from the lagoon. Stars, bright and many, hung among the dark-tressed branches, like little magic fruits of gold. Stars made long pencilings of light in the sea-water. Some way off, the henna glow of the hurricane lamps showed dimly, inside the palm-leaf houses.

Tombazis bent forward, and laughed, soundlessly, till he shook.

"You'd best not do that too often," commented Plummer, disapprovingly. "You might burst."

"I feel like it, but I wont—I wont." He stopped in front of Mark, and slapped him hard on the shoulder. "I want to burst," he said. "I want to blow up. You watch me when I do."

"If you're not quite mad, finish your smoke, and come on in. Don't you ever sleep?" asked Mark. He did not seem particularly curious.

Tombazis turned back toward the houses. As the two men walked together,

they almost ran into a third—Hemingways.

"Good night, Your Reverence," bellowed Tombazis. "Hope you're better."

"Much better, thanks; I think the place agrees with me—as much as any place can," was the derelict's answer. He passed them, and walked on alone.

Mark Plummer, some while after, saw him coming back. He was with Holliday. The two separated just as they reached the square of light cast by the open door of the men's house. It seemed as if they did not want to be seen together.

CHAPTER XVII

"NOW," said Tombazis, "are you ready?"

The *Kikenni's* whaleboat was moored inside one long finger of the reef. The pump was on board; Tombazis had gone over it, tested it and pronounced it fit to be trusted with the life of a man. The air-tube was in order, the valves of the dress working. Tombazis had, with his own hands, screwed tight the nuts that fastened Holliday into his little prison. The lifeline was in place; the weights were on. It still remained to close the opening through which Holliday's arched nose and prominent eyes looked forth, by screwing up the front glass. After that, the man would be, for all practical purposes, deaf and dumb; in another minute, he would die the little death that divers, all day long, are dying; he would be out of sight and hearing, out of reach save through the medium of the lifeline, buried at the bottom of the sea.

"Ready, aye, ready," answered Holliday boastfully. He could not even don a diving dress without showing his essential cheapness of nature; yet he was no coward. It is a mixture more often met with in real life than in fiction, which persists in regarding the boastful man as essentially poor-spirited.

"There's no sharks about," said Tombazis. "It's a beautiful day in every way." He spoke much as if sharks were in the nature of flies or mosquitoes, annoyances that came or went with the weather. "Not a ripple—no ground-swell even. Might have been made for you. Down you go." He screwed in the glass, and flung his own weight on the opposite gunwale, as Holliday crawled over the edge of the whaleboat and down the rope-ladder.

To Stacy, who had never seen a man go down before, the sight was nerve-shaking—it seemed so like deliberate suicide. She could not help admiring her husband, for once; it was certainly a brave thing to do. . . . Sitting in the dinghy, which had been brought out for her and Nydia, she looked fearfully over the side. There he was—there—a dark thing going down and down. . . . He had reached the end of the ladder; now, with a sudden drop and swirl, he disappeared, and there was no more Holliday, only a small stream of bubbles coming swiftly up and bursting in silver on the tourmaline green of the sea.

For quite a while, now, as it seemed to her, they sat in the dinghy waiting—listening to the faint sucking of the water against the deep sea-wall, to the regular sighing of the air-pump, to the *pat-pat-pat* of the tide's soft hands against the keels of whaleboat and dinghy. Stacy looked down at her own hands, and at her arms, in their short sleeves, burned to the color of bark. She looked out across the islets and the reefs, noticing, as she did, how the outdoor life of Oro had lengthened her sight—she could see almost as one does through a telescope. She could hear like a bat or a bird—not a sound among the reef pools or in the air, was missed by her—a faintly splashing fin, a fish-hawk, ever so far up, that called to its unseen mates was loud as something spoken at her elbow. She felt the life of the open air and the sun, warm, powerful, equable, coursing through her veins; she knew, she could not have told how, that she had grown, on this far island, prettier than ever before she had been in her life. She was glad—very glad of that. So ran her thoughts.

And all the time the other half of her mind was down at the bottom of the sea, with Charley, wondering what he was looking for—what he would find. Like everyone else in the party, she had caught the contagion of the idea that there was a mystery about the island, that the original idea of a simple cache of stolen pearl-shell was very far from covering the ground. The mystery seemed close to her now; the shut door stood almost visible before her eyes. . . .

She waited.

NYDIA, as soon as Holliday disappeared, had put him out of her mind. She was much more interested in Mark, who had been staring at her that day—he was

staring at her now, she knew, though he managed to avert his eyes every time she looked up. She thought it seemed hopeful.

If she had known, it was, and it was not. Mark was taking just that interest in her that all men take in a possible bride. He was turning over in his mind Tombazis' words of the night before, and speculating as to what lay behind them. He knew men, and the world of men, well enough to understand that Blazes' bet had been grounded on no empty boast. And yet—

He turned his thoughts to his own affairs. They looked bad. The luck that he had blindly counted on—the gambler's, gold-finder's luck that had never failed him yet—seemed to have taken wings. He saw, in that moment of depression, no possible chance of ever calling Stacy his own.

It was Nydia's moment, had she but known it. There is always the moment when the woman is in earnest. Many a love deserted, many a wife who has had to forgive, knows that—bitterly.

Mark Plummer loved Stacy as he had never even dreamed of loving any woman, in all his wandering career. But he was a man; and Nydia, as the probable captive of Tombazis, became interesting to him. And she loved him. And Stacy was not for him—ever.

More things than one man's life hung at the end of a string, were trembling in the balance, just then.

Nydia, always tuned keenly as a wireless receiver to catch flying thoughts about herself, looked up again. She met Mark's glance, and this time he did not withdraw it.

At the same moment Stacy, leaning over the side of the dinghy in which they all were sitting, cried out:

"He's coming up!"

In an instant every eye was fixed upon the water. A dusky shadow underneath the whaleboat was rising—rising. Tombazis' attendant boy was hauling in, as fast as he could go.

A huge, shiny metal head popped out, looking, with its glaring front and side glasses, like some unbelievable sea-monster coming up to take the air. The boy helped Holliday over the side of the whaleboat. His front glass was unscrewed, and a red, puffing face became partially visible, inside.

"What luck?" demanded Tombazis. Mark did not speak at all. His hatred for Holliday, and distrust of him, had been at boiling point for the last twenty-four

hours; he could not trust himself to ask a question. He was fully assured that the accident of the small-size dress, if it had not been maneuvered altogether by Holliday, had been, at the least, deliberately concealed by him.

"Give one time to breathe," grumbled Holliday. And then, through the window: "There's nothing. You may as well get me out of the dress."

SOMETHING told Stacy—who knew her Charley—that he was not speaking the truth. If he had found nothing, he would have said "Damned dress!" and cursed at Tombazis, while he was being unfastened and unscrewed. He was altogether too amiable, to her mind.

Whatever the others felt, they said little. Mark was utterly silent, but when Stacy stole a glance at him, she saw that his black eyebrows had come down over his eyes like ruled lines, and that his mouth looked angry. Tombazis let out a string of the absurd misfit oaths he affected. Nydia cried, "What a pity!" and then a silence fell upon the party, and the boats rocked idly, with a slapping sound, upon the tourmaline sea.

All for nothing! Was it possible? The long voyage to Oro, the patient hunting through reefs and rocks and sands, the troubles that had arisen, threatening to tangle, in their common threads, the peace and happiness of at least four lives. All for nothing! Not even a pearl-shell!

"Going down again?" asked Tombazis.

"Not I," was Holliday's answer. "Get me out of the thing. What's the use? I walked all over the place—stayed till I was near paralyzed; I'm all out of practice—and there wasn't a thing but coral. And fish. And seaweed. Not a thing."

"Lord, man, you've got to try another beautiful place; we can't give up like that," declared Tombazis.

"You may jolly well try yourself—if you can," replied Holliday. It seemed he knew very well that the whip hand was his. He waited till Tombazis, under protest, and the native, had taken off the dress, and then allowed himself, with the rest of the disappointed party, to be rowed away home.

Stacy, looking at Mark, wondered what would come next. Charley had gone too far. He always did. His gigantic egotism invariably stood in the way of his obtaining a fair view of other men's minds, when

his own interests were in any way involved. He did not realize that he was waking up a dangerous devil in Mark Plummer. Everyone could see that there was something crooked about the affair, that Mark was being cozened somehow. And Mark was not the sort of person to cozen.

What was Charley up to? She could only guess that he had found the shell, maybe more than anyone guessed, and that he meant to keep the secret to himself; returning, no doubt, to Oro Island by and by alone when the patience of the other treasure-seekers should be worn out.

IF she was guessing, other people were busy in the same manner. It was not an hour after their return, when Mark, seeing her seated under the casuarina trees by the shore, came up with what she called his "business face" on, and told her to come down to the anchorage with him. She rather liked his abrupt little ways, when he had some practical matter to deal with. He was always courteous in the things that mattered.

Near the anchorage there were two or three shallow caves—early in the search dismissed as possible hiding-places, and not used as shelters, since they faced away from the southeast trades, and were, consequently, rather warm. They were, however, well suited for a private talk.

In one of the caves, seated on a low rock, she found Tombazis and Nydia, obviously waiting. There was an atmosphere of committee-meeting about the whole party. Nydia, for once, did not seem to be thinking of her appearance, and was not even smoothing or patting her wonderful hair. Tombazis had let his cigar go out, and was sitting with hands on knees, serious-faced. ("He *is* like a pug," thought Stacy.)

Mark found a seat for her, and took one himself.

"We don't want to hurt your feelings," he began, "but we have to tell you we all think your husband is not playing fair."

"I should think not," said Nydia, unable to resist a pinprick directed at the woman who owned a real husband and a real admirer too—worse, owned the admirer she had marked for herself. "We think he is behaving very badly," she went on.

"Don't you think you had better say all that to himself?" was Stacy's answer. The meekest of wives, the least happy, cannot

easily endure to hear her property depreciated in public.

"I'll say it to himself fast enough, by and by," replied Mark, "but for the moment, we have to hold our little council without him. We can't hold it without you, you know." Unconsciously, his voice took on the tone that a man's voice holds, when he speaks of love, and the loved one. Nydia eyed him with green jealousy.

"Where is my husband?" asked Stacy.

Nobody replied for a moment. Then Tombazis, to save the reply he saw rising to Nydia's lips, put in, somewhat hastily:

"He—he's tired, and having a camp in the house. So is the parson."

STACY had seen, half an hour before, a boy carrying up from the schooner to the house a case marked with Holliday's name. She flushed, and then turned pale. "So is the parson—" Everyone seemed to be coupling these two together. Holliday and the parson—both with their feet, now, on the one black road. . . . It wanted only that!

Plummer saw, but saw, also, that there was nothing to be said. This loved woman must bear her own sorrows, he not helping, he who would have—

Hid her needle in his heart
To save her little finger from a scratch
No deeper than the skin.

"What a damned thing life is, anyhow!" he thought to himself. With his lips he said:

"We don't mean to give the matter up. Of course Blazes could go down to 'T. I.' for a diver—if necessary."

Stacy was silent; she felt there was more behind.

"The fact is—" said Mark, and stopped.

"Oh, me beautiful man," cut in Tombazis, "let me say it in my own way. The fact is, Mrs. Holliday, that we're going to knock the lovely head off that beautiful husband of yours, if he doesn't tell what he knows, and so we give you warning."

Stacy opened her mouth, shut it again, opened it. She felt she must look like a frog.

"Charley," she put in weakly, "has learned boxing. He used to win things. He—" She stopped, feeling the situation to be starkly impossible. It must be plain to these people that she was not, as she seemed to be, speaking in her husband's favor. What was she trying to do?

Mark was looking at her, but he had shut off all expression from his eyes; they were like bits of hard, blue-gray glass.

"I'm going to put it to him tomorrow," he said. "Today would hardly be fair play. I'll tell him—"

"You will not, my darling fellow. I will."

"We wont quarrel about it, especially before— Some one will tell him that if he's got hold of any information, he may give it up or fight for it. That seems to me a fair deal, if there can be any sort of fair dealing in such a matter." Mark spoke with his committee manner; you remembered that he was in demand among the men of Papua, wherever clear and accurate presentment of any case was wanted—in planters' and miners' associations, in deputations, meetings. Stacy could almost hear the unspoken, "Have you anything to say?" which, out of courtesy to her, he omitted at the end.

She answered it, unspoken as it was.

"I can only say I'm ashamed of him if it's true, and I'll try my best to get him to give you his confidence."

"That's what we wanted," said Mark. "It's always best to settle things peaceably when you can. Is that all?"

Nydia and Tombazis mutely agreed that it was.

"Then I should think we might be going back to the house."

They found no Holliday there, however, when they arrived. The derelict, Hemingways, who had clearly had as much as he could carry, but who, equally clearly, seemed to carry it well, told them that Holliday was gone out to lie down in the shade somewhere. "I think," said Mr. Hemingways, choosing his words carefully, "that he was somewhat fatigued."

Stacy, scarlet with shame, understood him only too well. She could not stay with the others—Nydia, who would be spitefully sympathetic, Tombazis, who would laugh at it as a good joke, Mark, who would know exactly what she was feeling, and pity her. She left them all sitting about the camp, under a group of windy, wailing casuarinas, and went away by herself, down to the shore again. Mark had the tact not to follow her.

Among the palms that fringed the back of the beach, she walked restlessly, miserably, up and down. Had there not been misfortune enough before, that Charley must take to drink? How was she go-

ing to bear it? How endure his company, when he made up his mind to forgive her that which he knew she had not done, and take her back again?

Misery rose to flood tide. She walked madly up and down, in the westerling sunlight. She did not know how long she had been there; she did not know when she could face the others again. The sun was in her eyes as she turned once again to walk through the seaward grove. It dazzled her so that she did not see, until she was quite close upon it, a dark silhouette advancing toward her—the unmistakable, thin, bent figure of the derelict Hemingways, for whom nobody was sorry.

Stacy herself was not sorry in that moment. She choked back an impatient exclamation, and turned toward the unsheltered sand.

Hemingways stood in her way for a moment as she passed, held out a shaking hand, and said—what did he say? Something silly, drunken, absurd: "Listen—you must listen—in the int'res' of m'rality." What did he mean? She tried to pass him. He kept getting in the way; he was undeniably drunk. "In the int'res' of m-m'rality, Mrs. Holliday. Always been a principle of mine. Marry them, I always say—int'res' of—"

She dodged him, and fled.

THE evening was a positive nightmare. Holliday had turned up again, apparently not a scrap the worse for a whole afternoon spent in drunken stupor; indeed, he seemed the better for it, for he was certainly more amiable. He did not even resent his obvious banishment to Coventry at the hands of Tombazis and Plummer. He spoke to Hemingways now and then, and seemed almost inclined to boast of having been vilely drunk; at all events, he referred to it, with a sort of bravado, more than once. Hemingways, who had been fighting his own particular devil with fire, had nothing at all to say; he gazed dully about him, and sometimes fell asleep.

Mark, on whose tact one might always depend, did his best to loosen the tension by bringing out cards. But Tombazis was not inclined for play, and Nydia's offer could not be refused, and when they were established, at the black palm table, Blazes became jealous and talked to Nydia loudly and determinedly, spoiling the game. Stacy, wearying of the wretched scene of disagreement and distrust, left the party,

and lamp in hand, went down to the kitchen to attend to her usual duties as store-keeper. Nothing had been given out for breakfast yet, and it was nearly time for the boys to go to sleep.

She found them, every one, sleeping, laid out on the grass about the cookhouse, so utterly dead to the world that she had to bend down and shake the cooky-boy, in order to wake him.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked. "Have you been getting at the betel-nut again?" For Stacy was by this time familiar with the New Guinea housewife's curse.

"No beeselnut," said the cooky. "Me too much blanky tired, Sinabada. Altogether boy he too much blanky tired."

Stacy looked at them; they seemed to be telling the truth.

"What on earth has tired you?" she asked. But over the faces of the Papuans, one and all, dropped suddenly the sullen expression that the white man knows. "Too much work," spat out one boy briefly; and that was all they would say.

Stacy gave out her stores, and came back, puzzled. Was she going mad, and suspecting mysteries everywhere? Or were there really mysteries on the island?

NEXT morning the tension seemed to have increased to the breaking-point. Stacy had had no chance of speaking to her husband, who had vanished after breakfast; but Tombazis and Plummer, nevertheless, were determined to carry out their plan. Stacy, half hysterical by now, and not knowing whether she felt most like laughing or crying at the sight, saw them actually drawing lots with straws, in a corner near the men's house. Nydia was shamelessly peeping through a rent in the palm-leaf wall of the women's house. Stacy thought her rather underbred, until she realized that she was doing just the same thing herself—by the medium of two open and opposite doors.

"Mark's got the longest," proclaimed Nydia. It seemed to be true. Tombazis flung his straw on the ground angrily, and walked away. Mark looked after him for a moment, and then deliberately rolled up his sleeves and took in a hole in his belt. He looked about. Neither of the women were in sight. He asked a question of a native, and set off, with long determined strides, through the grass.

"Are you coming?" asked Nydia in an

unnecessary whisper, putting on her hat. "I wouldn't miss it for anything!"

Stacy, opening her mouth to say, determinedly, that she would not even think of such a thing, found herself, before she had had time to speak, running hard alongside of Nydia, in the grass that Mark had just passed through.

"I must be there to stop it," she thought. "I can't allow such a thing. I never thought—"

She was beginning to be badly frightened. These masculine passions—these hot loves, violent hatreds and jealousies—were dangerous things to let loose, here alone on Oro, away from all the world. Only two well she knew that a fight between her husband and Mark would have no real reference to its apparent cause. She herself would be the cause. She could not—she could not— Why hadn't Tombazis drawn the longer straw? That would have been another thing altogether.

"Run faster!" she urged Nydia. "He's right out of sight."

"He got a start," gasped Nydia, who was not built for speed. But she kept on bravely. The grass ended; in a stretch of open pandanus ground, they caught sight of two khaki figures.

"Keep back now," warned Nydia. "If they see us, they wont fight."

"Do you—do you think I mean to let—" gasped Stacy, dropping into a quick walk.

"You don't mean to stop them?" cried Nydia. "Why, there'll be no end of fun." She barely dissimulated her open conviction that Mark was, in any case, bound to win. It was almost as if she boasted.

"I'm certainly not going to let them fight like two disgraceful prize-fighters," declared Stacy, walking faster. "Come on. If you wont, I will. Run down this slope; you'll catch them quicker. . . . Charley! Mr. Plummer! Ah!"

SHE gave a cry, and started running harder than ever.

The two men were in sight, close together, and as Nydia delightedly put it, "dodging to hit." Mark had his back to the women; Holliday did not see them, or if he did, did not mind. He had enough to do guarding his own head from the lightning blows that Mark was delivering. Any man who understood the sport would have called it "very pretty." Stacy wanted to stop them—to scream—she did not know what.

Nydia gave a cry of delight.

"Mark's got him—he's punched him a good one. . . . Oh! What are they stopping for?"

"One of Charley's teeth has been knocked out," said Stacy, very pale. "It's hideous. I—" She began to move forward. Nydia caught her by the skirts.

"Don't spoil it," she begged. "They'll start again directly. I can't see why they stopped anyhow. Men don't worry over a thing like— Good heavens!"

There was some reason for her cry. They had both seen Holliday, a moment before, spit out a small white thing on the ground. They now saw him drop half a dozen after it, spitting blood at the same time, for one of Mark's blows had gone home on his upper lip, and split it.

"He can't have hit out all those," declared Nydia. "Does your husband wear false— Lord, Mark's picking them up. Is everybody mad?"

Discarding all attempt at concealment, she ran down the slope, followed by Stacy. The two men wheeled round as the women appeared. Holliday, one hand up at his mouth, seemed to be feeling his injuries, and at the same time feeling for something that was not there. Mark Plummer was holding, in the palm of one hand, seven or eight large round pearls. A red-hot epithet had just hurtled through the air toward Holliday; the coming of the women stopped others that were apparently ready to take flight after it.

"So that's it, is it?" asked Mark, breathing hard. "So you didn't know anything, and wouldn't speak—no wonder, with that in your mouth! You saw me coming, and hadn't time to— Where are the rest of them?"

"Damned if I tell you anything," was Holliday's answer. He turned his head aside, and spat blood on the ground. "What do you want here?" he demanded of Stacy. "Get back to your kitchen."

ON the pandanus slope behind, a gentle song, sung in a voice that was anything but gentle, began to sound, as Tombazis, with careful carelessness, strolled toward the excited group, trying to look as if he had come there entirely by accident.

From my fond lips the eager answers fall,
Thinking I hear thee call!

sang the understudy of Bully Hayes, advancing toward the excited group.

"So he's told you!" was his comment.

"He has not told me. He spit these out on the ground when I hit him." Mark held up the handful of pearls. They were of different sizes, one or two very large, all perfectly round, and shining with the blue-white luster that, in "T. I.," the home of the pearl industry, marks a perfect "stone."

Tombazis blew a long, significant whistle. In the brief silence that followed, the four white people looked at each other. Stacy's eyes were fixed on the sulky, down-bent countenance of her husband. She was flaming all over with the shame that he, clearly, did not feel at all. Nydia and Tombazis, too, stared at Holliday. Mark Plummer, calmly pulling down his sleeves, kept his eyes on Holliday's wife. What would this last discovery mean to her?

From a pandanus tree above them, a leatherneck burst out suddenly, in the weird bad language used by these strange birds:

"Yer a regular cockolly-co! Yer a regular cockolly-co! Yer a reg—"

The group under the trees did not hear it. They would scarce have heard a hurricane, had one broken over their heads just then. It seemed as if no one knew who should speak first, or what should be said. Holliday solved the problem.

"What's all the damn fuss about?" he said impudently. "Can't I look for pearls where I like?"

"Why, you—" Mark began, and broke off. He went on, with visible restraint—"Whose pearls are you stealing?"

"I like that!" declared Holliday. "Mine, as much as anyone's. The island may be yours, but I'm hanged if the Pacific Ocean is."

"Tombazis, is he right?" asked Mark, turning toward the sea captain, who had seen as many strange things, and upon the sea, as he had on the land.

"My darling chap," replied Tombazis, "I'm inclined to think he is."

"There now!" declared Holliday. "I told you I was within my rights."

"I don't remember that you did. I only remember that you were sneaking off somewhere by yourself, and when I came on you, and spoke to you, you wouldn't answer. You'd just been putting those things into your mouth out of your hand."

"Because I had holes in both my trouser pockets."

"It doesn't matter a button where you

had holes. You were morally stealing, and you knew it."

"Oh, morally! One'd think you'd been talking to old Hemingways. He's always gassing about the 'interests of morality.' I suppose,"—to Tombazis,—“that's why you brought him up to marry Miss Leven and you—in the interests—”

“Do you want your face smashed in?” suddenly roared Blazes, turning in an instant from a peaceful ship-captain ashore, to a raging pirate.

“Any time you like, but not before ladies,” was Holliday's reply.

“What's there between the parson and you?” asked Mark, sharply as the cut of a whip.

THE blow got home. Holliday's jaw went down, and he turned a little pale. He could not find an answer. Mark stared at him harder. Over Holliday's blunt, high-nosed face there crept, by degrees, a flush of dark red.

Meantime Nydia, who had held out her hand eagerly for the pearls, was turning them over and gloating on them.

“Where he got these there must be lots more,” she said. “What do you think of them, Captain Tombazis?”

“I'll run them over by and by,” replied Blazes. “Just now I'd like to knock some of the stuffing out of this beautiful, lovely chap, if only you ladies would find an errand somewhere else. Mark, old son, it's my go—it is indeed. You've had your chance.” His face was as red as Holliday's; he was breathing hard, like a man who runs. Clearly, it was with difficulty that he held himself back.

Mark, gifted with more self-control, looked at him, and replied:

“You know something more. You might as well tell us.”

“Yes, let's hear all the lies,” jeered Holliday, who seemed to be recovering from his momentary fear.

“What,” roared Tombazis, “what did you mean by taking Plummer's Yassi-Yassi boys on the sly yesterday, when everyone, even the parson, thought you were laying off drunk? Where did you take them to?”

“If you know,” said Holliday, “why do you ask?”

“I do know, blank dash you, you blank dash. I know you took them to the reef—because you knew we wouldn't make two visits in a day—and you had them doing

skin diving all the afternoon. And what they brought up, you opened, and you got those out of them. And you meant to go on at the game on the sly, terrorizing the boys, so that they wouldn't—”

“How did you find out?” asked Mark.

“Just now—with a bit of lawyer cane.”

“And you talk of terrorizing!” sneered Holliday.

TOMBAZIS went on, still bellowing like a bull.

“Plummer took you up when you were broke, and brought you here, where you were no good to anyone, just out of kindness, and gave you shares, and you go behind his back, and take his— You—I swear to God I'll break every—”

“Tombazis,” came Mark's voice, very even and quiet, “I want to ask you something.”

“What?” roared Blazes, turning on Plummer as if he had been the very culprit himself.

“I want to know—as you've done plenty of pearling—why you think the old Jap left all that bed of rich shell alone, when he seems to have known about it. It seems a bit risky.”

“How do I know what a beautiful Jap thinks in his lovely mind, if he has any?” demanded Tombazis. But he seemed to be cooling down.

“Well, it looks odd to me. I could understand it when it was only a question of a cache of shell, but now I don't quite—”

“You don't want to understand any more than you see. The pearls are there, loads of them, and Holliday's found them.”

“Yes, and I don't mind telling you,” said Holliday boastfully, “that you don't come in. There was only a very little bed there, altogether. I ripped one shell open under water, and found a big one, and after that I knew what to do. I got the whole lot up yesterday, opened them this morning, before any of you were about, and all of them you don't see in Plummer's hand—he's stolen them, by the way—are put away where none of you will get them. What are you all howling about? Can't a man use his brains, when he's lucky enough to have them? When I was in hospital at Darwin, there was a Jap in the next bed, who used to talk to his friends when they came in—never knew I could understand. I was attached to the British Legation in Tokio, in nineteen five; they didn't treat me decently there, so—”

"What did your beautiful Jap say?"

"Doesn't matter what he said. But I guessed it wasn't only shell that was up here. And I guessed right. Who wins the game now?"

THERE was a silence; the men looked at each other. In the pandanus above their heads, the leatherneck began again insensibly:

"Look at yer coat now! Look at yer coat now. Do it! You're a regular cockolly-co! Get up!"

A movement began. It seemed general at first, but by and by it became plain that everyone was moving, except one man—Holliday. Blazes' hands, swinging outward at a sailorly angle, head well up, was seen detached from the group, and marching smartly away. Stacy, with an impulse she could not control, turned from the man whose name she bore, and made for the camp, with Nydia close at hand. Mark stayed just a minute; he was busy lighting his eternal pipe. He paid no attention at all to Holliday while doing it. Shortly, with the pipe hanging from its usual corner, he followed the women. Holliday was abandoned.

"Damn them all," he said unemotionally. He had not much nervous voltage to come and go on, at the best; the past scene had worn it out. Almost indifferently, he stooped and collected the pearls, which some one—perhaps Mark, perhaps Tombazis, certainly not Nydia—had thrown on the ground. He took a handkerchief out of his torn pocket, tied the gems carefully in it, and carrying them, turned off in a direction opposite to the camp.

It had seemed to Stacy, the day before, that things could not possibly be worse than they were. She had had to find—as most people do find, who throw down such a challenge to Fate—that things certainly could be worse, by a good deal. The evening that followed on Holliday's conviction was the worst of all. He was in an unpleasantly exalted mood; it was plain that, if the drunkenness of the other day had been assumed, that of the existing moment was not. Hemingways, too, had been drinking, but for him, Stacy could find excuse. She knew by now that the sudden fits from which he suffered were commonly followed by maddening pain and that the intervals between the fits, and the bouts of agony, grew month by month, slowly, certainly less.

"When they meet and overlap, it will be the conclusion. I shall be finally terminated," Hemingways had said to her, with his ineradicable love for the overpiled period of the sermon. "It may be a considerable space of time before that occurs—perhaps a year or two, perhaps somewhat more. In the interim, I do my best to make both ends meet—to keep body and soul from premature separation. Life, on any terms, is not without certain charms, strange though that may seem in the present instance."

"I'm quite sure you would like to live as long as possible; we all do," had been Stacy's trite but comforting reply. "And I do think the island is doing you some good."

"Thank you—thank you. It's kind of you to think about me at all," was Hemingways' reply. In his dull eyes there was the immense loneliness of the man doomed to wander through the earth's dead ends, incredibly far from all that had once meant home, hopelessly out of touch with all the things among which he was forced, forever, to live. "You don't mind my drinking, do you?" he asked her plainly. "I never hide it. I can do a great many undesirable things, but lying is not one of them. I have had some apprehension that your energetic friend Mr. Plummer, who, I understand, is in charge of the settlement, might object in some practical manner, by obliging me to go."

"I don't know whether he would," declared Stacy, "but I'm sure of one thing, that he sha'n't." She knew she could manage Mark so far. What did it matter, if this most miserable creature sought the one miserable refuge open to him?

"I am glad that you can answer for him," Hemingways had said, with something like a sparkle of amusement in his half-dead eyes. Stacy wondered a little why he was glad. It seemed scarcely right for him to be glad if he thought—and perhaps he did think—that she and Mark—

TONIGHT, the wretch was sitting, dull and glassy-eyed, on one of the log seats, with his back against a tree, while Mark and Tombazis played cards, and Nydia hovered about, restless, and clearly disturbed in mind. Nydia did not know what to think of the failure of the expedition. Blazes and Mark were already speaking of return. Seasoned by many a disappointment, they took things calmly

—more calmly than she could pretend to do. Her money, her precious money! Thus, Mark had said that she should have it back, and had brushed away her feeble, scarce half-hearted pretense of wanting to take her share of the risks and failures. But could they raise it among them, this company of broken men? She was by no means sure. She despised them—at least, she tried to despise them, having been brought up in a creed that attached almost American importance to the necessity of “making good.” Mark might be—was—the sort of man that almost any woman would want when she saw him, but she was not so sure that he was the sort of man a prudent woman would marry when she got the chance, as of course she would—They had said he owned the devil’s own luck. She saw no sign of it.

As for Tombazis—she did not know what to think about Tombazis. Her thoughts fluttered about the reckless sailor, as moths flutter about a lamp. She was still afraid of Tombazis. She knew he was not done with.

BY and by she saw Holliday, in the lamplight, leaning over the table, and ostentatiously handling something or other—it seemed to be one of the small enamel bowls they used in the kitchen. Nydia, eternally curious, managed to walk behind him. She clapped her hands across her mouth to keep back a scream. The bowl was full of pearls.

Holliday had brought out the whole of his dishonest gains, and was, with the worst possible taste, displaying them publicly, under pretense of sorting them. He picked out one from the rest, held it up, and looked at it. Then he dropped it among the others, selected a handful, and let them run through his fingers like rain. Then he matched two, and compared them. All the time, his hands were shaking; his eyes shone drunkenly. It was clear he had had more than was good for his feeble nervous system; a very little made Charley Holliday foolish, a little more, maudlin and then violent. He was rapidly verging toward the latter stages, having drunk a good deal just before joining the rest.

“Look-er this!” he proclaimed in a loud tone of voice. “Look-er this lovely pearl! Two of ’em, matches, by gosh! Earrings fit for princess. Can hang m’ wife all over with them like a Hindoo id—Hindoo isol—and she wont have anything to do

with me.” He shook his head violently, and seemed to be near tears.

THE derelict, from his corner, looked on with more interest than one would have thought possible to anyone in his condition. His pale eyes shone as they met the gems; his fingers made clutching motions. It seemed he thought he was handling pearls.

Holliday went on with his foolishness; Blazes and Mark played cards. They finished their game. Mark produced a pencil and gravely noted down what he owed Tombazis.

“That, and five pounds, by and by, to the back of it,” Tombazis remarked. Mark kicked him viciously.

“Oh, you needn’t be afraid of shocking her; she’s not so beautiful easy to shock—that one,” said Blazes, who seemed rather Irish, this night—a sure sign he was in a good humor.

“Well, you can talk about the bet another time.”

“Who’s betting?” asked Holliday loudly. “Shocking thing, betting and gambling. Very immoral. Never do it myself. Except sometimes. Now, who’ll bet me ten pounds I’ll get ten thousand in ‘T. I.’ for this little lot?”

One word had caught Hemingways’ ear. “In the int’res’ of morality,” he began monotonously, “in the int’res’ of m’rality, I must have half.”

“The devil you must!” shouted Holliday, suddenly quarrelsome. “I said one fourth, not a penny more. These are worth ten thousand—Ten? Twelve. Blazes, you know pearls. Come here. You han—you hannel these. Take ’em up. Look at the size of ’em. Twelve thousand? Fifteen—twenty. Look, I tell you.”

“I’m looking,” said Blazes, in rather a queer voice. He had come forward and taken a few of the largest pearls out of the bowl. His huge red face impended over Holliday, like the night signal of a train. The lamps, set low on the table, threw lights of henna, and shadows of Prussian blue, on the heads of Holliday, Nydia and Tombazis, on the little gleaming gems that lay like seeds of some magic fruit, within the circle of the bowl.

Mark, at the far end of the table, was methodically shuffling the cards, and putting them together. A small wind suddenly blew up from the sea; it ruffled the loose cards and shook the lamp-flames to

and fro. Tombazis seemed to be—perhaps was—grinning. Something in his looks arrested Mark's attention. He put down the cards and walked to the end of the table, where Holliday was gloating over his bowl of pearls.

"What is it, Blazes?" he asked.

There could be no doubt now that Tombazis was grinning. He held a big pearl in his hand—a jewel fit for the crown of a reigning queen. He looked at it, lifted it and laid it against his front teeth, drawing it lightly backward and forward, so that one heard it scrape. Then he put it down on the table and took another—a third. Each one he scraped lightly on his teeth; each he laid down apart from the rest. The fourth pearl he took in his hand, looked at it, and tossed it away carelessly to the shadows of the night.

HOLLIDAY sprang up with a curse. Tombazis paid not the least attention to him.

"These beautiful pearls," he said, addressing Plummer, Stacy and Nydia, and to some extent the derelict Hemingways, who seemed to have roused himself amazingly, "these beautiful pearls are every one cultured. 'Manufactured,' they call it in 'T. I.'—'Cultured' in London. But it's the same anywhere. They're made. The Jap made them—with the beautiful oyster to help. There's a secret in it, that only these Japs know—'button' pearls almost anyone can manage, but not the round ones. They're worth—if you market them honestly, which some don't—a few shillings each. I reckon the Jap meant to fool people with them. They're the best I've seen. Anyone would buy them for real, if he didn't know enough to rub them against his teeth, as they do in 'T. I.'"

"Scott!" said Mark Plummer.

"How do you know?" asked Nydia sharply.

"Lend me your pearl ring, beautiful lady, and I'll tell you. Or don't lend it. Do as I did, with it. Now take one of Holliday's delightful pearls, and do the same with that. Eh? Eh?"

"It's not the same," allowed Nydia, amazed.

"What's the difference?"

"My ring sticks—clings—just a little, and the other slips."

"Just so, my lady. Just so. That's the test they use in 'T. I.' There are people who have given good money to know it."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Holliday in a strangely tamed and lowered voice, "that these pearls of mine are manufactured?"

"My dear, beautiful man," said Tombazis pleasantly, "I've known it ever since you told us about your stealing them!"

Holliday, in that sudden state of collapse, did not seem able to resent the term.

"Why?" he asked feebly, wiping his lips with a dirty handkerchief.

"Mark put his finger on the weak spot. I didn't choose to allow it just then, but it came home to me next minute. My darling chap, why would any beautiful Jap find a bed of pearl-shell simply rotten with pearls, and go off to God knows where, making a memorandum about it and doing nothing else? Can you see him? I can't. But I tell you what I can see. I can see that beautiful Jap—who seems to have gone farther in the way of cultured pearls than almost anyone else has done. I can see the chap taking up this island—which is on the whole pretty handy, and yet a mighty hard one for anyone to get to who didn't know the reefs—and putting down his little oyster bed there, safe that no one would find it. And choosing just that finger of the reef that was shut up safe by the granddaddy of all the octopuses—think of the two Malays! And then the lovely chap went away to let them grow into beautiful necklaces, and he died, which was delightfully hard on him, if you ask me. And that's the story, my beautiful stealer of other people's pearls. And we're all in the same basket, and delightfully sold, but you're the soldest of all."

"Captain Tombazis!" demanded Nydia, who seemed almost more deeply moved than anyone. "Will you really tell me that all those lovely pearls are worth almost nothing?"

"I don't say that, dear lady. If a man had his wits about him, and knew where to pass them off— But you can be jailed for it if it's found out."

NYDIA heaved a deep, long sigh, and fixed upon the pearls a look tender, regretful, infinitely pathetic.

"It seems the most frightful pity I ever heard of in all my life," she said.

Holliday, stupefied with drink and sudden disaster, was sitting all in a heap, staring at the beautiful, useless gems as one hypnotized. Stacy, half hating him, altogether despising him, yet felt the old tie

between them stir in some degree. He had been hers—he was in misfortune, worse than the trouble that had overthrown him at Siai station. She wished that there was anything she could say to lift him out of that dead misery. Men looked so wretched when things went really wrong.

Then, in a minute, he laid all her kindly impersonal feeling dead, with one stroke.

"If I haven't got any money, after all," he said thickly, looking up with red eyes at Stacy, "I've got my wife still, and it's time she knew it. Stacy,"—he said "Stashy," she noted with a shudder of disgust,—"you and I will get to Thursday Island as soon as Blazes will take us, and make a fresh start there. There's been too mush—too mush—" He did not say what there had been too much of, but he rose unsteadily to his feet, and put a drunken arm across Stacy's shoulders.

Stacy let out a little cry, as of a bird caught suddenly in a snare. Mark Plummer made one fierce, long step forward, and then stopped. He stood for a moment motionless, lips set in a hard line, eyebrows bent low over brilliant, clever eyes. Then he turned and seized the half-sleeping Hemingways by the arm.

"Wake up!" he said. A jug of water stood on the table; Mark seized it and dashed the contents into Hemingways' face.

"What's between you and that damned cur?" he barked, as the parson sprang to his feet, choking and struggling.

Hemingways, fully aroused, stared at Holliday, who still held the girl in a half-drunken grasp.

"I—he—" he began.

"He promised you money. He's got none! Tell it, or I'll— No. Tell it, man. He hasn't a penny. The pearls are bung. Blazes says so. Blazes knows something, too; he'll make you talk, if I don't."

"I have been listening—" began the parson. Then, pulling himself together with surprising effect, he called out to Holliday: "Sir! In the interests of morality, I must ask you to treat that lady with respect."

"Oh, you're awake, are you?" said Holliday, slackening his hold. "Tell it, then. Tell it, and be damned to you. You know I can't buy you now, to put another year into your wretched carcass. No, you sha'n't tell it. I'll tell it myself, to keep you from the pleasure. You married me and that Mata girl, in the interests of your cursed morality, didn't you, in 'T. I.,' four years ago?"

"I certainly did perform the ceremony of marriage between you and the native girl you had led astray, by taking her from her village on a trip to Thursday Island in your company. I did so because the Government of Papua visits that offense with a high fine—removing a native without permission—and because you had rendered yourself liable—"

"Oh, curse it, you did it because you knew you could blackmail me for a marriage-fee, by threatening to tell."

"Not so. I saved you from the consequences of—"

"And you charged five pounds."

"I did it in the—"

"Of course you did. In the interests of the Reverend Mr. Hemingways, as you always do. Well, you've done for me now, and not helped yourself very much by doing it."

"May I inform you," said the little parson, turning formally to Stacy, "that your marriage with this man was not legal—undoubtedly not from a legal point of view; indeed, it does not exist."

"We were never legally married?" asked Stacy, white as the foam on the reef below, her great eyes staring.

"Certainly not."

"Then, all the time I thought I was his wife, I was his— Oh!" With the inevitable, world-old gesture of the woman wronged, she flung her hands before her burning face, and stood, a picture of shame.

NYDIA, that self-conscious and self-valuing maiden, looked at her with an expression that seemed to say: "Which of us is the better woman, now, you proud matron?" Tombazis, seeing it, and not much liking it, bent over from his big height, to whisper one sentence in her ear. Nydia jumped as if she had been shot. She had actually forgotten that aspect of the matter.

They would—of course they would! And what was to become of her?

Nobody was thinking very much of her, in that moment. Holliday had slipped away; one might, without exaggeration, have said that he sunk. Mark Plummer, watching him, turned to Tombazis, and lifting his pipe out of his mouth, said, casually:

"You were talking about an end of lawyer cane this afternoon. Where did you leave it?"

"Cook-house," said Tombazis cheerfully. He rubbed his hands together, as one well pleased.

Mark, without another word, went off into the shadows, and Stacy saw him no more that night.

Nor did she, or Tombazis, or Nydia, or the derelict parson, see Holliday. But next morning, when it became known that Holliday was in the separate hut originally built for men's quarters, by himself, and that he was not well enough to get up for breakfast, everyone, not excluding the native cooky-boys, knew that Mark Plummer—and the end of lawyer cane—had seen Charles Holliday again.

"I suppose," said Nydia, greeting Tombazis at breakfast, "that things have about done happening by now. I think I'd like a little quiet for a change."

"I think they have done happening, my lady—all but one thing," answered the Captain. "And you know what that is."

Nydia bridled. She thought she knew.

But she did not; nor did Tombazis. The surprises of Fate were not yet—quite—at an end.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN a windy, red dawn, promising near rain, Stacy found her way down to the beach. She had lain waiting for the light through interminable hours. Talk with Nydia was what she could not face just then; she had come very late to bed, and meant to be up and away before the steady snoring at the opposite side of the hut died out in snorts, gasps and the inevitable, "Oh—is it time to get up?"—followed today, as it would be if she stayed, by something barbed and insinuatingly scornful. Nydia, she knew, could not forgive her for attracting Mark; and she had the means of revenge well within her grasp now, if she chose to use it. Stacy was burningly sensitive about the position in which Holliday's selfish and criminal folly had placed her. She felt that she wanted an hour or two of complete quiet, before the beginning of the day, to find herself a little, and grow accustomed, in some degree, to the changed horizon of her life.

Not that she had failed to realize, from the first moment, what this freedom must mean to her and Mark. But she was like a sailor escaped from a wreck, who has been battered so long against drowning

seas, that he finds himself, once ashore, unable to do anything but lie still and take his breath, scarce even thankful to find himself alive.

The wind in her hair was comforting, cooling, after the hot night. She stood face to the east, watching the sky redden gloriously with the coming of the sun, and thinking, as well as she could think after the bewildering crash of events in the last few hours, about that other morning—it seemed already long ago—when she and Mark had stood together in the dawn, watching the ship sail in to break their dream. The dream was a dream no longer. Some day—not yet—she would be able to realize that.

The wind was rising; it blew her loosely coiled hair in long waves away from her face; it flung her white short dress out backward. She looked, in her long stockings and arched, little shoes like some new-fashioned figurehead for a new sort of ship—not classic, but twentieth century in every line; yet as she stood, an inspiration for a sculptor.

"You look as if you ought to be on the bow of something," was Mark Plummer's comment, as he came up behind her, walking rustlingly through the sea-grass that lined the beach.

She had known he would come. She had had the space of quiet that she wanted; now she was steady, and could face the great hour of her life.

"Well?" was all Mark Plummer found to say. But he made his eyes speak for him—those splendid, gray-blue eyes that so many women had desired, that had, through all the years, kept their best for her. . . . Mark had loved and gone away, more than once, more than ten times. But he had never looked at any woman as he looked at Stacy now.

SHE could not have told, afterward, which of them it was who kissed the other first. The leathernecks might have told—they sat close by in the tops of the nearest palm trees, having the "morning hate" for which a leatherneck is chiefly distinguished, and seemed, in the intervals of mutual commination, to be watching the two humans with malicious interest. Yet there was nothing gratifying to a leatherneck, in the sight of two people who stood with their arms about one another, minute after minute, saying silly things. They could so much better have stood a little apart, and

exchanged recriminations—like the small people with the necks of leather, and lungs of cast iron, who sat aloft and cursed in the tops of the palms.

"When are we going to be married?" was Mark's first question.

"I've got to be unmarried first," answered Stacy, drawing apart from him. "Do let me alone, Mark, and let me think. You—you bewilder me."

"I'm very simple, all the same. I know exactly what I want," stated Mark, loosening the long hold he had kept of this loved woman, and looking as if he purposed to resume it very soon.

"I wonder," said Stacy, suddenly turning white, "if we were right to believe all Charley and that man said. There's no proof but their word."

"Make your mind easy. Holliday was speaking truth. He was fairly candid—after."

"What did you—" began Stacy. But she saw the "shut-up" look she already began to know, coming over Mark's face. She changed her sentence. When Mark did not want to tell you anything—

"How can you check it?" was what she said.

"Easy enough. Go down to 'T. I.' and take a copy of the register. And by the way, you might as well know that he isn't quite the stage villain he appears to be. Bad enough, but—he thought the first marriage wasn't legal. Indeed, he didn't mean it to be."

"How?"

"Well, you know the Papuan laws—he was liable to get into a row for taking the girl out of the country, but not if he was married to her. So he thought he'd do what thieves call the double cross. Hemingways had got at him, and was more or less blackmailing him; and the Resident had heard of it, and threatened to report him to the lieutenant-governor of Papua; and the girl herself was trying to make a deal of it. He thought he saw his way out by giving a false name to everyone—since he wasn't known—and marrying Mata as James Brown. It's a very common delusion, by the way—that marrying under a false name makes the marriage illegal. Of course it doesn't. I will say this much for the cow, he did not mean to commit bigamy. He meant to do all right by you. It was a big shock to him, I reckon, when Hemingways got at him and told him how things were."

"Would Hemingways have kept quiet if—Charley—had had the means to pay him?"

"Who knows. Thank heaven he didn't."

"Thank heaven!" echoed Stacy. "I can't realize it all, Mark. I've dreamed it so often. I can't think it's true, this time, really."

"I could help you to realize it," suggested Mark, twisting his mustache, his arm stealing again toward her waist. "I find I can realize it quite well myself—Damn!"

THE parson was standing beside them. Neither had heard him come, but he was there, black-clad, stooping, red-eyed, a blot upon the beauty of the scene.

"How long have you been here, might I ask?" demanded Mark sharply.

"I have only just come," replied Hemingways. "I spent a disturbed night. The old enemy—the old enemy."

"You mean whisky," suggested Mark.

"Don't be so hard on him," whispered Stacy. "He can't help it."

"I mean the physical disability from which I suffer—the 'thorn in the flesh'—ah!" He paused a moment. "I hope you'll have a pleasanter way of exit when your time comes, both of you."

"I must say you're a cheerful sort of beggar."

"We have all got to die, and meantime we have got to live. Which brings me to the point."

"I thought we were heading toward that."

"You know, my dear Mr. Plummer, and my good Mrs. Holliday—I give you the title as a matter of courtesy; it is not justly due, because my marriages are sound marriages, and they always hold. No one has ever—I think I wander a little. What I meant to say was, that I have always tried to act in the interests of—"

"Yes, I know."

"So, to come briefly but effectively to the point: I am quite prepared to marry you, at any time you may wish." His dead eyes glowed; he looked like a fisherman who, in the clear waters at his feet, has spied his fish, and hopes for an immediate bite.

Mark, tall, personable, looked down at him with a half-smile and kept on twisting his mustache.

"It doesn't sound such a bad—" he began.

"I'd do it cheaply," interrupted Hemingways, with sudden eagerness. "I'd do it for—" He paused briefly, eying the two with a horse-buying sort of look. "Four pounds," he ended.

Mark was opening his lips, but it was Stacy who interrupted now.

"I never heard such nonsense," she said crisply. "As if I would be married in any such way! We should have to look things up—and see that everything was all right. And—and get some clothes, perhaps. Anyway, it's not to be thought of."

HEMINGWAYS fingered his chin, disappointed.

"If it's Holliday stands in the way," he said, "—I understand Mr. Plummer settled with him that he's not to stop and run the risk of being charged with bigamy, on account of the scandal; he's to go away to Africa or somewhere, and send an account of his death to the papers."

"Mark, is that true?" demanded Stacy.

"Quite," replied Mark calmly. "I thought it the best way for everyone concerned."

"Then that settles it, of course. You will have to marry me as a widow. I only hope Nydia will keep from talking."

"I dare say Tombazis will manage that. Tombazis likes you quite a little," observed Mark, pulling a long stem of grass between his hands. He was very matter of fact now; you would never have supposed that the leathernecks, only five minutes earlier, had seen and heard all that they'd seen and heard.

"Is she going to marry him?"

"Probably. I know Blazes."

"It might be as well to go and discuss the matter with one or other," said Hemingways thoughtfully. "By the way," he added, over his shoulder, "if you should happen to be in Thursday Island, or the neighborhood, when the happy event occurs, may I ask that you will—"

"You may," answered Mark pleasantly. "And I may answer that I'll see you damned first."

"Mark," remonstrated Stacy, as the derelict rustled away through the long grass,—which, strangely enough, had given no such notice of his arrival as now it gave of his departure,—"Mark!"

"That's my name . . . Mrs. Mark Plummer—I think it doesn't sound badly. Do you think I would give that rat the job? More likely Sydney Cathedral and

a bishop, 'assisted' by some one or other. Unless of course—" He did not finish.

"Impossible," said Stacy with decision. "Mark—do you know we're going to be very poor?"

Plummer seemed to wince a little.

"I do know it, when I let myself think," he answered. "Then, I realize that I ought to be kicked for letting you take up with me. I haven't even a present for you."

"I've got one for you," allowed Stacy, beginning to blush.

"What, the little thingummy you always wear, and wont let me see?"

"It's my luck—and yours. I can't help being superstitious about it. I couldn't show it to you before, but I promised myself, if ever—I promised you should have it then." She was fumbling inside her blouse. A long gold chain came forth; from its end she detached a little shining heart, and laid it in Plummer's ready palm.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she breathed.

PLUMMER stood absolutely motionless, staring at the heart.

"My God!" he said. "Where did you get this?" He lifted it to his lips, and Stacy thought he was going to kiss it. Instead, he bit it hard.

"Do you—do you know what it is?" he asked her, and Stacy for the first time saw her man of iron shaken. Mark's hands were actually trembling.

"It's a heart."

"It's a nugget—gold!"

"Gold?"

"Yes! Where did it come from?"

"The creek." Stacy was woman enough to feel a little disappointed at the reception her gift had met with. Not quite thus had she pictured the tender scene.

"The creek? Will somebody kick me?—hard?"

"Is there likely to be more gold there?"

Without answering her question, Mark put both arms around her, gave her a tender but almost hasty kiss, and started, walking five miles an hour, for the cook-house.

"Tell them," he called, over his shoulder, "to expect me when they see me."

Stacy reached the cook-house not long after him, but he was gone.

"Taubada," explained the cooky, "him takem one basin, him taken one fick" (pick) "him go long creek. What name I makem breakfass tooday? Hamanegg I make? Tausage I make?"

IT was ten o'clock—a long space of time for Stacy—before Mark came back to the camp. He came covered with mud, wet through, tired and hungry, but with the light of victory on his face—and another light as well, that she was to know, many times, in the years long after; that she did not yet know, as the flush of that most formidable of fevers—gold-fever.

"I've got it," he informed the assembled camp.

"What have you got," asked Tombazis, leaning back lazily against a palm trunk, and smoking a long cigar.

"I've got the most promising gold-field I've seen since the Yodda broke out."

"What!" Tombazis, Hemingways and Nydia all screamed out the word together; all jumped to their feet at once. No one doubted Mark; he was known all over Papua as the surest prospector in the territory.

"I've been the biggest idiot—comes of meddling with something else than your own business. If I'd just stuck to prospecting what I understood— Well, we have it, anyhow. And it wasn't me who found it; it was"—he hesitated for the fraction of a second over the name; he did not fancy using the hateful married-unmarried "Holliday" or the maiden name that was more or less an insult. "It was Stacy found it," he finished boldly. And in that word Nydia of the golden hair saw her hopes forever go down.

Characteristically, she reached for consolation to the next best thing. "How much share have I?" she demanded, on the spot.

"One-fourth," answered Mark.

"And Stacy has the same?"

"Stacy and I have half. You have a fourth. Blazes has another. It's going to be a real good thing. Of course, my owning the island doesn't prevent anyone coming here to take the gold—"

"Oh—how unjust!" came from Nydia.

"Not at all. That's law. But we can pretty well clean it out before anyone gets on to it. Stacy, girl, you never spoke a truer word than when you said the little heart was our luck."

THERE was perhaps a touch of pain, in another and a warmer heart of gold, at Plummer's words. Perhaps, in that minute, Stacy saw, far ahead, the years when gold and she were to struggle against each

other, for home, peace, stable position, all that a woman loves besides love itself. Perhaps she saw, in a prophetic flash, just what a woman must pay, in just how many pieces coined of her own heart's blood, for the love of a pioneer.

If so, she lifted the burden, as once she had lifted another; but this time, it was with pride.

Hemingways, obsessed by his one idea, had been slyly watching Nydia and Tombazis. He had seen how the eyes of the big man turned toward her, how she, with the talk of gold and of shares, kept looking oftener and oftener at him. The iron, to his mind, was hot; he struck.

"I hope," he said with a ghost of his old lost society manner, "I may have the pleasure of shortly marrying you." The words were distributed, judiciously, he felt, between the two.

It was Tombazis who answered him.

"Very soon," he said. "In about half an hour. Give the lady time to do her hair."

NYDIA let forth one of her little screams. "My hair doesn't want doing, and I'm not going to be married," she said. There was the least possible weakening in her tone.

"A lady's hair always wants doing," asserted Tombazis, "but, if you've any doubts—" He leaned forward. In a moment Nydia's dress, down to the knees, was hidden by a cataract of gold.

"How dare you?" she asked feebly.

"I can do what I like with my own property," said Blazes coolly. Out of his eyes there looked, for a moment, the spirit that had changed his name, among men, to the fiery title he bore. Stacy, at such a look, would have risen and shaken off any chain by which he held her. Nydia, seeing it, cringed, and was almost pleased to cringe.

"I'll go and tidy my hair," she said.

"Put on your best dress at the same time," counseled Tombazis. "Make yourself look very nice. It's your wedding day, remember."

And Nydia, down at last, said only "Yes," and went.

"It will be five pounds," said Hemingways quickly.

"Ask Mr. Mark Plummer for the five," answered Tombazis in a lordly manner. "He owes it to me."



A Dull Day

Dull? It may have started that way, but a couple of young riots occurred before it was over: an excellent story by the author of "The Doll" and "The Lobster List."

By GEORGE L. KNAPP

MOOD furnishes the spectacles through which we view the world; and a thousand different factors combine to furnish our moods. Health is one; its bearing is too plain to need illustration. Experience is another; the storm which a sailor dismisses as a capful of wind gives the new voyaging landsman thrills that will last a lifetime. The condition of the stomach is still another; the short temper of a hungry man and the complaisance of a well-fed one are the two fixed points in domestic diplomacy. In general, anything that makes a man satisfied with himself makes him easy to suit with the world; anything that depresses his vitality or wounds his self-love causes him to view the universe with a jaundiced eye and mourn that times are out of joint.

Now, important as is this truth with an adult, it is ten times more so with a boy. Pope, being an old bachelor, said that a child is pleased with a rattle and tickled with a straw. Sometimes that is true, and at other times the same child cannot be

pleased with a calliope or tickled with a church-steeple. It all depends on how he feels. In the right humor he can find thrilling drama in sailing a raft across a four-foot puddle. If hungry or tired, if his internals are complaining or if something has happened to make him think the world is treating him unfairly, he can fall over a dozen melodramas without seeing them, or sit with bored indifference while Fate stages a spell of hysterics that would tear his father's nerves to ribbons. And when two boys of the same age, and both in this mood of disillusionment, get their heads together, they might as well be left to sleep it off; they cannot be spanked or scolded out of it.

STEVE HRDLICKA shuffled downstairs from the parental flat one fine morning in the summer of 1918 in a mood of large disgust with the world. The planet, in his eyes, had become a flat, stale and unprofitable place of habitation. Item One: after too heroic abstinence from sugar, for the sake of the soldiers, Steve had succumbed

to temptation the night before, and filled up on indigestible stuff misnamed candy, acquired in three-cent lots at the Maxwell Street market. He was paying for his sins with a dull discomfort in his middle region, a dark brown taste in his mouth, and an uneasy feeling at the back of his head that it served him right. Not for worlds would he have admitted this, however, since other events made it clear that the earth was in a conspiracy against him. For weeks he had been practicing one of the solo parts in a projected children's concert. The day before (Item Two), he was sent back to the chorus and the solo was given to Morris Shapiro, for no better reason than that young Morris was the better singer. Steve could have made Morris ineligible for public appearance in about thirty seconds, but the director had taken canny precautions against such action. If anything happened to Morris, Steve should not sing at all—which was Item Three. What chance had a kid in a place where things were run like that? Manifestly none.

He started listlessly for the grocery half a block away, to get bread and cereal. The place was full of other breakfast shoppers, and while waiting his turn, Steve saw an acquaintance, Aleck Ralli. Aleck was in the dumps likewise, though his gloom was a shade less leaden.

"Hello, Steve," he said.

"Hello!"

"What you after?"

"Chow."

"So'm I." The conversation fainted there, but after a space Steve revived it with a question:

"Where you stayin'?" Aleck's mother was dead.

"Mrs. Santo's. It's fierce. She bosses me all the time."

Steve gave a grunt that seemed to say anyone could guess that. Aleck got his packages and went out. Steve obtained his bread, laid it on the counter while waiting for the cereal, and then carried the latter away alone. He did not discover his loss till it was called to his attention at home, with sundry comments, in Czech and English, on boys who walked in their sleep. He went back protestingly, retrieved the bread, returned and ate a sullen breakfast. At the close of the meal he was told that for some hours to come, he must mind the baby.

Steve was by many years the youngest of his direct family; the baby was his

nephew, son of an older brother then en route to France, whose wife was living with Steve's parents during her husband's absence. Minding the baby is not a favorite sport among boys of ten or eleven, but Steve was both fond and proud of his young kinsman, and on ordinary occasions, for a brief time, really liked playing with him. This occasion was not ordinary, but it had to be endured, and he would not take out his spite on the youngster. Casting about for some way to make the task less boresome, Steve saw his pushmobile, and a scheme was born.

AN empty soapbox was lying in the yard. Steve annexed that and nailed it on the pushmobile. Martin watched the process with interest. Steve now went exploring in the basement, and came back with a piece of frayed clothesline, which he tied to the pushmobile. Back he went to the basement again, the baby holding by his breeches-leg, and got some boards. These he laid on the steps leading from the yard to the basement, forming a run-plank or inclined plane. Then he lifted his nephew into the box and put the pushmobile on the run-plank.

"Here's where we shoot the chutes, Martin," said Steve, almost good-humored from the tonic of doing something for somebody.

He let the pushmobile run down the slope, holding by the rope to prevent too rapid progress. Martin voiced loud approval. Steve hauled him back, and gave him another trip—then another, and another. He was hauling back the car for perhaps the tenth time, when the rope broke, the pushmobile went whizzing down the short runway, tipped over at the bottom and spilled Martin out on the hard cement.

The yells woke the neighborhood, and before Steve could rescue or pacify the baby, fully twenty persons were in the yard or were looking into it from their windows. In the van of the arrivals was Martin's mother, frightened and furious, though she did no scolding save to ask Steve if he wanted to kill the child. The question did not seem to require an answer. Martin was carried away, still weeping, while the other visitors laughed at Steve and geyed his invention till he flung the offending contrivance into a corner of the basement and escaped out to the street. The cloud that had begun to lift shut down on him once more, thicker and darker than ever.

HE glared up and down the street, looking for trouble. He could lick anyone of his age within a radius of four blocks, and had proved it too thoroughly to have his prowess disputed. There were somewhat larger lads, however, who could give him a run for his money, and a fight with one of these might have worked off his spleen. But before any such saving chance could befall, he met the director of the coming concert, and was sent to deliver some music a few miles farther west.

"Go on the elevated," said the director, handing him some money. "I'll call her up and tell her you're coming."

"All right," said Steve, as if earning a quarter by an hour's easy trip were a trial to be borne, rather than a chance to be seized.

He was lucky enough to get a seat by the window, facing backward, but the car filled up quickly, and when it left the next station, all seats were taken. The woman who had been sitting by him got up, he did not know why, and then he heard a heavy voice:

"Hey, moof ofer!"

Steve looked up at a big man whose boundary lines were all convex curves. His cheeks bulged out from the bones of his face; his neck bulged over his collar; his front elevation, from throat to waistband, was a study in progressive protuberance. He had a short clipped gray beard, and his gray hair, cut straight across and standing up stiffly, made Steve class him at once as an enemy alien.

"Vell, moof ofer," repeated the newcomer, dropping into the vacant space, and shoving the lad aside by the mere breadth of his base of operations.

It would have been a tight fit at best, but the man was deliberately making it tighter. He wanted to make some one uncomfortable, and though a kid was poor satisfaction, it was better than none. Steve squirmed and scowled, and the enemy alien glared at him.

"Vot's der matter?" he demanded.

"You're taking up all the seat," retorted Steve.

"Vell, if you don'd lig id, ged oud," returned the other rudely.

Steve knew—by experience—exactly what to do in such cases, provided conditions were right. First, get up, in a weary, discouraged way, but stand close. Then, as the car slows for a stop, soak the offending adult on the nose and bolt. But these tac-

tics, tried and tested though they be, can be used only on a surface car, since they require a clear aisle and an open door. This aisle was not clear, and the guard, not occupied, like a street-car conductor, with collecting fares, would be sure to intervene. Steve sighed, and was about to yield to his fate, when he noticed a strap-hanger near by.

SHE was a negress, of a deep, chocolate-brown color, and a physique that a coal-heaver might envy. Not much below six feet in height and of ample breadth and thickness, her plenteous fat was laid on a frame big enough to carry it with dignity. Under one arm she held a bundle; the other hand alternately clutched a strap and wiped sweat from her shining countenance, and she grinned pleasantly at Steve as she caught his upturned eye. Steve grinned back, and rising with the best movie-hero manner that he could muster, offered the colored lady his seat. She started to refuse, grasped the situation, and her grin broadened.

"Much 'bliged, li'l boy!" she said. "Ah'll suah tell de worl' you's been mighty well raised. Much 'bliged." And she sat down with the persuasive finality of a pile-driver.

"Hey, vot you doin'?" cried the other occupant of the seat. The colored lady looked around as if she had not known he was there.

"'Scuse me, Mister," she said. "Ah didn't mean to set down in yo' lap. Jess wait till Ah gets fixed right."

She wriggled a few times, crushing him tighter and tighter. One side of his ample paunch was squeezed against the window-sill—he had taken possession of that two-thirds of the seat when Steve rose—and the colored lady's elbow indented the other side. The irate unfortunate felt as if he had been inveigled into a hay-press. The chocolate Amazon spoke again:

"'Pears to me yo' takes up a pow'ful lot o' room, white man," she remarked. "Is yo' paid two fares?"

The only answer was a throaty growl. The colored lady went on:

"Ef Ah was in yo' place, white man, Ah'd ship myself by freight an' have a truck waitin' fo' me, tother end of de line. Yessuh! Dat's what Ah'd do. 'Taint safe fo' yo' to ride on no elevated; you's liable to bust de timbers. Yo' wants to git right down next to de groun', an' stay dere."

Her voice, though pleasant and musical, had the carrying quality of a steam whistle. The whole car was enjoying the fun, and testifying to its pleasure by unblushing laughter. The fat man was fairly frothing with rage, but in the face of a verbal attack of this sort, he was inarticulate. His tormentress took a new tack:

"Say, fat man," she demanded, "how much food is yo' done saved to help win de wah?"

There was no answer, though the big man's mouth opened and closed like that of a newly landed fish. Steve was almost happy. The next station was his landing-place, and he moved toward the door. The colored lady's voice rang out again:

"Look heah, white man, Ah begins to have a s'picion yo' aint patriotic! Is yo' a spy?"

THE car shrieked, and the Teuton, unable to stand the chaff any longer, tried to struggle to his feet. The train stopped, and the guard threw open the gates. Several passengers were leaving. Steve hung back as long as possible, to watch the fun. The German pulled himself free at last and made for the door, shaking his fist at the grinning boy. Steve, already hurrying out, put the thumb of scorn to the nose of derision and twiddled his fingers. But alas! He could not do this and watch his step. A lady was entering the car, holding a parasol thrust out before her with one hand, and leading a spoiled and overdressed little girl with the other. Steve tripped on the parasol and fell sprawling just as the car went into another gale of laughter at the fat man.

"Oh, what a silly boy!" exclaimed the beribboned angel child. "Hear them laugh at him, Mamma! Isn't he silly!" She added her shrill squeal to the mirth. Steve had gained his feet like a cat, but the pride and pleasure of baiting the fat Teuton had vanished. He slunk down the stairs, muttering savagely to himself.

"Darn fool girl! I hate girls! Always giggling! Darn old umbrella!"

He looked so woebegone that when he delivered the music, the recipient tipped him a nickel out of sheer sympathy. Steve accepted the coin, but it did not cheer him. A drugstore was near by and he thought for a moment of getting an ice-cream cone, but gave over the project. His interiors did not seem to call for extra nourishment. He boarded a street-car, not

noticing that it was one which turned north four blocks from his home, instead of passing the nearest corner. He discovered his mistake only after being carried a block in the wrong direction, and the mishap added to his grudge against the universe.

"Wisht I was in the army," he muttered to himself.

A little farther on he encountered Aleck Ralli again. The Italian boy was shuffling along more dejectedly than ever, and as he looked up, the reason for his added gloom was plain to see. One eye had been decorated by an unfriendly but forceful hand. Steve registered mild interest.

"Who give you that shiner?" he asked.

"Jim Prevalsky. I'll get even with him, one of these days. I'll lay for him."

"He's too big for you. I'll lick him for you, sometime."

"I know where he is," said Aleck hopefully.

"I don't want to, now," said Steve. "Too hot."

A grown-up stranger would have thought the boy was dodging the combat, but that was not the case. Steve felt sure of his ability to lick Jim Prevalsky, did lick him a week later; but was too bored and world-weary to be bothered with the job just now. Aleck understood, and sighed. They walked a little farther, and then both boys sat down on the curb, bare feet in the street, living picture of juvenile ennui.

"Aint it fierce?" said Aleck.

"Yep," said Steve, without asking about the antecedents of the pronoun. Everything was fierce.

A HONK interrupted their forlorn meditations, and they jerked their feet away barely in time as a flivver truck dashed up to the curb at a hot pace and stopped with a protesting rattle and squeal.

"Say, you red-headed crap-shooter, where do you think you're goin' with that dishpan band?" demanded Steve, startled into a momentary interest. The carrot-topped youth of eighteen who climbed down from the driver's seat turned on the boys sourly.

"Shut your trap an' keep your feet outa the streets," he ordered.

"You go chase yourself, you organ-grinder's monkey!" returned Steve. "You couldn't drive a junk-wagon!"

The young man started forward threateningly, and Steve sidestepped toward a fruit-stand where some extra spiny pineapples were displayed for sale. But noth-

ing happened. The red-haired youth halted in the middle of a stride, and turned away with an air of elaborate unconcern. Glancing over his shoulder to see what had occasioned this change of heart, Steve spied an approaching blue uniform.

"Oh, rats!" he exclaimed disgustedly.

"Somebody's always takin' the joy outa life," quoted Aleck.

"Damn the Kaiser," added Steve, listlessly.

"Wisht I was big enough to go into the army," said Aleck as they wandered on.

"No good," returned Steve, forgetting that he had wished the same thing half an hour before. "The Kaiser'll quit soon's our boys get goin' good."

IT was noon when they reached the Hrdlicka flat, and at Steve's invitation, Aleck came up to dinner. The meal over, and a few chores performed, both boys went down to the street again. After some aimless wandering, they stopped at an alley by mutual consent. Morris Shapiro lived in a flat whose yard backed up on that alley.

"Goin' after him?" asked Aleck, who knew the story.

Steve shook his head, but turned down the peddler's thoroughfare, Aleck following. Morris was in the yard, with half a dozen other lads. He saw his rival coming, and knowing that he had not a ghost of a chance in physical combat, resorted to the quick, placating diplomacy of his race.

"Hello, Steve!" he called cordially. "Come in. Hello, Aleck!"

Aleck answered; Steve did not; but both boys entered the yard. The very presence of them brought gloom. One lad already there gave his vote on some proposed play.

"Aw, shucks, that aint no good," he said.

"Well, then, what you want?" demanded Morris. "Here, let's leave it to Steve. What you want to play, Steve?"

"Nothin'," said Steve. There was silence for a moment, and then some one made the inevitable suggestion:

"Let's play Injuns!"

None of them ever had seen an Indian, save those belonging to the cigar-store tribe, but the movie has done more to repopularize the more or less noble red man than J. Fenimore Cooper ever accomplished. There was a general chorus of approval.

In a few moments parts were assigned to all. Steve was chief, on Morris' nomination; and Morris was prisoner—on Steve's. Morris accepted the post readily enough;

he was determined to be thorough in placating so dangerous a rival, and did not realize all the implications of his rôle. Enlightenment came in a hurry:

"That's good," said Steve. "We'll tie you to the stake, an' burn you."

Morris entered instant objection, declaring among other things that his mother would not want him cooked. Steve dismissed such trifles with a wave of the hand.

"Taint real," he said, in vast contempt. "And you'll be hero."

That decided it. Morris remembered a movie that chronicled the adventures of Sure-shot Sam, the Scalping Scout of the Sierras, in sixty-seven blood curdling episodes. He consented to be the Scalping Scout. The next problem was the choice of a place. Steve insisted on real fire; and obviously, a performance of that sort in the back yard would attract the attention of some meddlesome adult.

"There's the basement," suggested some one.

THEY adjourned to the basement. It had a cement floor, and several wooden posts which helped hold up the beams of the flat. Morris was tied to one of these posts. Some boxes were broken to pieces and the fuel placed around him—at a little distance, for no one really wanted to hurt the boy, though no one realized how readily box splinters blaze up. Steve struck a match and lighted the heap, and then the band of red men began to dance around their victim, uttering terrifying yowls. The busy adults, above and around, paid no attention. They were used to yowling. Then came a crash in the alley, and the chorus in the basement stopped.

"Bet it's a bomb!" exclaimed one boy, and all of them ran out.

"Hey!" cried Morris. "Come back an' tie me loose!"

No one paid attention. The boys reached the alley, and found a couple of delivery autos which had locked mudguards as they tried to pass. The drivers were arguing the matter, fist to fist, but the combat was unequal and short. The noble red men waited hopefully for further excitement, when they heard a terrified screech:

"Help! Fire! Murder! I'm burning! He-e-elp!"

It was Morris, and the smoke coming out of the basement showed that there was reason for his fright. The lads rushed back, Steve ahead, but even as they

crowded into the area way, a clawing, raging she-thing plunged through them, knocking them right and left as a liner might knock a fleet of rowboats, caught up a pail of water, emptied it over the blaze that was singeing Morris' legs, dropped on her knees to inspect her offspring; and then, finding him really unhurt, Mrs. Shapiro arose and spoke.

Her remarks came in a torrent that left the small culprits gasping and stunned. After a bit, realizing that most of the boys did not understand a word that she was saying, Mrs. Shapiro switched to what she believed to be English. The change slackened her speed, though she still made some hundreds of revolutions per minute, but she got over the footlights. She did not call the boys Indians, perhaps from an instinctive feeling that they would like it, but that was the only term she spared them.

Loafers, no-'counts, worthless nix-nux, lazybones, boches, Bulgars, Cossacks, pogrommers, kannubbles who wanted to roast poor Morris alive and eat him—these were merely the high spots in the oration. As she felt herself running out of epithets, Mrs. Shapiro began to punctuate her remarks with swats delivered by a far from feeble hand; and the boys, hemmed in by a circle of sympathizing neighbors, could do little but crouch and dodge. Morris pleaded in vain with his irate parent; she kept at her task till the boys broke through the ring and scattered like a covey of quail. Aleck and Steve stopped, breathless, a block away. The latter's nose was bleeding, and the Italian boy's damaged eye on one side was balanced by a scratched cheek on the other.

"Aint it fierce?" asked Aleck, again, and again Steve assented without asking questions. The whole world was fierce.

HE bethought him of the quarter received for the morning's errand—that it had remained unspent so long was sufficient evidence of his distress of mind; and the two adjourned to a near-by shop for some strawberry ice-cream cones. The color of the cream seemed to show that American chemists were making progress in matching German dyes, and when a drop of the melting stuff fell on Aleck's hand, it left a bright scarlet stain. He contemplated it in some doubt.

"S'pose it's poison?" he asked.

"Mebbe," returned Steve, and went on eating. What did a little poison matter to

one whose young life was blighted, anyway? Aleck stared; and then, not to be outdone, went on eating too.

They finished their cones, stood up, felt nothing worse than a vague heaviness and sourness under their waistbands, and wandered on. An hour's aimless sauntering brought them to one of the little West Side parks. There is a shallow lagoon in this park, and just now, twenty or thirty children were wading and splashing around therein, mostly with underwear for bathing suits. As Aleck and Steve looked on wistfully, a group of their friends joined them.

"Why don't you go in?" asked one of these boys.

"No bathing suit," answered Steve.

"Do like me," said the other lad, patting his soggy union suit which gaped and yawned at all the important sectors, but furnished protection from police interference.

"Don't want to," answered Steve—which was rank evasion. He had no underclothes. He never wore them in hot weather, unless his mother personally saw to it that he put them on. She had overlooked that ceremony this morning, and the union suit was tucked away under Steve's mattress.

"Well, why don't you go in without a suit?" demanded the older boy.

"Taint allowed," said Steve.

"A heap you care about that!" retorted the other, who knew Steve's supreme contempt for regulations that ran counter to his wishes. "You're scared; that's all."

"I aint, neither!"

"You are, too."

Steve ran his eyes rapidly over the pool. All the bathers in sight were boys. He did not like the adventure being thrust upon him, but he hated to appear afraid; and what difference did a suit of underclothes make, anyway, among a bunch of kids?

"You don't dast," repeated his tormentor.

"I dast, too."

"Prove it, then. You can peel off by them bushes. You don't dast! You're a fraid cat! Steve's scared!" he began to intone, backing away, for he well knew the most probable retort to such a taunt. But neither Steve's mind nor his fists were as nimble as usual that afternoon.

"I aint scared," he retorted. "You watch."

A NUMBER of adults were sitting or lying around the pool, but a clump of bushes some thirty feet from the bank was

reasonably secluded. Steve retired thither, a screen of other lads around him, and doffed his hat, shirt and breeches. Then, outwardly blustering but with his heart in his mouth, he charged like a white streak across the open space and into the pool.

For a full minute no one noticed him, which seems to show that the Japanese are right, and that we Western folk see impropriety in such cases because we are eternally looking for it. Then the boy who had taunted Steve into the exploit gave tongue:

"O-o-o-o-e-ee, lookut! Steve's nakud!"

All eyes turned toward the pool; and in the pool, all eyes turned toward Steve. He stopped, embarrassed and furious; and with common accord the youngsters in the water raised voice and hand against him. He had broken the customs of the pack, and he seemed afraid; therefore, by ancient law, he was fair game.

"Ai, yow, nakud!" they yelled. "Sha-a-ame!" They came toward him, splashing water and throwing the twigs and small sticks floating on the surface; while two, in the shallower parts, clawed up handfuls of mud from the bottom and flung them. The spat of these missiles changed Steve's embarrassment to anger, and he counter-attacked at once. Two of the pack went down from his blows and pushes, and the rest gave back; but then came a diversion. The racket had roused a drowsing blue-coat, and a bull-like voice bawled out:

"Hey, there, ye young scut! Come outa that, quick!"

It would have been better for Steve had he obeyed. The policeman had boys of his own, and would have counted a fatherly tongue-lashing ample punishment for such an offense. But Steve was too furious and too startled to act sensibly. He whirled instead and raced through the shallow water toward the side where his clothes lay; and instantly the pack was splashing at his heels, while the cop, active in spite of his weight, and with the advantage of solid footing, ran round the bank to head off the culprit. He succeeded, but Steve turned and flailed his way through his pursuers. There were women on the opposite bank, but in his extremity the boy did not care, for he counted them negligible as obstacles. It was a fatal mistake. He out-paced the officer, but as he left the water, a woman's hand clutched his arm; he twisted free, staggered, and plunged head foremost into the folds of a skirt whose wearer was a person of weight and sub-

stance not to be thrust aside by any lad of Steve's years.

"I've got him!" she shouted. It was a needless remark. She was holding Steve's head between her knees, and applying a practiced hand where it would do the most good. The policeman ran up, panting.

"Give him wan for me, Mrs. Shane!" he exclaimed. Mrs. Shane finished her massage, and the cop took a firm grip on Steve's arm.

"Aint ye shamed o' yerself?" he demanded, jerking the boy upright. There was a twinkle in his eye, and he winked at his female helper over the culprit's head. "Tearin' in here like a wild Injun, scarin' the women an' children half to death—particularly the women!" He winked again, and Mrs. Shane chuckled. "Come on, now!" he ordered.

HE superintended Steve's dressing and ordered him out of the park on pain of immediate commitment to jail, then turned back to the pool.

"Aint he the fine young fightin' divil!" he exclaimed. "I fair love a kid like that. 'Twas that lump o' sin, Mike Miller, put him up to it, I expect—dared him, most likely. Sure, if I find him knockin' Mike's block off, I'll be blind in wan eye and unable to see outa the other!"

But Steve did not know that those who had punished his conduct approved his character; nor was he able to find his tempter, the same lump o' sin that the wise cop had named. Mike had judged it best to vanish. Aleck had waited, and with this faithful retainer, Steve watched and hunted for hours, but to no avail. Then came an unrelished supper, and then, begging seven cents to enable him to stand treat, Steve took his henchman to a ten-cent movie. For an hour they forgot their troubles while following a deep, dark, desperate melodrama of spies and secret-service heroes; but then they had to return to the street and drab reality once more.

As they came to the corner where they must separate for the night, a phonograph which had been declaring that it wouldn't go home till something was over over there, changed suddenly to the "End of a Perfect Day;" but the boys did not notice the irony. They were feeling a shade better than at some periods through the day, but they did not know it. Steve yawned.

"Gee!" he said. "I wisht we lived where somethin' happened!"

"So do I," said Aleck. "Well, g' night!"



Fifty Cans of Opium

A quaint little episode which has to do with murder and sudden death, and smuggled opium, and a white man who ventures a battle of wits with a Chinese.

By DRIS DEMING

CHONG'S slant eyes narrowed as he studied the white man who faced him across the teakwood table in the Oriental's sumptuous quarters. Chong Kee, ex-gunman, smuggler, dealer in opium and slave-girls, had many reasons to hate—and fear—the police.

"It's a cinch, Chong," argued Cartwright. "This guy doesn't know Chinatown; and he's asked me to put him hep to some mud. He's got five thou' to invest. See? He figures on going up the river and making a clean-up."

"Fi' t'ousan' dolla'," repeated Chong in his harsh, clipped English. "Too much! One hunna' dolla'—one can. Fibty cans? No can do!"

Cartwright's unshaven jaw went out aggressively; his small eyes flashed.

"Don't give me any of that 'no can do' talk! You can do it; and you will. Now you sit pretty and listen to me:

"I'll tell Pattison how to get to your place. I'll give him a card so you'll know it's O. K. You show him the fifty cans. Let him test 'em—if he knows that much.

Then, when he pays over the coin and leaves with the hop, you go to that window and give me the high sign. Savvy?"

Chong grunted, but held silent.

"I'll be down in the alley with Minard, my side-kick," went on Cartwright. "Minard will tail Pattison until he gets far enough away from your joint that he wont suspect you are in the deal; then he'll flash his buzzer and grab him.

"Minard will claim to be a Federal prohibition agent. He will call Pattison by some other name and accuse him of having liquor in the suitcase. About that time Pattison will be wishing it was liquor—anything but opium. See? He'll be so scared of going to the pen', he'll drop the suitcase and beat it.

"There's where the fine-work comes in. Minard will pretend to chase Pattison; but of course he can't go far lugging that suitcase of opium. When he is sure Pattison is out of the neighborhood, Minard will connect with me. *And I'll bring all your opium right back to you.* Get it?"

"In return, you give me four thousand of

the money Pattison pays you. You make a thousand clear; me and Minard split the rest. What say?"

Chong's yellow face was as expressionless as a stone.

"You still in P'lice Depa'tment?" he inquired casually.

"Sure. But don't let that bother you. I aint fram'in' anything—on you."

Chong took a Chinese cigarette from a pocket of his blouse, lighted it with a steady hand.

"A' right," he concluded, without enthusiasm. "Pattison come leben o'clock. I have op'um leddy. Pattison pay fi' t'ousan' dolla'. He take my op'um. You bling my op'um back. I kip one t'ousan'. Gib you fo' t'ousan'. A' right. I sabby."

Cartwright arose. He tossed his cigarette-stub into the sand and ash of a huge brass censer that stood on the floor by the desk.

"One thing more, Chong: How will you signal me when the deal is over? Come to think of it, you'd better not show up at that window."

The Chinaman's narrowed eyes darted swiftly around the elegantly furnished room and came to rest on the heavily figured Cantonese hanging that draped the window indicated by Cartwright.

"I tell you. I leeb little light showin' at window all time. See? When Pattison pay money, Ah Sin will shut off lights. Then Ah Sin quick make 'em light again. Sabby?"

"Good enough," agreed Cartwright. "I'll watch the window."

THE door closed behind the white man. For a moment Chong stood still, listening; then he glided swiftly to the censer, bent over and grasped it by the turned edges. To all appearances the censer was a massive affair of hammered brass. The huge bowl appeared to be full of sand in which stood nine sticks of burning punk. Chong, however, lifted the bowl with surprising ease, revealing the figure of a Chinese sitting on the rug, his head bent in a listening attitude, his arms clasped around his knees.

Chong spoke now in rapid Cantonese:

"Ah Sin, did you listen sharp?"

"I heard everything," replied Ah Sin, springing to his feet like a cat. "It's a clever scheme."

Chong grunted. "It's a clever trap," he said laconically.

Ah Sin blinked, but made no reply to this.

"A foreign devil who is false to his own people will not be true to us," said the old smuggler. "Cartwright told me that he is still in the employ of the police. He lied. Detectives Cartwright and Minard were dismissed this morning for good reasons. They were caught selling opium that had been seized as evidence."

"Haie!" breathed Ah Sin in sudden alarm. "Then, of course, you will have nothing to do with this man's scheme!"

Chong's brow lowered in a black scowl. "Cartwright is a dangerous man," he said thoughtfully. "I am afraid to cross him. Also I am afraid to go on with his scheme. Whichever way I turn, I am in danger. I see no way out. However, it is written that a bamboo fence seen at a distance appears impregnable, while on closer view one may find an opening. *Tsau kom lok!*"

IT was exactly eleven o'clock by Chong's gold watch when Dan Pattison rapped on the door. Chong admitted him. Neither spoke until the door had been closed again.

Pattison, unacquainted as he was with Chinatown, nevertheless had the sure manner of the crook who plays only when he thinks he has protection. For a moment he eyed the old smuggler with an air of superiority that bordered on insolence. Then he handed Chong a card.

"Who gib you this?" queried Chong politely.

Pattison's lips curled. "Get busy and cut the talk. You see the card, don't you?"

Chong nodded his approval. He tore the card to bits and tossed them into the ash tray. Then he drew one of the hangings aside, disclosing a large wall-safe. He opened the safe and brought out a small brown suitcase.

Chong set the suitcase on the table and opened it. Inside, arranged in neat order, were fifty cans, each about twice the size of an ordinary deck of playing-cards. On each can was a label bearing Chinese characters that meant nothing to Pattison. To Chong they spelled: "No. 1, Smoking Opium, Macao."

THE white man selected three of the cans, pried up the lids and smelled the black, gummy contents. Then he dipped up a small quantity on the end of a match, heated it over the flame of another match, and held his nostrils over the white vapor.

"All right, Chinky," said Pattison. He drew out a roll of bills and began counting them.

Chong watched the count, meanwhile re-packing and closing the suitcase.

"Here is the money," said Pattison.

"Here is your op'um," said Chong.

Then—the lights went out.

There was an instant of darkness. The lights came on again.

Chong picked up the pile of bills. Pattison took the brown suitcase, and left.

The opium-dealer was putting the money in the safe when Ah Sin entered. Chong closed the safe and went quickly to the teakwood table. He opened the drawer and took out a Chinese dagger with a short but wickedly curved blade.

"Take this," he said to Ah Sin. "Be on your way quickly. And remember: if you strike a tiger and do not kill him, you become his prey!"

IN Shanghai Alley, behind a pile of old tea-boxes, two men bent over a small brown suitcase.

"Dead easy!" chuckled Minard. "Pattison was so scared I bet he is running yet. When he reads nothing of this in the papers, he'll do some tall guessing, eh?"

"Let 'em all guess!" growled Cartwright. "Tonight we clean up and blow for good. Get that other package open!"

"Here it is," said Minard.

"Good!" Cartwright chuckled. "Now, out of the little brown bag comes Chong's fifty cans of good opium. Into the little brown bag goes our fifty opium-cans filled with axle-grease with a thin layer of opium on top."

Minard laughed.

"I'll take the suitcase with the fifty cans of grease up to Chong," went on Cartwright. "I'll collect the four thousand dollars. Then I'll come right back here. Four thousand dollars, and fifty cans of opium—not so bad for a night's work, eh?"

"Not so bad," agreed Minard, "—if Chong doesn't get wise."

"Chong's a fool," said Cartwright. "He

might open a can, look at it, smell it; but he wont bother to dig into it. The cans look all alike, so he wont suspect. It'll be bad for his health if he does. Get me?"

"I get you," replied Minard. He took the package Cartwright gave him, and turned to leave.

Behind him, he heard a sudden startled gasp. He whirled. A shadowy figure had leaped upon Cartwright. A naked blade, short but wickedly curved, caught the faint gleam of the street-lamp at the end of the alley, glittered for an instant, then vanished. There was the dull sound of a blow, a hideous, gurgling moan. Then—silence.

Minard fled.

"**S**O that was it!" Chong rumbled into the mouthpiece of his long-stemmed pipe. "They robbed Pattison, and intended to swindle me with cans of axle-grease!"

"Sir, that is correct!" cried Ah Sin, greatly agitated. "And now I must tell you how wretchedly I have failed. I brought you only the brown suitcase with the fifty cans of grease. Minard escaped with your fifty cans of opium!"

"*Haie!*" cried Chong. "You were very careless!"

"I did my best, sir. I had no chance at Minard. He got away while I was—ah—taking care of Cartwright."

"Will Cartwright bother us any more?"

"The dead do not trouble the living," said Ah Sin solemnly.

"Then," said Chong, "you have done well enough. As for Minard—well, this afternoon when I had smoked my four pipes of opium I saw a way out of Cartwright's trap. I made ready. When you turned off the lights to signal Cartwright, I switched my suitcase of opium for another exactly like it that I had ready on that stool beneath the table.

"So, after all, it is very funny. My opium is still there in the safe. I have the five thousand dollars. Cartwright will bother us no more. And Minard is running away with fifty opium-cans *full of black molasses!*"

"The Riddle of the Rangeland," a fine novelette of adventure in the West, written by Forbes Parkhill, a real Westerner, will be a feature of our forthcoming February issue. Don't fail to read it.



The Plymouth Express Affair

"The little gray cells," so often referred to by the great detective Hercule Poirot, certainly get in their fine-work in this intriguing mystery story by an exceptionally talented writer.

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

ALEC SIMPSON, R. N., stepped from the platform at Newton Abbot into a first-class compartment of the Plymouth Express. A porter followed him with a heavy suitcase. He was about to swing it up to the rack, but the young sailor stopped him.

"No—leave it on the seat. I'll put it up later. Here you are."

"Thank you, sir." The porter, generously tipped, withdrew.

Doors banged; a stentorian voice shouted: "Plymouth only. Change for Torquay. Plymouth next stop." Then a whistle blew, and the train drew slowly out of the station.

Lieutenant Simpson had the carriage to himself. The December air was chilly, and he pulled up the window. Then he sniffed vaguely, and frowned. What a smell there was! Reminded him of that time in hospital, and the operation on his leg. Yes, chloroform; that was it!

He let the window down again, changing his seat to one with its back to the engine. He pulled a pipe out of his pocket and lit

it. For a little time he sat inactive, looking out into the night and smoking.

At last he roused himself, and opening the suitcase, took out some papers and magazines, then closed the suitcase again and endeavored to shove it under the opposite seat—without success. Some hidden obstacle resisted it. He shoved harder with rising impatience, but it still stuck out half-way into the carriage.

"Why the devil wont it go in?" he muttered, and hauling it out completely, he stooped down and peered under the seat.

A moment later a cry rang out into the night, and the great train came to an unwilling halt in obedience to the imperative jerking of the communication-cord.

"MON AMI," said Poirot. "You have, I know, been deeply interested in this mystery of the Plymouth Express. Read this."

I picked up the note he flicked across the table to me. It was brief and to the point.

Dear Sir:

I shall be obliged if you will call upon me at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,

EBENEZER HALLIDAY.

The connection was not clear to my mind, and I looked inquiringly at Poirot. For answer he took up the newspaper and read aloud:

"A sensational discovery was made last night. A young naval officer returning to Plymouth found under the seat of his compartment, the body of a woman, stabbed through the heart. The officer at once pulled the communication-cord, and the train was brought to a standstill. The woman who was about thirty years of age, and richly dressed, has not yet been identified."

"And later we have this: 'The woman found dead in the Plymouth Express has been identified as the Honorable Mrs. Rupert Carrington.' You see now, my friend? Or if you do not, I will add this. Mrs. Rupert Carrington was, before her marriage, Flossie Halliday, daughter of old man Halliday, the steel king of America."

"And he has sent for you? Splendid!"

"I did him a little service in the past—an affair of bearer bonds. And once, when I was in Paris for a royal visit, I had Mademoiselle Flossie pointed out to me. *La jolie petite pensionnaire!* She had the *jolie dot* too! It caused trouble. She nearly made a bad affair."

"How was that?"

"A certain Count de la Rochefour. *Un bien mauvais sujet!* A bad hat, as you would say. An adventurer pure and simple, who knew how to appeal to a romantic young girl. Luckily her father got wind of it in time. He took her back to America in haste. I heard of her marriage some years later, but I know nothing of her husband."

"H'm," I said. "The Honorable Rupert Carrington is no beauty, by all accounts. He'd pretty well run through his own money on the turf, and I should imagine old man Halliday's dollars came along in the nick of time. I should say that for a good-looking, well-mannered, utterly unscrupulous young scoundrel, it would be hard to find his match!"

"Ah, the poor little lady! *Elle n'est pas bien tombée!*"

"I fancy he made it pretty obvious at once that it was her money, and not she, that had attracted him. I believe they drifted apart almost at once. I have heard

rumors lately that there was to be a definite legal separation."

"Old man Halliday is no fool. He would tie up her money pretty tight."

"I dare say. Anyway, I know as a fact that the Honorable Rupert is said to be extremely hard up."

"Ah-ha! I wonder—"

"You wonder what?"

"My good friend, do not jump down my throat like that. You are interested, I see. Supposing you accompany me to see Mr. Halliday. There is a taxi stand at the corner."

A VERY few minutes sufficed to whirl us to the superb house in Park Lane rented by the American magnate. We were shown into the library, and almost immediately we were joined by a large, stout man, with piercing eyes and an aggressive chin.

"M. Poirot?" said Mr. Halliday. "I guess I don't need to tell you what I want you for. You've read the papers, and I'm never one to let the grass grow under my feet. I happened to hear you were in London, and I remembered the good work you did over those bonds. Never forget a name. I've got the pick of Scotland Yard, but I'll have my own man as well. Money no object. All the dollars were made for my little girl—and now she's gone, I'll spend my last cent to catch the damned scoundrel that did it! See? So it's up to you to deliver the goods."

Poirot bowed.

"I accept, monsieur, all the more willingly that I saw your daughter in Paris several times. And now I will ask you to tell me the circumstances of her journey to Plymouth and any other details that seem to you to bear upon the case."

"Well, to begin with," responded Halliday, "she wasn't going to Plymouth. She was going to join a house-party at Avonmead Court, the Duchess of Swansea's place. She left London by the twelve-fourteen from Paddington, arriving at Bristol (where she had to change) at two-fifty. The principal Plymouth expresses, of course, run via Westbury, and do not go near Bristol at all. The twelve-fourteen does a nonstop run to Bristol, afterward stopping at Weston, Taunton, Exeter and Newton Abbot. My daughter traveled alone in her carriage, which was reserved as far as Bristol, her maid being in a third-class carriage in the next coach."

POIROT nodded, and Mr. Halliday went on: "The party at Avonmead Court was to be a very gay one, with several balls, and in consequence my daughter had with her nearly all her jewels—amounting in value perhaps, to about a hundred thousand dollars."

"*Un moment,*" interrupted Poirot. "Who had charge of the jewels? Your daughter, or the maid?"

"My daughter always took charge of them herself, carrying them in a small blue morocco case."

"Continue, monsieur."

"At Bristol the maid, Jane Mason, collected her mistress' dressing-bag and wraps, which were with her, and came to the door of Flossie's compartment. To her intense surprise, my daughter told her that she was not getting out at Bristol, but was going on farther. She directed Mason to get out the luggage and put it in the cloak-room. She could have tea in the refreshment-room, but she was to wait at the station for her mistress, who would return to Bristol by an up-train in the course of the afternoon. The maid, although very much astonished, did as she was told. She put the luggage in the cloak-room and had some tea. But up-train after up-train came in, and her mistress did not appear. After the arrival of the last train, she left the luggage where it was, and went to a hotel near the station for the night. This morning she read of the tragedy, and returned to town by the first available train."

"Is there nothing to account for your daughter's sudden change of plan?"

"Well, there is this: According to Jane Mason, at Bristol, Flossie was no longer alone in her carriage. There was a man in it who stood looking out of the farther window so that she could not see his face."

"The train was a corridor one, of course?"

"Yes."

"Which side was the corridor?"

"On the platform side. My daughter was standing in the corridor as she talked to Mason."

"And there is no doubt in your mind—excuse me!" He got up, and carefully straightened the inkstand which was a little askew. "*Je vous demande pardon,*" he continued, reseating himself. "It affects my nerves to see anything crooked. Strange, is it not? I was saying, monsieur, that there is no doubt in your mind, as to this probably unexpected meeting being the

cause of your daughter's sudden change of plan?"

"It seems the only reasonable supposition."

"You have no idea as to who the gentleman in question might be?"

The millionaire hesitated for a moment, and then replied.

"No—I do not know at all."

"Now—as to the discovery of the body?"

"It was discovered by a young naval officer who at once gave the alarm. There was a doctor on the train. He examined the body. She had been first chloroformed, and then stabbed. He gave it as his opinion that she had been dead about four hours, so it must have been done not long after leaving Bristol. —Probably between there and Weston, possibly between Weston and Taunton."

"And the jewel-case?"

"The jewel-case, M. Poirot, was missing."

"One thing more, monsieur. Your daughter's fortune—to whom does it pass at her death?"

"Flossie made a will soon after her marriage, leaving everything to her husband." He hesitated for a minute, and then went on: "I may as well tell you, Monsieur Poirot, that I regard my son-in-law as an unprincipled scoundrel, and that, by my advice, my daughter was on the eve of freeing herself from him by legal means—no difficult matter. I settled her money upon her in such a way that he could not touch it during her lifetime, but although they have lived entirely apart for some years, she has frequently acceded to his demands for money, rather than face an open scandal. However, I was determined to put an end to this, and at last Flossie agreed, and my lawyers were instructed to take proceedings."

"And where is Monsieur Carrington?"

"In town. I believe he was away in the country yesterday, but he returned last night."

Poirot considered a little while. Then he said: "I think that is all, monsieur."

"You would like to see the maid, Jane Mason?"

"If you please."

HALLIDAY rang the bell, and gave a short order to the footman. A few minutes later Jane Mason entered the room, a respectable, hard-featured woman, as emotionless in the face of tragedy as only a good servant can be.

"You will permit me to put a few questions? Your mistress, she was quite as usual before starting yesterday morning? Not excited or flurried?"

"Oh, no sir!"

"But at Bristol she was quite different?"

"Yes sir, regular upset—so nervous she didn't seem to know what she was saying."

"What did she say exactly?"

"Well sir, as near as I can remember, she said: 'Mason, I've got to alter my plans. Something has happened—I mean, I'm not getting out here after all. I must go on. Get out the luggage and put it in the cloak-room; then have some tea, and wait for me in the station.'

"'Wait for you here, ma'am?' I asked.

"'Yes, yes. Don't leave the station. I shall return by a later train. I don't know when. It mayn't be until quite late.'

"'Very well, ma'am,' I says. It wasn't my place to ask questions, but I thought it very strange."

"It was unlike your mistress, eh?"

"Very unlike her, sir."

"What did you think?"

"Well sir, I thought it was to do with the gentleman in the carriage. She didn't speak to him, but she turned round once or twice as though to ask him if she was doing right."

"But you didn't see the gentleman's face?"

"No sir; he stood with his back to me all the time."

"Can you describe him at all?"

"He had on a light fawn overcoat, and a traveling cap. He was tall and slender, like, and the back of his head was dark."

"You didn't know him?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so, sir."

"It was not your master, Mr. Carrington, by any chance?"

Mason looked rather startled.

"Oh! I don't think so, sir!"

"But you are not *sure*?"

"It was about the master's build, sir—but I never thought of it being him. We so seldom saw him. I couldn't say it *wasn't* him!"

Poirot picked up a pin from the carpet, and frowned at it severely; then he continued: "Would it be possible for the man to have entered the train at Bristol before you reached the carriage?"

Mason considered.

"Yes sir, I think it would. My compartment was very crowded, and it was some minutes before I could get out—and

then there was a very large crowd on the platform, and that delayed me too. But he'd only have had a minute or two to speak to the mistress, that way. I took it for granted that he'd come along the corridor."

"That is more probable, certainly."

He paused, still frowning.

"You know how the mistress was dressed, sir?"

"The papers give a few details, but I would like you to confirm them."

"She was wearing a white fox fur toque, sir, with a white spotted veil, and a blue frieze coat and skirt—the shade of blue they call electric."

"H'm, rather striking."

"Yes," remarked Halliday. "Inspector Japp is in hopes that that may help us to fix the spot where the crime took place. Anyone who saw her would remember her."

"*Précisément!* —Thank you, mademoiselle." The maid left the room.

"Well!" Poirot got up briskly. "That is all I can do here—except, monsieur, that I would ask you to tell me everything—but *everything!*"

"I have done so."

"You are sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. I must decline the case."

"Why?"

"Because you have not been frank with me."

"I assure you—"

"No, you are keeping something back."

THERE was a moment's pause, and then Halliday drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to my friend.

"I guess that's what you're after, Monsieur Poirot—though how you know about it fairly gets my goat!"

Poirot smiled, and unfolded the paper. It was a letter written in thin sloping handwriting. Poirot read it aloud.

"Chère Madame:

"'It is with infinite pleasure that I look forward to the felicity of meeting you again. After your so amiable reply to my letter, I can hardly restrain my impatience. I have never forgotten those days in Paris. It is most cruel that you should be leaving London tomorrow. However, before very long, and perhaps sooner than you think, I shall have the joy of beholding once more the lady whose image has ever reigned supreme in my heart.

"Believe, chère madame, all the assurances of my most devoted and unaltered sentiments—

"Armand de la Rochefour."

Poirot handed the letter back to Halliday with a bow.

"I fancy, monsieur, that you did not know that your daughter intended renewing her acquaintance with the Count de la Rochefour?"

"It came as a thunderbolt to me! I found this letter in my daughter's handbag. As you probably know, Monsieur Poirot, this so-called count is an adventurer of the worst type."

Poirot nodded.

"But what I want to know is how you knew of the existence of this letter?"

My friend smiled. "Monsieur, I did not. But to track footmarks, and recognize cigarette-ash is not sufficient for a detective. He must also be a good psychologist! I knew that you disliked and mistrusted your son-in-law. He benefits by your daughter's death; the maid's description of the mysterious man bears a sufficient resemblance to him. Yet you are not keen on his track! Why? Surely because your suspicions lie in another direction. Therefore you were keeping something back."

"You're right, Monsieur Poirot. I was sure of Rupert's guilt until I found this letter. It unsettled me horribly."

"Yes. The Count says: 'Before very long, and perhaps sooner than you think.' Obviously he would not want to wait until you should get wind of his reappearance. Was it he who traveled down from London by the twelve-fourteen, and came along the corridor to your daughter's compartment? The Count de la Rochefour is also, if I remember rightly, tall and dark!"

The millionaire nodded.

"Well, monsieur, I will wish you good day. Scotland Yard, has, I presume, a list of the jewels?"

"Yes, I believe Inspector Japp is here now if you would like to see him."

JAPP was an old friend of ours, and greeted Poirot with a sort of affectionate contempt.

"And how are you, monsieur? No bad feeling between us, though we *have* got our different ways of looking at things. How are the 'little gray cells,' eh? Going strong?"

Poirot beamed upon him. "They function, my good Japp; assuredly they do!"

"Then that's all right. Think it was the Honorable Rupert, or a crook? We're keeping an eye on all the regular places, of course. We shall know if the shiners are disposed of, and of course whoever did it isn't going to keep them to admire their sparkle. Not likely! I'm trying to find out where Rupert Carrington was yesterday. Seems a bit of a mystery about it. I've got a man watching him."

"A great precaution, but perhaps a day late," suggested Poirot gently.

"You always will have your joke, Monsieur Poirot. Well, I'm off to Paddington. Bristol, Weston, Taunton, that's my beat. So long."

"You will come round and see me this evening, and tell me the result?"

"Sure thing, if I'm back."

"That good Inspector believes in matter in motion," murmured Poirot as our friend departed. "He travels; he measures footprints; he collects mud and cigarette-ash! He is extremely busy! He is zealous beyond words! And if I mentioned psychology to him, do you know what he would do, my friend? He would smile! He would say to himself: 'Poor old Poirot! He ages! He grows senile!' Japp is the 'younger generation knocking on the door.' And *ma foi!* They are so busy knocking that they do not notice that the door is open!"

"And what are you going to do?"

"As we have *carte blanche*, I shall expend threepence in ringing up the Ritz—where you may have noticed our Count is staying. After that, as my feet are a little damp, and I have sneezed twice, I shall return to my rooms and make myself a *tisano* over the spirit lamp!"

I DID not see Poirot again until the following morning. I found him placidly finishing his breakfast.

"Well?" I inquired eagerly. "What has happened?"

"Nothing."

"But Japp?"

"I have not seen him."

"The Count?"

"He left the Ritz the day before yesterday."

"The day of the murder?"

"Yes."

"Then that settles it! Rupert Carrington is cleared."

"Because the Count de la Rochefour has left the Ritz? You go too fast, my friend."

"Anyway, he must be followed, arrested! But what could be his motive?"

"One hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewelry is a very good motive for anyone. No, the question to my mind is: why kill her? Why not simply steal the jewels? She would not prosecute."

"Why not?"

"Because she is a woman, *mon ami*. She once loved this man. Therefore she would suffer her loss in silence. And the Count, who is an extremely good psychologist where women are concerned,—hence his successes,—would know that perfectly well! On the other hand, if Rupert Carrington killed her, why take the jewels, which would incriminate him fatally?"

"As a blind."

"Perhaps you are right, my friend. Ah, here is Japp! I recognize his knock."

The Inspector was beaming good-humoredly.

"Morning, Poirot. Only just got back. I've done some good work! And you?"

"Me, I have arranged my ideas," replied Poirot placidly.

Japp laughed heartily.

"Old chap's getting on in years," he observed beneath his breath to me. "That wont do for us young folk," he said aloud.

"*Quel dommage?*" Poirot inquired.

"Well, do you want to hear what I've done?"

"You permit me to make a guess? You have found the knife with which the crime was committed by the side of the line between Weston and Taunton, and you have interviewed the paper-boy who spoke to Mrs. Carrington at Weston!"

JAPP'S jaw fell. "How on earth did you know? Don't tell me it was those almighty 'little gray cells' of yours!"

"I am glad you admit for once that they are *all mighty!* Tell me, did she give the paper-boy a shilling for himself?"

"No, it was half a crown!" Japp recovered his temper and grinned. "Pretty extravagant, these rich Americans!"

"And in consequence the boy did not forget her?"

"Not he. Half-crowns don't come his way every day. She hailed him and bought two magazines. One had a picture of a girl in blue on the cover. 'That'll match me,' she said. Oh! he remembered her perfectly. Well, that was enough for me. By the doctor's evidence, the crime *must* have been committed before Taunton. I guessed

they'd throw the knife away at once, and I walked down the line looking for it; and sure enough, there it was. I made inquiries at Taunton about our man, but of course it's a big station, and it wasn't likely they'd notice him. He probably got back to London by a later train."

Poirot nodded. "Very likely."

"But I found another bit of news when I got back. They're passing the jewels, all right! That large emerald was pawned last night—by one of the regular lot. Who do you think it was?"

"I don't know—except that he was a short man."

Japp stared. "Well, you're right there. He's short enough. It was Red Narky."

"Who on earth is Red Narky?" I asked.

"A particularly sharp jewel-thief, sir. And not one to stick at murder. Usually works with a woman—Gracie Kidd; but she doesn't seem to be in it this time—unless she's got off to Holland with the rest of the swag."

"You've arrested Narky?"

"Sure thing. But mind you, it's the other man we want—the man who went down with Mrs. Carrington in the train. He was the one who planned the job, right enough. But Narky wont squeal on a pal."

I noticed that Poirot's eyes had become very green.

"I think," he said gently, "that I can find Narky's pal for you, all right."

"One of your little ideas, eh?" Japp eyed Poirot sharply. "Wonderful how you manage to deliver the goods sometimes, at your age and all. Devil's own luck, of course."

"Perhaps, perhaps," murmured my friend. "Hastings, my hat. And the brush. So! My galoshes if it still rains! We must not undo the good work of that *tisano*. Au revoir, Japp!"

"Good luck to you, Poirot."

Poirot hailed the first taxi we met, and directed the driver to Park Lane.

WHEN we drew up before Halliday's house, he skipped out nimbly, paid the driver and rang the bell. To the footman who opened the door he made a request in a low voice, and we were immediately taken upstairs. We went up to the top of the house, and were shown into a small neat bedroom.

Poirot's eyes roved round the room, and fastened themselves on a small black trunk. He knelt in front of it, scrutinized the

labels on it, and took a small twist of wire from his pocket.

"Ask Mr. Halliday if he will be so kind as to mount to me here," he said over his shoulder to the footman.

(It is suggested that the reader pause in his perusal of the story at this point, make his own solution of the mystery—and then see how close he comes to that of the author.—The Editors.)

The man departed, and Poirot gently coaxed the lock of the trunk with a practiced hand. In a few minutes the lock gave, and he raised the lid of the trunk. Swiftly he began rummaging among the clothes it contained, flinging them out on the floor.

There was a heavy step on the stairs, and Halliday entered the room.

"What in hell are you doing here?" he demanded, staring.

"I was looking, monsieur, for *this*." Poirot withdrew from the trunk a coat and skirt of bright blue frieze, and a small toque of white fox fur.

"What are you doing with my trunk?" I turned to see that the maid, Jane Mason, had just entered the room.

"If you will just shut the door, Hastings. Thank you. Yes, and stand with your back against it. Now, Mr. Halliday, let me introduce you to Gracie Kidd, otherwise Jane Mason, who will shortly rejoin her accomplice, Red Narky, under the kind escort of Japp."

"It was of the most simple." Poirot waved a deprecating hand, then helped himself to more caviare. It is not every day that one lunches with a millionaire.

"It was the maid's insistence on the clothes that her mistress was wearing that first struck me. Why was she so anxious that our attention should be directed to them? I reflected that we had only the maid's word for the mysterious man in the carriage at Bristol. As far as the doctor's evidence went, Mrs. Carrington might easily have been murdered *before* reaching Bristol. But if so, then the maid must be an accomplice. And if she were an accomplice, she would not wish this point to rest on her evidence alone. The clothes Mrs. Carrington was wearing were of a striking nature. A maid usually has a good deal of

choice as to what her mistress shall wear. Now if, after Bristol, anyone saw a lady in a bright blue coat and skirt, and a fur toque, he will be quite ready to swear he has seen Mrs. Carrington.

"I began to reconstruct. The maid would provide herself with duplicate clothes. She and her accomplice chloroformed and stabbed Mrs. Carrington between London and Bristol, probably taking advantage of a tunnel. Her body is rolled under the seat; the maid takes her place. At Weston she must make herself noticed. How? In all probability, a newspaper-boy will be selected. She will insure his remembering her by giving him a large tip. She also drew his attention to the color of her dress by a remark about one of the magazines. After leaving Weston, she throws the knife out of the window to mark the place where the crime presumably occurred, and changes her clothes, or buttons a long mackintosh over them. At Taunton she leaves the train and returns to Bristol as soon as possible, where her accomplice has duly left the luggage in the cloak-room. He hands over the ticket and himself returns to London. She waits on the platform, carrying out her rôle, goes to a hotel for the night and returns to town in the morning exactly as she said.

"When Japp returned from his expedition, he confirmed all my deductions. He also told me that a well-known crook was passing the jewels. I knew that whoever it was would be the exact opposite of the man Jane Mason described. When I heard that it was Red Narky, who always worked with Gracie Kidd—well, I knew just where to find her."

"And the Count?"

"The more I thought of it, the more I was convinced that he had nothing to do with it. That gentleman is much too careful of his own skin to risk murder. It would be out of keeping with his character."

"Well, Monsieur Poirot," said Halliday. "I owe you a big debt. And the check I write after lunch went go near to settling it."

Poirot smiled modestly, and murmured to me: "The good Japp, he shall get the official credit, all right, but though he has got his Gracie Kidd, I think that I, as the Americans say, have got his goat!"

"The Adventure of the Western Star," another of Agatha Christie's clever stories of the astute Hercule Poirot and his interesting problems, will appear in our forthcoming February issue. Don't miss it.



Deep-Water Men

It's not easy to keep the secret of a rich mine when the sea-wolves are on one's trail—as witness this thrilling story, "On the Trail of a Platinum Mine"—one of the gifted Mr. Zandt's best.

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

WHEN the Australian cargo-boat *Wallacoomba* berthed at a pier in San Francisco harbor, two deckhands who had shipped for the trip up from Balboa drew their pay and went ashore—seedy in appearance, with nothing but their small earnings between them and the beach. They had stowed themselves in the hold of a much larger boat in Sydney harbor, with the intention of spying upon her activities and locating an immensely rich platinum lode—ore from which the steamer had brought to Sydney for sale. But they had been discovered and transhipped, at sea, to a wool-boat which had cleared for London short-handed—her master guaranteeing that he'd work them on his craft as far as that port, at least. Having other views, however, Jones and Wohlberg had jumped overboard just off the Pacific entrance to the Canal, managed to swim ashore, picked up an odd job or two which fed them for a week, and then shipped north after reading a notice in the maritime news that the steamer *Wyano-*

mah, upon which they originally stowed themselves, had arrived at San Diego (when it was generally supposed that she was bound to some port several thousand miles from there), and would load for an Eastern voyage in San Francisco.

Wohlberg, an island pearler and sometime pirate, was the more reckless of the two—the tougher fighter in any sort of a mix-up. But Jones, who had been a Broken Hill miner before going in for a course of engineering study, was the more farsighted, had much the shrewder wits. It was he who decided upon their next move as they walked up toward Market Street.

"We've less than eighty dollars between us—aye. And we must eat—aye. But there'll be a man in this town who'll pay for what we can tell him—give us a share of the pickings if there are any—provided we've luck in getting to him. That'll be the diffic'ly! He's by way of being a swell—expensive offices, great house and estate in the country—clubs, society, all that. We'll never reach him as we look

now! So we'll just blow in the most of our tin on clothes, shaves, hair-trimming and visiting-cards. I'll do the passing upon everything, myself—because I've seen the time when I knew what was what. Are you on?"

A FEW hours later the pair stepped into one of the newer office-buildings on Market Street and were taken up to a luxuriously furnished suite of offices on the twelfth floor, from the windows of which there was an extensive view of the Bay. Had any of their former shipmates seen them—or even the master himself—recognition would have been almost impossible. Two men of different breeding may each invest thirty dollars in clothes and haberdashery with amazingly opposite results. It isn't the cost of his clothes which stamps a man of the world with a compelling personality, but their selection, and the way in which they are worn. Aside from this instinctive knowledge, Jones and Wohlberg had rubbed against the sharp edges of life enough to give them poise—the impression of being at their ease in almost any combination of circumstances. For all of these reasons, the pair of speculators were presently admitted to a corner room of the suite, where Mr. Corbelston, an active man of fifty with heavy features and iron-gray hair, sat behind a large flat-topped desk. His whole appearance indicated power. The closeness with which his eyes were set together, and the grim lines of his mouth, spoke of power unscrupulously used. The man was in demand at clubs, social functions, in business circles—as a personage. On the whole, he was rather liked. But there was a reserve opinion that he could be something more than unpleasant if he had occasion to go after anyone in earnest. Nobody knew whether he had one million or ten—but his credit was good for something over the one, at least, and the way he got it was of no consequence.

CORBELSTON was holding Jones' card in his hand—looking reflectively out of the window as they came in. With a nod, he indicated a couple of chairs near the end of his desk—not intimately so, but near enough for confidential talk.

"I remember you, Jones—perfectly. You did me a good turn over there in Australia—though I guess you didn't know how good. Well, I gave what you asked—we considered the incident closed. But I've

thought more than once that if you ever turned up again, I'd hand you a check for a couple of thousand—just so you couldn't feel that I had a little too much the best of it—would be disposed to make another deal if things shaped up that way. I'll give you that check, now."

"Not on the old account, Mr. Corbelston! That was settled in full, at the time. I knew what you'd get out of it and was entirely satisfied—because I fancied it might get me an interview with you upon some occasion when, otherwise, I'd never get by your office people, or the butler in your house. I'm here, with Wohlberg, to sketch the facts of a certain situation as we know them—and see if you're interested."

"Shoot!"

"Two or three months ago a nine-thousand-ton cargo-boat came into a certain port—in ballast, judging by her freeboard—actually, with a part-cargo of the richest platinum-bearing matrix-ore ever discovered. The charterer, who might or might not have been the mine-operator, didn't wish it reduced for owner's account. Would listen to no proposition but purchase of that ore outright as it lay in the hold. Finally sold it and cleaned up more than six hundred thousand dollars for what there was on board. The boat was then cleared for Brisbane in ballast—with some talk of running over to Auckland for balance of cargo. Instead of that, she turns up in one of your Pacific ports. The smelting comp'ny, of course, put men of their own on her track—cabled their agents in various ports. Wohlberg and I got aboard and stowed ourselves in her Number Two, but the master discovered us—we were transferred at sea to a wool-boat, London-bound. Jumped overboard at Balboa—shipped on the first boat coming this way—paid off on the pier, this morning. You see, that charterer refused to give any information whatever as to the location of the mine or who is operating it. Now—what's the natural inference—out in Eastern waters?"

"M-w-e-l-l—I'd say either the mine is so far from civilization that the present operator knows he can't hold it against an attack in force—or else he may have a land-title to the ground which doesn't cover mining-rights of any description. In the last case, he's between two fires—risk of confiscation by the parties or the Government from whom he purchased, and the

chance of being wiped out by some expedition with men enough to do it when there's no warship within call."

"In either case, that platinum mine—a few thousand tons from it selling for nearly three-quarters of a million—belongs to whoever can take and hold it. Eh?"

"Oh—tut-tut! That's robbery!"

"Take some proving to make it so—would it not?"

"H-m-m! Jones, I think one reason why you interest me is your habit of eliminating the nonessentials and getting down to bed facts! Well—suppose an expedition did locate and take possession of that mine? It would be the word of the well-equipped, well-manned operating company against a weak claimant, as far as the legal status went. But in getting possession, you might unfortunately kill the previous operator—possibly his whole force—eh? A very serious offense—not?"

"Oh, that's putting such a contingency in its worst light! Any comp'ny is permitted by law to protect its property against attack—protect the lives of its operating force! Of course, if a handful of soreheads choose to make trouble while we are peaceably operating our mine, and get shot while doing it, no court is going to blame us for acting in self-defense—particularly if none of the other party is left alive to tell some cock-and-bull story about previous ownership. What?"

Corbelston threw back his head and laughed. He was just that cold-blooded, himself—though with a deceiving veneer which made him appear a gentleman. With no conscientious scruples to hold him back or trip him up, it is difficult to keep a person of that sort from accumulating what doesn't belong to him, even to the fullness thereof—and laughing at the helpless victims. As a rule, he's too smart to be caught actually outside the law—and if he is caught, he knows exactly what a hundred thousand or so will do by way of getting him loose again. He cast another appraising glance over the two men; then he asked:

"You haven't a sample of that ore with you, I suppose? It must have been almost impossible to hang on to it, with all you've been through!"

"Worth giving some thought to, none the less! Without a sample, we'd have difficulty in gettin' anyone int'rested. I had this in a belt, under my shirt—fancy I've not lost a grain of it. You'll have it

analyzed, of course—but return to me as much as possible of it."

"Hmph! I've a mineralogist of my own, as it happens—need him in various deals! You can bring your stuff along when we go to see him, presently—stand by and watch until he's through with his blow-pipe testing. Is either of you a navigator?"

"Wohlberg holds a master's ticket for sail and a mate's for steam. I'm both a mechanical and a mining engineer."

"Then there's no need of letting in any of those shell-backs alongshore to split profits with us and blab when they're drunk! You two command the expedition—if your stuff tests out as you say. I'll give each of you a quarter-share in anything we get, and five thousand for immediate expenses. You haven't given me any workable details yet—description of ship, port, charterer, smelting company. But I expect you to do that when you get the ten thousand. Then I'll decide whether to stop there, or whether there's a gambling chance in really going after that stuff. Come along! We'll see the mineralogist first—then have dinner and block out some plan of action."

THREE days later Miss Avery was putting her cabin in order for a voyage across the Pacific in the nine-thousand-ton cargo-boat *Wyonomah*—Joseph Allen, master—which had been loading flour and heavy-case goods for Manila. While she was arranging some of her recent purchases, Allen came in—bolting the door after him from mere force of habit.

"Going ashore again this afternoon, Claire?"

"Yes. I want to get a few more things before we leave. You'll clear tomorrow, will you?"

"Well—we'll have everything in before breakfast—there's no reason why we shouldn't, though Cap'n Jennings has been nosing around California Street to see if he can pick up anything we should guard against, and it might be to our advantage if we waited a day longer. Of course he has no idea who is really chartering his boat—back of you; and he doesn't give a darn—says your word and your father's were always as good as your bond. But he knows all about the stuff we took down to Sydney—knows we'll run more cargoes of it if we get the chance, and would like nothing better than to come along as passenger and watch us play the game. I was

almost tempted to invite him—but the Rajah might object, and he can help us more by staying here in Frisco and being honestly ignorant of what we're doing. What do you think, Claire? Is anyone after us right now—or have we bluffed everybody with our regular ship's business since we cleared from Sydney?"

"That depends a whole lot upon how much gossip there was around Darling Harbor when we left. That president of the smelting company is a pretty hard-boiled proposition—there isn't a doubt that he cabled his agents in more than one port to keep track of us, but they'd hesitate about going very far without plainer orders than he'd give by cable. And I don't think those stowaways had any connection with him—"

"In spite of the fact that they got aboard of us from one of the company's ore-barges?"

"They could easily have gotten themselves taken on as extra shovelers—and Manners is too smart to attempt anything as likely to point suspicion directly at him when we found them, which we were almost certain to do. He wants more of that ore—it paid him a frightful profit!"

"Then there *was* knowledge going about Sydney as to what sort of stuff we brought there!"

"Enough to put those two men aboard of us, anyhow—but they might have stumbled upon it accidentally, and had good reason to keep their mouths shut. They're in London by now—can't get here before we leave—"

"It would seem not—unless they got loose, somewhere along the Canal."

"I've been thinking of that. We'll overhaul the boat pretty thoroughly when we're past the Farralones. If we don't find anybody except our own crew aboard, I don't see how they can interfere with us much—short of catching us at the Island by sheer accident."

"You can't be sure of anything in this sort of game—except that our unknown adversary is working just as much in the dark as we are—but is not going to sleep on the job. Well—I'll clear her by noon. You'll be aboard either tonight or soon after breakfast, I suppose? Cap'n Jennings says he's coming down to get better acquainted with you before we pull out—the old boy seems to have fallen for you pretty hard—says it took man-size nerve to put through that deal in Sydney."

WITH all their caution and forethought, it had not occurred to either of them that anybody could have an object in molesting one or the other in a port where their business of securing cargo for their boat at more or less profitable freights was so perfectly obvious. The *Wyanomah* was loading a full cargo of bona-fide merchandise, and there wasn't an extra displacement-ton in which she could have carried anything else if her charterer had wished to. So Miss Avery took a jitney up to Market Street and made purchases in a couple of stores where she was known by name—then went to see an acquaintance in one of the office-buildings, remaining for over an hour.

When she came out upon the sidewalk, a neatly uniformed chauffeur stepped across from an expensive car at the curb, touched his cap, asked if she were not "Miss Avery"—and handed her a note in a stylish envelope, explaining that he had traced her to the last shop in which she had made a purchase and that one of the clerks had pointed her out to him just as she entered the office-building. He had waited, there, for her to come out again.

The man and the car had every appearance of quiet respectability. After glancing over them a second time, she opened the envelope and read the note. The paper was rich and creamy, with the name of a country estate engraved at the top.

MY DEAR MISS AVERY:

Very much to my regret, my chauffeur was unfortunate enough to run down Captain Joseph Allen of the Steamer *Wyanomah* at a crossing, when he was coming up from his pier. He was unconscious when we picked him up—but, stopping for a doctor on the way, we took him out to my home a few miles south of the city, and he was able to speak by the time we reached there. After examining him, the doctor thinks a fractured leg and bruises about the body are the worst of his injuries—hopes to have him out again within a month, if nothing else develops.

But his recovery will be retarded if he has anything to worry about—and he began asking, at once, that you be sent for, as there are a number of matters which you must handle in his absence. As I understand it, his ship was to leave tomorrow and he seems anxious to have her go even if he has to re-join her later in some other port. I'm not familiar with the shipping business, but I suppose there are expenses which run up against a ship if she remains in port after her cargo is in, ready to leave. The doctor used an anesthetic while setting the leg, and I'm sending my chauffeur at once to see if he can't trace you and bring you out here by the time Captain Allen is able to talk again.

Respectfully,
JAMES HARDING COPELY, II.

On the face of it, there was nothing suspicious about the note. The name seemed vaguely familiar to her as that of a rich society man, about thirty-five, who lived in one of the show-places of the suburbs and whose grandfather had been a "Forty-niner" from Boston. But just to make sure of this, she went back into the lobby of the office-building and looked him up in the suburban telephone-book. Name and address appeared to correspond, perfectly. Then—just for assurance which seemed really needless—she called up the *Wyonomah* and got Harry Bradford, the mate, on the wire. He said the shipmaster had gone up the pier within ten minutes after she left—intending to dine at one of the clubs after attending to some business on Market Street. This tallied with the statements in the note—there would have been ample time for the accident, the taking him out to Copely's house, and the chauffeur's return to search for her. It was even likely that Allen might have given the names of two shops in which she was known and might be found—inasmuch as she had told him just where she was going.

All this, of course, takes much longer in the telling than it did at the time. Looking at the note from any angle, it seemed perfectly straight—and if Joe Allen were really hurt too badly to clear his ship, next day, he might have decided it would be the safer course, everything considered, for her to sail without him. In that case, he would need a confidential interview with her at once. Probably it was less than ten minutes from the time she read the note to the moment she stepped into the car and was driven swiftly off down the Monterey road.

THERE was apparently nothing to prevent Claire Avery's stopping the car anywhere along the road and getting out, had she decided to do so. The windows were open—other cars passing. It seemed farther than her estimate of the distance, and soon became too dark to distinguish houses back from the road, but eventually, they swung in between handsome gate-pillars with lamps on them, drove for several minutes through a thick growth of evergreens, and came to the porte-cochère of a spacious bungalow, which didn't seem to be as well lighted as it would have been with guests about the place. Saying he supposed she would like to go up to see the Captain at once, the chauffeur removed

his cap and led the way up a broad flight of redwood stairs, along a spacious hall, and threw open the door of a room lighted by a single incandescent with a green shade.

Before Miss Avery could fairly make out the different objects in it, the door was quietly closed behind her—and locked. Unquestionably, securely, *locked!* There were in the room a neat white-enameled bed, davenport, chairs, books on a table, roses in a bowl, a bath adjoining—and steel grilles at every window, of beautiful design, highly decorative, but hard enough to resist any file or any human strength.

Miss Avery sat down, removed her hat, picked up a book. Eventually, there would be food, in all probability—and an explanation. Meanwhile—the only satisfaction she got out of the situation was that her instinct had been right. She was securely trapped, for the present.

In half an hour the door was unlocked to admit a big Chinaman who would have scared most women speechless. Some accident of birth had twisted his features until they were those of a demon rather than a normal human being. His eyes were deep-set, coal-black and piercing—but taken by themselves, gave a somewhat better impression than the face. The man was clean enough—his clothes neat for their type. Yet the whole effect was one which would have given the average woman a feeling of helpless terror—and Miss Avery decided at first glance that the man had been selected to wait upon her, purposely, with such an idea in view. As he was laying out a tempting meal upon a table near one of the windows, she studied him closely—then, with a smile, ventured a few words in the Cantonese dialect. (A woman who manages the business of her father's schooner, among the Pacific islands, picks up a good bit of the Samoan-Hawaiian dialects and runs across the limit of grotesque hideousness in human features. When her trading sends her up and down the China Sea, she acquires a smattering of Mandarin and Cantonese, as easily—becomes accustomed to even more nerve-jarring sights.)

For a second or two, the big Chink's face was Orientally impassive; then the more expressive eyes glanced over her speculatively. When it was evident that she had his close attention, the girl suddenly flung out one hand at arm's length in a peculiar gesture—the fingers crooked in a certain position.

Now, a Chinaman rarely gets pale. Instead of that, the flesh of his face sometimes appears to get pasty—as if one might dent it deeply with the end of a finger. Presumably the man was thoroughly cold-blooded—a machine to commit any sort of atrocity which might be ordered—had been a hatchet-man, and worse—or else he wouldn't be where he was in the circumstances. But like most of his race, he was intensely superstitious; "devils" were living, destructive forces to him; and this white woman not only knew his own country but apparently moved in the most powerful devil-society. Loyalty to his wages and salt were all very well in the case of soft, weak females with throats to be cut—but nothing had been said to him about a "devil-woman." That was a different matter altogether. For the sake of his ancestors and his own bodily safety, he was entirely at the disposal of such a person.

OF course the plotters in the background had figured that she would react to the Chink's terrorizing appearance in the usual feminine way and be in a receptive condition when one of them finally appeared to interview her—instead of which, she had written a coded note to Captain Allen and intrusted it to the Chinaman, apparently without a doubt that it would be forwarded as she had ordered. And this calm assurance that he dare not disobey her, clinched the young woman's status in Ling Fo's mind. The ordinary white-faced girl would have feared him—screamed at his approach. But this handsome "devil-woman" had given her orders with the air of one who knows they cannot be disobeyed under penalty of disaster to one's body and torment to one's ancestors—then calmly turned her back upon him. All things considered, he feared the mails were too slow, and managed to send the note by a fellow-Cantonese within an hour. Miss Avery knew it was a chance, of course—but took it with a good deal of confidence that her note would reach Joe Allen and induce him to sail without her—which was about the last thing the gang expected him to do.

Later in the evening a man whose strong features seemed vaguely familiar came in and sat down to chat with her as if she were a guest in his house instead of a prisoner. He was courteous—not in the least dictatorial—said that his own wishes in regard to dealing with her had been

overruled by rougher business associates who had determined to purchase a half-interest in the platinum mine whose owner she was known to represent. He explained that they were prepared to give her satisfactory guarantees that they would pay as high as a million for a half-interest if, upon examination by their engineers, the matrix-lode proved as rich as the sample which they had seen would indicate—but that they must know the location of the mine and examine it for themselves. In order clearly to bring out what she was up against, Claire pretended to more fear and nervousness than she came anywhere near feeling.

"Of course you know, Mr. Copely—if that's your name—"

"It isn't. We're using his house while it is supposed to be closed, during his absence in Europe. The two caretakers were induced to make a little extra money on the side. I'm 'Smith'—if you like."

"You're something a good deal more than *Smith*, if I know anything about physiognomy! Some day, I'll place you—and see if a man can really get away with this sort of thing! However, getting back to the main question: you know as well as I do that I merely acted as shipping-agent for the owner of that ore—selling it as ordered. And that closed the transaction as far as I and my steamer were concerned. We left Singapore in ballast and made a quick run to Sydney—showing that there was but one way in which that ore could be put aboard of us—from junks—at sea."

"Just where did they put it aboard of you, Miss Avery?"

"Somewhere between Singapore and Sydney. Figure it out for yourself!"

"Smith" threw up one hand in a gesture of annoyance. "Miss Avery," he said, "you fail entirely to realize the position you are in! I'm doing my best to get you out of this without bodily harm and with a minimum of detention. But the crowd who are back of this affair are as cold-blooded as an octopus! They mean to get what you know—or—"

"Yes? Or—what?"

"Well—the mildest thing they talk of doing is sending you out to an isolated bungalow the other side of the foothills with Ling Fo—alone!"

An expression of horror came into the girl's face. She was an excellent actress, at a pinch. "Oh, not that, Mr. Smith! Have mercy! Not that!"

"If you persist in defying them, I'm powerless! Were I seriously to interfere, they'd accuse me of intending to betray them—my life wouldn't be worth ten cents! And—frankly—I've too many weighty interests at stake to attempt anything quite so heroic for a woman who is simply obstinate and has it in her own hands to walk out of this house about her own business within an hour!"

"You're willing to have my life on your hands rather than make an effort to save me? That's the sort of a man you are, is it? Of course I'd kill myself at the first opportunity after reaching that bungalow!"

"M—well—that's putting me in perhaps a worse light than I really deserve, Miss Avery! It is barely possible that we may be able to work upon Captain Allen's fears for you sufficiently to get the information from him. I think he'll give it rather than have you subjected to any such treatment. He'll know by noon that something has happened to you—and he won't leave port until you're found."

"I think you overrate my importance to him or his shippers. He must run his ship according to his business agreements for his cargo—some of which is perishable."

"Smith" laughed—overconfidently, as he was afterward obliged to admit. At the time, he would have gambled any reasonable amount of money that Joe Allen would no more leave San Francisco knowing that she was in the hands of unscrupulous scoundrels than she would have sailed without him in a similar position. Had it not been for the note which she smuggled out by Ling Fo, Smith would have won his bet—because his knowledge of human nature and conviction as to a strong liking between the two were not at fault. It was simply that both were playing a game far bigger than their own personal interests, and were risking something at every step.

ALLEN had come down the pier to his ship about six bells—finding, at the gangplank, a well-dressed Cantonese who spoke fairly good English, waiting for him with Claire's note. Once assured that he was Captain Allen, himself, the Chinaman disappeared before he had read it through. It took but a couple of minutes for Allen to grasp the fact of her abduction—and sprint up the pier in record time. But the messenger was nowhere in sight. The watchman said he had crossed the street a

few seconds before—which was all the satisfaction the shipmaster got. As well try to locate one particular flea on a big dog! After he had reread the note in his own cabin to Harry Bradford and Tom Harvey, they were all three inclined to disregard it and quietly set the whole police-force at work. But gradually they came around to the belief that the girl was right and stood a good chance of outwitting the gang of pirates—even securing much valuable information if they did as she requested. The note was in a cipher which Claire and the Captain had worked out to be quickly read without a key and yet completely baffle a casual reader who would suppose it much more complicated than it actually was. Translated, it read:

DEAR JOE:

They "got me" through a fake note stating that you had been run over by a car and wanted to see me at once. I tested it—two ways—seemed perfectly straight. Of course they're using pretty nasty threats to force information out of me.

Just by luck, they tried to scare me with a frightful-looking Chink who has more anxiety about what I may do to his ancestors than keeping his job. Barring accidents, if I lose my nerve, he'll obey my orders at every turn—which is *something*.

They expect you to hold up the ship and search for me. If you do, they are likely to get you, also, or force your hand with threats concerning *me*. If you clear as intended, I'm fairly sure it will disarrange their plans a whole lot, because they're not expecting you to do anything of the sort and won't have any boat of their own ready to chase you on the jump. So, if you pass the Farralones before they're in sight, they won't get a glimpse of you all the way across. They'll calculate your time into Manila pretty closely—probably arrange to get there four or five days later—before you can load and be off again after discharging.

My impression is that if you let the newspapers get hold of my abduction—make quite a story of it without any apparent explanation—it will make other parties who may be on our track think that you'll never dream of looking for any business out of the usual run until I'm found. You can make Manila at least three days quicker than anyone supposes—set down in the log that you were making a test-run with picked coal under exceptionally favorable conditions. Cap'n Jennings can be fixing a part-cargo in the right direction while you're at sea—so that you can be out of Manila before this crowd reaches there. Catch the idea?

Never mind about *me*. I'll probably find out a lot before they get through with me—and unless a streak of unexpected bad luck happens along, I *think* I can get loose when it begins to look as though I'd better. If I get a chance, will communicate by radio.

CLAIRE.

THE mate and the engineer were inclined to minimize the danger which Miss Avery might be running in the hands of her captors. The fact that she had succeeded in getting her note through to the Captain and appeared to have been treated well up to that time indicated, as they thought, that whoever had abducted her would have too wholesome a respect for criminal punishment to do her bodily harm. On the other hand, her being in their power seemed to offer a better chance to run another cargo of the ore than they had really expected to get for some months—from the fact that her captors would never think of the Captain's risking it on his own responsibility, without her. But Allen knew the seriousness of the game better than they did.

"It probably does give us some chance of running another cargo after we leave Manila—provided those cowards who have Miss Avery happen to represent a combination of the only parties who are making a serious effort to run us down and discover the location of that mine! But we can't safely assume anything of the sort! That Sydney smelting company want to keep a good thing for themselves sufficiently to use every effort toward preventing any knowledge of the ore from leaking out. They're equally certain, however, to have one or more agents of their own shadowing us even if the men have no idea of just why they are doing it.

"Now, suppose that some one else with access to their plant happened to get hold of a sample and tested it—knowing the source from which the company got it? That would make at least two different parties on our trail. The company's own agents might be cautioned against getting caught in anything really outside the law—though I think both Manners and Sladen have nerve enough to take a chance for what they know there *is* in this proposition. But the possible outsiders wouldn't be influenced by any scruples at all. If they know the amount paid for that part-cargo of ore—and they undoubtedly would if they know anything at all about the stuff—they won't even stop at murder! They'll have no more mercy on Claire Avery than they would on a cat which had something of value to them inside of her! In spite of her letter, I'm going to stay here until I run those brutes down and get her out of their clutches!"

"I think you're wrong and she's right,

Cap'n! First place, she's sized up the proposition just about as I do—you'll be a darned sight more likely to wind up in their clutches, yourself, than you will to locate and get her out of them. Perhaps you'd be lucky enough or smart enough not to—but say they do get you? That puts the two of you in the gang's hands—and we'll suppose *this* lot to be the more determined, unscrupulous one. Now, imagine yourself securely bound to something solid watching them do things to *her* right before your eyes? See? If it were a case of you alone, blabbing, you'd tell 'em to go to hell and cut the liver out of you. But if you saw 'em trying it on her,—and couldn't do a thing,—you'd weaken inside of a minute! Any of us would!

"Suppose, on the other hand, you clear the boat as she wishes and let Cap'n Jennings do the chasing of those brutes while we are on our way? He likes her a lot—he'll see red when he hears about this—and he's got a lot of influence both with the city government and the Federal administration. He might even get a detail of doughboys from Presidio to work on the quiet while the city police are tracing her in their own way. If the *Wyanomah* unexpectedly gets away to sea before they can follow her with some faster boat, it'll make 'em damn careful what they do to Miss Avery! If they maltreated her uselessly when the key to the whole proposition was chasing after us, they not only wouldn't gain anything by it, but there'd be a good deal less mercy shown them if, or when, they are caught. Seems to me the safest thing for Miss Claire is to do exactly as she says!"

EVENTUALLY, Allen came around to their belief—though he felt sick all through at the idea of leaving Claire in such a position. They were at breakfast next morning when a note was put aboard by some messenger who got away before there seemed any reason for detaining him. This communication was expressed in courteous terms by a person of education, but its grim purport was none the less clear. Miss Avery was being "detained" by certain "interests" who were determined to purchase a half-interest in the mine whose owner she represented. She was in a place secure enough to make any search for her useless, and would be treated with consideration if she gave them the location of the mine within a reasonable time. If,

unfortunately, she remained foolishly obstinate, the "interests" would be regrettably obliged to use pressure. In the circumstances, Captain Allen must use his own judgment, based upon his knowledge of her, as to whether it might be advisable for him to remain a week or more in port—or whether, if there seemed to be nothing gained by waiting, he should clear at once as intended.

The shipmaster's immediate reaction to this note was both as the writer had anticipated—and very much otherwise. Allen was seen motoring furiously to the offices of the Jennings Shipping & Navigation Company—then, with Captain Jennings, to call upon the Police Commissioner. After that, by cable-car and on foot, he cleared his ship at the Customhouse in his usual businesslike way—and the *Wyanomah* was actually steaming out through the Golden Gate before the "interests" were convinced that he had really done so.

AT two o'clock, there was a hurried council-of-war in the corner room of Corbelston's office-suite between the financier, Jones, Wohlberg and two other men who had been taken into the game as competent executives. Corbelston had seen too many propositions of all sorts—been through too many risky adventures—to get much excited over a serious reverse when one happened to disarrange his plans. His voice was quiet—he seemed to be enjoying his cigar; but if he had lost one trick, he meant to take the next one. He wasn't playing for marbles, either.

"After we'd finished breakfast this morning, out at the Copely place, I'd about decided to pull out and quit. I don't pretend to know so very much about women—but I'm pretty well satisfied that we'll get nothing from that girl. And she has a perfect horror of Ling Fo, too! Makes her faint even to look at him, if I'm any judge of expression and nervous reaction. Of course, we can try going the limit with her—but if we do, and get nothing, we're not only where we started, as far as she is concerned, but we're up against conviction for murder if the police run us down. She'll kill herself! And her friends won't let up until they get us! The only thing which made me hesitate was the chance that we might get Captain Allen, too, while he was searching the city for her. It never occurred to me that he would actually sail and leave her in any such position, here—

not one man in ten thousand would have done it! And I figured that by working upon the fears of each for the other we might get somewhere.

"Well—Allen's clearing his ship and getting to sea, in the circumstances, puts another face upon the matter altogether. So far, I've been interested in this game of Jones' and Wohlberg's as a gamble with some chance of potting half a million if we were lucky—perhaps a bit more. And the thing began to look as though our chances were poor unless we got in deeper and took more serious risks than it was really worth. But now—I'm plumb interested! I'm going to sit in this game to win! If that girl will actually risk being alone with Ling Fo in a mountain shack rather than tell us what she knows,—and this shipmaster, Allen, will risk leaving her in our hands with all which that implies,—the game is far bigger than any of us have dreamed! It's not a matter of half a million, but of twenty—thirty—fifty millions! Unless it's absolutely necessary, with reasonable prospect of her weakening, I won't stand for doing that girl any real harm. I've too much to lose, personally, by getting implicated in anything of the sort—otherwise, of course, she or what happens to her are of no interest to me."

"But—hell! What can we do, now, if she doesn't come across? Allen and his ship are out of sight by this time—at sea!"

"Well—they can be followed. If we get busy at once, we can clear the *Llangow City* and be outside Point Lobos by sunset. According to Cap'n Wohlberg's estimate of the *Wyanomah's* engines, our boat should have the edge on her by a good four knots—overhaul her in forty-eight hours if she sticks to a straight course for Manila—"

"Aye—but suppose Allen doesn't? He'll save time and coal by a 'great circle' course—making his southing off Japan—difference of close upon two days in the run!"

"We don't really care much, either way. They'll post the *Wyanomah* on the blackboard at the Maritime Exchange as being due in Manila on a certain date—knowing better than we do how long she ought to take at sea. We may fairly assume, I think, that the platinum mine is not upon any of the Pacific islands—inasmuch as that boat picked up the ore somewhere between Singapore and Sydney. She hasn't a single ton of space for it until after she discharges at Manila. So all we have to do is to make Manila about the same time

or possibly a day ahead of her. Even if she beats us a couple of days, she won't be discharged and loaded again."

"Didn't you say you could have chartered an eight-hundred-ton seagoing yacht for a little less than you got the *Llangow City*, Mr. Corbelston? Why wouldn't she have been a better craft for the sort of chasing and cruising we're likely to do?"

"Cost more to run her—attract too much attention wherever we went—too easy to spot, and start gossip in different ports. On the other hand, a modern tramp like the *Llangow City*, under U. S. registry, getting no business at the freights she has to charge, might easily pass through the hands of six or eight different owners—be put under European registry again—be sent from one port to another in ballast for delivery—be chartered on short time or for a single voyage—pick up a little business here and there during these changes of ownership—and attract no attention whatever to the six or eight men who happen to be aboard in addition to her crew. Also—she'll carry that ore when we get it! I went over all this before chartering her.

"Well—I'll leave word in my offices that I've been suddenly called to the East—then get aboard the tramp from some launch on the side away from the pier, before the last coal-barge hauls away. Meanwhile, Cap'n Wohlberg will clear her, and Gurney will either get some guarantee from the girl that she'll go aboard without making any disturbance—face pretty well covered—or else drug her and come down in an ambulance with a 'sick woman.' Don't do that, however, unless you have to. It's too risky, with the police combing the city for her! My impression is that she'll go with us willingly—particularly when she knows we've cleared for Manila and are proceeding there, direct. I foresaw the possibility of having to bring her along and have had men fitting up a stateroom on the hurricane-deck, just under the wheel-house. Also, I've signed on a well-recommended steward and stewardess. We'll take a gang of fifteen or twenty husky scrappers from 'longshore, with us—and a couple of machine-guns, just in case we locate that mine within the next few months. But we'll berth them aft under the turtle-deck—away from the crew, and where they'll have no business in the 'mid-ship-house' at all. With that outfit, we can go most anywhere and do pretty nearly anything. Now—if you've got the

layout thoroughly in mind, let's go! Get busy!"

DURING the twenty-four hours Claire Avery had been materially strengthening her influence over Ling Fo in a way that was entirely psychological and which she artistically worked for all it was worth. The big demoniac Chinaman had been given to understand by Corbelston—as the supposed "Copely"—and his companions, that they had a young woman in their power from whom they meant to get certain information in one way or another—no matter how far they had to go with her. His natural inference, based upon Oriental methods in such cases, was that they were dealing with a female already frightened out of her senses and that either they would turn her over to him as a plaything or order her throat cut to get rid of her after getting the information they wanted. When she laughed at him—looking into those fathomless eyes, which were not so bad as his face, without the least evidence of fear—and proved herself the possessor of knowledge supposedly given only to those upon intimate terms with both gods and devils, he was convinced that a mistake had been made, somewhere. So he closely watched her bearing with the supposed "Copely-Smith" and Gurney, who was brought in to attempt a little "third-degree."

Had she weakened with either of them, he would have begun to distrust the extent of her power for evil or good in his own case. But she appeared to be laughing at them also—answering their questions and accusations with a simple innocence which the Chinaman saw, with a quiet grin of his own, was simply playing with them, fencing, telling nothing they wanted to know. So, being apparently in their power to kill or abuse in any way they chose, if she actually was so little afraid of them as to smilingly defy the worst they could do, it was manifestly probable that she could have some willing devil strike them dead with black magic at any moment she wished to do so. And thinking of certain stuff in little teakwood boxes concealed in secret pockets of his quilted jacket, Ling Fo rather hoped for selection as that "willing devil," himself, upon occasion. He was entirely at her service—it could be quite easily done, and no great "bobbery" about it if the bodies were properly made away with.

When it appeared that she had nothing of this sort in mind for the present, Ling Fo's respect increased, if anything. She would use the fools for purposes of her own, it seemed—when they supposed her in their power? The artistic finesse of this appealed to him. All in her own good time? Decidedly, this was admirable! In the serving of such a one, there was much to be learned. When he found that they were to make a journey, at sea in the general direction of his own country and that the woman was to accompany them, quite willingly, the oblique mind of him grinned while his face remained impassive. This was getting to be more and more a joke which none but the Oriental brain could thoroughly appreciate. It was conveyed to him in simple but forcible language that the woman would be more or less in his charge—that he was to look after, anticipate her wants, tempt her appetite with his choicest cooking—but that, under risk of sudden death, he was to see that no harm came to her from anyone. This, mind you, from the very employers who at first pretended indifference as to whether her throat was cut or anything else that might happen to her. Hmph! They had been as putty in her hands!

WHEN he first heard of the eighteen roughnecks who were to be quartered aft upon the same boat, it presented another aspect of the affair. Handling three or four men with brains enough to consider their own safety was a different proposition from controlling a dozen and a half beachcombers who were likely to be fairly primed with hard liquor and oblivious to personal danger for that reason. But if, for example, Ling were to constitute himself assistant steward, as would be the natural selection aboard the tramp, it would be among his duties to carry meals aft from the galley to this bunch of driftwood under the turtle-deck. And if the woman considered it advisable to so order it, any time, he would provide himself with more little teakwood boxes of different sorts to be used in connection with the food—the contents of some producing wholesale oblivion for many hours, while others made the effect unanimous and permanent. All things considered, Ling Fo went aboard that afternoon with no misgivings either for himself or his "devil-woman"—who seemed equally satisfied with the course matters were taking. And as they rounded Point

Lobos, the evening papers were out with big headlines concerning a handsome girl, well-known in shipping circles as the charterer and supercargo of a nine-thousand-ton steamer, who had been mysteriously abducted for no apparent reason—who was being diligently searched for both by the city police and army-details from Presidio. It was rumored that international complications might be mixed up in the case.

Corbelston's private secretary had been told that he could be reached by radio—and paid over a hundred dollars to have the gist of the news broadcasted. The operator on the *Llangow City*—Corbelston himself, happened to be the only man aboard who could adjust a regenerative set and use "Continental"—picked this up as it came, noticing with surprise and much satisfaction that no hint of their real game had been even suggested in relation to the girl's abduction. So far, it seemed, the efforts of the various conflicting "interests" to locate the mysterious mine had been leak-proof.

IN the mess-saloon, that evening, Miss Avery saw Jones and Wohlberg for the first time since her abduction. As they had not been on the deck of the *Wyano-mah* for over five minutes before getting into the boat which transferred them to the wool-steamer, and had presented a pretty tough appearance after their thirty-six hours in the hold, they didn't suppose she would recognize them. For a few minutes, she didn't—couldn't place them in spite of the something familiar in their faces. Then Wohlberg scowled in a peculiar way and it instantly recalled the look on his face after Allen had knocked him down. She smiled in frank good humor—and renewed the acquaintance.

"I've been unable to guess why I was abducted and what all this was about, but of course, if *you* two are in it, that explains a lot—though why you should bear any ill-will toward me, I don't know! How did you manage to get off that wool-boat? We understood her master to say he was short-handed and would be glad to work you as far as London, anyway."

Wohlberg scowled in a peculiar way and it—merely glowered at her across the table, but Jones had gotten more of his rough edges polished off, and for that reason was perhaps the more dangerous of the two, because it enabled him to keep his real intentions entirely under cover. Corbelston

was presumably another passenger, like herself—yet in a few moments she sensed the air of command which indicated him as the man in supreme authority. From his manner she judged that he was fully aware of the risk to all of them if they ill-treated her—that it was his intention to be as courteous as circumstances permitted. Again, the impression crossed her mind that he was really a person of social prominence—well-known in California. The difficulty would be to prove such a man's identity with this gentlemanly pirate who was certainly breaking the laws in her case and presumably in others.

FROM her stateroom she once or twice caught the snapping of a radio-spark which seemed to be just overhead in the master's cabin abaft the wheelhouse. She knew that Corbelston had appropriated this for himself and thought it likely that there would not be space enough up there for the more bulky parts of the outfit—either a large storage-battery or a small automatic dynamo, controlled from above. In such a case, these would be, possibly, in a storeroom adjoining hers. So, at first opportunity, she had Ling Fo get her a small electric torch and a pair of pliers. The serviceable automatic which she had been wearing concealed in her clothes, of course, hadn't been discovered.

Feeling practically certain that Corbelston—the supposed Smith—wouldn't go into this storeroom unless looking for trouble in his outfit, or have Jones overhaul it unless necessary, she managed to pick the lock and slip in there during the night-watch, unobserved, to make a thorough examination. As she had thought likely, there were a number of the smaller parts in duplicate. "Spares"—in the way of wire, switches, extra batteries, keys, head-frames with ear-receivers, spark-coils, condensers, and so forth. The connections from the master's cabin were led down through a couple of three-inch iron tubes—there was even a manhole plate in the deck which permitted access to the storeroom and its various parts of the outfit in case of mutiny or other trouble aboard. As nearly as she could judge, this manhole cover was under the chart-desk on the side opposite Corbelston's berth, and she found that by standing on top of the dynamo, she could manage to push it up at any time she wished. Hauling herself up through it was a more difficult matter—but it was possible.

AT a time when "Smith" was playing cards with the other men in the mess-saloon within thirty feet of her, she took the chance of going into the storeroom, bolting the door, putting a wooden box on top of the dynamo and actually getting up into the cabin above. Drawing the blinds so that no reflection from her torch could be seen from the bridge, she examined the wires leading up to the antennæ and found a place where a branch-loop could be spliced in on them without being discovered unless a careful search were made. Then letting herself down into the storeroom again, she sawed an opening in the bulkhead through which she crawled into the space under the berth in her own stateroom.

As Ling Fo had charge of its cleaning and bed-making, the steamer-trunk containing an outfit of clothing hastily purchased for her offered all the concealment necessary when shoved under her berth. On the other side, an empty wooden box was placed against the hole. She was now in position to make her next moves with more leisure and less chance of being caught at them—as every signal over the aërials passed through her branch-loop and she could cut-in with her switch at any time, having access to the storeroom without the risk of going in from the gangway.

Having handled a battery-set for her father on the old trading-schooner, she was a competent amateur electrician and had kept up with recent developments of the regenerative telephone-sets. So that with anything as comparatively simple as a spark and code outfit, she had little difficulty in rigging up a pony transmitting buzzer and key—from a spark-coil and two cells of battery—which was weak enough to sound as though it were coming from distance when Corbelston had the receivers over his ears in the cabin above. An experienced operator might have detected something about the strength of the signals which would have started him investigating, but to Corbelston there seemed to be nothing at all out of the way with them when she cut in and asked him to relay a message to some other steamer, that night.

THE other men hadn't considered that there would be anything more they could do on the voyage across the Pacific than get to Manila about the time the *Wyonomah* did and start the real chase from there. But Corbelston was now in the

game to win and was using his head. He had a confidential agent in most of the Oriental ports with whom he used a private code for more particular communications. So he began, on the second day out, to advise his Manila man that he wanted confidential information concerning all cargo offering there for Australian or Oriental ports—and received messages two or three times each day upon this subject. Half way across, he was amazed to hear that the *Wyanomah* was expected within forty-eight hours—having made a test-run with picked coal over the northern or “great circle” course—and that a part-cargo of hemp and tobacco for Brisbane had been fixed for her by the Jennings agents, there. If this information had any basis of truth, Corbelston knew that he must have been misled upon some of Jones’ or Wohlberg’s data—and put it squarely up to them.

“Didn’t one or both of you tell me the *Wyanomah* couldn’t do better than fourteen—usually logged around thirteen?”

“Aye, sir. Down to her Plimsoll, she’ll not do thirteen!”

“Well you’re crazy in the head, I reckon! She’ll be in Manila within forty-eight hours—been making a test-run with picked coal—northern course. And she’s got a part-cargo fixed for Brisbane!”

“Did you get that by radio? Well—it’s a lie! It’s not in her to do it in the time! I listened to her engines through that bulk-head for two days an’ they were shovin’ her—we could tell by the way she was buckin’ into them head-seas. Countin’ the revolutions—knowin’ the size an’ pitch of her screw—it’s not diffic’lt to figure her average speed! Turn up ‘Lloyd’s Register’—you’ll find her rated twelve-and-a-half!”

“H-m-m—you’ve pretty good reasons for your belief—but I’ve a hunch that you’re wrong, all the same. That boat must have a good four knots in reserve! Anyhow—say the report is correct? What would you suggest?”

“If the report is right—which it just can’t be—Allen’ll be loaded an’ outa Manila at least a day before we get there. Going to Brisbane, his course is down through Gilolo Passage and Torres Straits—if he goes direct. By changin’ our course right now, we could prob’ly reach Gilolo a bit ahead of him. Got any agents in those waters that’d be likely to hear of his being spoken?”

“One at Iloilo—one at Zamboanga—and the one in Manila.”

“The Manila one might pick up rumors at the Maritime Exchange. Tell him to let you know the minute any other craft speaks or sees the *Wyanomah*! He’s got agents of his own who can watch for her!”

Corbelston did this at once, and changed his course to make the Gilolo Passage. Claire Avery did some concentrated thinking. She first ordered Ling Fo to put something in the pseudo “Smith’s” cocktails which would keep him dead to the world until the next morning at least—and when the Chink brought word that the man couldn’t keep his eyes open ten minutes longer, she crept up through the manhole into his room—examined him carefully to see if he were really unconscious—bolted the door and sat down at the radio-outfit to send out her code-call for the *Wyanomah*. In half an hour, she got an acknowledgment from Allen himself, who instantly recognized her sending. She gave him the main points of Corbelston’s plans, so that Allen might easily avoid being spoken at sea.

FIVE days later, she talked to Corbelston in the room above, with her pony set—saying the *Wyanomah* had been sighted and spoken off Sandakan, North Borneo, apparently bound Macassar way—but botched the signature so that he couldn’t tell which of his agents supposedly talked with him. He changed his course for Borneo, but got no other report of anyone sighting his quarry—went 1500 miles out of his way on a fool’s errand while Allen was safely taking aboard another lot of ore at the mysterious mine on Lajoe Koera—loafed around Torres Straits for a week—then read in the maritime reports that the steamer *Wyanomah*, Allen, master, was discharging at Brisbane and proceeding from there with a part-cargo for the big smelting and refining company in Sydney. When he got back aboard the *Llangow City* with his news, he found that Miss Avery had somehow managed to get ashore at Thursday Island during the night and knew that she would go to the British Resident with the story of her abduction as soon as she could see him. Corbelston didn’t even wait to get his anchor up—cut the cable and steamed off down the Straits at the best gait the deceptive-looking tramp had in reserve.

By
H. BEDFORD-
JONES



CACTUS AND

AT least twice a year, when he came in to Stovepipe Springs to get his mail and flour, Sagebrush answered to the cognomen of George Beam. This was one of the occasions. To his acute consternation, he had discovered that "The Springs" was crowded with life and gayety, for there was a strange female stopping at the hotel, and another pilgrim was coming in by stage this same afternoon.

Sagebrush presented a general vista of whiskers, red nose and nondescript garments, bleached by sun and white with alkali dust; yet it was his proud boast that he was the only man between Death Valley and the big bend of the Colorado who kept abreast of the times. Subscribing to several weekly magazines, he came in once every six months to get the accumulated copies. Then he sat down and answered the advertisements, requesting circulars. Thus he had a burro-load of magazines to read for six months, then a burro-load of circulars wherewith to while away the next six months—an involved and vicious circle in which Sagebrush was always trying to catch up with himself. He kept the post office on the map, however.

"Now, dog-gone it," he observed to his three patient burros, as he tied on his grub and magazines and a bundle of postal cards, "you and me got to hike out again in order to git our correspondence goin' in peace! Dad blame this dad-blamed town! What in hell is folks crowding in this country for, anyhow?"

Haywire Johnson, assistant postmaster and general utility man about the hotel, showed up in time to answer this query.

"Hi, Sagebrush! Aint you stoppin' over in town? Things is pickin' up right fast. We got a settler yesterday, and we got a tourist comin' today."

"That's jest it," growled Sagebrush. "A feller can't have no peace no more. That makes three women in town now, not countin' them females over to José Garcia's shack."

"Well, listen!" Haywire laid his hand on the desert rat's arm. "Where'd you get that dust you weighed in over to the store, eh? Let's you and me go in and talk, Sagebrush. If you aint got no objections to wettin' down them whiskers with a mite o' licker, s'pose we go inside and arbitrate."



Here's a real thriller for you—a double-action, big-caliber novellette of adventure in the West, by a writing man who knows his business, the distinguished author of "Sixteen Miles," "Brome's Luck," "Shadows of Saffron" and other noted stories.

RATTLERS

Sagebrush grunted, hitched his three burros to the rail, and vanished in the hotel.

ONCE Stovepipe Springs had been a boom mining town, but now it was dead and dried out. To west and north lay desert, to the south lay more desert and the Colorado. To the east was the Chuckwalla Range—in it and beyond it rich cattle country with water galore. Here in Stovepipe Springs, and over across the Chuckwallas, men talked different languages, had different customs and were themselves different. No cow-men came over this way unless they were well ahead of the sheriff; and Stovepipe Springs, having its own railroad connections at a distance of twenty miles, was supremely independent of the remainder of the county, and heartily despised all ranchers and cow-men.

Here, besides the hotel, were five inhabited houses and two stores, a bank and a garage. Had it not been for the literary enterprise of Sagebrush Beam, even the post office would have long since been wiped off the map. The town was a point of call for desert rats, and being at present on a detour of the cross-continent automobile

highway, had more business than its looks would warrant. Its inhabitants lived only for the day when some one would strike it rich and bring back the boom.

It was three in the afternoon and blazing hot when the exhaust whistle of the auto-stage announced its arrival. The entire dozen persons of the local constituency gathered to watch. One of these onlookers was a small man in rusty and dilapidated attire. He stood barely five feet six, his face was a grayish mask from which shone two bright and glittery gray eyes, and there was a stoop to his shoulders—but he was not crowded. He was not only the most flourishing, but he was the most respected citizen of all Chuckwalla County.

The stage whooped out a final whistle and came to rest amid a whirl of dust in front of the hotel. The driver flung off a mail-sack, handed off an empty express-box, then swung down and vanished abruptly into the hotel. His solitary passenger, meantime, descended before the assembled gaze of Stovepipe Springs, staring around with unassumed interest. And Stovepipe Springs, after the first gasp, stared back—hard.

THE pilgrim was apparently a young man, though little could be seen of his features. He wore an enormous pith helmet which shaded his face, tinted yellow goggles which hid his eyes, and from the collar of his khaki coat to the tip of his nose was wound a bright green shawl which draped back over his shoulder. Just then Haywire and Sagebrush came out the side door of the hotel, and Sagebrush halted as though smitten.

"My gosh, Haywire!" he exclaimed. "What was in that there lick? I never seen nothing like this before—not even from tequila! Is that thing really there?"

"She is," said Haywire, with a startled look. "Wait—it's goin' to talk!"

The arrival had unwound the green shawl, to disclose a mouth and chin which were certainly square-cut enough for anyone. He glanced around the circle of staring faces, and his goggles fastened upon the little man in rusty attire. Toward him the newcomer stepped, met the glittery gray eyes, and spoke.

"Am I correct in assuming that this is Stovepipe Springs?" he asked.

"Yep," returned the small man curtly.

"Excellent! An admirable spot. I am Percival Henry J. Tompkins, a humble member of the American Society of Mammalogists, in search of material for a paper on the fauna of the great American desert." Mr. Tompkins spoke in a precise, neatly clipped voice. "I seek a temporary domicile here—"

"Git over to Mormon Wells, then," snapped the small man.

"You misapprehend my meaning," said Mr. Tompkins patiently. "I seek rooms at your hotel, and a guide. I want a man who knows the desert, who can lead me to the haunts of its creatures. Particularly I desire to study the habits of the *crotalus cerastes*."

With a flick of his shoulders, the small man turned as though to leave. Mr. Tompkins reached out and laid a restraining hand on his shoulder, unwarned by the gasp from those near by.

"My dear sir, I am addressing you—"

What happened was startling to see. The little man moved with a swiftness that the eye could not follow, then stood snarling, his gray mask of a face glittering with sheer malignity. Tompkins, knocked sprawling half across the road, rolled over, sat up, and then struggled to his feet. He stood blinking around.

"That—er—that was a most remarkable thing!" he exclaimed in his precise tones. "Did somebody run into me?"

With a sneer and a snap of his teeth, the little man turned and departed toward the bank, which he owned. Haywire drew the old desert rat hastily aside.

"Look out! Sidewinder's feelin' mean today. Him and that female woman have been talkin' chicken-ranches, I reckon. Oh, my gosh! Now that there mistake for a human is headin' this-a-way—"

Mr. Tompkins, indeed, seemed to sense a general lack of cordiality all around him, except in the gaping countenance of Sagebrush, whom he now approached.

"My friend—"

"Pilgrim, don't bother me!" said Sagebrush defensively. "It jest can't be true!"

"I'll pay three dollars a day to a man who knows the desert."

Sagebrush changed countenance. So did the remainder of Stovepipe Springs. There was a general forward movement, but the desert rat was the first to recover voice.

"You're done, pilgrim, you're sure engaged! What was it you wanted to find?"

"*Crotalus cerastes*. Undoubtedly you can introduce me to specimens?"

Sagebrush swallowed hard, but had a reputation to sustain, and upheld it nobly.

"You bet!" he announced promptly. "Lots o' them specimens up around Marble Cañon, and over by Lost Waterhole I've seen 'em so thick you couldn't hardly move without steppin' on 'em. I'll take you right where them things breed, Perfesser."

The "Perfesser" looked slightly startled, but nodded assent.

"Very well; you are engaged. We shall have to hire an automobile."

"You got to see Sidewinder Crowfoot about that. He owns 'em all."

"Very well. Come to my room in an hour, when I have had a chance to remove the stains of travel. By the way, where is the hotel? I wrote to engage rooms, but see no hostelry."

"Right yere under your nose, Perfesser. Hassayamp is takin' in the mail—thar he is.—Hey, Hassayamp! Meet my friend the Perfesser. This is Hassayamp Foster, Perfesser. The Perfesser's a bug-hunter, Hassayamp, and wants a bed."

"My beds wont help him none," said Hassayamp, a lean and melancholic individual who came forward, chewing a ragged mustache. "I got a room for you, Puffesser."

"With bath," said Tompkins. Hassayamp halted and blinked.

"Bath? Good gosh, we don't allow no washin' in the springs this time o' year! Got to use a cream separator to git enough drinkin' water. Rains are over, but they aint filled the springs yet—not for another two weeks, I reckon."

"I refer, sir, to a bathroom attached," explained Tompkins.

"Well, there aint none," said Hassayamp. "Whar's your grips?"

Two enormous and bulging suitcases, each as big as a small trunk, were in the stage boot, and Hassayamp hauled them out with antagonistic air, and led his victim away.

THE Stovepipe House was built for desert use, not for looks. The front building contained post office and hotel dining-room; and passing through this, Tompkins descended the rear steps and found two long adobe structures stretching in front of him, each divided into cells; between them drooped some parched flowers and shrubs. He was shown to his cell, a room twelve by twelve, furnished with all the comforts of home.

"Don't do no cussing nor singing after midnight," warned Hassayamp as he shoved in the two enormous grips, "'cause a lady's got the next room. When the bell rings for supper, you show up prompt; my old woman's liable to be real ornery if folks don't 'preciate hot vittles. Two-fifty a day. What did you go tangle up with that old desert rat Sagebrush for? I'd ha' been glad to pilot you around my own self. Int'ested in mines, are you? Don't let him show you no specimens, Puffesser. That old rascal would salt hell and unload it on a pilgrim. Don't you trust nobody around here but me. I got two quartz lodes and a placer location that'll make your eyes water—"

"Not interested in mines, thanks," said Tompkins, cutting short the flow of talk. "If I saw a good chicken-ranch, I might invest, but not otherwise. Ever hear of anyone around these parts by the name of Ramsay? Alec Ramsay. Might have passed through here a year or so ago."

"Nope," said Hassayamp, shaking his mustaches. "Well, if ye want anything, come and holler for it."

Hassayamp withdrew; in more haste than he had previously displayed, he ducked around the side of the hotel, rambled down the desert sands of the nominal alley, and

in three minutes was rapping sharply at the back door of the adobe bank. This was opened to him by the small gray-faced man, who was no other than Sidewinder Crowfoot. Hassayamp slid inside and closed the door behind him.

"Well?" rasped Sidewinder. "What's up?"

"That bug-hunter," said Hassayamp agitatedly. "What ye think he said? That if he knowed where there was a good chicken-ranch, he might buy it!"

A thin smile appeared in the gray mask.

"That so? We'll see about it."

"And he asked if I knowed anyone around here, a year back, name of Alec Ramsay."

The smaller man started, and his eyes glittered venomously.

"So that's it—so that's it!" murmured Sidewinder. "I thought he didn't act right natural. By gosh, I'll look into him!"

"Wa'n't Ramsay the one," began Hassayamp, "that bought that there claim from Mesquite up in Pinecate Cañon, and got mixed up with—"

"Shut up!" snapped the other man suddenly. "Listen to me, now. I'll attend to this gent myself, if he needs it. Let him run as far's his hobbles will let, for a while. First we got to fix up Miss Gilman. You got to take her out day after tomorrow—*sabe?* I'll have her all primed up about the location—you sell it to her. Take her up the Chuckwalla road, then off to Pinecate mesa and up the cañon to that big boulder. Sell her the same ground we sold that Ramsay fool. There'd ought to be water in it right now, and it'll look mighty pretty. Sell her any location she picks out. *Sabe?*"

"All right," said Hassayamp. "And ye needn't worry much over that bug-hunter. He's jest a natural-born fool."

"Maybe," was the response. "But don't be too durned sure."

SIDEWINDER'S doubts would have been verified could he have seen Professor Tompkins at the same moment. Tompkins had removed goggles and helmet, reveal snapping blue eyes which looked anything but weak, and close-cropped hair that spelled trouble. Also, from neath his shirt he had produced an automatic pistol, and was now carefully examining its load. When he spoke to himself, his voice lacked all the precision and clipped utterance it had displayed in public.

"Confound it, there's one thing I sure overlooked!" he was musing as he frowned at a silver plate set into the butt of the pistol. "If I take it off, dust will get into everything; if I leave it on, I'm running risks. Well, guess I'll run risks! If I need you, my friend, I'll sure need you real bad."

The initials on the silver plate were P. A. R.—which by no stretch of the imagination could be made to fit the name Tompkins.

CHAPTER II

THE usually free-and-easy dining-room of the Stovepipe House was hushed and uneasy when supper came around, before the unwonted presence of a strange female. Tompkins had a table to himself, and at the next table was Miss Gilman; there were only two other occupied tables.

Tompkins was interested in his fellow-pilgrim. She was a young woman; she was possessed of an indoor complexion; and if not exactly beautiful she had an air of character and firmness; when she smiled, indeed, as she did whenever Haywire came to her table with his tray, a dancing light came into her eyes, and Haywire was straightway confused and flustered. Seated with his wife at another table was Hassayamp, and Tompkins observed that the proprietor addressed his better half in a tone of voice intended to reach other ears.

"Marier, we got to improve on Manuela's cookin' fore next week, when them road-workmen git here. I aint stuck on Mex cookin' my own self. We'll be right crowded up with folks workin' on the highway next week. Mose Pincus tells me today there's a feller name o' Rosenblum comin' in from Meteorite, goin' to open up a army goods store for this here district; wants him a shack big enough to hold six kids and a missus, and a store front. Speakin' as the president of the Stovepipe Springs chamber o' commerce, I'd say this here town is started on her boom. They tell me Sagebrush Beam weighed in a right part o' dust today, too. Wouldn't s'prise me a mite if a rush'd start this way that'd take the Gold Hills a mile! Dang it, I wisht we didn't have to ship in these here aigs; somehow, they don't taste like aigs should, as I remember 'em."

Miss Gilman departed, and thereafter Hassayamp essayed no more information at large. Tompkins, who was decidedly hun-

gry, was the last out of the dining-room. He came through the post office lobby, performed the delayed ceremony of registering, and was then escorted outside to the street by Hassayamp. They found Miss Gilman standing under the tin sun-shade and looking up at the glorious sunset that flooded all the sky with gold and scarlet. She turned at their approach, and Hassayamp performed the introductions.

"Miss Ethel Gilman, lemme make you acquainted with the Puffesser. You folks want to make yourselves to home in Stovepipe Springs. We don't put on no airs here, and everybody's sociable. Miss Gilman, she figgers on startin' a chicken-ranch and settlin' in our midst, and I dunno but what we might make her our school-teacher. This time next week we'd ought to have six Rosenblums, and we got four little Garcias right now, and Manuela tells me her brother is liable to come over from Chuckwalla City next month, and he's got five more. That looks right healthy, don't it? Then take the old Alcora Dance Hall down the street, it'd make a right smart school, if we fix her up and spill a little paint around and so forth. The Puffesser is likewise int'rested in hen chickens, Miss Gilman. He's lookin' up bugs right now, but—what did you say your name was, Perfesser?"

Tompkins cleared his throat and bowed to the young woman.

"Percival Henry J. Tompkins, entirely at your service, madam. May I solicit the pleasure of your company in a short walk, to breathe the inspiring evening air and view the noble aspect of the Creator's handiwork in the heavens?"

"Gosh!" murmured Hassayamp in awe. Miss Gilman gave Tompkins a curious glance, as though wishing to peer past those tinted goggles; a smile was in her eyes, as she made demure assent.

"Thank you, I'd enjoy showing you the sights. You just arrived today?"

"Only this afternoon, madam," returned Tompkins. "Mr. Foster, if you apprehend any specimens of *crotalus cerastes* in the near future, I should be glad if you would confine and preserve them for me."

"I'd sure like to, Puffesser," said Hassayamp, blinking, "but we aint got a bug in the house. If you was to go up to Garcia's, you might have some luck."

Tompkins waved his hand, and strode off beside Miss Gilman, who seemed rather red in the face.

NEITHER of them broke the silence. They passed down the street, came to the fast-disappearing rows of ancient buildings, relics of boom days, and presently were walking along the open desert, following the white road that went straight as a die across the horizon. The silence became oppressive, until suddenly Tompkins chuckled and spoke in his natural voice. It was a drawling, rather whimsical voice, and drew a swift glance from the girl.

"Our friend Hassayamp is a human phonograph," he said.

"You'll go too far one of these days," said Miss Gilman. Tompkins stopped short and stared at her.

"Eh? Just what do you mean?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the girl sharply, yet with a laugh in her eyes. "That red hair and your natural voice and the shape of your head don't go with your assumed character, Mr. Tompkins. Take off those glasses and let me see what you look like. And stop fidgeting with that pipe in your pocket. Take it out and smoke. I'd like you to."

Tompkins broke into a laugh, reached up and removed the goggles, and met the curious regard of Miss Gilman.

"What do you wear them for?" she demanded. "You look better without 'em."

"Protection," he drawled, bringing forth his pipe. "You're an observant young woman, but I trust fervently that you'll keep your observations to yourself. I look very much like another man, and do not care to be recognized for him—or mistaken for him."

The girl laughed. "You don't look like a criminal, Mr. Tompkins!"

"I'm not. I'm really a mammalogist. Now, everybody here is positive that a bug-hunter is crazy, so I'm making it easy all around by playing up to the part. You, however, don't look like a chicken-raiser."

"But I am—at least, that's what I'm going to be. I've come from Los Angeles to start a ranch here. Land is cheap; there's no fog; the climate is ideal, and for a while I can sell all I can raise right here in town."

"D'you mean it?" asked Tompkins incredulously.

"Of course I do. The prospect looks a whole lot better to me than the prospect of your finding any animals or bugs out on the desert."

"You don't know a whole lot about the desert, do you?" he asked dryly.

"No. Do you?"

"A little." Tompkins puffed at his pipe rather hard for a moment, frowning at the sunset, then he came to a halt, and turned to the girl with an air of decision.

"See here, Miss Gilman, really I don't want to intrude into your affairs, but I think that you're going ahead rather blindly. Are you all alone here in town?"

"Yes." Her eyes dwelt on his strong, rather harsh features, with questioning scrutiny. "But I've lived on ranches, I've taught school, I have some money saved up—and really, Mr. Tompkins, I'm able to look out for myself."

"No, you're not," he said quietly. Suddenly a look came into his eyes that made the girl catch her breath, so furious and deeply filled with passion was it. "You've got to get out of here!" he exclaimed with abrupt anger in his voice. "You don't know what sort of a place this is—what sort of men are centered around here! There's a gang of the vilest murderers somewhere about Stovepipe Springs that ever saw the light of day! The whole place is a decoy-trap for the unwary—for people like you! If that town knew what my real name was, what my errand is here, my life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel."

Startled by his vehemence, sobered by his words, the girl met his gaze for a moment, then frowned.

"Why do you speak this way?" she demanded calmly. "I think you're far off the mark, Mr. Tompkins. I've met everybody in town since arriving yesterday. They're good, simple people—ignorant if you like, but at heart really fine. I'm afraid you're an un-American sort of person. Do you regard everybody outside of New York with the same savage intolerance? Do you think that because nobody speaks French in Stovepipe Springs, everybody is a poor hick?"

Tompkins stared at her for a minute.

"Good Lord—my dear girl, get me right!" he exclaimed. "I mean literally what I say. I don't know what you're talking about, but I know what I'm talking about!"

"What, then—bands of outlaws and robbers?" She smiled ironically, and the smile stung Tompkins.

"Something like that, yes."

"Then I simply don't believe you," she said with quiet finality. "Shall we go back now?"

"As you prefer. I hope you don't have

any cause to remember my warning with regret."

TO this she made no response, and they returned in silence to the hotel, Tompkins inwardly cursing his very undiplomatic way of presenting the warning. Upon nearing the hostelry, they encountered Mose Pincus, an earnest, alert little man who kept the general store, and he immediately cornered Miss Gilman with a request that she send all orders for chicken equipment through his agency. Tompkins went on alone to his own place, and when the lamp was lighted, he picked up his newspaper and went definitely to work. He knew what to look for now.

It was a Los Angeles paper, which he had bought on leaving the railroad at Meteorite because it was the latest sheet to be had. Now he searched the advertising columns, and after a moment chanced upon the very thing he sought. It was a large display advertisement, and after reading it, Tompkins clipped it out and then perused it more carefully and with keen appreciation. It read as follows:

CHICKEN RANCHERS

Come To Chuckwalla County!

No California fogs in this State; an ideal climate for chickens. Stovepipe Springs will welcome you. Local demand for eggs is heavy. Not a chicken within a radius of thirty miles in one direction and 250 miles in all others.

Off railroad but on State highway. Land from \$1 to \$50 per acre. Taxes so light they make you laugh. Correspondence invited. The Stovepipe Springs Chamber of Commerce will cooperate with you in every way; write the secretary, M. J. Crowfoot, First State Bank, Stovepipe Springs:

Putting the clipping away in his pocket, Tompkins got his pipe going and puffed for a while in frowning reflection. At length he sighed.

"Well, I suppose I can't help her any—and I don't know that I blame her for feeling as she does. To all appearance, this is a harmless little desert town and nothing else. I don't even know that I'm right; haven't a darned bit of proof to lay before her! But this Sidewinder Crowfoot sure lays a clever trap for suckers. Not a chicken around here, eh? He's dead right, at that. What with coyotes, skunks, lynx and snakes, not to mention rats, any chickens would have a hard struggle. And the advertisement doesn't mention water. Hm! I wonder how many poor flies have

been drawn into this spider-net and sucked dry? And I wonder how many poor devils have gone out into that desert around here and never come back—like my brother Alec Ramsay?"

He puffed on, a somber frown darkening his keen eyes.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Percival Henry J. Tompkins, mammalogist, walked into the First State Bank the next morning, he wore his best professorial air.

Moses J. Crowfoot, more generally known as Sidewinder, was his own banking force, and sat alone at a desk behind a grill which hedged off most of the bank. He was not afraid of robbers. No professional robber in the combined areas of Nevada, Utah and New Mexico would have dreamed of tackling the Stovepipe Springs bank, because Sidewinder Crowfoot was an old-timer who knew his business. Three amateurs had undertaken the job two years previously, and each of them received a forty-five slug squarely between the eyes.

The nickname was highly appropriate. Like his namesake, Crowfoot was highly venomous, he struck without warning, and he struck to kill; he was not a pleasant man, and he did not care to be pleasant. He lived alone. In the old dim days, Sidewinder had been a monte dealer in the Alcora Dance Hall; when the law clamped down on gambling, he had owned the Oasis Saloon; when the law clamped down on liquor, he had gone into banking. Some people would claim this was natural evolution.

He looked up at his visitor without speaking. Tompkins, entirely ignoring what had happened upon his arrival in town, came forward to the grill and smiled.

"This, I believe, is Mr. Crowfoot? I have been referred to you, as owner of the local garage. I desire to rent an automobile with which to survey near-by areas of the great American desert and pursue my investigations of the fauna—"

"Can't be done," said Sidewinder curtly. "We only got one rent car, and that's engaged. The other's a demonstrator, and we can't rent it or we'd never sell it."

"Ah! Thank you very much indeed," said Tompkins, and turned to the door. "In that case I had better buy it."

Before Sidewinder could call up any suit-

able retort, his visitor was gone to the garage next door; before Sidewinder could get there, money had changed hands and the shiny flivver reposing on the garage floor was the property of the Professor. Finding himself too late to prevent the purchase, Crowfoot put on his best air and engaged Tompkins in amiable talk, while the mechanic in charge filled the car with oil and gas and put in half a dozen water-bags.

"Hassayamp was telling me," observed the banker, "that you were askin' about a man named Ramsay. Seems to me like I recall the feller. Friend of yours?"

"A mere acquaintance," said Tompkins. "I met him at Palmdale, on the other side of the Mohave, while I was engaged in a study of the curious flora over there. Poor fellow, I felt sorry for him! He had lost one eye, and was afflicted with tuberculosis, and was at the age of sixty-five with not a cent in the world. He mentioned that he thought of coming in this direction to locate, having been here some twenty years ago during the mining boom."

"Oh!" said Sidewinder, with a relieved air. "Then it aint the same one. The one who went through here last year was a right young feller, red-haired and active. If I was you, Perfesser, I'd get loose of that Sagebrush. He aint only a desert rat, and folks tell mighty queer stories about him. All desert rats are queer in the head, you know."

"Why—er—that's very good of you, indeed!" said Tompkins gratefully. "Still, I have engaged the man, perhaps heedlessly, and must keep my promises for a certain time. I suppose, if I were to deposit my money and valuables with you, I'd be in no danger!"

"Right good plan," said Sidewinder. "Step into the bank, and we'll arrange it."

Tompkins obediently retraced his steps, and when he displayed his two certified checks and his roll of loose bills, the banker became almost affable. Tompkins, meantime, was quite conscious that he was being closely studied, and did not hesitate to shove out all his chips and play the game of innocence. He agreed at once that the best scheme was to deposit all his money in care of Mr. Crowfoot, taking the latter's receipt for it, and his air of eager gratitude was pleasant to behold.

"Whom would you recommend as a guide?" he inquired, when the transaction was completed. "After a trip with the

person I have engaged, I might find it advisable to take another cicerone."

"Right good idea," said Mr. Crowfoot. "Hassayamp's a good man— I tell you! There's a feller will be in town next week. I'll speak to him about it. Harrison, his name is—Mesquite Harrison."

A slight pallor crossed the face of Tompkins, but he responded gratefully:

"By all means. Kindly engage him for me. I shall expect to use him at once, and thank you again for your kindness in the matter."

"Don't mention it," said Sidewinder, and grinned to himself when his caller had departed. There was no longer any doubt that the Professor was what Hassayamp proclaimed him—a natural-born fool, like all bug-hunters. No one else would have handed over his money so readily.

TOMPKINS walked back to the hotel, and on the doorstep of his own cell found Sagebrush awaiting him. Inside, with the door closed, the desert rat chuckled.

"I reckon Hassayamp is right uppity over losin' the chance to guide ye, Perfesser," he announced. "But you done jest right. Hassayamp don't know nothin' about the desert."

"No?" Tompkins lighted his pipe. "He lives here, doesn't he?"

"Sho! He's like José Garcia; let a vinegaroon git on him, and he throws a fit. No sir, Hassayamp jest plumb aint a desert man. He knows a sight o' locations. Him and Sidewinder have sold a hell of a lot, too. Folks buy a place and set awhile, and next time I come in to town, they're gone. Thar's cabins all over betwixt yere and the Chuckwallas, where the ground has been sold and deserted. Hassayamp hires fellers to prove up on homestead rights, then buys the homestead off'm 'em and sells it again. He aint no guide, though. All he knows is roads. Git him off'm the road, or show him a t'rant'ler in his blankets, and gosh! Hassayamp is worse'n a tenderfoot. Say, I heard a good one on him this trip!"

Sagebrush chuckled again, spat on the floor, and scratched his whiskers.

"Met up with two fellers in the Salt Pans—ol' Hardrock Miller from Tucson, and another feller. Hardrock used to be a Mormon 'fore they run him out of Arizona for bein' too durned Mormonistic. He tells me Hassayamp used to be one too, away

over to St. John's, 'bout fifteen year back. 'Cordin' to him, Hassayamp vanished real sudden one night, and so did all the money belongin' to the church, and several head of hosses belongin' to other folks. May not be true, though. Hardrock Miller saved hisself from bein' lynched once by tellin' the truth, and aint never done it since. Afraid his luck'd turn, maybe."

Tompkins smiled. "Know a fellow by the name of Mesquite Harrison?"

"Do I?" Sagebrush scowled and spat again. "Is that skunk in town? Then by gosh, I'm goin' for him!" The desert rat shot a hand to his waistband, where there was a swelling about the size of a revolver. "Why, Perfesser, Mesquite is rank pizen! Yessir. I've knowed him to rob prospectors of their grub—it's a fact! And once he changed the signs over in the Salt Pans, so's a poor pilgrim took his team the wrong way and durned near died, and that skunk Mesquite robbed him bare. By gosh, anybody who changes water-hole signs in the Salt Pans gits shot on sight! Mesquite knows it, too. He don't come to town when I'm due, usually—"

"He's not here now," said Tompkins. "I heard the name mentioned; that's all. I've bought a flivver, and I wish you'd purchase all supplies necessary and get them loaded into the back seat. Strap her down good. We can get off in the morning."

"Gosh!" said Sagebrush, a far-away look in his eyes. "It'll seem lonesome as hell without them burros—well, s'pose I got to do it. Where we goin' to?"

"Don't know yet."

"I'd sort o' like to look over them ledges jest this side the Chuckwallas—over by Pinecate Cañon," said the desert rat thoughtfully.

"Can we find any *crotalus cerastes* there?"

"I reckon so. Find most anything there." Sagebrush inspected his employer curiously. "Say, you aint so bad a feller when you git off to yourself, Perfesser. You talk real human. Kind of put on dog when there's any folks around, don't you?"

Tompkins laughed. "I expect I do, Sagebrush. How about water over by that place you mentioned—Pinecate Cañon?"

"Plenty right now. Rains aint only jest quit. Another two weeks, and we wont find nary a drap. Cañon ought to look right pretty, too, with the flowers. The desert sure is handsome this time o' year.

All the bugs comin' out, too, so's you'll feel to home. Lots o' tumble-bugs over by the mesa and cañon—that's how come it's called Pinecate, bein' the Mex name for tumble-bug."

"Ever hear of a fellow named Ramsay, who was interested in mines around here?"

"Nope." Sagebrush rose. "Well, I reckon I'll go git them supplies, then git my correspondence finished today. See you around sunup tomorrow."

HE departed. Tompkins, left alone, opened his two large grips and began to pack one of them for the trip. The larger part of the contents consisted of supplies such as could not be purchased in Stovepipe Springs; there was even a large alcohol stove with plentiful fuel. The packing finished, from a secret pocket inside the grip Tompkins took a letter and began to peruse it carefully, not for the first nor the tenth time. The envelope had been postmarked "Stovepipe Springs" and bore a date of a year past. It was the final portion of the letter which attracted the rereading of Tompkins, however.

Enclosed is the deed to the property. I am more than satisfied with the prospects of the location. You will notice that the mining rights revert to the State in most instances, but here I have bought the land outright so there is no question of mineral rights. A man called Mesquite Harrison owned it.

I have seldom seen a more beautiful spot, even after the desert rains, for it is filled with all kinds of flowers. What a pity that flowers and water cannot last! Halfway up the cañon there is a huge boulder of pink granite, split squarely in two, with three piñons growing out of the split, and a tiny spring trickling from the piñons. Really a marvel! I understand the spring never fails, though it is too tiny to be of much use. Well, good-by for this time. I'm going to spend two months at the location, and if it has any gold I'll know by that time.

Your loving brother,

ALEC.

Tompkins folded the letter and put it away again, then sat down and sucked at his empty pipe.

"Poor Alec—what happened to him, I wonder!" he muttered. "And not a thing to go on. Deed to the property lost. No way of finding its location. Never recorded the deed. How was that deed lost? The letter was mailed here. It must have been in the letter. Therefore—but I've no proof. Hell! Once let me get a grip on something definite!"

He seized his glasses impatiently, donned them, and left the room. Outside he almost ran into Miss Gilman. She greeted him brightly.

"Good morning, sir! I hope your digestion is better today?"

"No, it's worse." Tompkins smiled. "Please remember to say nothing of my remarks."

"I'll have no chance," she returned. "We're leaving after breakfast tomorrow. Mr. Foster—otherwise Hassayamp—is taking me over toward those hills in the east. He knows of a splendid location for my chicken-ranch. Pinecate Mesa—isn't that a romantic name?"

"Very," said Tompkins gravely. "Very romantic. It means tumblebug. I may be going in that direction myself, so I'll hope to see you again."

And before she could say yea or nay to this, he went on his way.

CHAPTER IV

SUNRISE found Haywire serving an early feed to Tompkins and Sagebrush, while the laden flivver rested out in front of the hotel awaiting them. Tompkins expected to drive the flivver—in fact, he was forced to drive it. When they had about finished their breakfast, Hassayamp appeared, yawning.

"You gents sure are industrious critters," he observed casually. "Which way you headin' for?"

"West," said Tompkins promptly. "We shall impersiflate the great and boundless expanses of the arid lands beneath the setting sun."

"That's good." Hassayamp bent a significant eye on Sagebrush. "It's right healthy out in the flat country. I got to go east my own self today. Well, so long, and good luck to you, Puffesser! Hope you find lots of bugs."

"Travelin' with me," said Sagebrush, "the Perfesser wont find nothing else."

"I believe it," returned Hassayamp acidly. "I sure believe it."

"Meanin' what?" demanded Sagebrush, one hand slipping toward his waistband.

"Meanin' that you sure know the desert, o' course! What else would I mean?"

Sagebrush grunted and departed, while Hassayamp muttered inaudibly and glared.

Tompkins climbed into the flivver; Sagebrush climbed in after him; and with a

roar the little car started out of town. One mile north of Stovepipe Springs the main highway turned abruptly to the right, for the Chuckwalla range, and beyond it, the civilized purlieus of Chuckwalla City, thirty miles away. The desert highway continued on ahead, and ran, a flea-bitten track, straight over the northern horizon.

"I suppose," asked Tompkins as they rattled out of town, "you never happened to meet up with a large pink granite boulder, halfway up a cañon, split in two, with three piñons growing out of it, and a little spring at the foot of the piñons?"

"Nope," said Sagebrush after a moment. "Nope, can't say that I have, but that don't signify much. Aint no piñon trees around yere except toward the Chuckwallas. Pink granite is most anywheres. I'm right disappointed you aint headin' east. I'd kind o' set my notions on looking over that there Pinecate section."

Tompkins chuckled. Then, as they approached the turn in the highway, he swung the car to the right and headed for the distant peaks of the Chuckwallas.

"That's where we're going, Sagebrush."

"How come you told Hassayamp—"

"Because I was telling Hassayamp."

Sagebrush grinned, got out a black plug of navy cut, and bit happily at it.

"You and me sure is goin' to get on, Perfesser. Whoop her up!" Then he grunted. "You heard what he said 'bout it bein' healthy out to the desert? Durn him! Durn him and Sidewinder and all the rest o' them galoots! They been tryin' to keep me out o' the Chuckwallas for quite a spell back. I bet Hassayamp's got some claims over there hisself."

"Why have they been trying to keep you out of there?"

"Dad-blamed if I know. Jest plumb ornery, I reckon. Maybe they're afraid I'd meet some o' the pilgrims they gets located over there, and talk. They allus locates some over there this time o' year, when there's lots o' water and things look good."

TOMPKINS, who had removed his yellow blinders, squinted out at the desert with frowning eyes, and drove on in silence. He was reasonably sure that in Sagebrush Beam he had chanced upon the one man who might be of incalculable value to him. However, he was not disposed to take any premature chances. His own real business here was a matter for himself alone.

The flivver ate up the miles rapidly, ever advancing upon the Chuckwalla hills, which appeared to recede as it approached. To one acquainted with the desert only from the window of a railroad car, this morning's ride would have been a tremendous surprise. Under close inspection, what appeared to be ground flat as a billiard table was shown to be in reality dissected by almost invisible arroyos and crowned by slight rises. The blinding white desert glare was in fact a spectrum of brilliancy, only visible to accustomed eyes. The eastern horizon was barred by the Chuckwallas, a rather high range which on their western slopes presented only a bleakly dun expanse streaked with purple. To west and north were scattered buttes in splendid colorings of scarlet and lavender and gold, while the patches of cacti across the desert floor made brilliant carpet-spots of vivid green, sprinkled with the raw yet blending hues of an Oriental rug. Here were ocatilla sprays, towering up many feet in glowing blossom; here were opuntias gorgeous with red and yellow clusters, gaunt Joshua trees gay with bloom—all the brief flower-time of the desert was at its height. In a few more days the blossoms would be gone, the myriad flowers springing from the earth would be withered, and the white glare would break only over the brownish-green verdure of brush and cactus in summer garb.

Hot as that glare might be, the motion of the car kept its occupants comfortable; and the flivver itself, specially equipped with water-pump for desert use, made no complaint as the miles dropped behind. Now and again Tompkins asked a question, Sagebrush responding curtly. Garulous as he was at times, the old desert rat was for the most part silent as the desert itself, whose quiet was broken only by the angry chattering of cactus wrens or the occasional shrill call-whistle of a thrasher.

Twenty miles had been covered, and the Chuckwalla slopes, apparently as distant as ever, were now broken up into foothills and deep cañons, all a dead dun glare under the white sun, when Sagebrush touched the arm of the driver.

"Half a mile ahead the trail branches off to Pinecate Mesa. That's it, off to the left—reg'lar saddletop. Look out for a dry wash, soon's 'ye leave the road."

Tompkins looked at Pinecate. This was a great gaunt saddleback that ran off into

the range; he set it down as about ten miles distant, and well to the left. The cañon which gave access to the mesa itself was, as Sagebrush informed him, on the north side and therefore out of sight at present.

The turnout was almost invisible, but Tompkins caught it, swerved the car into the looser sand, and was aware of a grunt of assent from beside him. Then he jammed on the brakes and slid into a "dry" wash which at the moment was a foot deep in water, splashed through, and climbed out on the other side.

"Hold on a minute," spoke up Sagebrush. "Let's have a look at this yere trail."

The car halted, and both men got out. Here, off the highway and sheltered by the mesquite on either hand, the loose earth would bear any "sign" indefinitely, for nothing less than a sandstorm would wash over the tracks. Sagebrush examined the sand attentively, then expectorated and turned to Tompkins, who had donned his yellow blinders as a protection against the glare.

"What d'ye make of it?"

"Automobile," said Tompkins. "How long ago, I can't say."

SAGEBRUSH grunted, at this, and pointed to a series of scroll-like markings which followed the right-hand tire-rut. Then he indicated further prints in the shape of a Maltese cross, which had obviously been made over the scrolls.

"Flivver come along yere yestiddy," he stated. "Last night a sidewinder come along and follered the ruts. Then this mornin' early a roadrunner come along likewise."

"All obvious but the time, Sherlock," said Tompkins gravely. "How do you know it was yesterday and not last week?"

"'Cause I seen that thar cuss Hassayamp ridin' out this-a-way yestiddy mornin' as I was comin' in to town to mail my post-cards. Some skullduggery goin' on."

"Hm!" Tompkins frowned. "Sagebrush, that mesa up ahead would make a fine place for a chicken-ranch, wouldn't it?"

"Hell of a fine place," affirmed the desert rat, squinting at the long saddleback. "Danged fine place, Perfesser! Every wildcat and coyote in the Chickwallas would be pointin' that way, inside of a week. If a gent was feelin' real philanthropic and wantin' to help out the

pore desert critters, I'd say start him a chicken-and-egg factory right up yonder. Yessir. That's like Haywire Johnson done, time he was livin' down to Meteorite. He started him a egg-ranch—done it to get ahead of some other folks and kep' it real quiet. Got all his chickens clear from Phoenix and Yuma, danged near a hull car-load of 'em, and set up incubators and all that truck. Then he begun to figger on how rich he'd be. Every oncet in a while he'd go out to look for eggs, but dad blame if he got any. He fed them chickens on everything from ground-up lizards to egg-plant, and nary a egg come along. Finally he got desp'rit and called in help—and durned if all them birds wasn't roosters! Yessir, not a female chicken in the lot. That's how come Haywire went broke and had to come over yere to work for Hassa-yamp."

TOMPKINS grinned despite himself. Then he sobered.

"Look here, Sagebrush. Remember that young woman at the hotel? They've framed up a deal on her. They're trying to sell her a chicken-ranch on this mesa."

"Sounds like them city fellers. Dad blame, they'd rob a dyin' man! Serves the female right, too, for havin' that much money. Females ain't got no right to have money. Oncet when I was married and livin' down to Umatilla, my ol' woman got ten dollars from one of her relations and went to Phoenix, and durned if she didn't spend it all in three days. When I trounced her for it, she up and run off with a Mormon from Yuma, and that's the last of her. Twenty years ago that was, and I been happy ever since, and ain't looked twice at no females."

"That's a novel argument, certainly," said Tompkins. "But I'm going to try and keep Miss Gilman from getting robbed. Are you with me?"

Sagebrush rubbed his whiskers, squinted at the sand, expectorated over an unwary Chuckwalla lizard, and then responded without enthusiasm.

"Nope! Quicker that there female gits skun and gits out o' this country, better off I'll be. I don't hanker after no females spoilin' the scenery. Besides which, I aint pinin' to start no argument with Side-winder Crowfoot and his crowd, not without they force me into it. Leave the other feller alone, I says, so long's he don't crowd ye none."

"All right, then," said Tompkins briskly, and turned to the car. "Let's get moving."

THEY drove on in renewed silence. Tompkins had a new angle on his companion, and was not sure that he liked it; at all events, he perceived that Sagebrush knew his own mind and was not to be depended upon as an assistant under the present completion of things. The desert rat had a certain peculiar philosophy of his own, like all old prospectors, and arguments against it would be as useless as the teeth of a coyote against the shell of a tortoise. So Tompkins held his peace.

The flat desert gave way to hills and depressions as they drew closer to the range, and by the action of the engine Tompkins knew that they had been on a steady climb. Also, he began to sight scattered piñon trees, indicating a higher altitude, and was conscious that they were following an ancient road. Presently the car was climbing along a well defined valley, which Sagebrush called Mint Cañon.

"Ol' stamp-mill ahead of us," he announced. "Fellers used to bring quartz down to it from all around, in the ol' days. Got to leave the car there. Job Carter put up that there mill; four-stamp crusher, she was—dad blame, how Job did like his lick! Used to make mint juleps in a bucket. That's how come he growed mint. Job, he used to whiff the mint and then throw down the lick while he held his breath. One night he wakes up with a pain in his stummick and mixes him a julep in the dark, and got him the cyanide bottle by mistake, and he's buried somewhere back o' the mill right now. That's what comes o' not stoppin' to appreciate your lick as it goes down."

They rounded a low hill and halted by the remains of the stamp-mill—a structure of weather-beaten boards, open in front, with the remains of a shed adjoining. The machinery was rusted and strewn about the place haphazard, and the whole place was the epitome of desolation. To one side was a board floor—the only relic of what had once been a roadside saloon, adjoining the mill.

Sagebrush pointed out that by leaving the car here in shelter of the shed, they could then shoulder packs and cover the last three miles to Pinecate Cañon on foot. The Professor took one look at the duffle in the rear of the car, and threw in the gears.

"Not by a blamed sight!" he said cheerfully. "Looks like Hassayamp's car has gone ahead, so we'll do likewise. Did I mention that Hassayamp is bringing Miss Gilman out today to look over the cañon for a chicken-ranch site?"

"Dad blame it!" groaned Sagebrush. "Then I'm goin' to take my pick and go look over the north end o' the mesa. You can pester around that female if ye like, Perfesser, but not me. Send up a smoke when they're gone and I'll come in."

"Agreed," and Tompkins laughed as he sent the car ahead in the faint tracks left by the other flivver.

CHAPTER V

NOON was past and over. Tompkins, ensconced in a niche of the cañon, was delightedly observing the scene before him. Sagebrush was gone. The flivver was laid up out of sight a half-mile away in a thicket of cactus and piñon.

It was peaceful here in the cañon, and hot. Tompkins lay shaded by an overhanging rock which concealed him and enjoyed himself while he waited. He was a third of the way up the cañon, which wound upward for another mile before opening on the mesa. Here it was fairly wide, and the sun had excellent chances to radiate from the bolders, and the spring life of the place was warmed into activity. Patches of cacti and jack-pine abounded. No water was in sight, but Tompkins had a water-bag within reach.

He lay perfectly quiet, watching a trade-rat whose nest lay in a cranny of the rocks just to one side, and a young coyote which was vainly endeavoring to investigate the rat and nest. It was obvious that this particular rat had migrated from the desert below, for while his nest was composed of pebbles and sticks and all manner of queer objects, it was protected after the peculiar fashion of his desert brethren. Two runways entered the nest, itself nearly out of sight under the rocks; and about these runways, laid with mathematical precision, were hundreds of terrible opuntia joints.

To Tompkins, as to every other naturalist, it was an unsolved mystery how the pack-rat, with delicate and unprotected paws, could handle these joints of cactus. No other living creature can face the *cholla* cactus, whose spines, as the Indians declare, jump at one, inflicting acute agony;

even the rattler avoids it gingerly. Here for a space of ten feet around the nest were heaped the matted *cholla* joints, while the pack-rat who owned the establishment sat out in full sight and insulted the hovering coyote with angry taunts.

That the coyote was young and hungry was obvious, or he would not have attempted to molest so well-entrenched a rat. Oblivious to the presence of Tompkins, who sat perfectly motionless, he charged again and again on those defenses. Each time his courage failed at the last moment and he would draw off, snarling and snapping in futile rage, before his nose touched the *cholla*.

In a cool niche between two rocks, in sight of Tompkins above but concealed from the furious coyote, lay a fifteen-inch sidewinder, safely sheltered from the deadly rays of the sun, his brown-and-gray length practically invisible against the rocks. He lay stretched out, head lifted ready to strike, a venomous and malignant thing beyond all words with his horned features and green jewels of eyes. The coyote, unconscious of this lurking death, continued backward and forward, now rushing and now sending a flurry of sand flying in his anger. One such flurry had aroused the sidewinder, and Tompkins waited for the inevitable, since the coyote was drawing closer and closer to the unseen death.

Now it came, with such rapidity that the eye could scarcely follow. Pawing the sand, the coyote came sidewise toward the niche of the sidewinder, then went forward in another rush, stopped short, snarled, and took courage again. His leap brought him past the niche; and the sidewinder, after the fashion of his kind, struck without warning or coiling. There is nothing swifter than the strike of a sidewinder—but the coyote saw the lurking death just in time. A frantic yap of fear broke from his jaws. He gave a desperate twist sidewise in mid-leap—a doubling-up of his body that evaded the reptile's blow—and in mad panic came down and leaped again, blindly. He landed squarely in the matted *cholla*.

Agonized howls rent the air, and sticks and bones and odd objects from the pack-rat's nest were hurled about; the coyote became a whirlwind of furry agony from which proceeded howl upon howl of anguish. Then, tail between legs, wailing to high heaven with every leap, the wretched coyote went down the cañon like a streak and was gone.

TOMPKINS caught up the stone under his hand and hurled it, then rose. Crushed, the sidewinder lay quivering. A glittering object had caught the eye of Tompkins, and now he raked it forth from the *cholla* with a long stick. It was one of the mass of objects which had formed the rat's nest, flung about by the agonized flurry of the coyote. When he had it within reach, Tompkins picked it up and stood staring at it, incredulity and horror mingling in his eyes. It was a small tarnished cigarette case of silver, and upon it he made out the initials "A. R."

"The case I gave Alec for Christmas two years ago!"

The words died on his lips. It was the property of his vanished brother Alec Ramsay. Holding the case in his hand, he stared over the desolate, empty cañon until the heat of the sun roused him. He stooped, donned his pith helmet, and then looked again at the metal case. Mechanically he pressed the spring, which refused to work. Taking out his knife, Tompkins pried the case open—and beneath the spring-holder discovered a folded paper, on which was scrawled in pencil the writing of his brother.

His blurred eyes cleared. At the top was written:

Send this to Pat Ramsay, Glendale Apts. Denver.

And below, scrawled more sharply, but ending with an uncertain dash:

Dear Pat: Forgot to mail this. Too late. They got me. Shot through lungs. 3 men in party. Bad gang here. All located Hourglass Cañon, N. E. of here. Box cañon. Cholos and whites. Sidewinder—

That was all. Lips compressed, Tompkins read and reread this fateful message, which now he knew to be a message from the dead. Then, in that cold certainty, he opened the folded paper and found it to be a deed, made out by Mesquite Harrison to Alec Ramsay.

"By glory—the deed to Alec's mining property!" he ejaculated, as he conned the writing therein. Then, when he had finished reading, he folded up the deed, replaced it in the cigarette case, slipped the case into his pocket, and stood staring up the winding reaches of the green cañon.

That property was located in this very cañon. Stunned as he was by surprise heaped on surprise, he realized this only too

clearly. His brother was dead. The property in question had been bought from Sidewinder Crowfoot for whom Mesquite Harrison had acted as a blind. It lay somewhere up there toward the mesa—marked by that split pink granite boulder, perfectly described in the deed as to bounds and extent. It was this identical cañon for which he had come searching so blindly. Had he gone on around the next bend, he would have found the boulder with its piñon trees.

Tompkins sank down and took his head between his hands, striving hard for sanity. His first impulses were not sane at all; they were murderous. His brain was seething in tumult. He was not red-headed for nothing.

By slow degrees his thoughts settled down into grim coherence. Now he knew what he had long ago presumed to be the case—that his brother was dead. But here in his pocket was evidence as to who was responsible. There was no direct evidence against Sidewinder Crowfoot, but Tompkins brushed this impatiently aside; he was perfectly convinced that Crowfoot was the man behind everything going on here.

"At the same time, I've got to be sane—got to be!" he thought desperately, fighting for self-control. "I can't go off half-cocked. They've got brains. They'll get me if I let out a peep. Nothing but my own brains will save me now, and if I don't go slow, I'm a goner sure! This changes my whole program. Now I know everything—and it's up to me to get busy. First thing to do is to get back to town and get this deed recorded—send it in by registered mail. The stage goes out in the morning, so any time will do for that. Chuckwalla City is the county seat; might run over there in the flivver, only I'd better see Sidewinder Crowfoot, get my money, and sever connections. And I'll want a rifle, before I go up against that crowd in Hourglass Cañon, wherever it is. Then—"

HE was abruptly startled from his reflections by an eager hail, and looked up to see Miss Gilman approaching, with Hassayamp trailing behind her. He had forgotten the girl, and now an exclamation of dismay broke from him. Then he rose, donning glasses and helmet again, and nervously lighted up his pipe.

"We didn't see you till we were almost on top of you," exclaimed Miss Gilman.

"Were you asleep? What makes your face look so white?"

"A touch o' sun, madam. No, I was not asleep. I was watching the peregrinations of yonder pack-rat. Not so fast, Mr. Foster—there is a large *crotalus cerastes* just by your left foot."

"A which?" demanded Hassayamp, by no means pleased to see the professor.

"I believe you would term the reptile a sidewinder—"

"Oh, my gosh!" Hassayamp saw the dead snake and did an acrobatic stunt that removed him some distance away, while a revolver came out in his hand.

"Don't shoot!" said Tompkins. "He's dead. I killed him."

"Why in hell didn't you say so first?" snapped Hassayamp angrily. "What you doin' up this-a-way? Thought you was headin' into the sink-holes?"

"I changed my mind," said Tompkins. He showed Miss Gilman the pack-rat's nest. "That's worth seeing. I have a particular reason for asking you to remember it. But may I inquire whither you two are heading?"

"Up the cañon to look at a chicken-ranch site," said the girl, glancing from him to the nest and back again. "Will you come along? Or don't you feel well? Really, you looked almost ghastly at first, Mr. Tompkins!"

"Reckon the climb would be too blamed hard on the Puffesser, ma'am," struck in Hassayamp, who did not desire company. "And there aint no bugs up there."

"All the more honor in discovering some, sir! I accept your invitation, madam, and shall accompany you a little way."

"We've brought lunch along, if you'll join us," invited Miss Gilman, starting off again with Tompkins at her side. He glanced around and saw that Hassayamp had paused to wipe a dripping brow and bite off a fresh chew, and was momentarily out of earshot. Swiftly, he took the cigarette-case from his pocket and passed it to the girl.

"Open this and read it—quick, now! I found it in that rat's nest. When I tell you my real name is Pat Ramsay, you'll be able to guess why I came here—and whether my warning was well founded. Read the deed carefully, then see whether the place you're going to buy corresponds with it. Quickly! I'll hold this rascal engaged. Read and give it back to me. I must get back to town at once."

WITH this rapid utterance, he turned abruptly from the girl and walked back to Hassayamp, halting the latter's advance with upraised hand.

"Mr. Foster!" he said solemnly. "May I inquire, sir—ah, that is a very interesting creature on your collar, very interesting indeed!"

Hassayamp screwed his head to look at himself, but could see nothing.

"What is it?" he demanded nervously.

"A beautiful little creature, peculiar to our deserts," said Tompkins in bland accents. "Undoubtedly it has sought refuge from the sun under your shirt-collar. You know, of course, that the *solpugid* is really an insect, having tracheal tubes instead of the spider's book lungs—"

"A spider!" exclaimed Hassayamp. "Git it off'm me, Puffesser, quick!"

"Not a spider at all, my dear sir, and quite harmless, I assure you, despite local superstition. Ah, there it goes about your collar—no wonder the dear little creatures are called wind-scorpions or vinegaroons—"

"A *matavenado*—wow! My gosh, git him off'm me!" Hassayamp let out a yell and began to claw at himself. "I'm a dead man—git him off'm me—"

Tompkins seized him and brushed vigorously at his back.

"There—he's gone. Pay no more attention to the matter, I implore you. I was about to ask whether you ever indulge in spiritous liquors, Mr. Foster? In such case, I have in my pocket a small vial of medicinal whisky. I understand that it is the custom in the desert to offer a drink—"

Hassayamp, who like many another man with slight experience of the harmless but frightful-looking vinegaroons believed them to be deadly creatures, was pale with emotion. And with more than emotion, too.

"If you got a drink, Puffesser," he implored, "for gosh sake give it here! I swallowed my plug."

Tompkins produced a small pocket-flask and began to unscrew it. Hassayamp became yet more pale and agitated.

"Oh, gosh!" he groaned. "I'll never eat no more tobacker—"

He reached out and took the flask. He sniffed it, and into his melancholic eyes came a glow of warmth and happiness. Tompkins beamed upon him, as he lifted the flask.

"I forgot to mention, Mr. Foster, that

you must use your mustache as a strainer, because in that whisky I am preserving a very fine specimen of rock scorpion which I recently discovered, and I should be very sorry to have it lost—”

Hassayamp jerked the flask from his lips. He looked at the Professor with slowly distending eyes, then thrust the flask at him; and, with one agonized groan, retired among the near-by boulders.

Tompkins turned and rejoined Miss Gilman.

“Hassayamp will rejoin you shortly,” he said. “He unfortunately swallowed his chew of tobacco—an accident which will unnerve the strongest man, I assure you—”

The girl looked at him with strained and anxious eyes.

“But this—this paper! Do you mean to tell me that this man Alec Ramsay was your brother?”

Tompkins nodded quietly. “Yes, Miss Gilman. I came here to trace him—and by a stroke of sheer luck I found this cigarette-case. You have read that deed? Then I advise you to go on up the cañon and see if the description fits. I haven’t been up there. Be very careful to say nothing to Hassayamp about this. I’ll see you tonight, if I may, and we’ll talk over what is to be done. Now I must get off—you’d better keep a sharp lookout for rattlers among these rocks. Don’t wait for Hassayamp; he’ll be along as soon as he’s able. *Hasta la vista!*”

She made no response, but stood gazing after him thoughtfully as he turned and departed.

CHAPTER VI

AS Tompkins climbed down the rock-strewn cañon toward the thorny growth which hid the flivver from sight, he came to a decision upon his course of action, forcing himself to determine upon a caution which was distasteful and yet necessary.

“*Hasta mañana!*” he resolved. “Until tomorrow, at least, I must remain Percival and so forth Tompkins—and then I’ll become Pat Ramsay once more, and get into action. The damned murderers! I wonder how many men have gone the way of poor Alec? I wonder how many people have been decoyed into this spiderweb to lose everything they had? Alec must have gone investigating, must have discovered

the headquarters of this gang—and so they finished him. He’s probably lying somewhere up that cañon now. Well, time enough to look him up; just now I’ve got to watch my step mighty close.”

He was now assailed by the problem of locating Sagebrush, since he could not well run off with the car and leave his companion to rusticate in the desert solitudes. As he came in sight of the patch of piñon and cactus which enshrined the flivver, he caught no sign of the desert rat. He knew that he could recall Sagebrush with a smoke, but this he did not desire to do unless necessary.

When he drew near the clump, he perceived Hassayamp’s flivver on the other side, with strips of canvas flung over the tires to protect them. An unusual object beneath this car attracted his attention, and upon closer approach he discovered it to be no other than Sagebrush. He gave a hail, and the old desert rat crawled out into the sunlight.

An exclamation broke from Tompkins, and he hurried forward. The left arm of Sagebrush was out of its shirt-sleeve and roughly bandaged, and the bandage was dark with blood.

“What happened?” he demanded. “How’d you hurt yourself, old-timer?”

Sagebrush clawed at his whiskers and flung the inquirer a pained look.

“You got it plumb wrong, Perfesser,” he observed. “I aint been meanderin’ around these parts for fifteen year or more ’thout learnin’ how not to hurt myself. I aint no pilgrim, by gosh!”

“My humble apologies,” said Tompkins dryly. “May I ask, then, who hurt you?” Sagebrush grinned.

“Another of these yere smart gents who think that ’cause a man’s a prospector and don’t wear galluses, he’s a babe in arms. I aint right certain as to this feller’s name, but when I was over to Mohave six months ago, I seen a picture of him in the sheriff’s office. Name was Joe Mendoza, or some such *cholo* name.”

The speaker enjoyed hugely the bewilderment of Tompkins.

“You don’t mean you had a scrap, Sagebrush?”

“Nope.” Sagebrush expectorated, wiped his lips and grinned. “I was peckin’ away at a ledge in a cañon a couple mile east of yere, when durned if that feller Mesquite Harrison didn’t come ridin’ down the cañon on a hoss! Yessir! Right on top

o' me, 'fore I seen him, too. He started throwin' lead, and I covered up, and 'fore I could git into action, the coyote was gone. Then along come another feller that I hadn't seen, this yere *cholo*, and durned if he didn't pick on me too. But I was ready for him, you betcha! I gives him jest one crack from ol' Betsy,"—here Sagebrush patted his waistband significantly,—“and he flops. I walks over to him and seen he looked like this *cholo* Mendoza, and then I come back yere and set down to rest a spell.”

“Killed him?” asked Tompkins curtly.

“Hope so. He was some dead when I left him, anyhow, but you never can tell 'bout them *marihuana*-eaters. I knowed a *cholo* over to Mormon Wells, oncet, that et *marihuana* and smoked it likewise. Fin'ly one night he got plumb filled up on it, and jumped into the corral and begun to slash the hosses with his knife. Sheriff and two other fellers sat on the bars and pumped lead into him for as much as five minutes, but he didn't quit till he'd slashed every hoss there; then he quit. Sheriff allowed he'd been dead with the first shot, but the *marihuana* had kep' him goin', same's a rattler keeps a-twitchin' till sundown after he's dead. That there hop is powerful stuff, Perfesser.”

TOMPKINS stood staring at the desert rat for a moment. Then:

“The whole gang will be after you now, wont they?”

Sagebrush gave him a queer look. “How come you know so durned much, Perfesser?”

“That's what I'm here to know,” snapped Tompkins suddenly. “Remember my asking you about a boulder with piñon trees growing out of it? Well, that place is up yonder in Pinecate Cañon. My name isn't Tompkins at all. It's Pat Ramsay. Last year my brother Alec came over here to spend a year in the desert and clear up his lungs. He bought a place and vanished—clear vanished, and couldn't be traced. The last heard of him was from Stovepipe Springs. He wrote me about a place he had bought, describing that boulder. I found this up the cañon in a pack-rat's nest. Look it over while I get the car ready.”

He gave the cigarette-case to the staring desert rat, then turned and went back to his own car. When he got this out of the brush, he removed most of the load

and hid it securely among the trees. This done, he returned to Sagebrush, who was sitting on the running-board of Hassa-yamp's car examining the deed.

“Anything I can do for your arm?” he asked.

“Nope. Bone aint hurt. Say, Perfesser, you've sure struck me all of a heap! Still, I knowed you wasn't the danged fool you looked.”

“Thanks.” Tompkins laughed curtly. “Now, Sagebrush, I'm going to town, speak easy to everyone, and slide back here. First I want to investigate that Hourglass Cañon, wherever it is—”

“I know where it is,” said Sagebrush, scratching his wealth of whiskers.

“All right. Where do you come in on the program? Want to be left out?”

Sagebrush produced his pipe and sucked at it. At length he made slow answer.

“Perfesser, there's some folks around here jest pining to be left alone, and most gen'ally they gets left alone. That *cholo* Mendoza was one such, and killin' him aint botherin' me none. Most likely you've discounted Sidewinder Crowfoot?”

“My guess is that he's the head of the whole gang.”

“Reckon ye aint far off. Now, so long as I aint bothered, I aint troublin' nobody. My motter is never to bother a rattler what's a gent and sounds his rattles—but if he acts like a sidewinder, then bash his head, and do it pronto! Yestiddy you asks if I'll help keep this yere female from gettin' skun, and I says no. I still aint int'rested nohow. But two of that danged crowd have set in on me with a cold deck this mornin', and I'm plumb riled. Yessir, I'm riled!”

Sagebrush stood up. His bent figure straightened a trifle, and a sudden savage expression showed in his eyes, half masked behind the hairy growth of whiskers. In a flash all his dirt and squalor, all his unkempt and sun-bleached appearance, was gone in the eyes of Tompkins; he saw there a desert man who cared nothing for externals, but who could cope daily with the bitterest and most fearful forces of nature—and who was now ready to turn his inward strength against men. The drab and plodding desert rat suddenly showed, for one flashing moment, what unsuspected depths of character lay within him; and a rush of anger unbarred the floodgates of his reticence.

“Yessir, I'm riled! I've seen them go-

in's-on and said nothin'. I've seen them outlaws rulin' the roost around yere and said nothin'. 'Twan't no skin off'm my nose. I hadn't no call to butt in. I've seen folks come in yere right happy, and seen 'em go out skun and mis'able and busted. I've seen one feller after another come in yere with the law two jumps behind him, and he goes over to Hourglass Cañon and lives happy. No law reaches in yere; nobody dast to interfere; and nobody knows about it anyhow. Stovepipe Springs, dad blame it, is jest a blind! If any law-off'cer comes pirootin' around, he gits steered plumb careful and goes away 'thout learnin' nothin'. But now, by gosh, I'm riled! Yessir. Perfesser, I'm with ye six ways from Sunday. Them skunks have sold us chips in this yere game, and by gosh I'll play them chips till hell freezes over! Name your ante, Perfesser, and let's go."

SAGEBRUSH relaxed. He stuck his pipe in his pocket, brought out his plug and bit off a large section. Tompkins, taking the cigarette case and pocketing it, nodded.

"Good. I'm going to get a rifle in town and come back tomorrow morning without anyone suspecting what I have in mind. Then I'll be Pat Ramsay once more. Want to go to town with me?"

"Reckon not," said Sagebrush reflectively. "Mesquite was headin' for town, and him and me would sure collide. That might spoil your hand. And say! I remember that brother o' yours. I seen him with Mesquite one time. He looked a heap like you do 'thout them spec's and all."

Tompkins produced his pocket flask, opened it and held it out.

"Here's to our luck, Sagebrush! Good hunting!"

With a grunt of delight, Sagebrush lifted the flask and absorbed his share of the contents; Tompkins finished it off, undisturbed by any thought of rock scorpions, eyed the empty glass container, and with a laugh tossed it into the clump of trees.

"Then I'm off. I'll be back in the morning. Have to send that deed to be recorded. Anything you want from town?"

Sagebrush wiped his lips and nodded.

"Yep. There's jest one feller there ye can trust—Haywire Johnson, up to the hotel. Register that deed and send it by him and tell him to shet up about it. Otherwise, that durned Hassayamp will poke his nose into it. Then tell Haywire

to give you that there gun he's keepin' for me. I don't aim to carry more'n one gun these days, not havin' much use for it, and Haywire has been keepin' my other one, I'll mosey up this yere cañon and have breakfast ready for ye in the mornin'. Git out early."

With another nod, Tompkins climbed into his car, started the engine, and started away. He knew well enough that Sagebrush would carefully avoid meeting Hassayamp and Miss Gilman.

What most stirred in his mind, however, as he headed for town, was that mention of his brother and Mesquite Harrison—and Mesquite was now in town. Taken in conjunction with Crowfoot's recommendation, here was a chance not to be missed.

"I'll sure interview Mr. Harrison and give him the time of his life before I'm done with him!" thought Tompkins, and he glanced at the sun. "Hm! I can get to town and clean up everything before supper. Then I'll want to see Miss Gilman. She must be persuaded to get out of here at once. Hm! Queer how old Sagebrush showed up. To all appearance, he's a comic-supplement character; put him on a city street and he'd gather a crowd—but how many of that crowd would last a week with him on the Mohave? These smart Alecs back East who think Europe is better than America and who part their hair the way the Prince of Wales does it, and who look on everyone west of Newark, N. J. with supreme contempt—wouldn't I like to see 'em get out in the desert with old Sagebrush, though! They'd find out what sort of man it was who made this country what she is."

It did not occur to him that in undertaking to play a lone hand against the Hourglass Cañon gang, he was likewise carrying out certain traditions of Americanism.

CHAPTER VII

THE First State Bank of Stovepipe Springs had no banking hours, but was open whenever Sidewinder Crowfoot was there. It was nearly supper-time when Percival Henry J. Tompkins entered; and Sidewinder gazed at him in astonishment.

"Thought you were off bug-hunting!"

Tompkins shook his head sadly.

"I regret to say, sir, that the man whom I had engaged proved to be an unworthy

rascal. I refer to Mr. Beam. In common parlance, he was drunk, insisted on taking me in the contrary direction to that which I desired, and even threatened me with a revolver. I abandoned him in the desert, but had I not encountered Miss Gilman and Mr. Foster, I might never have found my way back to town. Here is your receipt, sir, and I shall have to withdraw my money temporarily until I can recompense Mr. Foster for his assistance and make certain purchases. Tomorrow I hope to start off again with a new guide."

The glittering gray eyes of Sidewinder were masked for a moment, then shot up.

"That's right good news!" he exclaimed. "That feller I recommended to you, Mesquite Harrison, is here in town right now. Want to see him?"

"By all means!" said Tompkins gratefully. "If he can come to the hotel later on this evening, I shall be very glad—or, let us say, early tomorrow morning. I shall be up with the sun, and I trust early rising will not discommode him?"

"None to mention," said Sidewinder, and took an envelope from his safe. "Here's your money. Bring back what you got left tomorrow, and we'll take care of it."

"Thank you—thank you very much," said Tompkins, and departed.

Halting at the garage to see that fresh supplies of fuel were put aboard the flivver, which he left standing in the street, he walked on down to the hotel and found Haywire Johnson in the office, alone. Mr. Tompkins produced a ten-dollar gold-piece and laid it under the eyes of the startled Haywire.

"Want to earn that, partner?" he asked in his natural voice.

"Gosh, yes!" said Haywire promptly. "Whose mail d'ye want?"

"Nobody's. Give me an envelope and some sealing-wax." When he was supplied, Tompkins wrote a short note, inclosed with it the deed to Alec Ramsay's property in Pinecate Cañon, addressed the envelope to the recorder in Chuckwalla City, and sealed it up. Then he gave it to Haywire.

"Register this, and slip it into tomorrow morning's mail-sack without giving Hassayamp a squint at it. That earns the first ten." Tompkins now produced a second gold-piece, at which Haywire goggled frantically. "Here's another you can earn. Go over to Pincus' store and buy me a rifle with a box of cartridges—"

"Hold on, Puffesser!" broke in Haywire quickly. "I got one I'll sell cheap. Good gosh, yes! Five year old, but better'n they make 'em now. Distance sights."

"All right. Sneak it into my room with a box of cartridges to fit, and I'll pay you for it; bring along that gun you're keeping for Sagebrush Beam, too. He wants it. There's the other ten. You'll earn it by keeping your mouth shut real tight. And listen! Will you or Hassayamp be on deck along about sunup in the morning?"

"Hassayamp wont; that's certain," said Haywire, staring at Tompkins. "I'm liable to be, if ye want me."

"All right. You know Mesquite Harrison? He's coming to see me. Bring him right to my room, savvy? Then if you hear him yell, be deaf in both ears, and if you see anything funny going on, be blind in both eyes."

"All right, Puffesser. Gosh, ye don't talk like the same feller ye was—"

"Never mind. Your job is to be a human sphinx. Supper ready?"

"Bell's just about to ring, Puffesser. I'll be along d'rectly."

SEEKING his own cell, Tompkins enjoyed a thorough wash-up, and before he finished heard signs of life in the adjoining room which tokened that Miss Gilman had returned. On his way to the dining-room he encountered Hassayamp, looking more melancholy than ever, and was given a cheerless nod; then a flicker of interest seized the hotel-proprietor.

"Say, Puffesser! Thought you aimed to stay awhile in the desert?"

"So I did, Mr. Foster," said Tompkins blandly. "So I did. But I regret to say that I had trouble with my companion. Perhaps you observed that I was alone when we met each other this afternoon? Luckily I was able to follow the tracks of your car back to town, or I might have been lost. I trust your stomach trouble has quite passed over?"

"More or less," said Hassayamp, and went his way.

Tompkins went in and dined heartily, now confident that even if Hassayamp and Sidewinder got together in conference during the evening, they would be unable to figure him out to any great extent.

When Miss Gilman appeared at her table, she gave Tompkins a smiling nod, and he perceived that her day on the burning sands had done its work well.

"Cold cream is recommended," he exclaimed. "May I inquire whether you will view the beauties of the sunset this evening in my company, madam?"

"I shall be charmed—Perfesser," she responded, and Tompkins grinned.

There was no sunset to view that evening, however. When they met in front of the hotel, a keen wind was coming down off the Chuckwalla hills, and clouds had appeared like magic in the sky. They walked together in silence toward the deserted buildings of the old boom town, until Tompkins spoke.

"We'll have snow upon the desert's dusty face in the morning. Old Omar Khayyam sure had been there! I've seen an inch of snow on the Mohave at sunrise, and it'd be gone in an hour. This is probably the tail-ender of the season—rains are all over now. Well, how did you find everything up the cañon?"

"It was just as described in that deed," she said soberly. "Oh, I'm sorry for the way I spoke the other night! I didn't think it could be possible, Mr.—shall I call you Tompkins or Ramsay?"

"Neither one," he responded with a whimsical smile. "Call me Pat."

"No. I think you don't need any encouragement to impertinence." And she laughed. "But really—that cañon was a dream of beauty! There was water, running and in pools, and all sorts of lilies were there, and flowers—"

"Sure, a regular desert cañon after the rains," said Tompkins. "And not very far away, a dead man."

"Oh, I didn't mean that! I didn't want to think of your brother as—"

"I'm not talking about him. Another man."

SHE gave him a startled look. "You mean a man was killed out there?"

"Yes, and another wounded. Several are going to be killed in the near future, if I'm any judge. You needn't look alarmed about it, Miss Gilman; they're outlaws. I've opened up the whole situation pretty well, I think. Now, I hope you'll take my advice and get out of this town tomorrow morning on the stage. I expected to be gone about sunrise, as I have work waiting for me out yonder, but if you think you'll need any moral backing in drawing out of the game, I'll stay and see you through."

"No, thanks," she returned quietly. "I'm staying."

"After what I've told you and showed you?" he said with a frown.

"Yes. Now let me explain, and don't get too bossy. Hassayamp wanted to sell me that claim belonging to your brother; it's one of the most beautiful spots I ever saw. However, I made some excuse about it not being suited to chickens, and I'm going to buy the five acres adjoining it and just above. You wait till you see that place! It's got—"

"My dear girl," said Tompkins, "don't you know chickens can't be raised here, without large and expensive precautions?"

"Oh, I'm not quite a tenderfoot. Chickens or not, I'm going to own that piece of land! And I've taken warning from you, too, because I'll not turn over the money until the title is clear and the deed recorded. The five acres cost me three hundred dollars, mineral rights and all. Hassayamp owns it. He showed me where a mine used to be—it's played out now. I don't care a bit if the place is never any real good to me; I'm going to keep it just to live on when I get old, and enjoy it. Why, you get a wonderful view from the upper cañon out over the desert!"

"Well," said Tompkins reluctantly, "since your eyes are open, I can't of course make any more objections, though you can buy plenty of desert cañon for less money. But what about transport?"

"I've bought Hassayamp's car. It's an old one, but I know all about a flivver and it will do me. Then, I'm going to get a big tent set up there—"

Tompkins groaned inwardly, but presently changed the subject. It was no use whatever to raise up practical objections; the girl would have to find things out for herself. She was obviously determined on her course, and the more he saw of her, the more he began to feel that she was a pretty competent young woman. In fact, as they walked and spoke of cabbages and kings, he was distinctly and unpleasantly surprised to find that it had grown dark and very cold, and that they must return to shelter immediately. When they had reached the adobe cells that constituted the hotel, he paused at her door and shook hands.

"From now on, Miss Gilman, my name's Ramsay—only you'll come to calling me Pat, especially if we're to be neighbors. If you have any need of me, don't hesitate to summon me. I believe Haywire Johnson is a good sort, and you may confide in him

any time. And by the way, if you hear any queer noises early in the morning, don't call for help."

"I usually don't," she said, smiling. "Why?"

"One of the men who murdered my brother is coming to call on me, I hope."

The smile died on her lips. Her eyes widened on him.

"You mean it? But—but surely you—you don't intend—"

"We're going to have a talk; that's all," said Tompkins. "Good night, and pleasant dreams! I'll see you again. Don't forget to look through your blankets for stray lizards."

He went on to his own cell, and in twenty minutes was sound asleep.

WITH dawn, Tompkins, or as he was now to become, Pat Ramsay, wakened to a glorious sunrise just breaking over a transformed world. As he had predicted, snow had come during the night. Everything was covered with a soft white garment, unusual but by no means unheard-of in the desert, which would be gone again in an hour.

He shaved and made his ablutions and got ready to travel. He inspected the rifle which Haywire had left in his room, and found it good. He was still looking it over when Haywire himself knocked at the door.

"Say, Puffesser! Mesquite is out there—"

"All right, bring him right along. Hold on! I want to settle with you for this gun. And where's that revolver that Sagebrush wanted?"

"Got it right here, Puffesser—"

Taking the old forty-five that was handed him, Ramsay paid for his rifle and then swiftly made ready for his visitor. He pulled down the blind of the window, partly darkening the room, then rubbed his face with talcum powder and seated himself without glasses or helmet, with his back to the door, the rifle in his hand. After a moment came steps, then a knock.

"Come in," he said.

Mesquite Harrison stepped into the room and stood blinking at the swift transition from snow-dazzle to this obscurity. He was a cadaverous person with straggling mustache and rudimentary chin, adenoidal mouth and projecting front teeth; his entire countenance was stamped with viciousness and weakness, and one glance showed Ramsay that his ruse was bound to succeed.

"Heard ye wanted a guide," said Mesquite.

"I wanted you," said Ramsay, "and I came back to get you."

He swung his chair around so that the light struck his face.

Mesquite Harrison uttered one low gasp, and then stood absolutely petrified, struck into helpless, motionless silence. His mouth opened, and his piggish eyes widened into round disks. He stood with hands thrown back against the door, and a ghastly pallor crept across his horrified countenance.

"Thought you were safe when you knew I was dead up there in Pinecate Cañon, didn't you?" said Ramsay, in a hollow voice. "You thought that after shooting me through the lungs you were safe, eh? But you're not. I've come back to get you! Don't move a muscle, or I'll put a bullet through you."

His likeness to the vanished Alec Ramsay was strong—so strong that the wretched Mesquite Harrison made no query about how a ghost could shoot a rifle. This interesting conundrum was about the farthest thing from Mesquite's mind at the moment. His distended eyes were fastened in horror upon the face of Ramsay, and now a low wail broke from him.

"Leave me be, fer Gawd's sake!" he howled. "It wasn't me! It was Cholo Bill and Tom Emery done it—I was jest trailin' along with 'em that day! It was Tom Emery fired that shot! Leave me be and I'll be good—"

He plumped down on his knees, and his teeth began to chatter with fright.

"All right," said Ramsay in contempt. "Get up! Turn around and walk out that door and walk out to the street. Then start going—and keep going. Head for Meteorite, and don't stop. I'll be right back of you until you get there. You can't see me after we get out of town, but I'll be there. Get going!"

The unhappy Mesquite lost no time in obeying. He flung open the door, darted outside, and started for the street. Ramsay followed more leisurely. When he passed through the hotel front, he saw Mesquite standing outside, staring back, and as Ramsay appeared in his wake, the thoroughly frightened rascal uttered another howl and started for Meteorite.

"Don't ever come back here or I'll get you!" called Ramsay, and the last he saw of Mesquite Harrison, the latter was plugging along through the snow, head down

and arms going as he ran. Ramsay turned back into the hotel office, and met the stare of Haywire.

"Gosh!" said the latter. "What'd ye do to him, Puffesser?"

Without replying, Ramsay went on back to his room. There he got his belongings together and carried them to the car, which was standing in the street. While he was putting them into the flivver, he saw Hassayamp appear at the front door of the hotel, yawning mightily. Ramsay jerked off his glasses and sun-helmet, and went up to Hassayamp. In the latter's startled gaze he read instant recognition, for this was the first time Hassayamp had ever seen him without the yellow goggles.

"Listen here!" said Ramsay, tapping melancholy Hassayamp on the arm and boring into him with stern gaze, "I suppose you thought that little escapade of yours back in St. John's, Arizona, a good many years ago, had been forgotten, eh?"

Hassayamp turned white. Whether or not he recognized his interlocutor as singularly like the vanished Alec Ramsay in looks, he certainly recognized the remarkable change of voice and manner in the supposed professor. Mention of St. John's brought the pallor to his cheeks. Over his shoulder gaped Haywire, intensely interested.

"Well," continued Ramsay, "it hasn't been forgotten, my friend. One of my errands here was to remind you of the occurrence. If I were you, I wouldn't rely too much on the protection of Sidewinder Crowfoot. The theft of horses may be forgotten with the years; but what about that church money you stole, eh?"

"I—I'll pay it back," stammered Hassayamp, now convinced that the Mormons were on his trail.

"You wont get the chance. If I didn't have other and more important fish to fry, I'd attend to you right now. But I guess you'll keep until I get back. Then you'll come along with me."

Hassayamp turned yet whiter. The Southwest has by no means forgotten the days of Mountain Meadow and the avenging angels of Mormon; and while in these more settled times the followers of that faith are certainly guiltless of any ill-doing, there is an heritage of uneasiness that lingers about the very name of Mormon and will not be stilled.

So Ramsay strode out to his car, donned goggles and helmet, and went chugging

away to get his breakfast at Pinecate Cañon.

CHAPTER VIII

SAGEBRUSH, who had camped at the entrance of the cañon, listened with hearty approval to Ramsay's recital of the morning's events. His roar of laughter echoed back from the rocky walls and went thundering away up toward the mesa.

"Durned if I've laughed so much since my ol' woman run off!" he exclaimed. "Shootin's too good for that coyote Mesquite, anyhow. He'll run into jail to Meteorite, 'cause he's wanted there for robbin' an Injun off the reservation last year. Yessir! That's how mean that pesky critter is. Done robbed an Injun squaw what had been sellin' beadwork to tourists on the trains."

"Do you know those men he mentioned as the actual murderers?" queried Ramsay.

"Nope. Never heard o' Cholo Bill—most likely he's a halfbreed greaser, same's that cuss Mendoza. Tom Emery's different. He's a bad man, real bad. Got out o' jail in Arizona two year back, murdered a rancher in the White Mountains, and skipped out. I reckon there's a reward for him."

"All right. You collect all the rewards—what I'm after is scalps."

"That suits me, Perfesser. She goes as she lays. What's the program?"

Ramsay, having finished his breakfast, lighted his pipe and considered.

"The thing to do, of course," he said tentatively, "is to apprise the nearest legal officers of conditions, get the sheriff to work, and round up the gang."

Sagebrush eyed him askance, in no little astonishment.

"Is that there your program, then?"

"No." Ramsay's blue eyes twinkled. "No, it isn't. I only mentioned it as the proper thing."

"If we all done the proper thing, this would be a hell of a world," and Sagebrush sighed in relief. "I nominates that we light a shuck out o' yere, go over to that there Hourglass Cañon, and clean her up. Everybody there is wanted, you betcha! We don't need no warrants, nor no officers fussin' around to see things is done right."

"Nomination seconded," said Ramsay promptly. "How far is it from here?"

"Hold on," warned the desert rat. "This

aint no picnic party, Perfesser. We got to git busy 'fore Sidewinder gits busy, but there's no sense to rushin' things. We can't take no autybile over there. We got to hike. Ground's durned rocky and rough. Yessir! We're headin' east on a rough and rocky road, and no mistake. That's one reason nobody aint never follered none o' that gang to the roost. Nobody much aint been along this yere range for ten or twelve year—she's got the repytation of havin' petered out. You and me can prob'ly git there sometime tonight, ease up the cañon, git the lay of the land toward sunup, and git into action. Wipe out the hull durned batch!"

Ramsay frowned. "That's a trifle bloodthirsty, isn't it? I want those two murderers; if I can get 'em alive to stand trial, all right. If not—"

"They're all in the same kittle," snapped Sagebrush. "Wipe 'em out! Yessir! I'm riled. But no sense goin' too fast. We got to see who's there and how many, and what things look like. That there cañon is shaped like the figger X, and where the lines cross is a right narrer gap. The back end is a box cañon, all right, with durned steep walls and lots of timber. Only green spot this side o' them hills. Last time I was there was ten year back, when Chuck Martin busted his whiffletree, and we rode over yere to find a new stick. We had some liquor along them days, and Chuck he took a drap too much and went to sleep in an ol' shack, and when he woke up it was dark, and they was a hull passel o' 'phoby skunks holdin' a carnival, and Chuck busted up the dance 'fore he knowed what it was. Gosh, I can smell him yet when I think of it. Yessir, 'Look 'fore you sleep' is a dad-blamed good rule to foller in these ol' shacks—and anywheres else too, I reckon. Well, I'll git the packs made up while you clean camp."

THE two men set to work. After the flivver was laid out of sight in the clump of piñon trees and thorny mesquite, the loads were assembled, and within twenty minutes the partners were on their way. What with grub and blankets, rifle and water-bag, Ramsay had all the weight to carry that he wanted, and he faced the prospect of a full day in rocky desert ground with a grimace.

His expectations were entirely fulfilled. Sagebrush led the way, skirting the high and precipitous mesa for a time and then

striking directly off toward the hills to the northeast. The abundance of rocks showed Ramsay that no flivver could hope to cover this ground; the snow had all vanished long since, and no trace of moisture remained to mark its passing.

Fortunately for Ramsay, the old desert rat was used to the slow burro pace, and shuffled along at a steady plodding gait which was not difficult to sustain, and which ate up the distance slowly but surely. To anyone not used to it, there was something terrible in the thought of thus shuffling across the desert day in and day out for years, eternally seeking the yellow dust; and yet men did it, hundreds of them, and were not happy unless doing it.

Pat Ramsay faced the project which lay ahead of them, unblinking the facts, and not shirking what was to be done. He now knew what before he had only conjectured. Impossible as it seemed, he knew it to be true. Here at this back door of civilization existed a number of men whose business in life was robbery and if necessary murder—an abnormal situation, to be handled with other than normal methods. Ramsay was no innocent in the waste places. He knew that in these vast stretches of desert country there existed strange things, that in this apparently empty basin of forgotten seas there were still unsolved problems and undiscovered wonders. If he was to go seeking the men who had murdered his brother, he must put away all thought of haling them before the bar of justice; the only justice which obtained in the desert was that of the strong hand and the inexorable requisitions of nature. If men offended the laws of nature, a terrible punishment was exacted from them. If they offended the laws of man, as they did every day, the ordinary machinery of man's justice could not always reach them—and they knew it.

"By gosh," said Sagebrush, when they halted at noon in the shade of a towering pinnacle of rock, "ye done a good stroke when ye got to work this mornin' and cut off Sidewinder from them fellers yonder! Yessir! I'd think twicet or maybe three times 'fore I tackled that there gent. Most likely that *cholo* and Mesquite rode in to git supplies, and cuttin' them off was a right smart piece o' work. Wisht we had a hoss apiece! Sing out next you see a nice fat chuckwalla. I'd like to git me a good chunk o' lizard-tail for supper, Perfesser."

BEFORE they had left the overhanging rock, indeed, Sagebrush located a fine big lizard and staged a battle royal. The lizard, ensconced in a rock cranny, inflated himself and could not be dislodged for all the tugging of Sagebrush, who in the end was content with taking the tail. This the chuckwalla gladly surrendered, and Sagebrush stowed it away in his pocket after Ramsay refused to share the delicacy.

The afternoon drew on. They did not hurry; yet the ground was covered steadily, and no moving object broke the dun expanse of glaring rock and sand. Gradually they approached a patch of green high on the hills, which served as landmark, but the entrance to Hourglass Cañon itself did not open up before them. When the sun was drawing down to the western horizon, Sagebrush halted.

"No use goin' on now—we'll be in the cañon in half an hour and can't take no chances. Goin' to be a clear night, and cold as hell. Why don't preachers make hell a cold place, Perfesser? Dad blame if I can see anythin' ornery in hell the way it's laid out. I bet it aint no hotter'n the Ralston Desert up in Nevada, and that don't stack up noways alongside what Imperial Valley used to be 'fore they started growin' melons and garden truck there. Reckon I'm goin' to freeze tonight 'thout no fire, but can't be helped. Let's git our victuals washed down, and then we'll mosey along and take it easy till dark."

When the sun was down, they moved on again, and before the last of the daylight died into the starry radiance of night, Ramsay descried the lines of the cañon opening out from the general mass of hills ahead. The night was clear, with a thin green-silver crescent of moon hanging high, but nothing could be seen of the environment, though old Sagebrush plodded along without a pause. A little later he broke into speech.

"Trail. No talkin', now. Watch out underfoot."

A trail indeed—at least, a path beaten by the hoofs of horses. Sagebrush had need to mind his own warning, for the next moment he jumped sharply aside, dropped his pack and picked up the nearest rock to crush a sidewinder in his path. After this both men kept a sharper watch for the nocturnal reptiles than on the surrounding scenery.

They had proceeded perhaps two miles when Ramsay found the cañon walls

closing in ahead, apparently forming an unbroken barrier. Then he began to appreciate the strategic value of the place, which to anyone on the search would appear to be an empty cañon, while in reality there was a narrow passage opening into a second but completely hidden cañon. This was a freak of erosion and wind-carving, for the trail led them sharply to the right, and then into a black hole—a widening cleft in the rock, ten feet in width and twenty through to the other side. Sagebrush halted his companion and stole forward cautiously, then summoned Ramsay. The opening was unguarded.

Passing through, both men came to an astonished halt. They stood in an almost circular bowl which, so far as the deceptive light told them, was not more than a mile in diameter, closed in by gigantic walls of rock which, on the side opposite them, presented only blackness which was illumined by three yellow pin-points.

"Lamps," said Sagebrush. "Got some shacks over there, by gosh!"

It was not this which had startled them both, however. In their immediate vicinity were great masses of jumbled rock, fallen from the walls that hemmed in the entrance. At a distance of fifty feet from them the scattered rock and sand gave place to a thick green carpet which seemed to cover the entire bowl, and across this carpet moved masses of horses, quietly grazing.

The explanation was simple. Just now, immediately after the rains, this hidden box cañon was saturated with drainage from the slopes above and behind. Either the growth of grass here was natural, or as was more likely, it had been sown by the occupants of the cañon.

"Set," said Sagebrush, slipping off his pack and squatting down. Ramsay followed suit, and the desert rat softly elucidated the situation.

"We got things straight now, Perfesser. This yere crowd is right happily located, for a fact! The idee is, they slide acrost the hills to the Chuckwalla range and slide back with a few hosses picked up over there. When they get a right good *remuda*, they drive 'em over to the railroad at Meteorite, or maybe up north acrost the Salt Pans to Silver City. They keep 'em yere maybe six montas till the hair's growed out over the rebrand, and by that time everybody's give up looking; they prob'ly git a lot o' foals, too."

"With a base of supplies at Stovepipe Springs, they're safe," commented Ramsay. "And Sidewinder Crowfoot is the brains of the outfit. All right. What d'you want to do?"

"Sneak up and look things over. Better let me do it when we git right close. Then I'll come back yere and lay up in these yere rocks with both guns handy. You cut around and open fire on them shacks. You'll jest naturally catch 'em penned up, and if they git away, I'll catch 'em yere. If they don't bust loose, I'll come over and help you. How's that strike ye, Perfesser?"

"First rate," said Ramsay. "What does Tom Emery look like?"

"Red whiskers. Can't miss him. Let's mosey along."

They rose, picked up their loads, and set forth.

IN the darkness of the upper cañon, with the stars glimmering far above, the scout was made, and all things considered, it was a good scout. But when it had been ended, the two men drew off together for consultation, upon both of them settled a silent consternation. For here was a factor they had not reckoned on.

Three cabins, and in one of them four men sitting playing cards, a lantern swinging from a rafter. One was Tom Emery—a brutal giant of a man with a great fringe of flaring red whiskers and matted red hair, a murderer and escaped jailbird with a price on his head. One, whom old Sagebrush did not know, was a swarthy halfbreed, doubtless the Cholo Bill mentioned by the dying Alec Ramsay—a slender, furtive man, on the surface all smiles, and all devilry beneath. The third card-player was identified as Gentleman Jimson, an elderly man with handsome, ascetic features and the general air of a benevolent preacher. He had escaped from a California penitentiary three years previously, where he was serving a life term for murder and forgery. The last of the four men was a pure Mexican, one Manuel Ximines—a scowling, sullen scoundrel from below the border, a murderer of women. Not all this had given the two friends pause, however, but the shrill wail of an infant from one of the other shacks, and the thin voices of two Mexican women.

"Women everywhere. Aint it hell?" demanded Sagebrush, when they were at a safe distance. "And now what?"

"Walk in on the four of them," said Ramsay promptly. "And we have 'em."

"Nope. Them *cholo* women would jump us in the back in a minute. Then, if anything went wrong, the bunch would scatter in the darkness. We don't know the lay o' the ground."

"All right. Then stick to our original plan."

Sagebrush dissented with a grunt. "Pardner, it means the females fight with the men. Now, I jest naturally can't abide that notion nohow. When it comes to puttin' a bullet into a female, I pass. We got to sep'rate them fellers from the females."

"Granted," assented Ramsay at once. "How?"

"There aint but one way out o' this yere cañon—the front way. Let's you and me go back through that hole in the wall and wait. If anybody comes, we got him; if anybody leaves, we got him. Then, come sunup, we lights a fire out beyond. They see the smoke, and most likely that feller Ximines comes out to investigate. We got him. The other fellers come out when he don't return—and we got 'em all."

"Good," said Ramsay. "Let's go."

CHAPTER IX

ALL that night coyotes howled dismally upon the hills; and Ramsay, stretched out beside Sagebrush near the "hole in the wall," wakened from time to time at their almost human cries.

The scheme proposed by the old desert rat was simple and promised to be highly effective. It had only one drawback, common to all human propositions—it failed to take into account the dispensations of Providence, not anticipating the unexpected.

The misty gray darkness that precedes dawn was over everything when Ramsay, on watch, wakened Sagebrush, and the desert rat sat up, shivering.

"Gosh, it's cold!" he observed, throwing off his blankets and pulling on his boots. Thus finishing dressing operations, he rose. Their camp was just outside the rock crevice which gave access to the inner cañon. "Might's well git us some hot coffee while we're makin' that fire. I'll rustle up some bresh along the slopes while you're gittin' the grub. Little skillet layin' in my pack for the side-meat. We got lots o' time—they wont discover our smoke until after sunup."

He shuffled off toward the slopes on the right, and disappeared in the darkness. Ramsay went to work at breakfast, preparing the coffee with the last of their water, and slicing up some bacon.

Getting some dry and dead twigs together, Ramsay heaped them in readiness to build a fire. As he rose, a voice suddenly impinged sharply on his consciousness.

"Up with 'em, stranger—reach high and quick!"

He put up his hands, and turned. There, standing at the rock opening through which he must have come unobserved, stood the tall, stooped figure of Gentleman Jimson, his pistol covering Ramsay.

"What you doing here?" demanded Jimson. "Who you looking for?"

His rifle out of reach, Ramsay knew himself caught. His brain worked swiftly.

"I'm looking for Tom Emery," he said, raising his voice in order to warn Sagebrush, whose proximity was evidently unsuspected.

"Oh, looking for Tom, are you?" Jimson sneered. "On what business?"

"That's for him to hear," returned Ramsay. "Sidewinder told me to camp here until morning. You're Jimson, I s'pose?"

The other was momentarily astonished.

"What! Sidewinder sent you here, did he? Where's Mesquite?"

"Gone to jail in Meteorite, I guess. That greaser with him was killed."

"What!" Jimson looked startled; then he frowned. "You're a cussed liar! What's this you're pulling off, anyhow? Sidewinder would never have told you to wait out here before telling us all this. March over here—leave that rifle where it lays! Quick, now, or I'll drill you!"

THE voices had risen shrill and distinct on the quiet air of the dawn, and had quite accomplished the purpose for which Ramsay hoped. Jimson caught a movement on the hillside from the corner of his eye, and turned—but his pistol did not swing quickly enough. The roar of a forty-five crashed out, then again. Gentleman Jimson, with a look of frightful astonishment, dropped his automatic, took two staggering steps, then slumped face down.

Sagebrush, standing on the hillside to the right, emitted a whoop of exultation.

"Ye will crowd me and my pardner, will ye? Reckon that's one reward I'll collect." Suddenly his voice rose shrill. "Hey, Perfesser! Look out—hosses comin'!"

Ramsay, already scrambling for his rifle, heard the pounding of many hoofs and sprang up, wildly startled by that shrill cry. He saw, coming in upon him from the desert, a mass of horses. One glance at Sagebrush, and he caught sight of the latter staggering out of sight—then rifles cracked. A bullet sang past his head.

With a leap, Ramsay darted toward his only protection, the hole in the wall. He jumped the motionless body of Jimson, turned, and began firing. The scream of a frantic horse answered his first shot; then bullets began to whang on the rock around him. He saw that a dozen or more horses were charging in, had a vision of two men firing; then he slipped back into the ten-foot passage, with the rush of animals at his very heels.

As he ran for the other side, a curse broke from his lips. Sagebrush was shot down, and their whole scheme of action was disrupted. It was plain enough that two of the gang were returning with stolen horses—

They were upon him, and nothing saved him from trampling but a hasty shot from under his arm. At the report, a horse leaped high and then came down kicking. Something struck Ramsay as he gained the inner opening of the passage, struck him and sent him headlong to one side. He crashed down, rolled over, picked himself up. A rifle roared above him; the bullet sang by his face; and as he himself fired, he had a swift vision of a bearded rider flinging out arms and pitching forward. Then he was working the bolt, looking for the other horsethief, as the rush of animals swept past and went pounding up the grassy cañon. No other appeared.

Ramsay stood panting, waiting, rifle ready. Twenty feet away lay the outlaw he had shot from the saddle—but where was the other? From the other end of the cañon lifted faint shouts of men; the gang there were alarmed, but it was still too dark for them to make out anything.

Something flickered from the black depths of the passage. Before Ramsay could comprehend its import, a lariat settled over his shoulders and was jerked taut. He was fighting it instantly, trying to whip around his rifle—fighting it furiously, fiercely, vainly. A hoarse laugh made answer; then he was drawn off his feet and hurled sprawling. Next instant, a horse came leaping through the opening and started away, the rider holding the rope with Ramsay dragging behind.

IN the space of a few seconds terrible things can come to pass. Arms caught just above his elbows and fast bound to his body with the rope cutting into the flesh, Ramsay was dragged along for half a minute, jerking and helpless, clothes ripped away, death threatening with every rock that loomed in his path; he came to the grass, slid over it more easily, heard the outlaw yelling at his mount to increase its speed—and all the while held on to his rifle, though it was nearly torn from his hand.

And then came a merciful relaxation. The horse stumbled suddenly, was reined sharply in—the lariat slackened. Ramsay rolled over on his side, gained his feet with a leap, cocked and fired the rifle from his hip. It was a chance shot, but a good one. The poor horse sank forward. Its outlaw rider, leaping from the saddle, turned and threw up a pistol. But Ramsay, working up the lariat, had ejected the shell and now fired again. The outlaw pitched forward on his face, shot through the brain.

All this took place with incredible rapidity. Indeed, it must have passed swiftly, for no man can long survive the dragging at a lariat's end. As it was, Ramsay knew himself bruised and hurt, torn and scratched—but in essentials undamaged. He was not thirty yards from the passage, and turned to it. As he did so, that dark cleft in the rock wall vomited a spat of flame, and to the smashing report of a pistol, a bullet whined past him.

Instantly Ramsay whirled, threw himself at the dead horse, gained it, and took shelter. Another report, and another bullet went screaming over him. He answered it with a blind shot. Panting, he realized his intolerable position. He was out here in the open, trapped, and from the shouts at the other end of the cañon, he knew the three men there would soon be sweeping down on him. Swiftly he weighed the chances for a dash toward one of the side slopes—and then he saw a grim thing, yet one which spelled his salvation.

He had supposed that these shots from the passage must have come from a third horsethief. Now he perceived a figure take shape in the grayness, and was about to fire when he saw it staggering forward, and checked himself. It was the tall figure of Jimson, mortally wounded and yet still alive, blindly reeling on, pistol in hand. As Ramsay waited, the pistol dropped. For a moment Jimson stood there, swaying, then

dropped slowly to his knees and fell in a limp heap.

In a flash, Ramsay visualized what was now sure to take place. It was his one chance, and a sure chance. None of those three outlaws at the head of the cañon would know what had happened here. He leaped up, and imagined that he could see riders coming from the gray background of the cañon. That he was unseen, he knew well enough. Next instant he was running for the heaped-up rocks near the passage. As he went by Jimson, he saw the dying man was still alive and trying to rise, but kept on, and a moment later threw himself down in cover of the boulders.

"No time to ask after Sagebrush now—here's the great chance to clean up the whole gang!" he thought, as he reloaded his rifle and drew long deep breaths to calm himself. "By glory, we haven't done so badly so far, either! Three of them done for now. They came asking for it, and they got it. If things work right, I'll get these last three scoundrels alive—ah! They're coming, all right."

HE waited, eyes glittering, bloody and bruised figure tense, rifle ready. Now the gray darkness was clearing off, and the clearer light of day was breaking through. Coming across the grassy cañon at a break-neck gallop were three riders, impeded at first by the mass of frightened and rushing horses. Now, free of the remuda, the three were plunging toward the passage and the three outstretched figures lying there in the open; one of those figures was moving, slowly crawling upward. Jimson, dying hard, got to one knee and remained thus, swaying.

The three outlaws swept on, straight for the figure of Jimson, and the man in the lead was Tom Emery, his mass of flaming whiskers marking him clearly. All three had rifles and were girded with gun-belts. Ramsay grinned excitedly as he waited, out of sight.

"They don't know what's happened!" he thought in exultation. "Jimson is baiting them right into the trap—"

Jimson was not forty feet away from him, and the three outlaws came thundering down with shouted queries and wild oaths of rage. As they drew closer, Ramsay could see them looking from Jimson to the girdling masses of rock, and knew that he was out of their sight. Tom Emery was in the lead, riding like a Centaur, his face like

a red blur; behind him were the sullen, scowling Ximines and the more dapper halfbreed Cholo Bill, eyes glittering like dots of jet.

They came hurtling down upon Jimson, threw themselves from the saddle and gathered around him with a burst of excited speech. But they came too late; for Jimson, swaying, toppled over as they reached him, and lay quiet—this time forever. The three stared one at another, but only for an instant.

"Stick 'em up—*pronto!*" commanded Ramsay's voice. "Drop the rifles."

A RAGING oath burst from Emery. All three turned, facing the rock wall and the passage; dismounted, caught in the open, their three dead comrades to serve as warning, they comprehended instantly that they were trapped, snared mercilessly. In silence they obeyed the mandate, but their faces were eloquent as they dropped the rifles and elevated their arms.

"Tom Emery," continued Ramsay, his voice cool and deadly in its slight drawl, "you and Cholo Bill are wanted for the murder of Alec Ramsay last year. Ximines, you can come along on general principles. You take your own pistol and drop it overboard, then relieve your two friends of their weapons. Leave 'em all in a pile. I don't need much of an excuse to put a bullet into you, so watch out you don't give it to me."

The scowling Mexican deposited his own pistol and those of the others in the dust.

"Now tep forward!" Ramsay rose, rifle at his shoulder. "Step forward, please! All three—that's right. Walk right through the hole in the wall, and don't walk too fast. The hand is quicker than the foot, gentlemen. Now into the hole—you first, Señor Ximines, then Cholo Bill, and Mr. Emery last. Close together, and slowly."

He strode forward as the three came to the passage that gave on to the outer cañon. Their eyes glittered on him with unspeakable rage, but they said not a word. In the order assigned, they entered the cleft, and Ramsay brought up the rear with the muzzle of his rifle thrust against the back of the gigantic Emery, whose red whiskers were bristling with suppressed fury. Ramsay chuckled, as he marched them forward.

"I expect you're due for a shave before long, Mr. Emery, and a free haircut to boot. Keep right ahead of each other, gentlemen, and walk straight out into the

daylight. When you are safely taken care of, we'll all start out and have a nice little walk over to town, and interview Mr. Crowfoot. Now, everybody, four steps forward, then halt and about-face."

BY this time the full morning light was spreading over everything, and the three captives left the rock-cleft and marched forward as directed. Ramsay, not daring to take his eyes from them, followed for a pace or two and then halted as they turned and faced his rifle. For a moment he met the savage gaze of Emery—then the latter suddenly looked up, behind Ramsay, and his eyes widened in surprise.

Ramsay cast one startled glance over his shoulder. He saw, to his utter consternation, a horse close pressed against the rock wall to the left of the opening; and holding the reins in one hand, and in the other a leveled pistol—Sidewinder Crowfoot. For an instant those glittery gray eyes held Ramsay paralyzed.

"Careful with that gun!" warned Sidewinder, a deadly whine to his voice. "Grab it, Tom. Then grab this gent—and do it careful. He's got to do some talkin' real soon. Tie him up and leave him be."

Ramsay knew better than to resist. Utterly dismayed, dumbfounded by the simple manner in which he had been trapped in the very moment of victory, he let himself be seized, hurled to the ground, and then none too gently be bound hand and foot. A swift search, and he was disarmed.

A flood of curses burst loose, and for a moment he thought the Mexican would stamp on him in rage, but Sidewinder interfered and quieted the noise.

"What's happened here?" he snapped. Emery made profane response.

"Dunno! The boys come in with them hosses they went after, but they come dead. Jimson come out to meet 'em, and he's dead. This feller jumps us. Says we're wanted for killin' Ramsay last year. What is he—sheriff or detective?"

"That's what we'll find out," said Sidewinder. "He sure played hell around here, didn't he? Well, I'm dead for something to eat. Any of his friends around?"

"Nope. I reckon he done played a lone hand," said Emery, not without a trace of admiration. "You aint seen no one out here?"

"No," said Sidewinder. "Nary a sign. This hoss of mine is clear done up and staggering. I seen what happened from

the passage, and come back to lay for him—and got him. Tom, take charge of him and walk him in. I'll take your hoss and ride over to camp. This gent has played hell in town as well as here. I been on my way since yesterday noon—had to come all the way on hossback. Leave the hoss here—he'll wander in after he comes around. All ready, boys—let's go!"

EMERY jerked Ramsay to his feet, cast loose his ankles, and propelled him forward into the passage; he went dumbly, unresisting, appalled by the disaster which had overwhelmed him.

Behind them, the outer cañon was empty of life save for the horse which Sidewinder had ridden, and which stood with legs wide apart, head drooping, exhausted and spent. Red and gold streaked across the sky, as the first fingers of sunrise reached up to the zenith. Presently the horse, still saddled and bridled, made a convulsive movement and came out from among the rocks, and stood, white with lather. He was still standing there twenty minutes later, when the first rays of sunlight struck down from the hilltops and smote all the desert spaces into gold and purple, and up on the hillside stirred something that presently took definite shape. This was Sagebrush Beam.

The desert rat painfully gained his feet, staggered forward, lost his balance and came sprawling down among the rocks. He lay quiet for a while, blood spreading across the grizzled expanse of his tangled beard. Then, warmed by the sun, he lifted himself again, feebly gained his feet, and came tottering across the sand to where the horse stood watching him. For a little he clung to the saddle, helpless. After a time he made an effort to draw himself up, cursed vividly if weakly, and at the second effort made shift to mount.

The exhausted horse submitted to its fate and started out into the desert, with Sagebrush limp and clinging to the pommel.

CHAPTER X

THE three shacks at the head of Hour-glass Cañon were set amid trees and near a trickling brook, which in another three weeks would be only a summer's memory, and which was lost in the grass a hundred yards distant. Ramsay was allowed to sit against a tree, and was set free of his bonds, while his four captors

surrounded him. The two frightened Mexican women, wretched creatures who belonged to Ximines and Cholo Bill, fetched coffee and tortillas.

Ramsay had been studying his captors. Ximines was the most dangerous, because the most vicious and debased. Cholo Bill was far above him in character. Tom Emery had some traces of humor in his brutal countenance. All three of them were distinctly perturbed and uneasy, yet deferred everything to Sidewinder. And Ramsay perceived that Crowfoot himself, beneath that grayish mask of a face, was more alarmed than he cared to betray.

"Now, you going to talk or do we got to make ye?" demanded Sidewinder, his reptilian gaze fastened on Ramsay. The latter smiled slightly.

"You give me a share in your breakfast and let me get my pipe going, and I'll swap all the information you want."

"Fair enough," grunted Sidewinder, and summoned one of the women.

RAMSAY found his tortillas excellent and the coffee passable, and attacked his breakfast heartily. His chief concern was for Sagebrush. The latter was either dead, in which case he could not be aided, or else was wounded, in which case he was better off without Sidewinder's help; in either event, his participation in the morning's affair was not suspected and must not be suspected. In all other respects, frank speech was the best policy.

The meal finished, Ramsay got his pipe going while the other four rolled cigarettes, and Sidewinder started his catechism.

"First off, what kind of an officer are you, anyhow? County, State or Fed'ral?"

"Neither one," Ramsay chuckled. "My name's Pat Ramsay. I came here to get Mr. Emery yonder, also Cholo Bill, for the murder of my brother Alec last year. You were a party to it also."

Emery started to speak, but Sidewinder flashed him a look that held him silent.

"It wasn't no murder," said Sidewinder. "It was a straight killin'—"

"No use passing any lies," said Ramsay quietly. "Let's all stick to the truth. Alec left a message for me, also the deed to that property he bought from Harrison—told me all about it. I found 'em in Pinecate Cañon the other day. The deed's gone in to the recorder's office. So has an explanation of the circumstances. I expect the sheriff will be along any time to look things over."

AN outburst of startled oaths broke from the three outlaws, but Sidewinder only grinned and put a hand to his pocket. He drew forth an unopened letter. Ramsay, in dismay, recognized it as that containing the deed, which he had registered with Haywire Johnson.

"Here y'are," said Sidewinder, and tossed it to him with a malignant grin. "I reckon ye might's well keep it. Serve for identification. Darned good thing I took a look through that mail-sack 'fore it went out yesterday, eh? What'd you do to Hassayamp, anyhow? He got Miss Gilman's money, took Mesquite's hoss and beat it for parts unknown."

Ramsay, although he flinched under the blow, rallied quickly.

"I jogged his memory about a job he pulled off down in Arizona before coming here."

"And ye sure give Mesquite a scare. Reckon he's still goin'. So you aint no officer, eh? You just come nosing in here on your own hook, eh? Well, you've sure played hell. I wonder how you can set there and eat and smoke and laugh, after wipin' out three good men this morning! Aint you got no conscience? Don't it mean nothin' to you that ye've killed three men?"

Ramsay shrugged.

"It doesn't worry you to bring in people from outside and cheat them or murder them, does it?" he retorted. "And it doesn't worry anyone to wipe out a rattler. You fellows and desert rattlers are about in the same class."

"And you'll be in the same class with your brother when we get through with ye," said Sidewinder acidly.

"He knows too much," said Ximines in Spanish. "Kill him now, quickly."

"You back down and rest your heels," snapped Sidewinder. "I'm running this show. Now, Ramsay, you're alone in this deal—you and Miss Gilman—"

"She's not in it," broke out Ramsay quickly, alarmed by the man's look.

"Don't ye lie to me! You and her have been carryin' on together. Got to town about the same time, and been thick ever since. She fooled me at first, all right, but now I'm wide awake and ready to strike. You've earned your victuals. Now shut up."

WITH this, Sidewinder turned to the three outlaws and briefly described Miss Gilman's activities, while Ramsay listened in acute anxiety.

"All good things have an end," he finished. "We've just about reached the end of our rope. The thing to do now is to bust up camp. Better get them women and the kid off right now, with hosses. Let 'em ride in to town, and José Garcia will take care of 'em until you're ready to send for 'em. Then get busy with a running-iron and a knife, and we'll go over them hosses on hand. Any that can't be worked over, leave here. You'll have a right good remuda, and you three fellers can run 'em up to Silver City. Emery, you know how to get there across the Salt Pans, don't ye?"

Tom Emery nodded in silence, but jerked his thumb at Ramsay.

"Don't worry none about him. First, get them women off. Then get busy with the irons. We'll be until night gettin' the remuda worked over and in good shape. Then, early in the morning, we'll ride over to Pinecate Cañon with this inquisitive pilgrim. That fool woman is goin' out there sometime today, to camp and see about where to build a shack. We'll nab her and her car. —Hey, Ramsay! Where's that rat Sagebrush?"

"Last I saw of him was out in the desert," said Ramsay truthfully. "He didn't fancy any acquaintance with Miss Gilman, and got right huffy over her being around."

"So he run off, eh? Blamed if that aint old Sagebrush all over!" Sidewinder chuckled dryly. "Where's your car?"

"At Pinecate Cañon."

"All right." Sidewinder eyed his three men. "Ye see, we can't afford to take no chances. If we kill this *hombre*, there may be questions asked—and what'd we do with the Gilman woman? I don't aim to murder a woman."

"Give her to me," suggested Ximines, with a grin.

"You go plumb to hell," snapped Sidewinder. "I don't guess any of us want a double murder charge follering us. So here's the program with them two: Leave 'em in Pinecate Cañon, with some grub. They aint going to walk away from there in a hurry—"

"Hamstring him!" Ximines gave Ramsay a scowling glance.

"Good idea," approved Sidewinder, with a nod. "Fix him so's he can't travel, anyhow. Then I'll have José Garcia come over there from town and camp out to keep an eye on the two of 'em. You boys run the remuda up to Silver City, sell her, and then scatter. I'll get sold out in Stovepipe

Springs, and disappear. Three weeks ought to fix us up all around. Then Garcia can remove himself likewise. By the time Ramsay and that fool woman get out to where they can tell their story—let 'em tell it! That's the general scheme. We can fix the details later. How's it suit?"

"Fine with me," said Tom Emery, pawing his red whiskers.

Cholo Bill nodded. "*Bueno!* But my woman, she go with me and the remuda."

"Mine too," growled Ximines.

"Then get busy." Sidewinder rose. "Tie up this gent."

RAMSAY, despite his protestations, was seized and lashed firmly to a tree, after which he was ignored for the remainder of the morning. He was somewhat relieved by the exposition of Sidewinder's plans, since these did not at least include murder; this relief was more than balanced, however, by the menace directed toward Ethel Gilman.

The hours dragged past, while Sidewinder and his three companions worked like slaves. The entire band of horses, numbering nearly forty, had to be gone over. Each animal had to be examined carefully, and his brand worked upon with running irons to make it accord with the brands used by Sidewinder, while the other marks also had to be altered to suit.

There was an hour's lay-off at noon, when Ramsay was given temporary liberty. Then he was closely confined again, and the work went on. Five of the unavailable horses were turned into a small corral behind the shacks, and one of the women was sent to the outer cañon to bring in the horse which Sidewinder had left there. She returned later with word that the animal had wandered off out of sight.

It was nearly sunset when the work was concluded, and the four men, weary to the point of exhaustion, came in and flung themselves down. The two women had prepared a meal which was eaten hurriedly; then Ramsay, who had been released temporarily, was again bound and relegated to his post against the tree. Ordering the women to wake them at midnight, Sidewinder and the others rolled up and were asleep at once.

Benumbed by his many and tight lashings, stiff and sore with his hurts and bruises, Ramsay resigned himself to the inevitable, and after a little dropped off into a doze. From this he was wakened to find

Ximines cutting him free and playfully jabbing him with the point of a knife as he cut.

"So, leetle señor, you come weeth me, eh?" In the starry darkness the white teeth of the swarthy Mexican outlaw flashed faintly. "You ride with Manuel," continued the man in Spanish, which Ramsay comprehended perfectly. "And while you ride *conmigo*, we shall talk, eh?"

Ramsay, rubbing his stiffened limbs, glanced around and saw that they were alone. He gathered his muscles—

"Careful, señor!" The muzzle of a pistol touched him. "Turn and walk to the horses."

"Five hundred dollars and a get-away, Ximines," he said softly, "if you turn me free."

The other growled. "Bah! If you have that much money, I shall take it anyway, and take the pretty señorita too! When we get to that cañon of *pinecates*, eh? Then this Sidewinder will go away, and maybe Manuel will come back, eh? And you will not be able to object, my little señor. *Vamos!* To the horses!"

SIDEWINDER called. Ramsay, hopeless, turned and went to the horses, saddled by the other men. He was put into a saddle, his feet roped to the stirrups, and his arms bound. Then Ximines, without orders but for reasons of his own, improvised a dirty bandana into a gag, which he lashed about the jaw of Ramsay.

"Bring him along," said Sidewinder impatiently, and mounted, leading the way. The others trailed out after him. After Cholo Bill rode Ramsay, the reins of his horse held by Ximines at his stirrup. As they rode out across the grassy cañon, the Mexican laughed and spoke softly to the captive.

"Ho, little señor! What is it I read in the newspaper, that the wise men say in your town of New York, eh? They say that the *Americano*, he is not civilized—that the *Americano* of the West, he is an animal. Ho! Well, when I come back to that cañon of the little tumbling bugs, señor, you shall see how we treat gringos, dogs of *Americanos*, in my country! And you will not be able to walk, for I shall cut your legs behind—*que lástima!* What a pity, little señor! And when I kiss the señorita, eh? It will be amusing to hear you curse, uncivilized *Americano!*"

Ramsay now perceived why he had been gagged by the Mexican. And beneath the

raging fury that the taunts and threats roused in him, beneath wonder that on the lips of such a man he should find the smart sayings of the radicals of New York's East Side, slowly mounted a growing horror at the prospect. For he comprehended that this swarthy Mexican, whose cigarettes had such a queer and unholy odor, was a smoker of the *marihuana* weed—a monster beside whom the cocaine fiend was as a pale angel, a creature debased and degenerate whose one craving was for blood, for cruelty, for torture.

So the five riders passed through the hole in the wall, and came out upon the lonely starlit desert, and headed for the Pinecate mesa. And upon the hills the coyotes howled dismal orisons to the stars.

CHAPTER XI

ANOTHER dawn was breaking when the five riders approached Pinecate Cañon, and the sun-spears were thrusting across the eastern sky. The lower reaches of the rocky cañon were desolate and empty, save for the figure of a saddled and bridled horse moving about. Sidewinder, with a grunt of recognition, broke the silence.

"There's that cayuse of Mesquite's now—started for town and stopped on the way. Prob'ly smelled water here."

"And yonder's the auto," said Tom Emery with a jerk of his head. "Two of 'em!"

There was no need to question Ramsay about his car, for that of Ethel Gilman had been thrust beside it into the cover of the trees and mesquite clump, so that both cars stood protected from sun and dew, but plain to be seen. Sidewinder flung them a glance, then turned his horse into the cañon.

"Come along—ride as far as we can, anyhow. Her place is quite a ways up."

The five rode slowly up the cañon, until they came to the spot where Ramsay had found that cigarette-case. Here Sidewinder drew rein, since it was becoming increasingly harder for the horses to climb. Ahead was the bend in the cañon.

"Manuel, you stay here with Ramsay. You'd better stick here too, Tom. Come ahead when I call. You come with me, Bill."

Sidewinder dismounted, and with the dapper Cholo Bill swinging along beside him, ascended the rocky floor of the cañon

on foot. A faint thread of smoke began climbing into the sky from somewhere around the bend; sunrise in all its glory was spreading a riot of color across the heavens.

Some distance above them was a great boulder, huge as a house, in the center of the rapidly narrowing cañon. It was a rich and ruddy rose-pink in the first sunlight, and was split squarely in two, with a number of small piñon trees growing from the split. Water came from it, came from the cañon above it also, and ran down into several pools and short falls; it was the evanescent water of the desert springtime, giving a short-lived existence to lilies and masses of flowers on either hand. Above this boulder, and to its left, could be seen the brown outline of a small tent, with the figure of Ethel Gilman tending a fire close by. Sidewinder raised his voice in a hail, and waved his hand.

"Leave the talk to me, now," he growled. "It's all right—she's alone here. Don't want to frighten her. Scare a fool woman, and she's like a locoed horse."

"*Seguro, señor,*" assented the halfbreed with a flash of his white teeth. Sidewinder, now that the girl had seen them, turned and sent a stentorian hail down the cañon, bidding Emery come along up. Then he started climbing again to where the girl stood beside her little fire, staring at the arrivals in alarm and fear that could not be wholly veiled.

"Morning, miss," called Sidewinder as they approached her camp. "How's every-thing?"

"All right, thanks," she returned, low-voiced, obviously startled.

"I was goin' by with some friends o' mine," said Sidewinder, puffing with the climb, "and thought we'd stop in and see if you were all right. —Bill, rustle up some firewood for the lady!"

CHOLO BILL smiled and went about his task. Sidewinder approached the girl.

"We're going to leave Ramsay with you a spell," he said. "He's a mite scratched up, but aint hurt to speak of. Fell off a hoss, I reckon. Miss, where's that pistol of yours? Let's have a look at it."

He did not miss her start at Ramsay's name. His gray eyes glittered on her, bored into her, and as she met that deadly gaze, there was a struggle in her face.

"You want—my pistol?" she faltered.

"If you please, ma'am."

Her hand went to her bosom and produced a small, flat automatic. Still she hesitated, a surge of anger coming into her eyes—then as she looked past Sidewinder, she saw the other three figures turning the bend. At once she held out the weapon.

"There. Now what? You need not pretend that you want to help me."

Sidewinder took the weapon and thrust it out of sight.

"We aint goin' to hurt ye, not a mite," he said harshly. "We got Ramsay where we want him, and neither one of ye is going to do any talkin'; that's all. We're goin' to leave him and you here, and fix it so's ye'll stay here a spell. Nothin' to be scared of, miss. If you've got any grub, let's have some. I'll send ye out plenty from town, as soon as we get back. The water'll last ye long enough, so there's nothin' to be scared of."

"I'll get what I have," she said quietly, then turned and went into the tent—whence she presently reappeared, with coffee and bacon, coffee-pot and skillet. Cholo Bill came in with an armload of brush, which he heaped over the fire, arranging several stones to hold the coffee-pot. A moment later Tom Emery strode up, followed by Ximines and Ramsay, who was still gagged and his arms bound. Miss Gilman stood staring at him, wide-eyed—this scratched and bruised and helpless man, with the garments hanging in shreds about him, was somewhat different from the Pat Ramsay she had known previously.

"I reckon he needs a shave, ma'am." Sidewinder chuckled. "But that'll keep. Set him against that rock, Manuel. The lady can let him loose after we're gone. Get some water, Tom—the quicker we get a bite to eat and get off, the better."

DISREGARDING their curious glances, Miss Gilman, looking only at the figure of Ramsay, returned to her tent and sat down before it. Sidewinder and his companions managed a makeshift bite to eat and a swallow of warm coffee apiece; then Sidewinder rose.

"We'll leave the hosses here. Which of you boys can drive a car? Got to take 'em both to town with us."

"I can," said Tom Emery.

"All right—"

"Somebody better stay and watch things, and attend to the horses," spoke up Manuel Ximines, who was rolling one of his evil-smelling cigarettes. "It would be foolish to

leave horses here. Why not let me stay? I have nothing to do in town."

Sidewinder nodded, with a slight look of chagrin at the slip he had so nearly made. To have left the horses here unwatched would indeed have been fatal.

"All right," he said curtly. "You stay. Don't bother the lady none. Better go on down to the lower cañon. I'll send a driver back with the other boys and a load of grub in one o' the cars. Then you boys get back to Hourglass in a hurry, and get started. I'll have José Garcia out here by morning to ride herd on things."

"And shall I hamstring this *hombre* now?" asked Ximines, gesturing with his cigarette toward Ramsay, who was glad that Miss Gilman could not understand the Mexican tongue.

"Let him wait till tonight. You'll likely need help to hold him down, and we aint got any time to waste now. Come on, boys."

With this, Sidewinder started down the cañon, Tom Emery and Cholo Bill at his heels. Manuel Ximines, however, remained sitting where he was, a thin smile on his black-avised features, in his glittering dark eyes the wild cruelty and the cunning that mark the *marihuana*-smoker.

NOT until the three departing figures were out of sight around the bend did the girl move. Then, as Ximines showed no intention of leaving, she rose to her feet.

"Well?" she demanded sharply. "I suppose I may release Mr. Ramsay?"

Ximines turned his head and surveyed her. Under that gaze she shrank, and the color ebbed from her cheeks.

"You stay quiet or I shoot heem." With this, the Mexican resumed his cigarette and stared again down the cañon.

The girl flashed a terrified, wondering look at Ramsay, who had drawn closer a step or two. His eyes, vainly trying to give her a message of warning, terrified her the more, and she stood motionless before the tent. Ximines, who perhaps wanted to let Sidewinder and the other two men get well away, paid her no attention but smoked on reflectively and stared down the cañon. He had drawn his pistol, however, and now held it idly in his lap.

Ramsay, arms bound and gagged as he was, was more terrified than the girl. He knew that Ximines might at any instant leap into stark blood-madness or wild passion. Alienists declare that the man who

thinks himself about to explode is the most dangerous of all maniacs; but men on the border know that more dangerous than any maniac is the smoker of *marihuana*. So, with the intention of quietly working his way toward the girl, in a desperate hope that she might be able to release his bound arms, Ramsay continued his slow forward advance.

Then, sudden as the flashing stroke of a snake, Ximines was on his feet, pistol out.

"One more step, little señor, and I cut your throat and drink your blood!" he exclaimed, a wild and lurid glare in his eyes. A cry broke from the girl.

"Stop! Leave us alone—go on down and look after those horses!" She faced him as he turned to her, grinning. Despite the terror that was upon her, she met his grin defiantly, bravely. "Go on down the cañon as you were told to do!"

Ximines thrust away his pistol and took a step toward her, glaring eyes gripped upon her.

"Manuel has come to take you, little señorita of the white throat," he declared in soft Spanish, and if the girl could not understand his words, his manner was beyond all mistake. "Come to me, little cooing dove! I shall show you how we treat the gringo señoritas in my country."

Ramsay hurled himself forward, frantic with horror, flung himself at the Mexican. Ximines grinned, avoided the rush, deftly tripped the bound man and then struck him with an open-handed blow that sent him headlong among the rocks. Next instant, with a sudden and unexpected lurch forward, he was upon Ethel Gilman and had caught her in both arms.

"Come, señorita—"

She struck him across the face, staggering him, and struck him again so that he loosed her and fell back, hand to eyes. A wild scream burst from him, and he whipped out a knife, swaying as he stood.

"Ha! I shall drink your blood for that blow, white-throat!" he yelled.

Ramsay, pulling himself up, saw the Mexican start forward, knew himself helpless to intervene; then he saw something else.

The flap of the brown tent was shoved aside, and in the opening protruded the red nose, the tangled whiskers, the sharp little eyes of Sagebrush Beam. The Mexican saw that movement also, and furious as he was, halted and shifted hand to pistol. But he was too late.

"I reckon ye've crowded us far enough," growled Sagebrush. The roar of a forty-five barked out, and lifted thunderously along the cañon walls.

CHAPTER XII

SAGEBRUSH, dragging himself from the tent but not rising, called to Ramsay.

"Kick that skunk's knife over yere, and I'll cut ye free."

Ramsay, who had been stupefied by the appearance of the desert rat, obeyed the order, and in another moment was rubbing his arms to get rid of the numbness. Ethel Gilman had dropped in a heap, mercifully unconscious; and almost at her side lay Manuel Ximines, his contorted features staring at the sky.

"Where on earth did you come from?" demanded Ramsay. "Man, I thought you were dead!"

"So I was," and Sagebrush chuckled, "but I come to life again, found a hoss and got over yere. The lady give me a lift up the cañon and took care on me. I got a busted head and a bullet in the gizzard, but I'm gettin' all right. Yessir! Like Yavapai Ferris, down Phoenix way. Time o' the border raids, some greasers drapped him into a dry wash with two-three bullets; then some sojers come along, and the greasers crawled into the wash for shelter, and Yavapai set up with a gun in each hand and plugged ten of 'em. The 'leventh got away, and Yavapai said he'd ha' been cured pronto if he'd got the 'leventh. Yessir, same here. Pluggin' that there p'izen skunk sure done me good. I'd have done it earlier, only I didn't figger on drawin' Sidewinder back yere. S'pose you drap him into the cañon 'fore the lady wakes up. Git his gun, too."

Ramsay stooped above the dead Mexican and found that the latter's automatic was his own pistol, which had been taken from him when captured. At one side of the upper flat was a great bunch of yucca, its spiny perpendicular leaves topped by the remains of a glorious cluster of creamy, bell-like blooms. Carrying the body to this, Ramsay dropped it out of sight.

"Don't forget the spot," said Sagebrush anxiously. "I reckon there's a reward for that gent down south."

"Never mind talking now," said Ramsay, with a glance at the unconscious girl. "Got any more grub in there? Then lay it

out—get breakfast started, anyhow.”

He went to the pool below, sluiced head and neck and arms with the cold water. Then he turned to the girl and lifted her head in his arms. He was about to bathe her face, when her eyes opened and looked up into his, startled and wide in recognition.

“You’re all right,” he said quietly, and smiled. “Sit still a minute, young lady, and take it easy.”

Color rising in her cheeks, the girl sat up, then sprang to her feet, staring around.

“Where is he?”

“He done went away, ma’am,” said Sagebrush solemnly. “Yessir. That Mex done seen the error of his ways and got converted. I never seen a Mex get converted so sudden before, neither, nor with such good results.”

“And we owe Sagebrush a vote of thanks for converting him,” added Ramsay, turning to the fire. “Breakfast ready in a minute, Miss Gilman. Have you any biscuits cooked up?”

“Yere’s some store biscuits.” Sagebrush tossed out a package. “Say, Perfesser! I’m right worried about somethin’.”

“About what?” asked Ramsay.

“Why, d’you s’pose that cuss Sidewinder will steal them magazines o’ mine? I left ’em to the hotel in my pack. I got six months’ store o’ magazines there, and I’m readin’ a long story in one of ’em. I been thinking a lot about that there story in the last six months, and I’m gettin’ real anxious to finish it. If Sidewinder steals ’em—”

“He wont,” said Ramsay, laughing to himself. “He wont. I’ll nab those two friends of his when they come back with the car this afternoon, and we’ll all drop in on Sidewinder tonight and surprise him.”

Sagebrush was sitting up, and they joined him, all three feeling considerably benefited by the coffee and a bite of food. Miss Gilman asked no more questions about Ximines, and Ramsay outlined what had taken place in Hourglass Cañon.

“How badly is our friend here hurt?” Ramsay asked of Miss Gilman after he had ended his story.

“He’ll be on his feet in a few days. I took out the bullet—I’ve had a little experience nursing—and there’s nothing very much the matter with him. He lost a good deal of blood.”

“Blood’s cheap.” Sagebrush grinned, as he leaned back comfortably. He seemed to have quite gotten over all his aversion to this particular woman. “Best thing for

blood is good fat lizard-meat. I’ll get me a likely chuckwalla and lay him in the ashes, and feed up. Some says pack-rats make good meat, but I dunno. I’ve et rattlesnake, but my gosh! A feller has to draw the line somewhere, and I draws it at pack-rats. So you’re figgering on roundin’ up Sidewinder tonight, Perfesser?”

“Yes,” responded Ramsay. “If I can get Tom Emery and Cholo Bill—”

“Ye can’t do it noways,” said Sagebrush with savage emphasis. “Don’t be a durned fool and try it, Perfesser. Even if ye got them two fellers covered, would they give in again? Not much. They’d figger that one of ’em would go down, the other might plug ye—and they’d take the chance. Yessir. After all that’s happened, they’d go for ye, gun or no gun. Ye took ’em by s’prise the first time, but there wont be no second time. The only way to get ’em is to drop ’em cold and get ’em dead.”

“I’m no murderer,” said Ramsay quietly. “And I’m going to get ’em, one way or the other; so stop your argument. Miss Gilman, why didn’t you put Sagebrush into your car and take him to town when he showed up here?”

“He wasn’t in shape to stand it,” said the girl. “He got here only last night, half dead and very weak from loss of blood. I had to give him instant attention, get out the bullet, and bandage him up. I should think you’d compliment me on the recovery of my patient, instead of finding fault!”

Ramsay smiled. “I’m not finding fault, except that I wish you were out of here. Well, shall we go down and attend to those horses? We’d better rid them of saddles and bridles and herd them as far up the cañon as possible. We have until tonight to lay our plans, and we must get the flivver that brings those rascals back here, as well as the two men themselves.”

“Then ye’d better figger on shootin’ first and fastest,” snapped out Sagebrush.

RAMSAY laughed and made no response, as he started down the cañon with Miss Gilman at his side. When they stood beside the great boulder of pink granite, with the piñon trees growing out of the cleft above, he paused.

“This is where my brother came,” he said, looking around. “I suppose he’s buried somewhere near here—if he’s buried at all. And there’s gold in these rocks.”

“It’s a beautiful place,” said the girl softly, staring at the pool with its great

clusters of yucca flowers and lilies. "I suppose these flowers will all be gone in a few weeks, Mr. Ramsay?"

He gave her a whimsical look. "Can't you make it Pat, yet?"

She shook her head, gayly enough. "Not yet. Look up there above the boulder—what a site that would be for a house!"

"You can have it," he said, starting on again. "I want none of this place—I'd never get away from the thought of poor Alec. No, the place you should see is Hourglass Cañon. There's a real beauty-spot, with water the year around. If I were you, I'd grubstake old Sagebrush and set him to work looking for gold in this cañon. My brother Alec was no fool, and if he thought there was gold here in paying quantities, it is probably here. Then you come over to Hourglass Cañon with me and start your chicken-ranch."

She gave him a laughing look. "You own that other place, then?"

"No, but I will own it as soon as the papers can be put through. Do you want half?"

"Tell you later," she returned, and pointed. "There are the horses."

DURING the next half-hour Ramsay and Miss Gilman were busy in the extreme. They unsaddled the five horses, got the poor beasts free of bridles, and then started to drive them up the cañon as far as the bend. Having found some of his own supplies lying cached among the trees, Ramsay left the girl to handle the horses and himself turned back down to the mouth of the cañon.

There, where the cañon gave on to the open desert, he approached the clump of piñon and mesquite, and dragged forth the pack of supplies which he had seen. It had evidently been flung out of his car by Sidewinder. He stooped to open the pack and examine its contents—then he suddenly stood up. A queer noise had startled him, a noise which made him glance incredulously at the sky. An airplane?

No. He turned and stood transfixed. There, approaching at full speed, leaping and bounding on the rough desert floor, was one of the two vanished flivvers, and all three men were in it.

He stood staring, helpless, not daring to produce the pistol from his pocket and open fire. That might have been his best chance; yet he neglected it. With a grind-

ing squeal of brakes, the car rushed down to a halt ten feet away. Sidewinder leaped out in the cloud of dust, followed by Tom Emery and Cholo Bill.

"Manuel! Where's Ximines?" demanded Sidewinder hastily.

"Up the cañon." Ramsay waved his hand. "What's the matter?"

Sidewinder turned to the two men, who had rifles in their hands. Obviously, something very much was the matter, for they were pouring out oaths at sight of the horses, and were in frantic haste.

"Go get Manuel and the hosses—quick!" snapped Sidewinder. "This is as far as they can get in their car—we got the hosses, and they aint got any. Move, durn ye!"

The two men stood their rifles against the car and started away, toward the starting figure of Miss Gilman and the slowly moving horses.

CHAPTER XIII

SIDEWINDER stood snarling malevolently at Ramsay, his glittering gray eyes filled with a greenish light, his gray mask of a face bitter to see.

"What's happened?" demanded Ramsay.

"Hell's to pay, that's what! If I thought you were behind it, I'd leave you here to the buzzards. Dunno but what I will anyhow."

Ramsay, frowning in perplexity, came closer to him.

"What do you mean?" he inquired. Sidewinder flung out a hand toward the desert behind him.

"I mean that the sheriff's got on our trail; that's what! Prob'ly trailed that last bunch of hosses. Now we got to get along to Hourglass Cañon, and we'll take you and the girl so's ye wont do no talkin'."

"Oh!" said Ramsay, and then lifted his eyes to the desert. "Is that dust caused by their car?"

An oath on his lips, Sidewinder whirled—and Ramsay struck.

He struck straight and hard, mercilessly so, and his fist caught Sidewinder just behind the ear. The little man was knocked off his feet, knocked headlong into the radiator of the car, and fell in a limp and senseless heap, stunned.

Ramsay, carried off his balance by the furious energy of his own blow, staggered. As he did so, a pistol barked and a bullet

scraped his very hair. He came around, to see Tom Emery and Cholo Bill, who were not yet fifty feet away, in the act of firing on him.

A leap, and he was behind the car. No protection here from heavy bullets—but he had his own pistol out now, and was taking his chances. A bullet crashed into the frame of the car. Another smashed the windshield. Ramsay was firing, rapidly but coolly. Now he ducked swiftly to the other end of the car, darted out into full sight, took two quick, sure shots. He saw Cholo Bill go down and lie quiet; then Emery came for him on the run, red whiskers flaming in the sunlight, pistol spitting.

Ramsay stepped out, deliberately, and took aim.

A BULLET streaked fire between arm and side, searing his ribs—but to his shot Tom Emery's giant figure came crashing forward, rolled over once and then lay sprawled out. For a moment Ramsay stood quiet, scarcely daring to realize that he was unhurt save for scratches, until he saw Ethel Gilman running down the cañon toward him.

Then he sprang forward and leaned over Emery, only to rise at once and hurry to the side of Cholo Bill. Just in time, too, for the halfbreed, leg broken by a bullet, was trying to reach his fallen pistol. Ramsay kicked the weapon away, and Cholo Bill, with a low groan, relaxed into unconsciousness. As Ramsay obtained the outlaw's knife, the girl arrived on the scene. He looked up at her with a slow laugh.

"Sagebrush said it couldn't be done, but he was only partly right. Emery's gone. Can you fix up some sort of bandage for this chap, after I get his arms lashed behind him? His leg's broken, I think. The sheriff is on his way here, according to Sidewinder—and I'll have to attend to that gentleman before he wakes up. We've got him, and we've got Cholo Bill, and it's a good haul."

As the white-faced girl nodded and knelt, Ramsay lashed the arms of the wounded man firmly behind him with the gay silk kerchief that had been at Cholo Bill's neck, then rose and ran back to the car. Here again he had not an instant to lose, for Sidewinder Crowfoot was stirring, was clinging to the car and trying to haul himself up. Knowing with what incredible

swiftness the man could strike, Ramsay did not hesitate, but stooped with a blow that drove Sidewinder prostrate again, then flung himself upon the fallen man and in five minutes had him disarmed and firmly bound hand and foot.

He rejoined the girl, to find her finishing her task as well as circumstances would permit, and as she took his hand to rise, he saw a change come into her face.

"Another car—there!"

Ramsay swung around, and a laugh broke from him at sight of another flivver bearing down for the cañon, crowded with men.

"Good! It looks as though the law had come to Pinecate Cañon at last, young lady!"

Fifteen minutes afterward Ramsay and the grizzled sheriff from Chuckwalla City were accompanying Miss Gilman up the cañon toward the girl's camp, while below them the deputies were getting the prisoners loaded up and were bringing the five horses to the cars. All five of those horses had been among the bunch recently stolen from the other side of the range, and two of the deputies were preparing to ride on to Hourglass Cañon and take possession of the herd there.

As the three came to the bend in the cañon, Ramsay halted and drew from his pocket his brother's deed, still in its torn envelope.

"Sheriff, here's evidence of a Federal charge to lay against Sidewinder Crowfoot—mail-robbery. I think it will serve to give him a long time in the penitentiary to think upon his sins. Suppose you look it over, while I say a word to Miss Gilman, will you?"

The sheriff met his whimsical gaze, grinned, and then strode on around the bend with the evidence in his hand. Ramsay turned to the girl.

"What do you say about Hourglass Cañon, young lady? Do you want to share it with me?"

"Well, I'll go and look at it, but I won't promise anything."

"All right. That's fair enough. And you'll call me Pat?"

Her eyes surveyed him merrily.

"Not until—you get a shave!" she said, and then was gone, running after the tall figure of the sheriff, a laugh floating back to Ramsay.

He followed, smiling.

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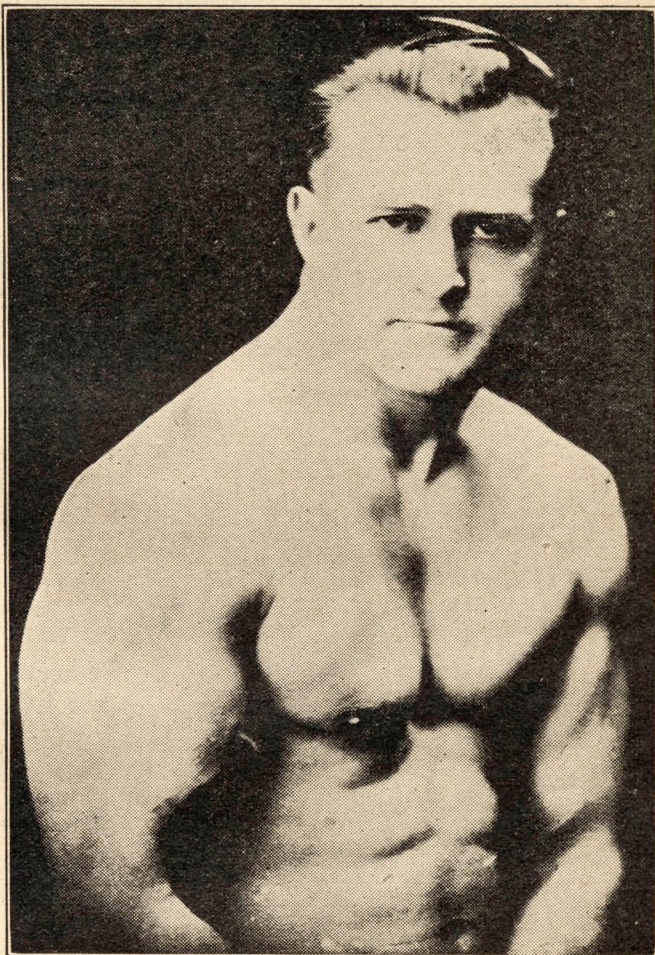
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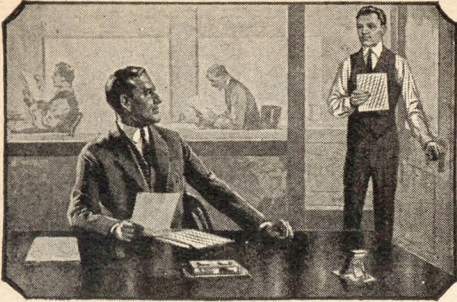
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Name

Present Position

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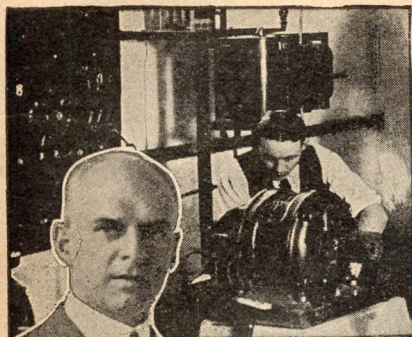
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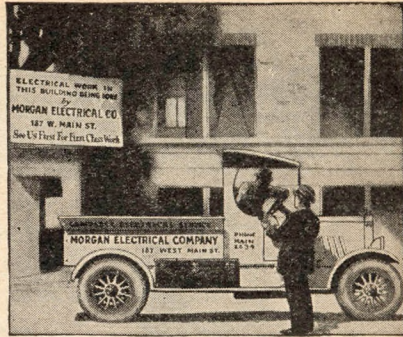
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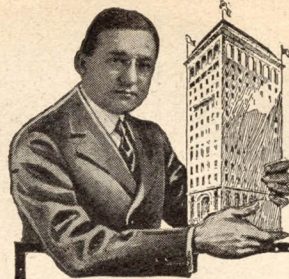
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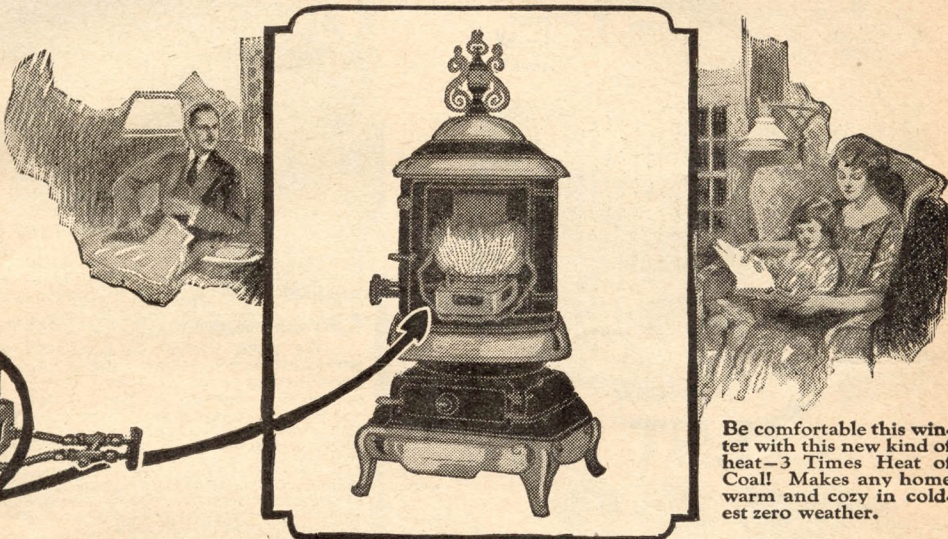
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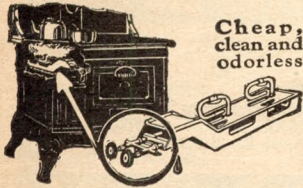
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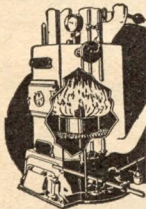
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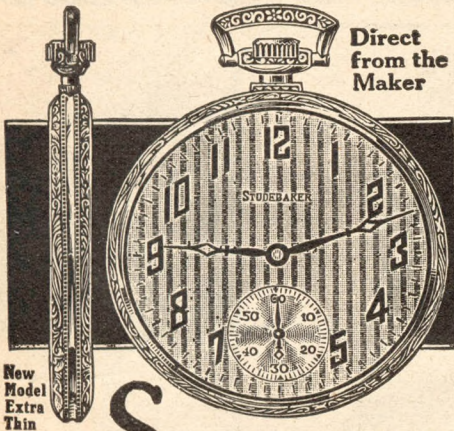
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Name

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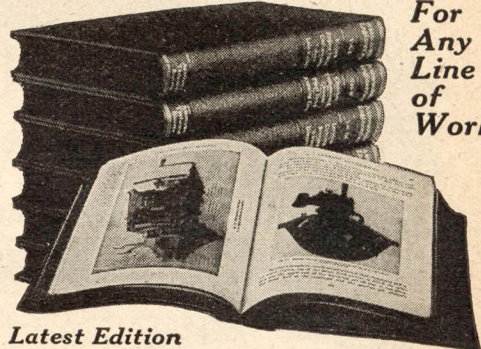
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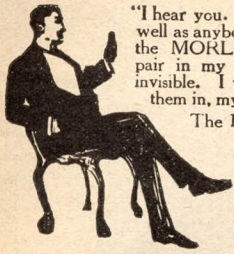
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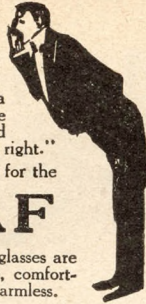
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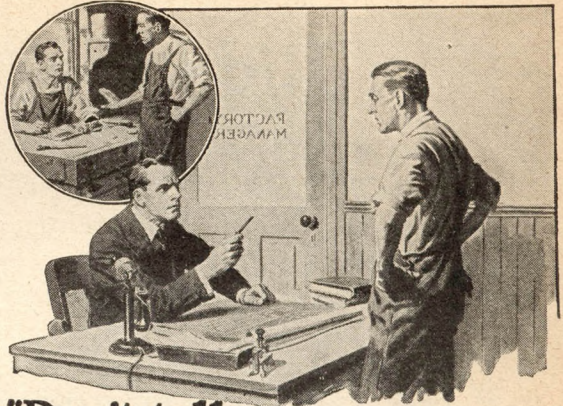
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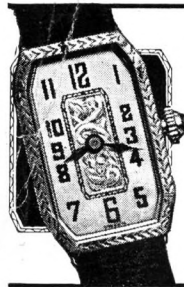
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