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No. 5, Vol. 26

TWICE-A-MONTH

15 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

DECEMBER
MONTH-END EDITION
OUT-NOV. 23, 1912



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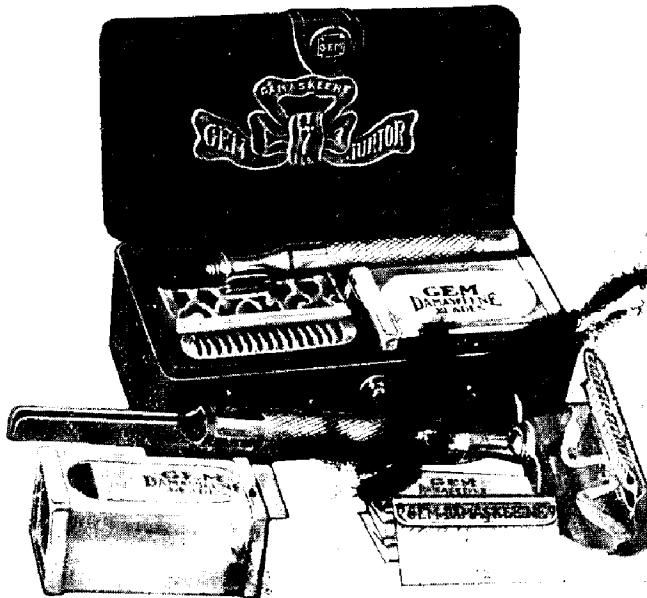
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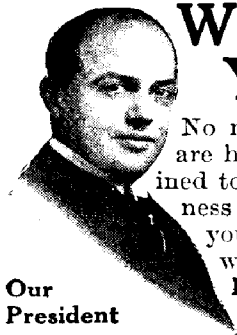
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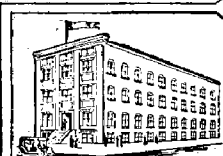
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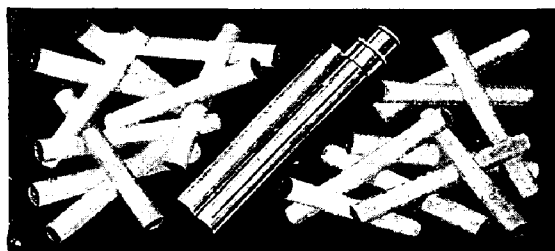
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VOLUME XXVI

NUMBER 5

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXVI.

DECEMBER 15, 1912.

No. 5.

The Phantom Shotgun

By Stanley Clisby Arthur

"Next to the Western novel, give us a mystery novel." It is the request in many letters that have reached us. We have given you the very best Western novels printed in any magazine. And now here is a mystery novel that is in a class by itself. For plot and incident and sustained interest we know of none better. A crime is committed on board ship—a series of them. A phantom shotgun figures in each of them; but until the last pages of the novel are turned not one reader in a thousand will guess whose hand held the shotgun. That is the kind of mystery story we are anxious to get. Mr. Arthur is new to readers of the POPULAR, but we know that you will want to hear from him again.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

BOUND SOUTH.

A BRIDE and a groom are always an interesting sight, and when an embarrassed bridal pair, surrounded by a boisterous score, trouped to the steamer's side, we, already on board, had something to watch besides the shouting and cursing stevedores and sweat-scented long-shoremen wrestling with huge cases, and hurrying cumbersome trunks into the vast, black interior of the vessel's hold.

The exuberant friends of the newly married couple had evidently not been satisfied with thronging the church at eight in the morning, seeing the un-mathematical process of two made one, but felt that they must invade Pier 25,

North River, and hurl "*bon voyage*," trite, crude, and cruel advice, along with handfuls of rice at the confused and disconcerted two just joined together until death, or the hungry divorce mill, would them part.

Many interested passengers like myself leaned over the rail of the S. S. *Minerva* to smile at the laughing, noisy group on the rough boards below us. I dare say every woman who was not weeping was making mental criticism of the hang of the bride's traveling skirt or the tilt of her hat. Such details were not for my eyes, nor were they for the eyes of the well-set-up young fellow leaning over the rail to my left. Seeing his manifest interest, I spoke:

"Know them?"

"No," he answered shortly, giving

me a swift, startled look, and I knew he lied.

His back was turned to me, and I could not help noticing the contraction of the shoulder muscles under his well-fitting coat when one of the group below emptied a pocketful of rice over the two who were the center of attraction.

I distinctly heard the man to my left mutter an oath.

"Barbaric custom," I ventured to his broad back. "Do you think they"—and I pointed my cane toward the crowd below—"would act such utter idiots if they could see themselves as we see them?"

The man, turning abruptly, answered me rather queerly.

"Oh, what—*what* shall I do?" he groaned.

Before I could recover from my amazement he had hurried into the nearest companionway, and once inside I could hear his voice angrily demanding where the purser could be found.

The hoarse, throaty blast of the siren, warning recreant passengers ashore to get on, and those aboard who were not sailing to quit the steamer, rent the smoky air with its ear-splitting blast, and I moved nearer the gangplank as the bride and groom, dodging a varied assortment of old shoes, stepped on the saloon deck.

I stood near while their friends hurled rice at them, and I thought that the girl looked as some rich luxuriant flower of the tropics might look in a snowstorm. There was something sweet and splendid and gracious about her, but as she threw back her veil I was struck by the indefinable sadness that lay in her eyes, darkening the clear gray of them as shadows might darken the gray of a winter twilight.

But at least the smile on her lips made up for the pathos of her eyes—it was like sunlight through a stained-glass window, and when she laughed one was reminded of all things wonderful in sound.

And laugh she did, again and again, as if she knew the sparkle of it warmed one like wine, and, remembering that

shadow in her eyes, I thought that if a man can smile and smile and be a villain, a woman can laugh and laugh, and be tragedy incarnate!

Oh, she was lovely, this bride of a little while, and I felt a sudden resentment against the man, no matter how deserving he might be, into whose keeping had been given so much of sweet womanliness.

"Now, remember, Elizabeth," a girl's voice floated up in a sally to the bride, and I was conscious of a feeling of satisfaction. Elizabeth! To me it is the prettiest name in the whole wide world—the name itself, not any of its horrible contractions such as Bertha, Bess, Libbie, or Lizzie—and as Elizabeth I shall speak of her through these pages, for it is a name I like to voice, to think, to write.

Some one called a banality to the groom, and my attention was drawn to him for the first time. He was the usual type of successful business man, with a smile a bit too calculating to be pleasing, and the well-fed, prosperous look that always stirs my antagonism more than an expression of absolute villainy. He was pretty decently proportioned, however, and decidedly well-groomed, and while clothes do not make the man, they have been the unmaking of many in the eyes of a woman.

"There's the spirit of the up-to-date press for you!" a tall, loosely built young fellow remarked, crowding beside me at the railing, and pointing to the group of newspaper photographers below leveling a battery of cameras at the bridal couple.

"Here it is not quite noon, and that enterprising kid at the foot of the gangplank is reaping a harvest of pennies selling the *afternoon* papers, with a detailed account of the wedding, and half-tone illustrations of the bride as she entered the church at eight o'clock! Can you beat it?" He turned to me with such an engaging smile and so much expansive pride in the eyes which squinted at me through the pince-nez he wore that I felt attracted to him instantly.

"Your innocent enthusiasm over our

yellow press might make one wonder what your own profession happens to be," I smiled in return. "A prize fighter, a Marathon runner, an aviator, maybe, or an absconding bank cashier? I know that you're not an actor, for I see nothing that looks like a press agent."

The young fellow grinned. "Nothing so respectable as any of those," he retorted. "I'm merely a common specimen of the genus reporter, habitat Manhattan, species *yellowjournalistica*. However, don't attempt to jump overboard or anything like that, as the poison has been extracted from my fangs—I'm perfectly safe to handle—warranted not to bite."

"I hardly expected to find a reporter aboard," said I. "My impression was that they had a hereditary antipathy for water."

He looked at me reproachfully, and thrust one of his cards toward me, upon which I read:

ROBERT L. LARKINS

N. Y. Evening Ledger

"I haven't a card with me," I said, holding out my hand, "but I'm Frank Marshall, and I'm very glad to make your acquaintance. I don't care two bits, as a rule, to meet people; but on a steamer, somehow, it is different, and congenial company is half the pleasure of the journey."

"When did you leave the coast?" asked the newspaper man, falling into step with me as we made our way forward. "You see," he explained, as I looked at him in surprise, "only Westerners say 'two bits,' and I couldn't help but call the turn."

"Or, rather, the analytical mind of a trained news gatherer got into action immediately," I prompted.

"Oh, anything you like," he replied, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Our honeymooners seem to have been meat for the papers," I remarked, drawing from my coat pocket a sheet

bizarre with big type detailing the wedding of the Wall Street broker and his erstwhile stenographer. I had purchased it out of mere curiosity when the bridal couple came aboard. "What rot!" I commented disgustedly.

"Oh, I don't know," said Larkins lightly. "Think of the hope it gives the remaining stenographers! Approximately there are seventy-five thousand of them in New York, and about an equal number of unmarried brokers," and he looked perfectly sober when he said it.

"But this particular sheet," I protested. "Of all the newspapers published under the sun I don't know of one that equals this for mendacity, inaccuracy, and sensationalism. I can't see why people buy it."

"I can," maintained the reporter. "You bought one, didn't you? There were a half a dozen different papers sold there, yet you chose the one you're knocking. Another thing—you can't tell me anything about the *Ledger*, because I work on it," he added quietly.

I remembered with chagrin that the paper I was upbraiding was the *Ledger*, and that his card had borne the name of that journal. I started to stammer an apology, but Larkins stopped me good-naturedly.

"Oh, you can't hurt me," said he. "Soak it, hammer it, knock it—that's why it grows so fat. I suppose you think that it should run a little four-line announcement setting forth the fact that Hamilton Forbes, a well-known Wall Street broker, married Elizabeth Kennedy, his stenographer, and that their honeymoon would be spent in New Orleans and the South?"

"It would be better than this florid account," I maintained.

"My dear sir, when a penniless man appears in Wall Street out of nowhere, and in seven years counts his fortune with two commas and a period, corners the cotton market, marries his beautiful stenographer, making her the richest bride of the year, you demand a four-line record of the fact. Why—why, what do you take the daily press for?" He surveyed me with an injured air.

"Then this—romance, as the *Ledger* has it, is true?"

"M-m-m-m—yes," he replied. "Of course, it has been dressed up a bit, but in the main it's the straight goods," he added.

The following is a portion of the *Ledger's* account of the marriage of Hamilton Forbes, broker and trust magnate, to Elizabeth Kennedy, stenographer, which I insert in recognition of the fact that it is a far more illuminating document than I could offer in my own words:

This morning at eight, Bruce Hamilton Forbes, the man who cornered the cotton market, and his stenographer, Miss Elizabeth Kennedy, were quietly married at The Little Church Around the Corner by the Reverend Warren Beverly.

The romance of the wealthy broker and his beautiful bride is of unusual interest.

Mr. Forbes' career in the Street has been short but meteoric. He came to New York a poor man, and in seven short years he has swept through the Golden Calf district like a financial Alexander. His speculations have been so paying that he is the most feared man in Wall Street to-day.

He is a bachelor, with no relatives in this city, but is a member of some of Gotham's most select clubs.

Miss Kennedy gained much newspaper notoriety two years ago when she appeared as the principal witness for the defense in the trial of E. Van Buren Courtlandt, a broker's clerk employed in the Forbes' offices, who was arrested and tried for stock-market juggling. After three trials, two resulting in a jury disagreement, the district attorney quashed further proceedings.

At the time it was rumored that Miss Kennedy was the fiancée of the accused, who was a member of one of New York's oldest families, but after being discharged, Courtlandt left New York for the West, and, shortly following, his death in Arizona was announced.

Mr. and Mrs. Forbes, immediately after the wedding ceremony, sailed for New Orleans. They will spend their honeymoon traveling through the Southern States, where the bridegroom has extensive cotton interests.

Larkins watched me closely and in silence as I read the *Ledger's* account, which I have robbed of the sensational features such as the riot of souvenir hunters at the church, speculation as to what the bridegroom settled on his bride, the intimate story of the courtship from the time she first took dicta-

tion from her employer to the hour when he led her to the altar, and such details as only are found in newspapers of the *Ledger's* type.

"Well, what's wrong with it?" he asked, seeing I had finished.

"Oh, nothing," I replied, to end the futile argument.

"I'm relieved," he said dryly. "I wrote it."

Just then the trumpeter made his rounds of the ship, calling us in musical blasts to our first meal aboard.

Larkins was staring at the Bartholdi Statue of Liberty that we were leaving astern.

"Do you know," he said, "I've lived in little old New York for some years, and I've never yet paid my respects to the dear old girl with the torch. Funny, isn't it? As a kid I longed passionately for just one thing—to see that statue, and climb up to her crown."

We strolled toward the middle of the ship after making the pleasant discovery that our staterooms faced each other, and came suddenly on the bridal couple slowly pacing the deck.

"I hate to see such a nice girl married to that," commented Larkins, in an undertone.

"Why, what is wrong with him?" I asked, surprised to hear the reporter speak with such animus.

"Well, she's such a fine sort, and he—oh, he's a—— Say, do you remember what we call a fellow out West who is not up to the mark?"

"We principally call him things that do not look well in print," I rejoined.

"He's one," said the reporter laconically.

Then I told Larkins of the clean-cut young chap who watched the bridal couple with such absorbing interest as we lay at the wharf, and repeated the curiously wild ejaculation he had directed at me.

"There is something that should fire your newspaper soul," I exclaimed. "Possibly you'll have a mystery to ferret out—that is, unless my excited friend was not a passenger, as I supposed, and has left the ship."

At that instant, as it often happens

in plays and rarely in real life, there stepped out of the companionway the very man of whom I was speaking.

Larkins gripped my shoulder. "Is that he?"

"By all that is wonderful—it is!" I managed to gasp. "How did you know?"

"Hold fast, Mr. Marshall, for we are going round a corner," Larkins laughed more than spoke, and he took a few hurried steps forward.

The stranger was just ahead of us, and Forbes and his bride were approaching. The two were talking, and it was only when he started to pass the man in front of us that the bride looked up.

I have seen people shocked and surprised before, but I hope I shall never again see the look that passed over the woman's face. She turned positively livid.

"Van!" she cried, her voice barely above a whisper, and with arms stretched to him she sank in a heap on the deck.

For a moment Forbes stood silent and tense, staring at the young man facing him, then slowly he started to lift his wife to her feet.

The young fellow sprang forward in a rage.

"Don't touch her, or, by Heaven, I'll kill you!" he yelled, heaving Forbes back with a violent thrust of both hands; and bending over the fainting girl he raised her tenderly. Then, turning, asked me to summon the stewardess.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST DAY OUT.

Larkins was not at luncheon when I took my place. I had been given a seat at the captain's table, from which vantage point I could command a view of the entire dining saloon, and I failed to locate the reporter at any of the other tables. As I was about to go on deck the newspaper man came tripping down the stairs, and was shown to the seat next to mine.

"Little bit delayed," he said, as he unfolded his napkin. "How do you like our seats? I fixed 'em up."

"I was looking for you," I told him, "and was hoping you hadn't fallen a victim to the sway of the ship."

"I never get seasick," answered Larkins, after he had ordered practically everything on the menu. "I don't believe in it—foolish notion for a fellow to get in his head."

"Ah, there's the trouble, Mr. Larkins," said I, "the notion doesn't attack the head first."

Larkins smiled, and wanted to know if the bride and groom had appeared at luncheon.

I explained that the bridegroom had been down and had seat number four, opposite our chairs, which gave me a good opportunity to observe him closely. He was nervous and distraught, scarcely ate anything, and left the table after ordering a few delicacies taken up to his suite.

"You know what got his goat?" asked Larkins, ordering two kinds of pie.

"I could guess if I tried real hard," I replied. "That young fellow who threatened to kill Forbes when Mrs. Forbes fainted was Van Buren Courtlandt."

"Yep."

"What have you been doing since that time?" I asked, as we arose to take a turn on deck.

"Cr-r-r-a-a-sh! Cr-rash! Crrash! Cr-r-r-a-a-sh!" said my companion, imitating the wireless instrument that was sending its roar throughout the length and breadth of the ship.

I turned on him in disgust. "Do you mean to tell me that you have sent what happened to your paper?"

"Why, no, of course not! I merely wired them that I had discovered a new method for making electric lights out of current magazines!" He looked me over as if I were some strange animal in a zoo.

As we went above he declined the cigar I offered him for a Turkish cigarette, which he fished from his pocket.

When we arranged for our steamer chairs we had them placed on the saloon deck near the window of my stateroom, where the cabin wall formed a sort of L of the deck. Two empty chairs were

already there, and as ours were being placed I saw the newspaper man eye the deck steward rather queerly.

"You're a pretty well-set-up fellow," Larkins said, addressing him. "I suppose you get all your muscle from toying with these chairs?"

"Yes, sir," replied the steward, still busy with the chairs, "but tossin' baggage around is a heap sight better for grabbin' muscle. I'm head baggageman 'sides deck steward, you know, sir."

"I guess your arm is twice the size of mine," Larkins continued. "Let's see," and he surprised me by peeling off his coat and rolling up his shirt sleeves, thereby displaying a pair of arms about as husky as lead pencils. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Hallaron, sir. Tom Hallaron."

"Well, Tom, let's see how much bigger your arms are than mine."

Hallaron rolled back his blue flannel sleeves, and held out a pair of hairy limbs larger than most men's legs.

"Guess I'll have to eat a mixed diet of elephant steak and hippopotamus cutlets to get arms that size," said Larkins, putting on his coat again.

"Try steamer chairs and Taylor trunks, sir," advised the steward.

"I say, you young scalawag," I laughed, "what kind of an exhibition was that? Seems to me if I owned a pair of toothpicks such as you carry around for arms I'd keep them in my coat sleeves."

"Of course you would," said my eccentric companion, digging his nose deeper in his magazine, leaving me to mine with no further comment.

Larkins read in silence. A stiff breeze off shore made our overcoats and steamer rugs very comfortable, and as we stretched out lazily in our chairs I surreptitiously studied the erratic young man to whom I had taken such an instant liking. His face was well-bred and intelligent. His pronunciation delighted me, but his liberal use of slang offset the pleasing quality of his voice and the singular refinement of his features. It was like hearing syncopated music played on a harp. As he read page after page of his magazine I

watched his face carefully for some sign of pleasure or dissatisfaction in what he was reading, but he might have been chiseled out of stone for all the emotion he displayed.

As I studied him I speculated on the reason for his presence aboard the *Minerva*. It suddenly occurred to me that he had listened intently to my story of my return trip to California via The Hundred Golden Hours at Sea, of my raisin industry in the San Joaquin Valley, and my abhorrence of anything Eastern, but never a word had he said as to why he was sailing. On the whole, I decided it was unusual. Newspaper men rarely travel just for mere fun—they haven't that much money, as a rule, and the Interstate Commerce Commission had made free transportation a vision of the shadowy past.

Did his paper imagine that something would happen on this particular trip of the *Minerva* to justify sending one of their men along? The thought appealed to me as not unlikely.

Forbes and his young wife appearing on deck, and seating themselves in the empty chairs adjacent to Larkins' and mine, broke up my reverie. Larkins glanced at them casually, then was once more intent on the magazine in his hand.

I, however, studied them as closely as I could without being openly rude. This was not difficult, as the two centered their eyes, words, and thoughts on each other—not in the way of most bridal couples, strange to say, for it was very evident that some serious disagreement had arisen between them.

Forbes' attitude was that of a man trying to explain something. So I judged, as I could not hear a word that was spoken, but I count myself a fair reader of the human countenance. I could plainly see that he was not succeeding in his explanation. His wife sat erect in her chair, and, chin in hand, watched the dim shore line over which the sun was hanging like a big ball of molten copper. The few times she did look at her husband I was startled to note that her glance was filled with actual loathing. Once, when he was

pleading, he laid his hand on her arm, and instantly her eyes were ablaze with anger.

It was not difficult to figure out a reason for all this. Forbes had deceived her as to Van Buren Courtlandt's death, I argued to myself, and Courtlandt's appearance on the deck of the *Minerva* was like a rising from the grave.

Glancing at Larkins, to see why in the world he took no notice of what was going on, I saw his eyes still devouring the printed pages of his gaudily covered magazine. Then I made a discovery. Larkins' eyes were riveted on the periodical, but not a page had he turned for at least a half hour!

I leaned over and addressed him: "Do you know who are behind you?"

"Sure! Don't you?" he answered equably, and then we were both distracted by Mrs. Forbes rising abruptly.

"Please, Elizabeth!" pleaded her husband's voice.

She ignored him utterly, and, turning to a uniformed officer, who I afterward learned was Mr. Woodruff, the first officer, she asked to be taken to the captain. The two moved off together, and as I arose from my chair I heard them going up the forward-deck companionway. Forbes preceded us inside, and as he unlocked the door of his suite I found it was next to my own stateroom, which lay between his, stateroom A, and the library of the vessel. Larkins' room was number two, directly across the social hallway from mine.

Larkins knocked at my door just after the trumpeter was sounding the half-hour warning for dinner.

"Do you know who has just entered the Forbes' suite?" he asked, as he sat on the edge of my berth. "Captain Loyd!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CURIOUS CIPHER CODE.

Dinner was uneventful. Forbes was in his place, but his wife did not make her appearance in the dining saloon. Later, in the smoking room, I found every passenger's tongue wagging, to

judge by the male element, and the Forbes naturally were the one and absorbing topic.

"Humph!" said Larkins to me, as we sat at one of the small tables, with our drinks before us. "They say women are gossips!" and he nodded his head toward the clusters of men eagerly discussing the Forbes affair.

"I tell you I know!" broke in a man's voice loudly. "She has the stateroom next to the purser's, opposite the one her husband occupies. She had her things moved in while every one was at supper."

Larkins and I looked up with interest.

"Guess their honeymoon is on the wane already," observed another. "Does any one know the young chap that's proving a sort of belated Lochinvar? He seems to be the disturbing element."

The gossip ran on; then suddenly a hush fell, as Courtlandt entered the room from the deck. By his expression I could see that he suspected who were the topic of conversation. I half expected to see him give active vent to the smoldering fury in his eyes when Larkins surprised me by catching the young fellow's coat as he passed our table.

"Sit down with us a moment, Mr. Courtlandt," said my companion.

The young man looked at Larkins coldly. "My name is Barthney," he said, with quiet deliberation.

"Sit down," said Larkins, in a low voice; "they're all looking at you. My name's Larkins—of the *Evening Ledger*."

Courtlandt sank into the empty seat between the newspaper man and myself. "Oh, I say, old man, thank you—thank you!" He held an unsteady hand toward Larkins. "You don't know how I've always wanted to express my appreciation for what you did for me that time, but——"

"That's all right—er—Barthney. Tickled me to death. Got a big beat on it," said Larkins. "Say, what are we drinking?" and he pushed the bell for

the bar steward, then introduced me to the young man.

Courtlandt swallowed his drink of straight whisky feverishly. Larkins and I merely sipped a liqueur.

"Say, boy," chided the reporter, "I'd cut out that raw stuff if I were you. What in the name of all that's good are you doing on this boat?"

The young fellow glanced at me quickly. "Oh, that's all right," said Larkins. "Mr. Marshall knows who you are, and I vouch for him."

"Good heavens, Mr. Larkins," exclaimed Courtlandt passionately, "do you suppose that I would have set foot on this infernal boat if I had imagined that they were sailing on it? Why, I wouldn't——"

"Lower your voice," warned Larkins sharply. "They're all looking at you."

A steward entered, and handed Courtlandt a note.

The envelope was of the ship's stationery, and contained a single sheet of note paper. Courtlandt read it very slowly, then wrote a single word in reply, and passed it to the steward.

Larkins' sharp wits apparently needed nothing further to make the situation clear to him, for as he knocked the ashes from his cigarette he said slowly, and in the frank, pleasant way which made it impossible for one to take offense:

"Courtlandt, I'm not butting into this thing merely because poking my nose in other people's affairs is my bread and butter, but I want to say just one thing to you—and Mr. Marshall here, who is an older and probably a wiser man than either of us, will bear me out. I think when a man's in the mess you're in, it's his cue to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Don't lie or quibble. Hand her the straight unvarnished—*sabe?*"

Courtlandt arose, and looked straight into Larkins' eyes. "That's good advice," he said wearily, then a slow smile broke over his face. "I suppose it takes a yellow journalist to appreciate the value of the truth," and he passed on out.

As Larkins and I were about to leave,

a steward picked up something from under the table we had occupied, and handed it to me. It was a sheet of note paper, covered with peculiar hieroglyphics.

"Not mine," I said, passing it on to Larkins. He glanced at it thoughtfully for a moment, then folded it and put it in his pocket.

"I guess this belongs to Courtlandt," he said; "it's that note he got, although it looks more like a problem in Chinese mathematics than a billet-doux."

Five bells struck as we descended from the upper to the saloon deck. At my suggestion we made for our steamer chairs to enjoy one more smoke before retiring. As we neared the forward part of the deck I noted the figures of a man and a woman occupying our chairs, and engrossed in earnest conversation.

The woman's voice rose in sudden passion: "A man who would so trick a girl deserves the death-dealing hand of God——" Then she broke off with a slight cry of dismay as Larkins and I passed where they were seated.

"Mrs. Forbes and young Courtlandt!" I exclaimed, when we had rounded the forward part of the deck, and crossed to the port side.

"Yes," assented the newspaper man. "You know, I feel sorry for her, her illusion was so quickly shattered."

"You heard what was said in the smoking room as to her taking another stateroom, didn't you?" I asked.

"Oh, I was wise before that gabby individual sprang it," was Larkins' reply. "She went to Captain Loyd, and explained something to him. Five minutes later the purser was ordered to assign her to another stateroom. She and her effects are now in suite C. Funny——" and he paused.

"I fail to see anything so very funny in her dilemma."

"She asked the captain to turn the ship back, and land her in New York!" he chuckled.

"Poor girl!" I sighed.

As we circled the deck again I tapped the stained-glass window of stateroom A, and called Larkins' attention to the

fact that the light in Forbes' stateroom was still burning brightly.

"Yes, I see," my companion chuckled again. "He has one of the stewards getting blisters on his feet chasing gin fizzes into him."

The decks were deserted save for Courtlandt and Mrs. Forbes, who were still talking earnestly, and the reporter and myself. The deck lights had been turned off at eleven, and the ship was in darkness save for a light here and there shining out of the companionways.

"You must be tired," said Larkins, most solicitously, offering the support of his arm.

I stiffened instantly, for any illusion to my infirmity, however veiled or kindly meant, irritated me. I was willing to limp through life without the sympathy of others or any assistance save that which my cane gave me.

Larkins saw my displeasure, and quickly said: "I beg your pardon!" and took up the thread of our conversation in his characteristically disarming manner. From that time Larkins fully respected my supersensitiveness as to my offending clubfoot, and even on the rare occasions when I inadvertently dropped my cane—and rare they were, for I guarded myself vigilantly against the embarrassment of being without even its momentary support—he considerately allowed me to recover it for myself, knowing I would prefer this inconvenience to the humiliation of his proffered aid.

As the reporter and I neared the forward portion of the ship, on our way to our staterooms, a cry of a man, frightful in its agony and fear, rang through the ship, and Hamilton Forbes stumbled from his stateroom in a frenzy of terror.

His eyes, bloodshot and wild, had the glint of a hunted animal, and I saw with disgust that he must be suffering from some horrible hallucination of overdrink.

"Don't let him get me!" he cried. "Help! help!" warding off imaginary figures with his hands. "He's going to murder me!"

Larkins sprang toward him and grasped him roughly by the arm.

"Here, here!" said the reporter. "Brace up! You've got a bad case of the jimjams!"

The purser and the chief steward hurried from their staterooms at the sound of the disturbance; and likewise came Woodruff, the first officer, running along the deck from the bridge. The next moment Courtlandt, Mrs. Forbes, and a few startled passengers made up a group that quickly surrounded the panic-stricken man.

"He's going to murder me to-night!" shrieked Forbes. "To-night—to-night!"

"Who?" demanded Woodruff impatiently.

Forbes held out a trembling hand. Clutched between his fingers was a crumpled piece of paper.

The first officer straightened out the little slip, and stared at it blankly for a few seconds.

"Well, of all the rot!" he ejaculated.

"What do you mean by losing your head in this manner over a silly bunch of figures?"

Forbes' teeth were chattering so furiously that he could make no intelligible reply; but Larkins broke in eagerly.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Woodruff," he said, "but may I have a look at that bit of paper?" The officer passed it over, and Larkins studied it intently. "It is some sort of cipher," he said, and as Larkins afterward made a copy of it I give it here:

19

25-20- 8- 7- 9-14-15-20

3-15-11-16- 9-11- 9-16

8-11-21-19-11-26- 3-19

4- 8- 2- 4-14-22-24-20

15- 9-19- 9-26-23-10- 1

7- 6- 5- 1-25-24- 1- 8

10-20-19-22-26-25- 3- 9

8- 5- 1-22- 5-14- 7- 6

By this time Captain Loyd had joined the throng around the excited man. "See here, Mr. Forbes," he demanded harshly. "What does this mean?"

"It means that my life is threatened!" gasped Forbes. "Death, it says, captain—death! Oh, save me—he's going to kill me! *To-night!*" the last word was a shriek of absolute terror.

"Here, here, pull yourself together, Mr. Forbes," said the skipper. "What has scared you? This foolish collection of figures?" and he indicated the cipher Larkins handed him.

With a groan Forbes clapped both hands before his eyes. "Don't let me see it?" he pleaded pitifully. "It spells—Death!"

"But where did you get it, man?"

"Just an instant ago."

"Where—where, I asked you?"

"It was lying on my bed. It has come at last! For years, fool—fool that I was——" Forbes broke into hysterical laughter. "To have thought all these years that I was safe—that he was dead——"

"Stop this!" thundered Captain Loyd. "For Heaven's sake, be a man!" He turned and addressed the group of passengers. "Be good enough to leave me alone with Mr. Forbes. Mr. Larkins and Mr. Marshall, I'll ask you to remain," he continued, "and accompany Mr. Woodruff and myself to Mr. Forbes' room. There may be something serious under all this."

Forbes had staggered to the couch in the parlor of the suite, and flung himself upon it.

"Looks like plain D. T.'s to me," said Larkins.

"Come, Mr. Forbes, show me where you found this cipher thing," Captain Loyd urged in a more kindly tone, seeing the man was physically overcome.

Forbes staggered into the bedroom, and pointed tremblingly to the far side of the bed.

"There," he said faintly.

"Who was in this room with you to-night?" Captain Loyd asked.

"No one."

"Captain," Larkins interrupted, "may I ask Mr. Forbes a few questions? This

is more along my line," he explained apologetically, "and I begin to see something besides John Barleycorn here."

"Certainly," said the skipper, with manifest relief.

Larkins turned to Forbes. "You say you were all alone, Mr. Forbes?" he queried.

"Yes."

"Who was last in this room besides yourself?"

"Mrs. Forbes."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely sure."

"What time was that?"

"This afternoon."

"Was that when she was removing her effects to the opposite stateroom?"

An angry red flamed in Forbes' cheeks. "What right have you to question me in such a manner?" he demanded sullenly.

"I don't mean to be offensive, Mr. Forbes," Larkins said gently. "I'm only trying to make use of my ability as a newspaper sleuth," smiling whimsically. "to discover the why and wherefore of this thing that troubles you so; and you *would* like us to get at the bottom of it, wouldn't you?"

Forbes shuddered. "Go ahead and quizz me all you wish," he said wearily. "What does it matter to a man who has only a few more hours in this world?—a marked man, sir; a marked man!"

"Cheer up, then, the worst is yet to come," said Larkins flippantly. "What if you do read a tragic warning in this simple bunch of numerals? Don't you suppose you'll be properly safeguarded on this ship? Somebody's just throwing a scare into you, that's all. What idiot is going to deliberately jeopardize his personal safety and liberty by assaulting you with murderous intent now that we're all wise? Brace up and give me a few straight answers, and we'll see what we can do toward nailing the villain of the piece. Now, tell me, did you see the cipher on the bed an hour ago?"

"No."

"Do you think you would have seen it if it had been there?"

"Yes; I am sure I would."

"Umph!" said Larkins. "Absolutely certain?"

"Absolutely."

"You were also absolutely certain Mrs. Forbes was the last person in this stateroom besides yourself before you found the cipher?"

"Well?" impatiently.

"Well," returned Larkins, "who brought all these in?" He indicated the various empty glasses in both rooms.

"Oh, only a steward——"

"Suppose we take a slant at him," said the reporter. "What steward was it?" He put the question to the chief steward, whom the captain had summoned to the stateroom.

"I'll see," said the officer, hurrying out and returning shortly with one of his subordinates, the little steward who served the first table at mealtimes. Like a good many others in his particular line of employment, he was an Englishman.

"What's your name?" asked Larkins, taking the little fellow in from head to foot.

The steward, just awakened from a sound sleep, was bewildered and frightened.

"Thompson, sir," he replied.

"When were you in this room last?"

"A little after seven bells, sir."

"Did you ever see this before?" Larkins held up the cipher message.

"No-o-o, sir."

"Sure?"

"Sure, sir."

"You didn't bring it into the room?"

"No, sir."

"How much of a tip did you get for bringing it in?"

"Nothink, sir! I didn't, so 'elp me, sir!" Mystified and dazed, he turned from one to the other like a little, terrified rabbit.

"All right, you can go," snapped Larkins. To the captain he said: "That eliminates him."

"Of course," assented Captain Loyd eagerly.

"Mr. Forbes," said the reporter, "now that we know how this slip of paper came in here, suppose you tell us what it means."

"Well, how in thunder *did* it get in here?" the captain asked, voicing the question for us all.

"Some one from the deck dropped it through the upper portion of that window, of course—the part that is regulated by a screw from the inside. By a process of elimination, as Friend Sherlock would say, nothing was left to suspect but that opening."

We all turned our eyes on the window indicated. The bed was directly beneath it, just where a note, or any object, for that matter, would fall if dropped through the opening.

"That seems to be the answer," conceded the captain. "Now we must find out who was on deck during the past hour." He turned to Woodruff, the first officer.

"I think I know pretty well," Larkins broke in. "There were Mr. Marshall, myself, Mrs. Forbes, and the young fellow listed as—Barthney, I believe. Now, I pledge my word that I didn't drop that cipher in here, nor did Mr. Marshall, as I was with him all the time. Mrs. Forbes and—Barthney were both within fifteen feet of the window, seated in steamer chairs whenever we saw them, and I don't think there was another soul on the deck."

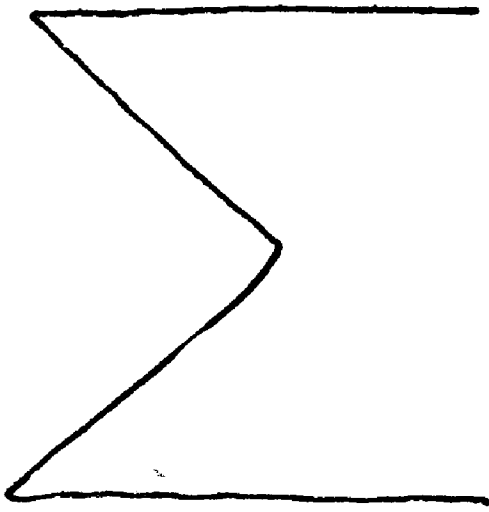
"I suggest that you tell us what is in that cipher, Mr. Forbes," said the captain.

We all concentrated our gaze on Forbes. "I—I cannot—I dare not," he almost sobbed. "Enough that I have told you that it threatens my life—and to-night. But"—here he pulled himself together, and spoke with quiet deliberation—"neither Mrs. Forbes nor Mr. Courtlandt, who has chosen to assume the name of Barthney, had anything to do with this affair. I—I know that. My trouble with my wife has no bearing whatever——" He stopped abruptly, his eyes staring fixedly at the wall back of where the group of us stood.

"There—there it is again!" he shrieked wildly. "God save me!" and he plunged forward on his face in the narrow confines of the room.

We all turned to the wall as one man,

to see what he had pointed at, and there, scrawled in lead pencil, was a symbol or letter:



CHAPTER IV.

THE SHOT IN THE NIGHT.

The purser and steward raised the unconscious form of Forbes from the floor where he had fallen prostrate, and laid him on the bed.

"I don't know but what it is a case of plain drunk, after all," mused the captain aloud. "Why, the man reads sinister meanings in the merest trifles—a bit of paper—a scratch on the wall!"

Larkins looked thoughtful. "Maybe you're right. Besides, this unfortunate misunderstanding with his wife preying on his mind and combined with all the booze he's been tucking under his belt is enough to make him see almost anything. In any case he's best left alone. The chances are he'll sleep it off, and wake up in his right mind and a taste in his mouth like a shoemaker's apron."

The captain saw that Forbes was made as comfortable as possible, then we all passed out, leaving the broker apparently in a drunken stupor, and breathing heavily.

"There goes three bells," said the purser, "time all sober men were abed." So we all dispersed, laughing, Larkins flinging me a "Good night" over his shoulder as we simultaneously entered our respective staterooms.

Eight bells—four o'clock in the morning—were striking when I answered to an excited hammering at my door.

"Marshall! Marshall! Come on out, for the love of Mike!" Larkins' voice was shouting. "You're going to miss the first edition if you don't hurry!"

"What's happened?" I asked, stumbling hurriedly from my bunk, and putting on my shoes before I unlocked the door.

"Lord, man, what a sleeper you must be! Didn't you hear the shot?"

"That's funny; I *did* hear it, I suppose, only I thought I was dreaming."

"It was no idle dream, believe me; it was the real thing. Come on out—I don't look any handsomer than you do—get a wiggle on!" Larkins' eyes were snapping with excitement, and his slender nostrils quivered like a thoroughbred horse's.

I grasped my cane, and followed in his wake, clad as he was in a bath robe and little else, meeting a number of our fellow passengers in the broad social hall similarly attired.

The reporter headed toward the door of stateroom A, where a group of the ship's officers in various stages of undress had gathered. The purser was making bungling efforts to open the door, which was obviously locked on the inside, when Larkins broke through the crowd in his usual aggressive fashion, and threw his weight against the panels.

"Come on, all you dopes, and lend a shoulder!" he cried. "We've got to break in here! Don't you see, he may be dying—dead! Great Scott!" he added, under his breath. "What a scoop for the *Ledger*!"

When the combined efforts of Larkins, Woodruff, and the burly chief engineer failed to budge the door an inch, Captain Loyd sent the engineer rushing aft for some sort of tools, with which to batter it in.

While we stood grouped about the doorway, everybody talking at once, in high-pitched, excited voices, young Courtlandt suddenly appeared on the scene, fully dressed, and noticeably pale.

"What's the row?" he asked, and even to the most casual observer it was

plain that some stronger feeling than the contagion of excitement had him in its grip.

"Matter enough," responded the skipper gruffly. "This man Forbes has either committed suicide, or has been shot. You seem to have had more time than the rest of us for a careful toilet, Mr. Courtlandt!" he added tartly. The whole Forbes affair was getting on his nerves.

More than one of us had noticed and wondered at Courtlandt's dress for that hour of the morning. The young man flushed darkly at the captain's remark.

"I was already dressed when I heard the shot," he explained stiffly. "I couldn't sleep—I was taking a turn on deck."

He was plainly ill at ease, but before anything else could be said to add to his discomfort we were all struck dumb by Elizabeth Forbes' sudden appearance on the scene. She, too, was fully dressed.

"Oh, what is it—what is the matter, captain?" she cried. "I heard a shot! Has—has—Mr. Forbes done anything desperate? Oh, won't *somebody* answer me?" She turned appealingly from one to the other.

The captain was the first to recover his voice, and laid a soothing hand on the arm of the girl. "There, there, child," he said gently. "We don't know just what has happened here, but we are going to find out right away. Until we do won't you oblige me by returning to your stateroom? Mrs. Treemore will go with you, and I will see you presently, and tell you everything it is your right to know."

She began to sob quietly as the stewardess stepped forward, and with motherly tenderness drew her away. As they passed across the hall, the crowd making way in awed silence, I could see that Larkins was scrutinizing Mrs. Forbes with undue interest, and it came upon me that he was speculating, as I had been, why Elizabeth was so fully dressed at four in the morning.

McDonald and two of his assistants came hurrying back at this instant, and the work of battering in the door required but a few moments.

Captain Loyd turned on the threshold as he and the purser were about to enter and waved back the curious crowd pressing close. "Everybody remain outside, please. Mr. Larkins, will you come in with me—and you, too, Mr. Marshall? I will want some witnesses to this thing, I suppose."

I will never forget nor ever describe how the sight of Forbes, lying in a pool of blood which poured from wounds in both his head and chest, sickened and unnerved me. He was lying just where we had left him earlier in the evening, and as the captain bent over the prostrate form he exclaimed, in horror:

"The man is dead!"

Larkins had been taking a rapid inventory of everything.

"And furthermore, captain," the newspaper man spoke with quiet conviction, "the man has been murdered."

"Murdered! How do you know?" the captain's voice rose above the startled cries of every one who heard Larkins' charge.

"He has been killed by a shotgun," replied the reporter. "It is plain that he didn't hold the weapon himself, as the shots are too scattered, and there are no marks of powder burn; but if further proof is needed, I call attention to the fact that a cursory glance about the room does not reveal a shotgun anywhere! Will you let me search the place thoroughly, captain, with the assistance of Mr. Everett?"

"I will be grateful, indeed, my dear boy, and I will appreciate it if you will let me depend on your larger experience to discover whatever you can about this fearful affair. Why, sir, it's got me on edge!" and the captain mopped his brow and stamped irritably toward the door where he and I stood, while Larkins and the purser searched stateroom A.

The parlor, the little hallway leading into the private bathroom, and the bathroom itself were explored without result; this was to be expected, because the door leading into the bathroom and the parlor was found to be locked from the inside of the room where Forbes met his death, as was the door leading out in the companionway.

In the bedroom Larkins crawled under the bed, peered into the wardrobe, and closely scrutinized the floor in every direction.

"I'm stumped!" he muttered. "Here's a mystery that I'd like to flood with the torrents of my penetration, submerge in the depths of my superior enlightenment, bathe in the overflow of my vast powers of intuition, and I'm stumped—that's all."

"As far as I can see, the shot was fired through the window," said the purser.

"Which shows that the window is as far as you can see," returned Larkins. "Use your mind along with your eyes, and you will notice that the body is lying directly below the window, and both the wall and the window bear indentations of the bullets. That weapon was fired from the door by which we entered this room!"

"Impossible!" cried several of us, in unison.

"Impossible nothing!" snapped the reporter. "The bullet holes in the wall opposite and those which are in the mattress prove it beyond a doubt." He strode over to the bed, and heaved the body aside with the utmost composure.

A cry of horror and amazement went up from all of us. Where the body had lain a nickel-plated thirty-two caliber revolver reflected the brilliant electric light that flooded the stateroom.

"There!" cried the purser triumphantly. "You are away off, Mr. Newspaper Man Detective. He shot himself with his own pistol!"

"Really?" drawled Larkins, picking up the revolver and twirling the chamber with his thumb. "How clever he must have been, then, after shooting himself, the room, and the bed full of holes, to clean the 'gat' and reload! My word, Mr. Purser Man, he was almost as clever a corpse as you are a live one!"

Larkins passed the revolver into Captain Loyd's keeping. "Poor devil," he said. "Hadn't any more chance than a rabbit. Let me see," he went on thoughtfully. "Four bullet holes in his head, three in his body, one, two, three,

four in the wall, counting the one through the window, and five through the bed—sixteen in all!" He placed the body back in its original position, and, going to the washstand beside the bed, coolly washed his hands.

"Who knows anything about shot-guns?" he queried, raising his voice to gain attention from those in the doorway who were talking at the top of their voices. Nobody answering him, he turned to the bullet holes in the wall, and with his knife dug out one of the leaden pellets and examined it thoughtfully. "I guess a sixteen-gauge would hold about that number of shots, all right. From the way they scattered it wasn't a chokebore." He surveyed the room again long and carefully, then said:

"Humph, I give it up!"

"Well, we know one thing for certain," said the captain. "Mr. Forbes was murdered."

"We know two things, you mean," said I, though I am by rule a diffident man, and rarely offer an opinion unless I am pressed. "Mr. Forbes has been murdered, and a shotgun was the weapon used. It strikes me that by finding the shotgun we shall thus find the murderer."

"Good boy!" exclaimed Larkins, giving me a resounding whack across the shoulder, and embarrassing me considerably. "Here we have him—the man with the idea! Well, me for the hay!"

As I turned to enter my room, I heard Captain Loyd's voice giving an order to the first officer:

"Mr. Woodruff, assemble the watch, and search every part of this ship from bow to stern, and from deck to keelson, passengers' rooms and effects, *but find that shotgun!*"

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTAIN'S INQUIRY.

"You've nearly missed your break, fast," I remarked, as Larkins sauntered into the dining saloon shortly before nine. "You should have risen earlier."

"Earlier!" he laughed. "Go up and

tell that to 'Sparks,'” using the wireless operator's nickname.

Sure enough, the tearing, rasping “*Cra-s-s-sh, cra-s-s-sh*” of the wireless was grinding away incessantly, and I realized that Larkins had indeed been up betimes, and the story of last night's tragedy was flying over space to the hungry presses of his paper.

“I suppose they'll be swamping New York with luridly headlined editions all day. Lucky for your paper you were aboard, wasn't it?”

“Lucky's my middle name,” said the reporter, sampling his grapefruit with evident relish.

When he had finished breakfast we left the dining saloon together, and as we proceeded to the upper deck the crash of the wireless instrument tore into the stillness of the rest of the ship.

“What will man achieve next?” I asked. “Just to think that the little sounds that are flying from those wires,” and I pointed to the four thin threads of copper strung from the forward mast back to the big, black smokestack, “can be heard in New York!”

“You think again,” Larkins advised. “Come here,” and he led me around to the starboard side of the vessel. “See that boat?”

Out on the swelling bosom of the Atlantic, dipping and curtsying as the *Minerva* approached, was a vessel with peculiar masts.

“That's a lightship,” I said.

“Right—Diamond Shoals. At present our wireless operator is still in communication with Norfolk, Virginia. He picked it up early this morning, but we are steadily going south, and getting out of the radius of our sending power. Therefore, in a little while Sparks will send to the lightship, and the government operator aboard will relay our messages on to the navy-yard station. The aërials are not high enough to send over two hundred miles.”

He drew me around to where the operator's room could be seen from the deck. “Sparks is getting something now,” Larkins said, as there was a cessation of crashes from the little room.

“*Crash, cr-a-s-s-ssssh, cras-sh, cras-sh!*” sputtered the instrument again, suddenly lighting the room with a ghastly greenish-blue glare; and then silence followed once more.

“What is being said?” I asked.

“You can't hear that from here,” explained Larkins. “You catch the sounds from receivers the same as you do over a telephone—maybe he'll repeat, and then I'll know what the message was.”

“*Crash, cras-s-sh, cras-s-h-h-h-h!*” the instrument thundered, springing into life with a suddenness that made me jump. For some time the din kept up, making, as Larkins put it, as much noise as a cook stove falling downstairs, then subsided into complete silence save for the whine of the motor as it came to a gradual stop.

“Humph!” ejaculated the reporter. “We go on to New Orleans without stop. He repeated the message to Norfolk. Luckily I can read Morse.”

“Do they use the Morse code on the wireless?” I asked.

He nodded affirmatively. “The Federal courts will have to handle the Forbes case. You see, we were beyond the three-mile limit—in fact, fifty miles offshore when the crime was committed. Captain Loyd wired to his company for orders, and they directed him to make no change in the schedule of the boat. The authorities in New Orleans are to take charge of the case when we reach there.”

“But what is Captain Loyd going to do in the meantime?” I asked. “Here is a murder committed on his boat, and he has only gone into the matter superficially. Surely he——”

“Oh, the captain's on the job, all right,” Larkins interrupted. “A full and thorough investigation has been set under way, and we'll all be called into the dining saloon to act as sort of coroner's jurors, I believe.”

The newspaper man was right, and at half past ten we were all summoned below—and what a morbid lot we were! All of the eighty-odd passengers aboard took their places at different tables near the one where the cap-

tain sat with his first officer, Larkins, and a passenger who, having confessed to a smattering knowledge of shorthand, was to act as stenographer.

Captain Loyd, in announcing the inquiry about to be held, explained that while it was not exactly according to the law, it was well within his rights as commander of the vessel upon which the crime had been committed, and that he was taking this course as a means of possibly fastening the guilt where it belonged. Some one on board was guilty of the murder of Hamilton Forbes, he continued, and it was his duty to find such person and place him or her in close custody until land and the law were reached.

"I think it would be a good plan to appoint a committee of gentlemen to act as a kind of jury," the captain concluded. "I am going to ask Mr. Marshall to act as foreman of jury or committee."

I therefore moved up to the captain's table, presently being joined by the others whom the captain named to serve.

It didn't surprise me when the captain turned over to Larkins the business of conducting the inquiry, and it goes without saying that that young man was in his glory, and was possibly the only person in the big room who was thoroughly enjoying himself.

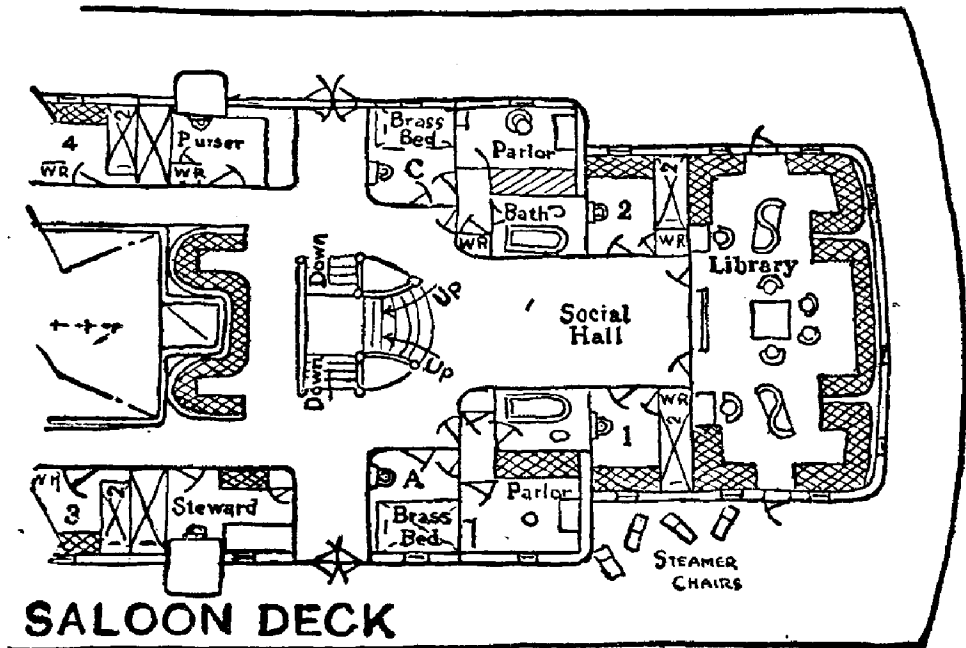
The purser, Mr. Everett, was the first to be examined. He told briefly of hearing the loud report of the gun that awakened him, how he lay wondering for a short interval, then, after practically dressing, how he stepped out into the companionway to see, in the dim light, smoke curling under the

low ceiling near the door of stateroom A. His first impression was that some one had fired a gunpowder weapon in the social hall; then he remembered the scene he had witnessed in the stateroom itself just before midnight, and it flashed upon him that Forbes had committed suicide.

He rushed over, and began pounding on the door, receiving no answer. By that time the hall had filled with others who had heard the shot. When he had finished his plain statement of fact, Larkins began to question him.

So that the reader may be aided in following the incidents, or series of accidents and deaths that occurred on that momentous trip of the S. S. *Minerva*, I append a plan of the forward part of the steamer.

"Do you think that you could have



seen any one in the hall from your room if he or she had used a shotgun at the door of Mr. Forbes' stateroom?" asked the newspaper man. "Or had sufficient time elapsed for the guilty person to escape by the time you entered the hall?"

Mr. Everett thought that it would have been possible for such a person to escape to other parts of the ship by the time he, Everett, looked out of his room.

The captain next called the chief steward, whose testimony was almost identical with that of the purser, save that he opened the door of his stateroom almost immediately on hearing the shot, and peered out. He, too, saw no one, and swore to the fact that no one could have gone down the starboard companionway without being seen by him.

"Mr. Truesdale," called the captain.

"Mr. Truesdale proved to be an elderly gentleman returning to his home in Mississippi, whose stateroom was on the port side. He testified that the roar of the weapon awakened him, and, being of an exceedingly nervous temperament, he at once sprang from his bunk and into the companionway, and while he could not see the door of stateroom A, or the social hall, he would make affidavit to the fact that no one fled down the port companionway.

"This leaves us the alternative of believing that the murderer went up the stairs to the deck above, out on deck from the cross companionway, either the port or starboard, or ran below to this, the dining saloon," summed up Larkins. "And now, captain, perhaps the stewardess, Mrs. Treemore, whose room is at the top of the stairs, can offer some testimony."

The stewardess left Mrs. Forbes' side, and sat at the foot of the captain's table. She told how the shot had awakened her, how she had stood in the doorway of her stateroom, then walked to the head of the stairway in time to see the purser violently shake the handle of Mr. Forbes' door. She was quite positive that she could have seen any one coming up the stairs had the murderer chosen that avenue of escape. She told of joining the group at the door of stateroom A, and of afterward accompanying Mrs. Forbes to her stateroom, which was C, opposite the one where the men were gathered trying to effect an entrance.

"How was Mrs. Forbes dressed?" asked Larkins.

"She had on the same clothes she had worn all evening—I had given her some

headache powders earlier in the night," Mrs. Treemore replied.

"Did she say anything to you when you accompanied her to her stateroom—I refer to the time when efforts were being made to break into Mr. Forbes' room?"

The stewardess hesitated, glancing appealingly at Mrs. Forbes, then answered in a low tone: "Yes, sir."

"What did she say?"

"I remarked that I hoped nothing dreadful had happened to Mr. Forbes, and she said, poor dear, in a dreadfully tired voice: 'Well, it would be the judgment of a just God!' and added that she had had a premonition that something would happen, and that she hadn't been able to sleep. So I persuaded her to let me help her off with her clothes, and tucked her in bed."

"Did you see a weapon of any kind in Mrs. Forbes' room?"

"I certainly did not," Mrs. Treemore answered indignantly. "Mrs. Forbes never killed her husband, and you know it!"

"I simply want to establish that fact beyond a doubt," replied the reporter gently, "and perhaps you can help me. Did you make a thorough search of Mrs. Forbes' suite afterward?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Woodruff, the first officer, ordered it a short time later, but I found nothing."

"Thank you, Mrs. Treemore. Oh, one question more, please. Did you and the assistant stewardess search the staterooms of all the women passengers on board, pursuant to Mr. Woodruff's orders?"

"Yes, sir; but found nothing in the nature of a weapon—that is, nothing but hatpins," she added dryly.

The stewardess resumed her seat besides Mrs. Forbes.

Woodruff was the next witness. He told of hearing the sound of the shot from the bridge where he was on duty, and of how, after first awakening the captain, he had made his way below, and found an excited throng at the door of Mr. Forbes' stateroom. Under orders from the captain he had taken a number of the stewards and made a

thorough search of the ship, passengers' rooms, and crew's quarters, all of which had been minutely examined for a weapon, but without success.

"How do you think this murder was committed?" queried the reporter.

"Well, I've figured it out," said the first officer, "that the person who fired the shot was aware of the position of the bed, and, taking a shotgun, stood in front of Mr. Forbes' stateroom door, put the muzzle through the narrow space where the partition just escapes reaching the ceiling, and fired in the direction of the bed. I think the presence of smoke in the companionway proves this."

"There is such a space, then?" asked Larkins.

"Yes," asserted the first officer. "After you pointed out this fact to me early this morning, I took the iron bar that we used in breaking open the door, and demonstrated to you and the captain how such a thing was possible."

"Why is there such a space, Mr. Woodruff, and have all the cabins on the ship such openings?"

"Yes. They allow ventilation for the rooms, and are only on the inside of the ship."

"Then this accounts for the fact that the doors could be locked on the inside, and still Mr. Forbes could be shot without a person being in the room?"

"I believe so."

"Did you figure that it would be quite a difficult thing to depress the muzzle of a shotgun sufficiently to have it hit a mark so close to the floor as Mr. Forbes' bed?"

"Only after you suggested it. Not having a shotgun on board, I could not make a practical demonstration of it. I have ordered a rifle out of the ship's arsenal, and I have it ready to try now."

At the captain's suggestion the committee, together with the commander, Larkins, and the first officer, went to stateroom A. The majority of us stood outside while Mr. Woodruff, taking his Remington, stood in the companionway, and from that spot put the muzzle of the rifle in the narrow slit on the top of the partition, and endeavored to point

it at the bed, now cleared of its ghastly burden.

The experiment failed to dispel the mystery, for it was apparent to all that the ventilation slit was too narrow and too near the ceiling to allow the gun to be pointed sufficiently downward, the stock striking the top of the companionway ceiling. With the mystery only deepened, we returned to the dining saloon, where Larkins announced the failure to the remaining passengers.

Questioning the first officer again, Larkins made it plain from the shot dug from the wall and the mattress that the death-dealing missiles came downward, and from the direction of the door, which, according to all testimony, was securely locked from the inside.

"Now, Mr. Woodruff, since the shotgun theory has failed—unless when we find the weapon we discover it to be like the Irishman's gun, 'that could be fired round a corner'—have you any other to advance?"

"I am still of the opinion, Mr. Larkins," said the officer, "that a shotgun was the weapon used. The scattered shots in the room, together with the fact that only one report, and that an extremely loud one, was heard, prove this beyond a doubt. There is not a revolver made that could do such execution or carry large shot in such numbers. After firing the shot into the room in some mysterious manner, the murderer fled upon deck, threw the weapon overboard, and escaped into his stateroom, secure in the fact that he left no clew."

"Could he have fled into the library, and then out on deck?"

"No; the library is locked for the night at six bells. Anyway, it was thoroughly searched immediately after the discovery of the murder."

"Then, seeing that we have witnesses that the murderer did not flee down either companionway, toward the aft part of the ship, or up the stairs, as the stewardess' testimony shows, you think that this person went out one or other of the doors that lead to the deck?"

"That seems to be the only inference. Had he run below we would have found

him in our search, for both doors leading into the pantries were locked securely."

When the first officer was excused I was interested in studying the faces of the passengers who were gathered in the saloon. Bewilderment was set on every face, and as the testimony was heard, each witness making the mystery the more mysterious, an obvious uneasiness began to spread. I could see that the most of those gathered there felt that there was something supernatural about the whole affair.

McDonald, the chief engineer—a broad-shouldered Scotchman—was the next to tell of his part in the night's happenings. He had come on deck from below to get a breath of air before the change of watch, at eight bells. He distinctly heard the noise of the shot, and hurried forward along the starboard deck. When he reached the room he found the purser, the chief steward, and Mr. Larkins there.

"Did you see any one on deck as you came along?" asked Larkins.

"Yes, sir."

Here was a new phase of the case. There was quite a stir in the room as everybody tried to get a better view of the engineer.

"Did you recognize who it was?" asked the reporter.

The engineer turned in the revolving chair he occupied, and pointed out Van Buren Courtlandt. "It was that gentleman over there," he said.

Here was a sensation, indeed! Almost every one rose, uttering exclamations of dismay.

"Order, order, please!" commanded Captain Loyd, pounding his fist on the table.

Larkins never blinked an eyelash or displayed the least astonishment, and I wondered how much of a surprise this was to him.

"Mr. Courtlandt, will you please come forward?" he said.

Courtlandt, his face singularly pale, rose and walked to the captain's table, and took a seat beside the reporter.

"Now, Mr. McDonald, please tell us what Mr. Courtlandt was doing?" Lar-

kins asked. "Tell us just where you saw him, and what his actions were."

McDonald cleared his throat noisily. One could see that the burly Scot did not relish the thought of what he was about to say.

"I was comin' up the starboard deck at a pretty lively speed," he said. "This was after hearin' the shot, ye mind. Some one was leanin' over the rail just opposite the companionway amidships, an' I stops an' says: 'What was yon shootin'?' The lad here says: 'I dinna ken.' There was a sickly light on the deck here, comin' from one light in the companionway, an' besides the dawn comin' made it muckle clearer on deck than insides the ship. The lad here was shakin' and breathin' hard, so I says: 'Lad, you must 'a' seen a ghost!' but he didna say annythin' to that, an' I goes for'ard where we finds the poor mon dead."

Larkins turned to Courtlandt, and said slowly: "This is something you should explain, Van!"

"Yes, sir!" cried Captain Loyd. "Come, come! Explain why you were on deck, at four in the morning, fully dressed, and——"

"One moment, captain," broke in Larkins, and, turning to the young fellow, he said: "Remember that any statement you make may be used against you, and that your refusal to answer any or all questions can in no way be accepted as a confession of guilt."

"I have nothing to conceal, Mr. Larkins," said Courtlandt, very quietly. "I killed Hamilton Forbes!"

There was a stunned silence in the dining saloon as Courtlandt made the dumfounding admission of his guilt. For perhaps a moment not a soul stirred a muscle, then the sudden rustle of a woman's skirt broke the tense silence, as the murdered man's wife sprang to her feet, and almost ran toward the captain in her excitement and agitation.

"Mr. Courtlandt lied to you, Captain Loyd. He said that to shield me! It was I who so deliberately shot Mr. Forbes!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOVE OF A MAN FOR A WOMAN.

In an instant all was wildest confusion. Women fainted and men swore. Courtlandt, violent in his excitement, raved and stormed at the captain not to believe anything Mrs. Forbes said. He repeated again and again that he was the guilty one, and that Mrs. Forbes, in beautiful but mistaken generosity, was endeavoring to shield him.

Larkins was almost excited. I say *almost*, for as long as I was associated with him on that steamer, I never knew him to come nearer losing that remarkable grip on his self-possession. Twice—three times he flung Van Buren Courtlandt into the chair beside him, and curtly bade Mrs. Forbes to return to her seat.

Captain Loyd, while not bewildered, was plainly angry, and his deep bass boomed out in repeated calls for order. Gradually quiet of a sort was restored, and he took charge of matters.

"It is quite evident that one of you is not telling the truth," the captain said. "I am going to get to the bottom of this affair right now. Mrs. Treemore, please go with Mrs. Forbes to her stateroom, and stay there with her until I send for you."

The stewardess accompanied Mrs. Forbes from the room and up the stairs. The protecting arm she offered the murdered man's bride was declined prettily, and with a perfectly self-possessed smile. Never have I seen like composure under such trying circumstances. I loved her from that moment, and let me add here that Elizabeth Kennedy Forbes was the first and only woman I ever loved in all my life.

"You say that you killed Hamilton Forbes," said the captain, addressing young Courtlandt, "and Mrs. Forbes contradicts you, maintaining that she is responsible for her husband's death. Which, if either, is guilty?"

"I am," replied Courtlandt steadily. "Explain."

"Well," said Courtlandt, "I am going to tell the story in my own way. Some years ago I entered the brokerage of-

fices of Hamilton Forbes' Wall Street concern. At the time my family was not possessed with the fortune of the former Courtlandts, and I early struck out for myself. I was approached personally by Mr. Forbes, who was just then beginning to be a power in the Street; he frankly admitted that he offered me a place with his concern because of my family connection, declaring it would give prestige to the firm to have a member of so desirable a family appearing in its interests. I accepted, with the determination to make good on my own account, and to become of value to the concern for other than the snobbish reasons so candidly stated by Mr. Forbes.

"About the same time I entered the Forbes employ Miss Kennedy, now Mrs. Forbes, was employed as stenographer. In a short time she became Mr. Forbes' confidential stenographer, and within a year she was the ruling spirit in the offices. Mr. Forbes relied upon her business acumen to a large extent, and, as I was next to him in the office force, Miss Kennedy and I saw a good deal of each other.

"The result was that we fell in love, and became engaged. We were a very happy pair, indeed, who told our precious secret to Mr. Forbes. That it staggered him we both saw plainly. At the time we thought it was over the simple prospect of losing Miss Kennedy, whom Forbes declared invaluable to him in a business way. I, however, with all a lover's jealousy, was quick to conclude that Forbes, as well as I, had lost his heart to Miss Kennedy. Who could help it?" added Courtlandt, his face transfigured; and a voice in my own heart echoed: "Who, indeed?"

"One morning when I arrived at the offices?" he continued, "I was met by two men who took me into a private room, and informed me that they were central-office men, and had a warrant for my arrest on the charge of forgery of certain bank shares.

"I protested my innocence, and so did Forbes; in fact, through the subsequent trials I had to undergo, he supplied the money for my firm of lawyers, and ap-

parently was the staunchest friend I had. His testimony while on the stand appeared to be drawn from him reluctantly, but it was most damaging to my case. He swore that the forged shares were never signed by him, although I raised money on them with the understanding that they were indorsed by his signature. A supposed confederate of mine was produced who told of my intended division of the spoils with himself and another; this third man meeting death in a street-car accident the next day.

"I had only one friend to stand by me through it all, and that was my affianced wife. She worked night and day for me; her testimony refuted in part that of the man who alleged he turned State's evidence, but the jury found me guilty, and I was sentenced to a long term in prison. Forbes still posed as my friend, for he carried my case to the appellate division, only to lose on every appeal.

"It seemed that nothing but a long imprisonment awaited me when I was given a new trial—brought about by a newspaper reporter, who, strangely enough, was Mr. Larkins here. He discovered that one of the jurors who convicted me had previously been the inmate of an insane asylum in one of the Middle Western States, and on this ground I was given another trial.

"On my second trial the alleged confederate of mine mixed his testimony badly, and earned me a hung jury, and on my third trial only three jurymen stood for conviction. Soon after I was released, as the district attorney's office refused to prosecute further. This was because an election had robbed me of one of my bitterest foes and one of Forbes' closest friends—the district attorney himself. I was free, but smirched with the humiliating stigma of a divided jury.

"Warned that Forbes had tried to bring about my ruin, I charged him to his face with double-dealing. Miss Kennedy refused to believe that I was just in my charges, and I left New York for the West in an endeavor to find the man who could prove Forbes the scoundrel

I knew him to be. But my efforts to locate this man were unsuccessful. My letters to Miss Kennedy went unanswered, and I believed that she, too, had turned against me.

"Here was where I made a fool of myself. I should have gone to her and sought an understanding. But a false pride held me back. Once, while I was in Arizona, I read an account of my death in an old New York paper, and, being down on my luck, doing chores around a cattle ranch house, I let it go at that. I argued that when I could go to New York with the proof of my innocence it would be time enough for my brother and two sisters to know that I still lived.

"Then came the announcement of the engagement of Miss Kennedy to Forbes. Enraged, I started for New York afoot—that shows how crazy I was—but finally my better judgment took hold of me, and for months, after working in the power house of a big copper mine in Bisbee, I scrimped and saved until I had enough to take me to the metropolis.

"Once there my courage failed. The papers were so full of the coming marriage of the Wall Street millionaire and his bride that, I argued to myself, who was I to stop so brilliant a match? The newspapers made a very pretty romance of it all, and I realized hopelessly that I was out of it. I decided to go back to Arizona, and booked return passage on the *Minerva*, without the slightest idea that the Forbeses would select the same steamer for their honeymoon trip.

"When I saw the bridal party on the wharf ready to come aboard I was thunderstruck. My first impulse was to rush to the purser, and demand to be set ashore, but in the end I did nothing so dramatic. I remained aboard, and everybody on the ship knows of my meeting with Mrs. Forbes.

"Mrs. Forbes sent me a note; it was written in a cipher we had used before, and said simply that there was something she would like to say to me if I would go to her in the library. It doesn't matter what took place in that interview. She only meant to tell me,

out of the goodness and sweetness of her heart, she had believed the report that I had died in a saloon brawl in the Southwest.

"But a nature as frank and open as hers is not clever at concealment, and in every unguarded word she uttered I was gleaning revelations of this man Forbes that incensed me beyond endurance.

"That night, taking my shotgun, and, with a small pair of nippers, I turned the key in his lock, and, too blinded with rage even to notice that he was overcome with drink, I shot him like the dog he was. Then I locked the door, threw the shotgun and nippers into the sea, and tried to appear as calm and unconcerned as possible when the chief engineer passed me. And—that's all there is to it." Then young Courtlandt sat down heavily.

"Say, Van," drawled Larkins, breaking the electric-charged silence, "compared to you Ananias was a piker!"

CHAPTER VII.

AND A WOMAN'S LOVE FOR A MAN.

When I next saw Larkins he and the captain were having an argument about Courtlandt.

"But he can't get off the ship and walk!" Larkins was saying. "It's so absurd to lock him up."

"I can hardly permit a self-confessed murderer to walk my decks unrestrained," objected the captain, a bit pompously.

"Captain, captain," murmured the reporter sadly, "do you mean to tell me that you credit that beautiful lie? Upon my word, I believe I could sell you a gold brick with infinite ease."

Captain Loyd only bridled and cleared his throat noisily, and Larkins, moving off, flung over his shoulder:

"Well, I'm going to wire my city editor that Courtlandt's confession is no more to be credited than Mrs. Forbes'."

"You will do no such thing," contradicted the captain firmly. "I will

give orders to the wireless operator to refuse any message from you!"

"Don't do it," said Larkins. "You know, you're too good a sport for that, but all this trouble has got on your mind and made it seasick. The press has some rights, you know."

But the captain turned away without replying, and Larkins chuckled.

"You don't seem to care what Captain Loyd threatens?" said I.

"Oh, not for to-day. I've filed all my stuff already. I'm laughing because Sparks has had a wire from every paper in Manhattan for details of the murder, not to mention the frantic demands of the Associated Press. In the meantime the *Ledger* is having a wild time with the hot stuff their 'special correspondent on the spot' has shipped them. I'll bet that Randolph, our city editor, has laughed for the first time in his crotchety existence."

"What do you think of——" I commenced.

"Now, see here, Marshall, I've come to look upon you as a friend of mine, and I'd do anything for you, but I'm sick of the Forbes' mystery, so please give me a rest. Bet your bottom dollar that neither Courtlandt nor Mrs. Forbes is guilty." Larkins lit one of his vile cigarettes, and paced the deck thoughtfully. Once he turned to me, and I looked at him expectantly, for I was sure that he was going to mention something about the mystery.

"Say, Marshall," he queried plaintively, "do you know whether we have ice cream for luncheon, or do we only have it for dinner?"

I refused to answer, not thinking it consistent for a man to mix murder mysteries with ice cream.

"Oh, Mr. Larkins," called the wireless operator, as our pacing around the upper deck brought us past the companionway that led to his small office. "Here's an aërogram for you. Say," he continued, in a much lower tone, "what's up? The skipper, a little while ago, left orders that there was nothing doing on any more messages from you, and that I couldn't answer the queries from the other papers."

"Are there many—other papers?" asked Larkins.

"The *Orb* wants a hundred words," said Sparks, "and the——"

"Good old reliable *Orb*!" laughed the reporter. "They want only the skeleton of the story, and then they'll pad it out! I tell you what, there's nothing like those good old reliable papers. What does that yellow-hued affair, the *Sphere*, want?"

"Oh, all that I can give them!" replied Sparks. "Gee, I'm almost dead now. I've been hammering that old key until I feel as if I could drop."

"You'd better steal a little sleep while the cap is peeved," said Larkins. "Just as soon as I tell him something he'll open the wires to me again."

"Sure of it?" laughed Sparks.

Larkins shook the message he had just received at the wireless man, and added: "If you have brought me the answer I expect!"

"Say," said Sparks, his eyes wide open, "that message *was* going some." He stopped, and thought hard for a moment. "Blessed if I can place the description, though."

"You think real hard, Sparks," returned my friend the reporter, and then he fell in step with me again.

I waited hopefully for him to tell me what his aërogram contained, but when he made no move to do so, I couldn't keep quiet any longer, and I blurted out:

"You haven't opened your message."

"No, I haven't, have I?" said my companion; and I didn't ask any more questions, you can wager.

Luncheon at one o'clock was a very dismal affair. The crime of the night before and the disclosures of the morning had affected the spirits of the passengers to a marked degree, and gloomy silence reigned in the dining saloon:

Captain Loyd was one of the first down, and I could plainly see that Larkins had news for him; but, like the able general he was, he waited until the skipper had almost finished his meal, and was attacking his dessert with relish, before he spoke:

"Captain, I want to apologize if I

was too—well, fresh this morning—the lack of sleep set me on edge," began Larkins.

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Larkins," returned Captain Loyd. "I guess we are all a little upset. However, I think it best that nothing more be sent to the papers."

"Captain, I want to make a little deal with you. Suppose that you had on board this ship an escaped convict—a man who was serving a term for murder at the time he made his get-away?"

"Well?" asked the captain.

"Well, supposing he had been sent to jail on the evidence of the man who was murdered this morning?"

"Mr. Larkins, do you mean that there is such a man on board this ship?"

"Yes, I do mean just that!"

"I can scarcely credit such a thing," said Captain Loyd.

"It is so, nevertheless," retorted Larkins. "If I should point out this person to you, and have the documents to prove his identity, will you let me use the wireless?"

"No, sir; I will not barter with you," returned the captain brusquely, though there was a twinkle in his eye. "But, as a slight token of my appreciation for such shrewdness, however, I might give the liberty of the ship!" and he laughed.

Larkins passed over the sealed message he had received, saying that he had not opened it for he was sure of its contents. The captain tore open the envelope, and read the message with a puzzled expression.

"I'm afraid I do not understand," he said.

"That is an answer I received from the police headquarters of New York City—the rogues' gallery, to be precise. It contains the Bertillon measurements and police history of the man to whom I refer."

"Still I don't place whom you mean."

Larkins leaned over, and whispered something in the captain's ear. The effect was magical.

"Thunder and lightning!" ejaculated the skipper. "When you have finished luncheon will you and Mr. Marshall come up to my quarters? We'll have it

out there," and the captain hurried above.

During the rest of the meal Larkins was as conversational as a clam, and later led the way to the upper deck. Just off the bridge we entered the captain's quarters.

"I have sent Woodruff to bring the fellow aloft," he informed us as we entered, and then to my astonishment he opened a small case and slipped an automatic pistol in his hip pocket. "Just as well, I suppose?" he said to Larkins, who nodded.

Soon we heard the first officer and some one coming up the ladder, and I was deeply surprised to note that it was Hallaron, the deck steward, who followed Mr. Woodruff into the room.

Then I knew the answer to the little scene Larkins had enacted the day before, with this steward. The reporter was looking for marks of identification, and evidently had found them.

Hallaron stood before us ill at ease and mystified. I mentally decided that Larkins had made a mistake; the steward had a look of genuine innocence on his face.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said.

"Yes, Hallaron, I did——"

"Captain, why don't you call him Patton?" Larkins interrupted quietly.

The steward went white as a sheet, and swung about to face the reporter with a savage exclamation.

"So," said he, "that's why you wanted me to show you how big my arms was?"

"Yes," said Larkins.

"Well?" the man looked from one to the other of us sullenly.

"Hallaron," said the captain, "you have been with me on this ship almost two years. I have found you honest, faithful, and sober in your habits at all times, so when Mr. Larkins told me you were an escaped convict, found guilty of a serious crime, I could scarcely believe it."

"Well," said the man, "it's true enough; I guess the jig's up."

"Patton, what do you know about the murder of Mr. Forbes?" Larkin asked.

"Nothin' at all, sir, except what everybody else knows."

"Where were you this morning when he was killed?"

"Sleepin', sir," said the man, without hesitation.

"Did you drop a cipher note through his window just before midnight?"

"No, sir."

"Did you recognize Mr. Forbes when he came aboard yesterday?"

"Do you think I could ever forget that ——!" He spat out the vile designation, his face black with passion.

"The man's dead, Hallaron!" said the captain severely.

"Aye, and thanks to God that he is, say I." Tears were gathered in the man's eyes, and his voice trembled as he spoke. "He swore me into a livin' death with his black heart an' lies; starved my wife to death, an' ruined my daughter's life! All the day I've sung a song of joy, an' I'll gladly go back to that cell now, as there's nothin' left on earth for me to avenge!"

"How did such a man as Hamilton Forbes ever come into your life?" I asked, amazed indeed at the man's outburst.

"It were this way, sir. I were nothin' but a truck driver, an' I did my hard day's work along with the rest. My wife she had her troubles only when I'd get a little too much of the drink aboard. But not after my little Katie grew up, an' a fine girl she were, sirs. 'Sure, Hugh,' I says to meself, 'there's a girl worth bein' proud of, an' you'd better cut out the drink.'

"I did, an' the wife an' me we gives the girl the best there is. One day I were truckin' down Madison Avenue, an' a auto scrapes my wheels. 'Hey, you Irish mutt,' yells one of the gents in a big fur coat, 'can't you see where you goin'?' I were quick with me tongue, an' I shoots off a lot of abuse which truck drivers knows how to handle proper. The one what was drivin' the auto jumps out an' shakes a big wrench at me. 'I've a good mind to drive your nose in with this!' says he. 'Sure,' says I, 'supposin' you try?' an' I climbs down, an' as the swell closes in

on me I cops him on the jaw, only after he swipes me over th' shoulder with the big iron wrench. I saw all red before me at this piece of dirty work, an' when he aims another swipe at me I knocks him flat.

"Well, he never got up again—alone. The man what stays in the car an' never does nothin' but toot the horn for the police was this Forbes. An' when I were brought to trial, what does he do? He tells the jury that I took the wrench from their machine an' beats the man with it over the head, smashin' his skull! The dirty liar! His head gets fractured when I knocks him to the car rail! They don't hang me, seein' I had a good reputation—I only goes to prison for life!

"An' what becomes of my family an' the little flat I had in Harlem? Dispossessed were they one day, an' my wife dies from exposure, while Katie—Six months after I makes me get-away, I sneaks into Noo York. I hears about my wife, but nothin' of Katie. One night I were slinkin' along Forty-second Street, goin' east from Broadway, when one of them girls grabs my arm. 'Where you goin', kid?' she says. Somethin' in the voice makes me look at her close. Then—I can't talk about it. Thank God, Katie isn't leading that life now; but I tell you, if Forbes had 'a' bin in Noo York that night he'd 'a' died then!

"That's all there is to my story, captain, an' I'm willin' to go to the brig whenever you say," he concluded, rubbing his tear-strewn face with the back of his trembling hands.

We all looked at the steward in silence.

"Hallaron," said the captain finally, "I want you to give me your promise that you won't try to get away when we reach New Orleans. Give me your word, and you may continue at your duties until we reach port."

"Yes, sir," said the man gratefully; "thank you, sir."

"Pouf!" laughed Larkins, when the man had gone. "There goes one of my pet theories knocked into a cocked hat!"

"Did you think he was the murderer?" asked Woodruff.

"Well, you can never tell what I do

think when I get started," said Larkins. "I'm liable to think any old thing."

At this point a steward informed the captain that Mrs. Forbes wished to see him.

"Tell her you'll see her, won't you, captain?" Larkins urged. "I'll make you a wager that she'll come up here with a wild yarn about how she shot her husband with a shoehorn, and insist that Courtlandt only pleaded guilty to the deed because he thought she did it."

The captain chuckled. "Show her up," he ordered the steward.

That the strain was telling on Elizabeth I could plainly see, even in the subdued light of the captain's room. Her face, in spite of the suffering so apparent there, was as beautiful as ever, and my heart cried out to her—she seemed so like a crushed and broken flower.

"Captain," she said, in her deep contralto, "I come to you to protest against the further incarceration of Mr. Courtlandt. He only confessed to the murder of Mr. Forbes because he knew I was guilty. Don't you see he's sacrificing himself for me?"

"Oh, rot!" burst from Bobby Larkins, earning a flashing rebuke from the eyes I had grown to love in a short twenty-four hours. "Now, look here, Mrs. Forbes, you know as well as I do that you never even so much as shot off a cap pistol, much less a shotgun! If Mr. Forbes had met death from a hatpin stab, why, we would probably be willing to suspect you. Both you and Courtlandt are as guiltless as the inhabitants of Mars, or I'm going daft!"

As Captain Loyd looked at the girl a fatherly expression found place in his rosy, smooth-shaven face. He reached out and patted her hand.

"I believe that Mr. Larkins is right, my dear," said the captain gently, "and that you two young folks are both very cheerful prevaricators. Mr. Woodruff, take this brave little girl below, and give Mr. Courtlandt the freedom of the ship. I fancy he won't run away," and he brushed aside the girl's faltering words of gratitude.

"Come on," said Bobby. "I want to see how Sparks is making out as a cor-

respondent," and we made our way down the ladder behind the first officer and Elizabeth. She turned on seeing Larkins.

"Please may I thank you, Mr. Larkins?" she asked.

"Yes," said Bobby; "you may—that is, if you will let me first beg your pardon for any harsh thing I might have said to you."

The two then shook hands.

"Say," said Larkins to me, after they were out of earshot, "it must be great to have a woman love you the way she loves Courtlandt!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE WEAPON OF DEATH AGAIN.

An hour afterward we met Courtlandt and Mrs. Forbes pacing the decks side by side. Needless to say, they were the cynosure of all eyes, and her flushed face gave mute evidence to the fact that she was conscious of the vulgar stares leveled at them, but she bore herself with proud indifference.

In response to their invitation Larkins and I fell in step with them, and eventually the reporter and Courtlandt paired off, leaving Mrs. Forbes and myself to follow in leisurely circling the deck. We talked of those trite subjects that seem to belong to people who first meet, yet my heart was even then crying out to tell her of the great love that lay within it.

A school of leaping porpoise keeping up to the ship off the port side caught her interest, and she leaned over the rail watching them. She laughed with spontaneous joy at their sportive antics.

"Aren't they dear!" she exclaimed, and several women passengers standing near by cast looks of amazement and horror upon her.

"I believe she *did* murder her husband!" whispered one of the group spitefully to her companion. "Did you hear her laugh?"

If Elizabeth heard the words she gave no sign of it. In fact, she laughed again, freely and unrestrainedly; but,

as we moved away, I saw that her sweet eyes were filled with tears. It was after this incident, which set me inwardly boiling, that she seemed to lose heart in talking, so I persuaded her to let me get her cozily tucked in her steamer chair for a siesta on deck.

She seemed grateful for the suggestion, and when she was comfortably settled, and Courtlandt had hurried to the library to get a book for her, I joined Larkins again, and we betook ourselves to the upper deck, making our way to the smoking room aft. On the way we encountered the first officer, very handsome and striking-looking in his white duck uniform. He paused to chat with us a moment, and to put a question to Larkins.

"What did you think of Hallaron's story?" he asked.

"I think it was pretty straightforward on the whole," Larkins replied.

"He told one lie, however," announced Woodruff, in a lowered tone.

Larkins led him to the rail, and the three of us looked down into the blue of the sea churned into white foam by the mighty propellers. "Fire away," he said, after he was sure no one could overhear us.

"Hallaron swore that he was in his bunk when the shot was fired," said Woodruff, "yet one of the engineer's force, who was forward taking the air, just before his watch was called, tells me he saw Hallaron on deck and peering into the window of stateroom A not five minutes before the shot was fired!"

Larkins was startled, and for several minutes of complete silence he gazed into the depths of the sea so intently that I wondered if he expected those churning waters to furnish him with a solution of this latest development.

"That's odd," he said at last. "Have you told the captain?"

"Not yet," said Woodruff, "but I will at eight bells, when I do my turn on the bridge—it is nearly time now," he added, consulting his watch.

"The deck lights were extinguished,"

said Larkins, "so how could this engineer tell it was Hallaron?"

"He said there was light streaming through the window of stateroom A, and as Hallaron had his face in close proximity he is certain of the identification. Furthermore, this engineer maintains that when he and the rest of the watch started to the scene, some moments after the shot had been heard, he met Hallaron, and asked what was up."

"It looks as if your theory of the whole affair was right, Larkins," I observed.

"I never had a theory—that is, I never expressed one," retorted the newspaper man, turning to me.

"Didn't you think Hallaron shot Forbes?" I asked, in surprise.

"If I did I didn't think out loud," was Larkins' evasive answer.

"Come up on the bridge. We'll have more privacy," suggested Woodruff. "It's my time up there, and anyway the captain will be glad to hear what new views you may have arrived at," and we walked forward to the ladder leading to the bridge.

Captain Loyd welcomed us pleasantly, and plunged at once into the subject which was absorbing every one to the exclusion of every other topic.

"I am more deeply puzzled and mystified than ever," declared the captain, "and, by the way, the company has ordered me to bury the body at sea. With Mrs. Forbes' permission it shall be done at sunset."

Then Woodruff told the captain of the engineer's story about Hallaron's presence on deck just prior to the shooting.

"So it was Hallaron, after all!" exclaimed Captain Loyd, springing to his feet.

"I do not think so, captain," said Larkins.

"Why not?"

"You forget the cipher warning."

"Do you really believe the cipher had anything to do with his death?" I asked.

"I certainly do," maintained Larkins

emphatically. "It threw a man utterly devoid of nerves into a paroxysm of fear. He declared that hidden among the figures was a threat of death to be carried out that very night. Was he right?"

We could say nothing to this, and, unlocking a drawer in his desk Captain Loyd withdrew the cipher that had been found on Forbes' bed.

Larkins pored over it in silence for a while, then asked permission to make a copy of it so that he could study it more closely at his leisure.

"At that, I don't think this cipher will tell us anything we don't know," he remarked, as he slipped the copy he had made into his pocket. "And despite the fact that Hallaron was on deck I don't believe he ever owned a shotgun."

"Then," said the captain, "you regard the weapon as the pivot around which——"

"In this affair the shotgun is X—the unknown quantity. Now we must figure everything from that standpoint. Let us tabulate those who might be guilty, taking Mrs. Forbes first.

"Let us ask ourselves: Would she have any motive in killing her husband? The answer is 'Yes'! But—a shotgun is no part of a bride's trousseau, no matter how up to date brides are these days. Granted she had cause, however, it is utterly ridiculous in this case to suppose she shot him when she could have procured her freedom, minus bloodshed and sensationalism, via good old Reno's route. So that eliminates Mrs. Forbes.

"Courtlandt: Now, things look dark for our hot-headed young friend. It was his divine right to kill Forbes, so he thought, but somebody else saved him the trouble. His confession, as well as Mrs. Forbes', was the merest piffle. Each got the idea the other was guilty, so tried to shoulder the responsibility. The fact that the inside of a stateroom was torture to any one who had gone through the mental agony Courtlandt had endured during the day made his presence on deck nothing out of the ordinary. I want you to bear

this in mind, and figure it out with me; according to where he was standing when the chief engineer saw him—and the engineer didn't lose any time in moving forward when he heard the shot—it was a physical impossibility for Courtlandt to have fired the shot."

"But he was noticeably agitated, so Mr. McDonald affirmed," put in the captain.

"Yes," said Larkins; "that puzzled me until I had a heart-to-heart talk with him this afternoon. Poor fellow, he believes Mrs. Forbes fired the shot!"

"What made him believe that?" demanded the captain.

"His stateroom is twenty-two, opening off the cross companionway on the port side of the ship. He did not go out on deck there, but walked through the ship to the starboard side. As he came to the junction of the companionway that runs fore and aft, he looked toward the front part of the vessel. In the dim light he saw what he thought was a woman's figure, clad in a loose-flowing kimono, in front of Forbes' door. He stumbled out on deck, agitated and distraught, because he believed it to be none other than Mrs. Forbes, and leaned against the rail, plunged into a maelstrom of emotions. Imagine his consternation, then, when the shot was fired almost immediately thereafter, leaving only one conviction open to his mind."

"That puts it up to Mrs. Forbes, then," said the captain quickly.

"Not by a jugful; it only goes to prove Mrs. Forbes' entire innocence."

"How?"

"Do you remember the way she was gowned when she appeared on the scene immediately after the discovery of the murder?"

"She was fully dressed! By Jove, I had forgotten that!"

"Yes," said Larkins, "and in a close-fitting, tan-colored gown, at that."

"Then that lets her out," I said, in a voice so full of obvious relief that I was annoyed to see Larkins suppress a smile.

"Exit then Mrs. Forbes and our quixotic young friend, Courtlandt.

Now, my impression is that the crime was committed by some one whose stateroom opens off or near the social hall. Every stateroom on this ship opens off the interior companionways; there are no deck staterooms. The purser, the chief steward, the stewardess, myself, Marshall, and maybe a half dozen other passengers were in the locality, near enough to rush out, fire the shot, and get back into the safety of our staterooms before the ship was aroused."

"A nice, cheerful thought that," I interposed: "Which of us is it up to to spring to our feet, crying dramatically: 'Captain, captain, I cannot tell a lie; I did it with my little shotgun!'"

"That remains to be discovered," retorted Larkins dryly. "In the meantime, to give us suspects the benefit of the doubt, let's work on the Hallaron hypothesis.

"Hallaron, or Patton, is distinctly 'in bad.' Were the detective force of New York aboard they would fall on Mr. Hallaron's neck and third degree him to a fare-ye-well; but somehow I can't convince myself that he did the shooting. What do you say to confronting him with the fact that he was seen at Forbes' window?"

"A good idea," agreed Captain Loyd. "Get Hallaron, Mr. Woodruff."

The first officer was gone but a little while when he reentered the room with Hallaron. Briefly the captain told the deck steward of the engineer's story, and asked him to affirm or dispute it. I don't think we were, any of us, prepared for his answer.

"That's right, sir; I *was* on deck at the time that black dog was killed!" he said.

"And you killed him!" said Larkins quickly.

Hallaron shook his head slowly. "I did not, sir."

"You know who did, then?" the reporter suggested insinuatingly.

"Yes, sir, I do know!" Dumfounded, the four of us stared at Hallaron. "But wild horses couldn't drag it from me!" he went on quietly. "I consider *that*—we all hung on the next word—"per-

son," he added, "as only doin' the task God sent them to do."

And nothing—no amount of threats or cajolery, could swerve Hallaron from his determination to keep his knowledge of the murderer strictly to himself. The thought of being keel-hauled only made him smile; the prospect of a dark, dismal hole, chained like a dog and starved, earned merely an indifferent shrug of his shoulders.

"There's only one thing I'll do, sir," said Hallaron; "if an innocent party is convicted of killin' this Forbes, I'll tell all I knows!"

"Get out, Hallaron!" cried the captain angrily. "You actually make me want to throttle you for a pig-headed imbecile!"

After Hallaron had gone the captain turned to Larkins. "I think he's crazy," he said in disgust.

"Or just telling the plain, unvarnished truth, which is nearly the same thing," grinned the reporter. "I'm going to cultivate Hallaron's acquaintance, and I'll bet any one a doughnut to a left-handed monkey wrench I'll worm his secret out of him before we reach New Orleans."

And I mentally decided that it was a pretty safe bet.

That afternoon at sundown all that was mortal of Hamilton Forbes was carefully shrouded, weighted, and cast into the deep, while Captain Loyd, in an impressive voice, read the burial service. Every one on board, passengers and crew, thronged the side of the vessel, and looked on in silence—a silence terribly profound, undisturbed even by the throb of machinery, for the pounding propellers were still for the nonce. When Captain Loyd closed his book he bowed his bared head.

There was a rush through the air, a splash, a boiling of white foam, and then the ominous flirt of a dorsal fin as one of the denizens of the deep followed Hamilton Forbes to his last resting place.

Our solemn duty to the dead over, the gongs clanged their imperative demands in the bowels of the ship, the

thrashing screws clove anew the deep indigo of the Gulf Stream, and we surged southward.

Mrs. Forbes retired to her stateroom, Courtlandt and myself paced the deck, while Larkins went above to file "overnight copy," as he expressed it. Later we found him in the wireless room with Sparks, as all on board knew the curly-headed operator, swapping yarns of the newspaper game. I invited the reporter to join me in a stroll around the decks, but he declined, saying that he was "going to lonesome it" in his stateroom and solve the cipher—if he could.

As we reached the saloon deck Courtlandt, too, excused himself, and made off in the direction of his stateroom. I paced the deck alone. A full moon made the waters a shimmering sea of silver, and the passengers crowded the decks, more cheerful and light-hearted than they had hitherto been now that Forbes' body had been consigned to the keeping of the deep.

It was ten o'clock when I left my steamer chair to seek my bunk. The weather was growing warmer as we progressed southward, and I swung the glass window wide open, and pulled up the wooden shutter for privacy's sake. The steamer chairs belonging to Mrs. Forbes, Larkins, and myself were occupied, and although I tried to distinguish the voices, I failed to recognize any speaker, so I decided that some of the other passengers, unknown to me, had taken possession of our chairs for the time.

I was in my berth, when suddenly I heard Hallaron's voice. I listened intently; I could easily make out that he was telling those in the chairs that the persons who rented them desired their use. While I could not see the occupants, I could tell that they moved off at once.

Next I heard Mrs. Forbes and Courtlandt in conversation with Hallaron; but later they, too, got up and moved away.

From the bridge six bells told the hour of eleven, and I could see the lights on deck snap out.

Suddenly a gunshot rang out on the

night air. A cry of misery, a woman's shriek, and a man's exclamation of dismay followed the crash of a heavy body falling to the deck.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY ONLY DEEPENS.

A copy of the New York *Ledger* lies before me as I write of the terrible mystery of the Phantom Shotgun, and, knowing that Larkins' account of that night is far superior to any I could give, I copy it verbatim:

The mystery of the murder of Hamilton Forbes, the millionaire Wall Street broker, who was killed on board the S. S. *Minerva*, has deepened with the killing of a man named Hallaron, the deck steward of the steamship, last night. The steward met his fate in the same mysterious manner in which death claimed the broker.

Hallaron, whose real name was Hugh Patton, a convict escaped from Sing Sing, was found lying in his own blood on the deck of the ill-fated vessel, following the explosion of a shotgun, outside of stateroom A, where Forbes met his untimely end. The murderer, as in the Forbes shooting, has so far not been identified.

Hallaron was under suspicion for the murder of Forbes, as mentioned in the wireless dispatches yesterday, and his death by the same means employed in the killing of Hamilton Forbes only deepens the mystery.

Hallaron was quite dead when picked up; and a charge of buckshot having riddled his body, showed the weapon to have been used at short range.

E. Van Buren Courtlandt, whose spectacular admittance of guilt in the Forbes shooting has been told of, has been placed under arrest by Captain John S. Loyd, the commander of the *Minerva*, owing to the fact that he was only within twenty feet or so of the murdered deck steward when the shot was fired.

Courtlandt and Mrs. Forbes, the widow of the murdered broker, according to their own testimony, were leaning over the forward rail of the *Minerva* when they heard the roar of the shotgun, and, both turning simultaneously, beheld Hallaron thrashing about on deck. Courtlandt rushed to the stricken man and was giving him what aid he could when passengers, officers, and crew crowded around the spot.

Both Mrs. Forbes and Courtlandt declare that they saw no one else on deck, although they turned instantly at the sound of the weapon exploding. The whole length of the starboard deck was clear, so they maintained, and Courtlandt gave it as his impression that

some one standing in the forward companionway, that leads to the social hall, had fired the fatal shot.

The purser and the chief steward of the *Minerva* were talking with the correspondent of the *Ledger* inside, not many feet from this companionway, and it would have been impossible for any one to have escaped that way and not have been seen by these three.

That some one inside of stateroom A fired the shot, was the generally accepted theory until a thorough search of the room dispelled any such belief. The doors had been securely locked by the purser, and the keys kept in his possession, since the Forbes murder, as the New Orleans police authorities had requested that nothing be disturbed until that room should be searched by them for any possible clues. The window of this stateroom looked out on deck, and was open. Hallaron's body was lying directly beneath it when he died.

Another stateroom, number one, lying midway between stateroom A and the library, was occupied at the time by Franklin Marshall, a raisin man, of Fresno, Cal., who is taking the Southern trip on his way to his home. Mr. Marshall was in his berth at the time, and told how the report of the shotgun awakened him. Hearing the commotion on deck, he lowered his window blind and looked out. Others were crowding the deck by this time, and he could add little toward clearing up the latest development.

The library, stateroom A, and all the staterooms were immediately and thoroughly ransacked for a weapon, but without result.

In arresting Mr. Courtlandt and placing him in the confinement of his own stateroom, Captain Loyd explained that there was no other course open to him.

Mrs. Elizabeth Kennedy Forbes sought the seclusion of her stateroom immediately after the occurrence, and it was rumored among the passengers that she, too, had been placed in custody. Captain Loyd denies this, however. Mrs. Forbes declined to make any statement for the press.

If the death of Mr. Forbes aroused the ship to a state of excitement, it could not be compared to the frenzy of passengers over the Halloran tragedy.

I advanced the theory of suicide, suggesting that the man had probably shot himself and pitched the weapon overboard as he fell.

Larkins scouted this, and pointed out that the gun was not held close to the body, as a suicide would be forced to hold the weapon, but at least ten feet away, as the scattered shots in the dead

man's body and lack of powder burns clearly testified.

"I give it up," I said; "it's too deep for me."

"Well, I don't give it up," said the reporter grimly. "Why, I'd never look a gumshoe in the face again if I let this boat get to New Orleans without solving these two murders. On the same boat, and a witness almost to everything, and Lucky Larkins not clean it up? Humph!"

"How about the cipher?" I asked.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Overwhelming curiosity," I said. "The only thing that can throw any light on these murders is that mass of figures, and I, together with every one on this ship, would like to see it deciphered."

Larkins mused a while in silence before he spoke:

"Well, I'm free to confess I'm up against it there. It looked like the easiest thing I ever tackled in the way of ciphers when I started, but it wasn't long before I gave it up. See here." And he pulled a lot of papers from his coat pocket. "Come into the library, and I'll show you an alphabetical mix-up that's like a poor relation of pied type. Here is the cipher warning." And he laid the copy before me:

19

25-20- 8- 7- 9-14-15-20
 3-15-11-16- 9-11- 9-16
 8-11-21-19-11-26- 3-19
 4- 8- 2- 4-14-22-24-20
 15- 9-19- 9-26-23-10- 1
 7- 6- 5- 1-25-24- 1- 8
 10-20-19-22-26-25- 3- 9
 6- 5- 1-22- 5-14- 7- 5

18

"Now, there are twenty-six letters in the alphabet, and we'll first transpose each figure to the letter it represents, supposing 1 stand stands for A and 26 for Z," said Larkins.

Then he laid down a second piece of paper, covered with letters instead of figures:

(S)

Y T H G I N O T
 C O K P I K I P
 B K U S K Z C S
 D H B D N V X T
 O I S I Z W J A
 G F E A Y X A H
 P T S V Z Y C I
 B E A V E N G E
 R

"Now, I have taken those figures like so many recruits, marched them to and fro, backward and forward, marshaling them into all sorts of formations, only to come back to this array. The top line bears out Forbes' statement, in a way."

"How?" I asked, very much interested.

"Read it from right to left, and you have 'To-night.' The 'Y' I can't understand yet. The bottom line is either 'Heaven' or, skipping 'H' and 'E,' it is 'avenger.'"

"Isn't it strange that the words you have deciphered were so easy, and those that remain hidden are so difficult?" I asked.

"That makes it a cipher," Larkins retorted dryly.

"What about the S within the circle?" I inquired.

"That is either a signature or a sub-key—I don't know which. At first I thought it might mean that the reader was to follow the form of the letter S through the letters, but that's not the answer."

"Then you give it up?"

"Not by a jugful! I shall eat, sleep, and exercise with this thing until I solve it." And he swept the papers up, suggesting a stroll on deck.

CHAPTER X.

LARKINS SOLVES THE CIPHER.

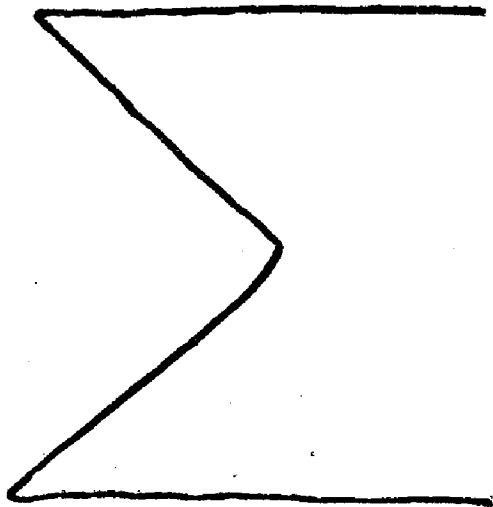
At dinner Elizabeth Forbes appeared in the dining saloon for the first time during the trip, joining Captain Loyd and myself at the first table; and we carried on a fairly lively conversation. Larkins appeared when we were about half through. He was smiling and debonair as usual, but I could detect a glint of satisfaction in his eyes.

"Well, what's up?" I asked him.

"I have solved the cipher—that's all." And he proceeded to attack a fritter with undue violence.

Of course, this statement created something of a stir in our particular group, and Mrs. Forbes, paling a little, asked to see the solution.

"Sure, if it will do you any good," said Larkins. "I felt that if I could decipher that mess of numerals I would have the answer to the whole affair; but there is nothing doing." He dug a hand into a pocket, and drew out his copy of the cipher. "The little number on the top gives the key. The nineteenth letter in the alphabet is S. The Greek letter S is Sigma." And, with fine disregard for table linen, he drew the letter thereon:



"By Jove!" exclaimed Captain Loyd. "The very mark that was on the wall of Mr. Forbes' stateroom, and that threw him into a spasm of fear!"

"How does that explain the cipher?" asked Mrs. Forbes.

"I'll show you," said the newspaper man, producing another sheet of paper. It was the one with the numbers changed to their corresponding letters. "I merely follow the form of Sigma through the different rows, reading each letter as I go along. There"—he suited the action to the word—"what do you make of it?"

(S)

V	T	H	G	I	N	O	D
C	K	P	I	K	I	P	
H	X	S	K	Z	C	S	
D	H	B	B	V	X	T	
O	I	S	I	Z	W	J	A
G	P	E	A	Y	X	A	R
P	E	S	V	Z	Y	C	I
E	H	A	V	E	N	G	E

"To-night you die, the avenger!" read the captain, with painstaking distinctiveness. "But we knew approximately that much already, Mr. Larkins." He turned on the reporter in an aggrieved manner. "This doesn't throw any light on the mystery. What we want is the final solution."

"Oh, you do?" said the reporter blandly. "How very odd! Well, I don't mind admitting that I'm in the same boat with you, but I've done my derndest, and angels can't do more. That being so—I am going to have ice cream and my nearly peach pie all in one dish."

"What will you do next?" I asked. "Since you counted so much on the solution of the cipher, doesn't this leave you high and dry?"

"Well, it might look that way, but you must remember that I am amphibious."

We all arose at the same time, and made our way on deck, Larkins bringing up the rear, humming over and over again with deadly monotony:

"She got down on her knees

And sighed 'Bejeez'!

But the vill-i-an still pursued her!"

He suddenly stopped. "I suppose we ought to go and watch Courtlandt feed," he said, as we fell in step behind the captain and Elizabeth. "Only we have such a horny-handed old son of a sea cook for a skipper that he would suspect that I was going to slip the desperate prisoner a jagged meat saw by which said desperate prisoner would gain the freedom of the deck and swim three miles to yonder sand key and hide behind a dune."

Captain Loyd made no retort, but when we were on the port side of the saloon deck he entered the aft companionway, and knocked at stateroom twenty-two.

"May we visit you, Mr. Courtlandt?" he asked pleasantly. "I have some of your friends with me."

For answer, Courtlandt himself flung open the door. His face lit up as he saw who was there besides the captain, Larkins, and myself.

"Welcome to my dungeon!" cried the young fellow; and I observed the look of gratitude Elizabeth flashed at the captain when she discovered that Courtlandt was not under lock and key. The five of us stuffed the little place uncomfortably, and so I suggested to the captain that a turn on deck for the prisoner would be nothing more than humane; but Captain Loyd shook his head.

"I have been ordered by my superiors to keep Mr. Courtlandt in custody, and I must do so despite the fact that I am practically convinced, that our young friend could not have been guilty."

"Oh, I'm all right here, anyway," spoke up the accused man nonchalantly. "The captain has been more than good, and, as he has pointed out, the Federal authorities in New Orleans will undoubtedly arrest me merely because my presence on the ship is against me. But I am innocent, and I'm not one bit disturbed."

"Oh, Van, don't speak of arrest!" almost sobbed the girl, completely losing consciousness of our presence in her agitation.

"It isn't so bad," Courtlandt con-

tinued; "and don't you folks worry about my situation. I read most of the time." He pointed to a pile of books strewn over the lower bunk. "The first officer sent in this bunch, and I'm promising myself a great treat to-night with this particular book." And he held up a volume by a popular writer.

"But can you see well enough in here with that one little light?" asked the girl.

"That one incandescent is plenty if he occupies the upper berth," put in the captain.

Courtlandt laughed. "That's a queer thing about me," he said, "but, do you know, I never like an upper berth. I object to the climbing part, even on a boat."

As I opened the door to lead the way out, I found Woodruff in front of the door. He flushed as I hailed him, and hurriedly told the captain that there were wireless messages to be answered from the company offices. I could not get over the impression that I had caught Woodruff eavesdropping as the three of us walked around to where our chairs were located; but there in silence we fell under the spell of the June moon, which had just risen over the edge of the sea, throwing a mist of silvery light over the waters in front of the sharp-nosed bow of the *Minerva*.

Toward nine o'clock Mr. Woodruff joined us, and then McDonald, the chief engineer, wandered up, and we discussed the sea, her variable ways, history, and superstitions.

"Aye, you may weel laugh at a sailor's superstitions," said McDonald, in his rich voice, tinged with a Scotch brogue. "While I'm a mon wha does na believe in ghosts an' sic things, still I'll confess that I believe an' I pay heed tae signs. Th' day we left New York a shark nosed along in our wake. 'Miguel,' says I to one of my Cuban wipers, 'did ye ever see a shark so far north before?' 'No, señor,' says the wiper. 'Some one die thisa day.' An' by that I ken that Miguel is a true sailor, even if he isna a Presbyterian. That business of Mr. Forbes happened that night. Yesterday who should I

see every time I come on deck? Mr. Shark tumblin' along in our wake. Last night Hallaron met his end—an' doesna that prove onything?"

I looked at Larkins, and caught him in the act of winking at the first officer, who, to my surprise, did not return the wink.

"See your old chum to-day?" asked the reporter, touching a match to a fresh cigarette.

"I did, sir," answered McDonald, at which Mrs. Forbes stirred uneasily, and I felt a queer sensation along my spine. "He was showin' his dorsal fin every time I looked aft, an' in my opeenion th' old *Minerva* is marked by Davy Jones, an' I'm no' a croaker, sir."

"No, indeed!" Larkins hastily assured him. "You are bubbling over with joy and optimism. Any one listening to your cheering reflections could feel nothing but carefree and light of heart."

"Thank ye, sir," said the engineer earnestly, and without the slightest degree of sarcasm.

Later Larkins, Woodruff, and McDonald moved off toward the rear of the ship, where on the aft freight hatch a sound of a concertina and shuffling of feet proclaimed that the wipers, stokers, and assistant engineers were having their day's relaxation in the balmy tropic air. I stayed with Mrs. Forbes, and we talked of many subjects, every one quite remote from the incidents of the last two days.

The first shock of what she had passed through was wearing away, and her true nature blossomed forth like a rose. As she reclined in her chair I stole secret glances at the charming picture she made in her crisp white duck suit and natty yachting cap, touched to even a snowier whiteness by the magic of the moon.

I wonder what power it is that governs the law of attraction—that often lifts us breathless and amazed from the highways and byways of life's commonplaces to that highest pinnacle of human emotions which men call love? Here was I, a sedate and middle-aged man, hitherto untouched by charm of

any woman, crabbed and crusty, I suppose, as a result of my lonely bachelorhood and singularly unresponsive nature, suddenly enamored of a woman many years my junior, who had come upon this vessel a bride and was obviously in love with another man!

It seemed to me that all the passion that had found no outlet in me before was crying aloud in every drop of blood—was flaming in my eyes and blazoned upon my eager lips—and as I leaned forward, carried away with the madness of my infatuation, Elizabeth turned, and her gaze, level and oh, infinitely sweet and pitying, met mine.

She reached out one slim white hand and laid it upon my arm. "Dear friend," she said gently, "love has been offered to me always, and always it has brought me nothing but sorrow. I want friendship—the strong, honest friendship, of a strong, honest man—for it is my greatest need of all things now, and so I ask for yours, knowing, though I met you but two days ago, that no worthier or sweeter gift could come my way. Will you be—my friend?"

I was an old man! Suddenly I felt my age upon me—the fire died from my heart and my eyes, and the thought of Courtlandt, whose vibrant youth had called to hers and drawn her yielding heart to his own, sickened me with despair. But I took the hand she offered, and held it close for a golden moment while I pledged my friendship as earnestly as could a broken old man who had asked for bread and received a stone.

CHAPTER XI.

THE "LEDGER'S" VERSION.

The reverberation had scarcely died away before I sprang from my bed, seized my cane, and, scantily costumed in my bath robe, joined the running, panting through that was crowding the passageway.

That fiendish weapon of death had spoken again, and this time it seemed that every passenger on board, frayed of nerves and painfully on the alert in consequence, had roused to instant ac-

tion and poured from the staterooms like so many ants from a disturbed hill. Small chance had any criminal to escape unseen this time, thought I, when Larkins flying past, with the tail of his bizarre dressing down flapping grotesquely around his thin shanks, hitched his arm in mine, and rushed me along with him.

"Courtlandt's been shot!" he panted. "Courtlandt—do you hear? Oh, Marshall, if he's dead, that devilish instrument has done for one of the best fellows I know!"

But that young Courtlandt was *not* dead is evident from Larkins' detailed account of the affair, which I have clipped from the *Ledger*:

Mystery upon mystery accumulates on the *S. S. Minerva*. An attack has been made on the life of E. Van Buren Courtlandt, who is under suspicion as the murderer of Hamilton Forbes and the deck hand, Patton, alias Hallaron. While the attack on Mr. Courtlandt has not resulted in a fatality it has thrown the passengers of the big ship into a riot of frenzy.

Courtlandt's escape from instant death was nothing short of miraculous, and the fact that he was not even wounded hardly seems believable. The weapon used was evidently the same instrument that caused the death of Forbes and Hallaron—the mysterious shotgun!

According to the story told by the young New Yorker, he was awakened by a thunderous noise and the pungent odor of burning powder in his nostrils. His stateroom was in total darkness until the door was opened by the first officer of the ship, Albert H. Woodruff, who, before entering, had called out Courtlandt's name.

Being answered by the occupant of the stateroom, the first officer turned the knob and was surprised to find the door unlocked. Entering, followed by the members of the crew, a few passengers, and the *Ledger's* correspondent on the ship, Courtlandt, in his pajamas, and looking dazed and bewildered, was found sitting on the edge of the upper berth. He was unhurt.

The bed coverings and pillows of the lower berth had been nearly torn to shreds by the charge from the gun, and had Courtlandt been sleeping there he would have been killed outright.

From the shot found in the woodwork of the berth it was easily ascertained that the weapon had been aimed through the small window of the stateroom, and that the holder of the shotgun stood on deck and fired from that spot.

Courtlandt said after the shooting that his escape from death was a very narrow one.

His habit, so he explained, has been to always sleep in the lower berth, but on this occasion he was reading, and to get proper illumination he had climbed into the upper berth, as this brought him nearer the electric light that is attached to the ceiling of the stateroom. While reading, Courtlandt says he fell asleep, and waking about eleven o'clock or later, to find the light still burning, pushed the switch button with his foot, plunging the room in darkness. Then he fell into a sound slumber until awakened by the shot.

Investigation showed that the black-and-white buttons, that switch on and off the current, are located at the foot of the upper berth, and the young suspect could have easily manipulated the buttons as he described.

This, the third shooting on board the *Minerva* since leaving New York, has thrown the passengers of the boat into a state bordering on panic. This is particularly the case as applied to the women passengers, many of whom are keeping to the seclusion of their staterooms, declaring their intention of remaining there, until New Orleans is reached.

To add to the general discomfort trouble is looked for from the members of the crew. The Cuban element, of which the engineering and stoker forces are mostly composed, are imbued with a fear of the supernatural as evidenced by the series of crimes that have visited the vessel, and while there have been no serious disturbances the officers are going armed and will take stern measures in suppressing any outbreak.

Captain Loyd has been importuned to make a landing when the *Minerva* passes Key West to-day, but the commander has announced that it is his intention to continue on to the Crescent City unless his company advises him differently.

The mystery of the deadly shotgun has cropped out again. At the time of the death of the escaped convict, Hallaron, it was thought that the weapon had been thrown overboard either by Hallaron, if he had suicided, or by his murderer. The boat officials had decided that such was the fate of the weapon until the attempt this morning on the life of Courtlandt blasted that hope.

The first officer of the ship, Albert H. Woodruff, assisted by the crew and the two stewardesses, have once more searched the ship from crow's nest to keelson and from bow to stern, but the hiding place of the shotgun has not been discovered.

Rumors, deductions, suggestions, and suspicions are rife. Many of the ship's passengers are one in their belief that Courtlandt fired this latest shot in his own stateroom to divert suspicion from himself, and then, by throwing the gun over the side, destroyed the most important piece of evidence in the triple mystery.

The shooting presents the same baffling aspect as the others, because while not every one aboard had retired, those on deck could see no one who carried a shotgun or in any way roused suspicion.

The only bit of evidence to have the slightest weight is that of one of the crew. His name is Henry Farrell, an Englishman. Farrell was on the promenade deck, which is the one directly above the saloon deck, where Courtlandt's stateroom is located. The seaman says he was going aft after bringing a cup of coffee to the man at the wheel on the bridge, and had been told to turn in.

Farrell is positive he heard footsteps on the saloon deck, and thinking it was one of the crew took no further notice of it. He said he stretched himself out on one of the passenger's steamer chairs and was filling his pipe preparatory to a smoke, as smoking is strictly forbidden in the quarters.

Suddenly there was the loud report of the shotgun from the deck directly beneath him. Farrell sprang to the rail and endeavored to peer under, but could see nothing more than the railing of the lower deck. According to this member of the crew nothing was thrown over the side, as he would have been in a position to have seen such an act or to have heard the splash of any such object as a shotgun striking the water. As the footsteps left the deck Farrell rushed forward and ran down the main stairway in the fore part of the ship, and when he reached the saloon deck he saw Mrs. Forbes, the widow of the broker who was killed the first day out, standing in the door of her stateroom, with a look of horror on her face. The seaman says the next passengers he saw were too numerous to mention, as every one seemed to pour from their respective staterooms the next moment.

Farrell claimed that the person he heard running, from the sound of the footfalls, undoubtedly wore shoes, as the heels striking the deck made a loud noise.

Mrs. Forbes was dressed in a long flowing wrapper and wore slippers. She explained that she had passed a restless night, and was awake and lying in her berth when the explosion reached her ears. She at once sprang up, slipped on a wrapper, and opened her door just in time to see the man, Farrell, running down the stairs from the upper deck. She said she heard no one running along the deck, and was positive no one entered the companionway after she opened her door. When questioned as to her ability to have heard any one running on deck, she admits it would have been possible for the running to have occurred without her hearing the footfalls, as her stateroom window was closed tight and sounds do not easily penetrate into her suite.

Captain Loyd is inclined to credit Courtlandt's story that some one made an attempt on his life. There seems to be little doubt that the person who killed Forbes and

Hallaron is likewise responsible for the firing of the latest shot.

With every revolution of the propellers driving the ship southward the mystery grows deeper.

CHAPTER XII.

MUTTERINGS OF MUTINY.

I had fallen asleep in my berth, fully dressed, when I awoke with drowsy consciousness of something unusual in the air. I listened intently, my eyes straining into the darkness, and heart pounding uncomfortably.

What was wrong?

Stillness reigned everywhere; not a cry, not a sound, came to my ears. I lay in my berth, puzzled and mystified. What had caused me to awake so suddenly and so thoroughly?

With a cry, I sprang to my feet as the truth flashed upon me:

The *Minerva* was no longer in motion!

The *throb, throb, throb* of the mighty shafts that revolved the propellers was stilled, and the big ship floated, a listless mass of iron, on the swelling bosom of the moonlit gulf.

I made my way to the deck, but as I stumbled out of the companionway I was stopped by a burly Irishman, one of the boatswains.

"No one allowed on deck," he told me, barring my way with a brawny arm.

"What is the trouble?" I asked.

"What trouble?" It was Larkins who spoke, and whom I now saw for the first time. He was on deck, leaning against the rail, smoking.

"Why has the ship stopped?" I demanded.

"Thirsty, and wanted a drink," he replied.

I ignored Larkins' flippancy. "Why is it I'm not allowed on deck since Mr. Larkins is?" I demanded of the boatswain.

Larkins chuckled. "You see," he said, "I've showed the officer my fire badge and police card; besides, war correspondents can go anywhere."

"War correspondents—*war*?" I stammered. "What do you mean?"

"S-s-s-sh!" the reporter warned, and, motioning me out on deck, he whispered: "There is trouble in the engine room—the Cubans are demanding that the boat put to shore. The thing we feared—superstition—has them all in its clutches."

"Then you think——"

"There will be no bloodshed," interposed Larkins. "Captain Loyd is a wise, level-headed man, and instead of grabbing up a marlinespike and smashing a few skulls he is pursuing a more modern and tactful policy—reasoning with his mutinous crew." Larkins suddenly peered down the deck. "There comes the captain now."

I looked aft, and saw the white-uniformed figure of Captain Loyd striding along the deck. He was followed by half a dozen Cuban stokers, nearly all of them begrimed from coal dust, and stripped to their waists, their swarthy skins shining a dull yellow under the pale illumination of the deck lights. McDonald and Woodruff brought up the rear.

They turned in the companionway where we stood, going to the door of stateroom A. The first officer, after selecting a key from the bunch he carried, unlocked and threw open the door of the mysterious room where Forbes met his death, and in front of which Hallaron, the deck steward, was killed.

At the doorway the Cubans halted, and each crossed himself devoutly as Woodruff stepped inside, and, pressing an electric button, flooded the place with light.

"In ye go, ye lubbers, and look yer blasted eyes out!" bellowed McDonald, as the stokers hesitated on the threshold.

"Easy there, Mr. McDonald," said Captain Loyd sternly. "I want no driving. I promised these men that they could enter this room and see for themselves that nothing is hidden here. Now, you men, look with your own eyes."

I moved around near Larkins to get a better view of the mutineers, and found the reporter leaning carelessly up against the white-painted wall of the

stateroom, his hands thrust in his trousers pockets, bored and uninterested, it seemed.

"Well," demanded the captain of the six cowering stokers, "do you see anything?"

"*Si, Señor el Capitan,*" piped up one of the half dozen, in a very small voice. "We see the death!"

"You see rubbish!" bellowed the captain. "The room has been locked since the removal of the body, and no one could get in here. What do you men expect to find in this room—ghosts? I've humored you by permitting a picked number of you to come and examine this stateroom. You've seen it; now you go back to your duties, or I'll lock every one of you in irons!"

The leader of the six turned to his comrades, and in a rapid-fire volley of Spanish translated the captain's words to the four who could not understand English. This done, they made no comment, and McDonald ordered them on deck. They obeyed, filing through the companionway and congregating in front of the window of stateroom A.

Larkins followed the officers on deck, but I—not liking the expression I saw in the Cubans' eyes—took up my station in front of Mrs. Forbes' stateroom, opposite, figuring that if anything happened I could be there, ready to aid or reassure her.

From the deck I could hear the voice of Captain Loyd ordering the stokers to their work. There was a brief interval of silence; then Larkins' voice cried out sharply:

"Look out for that knife, cap!" Then a sounding "*smack*," telling me as well as if I had witnessed it that somebody's fist had connected with somebody's jaw, the sound of a falling body, a revolver shot, followed by the pur of an automatic pistol, and a Cuban oath.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SHOCK OF BATTLE.

I subsequently learned the incidents which led up to the tragic event on deck from Mr. Woodruff, and his account, in the main, was as follows:

The stokers, after their inspection of the stateroom where Forbes had been killed, filed sullenly out on deck. The captain, Woodruff, McDonald, and Larkins followed them to where they congregated, a scowling, muttering group, just outside the companionway. One of them—Mendez—rattled off an outburst of violent Spanish to his mates.

“Go below!” commanded Captain Loyd, his patience exhausted.

The men turned as if to leave, but two of the Cubans did not move fast enough for the chief engineer, and, reaching out his long, muscular arms, the Scotchman grabbed the cringing Cubans by their necks, and brought their heads crashing together.

At this act of violence, Mendez swung suddenly on his heels, whipped out a long knife from his shirt, and attempted to plunge it in the captain’s back. Larkins’ cry of alarm warned the captain of the impending danger; then the reporter knocked the Cuban flat on his back with a well-directed blow on the chin. Woodruff, the first officer, immediately drew his revolver, and shot a knife out of the hand of another of the mutineers, who had drawn it with the intention of stabbing McDonald, who was hustling the two stokers he had collared down the deck toward the quarters aft.

Mendez, after measuring his length on the deck, arose, and ran forward, shrieking in Spanish. In answer to his cries, the main body of stokers, who had congregated near the engine-room hatch, rushed forward to where the officers were trying to subdue the remaining three of those who had visited stateroom A.

As the main body of Cubans left the hatchway aft, Captain Loyd drew his automatic pistol, and swept the ironwork above the mutineers’ heads with a rain of lead. Howls from those who received the ricocheting missiles and the wreaths of smoke curling around the officers’ weapons suddenly quelled the revolt, and the stokers scrambled off the deck into the hatchways, scurrying like rats to safety.

Mendez, howling in insane frenzy, raced back from the bow of the ship, and was upon the captain before any of those on deck were aware of his return. Captain Loyd thrust his pistol in the Cuban’s face, and pulled the trigger, but no discharge followed. The force of the stoker’s onslaught threw the commander to the deck, and the pistol that he had previously emptied was useless other than a club.

Three times the captain brought the automatic crashing on the Cuban’s head, but the grip the stoker had around his commander’s body prevented Captain Loyd from landing a finishing blow. Mendez had his knife closely clutched in his left hand, and as the two tussled he managed to transfer it to his right.

The younger Cuban, however, was no match for his commander, and the latter managed to rise to his feet, and drove the Cuban to his knees with a well-aimed blow. Then, stepping back to better brace himself for the next onslaught, the captain tripped over the projecting part of a steamer chair, and fell heavily. Mendez, with a blood-curdling cry of rage and savageness, raised his knife, and launched forward. Larkins, Woodruff, and McDonald all this time had their hands full with the remaining five stokers, and it looked as if nothing could prevent Captain Loyd’s death.

Succor came from an unexpected quarter, for just as Mendez flung himself at the prostrate commander there was a great spurt of flame and a thunderous discharge from the window of stateroom A, and Mendez crumpled up on the deck.

The Phantom Shotgun had spoken again!

“It seemed like an intervention of Providence,” concluded Woodruff. “The five Cubans ceased struggling in our grasp, and broke into hysterical prayer. At this juncture the scantily clad passengers, some armed, and others carrying their belongings, poured out on deck. The first to arrive on the scene was Mr. Courtlandt, who sprang through the companionway

next to stateroom A. It was he who assisted Captain Loyd to his feet.

"The commander thereupon inquired the reason for his being out of his stateroom. The young suspect stammered that he heard the sound of fighting, and raced to the scene to offer what aid he could. The commander peremptorily ordered him back to his stateroom. It was at this point, Mr. Marshall, that I asked you to watch the door of stateroom A."

I omitted to say that it was while Captain Loyd was ordering the rest of the crew to place the mutineers in irons that Woodruff asked me to watch the door of the mysterious stateroom. He and the captain sprang into the interior of the ship, and the first officer flung open the door of stateroom A.

It was empty!

Exhausted from his rough encounter with Mendez, the captain turned the search for the weapon and its handler over to the first officer, and sought his quarters near the bridge.

Within five minutes from his arrival on the bridge the vessel was once more in motion, the throbbing pulse of the great shafts shaking the ship as the fanlike propellers forced it toward its destination. It was not until morning, however, that there was anything like composure among the passengers. The incidents of the night, coupled with the crimes of the past few days, played havoc with the nerves of almost every one on board, and knots of the passengers discussed the mysterious reappearance of the Phantom Shotgun, while rumors flew thick and fast, and deductions and impossible theories were rife.

It seemed almost farcical for Mr. Woodruff to again search the ship for the weapon; nevertheless, this was done, and once more without result. At the finish of the search the first officer declared that the stokers could hardly be blamed for their belief in a supernatural agency in the long list of visitations of the Phantom Shotgun, as even a number of the passengers were beginning to entertain such a conviction.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE YELLOW JOURNALIST.

Sunday's breakfast was a very dismal affair. None of the officers appeared in the dining saloon, and their absence only caused a greater uneasiness among the passengers. Larkins, however, was at his place when I arrived at our table, and the excitement of the night had made no perceptible difference in his appetite.

"Did you remain up to write?" I asked, diverting his attention from the pancakes he was submerging in a flood of maple sirup.

"Not I," he replied. "I caught up with some lost sleep. The *Ledger* believes in remembering the Sabbath to keep it wholly to save up scandal for the morrow. I am reserving my energies until evening, so as to prepare my copy for the first edition that comes out on the street at seven a. m."

"How are the stokers behaving?" I queried.

"Eating out of the hand," laughed the reporter. "After this morning's experience, they are about as warlike as a flock of eggs. Say, Marshall, I've been up against some queer propositions in my time, but this Phantom Shotgun thing has certainly got me running around in circles."

"Have you talked to the captain about it?"

Larkins shook his head. "No, thank you! The poor old cap has trouble enough without jabbing the hooks into him when it isn't necessary. Say, but didn't that last shot take the starch out of those *colorado maduro* guys, though?"

Larkins drummed his long fingers on the tablecloth for a while, and glanced out of the portholes onto the blue of the sea. "How that marksman and his now-you-see-it-now-you-don't shotgun ever got into the stateroom without you seeing him gets me," he said musingly. "He, she, or it seized the opportunity when you were in the hallway of Mrs. Forbes' suite, reassuring her as to the sounds of fighting on deck—slipped in the door, which

Woodruff failed to relock after exhibiting it to the stokers, fired the shot that saved Captain Loyd's life, and then mingled with the rest of the passengers and crew when they piled out on deck."

"That is my idea of it," I said. "But where did he hide his shotgun?"

"Let's go out on deck," said the reporter, "and listen to what the sad sea waves are saying; they may tell you—I can't."

As we reached the deck, the beautiful Sabbath day burst upon us in all its tropical glory, and a light wind, perfumed with the scents of foliage and herbage it gathered as it passed over Florida and the Southern States, swept the decks balmily.

"This is great!" said Larkins, as we fell in step for our usual stroll; and presently we found Elizabeth Forbes in her steamer chair, and she joined us as we circled the deck in company. Larkins bubbled over with the thought that we were sailing in historic waters, and regaled us with harrowing tales of Captain Kidd, Henry Morgan, and others of their ilk.

"But," remonstrated Elizabeth, "I thought this was the Gulf of Mexico."

"The head of the class for yours," replied the reporter. "Better than that, it is—or, rather, was—the Spanish Main. I have great hopes of a long, low, rakish craft stealing over the horizon, firing a round shot across our bow, throwing grappling hooks unto us, and the whole crew boarding the *Minerva*, with every man arrayed in crinoline pajamas, and brandishing a broadsword, a cutlass or two in his belt, a dagger between his teeth, and a horse pistol in his left hand. Then we should fall upon them with pike and marlinespike, and have such a nice, sociable little time."

Elizabeth shuddered, and cast appealing glances at me.

"Don't let that yellow journalist frighten you," I hastened to say. "He's so used to having his imagination working overtime that even when he is not on duty he can't help dreaming nightmares."

"Who's a yellow journalist?" the newspaper man demanded.

"You are," laughed Elizabeth. "I'm not color blind."

"And now *you've* gone back on me!" Larkins indicated that he was moved to tears. "Have I not been your friend? Am I not still?"

"That is because I am not where I can read all that you are printing about me." And her voice took on a serious note.

"My dear Mrs. Forbes——" began the reporter.

"No, Mr. Larkins, don't—please don't. I know what your paper is, and I can imagine the things that it has been printing about me the past week. My family has been dragged into the public print. My poor old mother, half blind and infirm, has been besieged by the men of your paper, threatened, lied to, and cajoled into giving out statements that could not throw any light upon the terrible mystery that has happened aboard this ship.

"Pictures of me have illumined the front pages, illustrating articles that have been written out of whole cloth as to my past life. Special women writers have written thousands of words as to my mental state at this time. A series of atrocious pen-and-ink sketches are presenting a story of the great mystery in pictures. Other columns are figuring out how much I shall inherit of Mr. Forbes' fortune, and what I shall do with it, and who my next husband will be. Oh, I know the *Ledger*, and I hate it!"

Larkins listened to her in silence. "You merely have the wrong viewpoint, I think," he said. "I don't think you know the *Ledger*."

"Know it? Oh, Mr. Larkins, I know it too well for even you to attempt to champion it. It is a newspaper that grows fat on scandal, which respects no ethics of legitimate journalism, a paper that offends against good taste and degrades the standards of morality. The *Ledger* redresses, by virtue of glaring type, more of the wrongs of humanity than you can keep count of; but it adds to the sum of humanity's ills by an

alluring treatment of social sin. The *Ledger* poses as the friend of the poor people, but any quack or financial humbug, bent on stealing the dollars of the poor, can buy its advertising columns. It prates about the rights of the individual, but respects the rights of none.

"Your paper has no conscience; it has no standards; it has no morals; it has no shame; it has no pity! It panders to prurient curiosity, and makes vice attractive, while it appears to condemn it. It creates false impressions of life, and gives a disjointed view of life's most serious and sacred problems. In its eager play for patronage it throws sops to the Catholic, Jew, and other denominational bodies and races, and——"

"Gets away with it!" broke in Larkins, as Elizabeth paused for breath. "A newspaper should reflect the news of the world for all to see?" he queried.

"That, of course," replied Elizabeth.

"Anything that reflects is a mirror?" he pursued.

She nodded. "Of course again."

"Well," and Larkins permitted himself to smile for the first time, "when you look into a mirror, and do not like the face it reflects, you do not smash the mirror to bits, do you?" And he looked so innocently triumphant that we both laughed at his absurd conceit, and Elizabeth called him a very vain and a very good-natured boy.

I suppose we all three noticed the change in Captain Loyd's usually ruddy face as he came along the deck. The lines in his face were drawn and haggard, and the skin almost as white as his hair. His attempt at a smile as we stopped him was almost pathetic. Larkins was blunt:

"Hello, captain! You look like the frayed-out end of a rope."

There was a suspicious gleam in Captain Loyd's steel-gray eyes as he flashed them on the reporter. "Why?" he snapped.

"Why?" repeated Larkins. "Because

you do. You look as if you hadn't had a wink of sleep in a million years. This Phantom Shotgun thing is getting to absorb too much of your time. I'd heave it overboard if I were you."

"Yes, that's it, Mr. Larkins," said the captain hurriedly. "The thought of that dreadful weapon being still on board, and not knowing whom it will claim next, has me worried." Then he excused himself, and went aft.

"Poor old dear!" said Elizabeth, as the commander walked out of hearing.

"Grand old liar!" snorted Larkins. Elizabeth looked at him reproachfully. "There is something bothering him, and it's not a mythical shotgun or a handful of *muy malo hombres*. There is something big and dangerously wrong on this ship, or I'm a bunk prophet."

I looked at him inquiringly.

"When I asked the captain just now if the Phantom Shotgun was worrying him, he seemed greatly relieved, and the thought that I was guessing wrong lifted a load from his mind. Another thing: Immediately after the riot on deck this morning, Captain Loyd commenced to worry about something. He did not go to bed, nor did one of the crew. That was over ten hours ago, and with every round of the minute hand he has been growing older and more haggard. Even the first officer—Woodruff—who is naturally devoid of nerves, is as agitated as an old hen with young chicks. Every member of the crew is tiptoeing around with 'secret' written all over their faces. That's enough for me."

We all fell silent, and listened. The steady throbbing of the big propeller shafts was incessant.

"Nonsense, Larkins! You're worse than an old woman!" burst from me. I confess his ominous words affected me strangely.

"All right," he answered, stretching his lanky form at full length on his steamer chair. "Don't call names; I can't help it if something is wrong with the old tub."

As Larkins stopped talking, Elizabeth turned, and the next moment

sprang to her feet with a glad cry on her lips.

I glanced up, to see Courtlandt walking down the deck toward us.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EMPTY SHELL.

"Hello, Van!" drawled Larkins. "I didn't think they'd let anything as dangerous as you roam the decks without a muzzle."

Courtlandt laughed lightly, and he stood before us, holding the girl's hand tight in his own. My heart suddenly turned to the heaviness of lead as I realized what a splendid couple the two made—young, vibrant, and handsome. Could I be blamed for not welcoming him with enthusiasm?

"Oh, the captain just now poked his head inside the door of my Bastille and ordered me to do fifteen minutes on deck."

"Take my chair, Van," said the reporter, moving to the empty one on the other side of mine. The young prisoner sank into a reclining position beside the girl we both loved. Would that he was worthy of her was all that I prayed.

The three of them chatted and laughed, and I was out of it for all the notice they took of me. My eyes could not see anything but Elizabeth's face as I watched the group in silence; and the love within me for this woman flamed brighter and brighter, and I found myself calculating as to what I would do for her should she ever demand my services. And I decided that I was ready to lay down my life for her if needs be.

Strange what an influence a woman has on a man. She can sway him either to good or to evil. And how would such a woman as Elizabeth Forbes influence me? I cogitated as I sat there, wandering idly with my fancies. What all came to me in my daydream I do not now remember, but I do recall the guilty start I gave when Larkins' rasping voice recalled me to mundane things.

"We were having a little argument," said the reporter, "and supposed, up to the time we found you sleeping, that you were listening to the verbal scrap, and could decide for us."

"Oh, I am to act as a sort of up-to-date Solomon?" I laughed. "As the donkey said, 'I am all ears'—go on."

"I said that it would have been possible for some one to have opened Van's door and shot at the lower berth with just as deadly effect as though he had——"

"Hold on, Bobby!" put in Courtlandt. "The one who used the shotgun would not, could not, have opened the door. It was fastened with that patent door fastener that permits it to open about four or five inches and no more. It presents the same problem as the shooting over the ventilating slit in the first affair. How do you explain it?"

"Same explanation as I gave in the first: Blanked if I know!"

"What do you say to a stroll around to Mr. Courtlandt's stateroom and look it over?" I suggested to Larkins, with an eye to leaving the two together. The reporter unwound himself from his steamer chair with avidity.

"Delighted!" he said. "Anything to break the monotony. Life on this ship is just one murder after another."

But inspection of twenty-two—Courtlandt's room—gained us nothing, and so we idled away a half hour in the smoking room. Then Larkins announced his intention of visiting Sparks, and left for the wireless room, while I, after visiting my room, wandered out on deck again. Our steamer chairs were deserted, for Elizabeth and Courtlandt stood at the rail some feet away, looking down into the sea as they talked.

I believe I dozed a little, for while I was conscious of passengers pacing the deck and passing the corner where I sat, I do not remember seeing any of them. Larkins came along, whistling a little air, all out of tune; but I did not open my eyes until his shrill rendition of the latest plagiarism from Tin Pan Alley gave way to a prolonged blast

that gradually died to a few breaths blown spasmodically through lips that refused to pucker.

As I eyed him, he silently pointed to the seat of the steamer chair that Courtlandt had occupied. It was one removed from where I sat, so I got to my feet to see the better, and nearly fell back at what I saw.

On the steamer chair lay a shining brass shotgun shell!

The reporter and I eyed each other in silence for some moments. He seemed to be trying to read my thoughts, and I tried to read his, but without success.

Larkins picked the shell up, and as he held it toward me he spoke a single word:

"Empty."

Then he turned and surveyed the broad back of Courtlandt as he stood leaning by the rail. His head was close to that of the girl's, and they were deep in conversation and each other.

"Here, give me that thing," I said suddenly, extending my hand for the empty shell. Larkins put his hands behind him.

"What will you do with it?" he said suspiciously.

"Throw it overboard!" I exclaimed, but keeping the tones low, so that the two at the rail could not hear. "Where else should it go? He's your friend, and he's all that's dear to that girl—that is where my interest comes in. You and I are the only ones who know of it."

"I wouldn't throw this thing overboard, or otherwise destroy it, were it found in my grandfather's chair," answered Larkins. "What does this prove, anyway?"

"Prove—prove? Why, man, coupled with the other circumstantial bits of evidence that have entwined themselves about Courtlandt, this could hang him!"

I shook with restrained feelings as I spoke: "You must have the heart of a stone if you make public this piece of evidence. Isn't he your friend?"

Larkins nodded his head. "Certainly he is, and I'd do anything for him——"

"Then throw it overboard!" I plead-

ed. "Don't shatter that girl's faith in him!"

"Then your theory is to let her marry a murderer just so she can be happy?" Larkins laughed shortly. "I see you believe that he is the wielder of the Phantom Shotgun. Well, Mr. Marshall, I don't! I know him. But I think that *you* are a brick, and there is my hand!"

We gripped heartily. "I am going to put this thing up to Van," said the reporter, "then turn it over to the captain."

"See here, Larkins, rather than let that girl know of this, I'll—I'll—why, I'll confess to losing it myself!"

"Now, now, Don Quixote," chided the newspaper man, "calm yourself! The finding of this empty shell is only conclusive proof that even though the weapon is spectral its ammunition is decidedly material. At any rate, it is the first clew." He then called Courtlandt, and both he and Elizabeth turned and came over to where we were standing.

"Ever see that before?" asked Larkins quietly, holding out the damning clew so that the young fellow could not fail to see it. I watched Courtlandt's face closely, you may be sure, but he did not move a muscle, nor did his eyes betray one glint of guilt.

"Not that I know of," he said slowly; then the realization of what the reporter was holding between his slim fingers broke upon his mind. "The devil! A shotgun shell! Where did you get it?"

"Reposing comfortably on the seat of this steamer chair you have occupied for the past half hour." I thought Larkins' voice was a little hard as he explained; and when Elizabeth cried out I moved near her.

"Impossible, Mr. Larkins—I do not believe it!" she cried. "This is some horrid plot against Van. I do not believe it!" she repeated.

"I found it there," said the reporter simply, keeping his eyes on Van Buren Courtlandt's face.

The accused young man stood like a stone image, utterly incapable of moving or speaking.

Tears now sprang to Elizabeth's eyes, and my protecting arm was necessary to lead her to her chair, where, once seated, she buried her face in her handkerchief.

"That's the strangest thing I ever heard of, Bobby—blest if it isn't! How do you suppose it got there?"

"I wouldn't be asking you if I knew," flashed back Larkins.

"Why—why—you don't think that I ——" stammered Courtlandt, grasping Larkins by the arm.

"I know you don't know a thing about it, Van," snapped the newspaper man. "The thing was placed here to throw some more blame on you—you know you've got a corner on it already, so it was figured a little more wouldn't hurt. Now the three of us have got to put our heads together and do a little think-tank work, and figure out how this was done."

"My head's in such a whirl that I don't think I could be of the slightest use," admitted Courtlandt, dropping on a chair. "However, Bobby, you go ahead. I'm putting my trust in you."

"Thanks," muttered Larkins dryly. "Now, Marshall here, when I showed him what I had found, was for throwing the shell overboard and keeping our mouths shut, but——"

Courtlandt turned on me savagely. "I don't thank you for that, Mr. Marshall. I am guilty of nothing, and no matter how black things may appear against me I haven't sunk low enough to want my friends to suppress anything——"

"Oh, dry up!" Larkins interrupted. "You ought to thank Mr. Marshall for feeling so decent toward you. You can bet your boots I wouldn't agree to the suggestion. Now, let us try and figure out how this shell got here. When was it found? It was found when Robert Larkins, reporter, appeared on deck about fifteen minutes ago. Where was it? It was on the rear of the seat of the steamer chair occupied some quarter or half half previously by E. Van Buren Courtlandt. Who else was near by? Franklyn Marshall. Would either Larkins or Marshall have any motive

in placing a shell on the chair? No. During the space that the four steamer chairs were vacated was there a sufficient time for any unknown person or persons to have laid this object there? Now, fellows, I can't answer that. Who can?"

I confess that Larkins' absurd questioning and answering himself made me smile, and I could detect, despite the seriousness of the moment, a twinkle in the eye of Courtlandt. Neither of us answered the reporter's last question—but Elizabeth did:

"Shortly after you left with Mr. Marshall, Van and I walked the deck for some ten minutes, going to the port side, but not very far toward the stern. We stood at the rail some time. A good many of the different passengers passed. Mr. Marshall returned some minutes ago, and while we did not occupy the chairs I am sure the cartridge, or shell, or whatever it is, was not there. Did you see it when you returned, Mr. Marshall?"

"I did not," I answered. "The first I knew of its presence was when Larkins here drew my attention to it. I saw it then before he laid a hand on it. I dozed off in my chair, so it would have been an easy matter for some one to have dropped it without my noticing it."

Larkins nodded, pulling at his lower lip with a nervous hand. "There isn't a mark of identification on the blamed thing," he finally said, producing the shell from his pocket. "I made one good guess, just the same—it's a sixteen-gauge, and that means that the gun is a light one."

For some time we discussed the strange appearance of the empty shell, but arrived at nothing definite. Larkins and Courtlandt left us to go to the captain's quarters and tell him of the latest development in the mystery of the Phantom Shotgun. Courtlandt had insisted on going also—to, as he expressed it, "face the music" in person.

When the two had moved off, Elizabeth turned to me.

"It was good of you to want to shield

Mr. Courtlandt, friend," she said, "and I want to thank you so very, very much."

"I did nothing," I answered brusquely.

"Mr. Larkins told me you threatened to shoulder the responsibility of owning the shell—you are more than good."

I lifted my hand and shook my head as I smiled at her. "Your thanks would repay me for anything," I said, in a low voice; and then we two fell silent, and so remained until Larkins once more joined us.

"The captain took our latest discovery with unusual calm," he said, lighting a cigarette, and inhaling a few mouthfuls. "Something else is on the old boy's mind."

"Did Van——" commenced Elizabeth.

"Yep—back to the deep dungeon," the reporter said lightly, rising to his feet suddenly. "Come on, Marshall, I want to show you something funny. You'll excuse us, won't you?"

Elizabeth nodded—a bit wistfully, I thought.

Leaving her in our little nook on the saloon deck, Larkins led the way above, our walk bringing us past the wireless room, where the machine inside was tearing and roaring and crashing without cessation.

"Hold up a minute," said the reporter, stopping short. "Does it not strike you that Sparks is extremely fond of this hot weather?" And he referred to the fact that the little state-room door was closed. This undoubtedly did look queer.

"He seems to be sending the same kind of sounds," I observed, as Larkins stepped up close to the door.

The reporter frowned as he listened.

"Say, Marshall, don't jump overboard, or anything like that, but the operator in there is sending S. O. S.," said the newspaper man quietly.

"S. O. S.?" I repeated, not understanding.

"You've heard of C. Q. D.?" Larkins asked.

"Of course. Jack Binns made that famous," I returned; "but I don't see the connection."

"The connection is this," said Larkins: "C. Q. D. is not used any more. S. O. S. has taken its place. In other words, this vessel is calling through the wireless *that she is in distress and is in need of assistance!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIRE BELOW DECKS.

I grasped Larkins' arm in alarm. "Is the ship sinking?" I cried.

"Hush!" he commanded. "Do you want to start a panic?" He stepped up to the door of the wireless room, and listened again.

"What is he sending now?" I asked, for even my inexperienced ears could detect a difference in the crashings. The whole forward part of the ship hummed with the sound of the key, and over the transom the flickering blue-green light played weirdly.

"B. H. S.," mused Larkins aloud. "I wonder what that can mean? He evidently is trying to get some station on land, but I doubt if his aërials are high enough to carry that far." I followed him out on deck, and, without a word, he went to the lower deck and aft.

"Do you notice how much warmer it is here than forward?" he asked me suddenly. I had noticed it.

"Well, Marshall, this ship is on fire!"

I stared at him, bewildered. "But I don't see any smoke," I said.

"Not if the captain can help it, you won't," said Larkins, sniffing the air where we stood. "The cargo under this aft hatch is afire. Notice how it is battened down? If you listen you will hear the pumps working."

"You mean that right here beneath us——"

"S-h-h-h-h! Here comes the captain," warned Larkins.

Captain Loyd made his way briskly along the deck. I now saw how really haggard he appeared, and he hardly noticed us as he leaned on the rail that

overlooked the deck where the hatches were located.

"Do you think you will get it under control all right?" asked Larkins.

Captain Loyd whirled around, and stared at the reporter in amazement. "What did you say?" he asked gruffly.

"I merely asked if you thought you could get the fire under control before we hit port, or will we have to look to some vessel to come to our assistance?"

"Young man, what are you talking about?" The captain tried to put the question blandly, but it was plain to both of us that he was greatly disturbed.

"There, there," Larkins smiled, "you're a good skipper, but you're a darned poor liar. I think Marshall and I are the only ones, outside of the crew, who know what is threatening us, and count on the fact that we know how to keep our mouths shut."

"Thank you, my boy," said the captain wearily. "I feel that if word of this latest catastrophe got abroad the ship after the nerve-racking experiences the passengers have endured through our shotgun mystery, there's no saying what might happen. I want to feel that I can count implicitly on your and Mr. Marshall's discretion."

"Sure thing!" returned Larkins heartily. "I gathered from my smattering of Morse that the *Minerva* is signaling for help from the *Bacchus*, which passes us some time to-day."

"Yes, I hope to keep the fire under control until we raise the *Bacchus*, who should answer our call of distress soon, and I am keeping a little to the south so as to be on her course. With both vessels going at full speed, we ought to sight each other late this afternoon. God grant she may reach us before news of this hideous misfortune becomes known among the already unnerved passengers!" His voice was tired and broken, and he seemed to have aged a dozen years since the day we had steamed past Sandy Hook.

But Captain Loyd's hope of secrecy in regard to the discovery of the fire

was destined to go unrealized. Larkins and I had gone down to luncheon together, I being far too disquieted and agitated to do other than merely make a pass at eating, but Larkins, as usual, tackling the whole menu from soup to a series of desserts with the same undiminished enthusiasm.

"I believe you could eat if you were being hanged," I growled savagely, irritated beyond endurance at his nonchalance.

"I'd be hanged if I couldn't," he returned pleasantly, and examined his second piece of pie critically, as if to be sure it was altogether to his liking.

Just as we were ascending the broad stairway on our return to the deck, a sudden explosion rent the air, the ship rocked crazily, a dense pall of smoke enveloped the decks and companionways, and above the terrified screams of the passengers rang the nerve-racking cry of:

"Fire!"

Larkins swept the deck like a young hurricane, plunging through a knot of hysterical passengers, reached Van Courtlandt's stateroom, and yelled to him to break his arrest and take care of Mrs. Forbes. I followed as best I could with my misshapen foot, feeling my way through the dense smoke with the aid of my cane. I came upon Larkins again where the crew was gathered, fighting with puny streams of water the hell that belched from the aft hatchway.

Captain Loyd was directing the fire fighting, his white uniform torn and bespattered, while Woodruff, stripped to the waist, stood close to the edge of the hatch, doing three men's work. The crew, some of them barricaded behind coils of rope, boxes, tarpaulins, or anything that offered shelter from the intolerable heat, fought as men fight for their lives. The sight was inspiring yet terrible indeed.

The tropical sun beat down on the ship in a fury, and the solid tongue of yellow red that leaped up from the bowels of the ship presented the Brocken of a Mephisto's dream. All about the after part of the ship the

white paint was shriveled and scorched from the intense heat, and as a white-jacketed steward ran past us Larkins and I followed in his wake to hear what he had to report to the captain, who was directing from the aft portion of the saloon deck.

"The wireless operator, sir," yelled the steward, "says as 'ow 'e's been talkin' with the *Bacchus*, sir. She will over'aul us by nine or ten o'clock, sir."

A look of relief crossed the captain's soot-stained face, and a prayer of infinite thanksgiving stirred in my own heart. Larkins said "That's good!" as casually as if he were commenting on the qualities of his favorite dessert.

As the steward passed us again Larkins stopped him.

"I see the engine-room crew is sticking," said the reporter.

"Yes, sir, but the rotters will be a-comin' out, mark me," returned the man gloomily.

This was the first intimation I had that any trouble with that part of the crew might come about. Steadily the propeller shafts kept up their pounding, and as majestic as ever the ship cut through the waters. The only untoward sound was the awful roar of the devouring flames.

The reporter and I, using the side of the deck house as a shield, watched the seemingly hopeless fight. The puny streams of water that poured into the hatch were almost instantly converted into steam that mingled with the black smoke before the water could quench the devastating fire. Catching Woodruff's eye, the captain signaled to the first officer to come up on deck.

"How are things coming?" the captain shouted.

"Not—quite—holding—own," yelled back the panting Woodruff. "Twenty lines hose playing into hold. Water can't get down where trouble lies. Hold too closely packed."

"How is engine room?"

Woodruff shook his head gravely. "Don't know," he shouted; then the captain and the first officer moved forward to where the air was less smoky

and the roar of the flames a little less thunderous, and Woodruff went on:

"The place is steadily growing hotter as the fire is nearing the iron-plate partition. McDonald sent up word that he is reduced to bulldozing the stokers to keep them at the work, but they ——" He stopped suddenly, and threw back his shoulders, taking long, deep breaths.

Captain Loyd's face grew tense, and his jaws locked with sudden grim determination. When he spoke, it was more to the blue of the heavens than to Woodruff: "If we have to abandon the engine room, we will be without power to run the ship to land and beach her, or to keep the deck streams going."

The first officer nodded. "McDonald will *have* to stick!"

"Get word to him that this ship *must* be kept moving," shouted the skipper. "Tell him to brain the first man who starts up the ladders! He has got to stay there until every last man jack of them drops! The boat has got to get to land!"

Woodruff turned and vaulted to the deck below, shouting words of encouragement to the crouching forms of the crew as they clung to the hot nozzles of the hose lines.

For an hour Larkins and I watched the unequal fight. Luckily the blaze confined itself to the inside of the hatch, but every now and then a stream of water would be sent sweeping over the deck superstructure to obviate the danger of its bursting into flame from the awful heat radiated from the hatch.

Suddenly a great yell from Woodruff rang above the throbbing of the pumps and the roar of the flames, and Larkins ran to the rail.

"It's all over!" I cried. "They are deserting the engine room."

The reporter followed the captain as he scrambled to the lower deck, for up from the companionway that connected the engine room with the deck poured a horde of grimy Cubans, rushing over Woodruff, who tried to send them back with his fists.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PHANTOM SHOTGUN SPEAKS AGAIN.

This is a portion of Larkins' story, as published in his paper:

The *Minerva* was about one hundred and fifty miles from the Florida coast when the flames attacked the iron partition that divided the engine room from the after hold where the fire raged. Chief Engineer McDonald, hard-headed and hard-fisted Scotchman that he was, had his hands full keeping the below-deck crew at their stations. The heat of the engine room was almost intolerable. Smoke gathered there in great, choking clouds, and the Cubans, who in the main composed the boiler crew, went about their work muttering ominously.

Captain Loyd knew the safety of the ship and the lives intrusted to his care hung contingent on keeping the mighty engines going. His orders to McDonald were to keep the propellers whirling the ship to the safety of the shoals. Fiercer and fiercer the fire glowed, and in the depths of the ship it seemed that human beings could not live. McDonald sent a message to the captain that at any moment the men would either have to abandon the place or be roasted alive.

"Roast!" was Captain Loyd's answer.

Coughing and sputtering in the deadly smoke that gripped their lungs like the handshake of a giant, McDonald and a few of his assistants kept the oilers, wipers, engineers, and stokers at their tasks. Word coming to the commander that the men in the engine room were dropping like flies from the heat and smoke, his face whitened as he ordered those who had succumbed brought to the deck for a few lungfuls of fresh air, then to be sent back as soon as revived.

The crisis was imminent when the captain suggested the experiment of turning the steam on the stifling interior, and this in a measure converted the smoke, and the air cleared a little.

Slowly but surely the flames ate their way to the iron-plate partitions, and the wall dividing the engine room from the after hold grew red-hot.

At this sign the Cubans, shrieking and cursing, rushed for the ladders leading to the deck, McDonald and his few faithful adherents going down beneath the wrenches and shovels wielded by the deserters.

First Officer Woodruff flung the first men scrambling to safety back on those following, but he might as well have tried to stem the eruption of Vesuvius. A shovel felled him to the iron deck, and the mutineers faced the rain from Captain Loyd's revolver. A passenger standing by the side of the commander brought an automatic pistol into play, and the deserters were driven to the starboard side of the deck.

One of them, bolder than the rest, sprang to the davits that held a boat on this side, and was throwing off the wrappings as the rest of his fellows crowded around him. In a fury Captain Loyd flung his empty revolver at them and was rushing the Cubans empty-handed when, from the companionway that led from the staterooms on the saloon deck, a flash of fire shot forth, a loud report vibrated over the gulf, and five of the stokers fell—one of them headlong into the sea.

A yell went up from the mutineers—a cry charged with the hysteria of superstition, and they fell to their knees and on their faces, crossing themselves and groveling in the dirty water that covered the deck.

The Phantom Shotgun had spoken again!

It was with a feeling of relief that the captain beheld the change the shot had wrought, and he swiftly seized the opportunity to play on their fear of the supernatural.

"The God of Death has spoken," he cried dramatically. "Now back to your duties before all of you die by His instrument!"

Woodruff at this moment hurried up, the blood pouring from a deep gash on his forehead, and led them cringing back to the inferno below, where, sorely wounded, they found the chief engineer, assisted by two nearly dead men, keeping the mighty shafts whirling the vessel on to Florida and safety.

Almost immediately in the wake of the shot from the companionway Van Buren Courtlandt appeared on the deck and came rushing down the ladder to where Captain Loyd was berating the mutineers. He begged the commander to accept his assistance in any way, explaining that he knew enough about engineering to take orders from McDonald.

Captain Loyd looked at him strangely. "You have already rendered great assistance," he said, with scarcely veiled meaning. "I will be glad to have you report to Mr. McDonald—he will need you, surely."

Courtlandt stared at the captain stupidly for a few seconds as if to grasp the meaning of his inference, then with a shrug of his shoulders, turned and plunged into the passage that led to the engine room and the raging hell below decks.

Larkins was stretched out in a steamer chair, smoking, when I found him after the facts narrated above, and shortly afterward Mrs. Forbes joined us. With glowing eyes, she listened to Larkins' account as to the manner in which Courtlandt had jumped into the midst of the fray. He gave a detailed account of everything Van said and did, and also added that the captain had thanked him for firing the shotgun with such decided effect.

"But he didn't fire the shotgun!" she cried. "Why, Van was with me on the port side of the deck, near the library, trying to forcibly prevent a distracted mother from flinging herself overboard with her baby. At the sound of the pistol shots, he ran straight along the deck, and I could see him running when the shotgun's report rang out."

Larkins looked at her speculatively. "Well, all I know is he didn't have the weapon in his hand when he jumped into the thick of the scrap." He paused for a moment. "I give it up," he said slowly. "Two or three manifestations like that, and I shall throw my vote over into the superstition column. What do you think, Marshall?" he asked suddenly.

I used one of his favorite slangisms in answering.

"Search me," said I.

"You ought to know," he growled querulously. "I left you on deck, not twenty feet away from the door that shielded the wielder of the shotgun."

"You forget," I returned, "that I left the deck when you did. I was not there to stop any bullets, and I went forward. At any rate, I don't see why we should censure the shooter in this instance, for it strikes me he did a pretty decent service to the ship."

"Yes, that's true enough," assented the newspaper man; "but just the same I'd like to thank him to his face."

"Please let's not discuss it any more," broke in Elizabeth pleadingly.

"All right; we won't talk of it," agreed Larkins, loath to leave the subject. "But I'll keep busy at my little game in silence."

"What little game is that?" I inquired as he moved off.

"Shotgun, shotgun, who's got the shotgun!" he flung over his shoulder.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRANSFER AT SEA.

Every quarter hour the chief engineer converted the stifling smoke in the engine room by turning on the steam, thereby clearing the atmosphere long enough for the men toiling in the

bowels of the ship to gulp the revived air into their choking lungs before the deadly smoke settled about them again like a pall. It was sickening, hideous work, but the crew fought doggedly and steadily, and kept the power alive.

Slowly evening drew near. The electric lights were switched on, when the sudden tropical night engulfed us, and at about nine the moon lit up the boundless sea. The after deck presented a weird sight as tongues of flames momentarily licked into the still air of the gulf. Tons of water poured into the red-hot depths, and the white steam mingled with the black smoke fantastically, and presented such a picture of vivid and fearful magnificence as Doré might have evolved from his splendid imagination.

Just before midnight land was reported dead ahead, and, with eager footsteps, a quartermaster and two of the crew hurried forward. From a perch on the port side the heaver of the lead droned out that he could not get bottom. Soon he commenced calling fathoms to the officers on the bridge, and a faint cheer went up from the knot of passengers gathered on that part of the deck.

When six fathoms were reported to him by the quartermaster, Captain Loyd ordered the vessel stopped, and, with a rattle, the huge anchors tumbled into the sea. As the great propeller shafts stopped the steady throbbing of the pumps sounded above the roar and crackle of the fire, and steady streams of water poured from the twenty nozzles into the broiling hold.

Many passengers had quieted down, but occasionally little things set them scurrying about like frightened quail. A report that the crew was provisioning the lifeboats plunged half a dozen back into hysterics, and caused a score of men to fortify spirits with spirits.

There were a few shining examples of real courage and heroism. I must confess to tremors of panic seizing me like symptoms of fever and ague, but Elizabeth Forbes was of finer mold, and after the first shock of fear she was regardless of everything but the

comforting and sustaining of those around her.

Despite the fact that they had been reassured again and again, an audible prayer of thanksgiving went up from all on board when the steady lights of an oncoming steamer appeared over the western horizon.

"The *Bacchus!*" shouted an excited man, bounding into the library; and every passenger rushed to the decks hysterically. Overhead the "*crash, crash, cr-r-r-r-r-ash*" of the wireless even took on a brighter, more joyous tone, and every command given from the bridge earned a cheer.

Long before the *Bacchus* came within hailing distance the order that the passengers without luggage were to be transferred to the sister ship, and there await the result of the fight to subdue the flames, was given.

"A battle of the elements," I heard Larkins say softly to himself, and, puzzled as to the meaning of his remark on such a perfect night as this, I pressed him for an explanation.

"Wait and see," he answered, as he turned his attention to the preparation the passengers were making for the transfer to the succoring vessel.

When Captain Loyd arrived on deck the reporter drew him aside, and held a whispered conversation with him, and after a few sentences the commander moved away, saying he "would have some of the crew keep watch."

"May I ask who or what is to be watched?" I asked the newspaper man, as he joined me at the rail.

"Sure!" he responded. "But keep it under your belt—every passenger and every effect that is taken from this boat will be most thoroughly scrutinized for any evidence of——"

"The Phantom Shotgun?" I put in.

Larkins nodded. "If friend shotgun bobs up on the *Bacchus* after this," he added, "I will indeed begin to believe in fairies."

He took up an advantageous position at the head of the ship's ladder, where Woodruff directed the disembarking of the passengers. The sea was as smooth as a mirror, and the moon was shining

brilliantly as the crew lowered the boats from the davits, while from the huge sister ship the small boats were already under way to assist in the transfer.

With the arrival of the *Bacchus* the spirits of the passengers revived wonderfully, and when the transfer from ship to ship was started they were in excellent humor. The men and women laughed and called little pleasantries to each other as they went down the ship's side to where the boats rode lightly on the water. A short hundred yards away lay the *Bacchus*, and the small boats covered the distance quickly, leaving the tale of their passage in a swift, sparkling streak of phosphorescent foam.

Woodruff, the chief steward, the purser, and Larkins closely inspected every passenger that left the ship. Very little was allowed to be taken in the way of personal effects, and, as Larkins expressed it, under their combined scrutiny it "would be difficult for any one to safely conceal a toothpick, much less a shotgun."

I was in the boat that carried Elizabeth—Courtlandt and Larkins coming over to the *Bacchus* with the last load of passengers.

"What about the battle of the elements you foretold?" I asked the reporter as soon as he gained the deck, and the four of us leaned over the rail, looking at the smoking ship we had just deserted—the ship that had been the setting for so many puzzling and baffling mysteries.

"There's your answer," cried Larkins, and as we looked we beheld the stern of the *Minerva* slowly sinking into the sea.

A gasp of astonishment went up from all on board the *Bacchus* as the ship that had carried us from New York continued to settle until the entire stern was submerged. The three of us turned to Larkins, plying him with questions.

"It's just a little scrap to the finish between fire and water. As it became evident to Captain Loyd that the fire could not be absolutely extinguished without completely soaking the cargo

compartments where the conflagration raged, he has had the sea gates opened. When the compartments where the blaze has been confined have had a few hours' soaking, the gates will be closed again, and the compartments pumped out. That's all."

"Do you think the fire has finished the shotgun, or will the water attend to that?" asked Courtlandt of the reporter.

"Search me!" replied Larkins. "If that blamed gun shows up again, I shall certainly feel like the fellow that saw a giraffe for the first time, and exclaimed: 'Aw, there ain't no such thing!'"

"Why, Mr. Bobby Larkins!" chided Elizabeth rather indignantly. "Do you mean to try and tell me that you—you are beginning to credit this absurd theory of a supernatural agency?"

"Well, figure the whole business for yourself," he responded wearily. "Not a passenger or member of the crew left the *Minerva* with anything faintly resembling a shotgun. A shotgun is slightly bigger than a mustache comb, too."

"Then, thank goodness, the terrible thing is not aboard this ship," I exclaimed; and both Elizabeth and Courtlandt echoed my words.

"Don't be too sure, little ones," Larkins rejoined. "Did you ever have a hunch?" He paused and surveyed us gravely. "Well, I've got a big healthy one, and it's that the Phantom Shotgun is aboard the *Bacchus* this very minute."

We laughed. "The last thing I heard you say before we left the *Minerva*," I reminded him, "was that no soul should leave that ship with a toothpick on his person unbeknownst to you."

"Yes, that's so," he admitted; "but a hunch is a hunch for all that."

Staterooms were assigned to all the passengers from the *Minerva*, and almost every one sought bunks without delay, worn out after the long siege of wakefulness and excitement.

A roaring crash awakened everybody about four a. m., and I joined the

crowd of half-dressed passengers who rushed out on deck. A number were gathered around a prostrate form on the after deck, and as I approached I heard a sailor's voice cry out:

"A man has been shot, sir! His name's Larkins, I understand!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SHOOTING OF LARKINS.

Before noon we had all been retransferred back to the *Minerva*. The stern of the vessel had been submerged in thirty-five feet of water, the ocean completely soaking the burning cargo, and then, with the compartments pumped out, the ill-fated boat was again in trim for the continuation of her voyage to New Orleans.

Larkins was not killed, but near it. He was no quitter, however. He threatened to swim from the *Bacchus* when it was suggested that he be taken back to New York on that steamer rather than risk the chance of further or greater injury should he return to the *Minerva*.

According to the reporter, his wounds were trivial; but when a man has a number of leaden pellets in his body—granted they did not stray into fatal spots—he is not all he should be; so Larkins was tenderly ferried from the *Bacchus* to the *Minerva*, where he was put to bed in one of the best staterooms.

Propped up in this bed, Larkins received Woodruff, Courtlandt, the captain, and myself.

"Welcome to our city!" greeted the reporter gayly. "Glad to see you, captain! I wish you would direct my nurse"—here he patted Elizabeth's hand—"to furnish me with an unlimited supply of cigarettes. I'm famished for a smoke."

"I don't like cigarettes," said Elizabeth, with decision.

"Quite proper," rejoined Larkins, "but I do. Besides, smoking cigarettes doesn't hurt a man."

"I never saw a *man* smoke one," flashed Elizabeth.

Larkins dodged, and threw up his hands. "Taking advantage of a dying martyr," he groaned. "If I hadn't had my brains investigated by a lead muck-raker you couldn't get away with it."

"Yes, but let's talk of other death-dealing implements besides cigarettes," I broke in. "Larkins, we came here to——"

"Find out how I got mine," supplied the reporter. "Well, there isn't much to tell."

"I had just finished a wireless dispatch to the *Ledger*, telling of the events of the day and night that had passed, and was out on deck, taking an early-morning view of the *Minerva* as she lay in the water, looking for all the world like a wounded duck. I heard no sound as I stood there except the continual lapping of the water against the boat's hull.

"Without the least warning, a roar seemed to shatter my eardrums, and I was aware of a sharp stab, such as I imagine a lightning bolt might give, and ——" He paused in his recital, and closed his eyes for a brief second. "Well, that's all there was to it. There I was, and here I am."

Captain Loyd was the first to speak after Larkins had finished his story:

"What puzzles me is——"

"The spook shotgun," furnished Larkins for him.

The mystery had, indeed, grown. The shotgun, that mysterious implement of death, was still the great unsolved problem.

"I got a mighty surprise when word reached me that you had been laid low by that—that Thing." The captain's voice actually faltered as he endeavored to name the mysterious weapon.

"Yes, the old mystery has certainly chirked up some," agreed Larkins cheerfully. "I watched every boatload that left the *Minerva*, and I didn't see anything that looked like a shotgun going along."

The captain nodded. "And I'll stake my life that the Thing didn't come aboard this noon. I had every passenger searched when they returned from the *Bacchus*."

"Cap"—Larkins' voice was a trifle raspy—"I'll bet you a dollar to a doughnut that you're a dead one."

"Bless my soul! What do you mean?" the captain queried anxiously, every wrinkle in his ruddy countenance forming into minute interrogation points.

"Just this—friend shotgun, like the old black cat, came back, and is now aboard this ship."

"Is that mere guesswork, or have you found out something?" asked Courtlandt, who up to this time had said nothing. His voice was a little anxious, I thought, and at the time I wondered why.

"Figure it out for yourself," the reporter parried. "Hey, how is it you aren't in the brig, being fed on bread and water? You don't mean to tell me that they haven't accused you of shooting me?"

There was a pause, and then Courtlandt, laughing shortly, spoke up:

"They have, Bobby. Some one declared that after you were shot they saw me near the after deck, flitting away like a frightened sparrow—or something like that."

"Ah-ha—another reporter aboard!" Larkins grinned. He looked like a fiend with his grin connecting the swaths of lint bound around his head. "Well, Van, you certainly are a Jo. Don't fret—you didn't shoot me."

"Who did?" asked the captain quickly.

"The shark, I guess," returned the reporter, winking at the rest of us. "He's the only one with a guilty enough conscience to have run away." Despite his flippant words, I realized with a start that Larkins was holding something back.

Then Elizabeth took a hand, and, declaring that her patient needed quiet and rest, she drove the three of us out of the stateroom, paying no heed to the frantic protestations of the injured man.

The captain and I walked leisurely along the deck. Steadily the *Minerva* pounded forward on the bosom of the gulf. Ahead to the northwest lay the

mouth of the Mississippi and the end of our voyage. On this point I questioned Captain Loyd.

"We should fetch Port Eads about midnight, and will tie up before ten o'clock Tuesday," he said. "And thank God for it!" he added, in an undertone.

"Same here, captain," I said. "It has been a trying trip, indeed. I, for one, must congratulate you on the manner in which you have handled the ship and the untoward happenings."

He thanked me warmly. "I don't know what I would have done without that young newspaper chap," he added. "He is a bright, clever fellow, and if his accident had proved fatal I would have really felt it a personal loss."

"He's a first-rate fellow," I agreed heartily; "but did it ever strike you, captain, that that youngster knows more about all this mystery than he has told us?"

"Indeed, no!" the ship's master hastened to assure me. "I believe Mr. Larkins has been perfectly frank and open in everything he has done and said."

"It is not that, captain," I returned; "it is what he has *not* said—unless, of course, he has privately confided to you all he has learned toward clearing up this mystery of the murders and the elusive shotgun."

"No; you have heard everything he has said to me," the captain replied. "What has prompted you to think otherwise?" He put the question bluntly.

"I don't know," I said. "I somehow get the vague impression that he always knows a little more than he tells. By the way, did you know that when Captain Peterson, of the *Bacchus*, ordered an investigation of his ship immediately after the finding of Larkins' wounded body, some one—who it was I was unable to discover—started the rumor that Larkins had turned the spectral weapon on himself, so as to end the whole affair in a blaze of glory?"

"How ridiculous!" snorted the captain. "What will they be saying next?"

But this evidently set him thinking, because he paced the deck with head bowed, uttering no sound. Suddenly he turned to me in a hesitating manner.

"Mr. Marshall, will you come with me while I question Larkins on a few points?" he asked.

I acquiesced, and together the captain and I went to the room where Larkins was abed. Elizabeth Forbes was reading to him, and as we entered she laid the book on the bed with the pages open. The gaudy cover and garish title bore lurid testimony to the fact that it was a detective mystery story. I tapped the book with my cane.

"Brushing up on theory and detail, or seeking a solution of our incomparable mystery?" I asked, laughing.

"Just following my natural bent," he retorted. "Besides, I like the dulcet tones of my nurse's voice." He peered at the captain through his glasses. "What's up?" he demanded.

The captain seemed at a loss how to proceed with what he had to say. He drew his hand across his mouth several times, and cleared his throat nervously.

"Speak up, little one—be not afraid," laughed Larkins.

"Mr. Larkins," began the captain, "I believe you once told me that when you investigated anything you suspected everybody, didn't you?"

"Yep—the whole shooting match—from doorknobs to the family cat."

"Then you will—ah—er——"

"Not be offended if you ask me some direct questions as to whether or not I am the phantom behind the shotgun?" Larkins supplied.

"Oh, captain!" Elizabeth cried. Every bit of color had gone from her face as she turned to the commander, and her eyes were indignant.

"Why are you on board the *Minerva*?" Captain Loyd stood nearer the reporter as he put the question. "Did your paper send you on this trip to cover—as you call it—the honeymoon of——" He left the sentence unfinished, waving his hand vaguely.

"No, captain, it did not," replied Lar-

kins, with a sparkle in the gray eyes. "Even on yellow journals we have what is known as vacations. I'm having mine."

"Why on this boat?"

"Hope you people won't laugh," said Larkins, with a sheepish little grin; "but some years ago I was a reporter on a New Orleans paper, and I aspired to be the star man; the boss decreed otherwise, so I abandoned the paper to its fate. A few months ago I read that this same paper had doubled its circulation, and it rather spoiled my appetite for a week. Still a little skeptical, I started for the land of magnolias, creole beauties, Ramos' gin fizzes, and the statue of General Jackson, to see if it really flourisheth as its circulation manager sweareth. As luck would have it, this mystery broke right under my nose—and there you are."

He eyed us blandly as he finished, and as if there was nothing more to be said.

"Did you shoot yourself?" asked the captain bluntly.

"I should say not!" retorted the reporter emphatically. "I have too much regard for the tender feelings of one Robert L. Larkins."

"Did you shoot Forbes?"

"Not that I can recall."

"Hallaron?"

"Not guilty."

"Did you fire the shot that brought the stokers to their senses?" continued the captain colorlessly.

"You ought to be able to guess the answer to that, captain," Larkins replied pleasantly. "If I remember rightly, I was soaking Cubans in the eye—one in particular, who was trying to find the space between your fourth and fifth rib with a long knife. That all took place on deck in your plain sight. Of course, as a newspaper man, I would do a whole lot for my sheet, but we reporters always draw the line at murder."

A general laugh went up, which brought the farce of cross-questioning Larkins to an end.

"The murderer is on this boat, and

we will have to find him, her, or it before the *Minerva* lands, or the authorities never will after the passenger list scatters to the four parts of the world." The captain sighed as he realized the task before him.

"Don't waste time looking for the murderer, Captain Loyd," said the reporter.

"Why do you advise that?" I put in. "Do you think it is useless?"

"I think it a waste of energy. In this problem the shotgun is X. That is the way I am figuring. Get that wraith of a weapon, learn how, if you can, it could be carried to the *Bacchus* without it being seen by us who watched. Suppose you wanted a weapon of that kind, how would you manufacture one? Put yourself in the murderer's place, and go over the events of the past few days, and dope it out the way you would do such a thing if it were up to you to do. That's the way to do it, as old boy Punch says."

"B-r-r-r-r!" I shook my shoulders. "Excuse me from such gruesome mental calculations. I'm afraid I'm not cold-blooded enough for that, Larkins."

The captain said he certainly agreed with me, and he left for his post. I followed shortly after, to partake of a solitary dinner and spend the rest of the evening parading the deck with my thoughts as the ship drew nearer and nearer the Crescent City. The night on the gulf was beautiful as soon as the moon came up, and many were loath to turn in until long after the deck lights were extinguished.

When I went to bed, I left my deck window wide open, for the heat of the tropics made sleep a doubtful issue, and I lay awake for hours, unable to sink into the blessed oblivion.

It was while I was wide awake that the Phantom Shotgun spoke again, filling my little cabin with a sheet of wicked flame, a deafening roar, and the stinging fumes of burned powder.

I was trembling and unnerved when I flung open my door to the furious pounding of those who quickly crowded the social hall.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LINCOLN PENNY.

"Are you hurt?" shouted Larkins, who came limping into the narrow quarters, closely followed by Courtlandt, Woodruff, and half a dozen excited others.

"I don't know," I answered, sinking back in my bunk and burying my head in my hands. "Am I?"

"You ought to know," snapped the reporter, as he switched on the electric bulb. "It doesn't look it— Gee whiskers!" he added, and I turned to see what he pointed to. The wooden back of my bunk was riddled with shot!

Questions poured in on me, and I answered them as best I could.

"Were you asleep?" Larkins asked.

I had explained that the heat had made it impossible.

"Hurrah! You saw him, then?"

I shook my head. "I was lying with my eyes shut. The first thing I knew was the awful roar, and as I scrambled to my feet the powder smoke choked me."

Larkins limped over to the window. "It was fired from the deck. See, the bullet marks show that it came from this direction. Any one on deck?" he yelled, poking his head through the window. A hasty glance up and down the boards seemed to satisfy him, for he withdrew his head almost instantly.

"Nothing doing," he muttered. Then he faced us. "Captain, this is getting to be serious." This in a louder tone as the commander entered hurriedly. "Marshall here has had a narrow escape from friend shotgun."

I had to tell my story all over again for the perplexed captain, and at the end of an hour's consultation Woodruff again went through the ship, making futile search for the implement of death.

Once more were the passengers of the *Minerva* thrown in a panic. The attempt on my life, combined with the torpidity of the night, banished all desire for further sleep. Along near dawn, in answer to a knocking at my

door, I opened it, to find Larkins, pale and haggard, standing in the hallway.

"Just a question, Marshall," he said. "Were you in the lower berth, where the shot holes are, when the shot was fired?"

"Just as I told you before," I answered tartly, for I was beginning to tire of the unceasing fusillade of questions. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm trying to dope this thing out, as long as I can't sleep," he said, in a weary voice, leaning against the door jamb.

"Don't try, old man," I said, springing to his side, and throwing a supporting arm about his shoulders. "You are sick—wounded—Larkins, and you are killing yourself by the misuse of the energy that you have left. Chuck it—forget it, Larkins, please."

"Marshall, I'd never hold up my head again if I let this ship get to New Orleans and I not solve this business." In spite of himself, his head lopped forward on his chest, and I dragged him inside and dosed him with a stiff shot of whisky.

"You go to sleep, my boy," I said. The drink revived him, and as he sat on the edge of my bunk, his dressing robe wrapped about his long legs, he presented a pathetic figure. He was absently fingering one or two of the shot holes when I asked him to have another drink from my flask.

"It will make you," I urged.

"That stuff doesn't make reporters—it unmakes them," he said dryly. "I don't think I'd like to be sleeping in this bunk and have any one take a pot shot at me." Then he got up and went to the door, all his weakness gone.

"Take some of this stuff with you?" I asked.

"No-o-o," he said queerly. "You have given me enough. I am going to go to sleep now."

"Glad to hear it, old boy—you need it," I called to him, as he made his way across the social hall. He seemed to walk quite spry, too.

Most of the passengers were on deck when Port Eads was reached, and Larkins, propped up on a steamer chair,

hailed with delight the small army of reporters and camera men from the different New Orleans papers who came aboard off Pilot Town. These good-natured and impertinent young fellows questioned everybody on board indiscriminately, and Larkins was enjoying the novelty of being interviewed for the first time in his life—"just like a real person," as he put it. It was a sight to see the reporters clustered about him, listening to his fantastic recital of the mystery that was engaging the attention of the whole country.

As he talked, Larkins wrote rapidly on the pad that lay in his lap, and performed the feat of talking about one thing and writing about another at the same time. To the curious, he said that he was getting his copy off to his distant paper.

After we had passed quarantine we went down for the last breakfast on board; and Larkins, in high spirits despite his wounds, kept the captain's table and those near by convulsed with laughter throughout the meal.

"I want to know the meaning of all this hilarity," Elizabeth demanded. "For a wounded hero, you are not conducting yourself with becoming sobriety."

"The presence of so charming a nurse has intoxicated me," Larkins laughed exultantly. "That and the fact that I have solved the mystery of the Phantom Shotgun!"

A surprised hush fell over the big dining saloon as the reporter made his startling announcement, which was swiftly passed from mouth to mouth. One or two stewards dropped their trays, and the clatter of broken china mingled with the sudden storm of questions that poured upon him from all sides.

"Oh, I'm not *dead* sure," he shouted above the clamor; "but I rather guess I've worked it out. When I rend the veil of mystery we shall find the Phantom Shotgun in—stateroom A."

Other than this he would not say, merely going up to the wireless room, where Sparks was sending the crashing of his instruments throughout the

ship's length and breadth. When the news of Larkins' announcement reached the deck, where the local reporters were gathered, they swooped on him like a flock of hungry vultures. But he refused to say a word, declaring that at eight o'clock, in the presence of a number of witnesses, in stateroom A, the mystery would be satisfactorily cleared.

"And, say, you fellows," he said to his brother scribes, "I don't want you to use the wireless—you boys can wait a couple of hours until we land. And you, Associated Press, you give the others first chance, or you won't get in on the pie at all."

"I suppose you want to use the wireless after you've shown the thing up?" said the *Index* man.

"Don't worry, Emile," laughed Larkins. "My story is going out now—after a while is too late for me."

I suppose it was because Larkins was himself a scribe that he could handle the newspaper men the way he did, for despite their first objections they finally agreed to follow orders.

I, after an effort, managed to get Larkins alone; but though I tried to wheedle the solution from him I might as well have attempted to coax the mystery of the ages from the Sphinx. He merely winked at me.

At the specified hour, Larkins, after speaking to the captain, asked Woodruff to summon Courtlandt, the purser, the chief steward, the engineer, myself, the different newspaper men, and Mrs. Forbes. The captain rounded out the number Larkins chose to witness the dramatic disclosure we all looked forward to as we filed into stateroom A.

Larkins was the last to enter, and he closed the door. Putting his hand into a pocket, he drew forth a coin.

"In this lies the solution," he said impressively; and I believe for a few moments everybody thought he had gone out of his head.

"I'll show it to Marshall first, and explain afterward." As he held the coin toward me, it slipped from his fingers and spun under the bed. The

reporter was on his knees in an instant, reaching for it.

"Lend me your cane, Marshall, so I can hook it out." And before I could give it to him he impatiently seized the stick, and began rummaging under the bed, finally recovering the coin, and passing it to me.

I examined it eagerly. "Why, it's a Lincoln penny!" I exclaimed, at once perplexed and relieved.

Larkins nodded. "That's the solution," he said.

"What has a Lincoln penny to do with the Phantom Shotgun or the mysterious murders?" I asked.

"Wasn't it Lincoln who said: 'You can fool some of the people all of the time, all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time?'"

"I don't see——" I began.

"Well, I do!" he fairly shouted at me. A rapid movement of his hands broke the breech of my shotgun cane, and as he started to extract the cartridge I sprang at him savagely.

Swiftly he raised the cane, and brought it down on my head.

Then Darkness took me in her arms and mothered me.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHICH EXPLAINS EVERYTHING.

Have we two souls? Is the spirit self a tangible thing, merely a few ounces of water and albumen, or is there an actual soul with twin ruling powers hidden from the anatomist, baffling the scalpel and microscope? Each of us has a soul, and many of us are restless in the consciousness of a second self or personality that lies latent, dormant a while, and then asserts itself in horrible form. The body is a ship that the soul directs; yet with eyes open to the consequences we sometimes permit this second soul to guide us on the rocks and reefs to wreck and dereliction. Why? The alienists do not tell us. The psychic reason is hidden deep down in the mysteries of life.

Yes, I killed Hamilton Forbes. I

killed Patton, or Hallaron, the ex-convict and deck steward. I also attempted the lives of Courtlandt and Larkins, and turned the Phantom Shotgun on myself to divert suspicion which I felt was finally centering on me. There I made the one mistake every criminal makes—otherwise that astute young fellow—Larkins—might never have solved the mystery. For had I been in my bunk when the shot was fired, as I told him, three of the bullets imbedded in the woodwork would have had to pass through my body—and I showed not a scratch.

Sitting in the narrow confines of my cell in the Parish Prison, of New Orleans, I have had plenty of opportunity to think over the events that transpired on that fateful voyage of the *Minerva*. As it all happened over a year ago, to kill time—you see, I cannot get over that habit of annihilation—I have put the mystery of the Phantom Shotgun to paper, stating events exactly as they occurred as a disinterested and innocent spectator might have done, allowing the reader to form his own impressions and to draw his own conclusions.

I offer no extenuating circumstances in my defense; for times I have sat back and calmly endeavored to figure out whether I am just a plain murderous brute or the homicidal maniac my lawyer is trying to prove me.

I suppose I am just a plain murderer in every case but that of Forbes. I am glad I killed him—he deserved it as much as any venomous snake that crawls in the grass. Years ago I swore to kill him, and I thank God—if there is a God for such as I—that I have kept that oath.

With Hallaron it is different. I killed him playing safe—self-preservation is the first law of nature, and he knew that I had shot Forbes.

As for Larkins, he was getting "too warm," as the children say when playing hide and seek, and I decided he would be safer out of the way; and then again I took a peculiar pride in powers of mystification, and in a mad moment I decided to show that the

shotgun could go from one ship to the other, no matter how closely watched. But I have never been more grateful for anything than that my aim was at fault, even though it was through him that I ultimately came to grief. I was justified, at least, in the killing of the mutineers, and that stands out as the only praiseworthy act for which I was responsible aboard the *Minerva*.

The Federal authorities and the two sovereign States of New York and Louisiana are still fighting their legal battles over my unworthy self, and Louisiana will probably get me to mete out its own peculiar form of justice. A spectacle of the noose winning over the chair. My choice would merely be a flip of the coin—a Lincoln penny, perhaps.

As you may have guessed, Hamilton Forbes—whose real name was not Forbes—and I were far from strangers. True, he did not recognize me aboard the *Minerva*, but then fifteen years since our last meeting, and a beard, to say nothing of a faked club-foot, effectually disguised me as far as he was concerned.

Forbes wrecked the innocence of my only and well-loved sister, who died giving birth to his still-born child. I swore at the time I would kill him *in his happiest hour*. My bitter determination was long in reaching fruition, for Forbes vanished suddenly and inexplicably, and was lost to my knowledge.

My lust for vengeance smoldered, but never went out. When the newspapers of the country exploited the coming marriage of the Wall Street millionaire and his beautiful stenographer the stories were profusely illustrated. In spite of the years that had passed since I saw Forbes, I knew I had my man, and the desire to avenge sprang into sudden flame.

My plan was to kill and get away. I valued my life, and dared not risk a trial. By chance, as I was passing through New Orleans on my way to New York, in an old Rue Royal antique shop I picked up the "Phantom Shotgun." It was a curious weapon—to all

outward appearances merely a stout walking stick, but containing all the devilish mechanism of a Remington. I had heard of sword canes, but the shotgun cane was new to me, and I realized I had the very thing for my contemplated purpose.

I planned the whole affair with minute and cold-blooded exactitude. Shotgun shells found in my possession would incriminate me; a safe hiding place was imperative. Seeing a cripple with his elevated shoe sole gave me an idea. My munitions of war in my sole defied the close search of the first officer and his men.

The cipher warning was one my sister and Forbes had used, and I was the only other who knew the key. When he saw it, he knew I was somewhere about, ready to fulfill my vow. My method of serving it on Forbes was simple. As Larkins and I passed the window of stateroom A, I had it palmed, and when I tapped the pane, calling the reporter's attention to the burning lights, I dropped it within; and when we were in the room interrogating Forbes, with my hand behind my back I scrawled the sign of Sigma on the wall.

The actual killing of Forbes was not difficult. I slipped out of my stateroom, and fired at the sleeping man through the narrow ventilation slit above the door. My cane was without a stock, so the depression of the muzzle was easy, and that was why it was so difficult for Larkins and the others to figure it out. I was back in my stateroom in an instant, and out again only when I appeared aroused by the reporter. My deck window was next to that of stateroom A, so when Hallaron was directly in front of the room once occupied by Forbes, I fired through my window. The attempts on Courtlandt and Larkins were just as simple, and it was merely to peculiar circumstances that others appeared in unfavorable lights.

The deeds of my "homania" that I have to comfort me—children of my "first soul"—are shooting the Cuban who was about to knife Captain Loyd

and the firing of the shot that stopped the mad rush of the engine crew when the hold was afire. I had nothing to do with the fire, thank you.

There you have it—the good and the bad.

Larkins *was* clever, was he not? At first I felt a superior contempt for the eccentric fellow, but as affairs went on I realized that he would rend the mystery of its enveloping shroud and expose me. At times I would feel the crushing presentment of being found out, and in the secrecy of my stateroom I would battle with my nerves until the panic passed. Then, as the days went by and Larkins acknowledged his growing bewilderment, I grew relieved, but never careless. I heard Larkins say that the time he

spent in bed, recovering from the shock of my bullets, he employed in thinking, and he eventually thought out the solution, coupled with the discovery in my stateroom. And he did fool me with his faintness and weakness, and I never—alert as I was for a single act or expression—caught the significance of his words to me as he left my stateroom saying that I had given him “enough.”

And so ends the story of the Phantom Shotgun.

For the last time I borrow from the files of the *Ledger*. This appeared in an issue of recent date:

COURTLANDT—FORBES.—Married Wednesday evening, June, 1911, by the Reverend Doctor De Witt Ward, Elizabeth Kennedy Forbes and E. Van Buren Courtlandt.

THE NAMES THEY CARRY AROUND

SENATOR GARDNER, of Maine, and Interstate Commerce Commissioner Meyer sympathize with each other about their first names. The real close friends of the senator call him Obadiah, and the thing that Meyer's parents pinned on him is Balthasar.

RUNNING A HEADACHE ON SCHEDULE TIME

LOUIS BROWNLOW, who is noted as a writer and traveler, and who denies that he is a hypochondriac, has a headache every morning at eleven o'clock. No matter how well he may feel in the early-morning hours, or how brightly the sun may shine or how gorgeously the flowers may bloom, Louis is there every day with that eleven-o'clock headache. One morning a friend of his called him on the telephone in his Washington office at about fifteen minutes before eleven and, in the course of the conversation, asked him how he felt.

“Bully right now,” replied Brownlow, “but in fifteen minutes there won't be five people in this city feeling any worse than I will.”

THE BINDING CHARACTER OF HIS OATH

WHEN Thomas S. Martin, a member of the United States Senate from Virginia, was practicing law in his home State, he was noted for his ability in cross-examining witnesses. In one case he began the questioning of a Mr. Brown, the defendant, with this advice:

“Please remember, Mr. Brown, that you must be very careful about everything you say, because you are testifying under oath.”

Mr. Brown, being a high-strung Southern gentleman, was somewhat annoyed by what he considered to be an unnecessary reminder that he had sworn to tell the truth. At the end of his testimony he was told by Martin that, as a witness, he had handled his own case very well.

“Perhaps,” returned Brown, with a pleasant smile, “I might return the compliment if I were not testifying under oath.”

The Man Who Would Play the North Wind

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Chip of the Flying U," "Lonesome Land," Etc.

Listen! The north wind is singing—the north wind and the wolf and the wide unpeopled prairie. Andy and Pink had heard the song a thousand times, but they had never thought there was much music in it—till Olafson joined the Happy Family, Olafson and his violin

THE door opened windily, and he came in, blinking at the sudden change from darkness to yellow lamplight. Big, black-browed, broodingly somber, with the poise of one who has many times faced—and swayed at will—the multitude, he bulked huge on the threshold, while the men in the hotel office stared at him curiously. In one hand he carried a large suit case thickly sprinkled with labels, in a strange language, many of them, which betrayed journeyings afar; under his left arm was a time-scarred violin case. He did not seem in the least embarrassed before the faces which stared; instead he stared back with a certain haughty appraisal of the place and the people before he closed the door against the whooping wind which the dusk had brought out of the west.

Pink, leisurely chalking a billiard cue in preparation of a nice shot which, if successful, should make for the complete discomfiture of his opponent—who was Andy Green—glanced at the stranger idly, smiled across at Andy, and looked again, more attentively. Andy Green's gray eyes, following Pink's glance, widened in recognition of the type, if not the man himself.

"By gracious, Pink, looks like we're due to listen at some grand opera," he murmured, sidling closer to the other. "Barring the open-front vest and swal-

lowtail coat, and footlights, and flowers all over the place, you've got the whole show right there; billed six weeks ahead of himself; fifty cents, one dollar, two, and two-and-a-half, and all the boxes taken by sassiety's elected. I wish somebody'd tell me how he got to Dry Lake, though. He's just about as appropriate as a marble statue of Venus down in the blacksmith shop!"

The stranger walked over to the bar. Before he spoke a word, before he had moved, other than to close the door behind him, he dominated the place. When he had taken two steps forward, Mikey began feverishly wiping his hands on a corner of his bartender's apron, and to experience the internal fluttering of the housewife who sees unexpected company at her door on wash day.

"A room, if you please," said the stranger in a voice like the middle tones of a bass viol. "Weeth bath."

Mikey felt a chill along the spine. There was not, to his knowledge, a room with bath nearer than Great Falls; certainly none in Dry Lake. Mikey swallowed a nervous titter, rolled eyes at his fellows for moral support, and surprised himself by weakly apologizing for the deficiencies of the hotel he represented.

"I can give you a room—the best we've got—though that ain't saying much for it either—by doubling up a couple of the boys. We're pretty full

to-night. I'm sorry we ain't got any bathroom." He set his teeth defiantly upon further abjectness, and fumbled among the keys on a rack behind him. Mikey was a self-poised young man as a rule, and it was his boast that it took a good deal to feeze him. He pulled himself back to his habitual cynical indifference toward the traveling public, beckoned Missouk over to attend the bar in his absence, and led the way out with his chin as high and his back as stiff as that of his guest who stalked after. At the door there was a halt in the measured steps of the stranger.

"My luggage—you haff forgotten it, boy," he reminded gently. And Mikey, swallowing hard, went meekly back and picked up the suit case. He was a bartender primarily, and the guests who lodged oftenest in that hotel were the men of the range land all around. They waited upon themselves as a matter of course. The duties of a porter, therefore, went hard with Mikey, but he did not say anything; and though his ears were strained to catch the laugh of derision, there was silence—the silence with which men pay tribute to death, strange femininity, and greatness.

Dry Lake, with all the self-sufficiency of little towns and little people, was not much given to paying homage to God, man, or devil. But whether it would or not, it paid homage to this big, dark man: the homage of ill-at-ease silence to his face, and of burning curiosity about him and all he did, so soon as he had turned his back. If they had been at all given to psychological analysis, the men of Dry Lake might have found the situation even more interesting.

This strange man did nothing and said nothing to arouse one's curiosity. He ate when the others ate, silently—with dainty habits and seeking glances for those niceties of service which Dry Lake had never possessed—and with a manifest desire to be unassuming and inconspicuous.

He sat much by the window in the barroom, with his hands—wonderful hands they were; long, white, supple-fingered, and nervously sensitive—drumming idly upon the whittled chair

arms, and stared broodingly out upon the bleak, brown sweep of the hills to the west. The crowd was quieter when his big, black-clothed form was sitting there; there was not the slightest reason why it should be so, for he did not seem aware of his surroundings. He never talked to any man, nor did any man attempt speech with him beyond a tentative remark, now and then, upon the weather. His answer, then, was courteous—so courteous as to be alarming—and brief, and inattentive. He went back invariably to his brooding and to staring at the brown hills, and the man who essayed speech with him went sheepishly away.

In a week they learned that his name was Olafson. One hardy soul asked him if he ever played the fiddle, and received a wince and a headshake for reply. And that was as much as Dry Lake knew of him.

One day Pink, and Weary, and that other irrepressible, Andy Green, were loitering in the hotel, dreading the long ride to the Flying U in the teeth of a chill east wind. Olafson was sitting by the window which faced the west and the hills, by his mere presence subduing somewhat the hilarious atmosphere which ever surrounded the boys of the Flying U when others greeted them after an absence.

Pink was sitting on the end of the billiard table, swinging his feet and smoking, while he watched Andy doing card tricks, when he became aware that a hand was laid upon his shoulder. He glanced up quickly, and found himself staring into the face of Olafson; and stare he did, without in the least knowing why he did so.

"I should like a little conversation weeth you, if you haff the leisure and weel be so kind," said Olafson.

Pink slid off the table like an obedient child, and followed the other without a word. In the armchair by the window Olafson settled himself again and caressed abstractedly the whittled notches on the chair arm with those white, supple fingers, and gazed out at the hills. Pink pulled up a chair and sat down, and waited.

"It iss a wild, silent land," said Olafson, and turned his dark, unfathomable eyes upon Pink. "You know it well, do you not?"

"Yes," Pink answered docilely.

"Do you know of a place where it iss far from other places; where no person would come often; where one might live alone, and see no face, and hear no voice unless he should choose—do you know such a place?"

Pink dimpled briefly. "It's pretty much that way all over," he said candidly. "It keeps the rest of us busy riding around the lonesomeness."

"Ah!" For the first time since he appeared in Dry Lake, Olafson smiled, and Pink sat abashed before him. Like a gleam of sunlight on the storm reflections in a lake, it was. "Weel you tell me of a place—a hut—never mind how small and mean a hut, or cabin, if you like, where one might live in the midst of the solitude; alone weeth all the peopled wilderness—?" He caught himself, as it were, from rhapsodizing, and smiled again reassuringly at Pink. "I am not mad, young friend," he said gently. "I am weary; weary weeth the soul weariness which makes one sick for the great solitudes. Of peoples I am sick—sick unto death. There iss a cure; it's there." He lifted his right hand and, with a turn of the wrist, inexpressibly easy and graceful, indicated the hills beyond the little huddle of houses which was Dry Lake. "Weel you help me to find that cure?"

"Sure," said Pink, and for the first time in his life, perhaps, was keenly conscious of the crudity of the expression.

Olafson smiled again—one could see that there was a sweetly sunny quality in his big, rugged, brooding nature. "A hut far off from people," he stipulated, with some eagerness. "Lonely—oh, so very lonely and far away, where no one would come. Do you know a place like that?"

"A dozen, if you want them." The dimples stood in Pink's cheeks.

"But one iss sufficient; the loneliest of them all—where iss that one?"

Pink meditated for a moment. "If it's

lonesomeness you want, and straight-up-and-down God-forsakenness, I'd say, try One-Man Coulee. I wintered there once, so I know. The shack there is pretty fair, considering nobody ever lives in it if he can help himself, and the water is good. But it's away off from the road, and except when we ride circle over there in round-up, or the outfit uses it for a line camp, I don't suppose three men a year ever see the shack."

"That iss good!" The fingers of Olafson beat a nervous tattoo upon the chair. "I weel go to that hut and I weel find the cure for my soul weariness." His rugged face lighted briefly and settled again into the almost forbidding look of gloomy introspection. "There weel be matters to attend, what you call details. Your face I like; I do not like many—but you, yes. Weel you give me assistance with the details?" He held up a hand and inspected absently his finger tips. "One must eat," he sighed, "and of the providing of food I know little."

Pink sensed his utter inability to cope with the practical side of his plan, and straightway set himself the task of attending to the details. Andy and Weary he would have enlisted also in the cause; but Weary wanted to catch the next train for Fort Benton, and so excused himself. Andy, however, bent his head over the list of supplies which Pink was painstakingly compiling, and offered now and then a suggestion, of value and otherwise. Olafson sat back in his chair, drummed nervously with his fingers, and watched the two abstractly, with now and then a wistful glance toward the hills for whose solitudes he yearned.

"Say, if he's got money enough to stand the extra cost," Andy suggested under his breath when the list seemed complete, "we better put down more canned stuff, and not so blame' much bacon and beans. He can't live on line-camp grub, Pink. Ask him how much he can spend on grub, why don't you?"

Pink hated to do that, and fidgeted over the list with his pencil. "I wonder if he can make sour-dough bread,

or anything like that?" he whispered anxiously. "If he can't, he's up against it. You ask him, Andy."

"Ask him yourself; he's your orphan, not mine." Andy licked his pencil and drew a heavy line through "*Prucns, 10 lbs.*" "No gazabo that wears his hair like that, and a frock coat common, and that shines his finger nails every day of his life, is going to eat ten pounds of prunes in a thousand years," he chided in Pink's ear. "Nor any gallon of Honey-dew sirup. This is a dickens of a grubstake for a man with a sick soul!"

"Wish I knew how much he wants to spend," Pink whispered back in a harassed tone, too worried to resent the criticism.

"Well, *ask* him, why don't yuh? He don't look to me like he'd bite."

So Pink, for once in his life showing in his cheeks the flush of embarrassment, broached delicately the subject of expense. Olafson brought back his thoughts from far journeyings into the past, grasped the difficulty, and unbuttoned his black frock coat. From a leather bill folder with initials tooled intricately upon the side, he produced a couple of bank notes, laid them upon Pink's knee, and looked at Pink inquiringly.

"It iss enough?" he queried. "If not——"

"It's a-plenty, and then some," Pink assured him, folding the bills together after he had surreptitiously shown Andy the denomination of them. "Two hundred for grub—we can turn ourselves loose on the canned stuff," he whispered jubilantly.

Straightway that list suffered revision as to plain necessities, and reckless expansion as to luxuries. Andy, drawing upon his fertile imagination rather freely, deduced a variety of eatables which seemed to him best fitted to find their way beneath that frock coat. He leaned rather strongly toward pickles, preserves, and condiments, and would have disdained such plebeian foodstuffs as coffee, bacon, and flour. But Pink was more practical. He stuck doggedly to the staple lines, standing

pat on his twenty pounds of white beans and ten pounds of brown, with salt pork for seasoning.

Men sidled up curiously to see what it was all about, to be waved off by those two who wrote, scratched out the writing, sucked their pencils, and wrote again, arguing in undertones the while. They did not believe in doing things half-heartedly. Since they had taken upon themselves the responsibility of this strange man's physical comfort, their inclination was to discharge that responsibility with perfect satisfaction to themselves and, if possible, to Olafson himself.

When half a tablet had been consumed, and their tongues were blackened to their palates, and their nerves on edge with argument they took the many-times revised list to the store, and there added and subtracted items desperately as fresh labels on the shelves caught their eyes. It occurred to Pink that Olafson would need a bed, and a few cooking utensils. A stove stood in the cabin, he remembered. So they frugally curtailed the supply of luxuries somewhat—taking off, among other things, two bottles of chili sauce, one of Worcester, and some stuffed olives—that they might not be compelled to ask Olafson for more money.

They made arrangements for a team to haul him and his outfit to One-Man Coulee, bought an ax at the last minute, and, after that, a lamp and a case of coal oil, which they had overlooked, and then wondered if they had not forgotten matches, and so got another fifty cents' worth to make sure; after which they went over to the hotel and told Olafson they had everything ready, so that he could start next morning if he wanted to. And Pink, with a certain conscious pride, went down into his pockets and brought up a twenty-dollar gold piece and some silver, which he handed over, along with the store bill of goods.

"The team we didn't pay for; but don't yuh let Pat Morrisy stick you for more than fifteen dollars," he warned. "He ought to haul you out for ten—but he won't, most likely. And your

bed and everything is on the bill, and we'll tell the Old Man about you using the shack. That'll be all right—he won't care."

Olafson looked from one brown face to the other, and at the money in his hand; looked again into their eyes, and thanked them with grave words spoken primly, after the manner of one who has learned his English from books. He did not make the blunder of offering them money, and they were more kindly disposed toward him because of the omission.

"Peoples I do not care to see," he said simply. "But you gentlemen weel be always welcome. Come, and I weel play for you." He smiled—and the smile was infinitely tired and sad. "I would not play for others, and that iss why I am here, perhaps; but for you I weel play."

"We'll sure come," they promised heartily, and wished him luck and left him, wondering vaguely at his paradoxical aloofness and reserve, and his childlike candor and helplessness.

It was because of his helplessness that, without saying much about it to each other—and to the Happy Family nothing at all—they took occasion to ride next day to One-Man Coulee. They found the stovepipe pulled apart by many battering winds, and they joined it and braced it well with wire which they hunted a long while to find. They dragged up some posts from the old corral, and would have chopped a pile of wood if there had been an ax upon the place. They made shift, with a stub of broom, to sweep out the accumulation of dust and rats' nests—and it was when he was pushing the trash off the doorstep that Pink stopped with a look of tragedy.

"So help me Josephine, we never bought Ole Bull a broom!" he cried, and stared doubtfully at the wreck of one which he held before him.

"Gosh!" Andy ejaculated in dismay. "Are you sure, Pink?"

Pink nodded. "And we never put down a water bucket and dipper, either, did we? Nor soap, nor——"

"We got him a dozen cans of sauer-

kraut, anyway, and a big hunk of tim-burger," soothed Andy. "Nobody but a Dutchman ever says 'iss.' And he don't look to me like he'd know how to use a broom if he had one. It kinda seems to me we did put down soap. Say, this sure is a lonesome hole!"

"Well, that's what he wanted," Pink retorted defensively. "He asked for the lonest place I could think of—and this is it."

"A good scrubbing wouldn't hurt that floor a blamed bit," Andy observed irrelevantly. "If I had a broom and a bucket—sure you didn't order a broom, Pink?"

Pink was listening to the far-off *ka-chuck* of a wagon bumping over the uneven prairie sod, with a rock here and there to accentuate the bumps. "He's coming," he announced, and gave a last glance around the bare little room, where the dust of his energetic sweeping had not yet settled. "I don't envy him the winter none, and that's a cinch," he observed. "I don't believe a sheep-herder could stand more than a month here without going plumb loco."

"Ole's loco now," Andy asserted with conviction. "If he wasn't he wouldn't be out here at all. He'd be living up to his hair in some city, and ladies would be passing up flowers tied with wide ribbons when he quit playing."

"I don't know," said Pink, "why we take it for granted he can play; nobody's ever heard him."

"Well, he can, I'll gamble on that. Look at the way he wears his hair! And—did yuh take notice of his hands? I'll bet you money he can play!"

He came, sitting aloft upon the high spring seat beside Pat Morrisy, with a dirty canvas horse blanket over his broadcloth-clothed knees, and the violin case cuddled in his arms like a sleeping child. His hair, like the mane of a lion dyed with India ink, fluttered in the stiff north wind. His face was as stonily calm as the Sphinx, his eyes sullen.

Pat pushed the brake forward to the last notch with a yank not far from vicious, and came skidding down the rough slope to the cabin. His "Whoa"

was a menace to his team, and the very set of his shoulders betokened distaste for the journey and dislike for the man beside him.

"Good thing we're here," murmured Andy, apprehending the situation. "Pat's been trying to pump Ole Bull, and they don't love each other a little bit. He'd dump the stuff on the ground, and collect his money, and drive off, if he was here alone with him."

Pat came near doing that very thing, as it was. He regarded the two with a snort meant to express his scorn of their mission, unloaded as hurriedly as might be, gave another snort or two by way of reply to Andy's remark that it was a nice little drive out from town, pocketed the money which Olafson extended haughtily in his direction, climbed up to the high seat, released the brake with another yank, and yelled ferociously at his team.

"It iss good," said Olafson, when Pat had driven out of sight, standing before the cabin, with his eyes greedily fixed upon the barren coulee which seemed all there was of the world, so jealously did it hug its barrenness to itself. Only to the south did a twisted arm reach out coaxingly to the prairie beyond, so that one glimpsed the wide land as through a half-open doorway. "It iss good," he repeated, and walked slowly down into the bleak hollow, with his violin case still cuddled in his arms.

Pink and Andy carried in the supplies and unpacked them. Pink also made Olafson's bed upon the board bunk in one corner, while Andy chopped wood with the new ax, and started a fire, and put some coffee on to boil.

"Say," began Andy in the tone of one who has worked out a problem to its logical conclusion, "a helpless son of a gun like him ain't going to make out very well alone, here. I'll bet he never made a bed in his life, or washed a tin plate, or boiled a pot of coffee. We can't hang around and be his hired girls *all* the time. What the deuce is he going to do?"

Pink flipped the last quilt over the bunk so that it lay smoothly, tucked in

the end, and pushed his hat back off his curls.

"Search me," he said impatiently. "I was just thinking about that myself. It's the darned 'details,' as he calls them, that's going to stick him if he don't look out. He ought to be in here right now, learnin' a few things about cooking his own grub. Where's he at, anyway?"

Andy went to the door, looked out, and pointed an eloquent finger. Far down the coulee, seated upon an outcropping ledge of sandstone, his face upturned to the jagged coulee wall opposite him, and to a hawk circling slowly above it, was Olafson. From the lift and sweeping gestures of his arm they knew that he was playing his violin, and, as they listened, certain strains swept, thin, and sweet, and evanescent, to their ears.

For long minutes they stood there in the doorway and watched him, and listened for the vagrant strains which could penetrate the distance, detached, yet clearly defined, like jagged peaks thrusting nakedly up through a thick blanket of fog which hides all else.

They did not like to disturb him. Perhaps they vaguely understood that there is an intoxication of mood which sweeps one above and beyond the realities of life, and wipes out, for the time, the physical need of food, or warmth, or rest.

Since it was Sunday, and their time was their own, they spent the next hour in baking a supply of bread—baking-powder bread—sufficient to last Olafson for several days, and cooked what other food they thought necessary for his needs. They cut a generous supply of wood, and then, being hungry, and seeing no sign of Olafson's immediate return to the cabin, they ate, and afterward washed the dishes. Then they mounted their horses and rode down the coulee on their way home, meaning to speak to their strange protégé, and bring him back from his dreamings. But Olafson gave them no heed beyond a stare and a negligent nod as they rode past, so they left him alone upon the ledge and went their way.

"He ain't real nutty," Andy diagnosed shrewdly on the way home. "He's a genius, I take it; and there ain't anything much you can do for that. I guess he won't starve or freeze, anyway."

So, having done for him what their humane instincts demanded of them, they rewarded themselves by making a great tale for the ears of the Happy Family; a tale which was received with incredulous jeers, and set the bunk house buzzing with argument till bedtime.

Once after that Pink and Andy rode over to One-Man Coulee, and were received courteously enough. They saw that Olafson gave slight heed to the bothersome "details," and that his eating was desultory and of the kind to breed dyspepsia. They cooked a pot of beans, another supply of bread, washed his dishes, and swept his floor, and Olafson remembered his promise and played for them while they worked. It was sure great stuff, Pink said afterward, but there didn't seem to be much tune to it. He would greatly have preferred a two-step, though he did not like to tell Olafson so.

Andy, who had instincts for the bigger things of life, told him bluntly that he ought to go buy him another musical clock; it was, he accused, about as high a brand of music as he was equal to. For himself, he listened intently while Olafson played, and was silent long after the music ceased, looking at Olafson with something akin to awe in his gray eyes. And after that he frequently rode alone to One-Man Coulee, and sat quiet by the broken stove and listened to the wonderful music which Olafson drew from the violin he handled so tenderly, caressing the strings with the light touches a mother gives to the face of a sleeping child.

One Sunday when the sky and the leaden air promised snow, and wind, and biting cold, Andy bethought him of Olafson alone, and ignorant of weather signs and the ill they often foretell, and rode to One-Man Coulee alone. The sorrel team of Pat Mor-

risky stood before the door, with tails tucked between shivering hind legs; and because of their presence he went in distrustfully. Within were Pat and another—a thin man in a glossy fur coat. The thin man looked up, saw only a brown-faced young man with an unobtrusive manner, and went on talking, ignoring his presence. Olafson, hunched sullenly before the stove with the broken front grate, through which red coals fell now and then to the hearth, listened and said nothing in reply.

The thin man talked of a broken contract, and of big seasons, and of packed houses, and money being wasted by Olafson's insane flight from the world that clamored for his music.

"I weel not go," said Olafson doggedly, when the thin man came to an anxious pause.

"But you can't stop here, Olafson!" the other protested. "Think of what you owe the world! A talent like yours—you can't bury it here in this hole; and the squalor—man, it's suicide! Nothing more or less than suicide."

"It iss freedom!" Olafson raised his shaggy head and looked at his old manager with sullen defiance. "Always it iss money of which you speak. The peoples, they do not love the music—they love to sit weeth others and listen to Olafson, because Olafson iss the great violinist, and haff won much fame. All my life I haff played for money. All my life I haff hated that thing money. You would harness Olafson to the plow—you would make him vork for you—to deeg up money!" He sprang to his feet and towered over the other, and his eyes blazed with the hot rebellion that surged within him.

"It iss freedom!" he cried, flinging out a long arm so suddenly that he of the glossy fur coat shrank farther away. "Neffor pefore haff I been free. Always haff I been the slave—the slave that vorks for hire. Music—you would make of my music a slave. The great, beautiful music, you would haff it come for hire. Peoples they must pay money if they would listen! Bah! it iss that

you make chains to bind me and my violin to the plow." He lifted his head, shaking back the mane of black hair with an unconscious gesture of scorn. "These hills, they do not pay. They hear the great music of my violin——" He stopped as if his thoughts had grown too vague for speech.

"It iss enough," he said, with haughty finality. "I am not a slave. My violin, it iss not a slave. I weel not go."

He sat down again before the stove and brooded there, and gave no further heed to the expostulations of the man. So, finally, they drove away and left him there, the giant who refused longer to plow the furrow for hire.

When they had been gone for some time, Olafson raised his head and looked around the tiny cabin; saw Andy sitting there, and smiled vaguely upon him.

"It iss good. They are gone, and you remain; and the hills, they remain, and the freedom which I came to seek, it remains also." He fell to staring at the coals as they dropped through the broken grate. "So fall the years, and turn black and dead like the coals as they fall," he muttered dreamily.

The north wind, which had blown in half-hearted gusts all day, with periods of leaden quiet between, rose and whooped lonesomely around the cabin; the crooning wail of it won Olafson from his dreams of what had been, perhaps, and could never be again except in his dreaming.

"The north wind, it iss of those dead years it iss singing," he said to Andy, who sat quietly smoking on the other side of the stove, waiting until the impulse seized Olafson to play. He had learned that Olafson's music came of its own volition, or it came not at all, and he had learned also that silence and dreams were the conjurors to call it forth. So he waited, and smoked, and put more wood in the stove, and thought his own thoughts.

Down the bare, brown hills came another song, the howl of the gray wolf as he sniffed the coming storm. Eerie it come, and mingled with the wailing of

the wind. Olafson lifted his head and listened to the cry, and his eyes, though they still stared unseeingly, were no longer dreaming eyes; intent they were, seeing more than the ears could hear.

"That—it iss not of the dead years. It iss of the ages to come. It iss the Song of the Ages. I weel play." He listened, lifted his huge body from the creaking old chair, and went into the shadows—for the storm was bringing an early night. When he came back he held his violin, and his hands trembled as they touched caressingly the strings.

"They sing," he murmured to himself. "They sing, the north wind, and the wolf, and the wide, unpeopled prairie! Great iss the song—they sing of the ages to come. To-night we, too, shall sing—what never pefore has been sung by the violin. We shall sing as they are singing, the north wind, and the prairie, and the wolf!"

He poised the bow above the strings and waited, for the wind had lulled for the moment and the wolf was silent. "It wass for this we came, my violin and I, and we did not know," he said, his eyes glowing toward Andy. "I knew only that we hungered to be free. But it wass for this song that we came."

They came again, rising mournfully—the north wind and the wolf, singing together as they had sung when the prairies were young. The bow dropped lightly upon the strings, and they, too, sang wonderfully, rising weirdly with the long-drawn howl of the wolf, falling and murmuring with the wind at the cabin's corner. Andy's cigarette dropped unnoticed from his fingers while he leaned forward and listened.

The eyes of Olafson stared straight before him. What they saw—or what Andy saw, and so thought that Olafson saw also—was a wide, wide land lying stark under a brooding night sky, with bars of faint moonlight stealing furtively into the hollows; with the north wind, a great, tangible shape, rushing wantonly after the moonbeams, singing, shrieking when they shrank

away; and a lone wolf, buffeted upon a hilltop, his coat roughened by the wind's ungentle hands, pointing his nose to the bleak sky, and howling his challenge to all the world.

"It iss not the song of the ages to come," said Olafson, while he played. "It iss the world-old song—the folk song of the north wind, and the prairies, and the wolf!"

It was a wild, unearthly rhapsody that he played, and the minutes slid into hours with the sliding of his bow across the strings. It was a plaintive, wailing thing that he played, and Andy forgot to feed the fire, so that the room grew chill. But it was not the north wind that he played, nor the wolf, nor the whisper of the storm which now beat upon the cabin.

The fingers of Olafson hesitated, moved uncertainly. The wind, it mimicked the wailing strings, and then whooped off into a wild song of its own, where the violin could not follow. The wolf howled derision, and he could not catch the notes of its eerie cadences. The blizzard, heralded throughout the day by leaden skies and a fitful wind, buffeted the little cabin as Andy had fancied the wolf upon the hilltop, and shook clods of earth loose from the sod roof and sent them thudding upon the floor.

"This, it iss the storm wraith of the folk song," Olafson, listening, muttered. "The folk song of the wild! Never before haff I lived, never before haff I played, until now!"

Then—he played, did Olafson!. His long, lean fingers caught the visions his staring eyes saw, and carried them to the strings of his violin; while across the stove, in deep shadow, Andy Green held his breath and listened. Times he played as blew the north wind, as swept the blizzard, as howled the wolf. Tone for tone, sweeping waves to a passion of sound, shrieking, whistling eerily like drunken elves at revel, how he played—did Olafson!

Again he paused, his fingers groping for the tones to match a whining croon at the corner. His breath came in half sobs with his striving. Times he had

almost caught the song, but even as the strings began to echo it exultantly, it eluded him like a mocking demon that could never be made a captive.

"Oh, to play the song!" He sprang to his feet, sobbing, still playing wildly. "They mock me—the north wind, and the prairie, and the wolf! But I shall play their song. They shall not say that Olafson, Olafson the master of the violin and of music—they shall not laugh among themselves and say that Olafson, he could not play their song! I shall play it! I shall triumph over the north wind, I shall laugh at the prairie, I shall send the wolf shrinking ashamed to his den! Ages have they sung the song, and they alone. But to-night I, the human thing, and this instrument which humans have made, we shall know their song!"

He paused just long enough to jerk open the door, and he stood there looking out. "I shall know their song. I shall go to the north wind, and to the prairie, and to the wolf, and they shall teach me their song, ages old—the folk song of the wind!"

Andy, sitting there under the spell of his playing, watched him while he stood a moment still, gazing into the night. Then he was gone, and after him went Andy, stung back to realization of what it all meant.

He heard afar off a high, sweet strain, like the wind singing in the treetops upon a mountain. Then the blizzard, a white wraith, came sweeping past, and muffled jealously the sound, so that Andy, stumbling blindly after, was bewildered and could not follow. Once again he heard faintly a single high, sweet, exultant note, long-drawn. Then the wind whooped anew, and the blizzard flung its burden of snow into the straining eyes of Andy Green, and when it lulled again the sweet, high note was still.

And though he searched and called through half that wild night, and with daybreak summoned help and searched anew, neither Andy nor any other human ever heard again the music of Olafson, the man who would play the north wind.

The Cat and the King

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "Guns and a Girl," "Criminals All," Etc.

The great things that happened in the Orient when Russia was driven back and the iron hand of Japan fell heavily on Korea are matters of history. Only the big outstanding facts, however, became known. What went on beneath the surface has been for the most part a closed book. In this story you get a side light on the machinations of the wily Jap, a new chapter in history written by a man who was on the scene at the time and who knows whereof he speaks. It is hard for us of the practical West to know the superstitious peoples in the Land of the Morning Calm. Mr. Ritchie's story will help you to a better understanding of them.

(A Complete Novel)

IF I did not tell the true story of the abdication of Old Emperor Bugs, who ever would?

Not Bethell; poor chap, he died before he could free his soul of what was crying to be heard of all the world. Nor Stevens, even if he would; a Korean bullet fetched him in San Francisco, you remember, and neat Japanese vengeance groped blindly for a while before it found several to pay the price of his assassination. Who, then? Why, there's only the Girl and myself, and when I met her by chance over at the Astor House in Shanghai only last winter, and suggested that she might put what she knew into a moving-picture film which would unroll to packed houses all over the circuit, she shuddered a bit and said with a queer little gasp: "Billy, it would be like opening the doors of a tomb. I can't."

So now, that I am living in the drab security of an elevator apartment house in Brooklyn, and the Jamaican Mercury in the tapestried hallway does not in the least resemble one of Hasegawa's cute

little spies, why should I not put to paper the story of how three in Korea flirted with sudden death—walked blindfolded in the jungle of fine Oriental diplomacy—for the sake of that weird old rummy, the Emperor Bugs? Even though the maniac in the apartment below has been three hours at her "finger exercise," and the old-clothes man is screeching in the street, it is not hard to open a shutter in my mind and live once more, right in the midst of the musty old wilderness of Seou's antiquities, those days of terror and of high adventure. Ha! When I, a flat dweller of staid Brooklyn, was a Lord of the Golden Umbrella, and the Girl was an emperor's kidnaper!

I'll have to begin by telling who Bethell was. A gadfly, that's what this squatty, bull-headed little Britisher was—a gadfly whose sole aim in life was to puncture the Japanese hide in Korea during those sad years after the close of the war with Russia. I don't know where Bethell came from; maybe it was Nagasaki, or Kobe; but there he was, in the City of Shadows, with his little

four-page *Korea Daily News*, before ever the last Russian was driven across the Sha-ho, biting and stinging the Japanese usurpers with every stickful of type that his Korean compositors set up.

Little Hagiwara, Hasegawa's Man Friday, used to drop spiteful hints about Bethell's newspaper being subsidized by the Russians; I never believed him, knowing that Bethell, in his blind, bull-charging way, was convinced of the iniquity of Japan's actions in the Land of the Morning Calm, and was quite sincere in tilting at the big windmill of Japanese diplomacy with his puny pen.

How this slashing, cutting little Britisher did get under the skins of Hasegawa, and Megata, and all of the rest of the Japanese "advisers" to old Emperor Bugs! When he showed up the fine trade Japanese counterfeiters did in lead twenty-chon pieces—invoiced as "nails" from Osaka—Megata screamed protest. When he exposed the Japanese trick of appropriating Korean peasants' property by the square mile "for military purposes," General Hasegawa, military commander of Chosen, squirmed and fumed.

The empire of Japan, you see, triumphant over the Russians, was appropriating Korea, which it had promised to protect, as a legitimate spoil of war, but it was accomplishing its purpose of absorption in a characteristically Oriental method of indirection.

And there stood Bethell, almost the only champion of the Koreans, and of the Emperor Bugs, defying the Japanese, uncovering their neat little tricks, urging the Koreans to resistance at every turn. Wrong he was, often; intemperate at all times; but the epitaph that ought to be carved over poor Bethell's clay, wherever it may lie in that grim land of ghosts and goblins, ought to be: "Whatsoever he did, he did with his might."

And now the Girl.

One night in October—the year was 1905—she walked into the dining room of Looie's Astor House outside the South Gate of Seoul, and very demurely

she took her seat and began to give her order to Pak, the pussy-footed waiter. Bethell and I were at our table across the room; Bethell was right in the midst of a tirade against Hasegawa, but he stopped short, both eyes on the newcomer.

"Ripping!" said Bethell, with a little intake of his breath. And she was. Tall and willowy; her head sat on her shoulders with an air of quiet assurance that was good to see; she had a great coil of auburn hair piled high above her forehead. None of your soft and melting beauty in her face. No, sir! Her features were irregular—eyes very wide apart and mouth too large, maybe, to get a certificate from a beauty specialist. But there was a stamp of—how shall I put it?—independence; yes, and glorious self-reliance and fine reserve on that face. They combined to make it handsome—striking.

Bethell and I both itched to know who she was and what she could be doing in Seoul, where mighty few white women except missionaries and the wives of diplomats ever come. We raced through our meal and got Looie aside out in the bar to tell us all he knew. Looie shrugged his shoulders and cast his eyes to the ceiling.

"She ees alone! And for luggage—one leetle tronk an' one suit case. Labels? Yes, yes—from ze Astor House, Shanghai; from ze Oriental Palace, Yokohama; *aussi* Pacific Mail from San Francisco."

Pak, the waiter, came padding into the bar that minute and tapped Bethell on the arm.

"New missis like look-see you," said Pak. "Like look-see Mis' Bethell, she say."

Bethell left the barroom with a queer crease of perplexity between his eyes, albeit he grinned in triumph over me. He was gone almost an hour, while Looie and I speculated wildly over glasses of *Fernet Blanca* as to the identity of the mysterious, red-headed girl and what her mission in Seoul might be.

Then Bethell came to the door. He beckoned me with a mysterious gesture,

and I left Looie in a fine Gallic spirit of typhoon.

"Something big, Billy," Bethell whispered hoarsely as the door closed behind us. "Whopping big; and she, the Girl, and I will need you. Come!"

Bethell was humming excitedly under his breath all the way up the rickety stairs that led to the room called by courtesy the "ladies' parlor" on the second floor of the dilapidated Astor House. The Girl—for that's what Bethell and I dubbed her from the first meeting—rose to meet us as we entered. I can see now the coppery glory that the light flung about her head, the level, confident gleam in her two violet eyes, the fine line of power that was drawn by her wide lips. We were introduced by Bethell—and I'm not going to give the name I heard, for the Girl still has work in her chosen line to do.

"Now you'd better tell Billy everything that you told me," Bethell then said. "He's an American like yourself; he's an American with nerve, furthermore; and I'd trust him like my own brother." So did this big-hearted, fighting Britisher flatter me with the extravagance of his language.

The Girl took a swift look about, peeped into the hall, closed and locked the door, and then we three sat down in a close circle under the ridiculous old swinging lamp, and she began to speak. Her voice was low, vibrant; it had a thrilling quality that would make a man swim the Gulf of Pechili at its bidding. That voice, those eyes made the Girl what she was—and is—a ruler of men.

"I come to Seoul," she said, "representing a certain powerful man at present in Shanghai, and his name is——" The Girl slipped a little gold pencil off her chatelaine, whipped a page from a notebook she had in her pocketbook, and wrote a proper name. I do not intend to reveal that name now; suffice it to say that it was that of one of the very clever men who clear the rocks from the path of Russia's "glacial advance" through Asia; of one whose hand has done more to mold history in

the Far East than any other. When I had looked at the writing on the slip of paper, the Girl tore the piece into very fine particles and dropped them back into her purse.

"And all that I have to do here in Seoul is to kidnap the emperor," she added, with a rare smile.

Of course, I was flabbergasted, Bethell's eyes were shining as he looked over at me and nodded his head enthusiastically.

"So that's all?" I asked with a weak attempt at raillery.

"Maybe not," she answered, just the shadow of rebuke in her voice. "Let me explain, as I have already explained to Mr. Bethell. The—the gentleman whose name I have just shown you has definite information that within the next three weeks Japan is going to make her biggest stroke in Korea. Marquis Ito is to come over here and force the emperor to sign away the sovereignty of his country under a Japanese protectorate. Japan has sounded England and the United States on the move, and has been told that if she can twist affairs around so as to make it appear that the request for a protectorate comes from the emperor himself there will be no notice of the steal taken by London or Washington. But—and understand this point—Japan knows that Germany and especially Russia, whom she is trying her best to conciliate now the war is over, would not countenance a grab without some show of Korean willingness."

Believe me, it was strange to sit there behind locked doors and listen to this clear-eyed young woman speak of chancelleries and the shifting of secret balances as she might of Pomeranians in a dog show.

"You know," she continued, "that the old emperor would rather cut off his topknot than agree to the signing away of his sovereignty. You know that he fears just such pressure as Marquis Ito is coming over here to apply. He has already rushed Hulbert to Washington to intercede with Roosevelt. But here is the point: if the emperor's seal is not set on that protocol of a pro-

tectorate that Ito is coming here to obtain, Japan will not dare to steal Korea. Furthermore, poor old Bugs believes that if he does not sign away his rights the Japanese will assassinate him. Well?" the Girl asked with an odd light in her eyes. "What's the answer?"

I shook my head. I was bewildered; did not catch the drift of her design.

"Why, Russia will offer him through me an asylum in Shanghai. By flight the old emperor will show Japan's hand down on the table. Ito cannot put his deal through. Germany and Russia will inquire what is happening in Korea to force its ruler to skip. Japan cannot dare to fly in the face of the world's outraged sensibilities."

The Girl threw back her gorgeous head and laughed a silent, whole-hearted laugh—all with those big violet eyes.

"Do I make a noise like a professor in secret history?" she asked. "But, anyway, you see it. You catch the spirit of this big game that my friend in Shanghai hopes to play through you gentlemen and me. 'See Bethell,' was the way he gave final instructions the night before I left Shanghai. 'See Bethell, and if it is possible to do the trick, Bethell will do it.'

"And now I've seen Bethell, and Bethell allows me to see you, Mr. Billy, and—and the fat's in the fire." She made a winsome gesture of lifting a glass to her lips. "So here's to Ito Horibumi, Marquis of Japan, and may he take our dust."

I will not go into all the details of that long, whispered talk we three had in the "ladies' parlor." Bethell gave the Girl a clear picture of what the situation was at the palace; how the emperor and his imbecile crown prince were surrounded by spies and tale-bearers; what measures Hasegawa had taken to keep old Bugs practically a prisoner in his own imperial suite; who of his craven ministers had been bought by the Japanese, and who remained loyal, though in daily terror of their lives. When he raised the question of how the Girl was to gain audience with his majesty we had another

glimpse of the remarkable resource of this friend of diplomats.

"Why, I have come to Seoul to paint his majesty's portrait," she answered, with a confident smile. "I have already painted the portrait of the old dowager empress in Peking, and the dear old lady gave me an autograph letter and hung me around with jade chains till I looked like a Christmas tree. And, besides, I have some other certificates of character."

She went to her trunk and brought out a thin packet of papers. One was a letter from a Very Big Man in Washington; another bore the signature of the American minister to China; still a third was from the wife of the British ambassador at Tokyo.

"My tickets of admission to the emperor's palace," she laughed.

Bethell and I took our leave about ten o'clock and went down to the bar to talk things over further. Maybe it was midnight and we were still over Looie's single battered pool table, when the silence was split by a pistol shot.

Looie came running into the bar from his little office, where he had been nodding away his regular nightly potations. There was a sound of pattering feet in the servants' quarters behind the hotel. The watchman at the gate set up an infernal shaking of his iron staff, cluttered with tinkling rings.

A clear voice came down from the head of the stairs above just as we were moving from the bar out into the central hallway.

"Will somebody come up to my room?"—it was the Girl's voice. Bethell and I exchanged glances of apprehension—"I have just had to shoot a burglar."

We found her—Looie, and Bethell, and I—standing under the light of the little bracket lamp in the hall. A long figured-crape kimono covered her night-dress; two great ropes of shining burnt gold hung down over each shoulder, alive with light in the contrast with the pale green of the kimono. She held a short, heavy automatic concealed under the folds of the kimono, where she had gathered it about her breast.

She did not say a word as we came panting up to where she stood, but motioned that Looie bring the lamp. She preceded us into her room and nodded to a little alcove, jutting out into the broad balcony which girdled the second story of the hotel. There her trunk stood, opened. By it was a sprawling blotch of blue—the blue of the Japanese coolie's surtout.

It was Bethell who turned the dead man over so that his coarse, simian face with its topping brush of black wire hair lay in the light. Bethell looked up at the Girl with a quizzical face.

"Yes," she said in a flat, emotionless voice. "Beginning right away, are they not?"

CHAPTER II.

It was Stevens who arranged the audience with his majesty two days after the Girl's arrival in Seoul. I believe that this was the only mistake Stevens ever made. He was, you see, adviser to the Japanese advisers of the Korean government—the shrewd, calculating wheel within a wheel, who earned all the Tokyo ministry paid him by directing the devious course of its diplomacy at that grand old mud heap of Seoul. I do not believe Stevens would have interested himself at all in the Girl's case if she hadn't turned the full battery of her eyes upon him and, incidentally, shown him that letter from the Very Big Man at Washington. At any rate, Stevens opened the way to the palace, and thither we went, the Girl and I, on a sparkling October morning. It was no trick for me to have audience with the emperor, because, as exalted deputy collector of the imperial customs and possessor of the Order of the Golden Umbrella, I always went armed with a double-barreled "open sesame."

"My friend," she said, turning a quiet smile into my eyes as I sat by her side in the state carriage which had been sent to fetch us, "this is the biggest game I've ever stalked, and—and I am supremely happy."

"And not the least bit afraid?" I queried. "The other night, you know

—that Japanese who came in to look over your trunk; the littlest cog in the admirable spy machine here in Seoul. What he might have done——"

She interrupted me with a low laugh, thrilling with suppressed animal spirits.

"Clumsy—clumsy," said the Girl. "These little brown brothers are very elemental, after all. Now, in Russia, or France, a polite agent of the secret service would have waited until one was away from one's room—and then would not have disturbed so much as a pleat in one's dinner gown when going through the trunk. But here they send a burglar—to be sacrificed."

So the Girl rode to meet Adventure with a laugh on her lips. Through the twisted streets of this ancient heap of ruins—the city of a thousand years' sleep—passed a bronze-haired Semiramis, bound on a mission to steal an emperor. And there was I, chained by her eyes, her voice, her superb spirit of daring, deliberately following into a labyrinth of Oriental guile from which there well might be no return. Yet I went fatuously. I felt like D'Artagnan, riding into Paris to snatch a prize from fate at the end of a long sword.

In the anteroom of the audience chamber we found little Hagiwara, the ubiquitous eyes and ears of General Hasegawa—Hagiwara, the suave and smiling master of the emperor's court, under whose scowl the craven Korean palace fixtures cringed, and at whose bidding convenient "suicides" were arranged. A dapper little jackal was Hagiwara, whose teeth were very sharp, and whose bark was more terrifying to the old Emperor Bugs than the gibbering of all his ancestors' ghosts. Hagiwara had, of course, been apprised of our coming. He advanced over the outlandish purple and blue carpet of the anteroom with dainty, catlike tread. I introduced him.

"Ah, Mr. Hagiwara, your friend Mitono of the consulate in Shanghai commended you to me before I left for Seoul." The Girl's velvety voice was purring and soft. "He told me that you were a man of influence in the court here, but that you were so im-

pervious to feminine appeal that I must be an unusual woman to win your favor."

"Yiss—ah—yiss." Hagiwara ducked his close-cropped head and smiled with every angle of his face. He came up standing under the full fire of those two big eyes. The Girl was still holding the tips of his fingers.

"But I am sure, Mr. Hagiwara, that you are not so terrible a monster as you have been painted. Surely, you will not growl at a poor portrait painter who comes to seek your protection in this terribly barbarous court."

"No—ah—no," babbled Hagiwara, his face flushing scarlet.

The Girl had him hooked. She drew him confidentially aside as if she would give him some secret too precious for my ears. I watched them out of the corner of one eye. There stood the Girl, radiant, wonderful in the softly clinging silk and voile of her Paris gown, and the sweeping white plumes that drooped to brush her burnished hair; her head was bent slightly so that she might bring her lips closer to Hagiwara's ear—a delicately personal and confiding gesture—and her hands were clasped before her in a pantomime of mock appeal.

I heard a trickle of silvery laughter. "Yiss—yiss," said Hagiwara eagerly, and he turned to lead us into the audience chamber. As the Girl passed me there was just the slightest lift of her eyebrows, and mischief flashed from her eyes.

Poor old Bugs; he had so many things to worry him in those dark days of the decay of his state and the weaving of snares about his feet, it was hardly fair that the old codger should be put to the shock of the Girl's galvanic presence. I remember how he sat, in his outlandish, stuffed, plum-colored silk robes, and the aureole of horsehair crown about his head, all huddled together on his teak and marble throne. About him were clustered all of the goat-eyed ministers, and soothsayers, and geomancers, the leeches sticking to the tottering throne, each decked out in the outlandish pur-

ples and whites of the official court costume and bonneted with the inevitable horsehair flytraps. The wonderful old Chinese screen, representing the mountains of the moon and a ramping dragon trailing his scaly length across them, which stood behind the throne, furnished appropriate background for this shadow court of a dead nation.

I can see now the look of wonder that flashed into the tired eyes of old Bugs as the vision of gently undulating gossamer and silk, topped with the red-gold coils and the trailing white plumes, flowed—that's the word—down the long room and paused with a deep curtsy before the steps of the throne.

The Girl lifted her eyes, filled with awe and deference, to the wrinkled face of the monarch, and remained in the difficult pose of obeisance until, with a surprised grunt, old Bugs scrambled to his padded feet and extended his hand in a gracious gesture. She made a tremendous sensation. Courtiers waggled their beards in excited whispers behind the emperor's back. Witch doctors and sign readers buzzed the news of the Girl's coming out through side doors and alleyways. Hagiwara, who stood boldly in front of the throne, fussed with the tips of his collar and seemed on the point of choking.

It was Prince Min Yung, a right decent sort, and unswerving in his loyalty to the emperor during all the whirlwind of intrigue, who acted as interpreter. The emperor extended himself in pretty phrases. He wanted to know by what kindness of the gods his poor court had been honored by the presence of so fair a stranger. He heard, right away, that the Girl, who was a humble painter person from America, and who had enjoyed the honor of putting on canvas the sacred features of the dowager of China, could not feel that life was complete until she had done similarly by his augustness, of whose greatness and glory she had heard wondrous tales in far-away America.

The palaver was rich in metaphor and dripping with courtesy. Old Bugs was plainly tickled. Casting an apprehensive eye upon Hagiwara, his majesty

answered that he would have to take the Girl's request under advisement. It was an unusual favor that she asked; he was not at all sure that he would not sicken and die if his features were transferred to canvas; he would have to get the advice of his spook doctors. However, since the empress dowager of China had not died as the result of her experience, he was prone to look with favor upon the American lady's petition. He would beg that she return to the palace on the morrow and receive his decision.

The emperor was eager as a child to find excuse for keeping the Girl longer in his presence. I did not blame him, poor old beggar, for trying to keep a sunbeam in that musty old audience chamber, whose very walls whispered plots. But his visitor knew the value of a pleasure deferred, and she made a graceful excuse for withdrawing from the presence of the Little Nephew of Heaven. She was not allowed to go, however, until his majesty had instructed one of his chamberlains to show the radiant American stranger the beauties of his deer park and summer pavilion.

We went out of the palace to the wildwood behind; but the chapfallen chamberlain did not have a chance to show any of the quaint beauties of tilted gable and carven lions. Hagiwara did that. The little Japanese strutted by the Girl's side as if he were stepping on rose leaves. I, who kept at a distance behind with the chamberlain, could hear the patter of his syncopated English, broken by occasional gusts of the Girl's full-throated laughter. Hagiwara was completely by the ears. When he handed the Girl into the carriage after our tour of the deer park, he insisted that she must accept his invitation to the garden party that was to be given the following week at the Japanese legation. It was in celebration of the birthday of the emperor of Japan.

"A very cute little mouse—Hagiwara," was the only comment my companion made during the drive down to the South Gate and the hotel.

"Yes, and the cruelest little mouse in this whole worm-eaten house," I added.

"He did not beg my pardon for setting his unfortunate spy to work on me," the Girl mused. "But he will—oh, yes, he will—before I am through with him."

The wife of the American minister was waiting when we arrived at the Astor House, and she took the Girl over to the legation quarters for tiffin and the afternoon. I went immediately to Bethell's little printing shop over back of Furniture Street, and there, in his dowdy office, we had our heads together for the better part of the afternoon. Bethell, who knew the underground channels of palace approaches as well as any Korean, dispatched an oral message to Prince Min Yung—that we must see the prince at his home over by the West Gate that night at all hazards was the tenor of the message.

We made our devious way after dark, separately and each by a different route, to the prince's house. Caution and not a little back-fence climbing were necessary, because the prince, on account of his known loyalty to the emperor and his constant scheming to block the Japanese game, was honored by the constant surveillance of Hagiwara's spies.

I can never forget the dramatic quality of that meeting in the darkened guest room of this real Korean patriot. We—Bethell and I—had come like thieves in the night, and like thieves we sat about the single rushlight, which stood on an inlaid teak stand amid the tobacco jars and the dull-gleaming amber seals of the prince's office, and spoke in whispers.

Bethell told the prince of the means by which the old emperor might be delivered from all the menace and the bullying of his enemies; explained how, by flight to a Russian asylum in Shanghai, the harried monarch could call the attention of the whole world to his plight and prevent the absorption of his empire by the Japanese. The fighting British editor urged the merits of the great scheme with the enthusiasm of a crusader.

Prince Min Yung listened to the end.

His hand was trembling as he reached out to tamp the bowl of his long pipe.

"It is wonderful—wonderful," he whispered at last. "If only we can persuade his majesty. Not since the beginning of time has a king of Korea fled beyond his borders. His soothsayers and wise men will all persuade against it."

"But they must not know," Bethell broke in impetuously. "They are all secretly in Japanese pay, and if a word, a whisper, of this should get to their ears, Hasegawa would have the palace surrounded by troops within an hour. You—you alone—must have the secret. You must find a way to-morrow to get a word to his majesty's ear; to tell him why the Girl comes to paint his portrait. There will be private sittings; you must be on hand to act as interpreter. Then you and she, alone with the emperor, can convince him of the wisdom of this course. Every detail of the flight can be arranged between you during the hours his majesty gives up to the sittings."

"It shall be so," Prince Min Yung said, and Bethell and I took our leave—through the stable yard and over the walls into the compound of the Methodist Mission.

Before noon the next day an imperial secretary arrived at the Astor House with a message for the Girl from the Emperor Bugs. His majesty would be graciously pleased to have the distinguished American artist paint his portrait, and his majesty awaited her immediate visit to the palace with pleasurable anticipation.

Not until after the Girl had rolled through the South Gate in the imperial carriage, her easel, frames, and paint box following in great state on the backs of two palace porters, did Bethell draw me aside in the deserted bar of Looie's.

"The lightning's striking closer every minute," he said, in a low, serious voice. "I got it straight from the palace this morning that two of the emperor's mutang (sorcerers) died last night. They ate a venison pie which the old boy refused to touch."

CHAPTER III.

After that first sitting of doddering majesty, the Girl moved from the old Astor House over to the home of the American minister. She jumped at the invitation which came from the minister's wife, who, like all of us there in Seoul, had been completely captivated by the dazzling personality of this remarkable woman, and had been avid, also, to seize the advantage which possession of this much talked-about young painter would give in the jealous circle of legation society.

The Girl, for her part, was doubly eager to make the change. To be officially adopted into the legation family was to remove the last possible suspicion as to the object of her mission from the cunning mind of Hagiwara and his crew.

The American minister's compound abutted on the rear of the palace grounds, and it was but a step from there to the rear of the building wherein old Bugs was practically a prisoner. Moreover, she could not afford to continue living in the neighborhood of Bethell, who was pariah in the minds of the Japanese, and was always watched.

I am frank to say that I would have preferred, for purely personal reasons, that the Girl remain at the hotel. Besides, the exalted glamour of the adventure upon which I had embarked with her, there was—yes, there was—But, pshaw! This is not to be a love story; no room here for that sort of stuff.

She gave me a few minutes while she was putting her effects together in the hotel room, preparatory to moving.

"Mr. Billy," she said, "we've got to play the game apart for the next few days. I cannot afford to see Bethell or be seen with him. I am not so sure that you are on the list of the 'unco guid' with little Hagiwara, either. But Prince Min Yung will provide a way for me to pass messages to both of you without being detected."

I assured her that I would obliterate myself utterly rather than risk being a

stumblingblock in the path of her great scheme.

"Oh, no, my friend," she said, laughing up at me, her eyes dancing with the surge and rush of the big hazard we were playing. "I will not allow you to say, 'The carriage waits,' in this little melodrama. When your cue comes you will have the spotlight all to yourself; but in the meantime——"

She brought out of a pocket in the lining of her trunk a cable form, already filled, and handed it to me. I looked at it curiously. It was addressed to one of her name at Shanghai, and read: "*Portrait successful. Hurrah!*" Her name was attached.

"No, not to my father," she said, reading the query in my eyes. "But to the man who is behind all this plan of ours—the one whose name I gave you the night I arrived here. Innocent enough, isn't it? Just a happy girl, telling the good news of her success to her daddy. Well, you keep this, my friend. When you get word from me file it yourself; not here, but down at Chemulpo, where Hagiwara's eye is weak. Don't fail to get it off immediately, for when I give the word for its filing, hours will count."

"Do you mind telling me——" I began.

"Certainly not. This is it: The instant that our good friend in Shanghai receives this message, he will send another to Chefoo, on the Pechili coast, and just ninety miles away from Chemulpo, you know. That wire will start a swift little steam yacht away from her moorings, and within twenty-four hours that yacht will be tied up on the river just ten miles from Seoul. That neat little boat will have accommodations aboard for one emperor, one portrait painter, and"—here she slowly lowered an eyelid at me in mock seriousness—"and two wicked conspirators who might not like to make the acquaintance of the lord high executioner."

I chortled exultingly as she unfolded this detail of the carefully designed plot. As a matter of fact, it had not occurred to me how we were going to

bundle a fussy old emperor out of his realm, even if he did consent to skip.

"And how did you make it to-day with his nobs?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"I am not going to tell you," she laughed back; and then, all of a sudden, the mirth fled from her eyes and they deepened into seriousness. The Girl came up to me and laid a hand upon mine in a frank, comradely way.

"Listen, my dear friend." Her voice was low, and there was a certain rough huskiness in it as of emotion, scarce restrained. "We must not forget—Bethell, and you, and I—that the loser in this game will pay, yes, heavily. Only since I have been here have I realized how desperate are the forces against which we are matched. All three of us might drop out of sight in this ghostly whirlpool of intrigue, and there wouldn't be a ripple to mark our disappearance."

I closed my fingers over the hand and tried to read something besides the impersonal earnestness in her eyes.

"I am not going to let you become involved any more than I have to," she continued. "Should you ever have to defend yourself before a secret court—and with death waiting behind the judge's chair—you will know only this and that; but not all. You are satisfied that it should be thus, are you not, my friend?"

I lifted her hand and kissed it. That seemed at the time the fitting thing—the only answer.

Then she went away to the American minister's home.

Three nerve-racking days followed, with not a word from the Girl. Bethell and I forgathered each night in Looie's bar and made weak efforts to pass the hours over the ancient pool table, but to no purpose. The sense of our impotency weighed heavily upon us; we felt that we were in chains, while one woman, with magnificent courage, was digging a mine under the Japanese trenches. Bethell, into whose heart much of the fatalism of the land had bitten, was prone to believe that no human agency could avail to check the

swift-moving avalanche that was sweeping down upon the country from the eruptive islands to the east. For my part, I believed that nothing could check the fruition of the great scheme, but I was burning with eagerness to play some part in it.

Then, on the third night, came the message from the palace. How Prince Min Yung had contrived the circuitous channel of its delivery passed my comprehension, for it was one of Bethell's printers who tiptoed in the bar from a rear entrance and whispered something in the vernacular into the editor's ears. Bethell's eyes snapped.

"She says to fire that message over the cable," he breathed. "And quickly."

The dash that I made through the sleeping streets of that dead old town to catch the last night train to Chemulpo, sixty miles away, was a record-breaker. I know that my ricksha boy must have laid off from work for three days thereafter. But I got the train, reached Chemulpo at midnight, and filed the cable. The fact that the cable office was in the same building with the customs, where I made my headquarters two days in each week, and that I was a figure of importance in both offices, disarmed any suspicion that might have grown out of my midnight visit and the filing of a seemingly unimportant message. As luck would have it, the Japanese cable inspector was off duty, and the Korean operator did not have intelligence beyond the keys of his instrument.

The rest of the dark hours of that night I spent on the balcony of Chou Hong's "foreign hotel," outside of the room assigned to me. There I sat and smoked, with my eyes traveling over the lights in the harbor, out and out to the Yellow Sea and beyond. I strove to pierce the dark and bridge the miles between myself and Shanghai; to watch the sudden springs of action which those three silly words of the Girl's cablegram would release. There, in his office, that master craftsman of Russian diplomacy would receive the spark which meant that the trap in this moldy old land of the past was ready to be

sprung. He would send another spark rushing under the waters to Chefoo, off there in the dim north, and then—then out of the mists of the Pechili Gulf would come swiftly, furtively, the yacht which was to carry away an emperor.

The spell of the whole cunning machinery, the well-oiled cogs and pistons of this daring engine of diplomacy, had me in its grip as I sat there under chill stars; but always my thoughts fled back to that dingy-walled city sixty miles behind me, where a woman with burnt gold hair and eyes of violet, wide apart, was matching her wits, single-handed, against the craft and guile of a predatory nation.

I saw her the next morning. Strange chance dictated the meeting, and a stranger fortune put me in the way of a delicious comedy.

Upon my return from Chemulpo to Seoul, I went directly to the palace, for it was necessary that I should have a conference with the Japanese adviser of the treasury upon matters concerning the customs.

Megata, for he was the adviser, was closeted with old Bugs, engaged, doubtless, in tightening the screws somewhere. I strolled into the old palace yard of Kweng-Pok, a favorite musing place for me, what with the hint of mystery and the whisper of lost glory in the gray gables of its deserted pavilions and audience halls.

I was sitting on the jutting balcony of the old royal library, shadowed by great Siberian firs, when I heard a voice. It was the Girl's.

The clear, lilting notes of her speech, and the heavy, blurred accents of a voice I knew instantly to be Hagiwara's, drew steadily nearer, until finally I judged by the sound that they had paused directly below the library balcony whereon I was standing. I was placed in the very willing position of an eavesdropper.

"No, Mr. Hagiwara," I heard the Girl say, "I do not flatter myself in the least that I receive such close attention from you. I have heard what your business is here in Seoul."

"Excoos me, madam," Hagiwara hastened to interpose, and there was a strange, strangling timbre in his voice. "Excoos me, I do not understand. I——"

"Oh, yes, you do," the Girl interrupted. "Any girl but myself might have believed—might have convinced herself that somehow you found her charming. Any girl likes to be flattered that way, you know, and one might—yes, one might almost learn to be pleased if she thought that." There was a shadow of something soft and sweet in the Girl's voice here, calculated to make little Hagiwara's heart skip a beat. "But you, Mr. Hagiwara, have been following me, keeping your eyes on me for just one reason. You cannot deny it."

"And that reason iss—that reason iss that you are beau-tiful; that I——"

"Stop!" What a ring of command there was in that short word; I could picture the quick fires that burned in the Girl's eyes as she uttered it! "That reason is, Mr. Hagiwara, that you think me a spy. Confess it!"

The Japanese bubbled and gurgled in his effort at denial. Never, never had he entertained such a thought. It was impossible. Beyond belief.

The Girl shut him off imperiously.

"Why did you send a spy to search my trunk the first night I was in Seoul?" There was a pitiful catch and quaver in the putting of that question; outraged dignity called for reparation.

"I did not think—I did not know," Hagiwara stammered.

"But you sent him. Tell the truth, Mr. Hagiwara."

"It was a mistake. Excoos! I was blind. I was a-fraid of plot, beau-tiful madam. You were speaking with Bethell immediately upon your arrivals. Bethell is dangerous person. I sent a man to inves-tigate. Ver' clumsy, excoos! And you shot him, for which I am ver' happy." Hagiwara was floundering hopelessly. I could hardly restrain a chuckle.

"And I understand that you sincerely apologize?" Her voice was all silk and tenderness again.

"On my knees, beau-tiful madam."

"Then let us have an understanding, Mr. Hagiwara. During my minutes with his majesty in these past few days, when I am very, very busy trying to catch the spirit of his portrait, you have insisted on remaining in the room with us. Your presence disturbs his majesty, who greatly fears you, and it disturbs me. I had thought you were there because you wanted to keep an eye on me, lest I was plotting with the poor old dear. Now I know that you had no such purpose. But, Mr. Hagiwara"—melting sweetness was in her voice now, and her words dropped hesitatingly and with maidenly modesty—"you must promise to give me my sittings with his majesty alone hereafter, and then maybe—maybe——"

"Yiss—yiss?"

"Maybe I will find more minutes to give to Mr. Hagiwara, of Japan—alone," said the Girl with a quick little laugh, altogether alluring.

I heard the swish of her skirts and dared to peep over the edge of the balcony. I saw the glory of her head, splashed with light that sifted through the far-flung bows of the pines, and I watched the supple rhythm of her shoulders, shadow-spotted, as, with little Hagiwara hurrying by her side, she crossed the old arched bridge with a free stride and swung into the path leading to the palace.

The jackal's jaws were muzzled!

CHAPTER IV.

A Japanese messenger, one of Hagiwara's men, was waiting for me when I returned to the Astor House for tiffin. He had a note addressed to me in the Girl's hand. It read:

DEAR MR. BILLY: Would it be troubling you too much to run down to Chemulpo some time this evening so that you may expedite through all the horrid port regulations a party of friends of mine—hunters after tigers or some other dreadful animals—who are coming from Chefoo on their yacht? I received word that they were coming some time to-night or early to-morrow morning; but they seemed in doubt whether in the disturbed condition of the country they and their guns would be mis-

taken for a filibustering expedition. I know that as a customs officer you will be able to render them some very much appreciated service.

P. S.—They might bring you up the river a way on the boat. It would be a delightful little jaunt.

The impudence of it! To send me specific directions thus by the hand of Hagiwara's own man! I smiled inwardly when I considered this second tally which the Girl was scoring against the jackal. Down to Chemulpo I went, and at the high tide came the yacht—a long, low, trim little thing, whose every line spelled speed.

Consider the shock I received when I discovered that the fatuous Hagiwara had already telegraphed orders to smooth the official way for the yacht's passage into and through the harbor of Chemulpo. More of the Girl's delicate work!

I boarded the yacht at the quay, presented the Girl's letter to Monsieur Reynard, a trim, blond young Frenchman, who was in command, and who had with him two companions, Frenchmen both, and a crew of five. My letter was my introduction, but both Monsieur Reynard and myself were scrupulous not to go behind the bald statement of facts concerning the hunting trip therein contained. Neither knew the extent of the other's orders or knowledge, and the next day I served as ex-officio pilot up the Han River, whose every flat and bar I knew through years of snipe hunting on its waters. We dropped anchor midway between the village of Angjou and the walls of Seoul itself, in a sequestered bend of the river, very close to the main-traveled road out of the North Gate, and not more than six miles from the city. The Frenchmen said that this very place looked the likeliest for snipe. I agreed with them, and left them, promising to return in a few days and have some sport.

I thought I detected a flicker of mirth in Reynard's eyes when I gave that promise, but he made no comment.

I was back in Seoul by noon, and that night I went with Bethell to the home of Prince Min Yung. The prince

was trembling with excitement, and could scarce wait until we were secure from listening ears before he began to pour out the story of the past few days at the palace.

The emperor seemed ready for the flight, he said in the first breath, but we must make haste while he was in a favorable mood. The old codger had at first been terrified out of his stuffed boots at the thought of attempting to escape the all-seeing eye of the Japanese; had sworn that they would catch him and cut his heart out. But the Girl had played on his fears as on a stringed instrument, Prince Min Yung declared. She had painted for him with words, even as she wielded her brush on canvas, the picture of the impending rape of the empire by Ito; he, the emperor, in chains and transferred to some Japanese prison; the country drenched in blood, and his subjects enslaved.

All this almost under the nose of Hagiwara, who was dodging in and out of the retiring room, where his majesty sat for his portrait, until that very day, when he was strangely absent. The poisoning of the two mutang by meat meant for the emperor's mouth had driven the poor old monarch into a spasm of fear, the prince said, and he had decided that it was better to be killed in flight than to sit supinely on a tottering throne.

"That wonderful woman," the prince murmured over and over again. "She has held the heart of the emperor in her hand since first she came to the palace. The minutes that we have been alone, his majesty, and the artist, and I, have been hundreds of golden years for the hope of Korea. Now the emperor is hot—now he is cold. Once he says that he will fly, and the light in that woman's eyes is beautiful to see; then he shivers on his seat of state and says that he cannot go."

Prince Min Yung, in his excitement, acted for us the craven old monarch, eyes roving and palsied hands trembling in alternate gusts of hope and of despair.

"Once he says that he will have to consult the soothsayers and get a favor-

able time set for his departure; he cannot take such an important step without the consent of the gods and devils.

"What, your majesty!" says this woman of the burning hair. "Are you not emperor, lord of all in earth? Will you be fooled to your destruction by these traitorous witch doctors? See, I am painting the face of a monarch—not of a fool." And at that his majesty falls to weeping and calling himself an idiot. Oh, gentlemen! Tragedy and comedy were there, too strong to bear."

Bethell and I managed to gain from the excited patriot some idea of the plans for the kidnaping of the emperor which he and the Girl had formulated between them. No one, not even old Bugs' ministers, who were believed to be loyal, was to be in the secret. His majesty had been persuaded without much argument to leave his half-witted son behind. He was to disguise himself as one of the palace mutang when the time came for the secret departure, leave the palace in the company of the prince by one of the devious rear passages through the women's quarter, and find horses waiting in a corner of the deserted deer park. Bethell and I were to be waiting outside of the little-used North Gate in the city's walls, to convey the old gentleman to the yacht.

As for the Girl, she was not to take any part in the actual flight through the city, but she would be on hand at the North Gate to accompany us to the yacht, whose position in the river she had not yet learned.

"I will arrange for the horses," the prince assured us; "you cannot do that yourselves without danger. All that we depend upon you to do is to form a fitting escort for his majesty on the ride from the city walls to the yacht. He will be in terror of the Japanese every foot of the way. Your presence will reassure him. Now, keep yourself in readiness for the word from the masterful woman who holds the destinies of all of us in her hand."

So Bethell and I went back to the Astor House to await the striking of the appointed hour.

6B

The next day Marquis Ito came!

Can I picture the thunderclap of that event? How the cloud which had been hanging as a dread menace over Korea for so many months suddenly split and dropped to earth this man of blood and steel—the nation builder of Japan? With sinister skill the Japanese had concealed his approach to Korea's capital; no one knew until he saw, that morning, file after file of troops with fixed bayonets marching away from the station with the Bismarck of the Orient in their midst. The day was the national holiday of Japan—the emperor's birthday. That this should be the day chosen for the arrival of Ito in Seoul was in itself sufficient presage of what was to follow. In supreme confidence the mikado's government had selected this day, when sun flags flew over every Japanese hut in Korea, to send to the Emperor Bugs the high priest of his nation's immolation.

Bethell and I were talking over the day's stupefying event on the piazza of the hotel at noontime, wondering whether the arrival of Ito would drive poor old Bugs yammering into our arms for instant flight, or so stun the old ruler with terror as to wipe utterly from his mind all hope of escape, when a sergeant of the American legation guard came up with a note for us. It was from the Girl:

To-night or never. Very recent events have served to put the Sick Man in a fearful state of mind, and he is wavering again; unless the medicine is administered at once he will be beyond cure. See me at the garden party at the Japanese legation this afternoon, if possible. If not—to-night at the place appointed.

I had completely forgotten the garden party in the swirl of events, though, as an official of the Korean government, I had been formally invited several days before. A simple celebration of the Japanese emperor's birthday we had supposed it would be—the Girl and I; now it was plain that in honor of Japan's greatest statesman the event had been planned.

I went to the garden party.

Not in years had decayed old Seoul

witnessed such a spectacle of brilliance. The Japanese, those masters at touching up the high lights of nature, had converted the spacious grounds in the legation compound into a second Nikko. Not a square yard that was not clogged with exquisite greenery—little pine trees, dwarf forests of bamboo, and the flaming sprays of the Japanese maple. Here a miniature pagoda, its nine gables hung with tinkling bells; there a rustic bridge spanning some lotus-filled pond; above all, a spider web of fluttering tissue flags of the nations, and the hundreds of golden-glowing lanterns.

All of the legation staffs of the various nations represented in Seoul, with their ladies, were there—a brilliant and changing throng, gold-laced and silk-frocked. And there, by the side of the Japanese minister, Hasegawa in full war panoply flanking him on the left, stood the man who was to take Korea in his fingers and snap its national life of a thousand years.

A striking figure! Above the average height of the Japanese, massive head firmly set on broad shoulders, there was the subtle hint of strength and tremendous vital force in the poise of his body. But the face of the man; it had been chipped from primordial granite with rough flint tools. The straggling white beard scarcely concealed the blunt, outthrust chin of the fighter. The mouth was a thin slit, all force and obstinacy. But it was in the eyes and brows that the latent strength most lay. His eyes were those of a bronze mask, shadowed by overhanging flesh which curtailed all flicker of emotion, allowed no flash of thought to escape undisguised. They saw everything; revealed nothing. Above was the heavy forehead of the thinker, massy, suggestive of a will which dominated the imperious nature of the man, and gave it restrained force. That was Ito, eldest of the elder statesmen, real sire of the giant of the Far East.

I was presented to the great man in my turn, and then I began a furtive search for the Girl. I found her the center of a group of Japanese notables,

with Hagiwara hovering slavishly at her elbow. I cannot hope to reproduce here the sallies of wit, the ready pleasantries, all of the verbal ammunition of a past mistress in the art of social generalship by which this dazzling woman kept ever under her power a devoted circle of slant-eyed gallants. Indeed, her Japanese admirers had to share her attentions with several men from the legations, who occasionally managed to break through the embargo; but I noticed that the Girl carefully played her cards so as to keep by her always the sedulous Higawara. She seemed to be using Hagiwara's countrymen as a sort of screen to protect her assault in force, which was upon that selfsame unsuspecting little dandy. Not for near half an hour did I manage to get within safe earshot of her, and that was for the few minutes that Hagiwara was absent on a mission of forage for delicacies.

"Oh, Billy," she said with a little gasp and dropping the playful formality of the mister, "pray for me that I may keep Hagiwara here for another hour. The crisis is on at the palace. Hagiwara possesses a dreadful sixth sense of premonition, and he has been trying to make a break for the old emperor's audience chamber ever since I arrived. He must not; he——"

The Girl interrupted herself to turn a neat epigram against the bold advance of a German secretary of legation; the blundering squire dropped back.

"What is the crisis?" I whispered.

"Oh, poor old Bugs is beside himself with fear—says he won't budge unless he gets some sign from heaven or the earth beneath. Prince Min Yung is with him, and Bethell dared to slip into the palace in the absence of Hagiwara. They are arguing with the old boy—they tell him that if not to-night, it will be never, for Ito will visit the palace to-morrow, and then—the end. I must—I must keep Hagiwara away until they have persuaded the emperor finally. I believe—I hope that we will win to-night. Bethell can tell you definitely at the Astor House at six o'clock."

Hagiwara, his hands crammed with dishes, appeared down the aisle of shrubbery.

"Run along now, Billy," she urged, "and be prepared to jump out of Korea itself if worse comes to worst. They'll strike in the dark, you know, if they get desperate, and—and nobody wants to be a 'damp, demnition body'!"

Bravely she laughed, though there were dark shadows of doubt in the limpid depths of her eyes for the first time since she had engaged on this high adventure. I left her side with the tell-tale message of those eyes a cold weight on my heart.

Never have I lived six swifter hours than those which followed, nor ones which so nearly whirled me off my feet.

Bethell, scarce able to restrain his excitement, met me at the hotel. He dragged me into the deserted bar, helped himself to a hooker of rum, tossed it down, and spoke.

"It's a go—a ripping, roaring go!" he chuckled. "The old rooster at last has caved, you know, and now he says the fourteen devils of Mokpu cannot stop him from flying to-night.

"Yes—yes, old fellow. Not a word. All arranged. The prince will take him out of the palace down to Queen Min's summerhouse. There horses will be; the prince looked after that. You and I to the North Gate at ten o'clock by ricksha. There horses for us both, and one for the Girl. Right-o! We wait outside the gate in a little clump of deserted houses there until along comes his nibs, all wrapped around in a coat like a stuffed mummy.

"Out we go and join him and the prince. Then away to the yacht, and the devil take old Ito, the rotter!"

So sanguine was Bethell that I could not get him to admit that the Girl's seeming fears of failure were well grounded. I asked him what he and I were to do if everything went well and the emperor actually got away to China; suspicion surely would fall upon us.

"Oh, drat it, man; we'll face the music," said the fighting editor. "They

can't do more than deport us, you know, unless they hire some rough to stick a knife between our ribs. But you see, dear fellow, they've tried that jolly trick on me so many times, and my inward parts are still capable of holding good liquor without dripping."

Ten o'clock, and Bethell and I riding through the ghostly streets of Seoul in our curtained rickshas. Never did that old charnel house of dead grandeur appear so unworldly as on that night. Black gables of temples, the great bronze belly of the old bell, the mushroom growth of thatched housetops everywhere like fungus in a witches' fen: all melting and blending into shadows—shadows! Not a soul stirring on the streets. Hardly a streak of light slipping through the clink of some unbarred door to make the streets seem real. Seoul at night is mournful enough; but that night—ugh!

We dismissed our rickshas at the North Gate, and walked through the wide portal, two Korean soldier guards hardly rousing from their sleep to notice us. Beyond a hundred yards, and behind the ruins of a house which had been burned, we found our horses. There we waited, not speaking a word.

Minutes passed—ten, fifteen, twenty. Then a step on the gravel near the roadway. I peeked around the corner of a blank wall, and saw a hooded figure approaching alone. I stepped from the shadow.

"Billy," came the whisper. The Girl ran up to me and laid a cold hand on mine.

"All right—all right," she breathed before ever I could put a question. "And Bethell, yes; I knew you'd be here, too. Ah, what's that?"

I felt her hand tremble on mine, and a quick catch came in her breath. The rapid notes of a bugle call, high and thin, sounded from beyond the serrated black mass of the city's walls. Instantly it was answered by another. Just those two quavering voices in the night, but what were they saying for us? The pitiful Korean army knew no bugles, but the Japanese troops camped on Namsan Hill—they had bugles.

"Tara-tara-tara!"

"Do you know, dear friends"—the Girl was trying to make her voice sound brave and confident—"I believe our Japanese brothers are calling to us over there. I believe they want to see us, very badly."

As if in answer to the Girl's words came suddenly the *clickety-click* of horses' hoofs on gravel, nearer and nearer. Then the hoofbeats stopped, and the low voice of Min Yung called a hail from the road. Each to his horse, and we three were out in the road by the side of the prince and another grotesquely hooded and swathed figure, which rocked unsteadily on a pony's back. A whimpering and a moaning sounded from the muffling bandages of linen dust coat which crowned the head of this scarecrow.

"The Japanese—the Japanese!" Prince Min Yung whispered in a shrill voice, straining with the pulse of excitement. "They have discovered his majesty's flight—they are after us—after us!"

A gagging, querulous plaint issued then from the wrapped mummy by the prince's side—from his majesty Bugs in proper person. Min Yung answered deferentially in the Korean.

"Ah, the emperor is beside himself," the prince said, addressing us hurriedly. "Terror is turning his mind. Hurry!"

Off we galloped, pell-mell down the thin ribbon of roadway for the yacht, six miles away—Bethell on the left side of his majesty, the prince on the right. The latter was hampered by a great chest, wrapped in silk, which he carried under his arm. Nothing else, was that, than a treasure box; therein fleeing royalty was taking with him all of his crown jewels that were not already in pawn.

On and on in silence, the Girl and I riding together behind. We heard the wailing and the muffled, pleading accents of the emperor's voice, punctuated as the jolting of his mount jerked the words from him. The senile old man was crying like a child who is being dragged to bed against his will.

We must have covered three miles in

the dark when something happened. It was all so sudden, so outré, that not until many hours afterward could I frame in my mind an ordered procession of the swift flux of incidents. We were passing a peasant's hut. I heard a dog's sudden growl, and the rush of paws on the hard ground. Then something sinuous and black shot up from the side of the roadway plump into the arms of Emperor Bugs. I remember a cat screamed horribly at that second.

But the scream of the cat was nothing to the curdling yell which followed on the instant. It was the voice of the emperor.

I crowded my horse over to where he rode; Bethell and the prince closed in simultaneously. We saw a great black cat clawing madly at his majesty's robes, twining and twisting in the saddle before him as it growled and spit. The Emperor Bugs, his hands stretched high above his head, gasped, gurgled, made insane cluckings in his throat. The cloak had fallen from his face. I could see his eyes, protruding like the eyes of an idol.

It was Bethell who shot out a hand, grasped the cat by the neck, and hurled it aside into the darkness. Even as he did so the emperor of Korea half fell, half slid from his saddle, and, once on the ground, began legging it back on the road in the direction of Seoul. The prince was pursuing him in an instant. Then the rest of us whirled about and galloped up the road after the two flying figures. We came upon the prince, gripping his majesty in a close grapple, and trying to interrupt a torrent of high-pitched words which rattled and clattered from the imperial lips. His majesty Bugs was quite mad; I am sure of that. He spluttered, and chattered, and flailed his arms wildly about in an effort to throw off the grip of the prince. The three of us—the Girl, Bethell, and I—sat our horses in impotent amazement.

"The cat—the cat," Min Yung finally managed to stammer. "His majesty says the black cat leaping at him is an omen. He will return to Seoul."

I heard a little stifled moan from the Girl.

"What bloody rot!" Bethell put in. "He cannot now. He must go on to the yacht."

The prince essayed to interrupt the yammering old idiot in his arms. We could hear his voice, pleading, expostulating. But ever the emperor raised his almost to a shriek, crying him down. He actually fought and kicked at his devoted captor. Five minutes passed—five minutes, while the empire of Korea was being blotted from the nations of the world by one black cat. We sat helpless.

"We'll put the old beggar on his horse, whether he likes it or not," Bethell finally growled. "Then off with him to the boat."

"I would have to kill you where you stand, Bethell," Prince Min Yung said quietly, "if you laid a violent hand on the person of my ruler."

More minutes passed, while the prince argued fruitlessly. I felt the Girl move her horse over near mine, and I reached out in the dark. My arm fell around her shoulder. She leaned weakly toward me; my arm closed tighter; I felt her head on my shoulder. There it lay, shaking under the rack of sobs which would not be uttered.

"It is the end of all," Prince Min Yung said at last. "I ride back to Seoul and the palace with his majesty."

Silence for one long minute.

"Then we all do," Bethell said. "Sink or swim, you know."

The Girl lifted her head from my shoulder and spoke brokenly:

"No—I go to Shanghai. It is not—that I am afraid. But—but that I have failed, and that I would—yes, I would die rather than face the humiliation! Hagiwara's na-nasty grin and—and—oh, you understand, my friends!"

"But you do not know where the yacht is anchored," I babbled. "It is three miles and more from here, and, anyway, alone on this road at night—impossible!"

"I will find it—alone."

My head was in a whirl; my heart pounded so that I could hardly draw

breath. Suddenly resolution came to me. I dismounted and drew Bethell aside.

"You will understand," I stuttered in his ear, "you will not think it cowardice on my part if I—if I see this thing through. The Girl—Shanghai—you——"

"Old chap—dear old chap"—Bethell was wringing my hand—"a gentleman, particularly a young gentleman who would like a wife, could do nothing else. Not for a minute—no, not a minute—would I think you were running away from the music. And now, God bless you, and be off!"

The Girl took the hand of Bethell and of Prince Min Yung in turn, and nodded the good-by which she could not speak. His majesty, who was sniveling quietly, she ignored.

Then we sat our horses for a minute and watched three figures ride into black dark, back on the road to Seoul—to fate.

It was midnight. The Girl stood by my side on the yacht as it rushed full speed down the yellow Han on the way to the sea. We were by the rail. I had dared to cover her hand with mine, and to press her arm against my side in a little heartening, comradely grip. The Girl was weeping, and she made no show of concealing it. At last she raised her eyes, all wet, to mine, and looked at me a long time.

"To fail," she said. "To be a man and fail is hard—but for a woman—ah——"

"Girl," I murmured, "if a man can share your failure—could always be by to help if failure came again—would it be worth——"

Suddenly her sobs stopped; I felt her shoulders twitch. Then came a hysterical peal of laughter.

"But—to be—beaten by a cat—and a black one—at that!"

As to what befell the chief actors in this little melodrama of ours, history has it thus:

On the night of November 17, not two weeks after the events narrated in

this closing chapter, General Hasegawa surrounded the palace with troops, then Ito went in to the cowering emperor, and forced him to sign away Korean sovereignty under a Japanese protectorate. In July, two years later, old Emperor Bugs was deposed and made a prisoner in his own palace, while the blood of his patriotic garrison was shed in the streets of Seoul. A prisoner he remains to-day.

The day after the emperor signed away Korean independence at the point of the bayonet it was reported that Prince Min Yung had "committed suicide" in his home. At least, that was the official report.

As for Bethell, poor devil, he was

brought up for trial before a consular court, wherein the British consul sat as judge. The charge was inciting to disorder and treason in a country at peace with Great Britain. He was convicted and sentenced to serve a term in the British jail at Shanghai. He did his bit, came back to Seoul, revived his *Korea Daily News*, and started in to harry the Japanese again; but not for long. He sickened and died there, and there in that ghost land, for all I know to the contrary, was buried.

Prince Ito, as the world well remembers, fell a victim of a Korean assassin's bullet in Harbin, Manchuria, on October 26, 1909. His work in Korea was ere that well and wisely finished.



A NEW SIDE SHOW

TOMMY had been to the circus with his father and was telling his mother all about it.

"But," he said regretfully, "there was one side show we didn't see."

"How do you know you didn't?" asked his mother.

"Well," explained Tommy, "just as we were leaving I heard Mr. Jones tell papa that he'd better stick around so as to see some of the pretty chickens."



THE NEW NATIONAL ANTHEM

ROBERT T. SMALL, of Atlanta, Georgia, was listening to a conversation in one of the clubs in his city about the power and importance of Theodore Roosevelt in American politics. The talk reminded him, he said, of a dispatch sent out by an Englishman who was working for the Associated Press in Khartum when Roosevelt arrived there from his hunt in the African jungle.

The Englishman's cablegram said, among other things:

A party of American tourists greeted Roosevelt by singing the new national anthem: "What's the matter with Roosevelt? Nothing. He's Roosevelt!"



WHERE JAKE DREW THE LINE

JAKE TANNENBAUM owns a theater in Mobile. Furthermore, he exercises great care in his scrutiny of the bills any company wishes to present in his house. One morning he received from a celebrated Shakespearean actor the list of plays to be put on during a run of seven days.

"I see here 'Romeo and Juliet,'" said Jake, running his finger down the list, "and I will stand for that. But I shrink when I think of that fellow playing *Romeo*. And here's 'Hamlet.' No living man can play *Hamlet* as he should be played. And here is 'Othello'!"

At this point Mr. Tannenbaum leaped out of his chair and hung on the ambient atmosphere a long and lingering groan.

"It is too much!" he cried, in anguish. "I am no fanatic. I am not a crazy man on the race question. But I'm a son of a gun if I'm going to have in my theater any black man handing out a lot of mushy talk to a white woman!"

When Thieves Fall Off

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "The Quarter Horse," "Poison No. 77," Etc.

Playing the racing game in the alkali circuit. How Isaiah, the star of the Curry stable and probably the most erratic beast that ever drove an official starter to drink, makes a bid for fame in a steeplechase. An exciting and amusing story of the race track

OLD MAN CURRY said the hand of Providence was in it, which was as accurate a guess as he ever made in connection with a horse race. It goes to show that a man may be well posted on all the prophets of Israel, and still not know a great deal about the sport of kings. Steeplechasing particularly. Providence might stand some sort of an outside chance in a dash over the flat, with everybody trying; but over the sticks? *Ne-ver!* The jumping riders settle things before the race, thus eliminating Providence and the mischance of jogging to the post with the wrong ticket in the bootleg. It is only when the riders fail to name the caucus nominee that complications arise. And Old Man Curry, bless his simple, honest heart, thought it was Providence!

Speaking from a professional angle, Old Man Curry had about as much business on a race track as a tender squab at a Third Avenue banquet—and almost as much of a chance. In the first place, a man who can recite the Old Testament backward, and who reads the Psalms of David and the Song of Solomon instead of the form charts and the sporting pages is quite apt to find himself outgeneraled by the unregenerate in the matter of placing race horses one-two-three at the wire. To make it worse, Old Man Curry didn't have a horse in his barn worth talking about with a straight face.

If an honest man hopes to win two-

hundred-dollar purses along the alkali circuit, there is only one way in the world for him to do it—and that is to get away flying, and fly in front all the way—so far in front that the wizened little tobacco-chewing burglars on the other horses cannot catch him and bump him over the fence. But what is a man to do who can neither outrun nor outguess his competitors?

Old Man Curry had four horses—Elijah, Nehemiah, King David, and Isaiah—"the Bible class," as the touts called the Curry Stable.

Elijah was a chunky, short-coupled, thick-necked brute of a sorrel gelding, with two bad legs and a chronic weariness which met him at the head of the stretch.

Nehemiah was a gaunt, hungry-looking, aggravating sort of an equine hermit. He could run fast enough to suit anybody, the only trouble being that he insisted on running alone. If he happened to get away from the post with the others, he sulked and quit; it was only when he had been left flat-footed that Nehemiah came to life, and ran like a Roseben—two hundred yards behind the others. He was absolutely no good, being too thin for soap fat.

King David was a stately chestnut, a confirmed stall walker, a malingerer from his yellow heart.

Isaiah—well, Isaiah was the star of the stable! He was a tall, big-boned, coal-black rascal about the size of a dromedary, as suspicious as a hawk,

and as savage as a wasp. He was probably the most erratic beast that ever drove an official starter to drink; and Sid, the negro jockey who rode all the prophets in Old Man Curry's stable, never knew when the barrier went up whether Isaiah was going up the track, down the track, or over the side fence. The black scoundrel had been known to do all three—in one race. Once in a great while it pleased Isaiah to behave himself and run second or third in some selling event, but his appearances "in the money" were rare.

There wasn't a breadwinner in the stable, nor anything which looked like one; and quite naturally Old Man Curry was a rank outsider—the last man on the track to know when anything was going on or coming off—a nice, respectable, soft-spoken old gentleman with white whiskers, who ran his bad horses to win, and gave every one else credit for "trying." No one paid any attention to Old Man Curry; and because he was harmless, from an owner's point of view, no one took the trouble to explain matters to him.

If the judges at a small Western bush track had not seen fit to order Isaiah on the "schooling list" after two atrocious performances at the barrier, Old Man Curry would have had no occasion to refer to the hand of Providence. Horses which shy at the barrier and refuse to break when the webbing flies up are put on the schooling list, and it is part of the duties of the assistant starter to train these wild creatures until they learn how to comport themselves at the post. It was after Isaiah broke sidewise, knocking two real horses into the fence, that the judges sent for Old Man Curry, and broke the news to him that Isaiah's entry would be refused until the animal had been schooled at the barrier. Old Man Curry was innocent enough to attempt an explanation, but how could he be expected to know that the judges had ten dollars apiece on one of the horses which Isaiah put out of the race?

The next morning Clem Newby, the assistant starter, looked down from his

perch near the five-eighths pole upon the usual bunch of two-year-olds and one immense black horse with a negro upon his back. Isaiah looked all of ten feet high among the colts and fillies, and Clem Newby, who had a date with the girl who waited on the table at the Bonton Restaurant, sighed as he beheld the negro's futile attempts to control his mount. A few feet away from the starter's platform, Old Man Curry sat on the top rail of the fence, chewing a straw and meditating silently.

"Here's that crazy son of a gun that busted up the start for us the other day," said Clem Newby to Butch Flynn. Butch, with a blacksnake whip, was aiding Newby from the track.

"I see him," said Butch. Then he went on to give his unbiased opinion of Isaiah, his breeding, his antecedents, and a few other things which occurred to him as he warmed into his work.

"Mr. Starter," said Old Man Curry gently, "I wisht you wouldn't cuss that hoss of mine. He ain't ust to such language, an' it ain't fitten he should be. Isaiah's right gentle when he's used kindly."

"S-a-a-y!" demanded Newby angrily. "Who's doing this? If I was the judge at this track, I'll promise you you wouldn't start that black hound around here no more! He acted to me like he was full of hop the other day."

Old Man Curry took the straw out of his mouth, but he changed his mind, and preserved silence.

"Now, then," bawled Newby, "bring that filly up on the outside. Easy, there! Come on with that chestnut! Whatche think this is—a *quadrille*? You, *dinge*, where you tryin' to go with that black camel? Stand still with him. *Stand still*, I tell you! No, no! You can't break that way! Butch, bring up that chestnut. Steady! Now! *You're off!*"

B-s-sip! went the barrier, and away went the two-year-olds like frightened snipe. Isaiah seemed to squat in his tracks for the fraction of a second; then he whirled with a tremendous snort, like the blast of an auto horn,

and ran the wrong way of the track, narrowly missing Butch Flynn in the maneuver.

"Yes," said Newby, with a sneer, "he is a right gentle horse, ain't he? As gentle as a wild cat! Keep a-stickin' around here with him, and he'll kill some of us yet."

"Mister," said Old Man Curry earnestly, "I wisht you wouldn't abuse Isaiah like that. What's the use to cuss him? He's a good hoss, but he can't seem to get the hang of that rubber-rope dingus. He ain't used to it. It gets him fretted up and scares him. Once he finds out it won't hurt him none he'll be all right. Back where he comes from they start hosses with a flag. He don't know no other way."

"Well," said Butch Flynn, as he labored with the heavy spring of the starting machine, "far be it from me to set my stack in at the wrong time; but you better take this Isaiah back where they start races with flags, because if anything happens to *me*, my heirs'll sue you for damages. If I hadn't been right there with that Jim Corbett side-step, Isaiah would have gone over me like a steam roller. You don't keep him hopped *all* the time, do you?"

"That hoss don't know what a drug is!" said Old Man Curry. "He's only nervous and scairt. He'll get ust to it in time. He's a smart hoss, that Isaiah. Try him again."

Newby tried him again. The two-year-olds broke as before, and just as the barrier rose, Butch Flynn, who believed in experimenting upon refractory horseflesh, curled the lash of his blacksnake whip around Isaiah's hams. The big fellow wheeled at right angles, and soared over the side fence, pitching Sid twenty feet into an alfalfa patch. It was not such a low fence, either, but Isaiah cleared it like a bird on the wing, and, after separating himself from Sidney, he ran away, switching his tail and snorting angrily.

"Goshamighty!" ejaculated Old Man Curry. "Look what you did by hittin' him with that whip!" He clambered down from the fence, and started to-

ward the negro, mumbling as he went: "He ain't ust to bein' hit with a whip, Isaiah ain't. It made him mad. 'Tain't no way to treat a high-keyed hoss. Did he hurt you any, Sid?"

The negro rose, and looked about him, grinning foolishly.

"Naw, suh," he said, rubbing his shoulder. "Naw, suh, he didn' hu't me none, an' he didn' do me no good, nuther. Shook me up some. I'd ought to have stayed with him, Mist' Curry, an' I cert'n'y would, only he was li'l' bit too sudden faw me. I didn't know whut he was aimin' to do twell he done gone done it. Yes, suh, he's a mighty sudden hawss, that Isaiah. Too quick a thinker faw me—yes, suh."

"He'll think you into the morgue one of these days if you keep on fooling with him," said Newby, as he climbed back to his perch.

"Well, Sid," said Old Man Curry, "go catch him up, and take him back to the barn. His feelin's are hurt, and he's all fretted up an' excited from bein' hit with that whip. He'll have to be cooled out. Take him back to the barn."

Sid departed, rubbing his shoulder and chuckling.

Butch Flynn was staring at Isaiah's hoofmarks upon the track.

"Here's where he took off," said Butch, "and over yonder is where he lit. And he'd have cleared that fence if it had been twice that high. Sufferin' Salvator, what a jump!"

"You did Isaiah a wrong to hit him with that whip," said Old Man Curry patiently. "Whippin' a hoss ain't no way——"

"Say," interrupted Butch suddenly, "has this horse ever been over the jumps?"

Old Man Curry shook his head.

"How far can he run?" demanded Butch.

"Well," said Old Man Curry, "his daddy was a four-mile champion. Isaiah can go one mile, two miles, three miles—makes no difference to him. All these races round here are too short for him."

"Old man," said Butch earnestly,

"lemme tell you something: Make a jumper out of this horse. If he'll take hurdles the way he took that fence he'll win you a nice pot of money. You could take him to some track where they've got a steeplechase course, and clean up with him."

"Yes," said Newby maliciously, "and they start jumping races with a flag, too!"

Old Man Curry removed his slouch hat and mopped his forehead.

"Goshamighty!" he said, half to himself. "I never thought of that!"

He ambled away toward the stables with his head bent at a reflective angle. Newby looked after him with a short laugh.

"What's on you, Butch?" he asked. "Are you framing up to get some jumping jock killed, or what?"

"Ho!" said Butch. "One of them crooks more or less wouldn't matter much! But, on the level, bo, did you see the way that big brute sailed over this fence? Looked to me like he went ten feet in the air. Why, that bird must have *wings!*"

"He better have," said Clem grimly, "an' use 'em to fly away from here. Get those kids back, and let's get through some time to-day."

Several months later the alkali circuit season ended; Butch Flynn and Clem Newby, no longer track officials, found themselves wintering in California, and attempting to pick up a living "from the ground." Clem, with a few dollars in his pocket, was giving a poor imitation of a gentleman of leisure and independent means. Butch, being financially straightened—"embarrassed" is no word to convey the proper impression of Butch's exceeding ruin—was "hustling" as best he could.

Hustling upon a race track is a many-sided occupation including everything in the world but real work.

Part of the time Butch assisted a "clocker" who worked for a bookmaker, and in this way came to have some sort of a line on most of the early-morning work-outs. With the knowledge thus secured, Butch set up

as a tout on a small scale, operating with one nervous eye on Sig Buetler, of the Pinkerton Patrol.

One afternoon Flynn and Newby met on the promenade in front of the grand stand.

"Who do you think is here?" asked Butch. "Nobody but that old joker and that Isaiah bird. And that ain't all. He took my advice, and made a jumper out of his horse."

"Him?" said Newby scornfully. "How come he to get on a real race track with those lizards of his?"

"He didn't get stable room," said Butch. "He's got 'em bedded down outside somewhere. From what he tells me, he's laying to put Isaiah over on 'em at a price."

Newby chuckled.

"Daffy as a cuckoo bird," he said. "I suppose the old boy doesn't know that some of the best jumpers in the country are out here this season? Molestar, Arabi, Prince Wang, and that bunch. A swell chance old Isaiah will have in that kind of company!"

"Wel-l-l," said Butch judiciously, "a jumpin' race ain't ever a cinch for anybody—not even the best jumper that ever lived. Too many things can happen. And, then, the riders are always doing business—framing up among themselves. You never know what those burglars are going to do, or which horse they are going to shoo in. I'd hate to bet a jumping race—with counterfeit money."

"Right-o!" assented Newby. "Those jumping jocks are pretty tough propositions; but, then, look at the chances they take. Man ought to be allowed to steal something if he risks his neck to do it. Which of 'em is going to ride for the old sport?"

"Not any," said Butch. "He's went and made a steeplechase jock out of the coon."

"*Good night!*" said Newby, with explosive emphasis. "Why, McGuire and Duffy and the rest of those mick riders will murder him the first time around the field!"

"That being the case," said Butch, "it's up to us to send flowers about

Sunday week. Isaiah is entered for a week from Thursday. He ain't got a thing to beat except Prince Wang and Arabi—the two best jumpers that ever came West. And the joke of it is," concluded Butch, "the old man tells me he's going to take the woolen string off the roll and set in the checks on Isaiah—to beat Prince Wang and Arabi. What do you know about that?"

"A fool and his money gathers no moss," laughed Newby.

"Even so," said Butch cheerfully, "that won't keep me from ribbing up some suckers to bet a few piasters on Isaiah—to come third."

"If the coon lives that long," said Newby.

"Of course," said Butch. "We got to take chances on him getting broke in two."

The grand stand overflowed on Thursday afternoon, the steeplechase being responsible for the added attendance. The balance of the day's card was given up to cheap selling races for cheap horses, and Charlie Comford, "outside man" for one of the big bookmakers, and turf philosopher in what spare time he found, stared hard at the human swarm in the stand, and extracted the pith of the situation in a few brisk sentences.

"Look at 'em up there," said Charlie. "And there won't be any Rosebens runnin' here to-day, either. They've all come out to see some poor devil of a jumpin' jock break his neck. Same proposition as a parachute leap. I've seen a million of 'em, but I always walk a mile to see another one, because I'm figuring that this may be the time when the umbrella won't open. We ain't half as civilized as we think we are."

A steeplechase breaks up the monotony of the daily racing card and fattens the daily attendance, but the bookmakers and the professional gamblers have small use for a jumping contest. There is never any real certainty of knowing how the riders are betting, and in a long race "over the sticks" almost any

sort of a miracle may pass unquestioned by the judges.

There was once a man who figured out fifty ways in which the best horse in a race might be beaten; and it was a flat race he was using as the basis of calculations. In a steeplechase there are five hundred ways. In a flat race, when there is to be a "shoo in," it is the owners who lay their heads together and make the arrangements. In a steeplechase, the riders often assume this responsibility; therefore, when the jumpers are on their way to the post the hardened gamblers sit in the stand, with no interest save in the spectacle, and the bookmakers handle what they call "the sucker money"—tens, twenties, and other small change. And the only bookmakers who will take a great deal of any kind of money on a jumping race are the ones who think they know how the riders are going to bet.

Down near the paddock, in the jockeys' room, Mr. Sidney Albert Johnson, slightly heavier than in the days of the alkali circuit, sat in a far corner, and eyed the other jumping riders with furtive distrust. He knew some of them by reputation, and was therefore not reassured to any great extent. There was "Durable" Duffy, so called because it was said of him that in a long and shady career he had broken all the bones in his body save the ones in his crooked spine. There was "Molly" McGuire, another steeplechase rider of great reputation, not exactly unknown as a welterweight prize fighter; and "Corkscrew" Kelly, just out of the hospital after his last fall, walking with a slight limp, but cursing fluently. They were a tough crowd, and Mr. Sidney Albert Johnson did not like their looks or the glances which they shot in his direction. Some of them spoke to him as he took his place in line at the weighing machine.

"Little dark meat to-day," said Duffy, with a meaning smile.

"About the third jump for his," said McGuire.

"Lemme tell you something, Mistah Johnson," said Corkscrew Kelly: "If you come anywhere near me I'll spill

you. I'm from a State where we don't like your kind of people."

Sidney Albert, saddle and weight pads on his arm, weighed in silently, and faded away to his corner again, his eyes big with foreboding.

"This ain't no good place faw me," he repeated over and over to himself. "No, suh! All shanty Irish. Lawd, you got to watch out faw li'l Sid to-day. Look like he's got into ba-a-ad company."

Out in the paddock, Old Man Curry led Isaiah into his stall, and stood quietly patting the big black horse on the neck. Butch Flynn, unobtrusive as a shadow, drifted to the old man's side.

"How about you?" said the tout. "Think you've got a chance?"

"This hoss," said Old Man Curry, "has always got a chance. He's a right nice hoss, Isaiah."

"Yes—but look what he's got to beat," argued Flynn. "Arabi's six to five in the ring, and Prince Wang is three to one. They kind of stick out in this company. Isaiah's twenty, eight, and two. Think you can come third with him?"

Somewhere a gong clanged, and the paddock announcer bawled:

"Saddling bell! Saddle *up!*"

"Can he be third?" persisted Butch.

"He can be first if he wants to," said Old Man Curry, with calm conviction.

"Daffy as a cuckoo bird!" said Butch to himself, as he moved over to inspect Prince Wang. "Now, if I only knew which one they're going to bet on to-day——"

Once more the gong clanged, and a flood of bright color burst from the door of the jockeys' room. Sidney Albert Johnson, conspicuous in canary yellow and peacock blue, was last in the line, his serious countenance in strong contrast with his gaudy attire. He seemed gloomy and preoccupied, and there was an appealing look in his eyes as he rolled them upon his employer.

"Sid," said Old Man Curry, as he gave the "tack" its final inspection, "I might spoil some of them Egyptians in

the bettin' ring to-day. They're layin' too long a price against this hoss. Do the best you can with him."

"Yes, suh," said Sidney Albert, without enthusiasm. "I'll be tryin', Mist' Curry." Then, after a short silence: "But these Irish jumpin' jocks, they—they seem to took a notion agin' me."

He climbed into the saddle, set his boots in the stirrups, and looked about him.

"Yes, suh," he repeated gloomily, "they sort of took a distaste to me."

A bugle blared, and there was a sudden stir in the paddock; the horses began to move. Old Man Curry stood looking after Isaiah for several seconds. Then, straw in mouth, he walked slowly toward the betting ring.

There were seven horses in the race—Prince Wang, Arabi, Blue Peter, Doctor Boggs, Gondolier, Ugly Joe, and Isaiah. Arabi, because of a sensational performance the last time out, was the favorite, backed from eight to five to even money. Prince Wang, easily outclassing all the others in the race, was the strong second choice at three to one; and Blue Peter, Doctor Boggs, Gondolier, Ugly Joe, and Isaiah were quoted at tempting odds, the prices being amply justified by information, belief, and past endeavor. There was no "form" on Isaiah, but the information secured by the bookmakers' assistants did not disconcert those suave individuals.

"Isaiah? Isaiah?" said Phil Hennessey, the ring plutocrat, who set the pace in the matter of opening prices. "First time over the jumps. Oh, well, make him fifteen to one till we see how he shapes up. Like's not he ought to be fifty."

At fifteen to one there was no demand for Isaiah, so the price lengthened to twenty, and later a gentle old man with white whiskers wandered through the betting ring, sowing a crop of crumpled five-dollar notes at odds of one hundred to five. No one paid the slightest attention to him; few remembered having seen him before. When he had accumulated a fat packet of pasteboards the old man went down

by the fence, and unshipped a battered field glass.

By this time the seven jumpers had reached the starting point, opposite the grand stand, in the infield, the steeplechase course stretching in a large figure eight before them. The starter, with a red flag, was stationed some distance in front of the horses; and the assistant starters, armed with whips, were herding the nervous animals into something like a straight line. Arabi and Prince Wang, being seasoned campaigners, and knowing what was expected of them, stood perfectly still, refusing to waste their strength in wild plunges and ineffectual dashes down the course. The hoarse voice of the starter came faintly to the crowded grand stand—a rumbling, complaining monologue:

“No, no! I won’t let you go that way! Dugan, you want me to fine you? Don’t talk back to *me*? I ain’t blind! Get that black horse into line. Walk ’em up, now. That’s it! All together! *Come on!*”

A thousand-voiced grunt burst from the grand stand as the seven big horses leaped into a lumbering gallop. Old Man Curry, leaning heavily upon the fence, took a fresh grip upon his straw, and sighed his relief. It was as fair a start as an honest owner could wish to see.

When the red flag fell Ugly Joe sprang to the front, and rushed recklessly at the first barrier. Jockey Hennessey cursed savagely, and sawed at the bit; he might as well have argued with a thunderbolt. Duffy, on Arabi, was directly behind the crazy animal, and, scenting calamity, pulled sharply to the right, with a shrill yell of warning. McGuire, on Prince Wang, also sheered violently, and the Prince caromed into Isaiah, knocking the big black horse out of his stride. Isaiah promptly shuffled out of the pack, and dropped to the rear, thrashing his tail angrily.

“Them Irishmen cert’n’y don’t waste no time,” thought Sidney Albert bitterly, wherein he wronged Duffy and McGuire. The bumping of Isaiah had

been an accident, and a fortunate one, it turned out to be, else Sidney Albert and Isaiah would have been involved in the smash which followed. The whole thing happened so quickly that even the judges were not sure as to the sequence of events.

Ugly Joe, attempting the almost impossible feat of taking the first obstacle without slackening speed, sailed over the barrier like a red streak, but could not hold his footing, and crashed heavily to the turf. Hennessey turned a complete somersault, and came to grass in a sitting posture, more surprised than hurt. Doctor Boggs, next inside, shied, took off short, and, jumping sideways, collided with Blue Peter in mid-air. Both horses went down, and Corkscrew Kelly and Dugan joined Hennessey on the ground.

Dugan’s collar bone was broken—not a new experience for Dugan—but Kelly, rolling rapidly to the edge of the track, escaped without a scratch, and was able immediately to sit up and express an unexpurgated opinion of Hennessey’s qualifications as a steeplechase rider.

Prince Wang and Arabi went over the jump neck and neck; Gondolier blundered after them. Last of all came Isaiah, feelings outraged, temper ruffled, jerking his head from side to side, and snorting his protest. Sidney Albert spoke reassuringly to him, and the black horse cleared the jump handily, and went on down the course, fifty yards behind Gondolier.

Ugly Joe, the wicked cause of all the trouble, scrambled to his feet, and set out after the others, the empty stirrups banging at his sides. Doctor Boggs rose stiffly, shivering as he hobbled away on three legs. Blue Peter never moved after he struck the ground. Thus, in a single breath, the spectators had been given their glimpse of turf tragedy—a crippled rider groaning in the dirt; three horses out of the race, two of them for all time; and far down the course went Arabi and Prince Wang, neck and neck.

After a few heart palpitations, a few ejaculations, a few sympathetic groans

from the females present, the spectators turned their eyes to the survivors. There were other jumps on the course, other risks to be taken, other chances for a spill. Comford's philosophy wasn't so far wrong, after all. Few in the grand stand heard or understood the distant pop of the pistol which ended the career of Doctor Boggs.

Ugly Joe, having furnished tragedy, now essayed comedy. The grand stand roared as he galloped past Isaiah and ranged alongside Gondolier. In effect, Ugly Joe seemed to say:

"What's a rider more or less? Bet you I can outrun you to the next jump."

"Slim" Sweeney, on Gondolier, cursed heartily, and aimed a cut at Ugly Joe with his whip. The riderless brute dodged it, and pressed closer. At the second jump he swerved into Gondolier, and both horses fell, Sweeney's nose plowing a furrow in the turf. That put another horse out of the running, and Isaiah, seeing this accident from afar, had to be coaxed over the second barrier.

"Come on, big hoss!" urged Sidney Albert pleadingly. "Jump cautious, and we got third money cinched."

Away out in front, Arabi and Prince Wang, first and second money at their mercy, were running close together, eating up the course in long, easy strides.

Old Man Curry heard a voice in his ear.

"All you got to do," said Butch, "is to keep going, and I win a show bet."

Isaiah's owner shook his head disconsolately.

"They rammed into my hoss at the start," he complained. "Bumped him clean outen his stride. He knew that wasn't right, and it's made him mad. He's awful sensitive, Isaiah is. He won't stand to be trifled with."

"He'd never do better'n third against jumpers like those in front," said Butch. "Look at 'em out there. I'd like to know what Duffy and McGuire are talkin' about, wouldn't you? They got it all fixed up between 'em."

As the leaders swung into the great oval which marked the last circuit of the course, Duffy pulled Arabi a bit closer to Prince Wang, and opened a conversation with McGuire.

"Come on, Molly," he said, "ride that horse out! I got a good bet on him."

"You *what?*" demanded McGuire, with suitable profanity. "Quit your kiddin'! Why, my folks are bettin' on *you!*"

For the fraction of a second, the boys eyed each other; amazement and incredulity numbed all other sensations.

"Why," faltered Duffy, "I thought it was the other way; I thought—and I got fifty bucks of my own on that one."

"Thought—rats!" snarled McGuire. "Didn't we fix it up night before last? You crossed me—for the price!"

"You lie!" almost screeched Duffy. "And I got a man from Seattle bettin' a chunk! You *got* to ride him out."

For a few seconds neither spoke. McGuire's eyes were on the jump ahead of them. Duffy, stealing a glance at his quondam accomplice, surprised a flickering light in his eye—a light which kindled an immediate suspicion.

"You ride that horse out, or I'll break your neck!" screamed Duffy.

"I'll break your Seattle friend first," said McGuire ominously, measuring the approaching obstacle shrewdly.

The trick was most artistically done, but unless practice makes perfect of what virtue is it? From the distant grand stand it seemed that Prince Wang faltered in front of the barrier, and then blundered ever so slightly in his leap. A touch of the knee, a shift in the saddle—these were two things which the grand stand overlooked, as did the judges. McGuire, acting his part perfectly, whirled through the air, struck upon his side, rolled over once, and stretched out at full length, limp and apparently lifeless. A coroner might have been deceived by his attitude. But Duffy was not deceived. A nasty, mocking laugh pursued him as Arabi thundered down the course alone.

"Cross me, will you?" murmured

McGuire. "Go on now, and cash my ticket."

"The crook!" panted Duffy. "He makes me lose a real bet, and I've got to ride this one for his money."

Away in the rear, Sidney Albert cast a pair of wide eyes on Jockey McGuire, still motionless in the grass. Men were running toward him. Out in the middle of the track several roustabouts were pursuing Prince Wang to remount and ride him home for the short end of the purse. At the fence rail, Butch Flynn was pounding Old Man Curry on the back.

"You run second!" he shouted. "All down but nine! Set 'em up again!"

Jockey Duffy, on the last half mile, with one more jump before him, and then nothing but the flat stretch to the wire—Jockey Duffy, huddled up on the favorite—steamed with impotent rage. What could he do? Nothing. That was the worst of it. Duffy's financial interest in the race was gone beyond recall. His fifty-dollar ticket wasn't worth five cents, nor were all the tickets which the man from Seattle was to buy in the pool rooms downtown. Gone—all gone! And why? Because that thief of a McGuire got his wires crossed, and put down a piking little bet on the wrong horse! Earnestly Jockey Duffy consigned all the McGuires to everlasting flame.

"I'm standin' to cop five or six hundred for my bit," thought Duffy, "and that louse of a McGuire won't even wait long enough to ask me will I split with him. He goes and does a Brodie for his petty-larceny bet. Oh, why didn't I beat him to it?"

"I could have done it at that first jump," reflected Duffy, "only I was afraid of being jumped on by the others. Why didn't I take a chance? Now I got to bring this one home—for McGuire."

About here Jockey Duffy's face grew brick red. Over his shoulder he saw Prince Wang, still eluding pursuit, and the black horse and the black boy. If they could catch Wang, and the black should fall—and why should Duffy oblige a petty larcenist like McGuire?

These considerations whirled in Duffy's brain. There in front of him was the last jump. Jockey Duffy ducked his head, and stole a look behind him. Four men were carrying McGuire from the track toward the paddock.

"Stall, you burglar!" thought Duffy. "I'll give you something that *will* make you sick. Now, what's your ticket worth?"

Arabi rose lightly to the last barrier, and Jockey Duffy, also a finished actor, rose with him—too far. As Arabi's hoofs struck turf again Duffy pitched forward upon the horse's neck, clung desperately for a few seconds, and then slipped easily to the ground.

"And I guess that'll hold *you* for a while!" he said to himself. "Go cash your ticket now."

Sidney Albert Johnson, riding Isaiiah cautiously, with a prayer for each jump, heard the deep roar from the grand stand which marked the concluding incident. Then he saw Arabi, with empty saddle, careening down the course.

"My Lawd!" breathed Sidney Albert. "Come on, you black hoss—for *all* the money! For *all* the money! Put your feet to the ground, and *come on!*"

For the first time in the race, Sidney Albert sat down on Isaiiah, and began to ride him.

"Old man," yelled Butch Flynn, "you win! You win!"

Old Man Curry swallowed his heart when Isaiiah took the last jump in safety, and through a mist which nearly blinded him he saw Sidney Albert draw his whip for a whirlwind finish. The grand stand yelled with laughter as the lone black horse crossed the line, ridden out to the last inch.

A little later Old Man Curry climbed the steps to the judges' stand. Three gentlemen, their faces set and stern, desired to question him. Later they would interview Duffy and McGuire.

"Mr. Curry," said the presiding judge, a tall Kentuckian of distinguished appearance and soldierly bearing, "we didn't like the looks of that

jumping race a little bit. No, suh. So we thought we'd talk to you about it. Mr. Curry, did you—bet on your horse to-day?"

"Why, yes, judge," said Isaiah's owner slowly. "I bet quite some money on him." He put his hand into his pocket, and brought out a fistful of tickets. The judges glanced at them hastily.

"All to win, I see," said the Kentuckian; "and to beat good horses. Why?"

"Judge," said Old Man Curry earnestly, "I bet to win because I thought my Isaiah horse had a right nice chance to come home in front. That's the only reason I know. He's a good hoss, judge, and——"

"Certainly," said the tall judge impatiently. "But doesn't it strike you as suspicious that both the boys on the short-priced horses should fall off to let you win?"

"Yes," put in another judge, "we'd like to know what you think about that?"

"What do I think?" repeated Old Man Curry, turning his slouch hat in his hands. "Why, gentlemen, it looked to me like the hand of Providence!"

The judges quite naturally took very little stock in the hand-of-Providence theory, so they sent for and examined the bookmakers' sheets on the jumping race, and what they found there led them still deeper into darkness. Next they sought information as to Old Man Curry's record, and the record of the right nice horse, Isaiah, and there they

found nothing to nourish their suspicions. Then they cross-questioned Sidney Albert Johnson, and found their efforts vain and fruitless. Last of all, an assistant judge gave McGuire and Duffy a miserable half hour, and returned to the stand shaking his head. Those scalawags, case-hardened by experience, fearing neither man nor his brief authority, stood pat; and the bookmakers' sheets furnished no clew to the mystery so far as Duffy and McGuire were concerned.

The tall judge summed up in short sentences.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have examined the sheets from the betting ring. They show that Mr. Curry was the only man who bet on Isaiah to win. If these other owners were in cahoots with him, they would have hammered that price to death. If McGuire and Duffy had been betting on this long shot we should have found the record of it here. No question but those two rapsallions were up to something, gentlemen, but what was it? I give it up."

"I guess," said one of the assistant judges, with a grin, "the old man was about right when he said it was the hand of Providence."

"Hm-m!" said the Kentuckian thoughtfully. "Providence better not mix up in any more jumping races at this track, or somebody will get himself ruled off for life."

The one thing the judges missed was the bare-knuckle fight that evening between Duffy and McGuire. The referee said that it was a draw.



THE MYSTERIOUS MR. WIND

IT was the coldest day Arkansas had ever experienced. In a little village in the northern part of the State an old colored man emerged from his shack shortly after ten o'clock in the morning. He was weighed down with clothing, carrying, at a conservative estimate, about one hundred and ninety pounds of wool and yarn, including three coats, two pairs of trousers, and a double equipment of socks. So burdened was he by his wraps that he could hardly walk. Just as he reached the street corner, a fierce gust of wind hit his tottering form and spun him half around.

As soon as he could get his breath, he gasped out:

"'Fore Gawd, wind, where was you las' August?"

The Right Bait

By William Slavens McNutt

Author of "The Princess of Wachita," "Bill Heenan, Postman," Etc.

Up in Alaska, where, if extravagant rumor is to be believed, wealth is waiting to be gathered up by anyone who has the nerve and strength to go into the land and brush off the snow, the tenderfoot sucker is likely to bite at 'most any old bait. This would have been that kind of everyday tale, if Bill Heenan hadn't happened along. And Bill knew all there was to know about bait.

PHIL HAMMOND was one of a great number of types of men who should never have enlisted in the army of searchers after the mythical pot at the rainbow's end, who invaded Alaska in the years following the first news of the Klondike wealth.

He was a good boy, Phil was—and he was only a boy—but he was pitifully unfit to "sit in" in the world's greatest gambling game. The main trouble with Phil was that he had too much to lose.

For those who had tried in the ordinary walks of life, and failed; for those to whom hope was a reminiscence; for the strong in whom the "wanderlust" was innate, and whose adventurous spirits were adroop with the general humdrum of a normal, orderly life in an orderly, civilized community—for these Alaska was a Mecca; and the hazard of the game that was played on its gaming board of icy mountains, treacherous rivers, and desolate, tundra wastes, with the lives of the players for chips, was as the wine of life to them.

It was to them what the field of battle is to an ambitious soldier who has drilled throughout years of a monotonous and inglorious peace. They loved the game for the game itself, and they won if they lost.

Phil had no love of the game for the game's sake. The only emotion that wild tales of the weird, bitter hardships of the new land stirred in him was dread.

For this reason, if for no other, he never should have gone, for in a game where the percentage is so overwhelmingly against the player, there must be a reward in the joy of the mere playing of it, else to play at all is tragedy.

Then Phil made two fundamental mistakes; he took five thousand dollars into the country with him—a considerable sum in that it was nearly all he had—and he left a bride of a year behind him in their little five-room cottage in Waverley, Iowa.

She was a pretty, demure, strait-laced little thing, the daughter of a retired farmer, and she worshiped young Phil in an old-fashioned, "Alice-Ben-Bolt" sort of a way, that might well have driven wiser men than he into making far more foolish attempts to accomplish things that would measure up to the gigantic standard of such a woman's belief in the all-power of whomsoever her love happens to magnify to her.

For that is exactly why Phil went North. He had a nice little business, and he was making a nice, comfortable living out of it, but he was very young

and very much in love, and he hungered mightily to be able to lay the contents of the fabled pot at the tiny feet of the misty-eyed, warm-lipped, wee goddess who let him into heaven by the front door every day at ten minutes past twelve and ten past six.

Extravagant rumors about the wealth that yellowed the earth in the North, waiting to be gathered up by any one who had the nerve and strength to go into the land and brush off the snow, were rife at the time—and widely believed!

Phil believed them; and throttling his dread of the unknown and the bitter ache that bit into the very core of his heart at the mere thought of leaving his wife and home, sold out his business and started North with five thousand dollars to get a slice of the moon for the little woman who believed that he could reach up and pluck the sun out of its course if he really and truly wanted to! She didn't want him to go; not a bit of it! She cried and begged; worshiped him all the more for that he did not yield to her entreaties; and then, when he was gone, she sat placidly down and busied herself figuring out what they would do with the millions and millions that he would bring back. Wasn't he Phil? Hadn't he said he would come back? Hadn't he said he would come back rich? Of course! And besides, other people could see now what she had known all along: that Phil was really and truly a hero.

He was! He suspected it himself. By the time he arrived at Skagway he was morally sure of it, and after he had negotiated Chilkoot Pass and the Rapids he was absolutely certain! Within twenty-four hours after he reached Dawson City another suspicion, that had been steadily growing in his mind from the time he had embarked on the North-bound boat in Seattle, became a certainty: he was a fool.

Some conception of the stunning hugeness of the country was his; a little glimmer of the true proportion of the odds against him; the knowledge that every likely foot of ground within a radius of a hundred miles of Dawson was staked,

and that there were thousands of men, eagerly waiting the news of any new strike, ready and eager to stake their lives in a rush to it on the chance that it might be a bona-fide one and that they might be one of the lucky few to make a rich location.

He had come, as hundreds of others had come—the ludicrous pity of it!—with the firm belief that once he got into the country his fortune was made. He found himself in a place where money was as plentiful as in Wall Street, and a good deal harder to get! It was too late to turn back, or so the dazed, lonely, disillusioned boy thought, so he got a job and stayed on; buoyed with a Micawberish hope that something would turn up; a ludicrous and pathetic figure in the human moil of the wild, raw camp.

So it came about that one day early in June of the following year, he sat on an upturned box in a cabin on a creek some fifteen miles from Ophir, with his back to the open door, staring with a horrified, hypnotic sort of expression at a blue-barreled forty-five that he held in his right hand. Just what would have happened if his trancelike absorption in the study of the gun had not been interrupted is a matter of conjecture, for a voice from behind him broke the spell:

"How, son?"

Phil started up and turned toward the door, instinctively hiding the gun behind him as he rose. A huge-bodied, middle-aged man stood in the doorway leaning forward slightly to balance the pack on his back, studying the startled boy with a quizzical, all-wise grin. He was a blond man with a wide, heavy-jawed face and small, squinted, blazing blue eyes.

"Why—why, hello! How d'ye do? Hello! How—how are you?" Phil stammered.

The big man chuckled silently and wriggled out of his pack straps.

"Don't ye never do it, son!" he said, as he swung his pack to the floor. "Things ain't never that bad; never! Any old time ye get to thinkin' that

they are, just you remember that they ain't!"

Young Hammond flushed hotly. "Why—why, what—what do you mean?" he demanded.

"That's all right, son; don't get miffed. I don't mean nothin'. I'm just tellin' ye that things ain't never that bad. They can always get worse or get better, an' y'always want to stick around an' see what happens."

Phil hung his head. "I—I wasn't going to do it, you know," he said sheepishly.

"Sure ye wasn't!" the other agreed heartily. "Sure not! Heenan's my name; Bill Heenan. Y'et dinner yet?"

"No, I——"

"Well, le's eat. You get that fire goin' and I'll show ye somethin' worth lookin' at. I just come down from up Nulato way. I got some potatoes off an up-river boat up there; some regular sure-nough potatoes, hear me! Bet y'ain't had none this spring, have ye? Sure not! Your belly's got the jimjams, that's what's ailin' you. Man does get that way! You stoke a mess o' them spuds into ye an' you'll feel like somethin'."

Heenan's assertive good humor was irresistible, and by the time the meal was cooked the lonely, desperate boy was laughing almost hysterically at his rough jokes and quizzical badinage. It was the first bit of even temporary relief from the sense of loss and utter failure that he had had in the whole bitter year; for he had been obsessed to the point of insanity with his grief, and his moodiness had caused him to be tabbed as "uppish" by every one, and severely let alone in consequence. All during the meal Heenan, through his pretense of jocularly, was studying the boy keenly. He interested and attracted the big fellow. His boyish helplessness stirred something of the paternal in the rugged, insolently self-reliant old-timer. After they had eaten he skillfully drew from the boy the whole funny, pathetic story.

"—— and so I worked there in Dawson until this spring," Phil concluded, "and then I came over here. They said

the strike here was a very rich one, and I thought there might be an opportunity for me to get hold of something. It took all I had made in the year working over there to get my outfit and get over here. I still had my five thousand that I brought with me when I came up here, but I—I——" His voice quavered, and he winced and swallowed hard. "I guess I was—pretty easy! I hired a man from down in Ophir to come up here and tell me what he thought of this ground. He just went away this morning. He says that there isn't anything here at all. He says that the fellows who sold it to me must have salted it on me. I guess I—I—— Gee! It hit me kind of hard at first! I thought I—had it at last."

Heenan grunted. "Um! They grab ye for the whole roll, did they?"

Phil nodded. "They got it all. I thought it was very rich here. They panned dirt from several places on the claim, and each pan ran from four to five dollars. They—they said they were tired of the country and wanted to get out right away. I—— Gee! I was pretty easy all right!"

"We all fall! Who were the guys trimmed ye?"

"There were two of them; one of them is a fellow they call Doc Adams, and the other one's name is Bender."

"Um? Doc Adams and Looloo Bender, hey? Huh! This job's just about their size."

"Do you know them?"

"Yeh! One sweet pair o' crooks, them two! Did they get out o' the country like they said they was goin' to?"

"No, they're still down at Ophir."

"Um; what do you figure on doin'?"

"I don't know. Do you think there's any chance of my going to law somehow and——"

"Not a chance! Up here? Forget it!"

Heenan sprawled back and smoked long with closed eyes. Finally his face crinkled in a slow grin and he sat up.

"I reckon if ye had that little old five thousan' o' yourn back in your pants you'd hit for home, huh? Sure ye

would! You ain't got no business roamin' around up here in this *man's* land. You got a wife an' a home; an' five thousan's a nice little piece o' change back in that country, ain't it? Sure! You could go back an' get started again dead easy. Now, listen: I'm goin' to strike it right up in here this year. That ain't guesswork. I got a straight tip on some ground up in here an' I know what I'm goin' after. I'm goin' to do you a little turn, younker; you and me's goin' pardners. We split two ways on whatever either one of us turns up, see? Now, this thing I'm goin' after may not be a lot rich, but I'm dead certain you're goin' to get enough out of it for your share to make up your five thou. You get that much out of it anyhow, an' when ye get it you beat it out o' here an' hike for home! Y'on?"

Phil fought hard to master his twitching face. "Mr. Heenan," he half blubbered, "I—I don't—I don't know how——"

"Sure ye don't! An' cut out that 'mister' stuff; I don't like it. Now I'm goin' on down to Ophir. I want ye to follow me along about to-morrow some time. It ain't no good for you to be up here alone. But when ye get down there don't let on that ye ever met me. There's goin' to be some rush up to this place where I got this tip on this piece o' ground when the word about it gets out, an' I want to get in there on the Q. T. an' dig around an' get the best location, see? I got to work awful soft-footed for a while, an' one can keep still easier'n two. You just come on down to Ophir an' stick around camp there an' keep your shirt on an' your mouth shut till I get this thing framed right. If nobody knows you know me, nobody's goin' to try an' pump ye about what I'm pullin' off, see? So when ye see me around camp just pass me up till I give ye the high sign."

A few minutes later Heenan bade good-by to a much bewildered but almost frantically happy and thankful boy and trudged away down the bank of the creek toward the camp. At the bend, two hundred yards distant from the

shack, he stopped for a moment and looked back with a certain puzzled expression of inquiry in his eyes, lifted his hat, and scratched his tousled, yellow head perplexedly.

"Me—I'm plain boob!" he muttered disgustedly. "I always did fall hard for an onery, well-meanin' little mutt like him. Dog-gone it!"

He jammed his hat back on his head petulantly, sighed, and started on.

When Phil reached the camp on the afternoon of the following day, Heenan was there and also Adams and Bender. The anxiety of these two to get out of the country had evidently subsided. Phil met Heenan in Dutch Louie's place, and Bill passed him without the slightest flicker of recognition. The next day Heenan was gone, no one knew where, but he was freely gossiped about.

"Heenan's clean, I'm tellin' ye," Phil overheard a man in Louie's place declare. "He tried to hook me for a piece o' change last night to sit in in a darn little summer game that was runnin' on the side here. Any old time Bill floats around tryin' to make a touch for a measly ten-specker to get into a little two-dollar limit game where they ain't fifty dollars in sight, I reckon he's all in, ain't he? You bet he is! I tell ye he ain't got the price of a drink on him."

"He won't be short for a long while," another spoke up. "I know Bill. He's got that old luck thing trained to come a-runnin' an' eat out o' his hand when he whistles. He'll be there with the big roll somehow when a lot of us in this camp are bummin' our eats. At that I ain't seen Heenan flat for a right long time."

"Ah, he's lucky all right, but he'll never have nothin'," Doc Adams declared. "He's got a weakness. He falls hard for the wheel, an' he's got a bug for this system thing. Get a few drinks into him, an' get him started playin' that system he's nut over an' he'll blow the whole sack, no matter how heavy she is. He'll never have nothin'!"

"He's short on keepin' it all right," Bender agreed. "But he's long on gettin' it, believe me. Scotty here's right; he's plumb lucky! If he's out prospectin'

—an' I reckon he is—I wouldn't ask nothin' better'n to tag along an' take my chances with him. I'm tellin' ye he'll uncover somethin'."

Three days later Heenan walked into Louie's place, called for a drink for the house, and paid for it in dust out of a poke that lit on the bar with a very opulent thud when he tossed it down. Then he walked back to the roulette layout and bought five hundred dollars' worth of chips. Looloo Bender edged his way through the crowd to Doc Adams.

"I told ye so," he whispered excitedly. "He's got somethin'. Sure he has! He beat it out o' here four days back with nothin' an' now he's heeled right. We got to get busy and follow him up when he goes out again. I tell you he's hit it!"

"The biggest boob in the place is wise enough to know that!" Adams retorted disgustedly. "O' course he's hit it. But we're a year late on that follow-up idea. This whole camp's just about thinkin' that same bright thought. Everybody'll be on the move when he leaves."

"He knows his way in the brush at that! It ain't goin' to be no 'dirty mortal' to follow him out if he don't want to be trailed—an' it's a pipe he don't. The whole gang's hep, but we might beat the gate on 'em."

Adams nodded. "It's worth a play. Keep near the door an' we'll give it a try."

Adams was right. Within twenty minutes after Heenan bought and paid for the first drink out of his well-filled poke, every one in the camp knew that he had struck something, and all were figuring on a sure means of keeping him in sight.

Phil was among the crowd who watched Bill lose his five hundred on a dozen spins of the wheel. When Heenan lost his last chip he turned away and started for the door. On his way out through the crowd he jostled against Phil and whispered quickly:

"Keep still an' wait."

Then he walked on out, and the crowd followed him, hesitantly at first and with a certain attempt at dissimulation, but

as a jam formed at the door they threw aside pretense and fought in a panicky rush to get outside and keep Heenan in sight. Once outside they stopped. Those who had gotten out first were shouting to those behind to stop pushing.

"He stops by Dandy's cabin down there an' flashes a gun," some one out in front volunteered in explanation. "An' he says he's goin' to wait there a piece of a half an hour, an' the first guy makes a play to get away from here ahead o' that time he'll plug him. That's what he says. An' then he hikes off around the corner o' the cabin there. I don't know whether he's a-layin' around back o' there waitin' for some of us to make a break, or whether he's bluffed us all out an' made his get-away, an' I ain't aimin' to try an' find out neither!"

The crowd murmured and threatened and planned for fifteen minutes, and by the time they got up courage to make an investigation en masse, Heenan was gone; and though they scoured the brush in every direction for the next five days no one found any trace of him. He had not filed on his claim at the recorder's office, so there was absolutely nothing for the frantic crowd to go by.

"He's stallin' till he can get the tip out to some friends o' his from somewheres else," Scotty Welsh complained bitterly. "That ain't right! I hope somebody turns up an' jumps his darn claim 'fore he gets a chance to file on it. Serve him right!"

On the evening of the sixth day after his disappearance Heenan walked calmly into Louie's and ordered a drink. The men crowded around him, and talked volubly about everything in the world except the one thing that they all wanted to talk about. Heenan took a number of drinks, and waxed loquacious on every subject save the one they wanted to hear him talk about.

"Look here, Heenan," Scotty blurted out at length with a nervous laugh. "Ain't no use o' keeping up this stall no longer. We're wise to you an' you're wise to us. We all know you've hit somethin', an' we all know ye ain't filed

on it yet. What's the idea? We don't feel like we was gettin' a square deal."

"Hit somethin'!" Heenan repeated. "Me? You're crazy! I ain't hit nothin'. What got that idea into your head?"

"Aw, come out o' that, Bill! We know you've hit it an' hit it right. Ye was in here a little while back flat broke, an' then a few days later ye come in out o' the brush with a stake. If ye didn't hit somethin', where'd ye get that dust?"

Heenan laughed. "You're sure a bunch o' gossip old women all right. Why, I borrowed that stake off o' Dutch here! Didn't I, Dutch?"

From behind the bar Dutch grinned and nodded assent. "Oh, sure!" he said. "You borrowed it off me! I lend money to anybody, don't I?"

The crowd laughed in appreciation of this, for Dutch had a reputation for never loaning money to any one under any circumstances.

"What's the idea, Heenan?" Scotty persisted. "Why don't ye file on whatever ye got an' give us that's in here a fair chance on this? What are ye doin'? Hidin' out till ye can get a bunch o' your friends from some place else tipped off? That ain't no square way to treat us that's in here on the ground!"

"I'm tellin' ye an' tellin' ye right that I ain't got nothin'!" Heenan retorted hotly. "I've told ye that flat, an' the next one asks me what I've struck I'll take it they're makin' me out a liar!"

That was the end of the questioning. Heenan stood long at the bar, drinking steadily, and became very noisy.

"Dutch, ye tight-fisted old skinflint!" he shouted loudly at length. "Get ready to die o' heart failure, 'cause I'm goin' to check-rack ye! I got the hunch I'm due, Dutch, an' I got the dust to follow my system through. I'm goin' to check-rack the joint!"

He swaggered over to the wheel and bought a thousand dollars' worth of chips.

"Pinch all ye can while I'm playin'," he admonished the man behind the layout. "You'll need all ye can graft, 'cause you're goin' to be out of a job when I

get done with ye. I'm goin' to check-rack the house!"

"He's off!" Phil overheard Doc Adams declare to Bender. "He'll go through for everything he's got an' all he can get his mitts on now. I know him. He'll blow the whole works for whatever he can cash it for once he goes clean with what he's got on him. Keep on the job an' there may be some pickings."

Poor Phil's heart contracted painfully. He stood and watched in an agony of helplessness while Heenan lost the first thousand dollars at the wheel.

"Come with another stack the same size," the big fellow ordered when the first thousand was gone. "I'm goin' to check-rack the joint to-night. I'm due, an' I got the dust to play my system through. She's bound to win if I follow it through. Might as well give it all to me now an' save time. I'm goin' to check-rack ye, I tell ye!"

He lost the second thousand within fifteen minutes, while Phil tried unsuccessfully to catch his eye, and convey some sort of warning to him.

When the final bet that wiped out his second thousand was lost, Heenan squinted at the layout and scratched his head perplexedly.

"Little bit shy," he admitted. "That cleans me for what I got with me. I thought I sure had enough to follow through, lucky as I feel to-night! Hey, Dutch! Want to loan me another thousan' to bust ye with?"

"Ah, I've loaned you too much already!" Louie answered with a laugh.

"Oh, all right!" Heenan turned and faced the crowd. "Who'll stake me?" he inquired feverishly. "Come on, somebody; stake me to a thousan' an' I'll split my winnin's clear through!"

No one volunteered. One man made a move to step forward, but another caught him by the sleeve and pulled him back.

"Nix on that!" he warned. "He's broke now an' he's soused. He'll hit for wherever he's gettin' this dust, an' he'll be a cinch to follow now. He's drunker'n a boiled owl."

"Come on, stake me, somebody!"

Heenan begged. "I'm due, I tell ye! There's nothin' to it! All I need is enough to play my system through till she turns. I can't lose, I tell ye! It's a dirty mortal cinch! Stake me, somebody!"

Doc Adams stepped up to him. "I ain't stakin' ye for nothin', Bill," he whispered. "You've got somethin' around here somewheres. Tout me right on that an' we'll talk business."

"I ain't got nothin'!" Heenan reiterated with almost tearful petulance. "I've told ye that before, but I'm due to-night, Doc. I am! Come on an' stake me an' I'll split all I win. I got a system, Doc, an' I'm due to-night. I can't lose if I can play it through! Stake me!"

"Doc's got him," a man near where Phil stood remarked. "He's ripe, an' Doc sure is one fancy little plucker. He'll trim him for all he knows, an' Louie'll get the rest!"

"Stake me, somebody! Stake me!" Heenan begged on desperately. "I'm due, I tell ye! I can check-rack the place! Just enough to follow my system through! Stake me!" He was fairly crying with desperation.

Adams caught him by the arm, and nodded toward the open door of a little room in the rear of the place.

"Come on back in there an' I'll fix it up with ye, Bill. I'll stake ye all right. Come on!"

Heenan started to follow him, raving drunkenly that he was due and could check-rack the place. It was too much for Phil. He rushed forward and grabbed Heenan by the arm.

"Don't, Heenan! Don't!" he begged wildly. "He'll cheat you out of everything just like he did me. You're drunk now, Heenan. Wait till——"

Heenan's fist caught him flush on the mouth, and he sprawled, stunned, on his back on the floor ten feet away.

"Who's that fresh young squirt?" Heenan inquired angrily. "Tellin' me I'm drunk! Who is he?"

"That's all right, Heenan. He's just a kid. Come on!" Doc urged.

They entered the little room in the

rear, and Adams slammed the door shut behind him. Phil rose from the floor and sank into a chair by a table to bury his head in his outflung arms in an agony of utter despair. The crowd waited, tensely eager. One man voiced the thought of all: "Watch Doc now. He'll get the dope. Keep track o' him an' he'll lead us to it."

"Poor old Heenan!" another sympathized. "Same old story! I've known him for ten years, an' he always does the same thing. Hits it right time an' again, an' then gets a few drinks in him, an' goes foolish an' blows the whole thing. It's too bad!"

"Serve him right!" Scotty Welsh spoke up bitterly. "Hittin' it rich an' then stallin' the bunch like he's been doin'! I hope Doc trims him proper."

A moment later Adams stuck his head out the door. "Bender," he called. "Come here."

Bender hurried into the room, and the door was closed again. Ten minutes later the two men came out together. Their poker training was of little use to them in their palpable attempt to mask the exultation that was in them. They tried to walk to the front door casually, but before they were halfway to it they broke and ran, and the crowd ran after them. And so started a wild stampede that has been described over many a camp fire in the North. When Heenan came out, the barroom was empty save for Dutch Louie behind the bar and young Hammond sprawled over the top of a table with his head hugged tight in his arms. Heenan surveyed the empty room and laughed.

"All gone, Dutch?" he inquired.

Louie nodded. "It does beat all!" he philosophized dreamily. "They stumbled over their own feet runnin' after it. The more I see o' people the more I think sheep is four-legged humans!"

Heenan walked over to Hammond and dropped a leather poke on the table in front of him.

"Sorry I had to bat ye in the mouth, son, but I had to do it to make my play good. I told ye to keep still; ye ought to done it. There's the money Doc

flimmed ye out of an' a few hundred to boot. You hang onto your belt an' hit for that wife o' yourn an' where ye belong. You can get a down-river boat up in Nulato an' catch the Seattle boat out o' Nome, an' don't you never, never come gold huntin' again!"

Phil was staring open-mouthed, first at Heenan, who seemed entirely sober, and then at the bulging gold poke on the table in front of him.

"Why—why—what—what——" he gasped. "I thought—I thought——"

"Ye thought I was in for a trimmin', hey? Huh? When I'm trimmed I trim myself for the fun I get out o' throwin' my money away. I don't stand for nobody else trimmin' me when I don't want to be trimmed. Not me! That there sack is what Doc Adams paid me for a half interest in a claim o' mine back there in the brush a piece."

"Heenan! You sold a half interest in your claim—for me?"

"You earned it. You gimme the idea." Heenan took a greasy, fat wallet from his hip and opened it. It was full of bills.

"This here's the chechahco money you paid them guys for that claim you bought off o' them. Me an' Dutch here splits this two ways. Bender gimme it for the other half interest in claim o' mine I was tellin' ye about."

Heenan laughed and patted the bewildered boy's shoulder.

"I'll tell ye how it come up, son. A guy I met up in Nulato staked this claim in here last year. He made the papers over to me for the price of a couple o' drinks just 'fore I left there to come down here."

"Then it—it isn't valuable?"

"Anybody that pays the price o' one drink for it is stuck."

"But the money! You came back with a poke full of dust every time you left——"

"I never left. Dandy down here was in on the play. I slipped around the corner o' his shack an' climbed in through the window an' laid low till I got ready to show up again. I told them boobs the truth. I told 'em I didn't have nothin'. I didn't. I told 'em I borrowed the money off Louie here. I did—an' then played it back into his game! They ain't none of 'em got any kick comin'. I told 'em all the truth. I couldn't help it if they thought I had somethin', could I? Sure not!"

Louie rested his elbows on the bar and shook his head sadly. "Poor boobs! They wasn't hungry, but they ate it up!" he mused.

"I baited 'em right." Heenan said. "I put my weakness on the hook, an' they swallowed it whole."



A NEW DEFINITION OF C. O. D.

MR. COHEN was a bankrupt. He had given the town of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a striking illustration of how to run a retail business on a grand scale until the wholesale houses had demanded payment of him for what he had bought. He went to New York and entered the offices of the firm which had been stung by his bankrupt activities.

Throbbing with optimism, he explained to Mr. Oddenheim that he intended to start a new business and wanted to buy a long line of goods. Mr. Oddenheim stuck his head out of the door and yelled out abruptly:

"Isaac, come down here! Mr. Cohen is here and wants to buy a lot of stuff. It is Mr. Cohen, of Lancaster. Mr. Cohen, C. O. D."

At this Mr. Cohen was greatly angered.

"What do you mean?" he inquired, with heat. "Is not my credit good for ninety days? What do you mean by describing me as 'C. O. D.'?"

"Now, don't be alarmed, Mr. Cohen," said the junior member of the firm. "That 'C. O. D.' does not reflect on your credit. When I called out to Isaac, I said 'C. O. D.' That simply means 'Come Omediately Down'!"

The Curio Collector

BEING ANOTHER ADVENTURE OF YORKE NORROY, DIPLOMATIC AGENT

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "An Enemy to Society," "Yorke Norroy," Etc.

(A Novelette)

IN the antechamber where Yorke Norroy stood awaiting the appearance of one Talbot Blake—a young gentleman who fancied himself a connoisseur of the arts and a man about town—the most conspicuous decorations were the photographs of pretty women and pictures having to do with the adventures of pink-coated huntsmen. They were hung together in a mad jumble, as if the owner's imagination were divided confusedly between the chase of wild beasts and the quest of the unattainable She. The secret agent, his keen eyes missing nothing, wondered idly how thoroughly the fellow distinguished between the two pursuits—if at all; then he let his curiosity stray to the costly knickknacks scattered about, and concerned himself with whatever niceties of the man's taste there were.

Wealth he saw in abundance, and evidence of travel in the quantities of booty from the bypaths of the world; but the few really choice pieces might have been selected by the agent of a public museum. The man of taste in Norroy grew inwardly satirical at the farcical result of clumsy money spending, and he smiled; but more than half of the smile was satisfaction, for Blake's benighted condition regarding the real values in art would make Norroy's access to the man's curio cases simpler.

The secret agent had interrupted—reluctantly, and only because the call was overdue—a bracing walk on a February afternoon by a chat with one

of the subordinates he employed in his prolonged war against the drug trust. A few whispered sentences from the man, and Norroy was again sauntering along Fifth Avenue, his mind now busily searching for data concerning the identity of Talbot Blake. He could not place the man in his acquaintance; and it had required the three minutes that had just passed properly to construct a mental image of Blake from his habitation.

The young man appeared at the door of his bedroom, the frown of inquiry changing quickly to courtesy as he took in the lean, modishly clad figure before him nonchalantly waiting to be addressed.

"Mr. Michael Trask?" ventured Blake, reading from the card Norroy had given his servant. "Have we met before? I think n——"

The last word trailed into vagueness as Norroy moved his head noncommittally, silencing his questioner with a half-persuasive, half-peremptory smile. In a moment Norroy had seated himself, at Blake's bidding, and was holding the man's attention with his whimsical comments on the pictures, his penetrating little thrusts at art in general, his backward glances at the young fellow's foreign haunts, given with the authority of one who himself had traveled at random to the four corners of the earth.

"And, apropos of Chinese art," Norroy continued, "a pawnbroker to whom I go occasionally for curios tells me that you possess a certain jade piece—"

a plate of phenomenally deep green, carved with Chinese ideographs. The only two buyers in New York whom the fellow allowed to hear of that jade were you—and myself. We were chosen because of the supposed length of our purses, I dare say. At any rate, I arrived at the shop ten minutes too late. You had just gone. Oddly enough, the piece has a peculiar value to me—a value of association. Luckily I have the means just now to satisfy my fancy. I am happy to offer you double the price you gave.”

The offer was made with all Norroy's quiet effectiveness, part of which was the finality of his tone. And so completely had the secret agent assured himself of this bargain that as he spoke his eyes had wandered to the window. When they returned to Blake's face, Norroy was amazed to find a small tempest at work in it. The wrath grew as Blake digested his caller's words slowly, and presently he was walking about the room, gesticulating violently.

“Am I never to hear the last of this plate?” he cried. “I tell you no—no for the twentieth time. I bought the plate because I wanted it, and that's a good reason for keeping it. Moreover, I don't want to get any more offers. I refuse to be badgered. Go back and tell Phil Hurrish—”

“Hurrish?” Norroy put in. He was looking at the man calmly, amused at the display, and waiting for the word that explained it.

“Yes, of course—Hurrish,” Blake stormed on. “You're the fifteenth man he's sent to me if he's sent one—”

“The fifteenth?” Norroy leaned back in his chair, and laughed heartily, adding half to himself: “Hurrish is a busy man.”

“Anyhow, a dozen—and that's a dozen too many,” Blake raged, maltreating a cigarette in his fingers until he broke it. “First he came himself—the brains of the drug trust, and the grasping fingers of it, too, with that cold eye and his oily words—and offered me half again what I paid. Why he wants it I don't know, and I don't care. Then he sent his wife, who hap-

pens to be my second cousin; and she begged for it on the ground of relationship, just as if she hadn't sidetracked me socially more than once when she was after bigger game. Then young Phil appeared—the whole family on the job, you see—with his idiotic monocle, and he lisped out a request. I came near kicking him downstairs. Then a raft of special agents pulled my doorbell, some disguised, and some not, until I'm driven mad with simply hanging on to the thing that I paid my good money for. And, anyhow, now wouldn't I be a rare fool not to put grappling hooks on a piece valuable enough to raise a cloud of offers like that? You can see for yourself—” Blake was growing restive under Norroy's piercing gaze. He caught his breath, his words coming slower:

“If you hadn't looked like anything in the world rather than a friend of Hurrish, I'd—” The sentence faded of its own accord, while Norroy waited patiently, steadily.

“If you have anything more to say, don't let me interrupt.” Blake's visitor was standing now, his gloved hand on his stick.

The young fellow shook his head, his eyes fixed on Norroy's expressionless face.

“Then let me observe that I am not a friend of Hurrish,” said Norroy quietly at length. “I have never seen him—I dare say I never shall. As to the jade plate, the matter can—ah—can wait. I regret disturbing you. If the plate's value should ever lessen to you, kindly consult my card as to my address. My offer is open indefinitely. 'Afternoon.”

Norroy strolled out nonchalantly, but behind the keen eyes his mind had been stung into life by the barriers raised about the jade in the last ten minutes. He had gone to Blake supposing that the recovery of the plate was the affair of an afternoon. Now he knew that he must make new and well-laid plans at once.

He tapped his slender, polished stick against his leg as he threaded the Fifth Avenue crowds. Before he realized it

he was in Washington Square, and evening had come. A glance at his watch, and he was making his way slowly westward toward an address in Greenwich Village.

II.

Three days later a heavy snowstorm began at dawn to blanket New York. It besieged the door of a bright little flower shop on East Forty-eighth Street, apparently enraged at the glow of spring within. Since early morning Holly Lea, behind the crowded, brilliant pots, had watched the storm warily, not at all dismayed at the slack business—indeed, well content with it. The two customers who had heretofore broken her peace found her listlessly staring at a point in the snow behind their backs. She had made the sales rapidly, after a cursory glance at their faces, then retired to her post near the window without a word.

It was now eleven o'clock, and for the first time she frowned, peering into the snowstorm anxiously, when a muffled stamping occurred on the threshold. Instantly she was at the counter again, her eyes on the door. A man entered, and at sight of his face, framed in damp fur, the muscles tightened in the girl's delicate wrists. A slight flush came to her cheek, but in her expression there was only the businesslike courtesy of the saleswoman.

To the girl Talbot Blake was the arch type of that curious human New York orchid, drawings of whom are spattered through the pages of the comic weeklies, and who is generally to be seen leaving motors to enter Fifth Avenue clubs. He had twenty thousand a year; his occupation of spending it solely on himself gave him an exotic distinction that is like none other; his tastes were numerous, expensive, and occasionally discriminating; and certainly the folly he loved dearest was the absorbing folly of women. These ideas rushed through her head as the man appeared on the threshold.

Evidences of other tastes, however,

she knew there were in his spacious apartment over the way from the flower shop—a leaning toward Oriental damasks, a penchant for rare ivories, a veritable passion for Chinese jade, which he incessantly indulged. The girl had kept a mental picture of this apartment—of which she knew nothing save the description—in her head throughout the forenoon. The appearance of its owner intensified the vision.

"That looks like Japanese carved ivory against the black coat," she said, half to herself, as she pinned in his buttonhole the gardenia for which Blake had asked.

The man about town paused in the act of regarding the flower, and noted the candid look in the eye across the counter. He liked it because it non-plused him; he was familiar with all of the expressions in women's eyes, perhaps, except the direct one.

"Carvings—you?" he stammered, as if a knowledge of the arts were an indecorous thing in a shopgirl. He checked himself, and went on hurriedly as she gave a slight nod: "Have you seen those in the Granby collection—the seventeenth-century Jap pieces? I got two of 'em at their auction last month. Would you—would——" He faltered again before Holly's open eyes. With no change in candor, a spark of encouragement appeared in them. She leaned over the counter, and spoke to him as directly as she would have spoken to her brother:

"I love ivories, and I'm particularly fond of Japanese workmanship."

"Would you like to see these?" Blake gave his invitation in a breath. The moment it was given Holly Lea's muscles relaxed behind the protecting flowers; she shifted her weight from foot to foot.

"When?" he queried. "To-morrow for tea—for luncheon—for dinner this evening——" The invitations crowded each other in haste toward the present moment, drawn by the cordial smile that had appeared on the girl's lips.

"To-night, if you like," suggested the smile.

"To-night?" asked the man aloud.

"If you like," she said. "I've seen no ivories for months, and I think that's a great hardship. Very good of you to be willing to show them, you know."

The man assured her of his delight at her own pleasure in good things, deposited a coin from his pocket, and a card from his case before a heap of flowers, and withdrew, bowing once more on the threshold.

The moment Talbot Blake's shadow was out of sight, the girl picked up a telephone at her side, and asked for a number. Then: "Eighteen thousand and one, Madison? Mr. Norroy? East Forty-eighth. To-night, eight-thirty. Will call you if I need you. Hope I shan't. Thanks. Good-by."

That evening at five Holly Lea turned over the meager receipts for the day to the owner of the shop, who appeared suddenly out of the storm and treated her with a respect he did not often accord to employees. "Quite possibly I may be back to-morrow," she said, beaming at him. "If not, I'll send a substitute. I can't remember another such satisfying day as this has been—my first glimpse of business life. I don't get that sort of thing at home, you know. You were very good to take me on, Mr. Abrahams. What I give you doesn't half represent what I am getting in return. Good night." And she passed out with a froufrou beneath her sober skirts that hinted at the luxury of another life hidden beneath her plain outer garb.

The man gazed after her for a moment. "Wants to learn business life, eh?" he mused. "Willing to pay for her experience, too. She must be a suffragette."

At precisely half past eight that evening Holly Lea alighted from a cab, and, pressing a silver button in a marble doorway across the street from the flower shop, presently found herself ascending in one breathless jump toward the upper areas of the house.

A manservant unbolted the mirrored cage, losing himself in the shadows of Talbot Blake's hall an instant after the light revealed his face. The girl paused

for a second, her alert mind striving to place the man she had just seen. He was vaguely familiar, but the recollection shaded off into nothingness. She found herself staring into the face of a trim maid, still groping for the man's identity; she passed into a small chamber and threw a shimmering evening wrap from her shoulders.

The Holly Lea with the regal coiffure, whose evening frock clung to her young body in lines that could have been achieved nowhere but under the eye of one of the great modistes, was a different being from the raw girl of the vaudevilles, whose life had changed its course after an evening's motor ride with Yorke Norroy a few weeks before. The inscrutable, slim dandy had achieved the metamorphosis single-handed, his peculiar mind being as interested in correcting a young girl's use of English as in warring against other notions. The seed of enthusiasm that he had sown in her heart for the capture of the essential jade plates had blossomed into outward maturity. The change was evident now in the deepened glance of her eye, the quickness of her mind, the poised alertness of her body.

In a tiny flat downtown, Holly had received daily news of Norroy's projects, so that every detail of the chase was imprinted in her mind. Save when rehearsing for "The Devonshire Maid," she had solitude; and careful attention to her health had filled the wells of energy within her to the brim.

To Holly Lea had come the six jade plates containing the formula for making Shandoo, the most seductive form of opium. Unaware of their deadly menace, she had sold them, and was now eager to regain possession of them so that Norroy might destroy them. Only one of the six plates had as yet been found. But a few days before the secret agent had told the girl of the whereabouts of number two.

He had given her two addresses—that of the Forty-eighth Street flower shop and of the residence of Talbot Blake, across the way. The secret agent had gone to the point crisply.

Tapping Blake's name with a slender masculine forefinger, he had said:

"This man procured the second of the jade plates. He bought it from a Seventh Avenue pawnbroker, who obtained it from the man to whom you sold the plates in October. The second dealer recognized pure jade, and kept it under cover until he could find a rich buyer. My men reached the shop ten minutes after that buyer left—Talbot Blake. Now, I've discovered that Talbot Blake is in the habit of procuring a buttonière from the florist—Abrahams—every morning. A decent chap, Blake, but, like most of his kind, too bored to be amused by anything except a pretty and witty woman. You can induce Abrahams to take on a temporary assistant, I dare say. You comprehend me?"

She had nodded, too excited to speak.

"Is your account with the bank sufficient?"

"Why, I think so; it's my first. I don't know about cost or anything."

"What about your own resourcefulness—your own strength of purpose? Do you think *that* sufficient?" There was a serious inquiry in the eye that watched her.

For reply, the girl had held out her arm, cool and steady with health, a discernible pulse beating calmly in the blue-veined wrist.

"My brain is working like that," she had said simply.

As Holly stood moodily in Blake's anteroom, she remembered how Yorke Norroy had bent down and kissed one tiny finger nail at her last words. "You'll do," he had said. In the mirror before her, Holly could see the flush of pleasure rise again to her cheeks at the memory of his simple, transforming phrase.

She paused for a moment on the threshold. Her beauty, rare at any time, was refined by the mauve and crimson mixture in her silk frock. The weave was an Oriental audacity that only the Persian bazaar man from whom Yorke Norroy had purchased it long ago would have had to sell. Only

the celebrated designer to whom Holly had taken it would have dared to attempt a frock of it. He had looked at the owner for the space of several minutes before consenting. It needed youth to run the gamut of those daring dissonances of color, youth to reinforce the deeper harmonies. And Holly was at the edge of twenty.

Each delicious curve in her white arms and shoulders was evident now against a dull and glowing background. With only a little expenditure of money, she had provided tourmaline and chrysoprase—the cheapest of beautiful gems—for her throat and hair. A golden mesh snake with hard green eyes encircled a lithe waist of the sort whose lines corsetières imitate but do not achieve. And above all of its complexity, like stars above a seething world, were Holly's candid eyes—the eyes that had caused Talbot Blake to turn and look at her again after she had accepted his invitation to a tête-à-tête.

Her host, connoisseur in women and patron of the arts, appeared out of the dark. She had not heard his footfall over the soft carpet. At full sight of her, he stopped, and looked her over keenly; then he greeted her with a quiet, cordial smile. Holly entered a high-ceilinged, mahogany-boarded dining room on his arm.

They were halfway through the fish before either spoke save in gracious commonplaces. He inquired concerning the fatigues of flower selling; she replied that flowers are beautiful, and that to be happy one must work. She touched on the delights of living among the treasures of art; he averred that one must spend one's income somehow, but that there are other marvelous things in the world than gems and old armor. She observed audaciously that nothing gives so little trouble as inanimate things; he retorted that trouble is sometimes sweet. It was the sort of conversation one reads in books written by young women.

The meal arrived. It was roast suckling pig, with berried holly leaves emerging from its backbone. The girl

clapped her hands in delight. She plucked one of the leaves, and thrust it into her hair, where its red berries nodded at her host.

"My only family crest," she said. "My first name is Holly."

His answer was of the sort he had found effective before. The use of the names of mythological goddesses as similes saved efforts of imagination. So he compared her to Aphrodite.

"You mean the goddess who rose from the sea?" she returned, smiling. "I never rose from the sea. I rose from the people. Thank you," she added, as his eyes expressed unbelief. "I have forgotten who I am to-night. But every day, from eight to five o'clock, I am one of them. After that the lizard changes its skin, but it is still the same lizard."

She knew she must satisfy his curiosity with whatever scraps her ingenuity could summon.

He was sipping his fourth glass of champagne thirstily now, confused, but delighted, at the girl's cleverness. Warmed by the wine, he at length began to put direct inquiries to her, and she replied with facts usually, but facts that revealed nothing. He turned his head to order a change in the dessert, and she calmly poured some of her wine into a bowl of flowers, which already held much of her former glasses. Then she toyed with a fruit glacé, and waited smilingly for the end of the dinner.

It came at last as a mound of jelly was borne away, unbroken save by an idle jab or two from Blake's spoon. The iridescent liqueurs that followed remained a shining and undisturbed company before Holly's plate. The host's attack on them had put a rosy cloud between him and notice of the girl's abstemiousness.

And now he clapped his hands three times loudly. "Ask Mrs. Parker for the key to the curio cases," he said to the footman who appeared. The man's footfall behind Holly's chair had been so stealthy that she was startled.

The servant moved away as silently and swiftly as he had come. Something

—perhaps a draft of cold air that had entered the room with him—caused Holly to shiver slightly, and as she turned her head she caught sight of the man's profile in a mirror as he disappeared. It was the fellow who had let her in. Again the nameless recollection troubled her mind, and she turned to Talbot Blake.

"Excellent servants these of yours," she said. "Dare say it takes years to train them."

"Not time, m' dear young lady. Housekeeper, Mrs. Parker, invaluable woman. Good old tyrant, Mrs. Parker. Got this man on'y two days ago, and look what she's made of 'im!"

The girl's memory had been at work as she bent her head attentively toward her host. Beneath the table she twirled a ring on her finger around once inconclusively, and then gave it a little pat, her mind at rest. She had placed Blake's footman—he was an agent of Philip Hurrish—Hurrish, of the infamous drug trust, who would move heaven and earth to get the jade plates with their formula for making Shandoo.

His complexion subtly altered with pigment, the outline of his nose changed by quills inserted in the nostril, his narrow head transformingly shaved after the manner of French butlers, beneath his disguise the servant was undeniably the fellow who had come to her flat in Greenwich Village, pretending to be an agent for the suppliers of illumination, under which pretext he had engaged her in conversation, and later tried to bribe her into telling something of the good fortune that had so suddenly befallen her. She knew now that Hurrish's money explained his presence in her apartment; that it was Hurrish who had sent him to enlist as Blake's footman.

The man reëntered the room, holding a gleaming brass key out to Blake, one arm stretched over the table. His shifting eyes never once wandered toward the girl; his lean body suggested automatic obedience. He was the embodiment of the crawling virtues of the slave, equipped with his master's money for his master's purpose. The

resolute look in Holly's eyes grew as she watched him leave the room. It was for strife with such of Hurrish's creatures as this that she had been training for weeks.

Blake rose unsteadily from his chair, and lifted his wineglass. "T' the curio lady!" he cried, face flushed and eyes swimming. "T' the curio lady! To all curios and all ladies!"

Suddenly he coughed, supporting himself with one arm on the back of his chair. Slowly a change of color came over his weak, but rather pleasant, face. The flush faded into white—the white became pale green. He coughed again, rinsed out his mouth with more champagne, and turned surprised eyes on the girl, controlling herself with an effort. The amazement in Holly's face was as genuine as his own; his distress was painful to see. Even in the moment of physical anguish, she observed the habit of courtesy in him, generations old.

"Somethin' tastes odd," he stammered. "Don't b'alarmed. Bit dizzy, that's all. Pray sit down. All right in a mo——" A paroxysm of the throat interrupted, and one of his hands passed wonderingly over a moist forehead. In another second he had fallen on the thick carpet, inert and dumb.

Holly leaned toward a silver button set into the cherry-wood boards at her host's right hand. Her eyes roved over the table, and before she touched the button they had found what they sought. Half immersed in Blake's glass of champagne was the key to the curio cases, where it had fallen from his hand. She plucked out the cold brass, and thrust it, dripping, into her dress. As the wine was absorbed, the silk turned a dull orange.

Afterward Holly remembered dumbly watching the action of the chemical, and wondering if the poison that had been used meant instant death; then pressing the bell rather frantically. Instead of the man who had served their dinner, the ratlike countenance of the footman appeared at the door. For the first time, his eyes went directly to Holly's. She did not mis-

take the menace in the look, but for some reason his lips were still closed and the obedient curve in his back remained.

"Bring me an emetic of oil instantly," she said, the note of command growing in her voice as she watched an odd enforced response in the man's eyes. By that look, the girl knew that he had not succeeded in getting rid of the other servants in the rear of the apartment as yet. Their presence in the house meant danger for him and quick work on her part. He hesitated a moment, and Holly took a step forward. The man's gaze went involuntarily from her uplifted arm to a huge lacquered gong toward which the girl had chanced to move. Holly understood that it was the housekeeper's bell.

"If you do not return with restoratives in three minutes I shall call Mrs. Parker," she said deliberately, surveying the gong. "You will understand that it is better for both of us that I do not have to ring her bell." Before she could add a word, he was gone from the room.

She was free now to crouch by Blake's side, her ear at his heart. His respiration was slow and faint.

Her lips compressed, and her eyes averted from the deathly pallor of the man's face, Holly seized his shoulders. The muscles stood out like whipcords in her slender back, but she was able to seat the man in his chair at the second straining effort. Then she propped up an arm, shielding his face with one of his hands, flecked the dust from his clothes, and rearranged his crushed buttonière.

To one on the other side of the room, Talbot Blake would have appeared to be merely absorbed in contemplating his own shoes. His slow, regular breathing had reassured the girl, and she dampened his brow with some cool wine. She carried a strengthening touch of it to her own lips, and looked swiftly about her.

"A moment or two more, and I shall be finished here," she calculated rapidly. "Blake can wait that long for attention; he *must* wait."

She had gone to the row of curio cases deep in the shadow of the opposite wall. The gloom of a great rug shrouded them; a red Bokhara, suspended at an angle from the wall on copper rods fixed in the plaster. Even in the crisis her mind was occupied with the mishaps to incidental pawns in the game such as Blake. Twice before turning the key in the lock she glanced back to see if he stirred. There was no movement; she drove him from her mind, and peered into the depths of the largest case.

Back of the medley of crystal and glass Holly could see faintly a green disk, but she was not sure of its identity. She searched for an electric switch, and found nothing but a match. In its sputtering flare she made out the unmistakable cuneiform characters in the face of the jade. For the moment it looked beautiful enough to be worth the lives that it and its mates had cost. At last she had the key in the lock and was turning it.

It resisted. The girl's arms became tense with the effort to turn it. She paused in the struggle, and glanced back of her in fright, half expecting to feel the enemy's fingers on her throat in the very second of victory. The room was as still as the motionless body of the man in the chair. A minute flame in a silver candlestick at Talbot Blake's elbow went out at that moment; Holly noted that the flickering shadow had given his profile a curiously alive look that was now gone. She bent her head over her work—mad suddenly to get away from the ominous room.

It became increasingly plain that something was wrong. She thrust the key back and forth in the opening, nicks up and then down. Nothing came of it but wrenched and aching fingers. She tried to shatter the glass. It was as thick and unyielding as a gravestone. Then she rested her temples on the silver edge of the case for a moment, whatever fear there had been in her heart gone. She was balked, but her will responded to the new call upon it like a steel spring.

Of course, the footman had substituted another key for the one Mrs. Parker had committed to his care. There had been plenty of time to make the exchange. She hated herself for underestimating his wits so badly as Blake had his honesty.

Holly glanced at the clock. Ages of intense activity had been packed into just three minutes of time. She knew that the sinister servant might return the next second, or in half an hour—with or without restoratives for Blake, depending on how far his fear of the other servants in the house forced him into obedience to her word. The entire affair was balanced on a razor edge, tipping toward failure.

Holly had gone to the telephone instrument at the other side of the room. She was giving the operator Yorke Norroy's number.

A vision of entering Norroy's apartment, the jade plate securely tucked under her arm, and victory in her eyes, was blotted out. It had sustained her for weeks. She held the receiver in a vise, her eyes black with disappointment. The keen, satisfied look with which Norroy had rewarded her aptness during the weeks of preparation would leave his face; she already hated the patient encouragement that would replace it.

And yet Holly knew that to stay in the struggle without help at this point would be to double the chances of failure. Only the day before, Norroy had reminded her that mere pride in his own strength has lost many a good warrior his battle. The recovery of the jade was the important thing, not her own prowess. She crushed back her conceit as she heard Norroy's voice on the wire.

"I need you at once," she said briefly.

Norroy closed the connection with a syllable of assent.

In another moment she had gone to the tiny dressing room after her cloak, and was back in the room hooded in it. As she slipped into the shadows behind the Bokhara rug, she noted that the deep green of her cloak was the exact

shade of Talbot Blake's ivy-colored wall.

For a succession of little eternities she waited. One by one the lights in the candelabra before Blake died. The soft glow of electricity in the ceiling above him seemed to sink in company with them, then flare out again. Holly saw each object before her shrink and swell, change in color and form as her tired eyes played pranks on her. The bent figure of her host remained still among them all, an immobility that was at times more terrifying than the wildest action. Now his body seemed the home of a brooding will that reached invisible hands over the room and made the chairs dance. Again he was passive and defenseless, and all his rioting possessions threatened to topple in upon him in a huge conspiracy.

Holly pressed her temples and smiled at herself. She knew that her brain was ready to work coolly and steadily the moment it was needed. The unstable room amused her.

The last lighted candle on the table spluttered and fell over on the white damask, and the smoking ring slowly widened. The girl sniffed the acrid smoke idly, uncaringly. She would as soon have ventured out of her hiding place to stop the smudge as to dust the furniture or to powder her nose. The crawling burn ended presently at a border of champagne stains in the cloth. At that moment a chime in one of the front drawing-rooms struck eleven o'clock. As if prompted by the vibrations, the hand that had supported Talbot Blake's head fell suddenly, and his body swayed slowly forward. And in a moment he was still again, his head quite simply buried in the crook of one elbow, his position more natural than before. Holly's lips curved at the grotesque pantomime.

The door from the butler's pantry opened quickly and noiselessly. Instantly the room that had been reeling before Holly's eyes settled to rights, each chair on four legs, every line straight and clear. Her brain registered every movement that the footman made

with startling accuracy. He had paused at the threshold, peering with the furtive slyness of an animal into every corner of the room. His eye fell on Talbot Blake's head, left it to search for something else, and returned to the still figure. For minutes he stood there, assuring himself before he entered the room that it held nothing he need fear, ready to move back into the dark at any moment. Holly never forgot the rabbitlike precautions of Hurrish's backstairs ambassador.

Presently he was at the side of the master of the house, testing his pulse, opening his closed lids. Evidently he read in the pupils of Blake's eyes that he could count on a further period of torpor, for he let the body fall back with a sudden movement of unconcern and an odd, ruthless twist on his face; then, with rapid, soft steps, he left the room by the hall door.

By no chance had Holly dropped a long white glove at the entrance of the anteroom, one of its crumpled fingers pointing toward the outer entrance. She had left it lying on the carpet when she returned with her cloak, hoping the servant would not overlook the mute index finger pointing toward her own departure. He did not, for he was back in the room presently, the scented kid flung over one arm, his face twitching with satisfaction. He flung it on the table, and reached for the sherry bottle on the sideboard, each gesture free now and with no attempt at silence.

There was a rapid, noisy gulping of wine, a hearty wiping of his unpleasant, crooked mouth, and he had slipped two fingers into his vest pocket and drawn forth a brass key—the real key. Then he was at her side, almost—almost within sound of her own heartbeats, his hand on the lock of the curio case.

Even a slight blow will convulse a certain small, vulnerable spot in the human wrist near the base of the thumb as quickly as fire sears the cuticle. Holly's fist came down with a smart impact; the falling key struck the edge of the case, and rebounded

close to the hem of her skirt. The man stepped back with a snarl of mortal terror, revealing a quaking soul which no amount of swagger could ever entirely cover. Holly put one foot over the key, sweeping it beneath her dress, and glanced up at the shaking man with a faint smile on her lips.

Even in his moments of self-control, the fellow's bluster would have been blunted against the steely composure with which the girl met him. He was helpless for many moments. The girl waited.

"You've learned some tricks since I saw you last, Holly Lea," he said at length. "Been working hard at the game?"

"Just hard enough to realize the value of this key, my dear sir. I hope you don't want me to return it?" she ventured pleasantly.

"I'm going to grab anything I can get," he said glibly, his assurance returning a little at the sound of his own voice. "Specially anything I can get as easy as that key. You wouldn't do anything worse than scratch my face with those pretty pink nails of yours, would you? You keep 'em filed nice and sharp now, eh—sharper than when you were dancing in the cheap houses on the circuit? Need 'em in your business?"

"They are quite as sharp, I assure you," she returned, a little viciously. "I must be ready for emergencies. But I shan't use them to-night. You're not going to require scratching."

"No? Well, I don't really believe that you get me, kid," he said slowly, his bloodless skin wrinkling as he smiled, his eyes watching the white hands that hung limp at her side. Then his fingers twitched toward a rear pocket, and she caught the gleam of a revolver in the air.

"Step off that key, and step quick!" He was shouting now. "Make believe I was the stage manager at yer first try-out. I'll give you three seconds and a half."

Holly was unarmed. She had been waiting for his movement toward the pistol she suspected he carried. When

it came, she did as she was told, leaving the key gleaming on the floor between them. The agent bent toward it, his nasal voice growing shrill with his triumph as he told her what to do.

"Now you can wait until I look at this brickybrac in the light before I make up my mind it's the right one," he said. "Wouldn't like to make a mistake in the dark. Then I've got a friend outside who'll take care of you, young one. He'll wall you up in a pretty boudoir where you will have plenty of chance to practice your new songs all alone. I'll get 'im on the phone in a second. Meanwhile, just step over by the wall, and try to look as if you was enjoying the party." He waved his gun toward her.

The girl obeyed him impassively. She moved with a quaint dignity, her skirts delicately rustling, her cheeks faintly flushed, her eyes and mouth calm. Holly's dramatic sense was at work; she was back in the days when she played her little games on the boards, when she knew that her slightest gesture must register in hundreds of idle minds, when she was playing for applause instead of for life and death. It all helped her to time each movement in the grim little ordeal as delicately as if nothing hung in the balance but her salary. The man showed the effects of her composure by grunting amiably at her docility. As he fumbled with the lock, he made a wry mouth in her direction which he meant for a kiss; but his right hand kept her securely covered with the revolver. In another moment he had thrust the little green plate into his pocket.

A shrill peal of laughter, into which Holly put all the discords in her flexible voice, stopped him before he had moved from the case. The girl kept her eyes upon the weapon, which she half expected would be fired instantly. But the lackey's nerves refused somehow in the crucial moment; instead, he wheeled round upon her outburst with an oath. He found Holly standing against the wall, one hand clutching the rope of the Chinese gong—the house-keeper's bell.

"It's all up," she said. "Up—emphatically and finally up. Did you think you could win with a little loud talk and an empty threat? Throw that weapon out of the window, and put that plate into my hand, or I'll ring this bell. The housekeeper's just above. Mr. Blake needn't have bothered to tell me. I knew it by the quiet way you moved about—your 'gumshoe step'—isn't that the word? I've forgotten most of my vaudeville slang."

A deluge of talk followed, with a sure, hard ring in the girl's voice that baffled the man. He gazed at her dumbly, his slower mind seeking an outlet. She fired her mockery at him in volleys, holding him with the sureness, the bravery of it. Holly had understood in her cradle how to overwhelm more difficult material than such an opponent. She let loose more talent than he was worth in the joy of the task, fixing him with burning eyes. She all but tossed the rope from her in abandon, daring him to fire.

Slowly he yielded, as a raven might yield to a snake. When he had lowered the hand that held the pistol and thrust forward one shuffling foot, Holly knew that she had triumphed. A dozen times after that he hesitated, his eyes turned yearningly first toward the door, then down to his weapon; but at each convulsive half raising of the pistol a sharp word from the girl held him back, and her bright, hypnotic eyes drew his to the fingers that clutched the bell rope. Presently he was before her, the plate in his lax fingers. She had taken it and thrust it into her bodice in a second, while the man stood before her, still in grotesque inaction, apparently as bereft of energy as the deadened body in the chair behind him.

"You've got me this time," he muttered, his eyes roving over the carpet. "If I'd known you was a professional, a reg'lar dyed-in-the-wool first-rater, I'd never undertook the job. Wasn't on to you at first—you looked so pretty and meek."

Holly laughed. "Acting unlike a thief is rather the thing for a first-rater to do, isn't it?" she said. "Did

you expect me to glower and mutter curses? They may do that in the lower walks of the profession—I don't know. Doubtless you could tell me. I'm fairly new in the business——"

"Not so new but that you've got next to some of the trade secrets mighty quick, young lady," he put in. "Some of the things only the wise ones know about. That there jade plate, for instance——"

"Ah, yes, the jade plate," she interrupted. "My present engagement in your profession ends now that I have it about me. I shall be quite finished as soon as you have laid aside your pistol—up there on the mantel out of our way. I want you to help me do what we can for Mr. Blake before I go."

The fellow's gaze followed the slight nod of her head toward the man in the chair. It was the first time his eyes had wandered from the cool command of her scrutiny—the hasty poise that lay beneath her bantering. For a second she was not sure that he would obey; but, with a cutting little word, she called his attention to the bell rope, which had been lying loose in her fingers, and which she now drew dangerously taut. He looked at the ominous, thick cord for a moment, wavering; then he slunk away rapidly toward the mantel.

The footman brushed the sleeve of Talbot Blake as he passed his master's chair, and the limp arm clung to him. Startled, he turned and looked into the face of the man he had drugged. Blake's eyes were open; the confused shadows in them were fading before a look of inquiry. The dumb question became a mutter, and in a moment more Blake had half raised himself, and was demanding of his servant an explanation of the disordered table, the weapon in the man's hand, his own condition.

"I was doped—doped, wasn't I?" he said, repeating the words over and over so that they might sink into his own clouded brain. He glanced down at the cloth, drenched with champagne, and added whimsically: "Must have cost me a good deal in wine bills while

I was asleep." Then, his humor changing in a flash to anger, he shouted loudly twice: "Who did it?"

The footman had watched the recovery narrowly, his beady eyes tracing every evidence of returning control on his master's face, his hand now and then carelessly exhibiting the little pistol that he carried. The necessity for any personal courage on his part was going with every second; and as the opportunity to use his natural guile dawned upon him his eyes grew bright with excitement. His tongue wagged glibly directly his master's straggling sentences were finished.

"I tried to save you from her, sir," he cried. "I did what I could—indeed, I did! But I got into the room too late. She had done her work already, and you was lying there in your chair as white as a sheet. I didn't have time to do anything for you then, because she was over at the cases, taking something out. I think it's a little green plate—jade, she called it—and if you want it back you can find it inside her dress. I had to use this pistol to keep her from going away with it. I hope she hasn't made you feel too bad, sir. You wouldn't think that a young woman that looks as nice and innocent as she does would have poison on her, sir, but it looks as though this one had gone clean wrong. Afraid she has, sir—afraid——"

"Hold your tongue, Baker!" called out Blake peremptorily, growing tired of the man's loquacity. "I'll attend to the young lady myself." He turned heavily in his chair, looking as keenly as his reeling head would permit at Holly as she leaned against the wall, still clutching the bell rope. The girl was a little white, but the eyes she turned to Blake were calm and unwavering.

"Sorry, but it looks bad for you," he said. "A girl doesn't find Oriental silks in a flower shop, nor learn to speak the king's English as you do there, you know. Wouldn't have minded your taking a curio, perhaps, but I do object to being drugged. I dare say I was an ass not to have been wiser

in the beginning. Have to ask you for whatever valuables of mine you have about you."

The clubman looked pained at the necessity of the moment, but he clung to his idea; and, instead of meeting the girl's eyes, he turned an unresponsive shoulder when Holly made an impetuous step forward.

"You were drugged by your own servant," she said quietly. "I found him rifling your curio cases with a revolver in one hand, and I had my hand on this bell to ring for the housekeeper when you opened your eyes."

Blake hesitated, moved a trifle by the quiet authority of her manner, but still filled with doubt. He paused for seconds, turning the matter over in his mind; then a decision came to him. With difficulty, he left his chair, and walked unsteadily toward the bell cord that Holly had just left. Three vibrant peals of the great gong were sounded, and the man sank weakly again into his seat.

Mrs. Parker arrived in a few moments, a bustling, imperial matron, in black silk, with sleepy eyes innocent of the dramatic goings-on that had taken place in the room below her. Energy came to her in a wave, however, as she beheld the havoc on the stained and singed tablecloth, and it grew into an irritable sympathy when the pallor of her master's face was borne in upon her.

"I knew it!" she cried. "Entertaining a strange young woman with a dinner fit for a queen, and her coming from a flower shop, and dressed like a grand-opera singer! I tell you again, Mr. Talbot, no good comes of making friends too easy. If anything terrible has happened, maybe you'll take old Parker's advice next time. And here—your best damask burned——" The old woman rattled on with the volubility natural to her who had given Talbot Blake his first knickerbockers to wear, and who now ruled his household with a rod of iron—a rod which she apparently thrust into his personal affairs on occasion without reproof. She began to straighten the table fussily,

darting hostile glances at the other woman in the room.

Blake indicated Holly with a jerk of his head. "This young lady may have some of my belongings on her—or she may not," he said. "I want you to find out here and now, Parker. And, meanwhile, do stop your chatter. You go on as if you had never found me in a mess before. I should think you would get tired of being shocked."

It was something like ferocity that the old woman exhibited to Holly now that even her master had laid the girl under suspicion. The clubman checked her enmity with an admonishing word as she approached the silent young woman, bristling. Before the housekeeper reached her, however, Holly took a step backward; and in a second she had drawn a small green object from her bodice, holding it for a moment between the gleaming, triumphant eyes of Blake's footman and the misty blue ones of the clubman himself. Both men held their breath as she deposited it on the table before them.

"There is your precious jade," she said, with a quiet smile at Blake, out of which not a particle of her steely sporting quality had gone. "I took it from your thieving footman to save it from—well, from worse uses than you will guess. And, by the way," she added, with an emphatic little nod toward Blake that he remembered long afterward, "it is going to surprise you some day—surprise you awfully—to learn that what I say is true."

The clubman wiped his moist brow. In a mirror opposite he caught the reflection of his own face, in which perplexity was deepening with returning pallor. Mrs. Parker had left the room suddenly, reproachful "I told you so" written large over her perspiring features and her broad and panting bosom. It was Baker, the furtive-eyed servant, who took first advantage of the girl's confession. His importance, swelled by the removal of guilt from himself, suggested instant rebuke to the woman who had outwitted him until now; and as Holly stepped backward toward the support of the wall his hand fell heav-

ily on her bare arm. Instantly she gave an exclamation of surprised disgust that echoed sharply through the still room and in the hall behind her.

"No easy get-away for you, young madam," the fellow said, his clammy fingers pressing into her flesh.

Blake had turned to order him away; even Mrs. Parker, from the hall behind, gave a little sound of protest. But before either could speak the man's hand suddenly left Holly's arm as a leather belt flies from the wheel that holds it taut. His body went spinning a few yards dizzily, and collapsed into a heap on the carpet, while the stranger who hurled him away lowered his arm and stood quite still in the doorway, inclining his head politely toward the master of the house.

The light fell full on the newcomer's face, revealing a dark, olive skin, like a Brazilian's, a sparse, curling beard, and hair that in spite of a recent clipping still waved fractiously. Impeccable evening clothes covered a full body bordering on obesity—a body that responded flexibly, however, to the man's swiftly working mind. Gold-bowed spectacles, part of the usual equipment of a physician, the man wore close to his eyes, concealing their color.

He did not speak until Mrs. Parker, who had just let him in at the front door, began to help him out of the snow-dotted fur that covered him.

"You called for a physician, I think?"

Blake did not answer, and Holly informed the clubman quickly: "I telephoned for a doctor an hour ago, when you were still in a stupor." Then she added, with a slow smile at the newcomer: "Thank you."

"No trouble," he returned. "Your voice sounded a trifle—alarmed."

Holly had given him no look of recognition, but her beating pulses calmed at the sound of the flexible voice, a trifle deeper than usual—the voice she had grown to associate with the mastery of a hundred difficult situations. The burden of the tense scene was lifted from her spirit; a delicious sense of

security went over her nerves. She sank into a chair, the only outward sign of relief being a slight flush that rose to cheeks which had grown pale during the long strain.

Norroy moved swiftly, intent on his patient. Again, and strongly, Holly caught the impression of powerful forces held in iron control beneath his careless exterior. She watched him bend over his black satchel and extract a stimulant that the weakening Blake seemed to need. He administered the cordial with the nonchalance of a professional, meanwhile directing Mrs. Parker in her hurrying to and from the kitchen with cloths and hot water.

Presently the slender fingers ceased mixing potions, and in a twinkling the physician became a gentleman of leisure. He had brought up Blake's vitality notch by notch, until the clubman smiled his thanks to him. Norroy took a chair opposite his patient, extracted a thin, crested cigarette from his gold case, and thumped it softly on his cuff.

"My dear sir," he said, "let me congratulate you on the moderation of the dose. A little more of that particular poison, and I should not have had the happiness to bring you through. An accident, I presume?"

In a few minutes Blake had told the tale as he knew it, punctuated volubly here and there by Mrs. Parker from the background. Norroy listened attentively, without comment. Then he examined the little green disk at his side carefully.

"A charming specimen," he said meditatively at length. "In the land it came from it would be held quite worth the attentions of a professional poisoner. And you say that neither the young lady nor the footman will admit that its beauty tempted them to risk a life for it—yours, and one of theirs?"

Blake nodded dumbly, his mind blunted against Norroy's pleasantry. Behind his chair, the housekeeper snorted audibly in Holly's direction.

"Rather odd that a young woman of so agreeable an appearance should need a champion," Norroy continued, still in his tone of amiable reproof. "Nor can

I detect any desire for one in her manner; but I wonder if she would mind if we assume she is innocent—only for a moment, and despite appearances?"

Blake stared stolidly before him, and Norroy went on evenly:

"Quite possibly, of course, she came to dine with you with murder in her heart. But—but did you find any poison on her?"

Blake fidgeted indecisively. In a moment he admitted that she had not been searched, but he protested that the presence of the jade plate in her dress would pronounce her guilty with any jury whose heads had remained on their shoulders.

In a second Yorke Norroy had stepped to the man who was obscured in the shadows of the far end of the room, and, with a viselike pressure on his arm, he brought him near the table. Presently from one of the inner pockets of the fellow's waistcoat Norroy drew forth a tiny pasteboard box. Under his master's eye, the footman dared make no move; and Norroy's tapping of his shrinking body had been done expertly. The man followed Norroy to Blake's side, and had begun to speak when he caught a steely gleam from the eyes behind the spectacles. He waited.

Norroy was leisurely testing in a little water the white powder which the box contained. In a few moments he looked up.

"This is the narcotic that stupefied you," he said quietly to Blake. "If it had been dropped into hot water, it would have been enough to kill you; but I dare say the solvent was cold, leaving much of the stuff undissolved—eh? Let us see." He held toward the light the champagne glass from which Blake had drunk three hours earlier, in which a group of crystals was evident, clinging to the inner side.

Blake's expression changed; he glanced quickly at Holly, then away again. The girl sat, chin in hand, watching the proceedings intently, but without a sound. The footman interposed in haste, his little eyes blinking in the effort to be coherent. He came

to Blake's side, and whispered in his ear.

"Talk out loud!" shouted his master roughly, an instinct for justice at work somewhere beneath his indecision. The servant braced himself to meet Norroy's gaze, faltered a moment before the steadiness of it, but went on after a gulp.

"She put it there!" he cried, struggling to make his speech plain. "I felt her hand fumbling around my back when I pulled her away from the case, and I said to myself she's up to some mischief. But I didn't have time to think of it afterward—she kept me so busy. I had a fight to get the plate, and I forgot her sly fingers. Then she jumped over to the housekeeper's bell, thinking to call Mrs. Parker and blame it all on me, and then—then you woke up, Mr. Blake. If you'd have waited another minute I'd have known it was the poison she put on me, for I could feel the box against my ribs, but my brain was whirling, sir."

The man's protestations filled the room; his white face had taken on a scared look that carried his words into his master's mind. His very confusion worked in his favor, seeming to be the tremors of an honest man hard pressed.

Blake looked at him blankly, attempting to check off the likely points in the man's story. The housekeeper had gone to the kitchen with her towels and hot water, her mind still occupied solely with her injured master. And Holly sat quietly in her chair, watching the throwing of the dice that would decide her fate, realizing that Norroy stood at the head of the gaming board. Once she glanced at her friend across the table, where he sat hidden in the blue incense of his cigarette. She heard one of his nails slowly tapping the arm of his chair; then suddenly the smoke was brushed aside, and, a hand still idly waving in the air, Norroy spoke.

"Doubtless our friend the footman is right, Mr. Blake," he said. "Doubtless he entered this room on the most innocent of errands, and doubtless he stopped an experienced criminal in her path. He seems a rather able pleader

in his own behalf, however, and the young lady says nothing. Perhaps—just perhaps—that fact prejudices me in her favor. Added to it is another circumstance—this small object"—and Norroy flipped across the table the cover of the little box—"on which the druggist has written the name of the buyer. And the name is *not* a woman's name."

Blake picked up the cover hurriedly, and the housekeeper, who was again in the room, leaned over his shoulder. Both of them read "Conrad Baker," written in ink. Baker said nothing, but Mrs. Parker shrilled out the name of her employer, and turned upon him.

Yorke Norroy had risen in his place, and was regarding Blake intently now, and quite seriously. "I propose that we give the girl a chance," he said, after a pause. "She seems to deserve the benefit of the doubt—at least."

"The benefit of the doubt?" Blake's voice was trembling in a reaction, and he gazed at the man and woman before him with eyes that filled—at last—with something like shame.

"She deserves more than the benefit of the doubt," he stammered. "She deserves my apologies. I wish she would forgive me, if she can. If she will understand that I was not very well, that I was a bit stunned by the whole affair——"

Holly had risen, and was slowly drawing on a white glove. "You are forgiven," she interrupted. "One hardly knows what to think when one is in a swirl, as we all were half an hour ago. I didn't myself. I am not sure that I do now—because my head aches, perhaps, and because I want awfully to go home. Can you spare the doctor long enough to let him put me in a cab, Mr. Blake?"

Before the clubman could reply, Norroy laid a detaining finger on his arm. During the call three days before he had taken the measure of the wavering fellow, spoiled by the surfeit that wealth had brought him from the day he was born, undermined every hour since by the ease of substituting his check book for his own will in getting

what he wanted. He was the usual product of his plutocratic class, neither better nor worse. Norroy knew the type too well to expect real generosity of him save at one point—his relations with women. There nature frequently raised a bulwark against the power of money; he knew that the spoiled Blake had a glimmering of that fact oftener, perhaps, than he would have acknowledged. He had caught the touch of real shame in the clubman's reply to Holly. Men more seasoned than Blake had won a woman's genuine gratitude, and by gifts rarer than jade—

Norroy leaned on the table, one elbow pinning the precious disk to the boards, and turned a magnetic eye toward the man in the chair. He began slowly, evenly, and—as usual—far distant from the point at which he aimed.

"Before we go, I should like to inquire about this speck of jade," he said deliberately. "It came near to causing your undoing, my dear sir, and doubtless you think it hardly worth all that. As a sample of Manchu art, however, I can see that it has points—"

Norroy got no further. He had meant to suggest a gift, remembering the outburst that had greeted his proffer of money earlier in the week. The gathering fire in Blake's eye told him how completely the idea had missed its mark. The man's jaw suddenly became almost formidable; the faint hard lines about his nose and mouth, grown lax since the need for them had departed with his money-gathering ancestors, reappeared; and for a moment he guarded the coveted green plaque with a fury that would have done credit to his vigorous forbears.

"The jade stays here!" he shouted. "It doesn't leave the house! Has Hurrish got his fingers in everything? Is this girl working for him, after all—and you, too? I'll lock it away in the dark before any of you get it, I tell you. I'll send it to a safe-deposit vault before your eyes. I'll—"

With a little sweeping movement, Norroy quickly moved the plate a few inches out of his way; the arm that Blake had stretched out was weak with

rage. In a moment he sank, coughing, into his chair. For one still second Holly watched Norroy bending, apparently motionless, over the table; and in another flash he had turned to mix a stimulant in a glass. Presently he was forcing the liquid between Blake's teeth.

"Drink this, and keep quiet. You forget yourself, my man." The iron command in his tone entered Blake's fury like a sword, and broke it. The potion cleared his head in a moment, and when calmness returned the shaken man relapsed into a sullen silence.

Norroy had gotten into his coat, and beckoned Holly toward the door. From the threshold he glanced across to Mrs. Parker, who had instinctively obeyed him from the beginning, and who now stood, blubbing a little, as she bathed her master's wrists in ice water.

"Better stop crying, and get ready for Mr. Blake's orders," Norroy said to her kindly. "In a few minutes he will be well enough to give them. Meanwhile, suppose you telephone your message to the police station."

Norroy nodded toward the footman, Baker, who had remained crumpled and speechless in the corner, his escape from the closed room impossible, his cowed eyes watching Norroy's least movement.

"I shall remain on this floor until I hear the bluecoats," went on the secret agent. "I am taking this young woman to one of the street windows, where she can get the fresh air she needs. And, by the way," he added, "I wouldn't call out the reserves from the station. One officer will do. The man looks—well, a trifle discouraged."

Norroy had turned his back for the last time when Blake, opening his eyes and searching the ill-lighted table confusedly, cried, with a final flash of wildness:

"The plate! The plate! Where's the plate?"

Norroy paused, waved one hand backward, and shouted sternly over his shoulder: "Use your eyes, man—your eyes!"

And Blake, using them, saw a deep-

green disk blotting the white cloth before him. He turned toward the door with an unsteady effort at triumph, but Norroy and the girl had gone.

Two burly guardians of the peace arrived presently, and bore the humble disturber without protest away. The footman had the intuitions of his kind; he had seen his prison term stretching before when he looked into Norroy's intent eyes, and felt the deft fingers tapping his pockets after the poison.

Talbot Blake had recovered sufficiently to make his complaint against the man, and when the group had gone he sent Mrs. Parker to bed. The old woman left reluctantly, voicing comments on the entire affair on her way down the hall, weeping from sheer exhaustion.

In a moment she was back in the room with a yellow envelope in her hand. She had found a messenger boy at the apartment door, who, being passed by the night man below, had failed to find Blake's bell, and had been pounding the wood. His entry was the final straw; the old woman collapsed on Blake's hands. He had to revive her with brandy before he tore open his envelope. At length he was able to read the five words:

Look at the jade plate.

Plainly it was an anonymous message, but together they gazed for moments at the place where the name ought to have been. Then together they rushed for the plate. It was on the table, untouched by mortal hands since they had seen it last, the cryptic characters graven as deeply as ever in its dark, adamant surface.

"It's the man!" he cried. "The fellow had a sneering look in his eye."

"It's the woman!" she expostulated. "The minx is a-mockin' at us behind our backs."

They hovered about the table, asking

each other the stupid questions natural to the occasion, and returning now and again to the plate, where it indubitably lay—under the full glare now of every incandescent in the room.

Presently they began to droop; excitement fought a losing battle with sleep; and at length Blake strode uneasily to the curio cases, with the idea of locking the jade away, but he found he was too sleepy to combat the difficult lock. He brought the plate back to the table, striving to concentrate on the idea of doing something with it.

Instead of making a decision at the moment, he ordered Mrs. Parker to bed again; and this time she got there.

Thus it happened that he was alone when the second telegram came, delivered by a youngster who found the bell and executed a triumphant tattoo upon it that finally convinced Blake—who was putting out the lights—that the noise was something other than the buzzing in his own head.

He read the message once sleepily; then his eyes opened, and he absorbed it in a flash. Instantly he sprang to his full height, and brought his fist down on the plate beside him with a terrific impact. The effort exhausted him, and the man fell back in his chair listlessly, the yellow slip crumpled in his hand.

Late the next forenoon the housekeeper found him still asleep where he had fallen, a check for a thousand dollars on the carpet, and a litter of shattered green pieces added to the wreck of the dining table. Mrs. Parker pieced together the torn telegram, and read it:

Thanks for your hospitality to Miss Lea. She and I regret the necessity of taking away the jade, accomplished quite simply by a movement of my palm. You will find the substitute I left with you adequate for show purposes. I am also inclosing you the sum Michael Trask offered you last week for the curio. The American National Bank will cash the check at any time.

MICHAEL TRASK.

The next story of Yorke Norroy will be a long one. You will get it in two parts, the first part in the POPULAR on the stands two weeks hence, December 7th.

The Two Flags

By Donal Hamilton Haines

Author of "Men and Mercenaries," "The Crossbuck," Etc.

By a chance fall of the dice Payne, the soldier of fortune, finds himself wearing a scarlet coat instead of a black leather helmet. All flags look alike to the professional fighting man, but Payne had more love for one flag than the other, and at the very moment when the taste of his triumph should have been sweetest he felt nothing but a bitterness beyond his powers of speech.

THE ground of the little farm-yard, softened from recent rains, had been cut and smashed into a perfect quagmire by the trampling of hoofs. From a corner of the barn, a field-telegraph corps, hard-pressed for poles, had strung its wire. Every window of the whitewashed farmhouse had been flung open, and scarlet-coated figures could be seen moving about inside. More scarlet-coated men stood in the tiny porch, and others sat their horses in the muddy yard.

Inside the largest room of the house, Hugh Payne, clad in the uniform of the Red Guard of Kelmark, sat at a rough pine table, a huge map spread before him, its surface covered with little red-and-blue counters arranged in rough blocks and squares.

"Keep an eye on the wire, lieutenant," Payne said to a subaltern who had thrust his head out the window. "We ought to be hearing from Nielsen."

The room—full almost to crowding with the Kellish officers—fell strangely silent. The peasant who had been ruthlessly despoiled of his home to make room for headquarters, came and stood in the open doorway unrebuked. Payne sat silent, his big pipe between his teeth, the blue eyes on either side of the hooked nose intent on the map, his long, brown fingers touching two of the red counters. His officers and aids watched

him eagerly, and talked to each other in low tones.

A sudden movement on the part of the lieutenant by the open window drew every eye to him. He leaned far out, and took something from one of the telegraph men.

"Read it!" commanded Payne, as the young officer started toward him.

"General Nielsen reports Eighth and Thirteen Infantry in positions assigned. Third and Twelfth in reserve. Fourth Lancers scoring both banks of river. Enemy making no move to advance."

A huge sigh went up from every man in the room. Payne leaned over his map, and moved five of the red counters into position along the blue line which marked the course of a river.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think we had better rest for the morning. The stage is set."

There was a restless movement on the part of the older officers in the room, then one of them—a gray-haired, heavy-set man—came to the opposite side of the table at which Payne sat, and saluted rather awkwardly.

"You have saved Kelmark, general," he said bluntly. "We know that if our foe is beaten to-morrow he will not dare fight again—and it is you who have beaten him!"

Payne shook his head with a slow smile.

"No, general," he answered. "I have

not beaten him. I have only done this much," and he pointed to the map. "The beating is in your hands."

Left alone, Payne got abruptly from his seat, and walked to the open window. Across a field he could see smoke arising from the camp fires of reserve regiments. The bearskin shako of the sentry on duty showed above the line of a brick wall. The voices of his chief of staff and some of the senior officers came from another room of the house.

"Yes," Payne said slowly. "I have saved Kelmark—and for what? Because it is all in a day's work; because I have been well paid for it. It is the chance fall of the dice that I am wearing a scarlet coat and not a black leather helmet!"

For years Hugh Payne, professional fighting man, had been dreaming of moments such as this, and had come to laugh at himself for having such dreams. Those times that he had shivered at the head of tiny expeditions fighting their way through the drifts of Himalayan foothills, or struggled through a hot South American forest with an army of ragged discontents and negroes, he had almost been driven to the belief that his chosen profession must be without great honor. Yet here he was, clad in the uniform of a regiment which numbered the names of princes among its "N. C." officers, practical head of a European army—though nominally only a divisional commander—and planning for the next day the humbling of one of the great powers of Europe!

And yet, in the very moment when the taste of his triumph should have been sweetest, Payne felt nothing but a bitterness beyond his powers of speech. He stood by the open window, tearing to pieces in his mind the bigness of what he had done. It was not much, after all. That huge power whose regiments were now bivouacking across the river had hustled forward a small army in the belief that Kelmark was incapable of real resistance. Payne, called in as an expert at the eleventh hour, had planned and executed a series of masterly retreats which had sup-

ported the enemy in his mistaken beliefs, and led him into a position where his discomfiture might be accomplished. And once Kelmark had checked its huge foe, at least three European powers whose word carried weight would call "Enough!" and hasten to interfere.

"To-morrow," Payne muttered, "I may beat regiments whose names were known in the days of Napoleon—and it does not mean as much as rushing a stockade of savages with men who have fought and lived at my side!"

A sudden gust of wind made the flag hanging from the gatepost flutter out stiffly. Payne looked at the white cross on the red field. It meant nothing to him. Until a few weeks before he had known it only as he knew all things pertaining to his business. Now he was fighting under it, and the men who fought with him cared for it, fought for it! By this time the next day they would be shouting his name—and he would not care. Already he knew that; there would be no joy in winning. There would be actually a greater delight in defeat; that at least would rouse him. To win would merely mean another period of drifting until he found another flag which needed him for the moment—perhaps the one whose confusion he was even now planning.

He turned abruptly, and walked to the map. For an instant he stood staring down at it; then, with a short laugh, he shifted a few of the red markers.

"In five minutes," he said slowly, "I could issue the orders for those movements, and no man would question me. By morning I would have wrecked Kelmark; with those four regiments moved, and the flank laid open, the thing would be easy for our blue-coated friends."

He replaced the pieces, and sat down on the edge of the table, filling his pipe, and letting his mind play with the future. After this, what? Only too well he knew the ways of nations who have been helped out of tight places by men not of their own blood. He would be well paid, honored after a formal fashion, given a handsome sword—and left

to himself! He would be a wanderer again—no nearer the chance to serve under one flag which would mean for him what the red-and-white banner meant to the big sentry at the gate.

Gradually he forced himself to throw off the feeling that had seized him, and spent two hours over his map. Supper with his staff in the big kitchen was a rather silent meal. The Kells were not talkative, nor was his command of their tongue sufficient to make conversation easy. His final orders were given in a mixture of Kellish and French, and he went back into the big bare room and threw himself onto the cot in the corner.

He had lain on his back half an hour, staring at the gray ceiling of the room, when he heard the sentry challenge sharply, then call for the officer of the guard. Payne got to his feet and looked out of the window in time to see the officer flash an electric pocket flash in the face of the man who stood at the point of the sentry's bayonet. At the sight of the man's face, Payne gave an exclamation, and leaned out the open window.

"It is not regular, lieutenant," he heard the newcomer saying, "but I assure you there is no time for delay. I must see General Payne at once."

The young Kell stood twisting his mustache in some perplexity.

"What is it, lieutenant?" Payne called sharply.

The officer turned and came toward the house, the stranger walking in front of him, and stopped within a few feet of the open window.

"This man claims to have important news for you, general," he explained. "He has no papers, and is ignorant of the countersign. He is unarmed—but I cannot see how he can have passed the outer lines. Shall I lock him up?"

"No," answered Payne briefly; "send him in—and stay at the door. I'll call."

An instant later a tall, slender man with a lean, wrinkled face came into the room, the lieutenant's figure showing dimly behind him.

"You want to speak to me?" Payne demanded.

"Yes," answered the other, swinging the door shut behind him. The two men stood looking at each other fixedly for an instant, then the newcomer held out his hand, and Payne took it unhesitatingly.

"I thought it was you," the lean man said shortly, "although your name hasn't leaked out."

Payne motioned his visitor to the other side of the room.

"You've given me a hard task, Krupp," he said gravely. "You ought to have known better. There's only one thing I can do with you."

Krupp sat down quietly on the edge of Payne's cot, and took off his cap.

"I suppose so," he answered. "But you'll hear me out?"

Payne, his arms behind his back, looked at the lean figure of the Swiss. The last time he had seen the brown face and the pointed yellow beard had been when the two of them were tinkering at the clogged mechanism of Krupp's Schoenhauer in the bottom of a wet trench.

"Go ahead!" he commanded.

Almost at the first words, Payne started. Krupp did not talk as he had expected he would. In the even tones that Payne had heard many a time, he spoke of the lives the two of them had led, of the times their lives had touched—of the present moment, and of what might come afterward. Krupp had a tongue. His services were more often rendered in court dress than in khaki, and Payne listened as other men had done. The words of the Swiss fitted with almost uncanny nicety into the broken ends of Payne's interrupted thoughts.

"You and I," Krupp was saying, "are held fortunate by some poor devils tied down to garrison duty or trading post—but we know, Hugh, we know! Fortunate! Ah, what wouldn't I give if I could put on a blue coat and a pair of gray trousers and sit down to idle away the rest of my days in Geneva, or any other place under my own colors. And what wouldn't you give to take the next steamer——"

"Never mind that," Payne inter-

rupted sharply. "I've my own thoughts, Krupp."

The Swiss waited a moment, giving his words time to rankle. His next question was abrupt:

"You remember Melchistan?"

Payne nodded. Instantly he saw the trim streets of the little town, and the ring of blue mountains beyond. Krupp leaned forward.

"Listen!" he commanded. "You've been out of things for a minute—God knows where, and you don't know. Melchistan is about to make history. Once you and I talked of how beautiful it would be if a certain nation made Melchistan into a buffer state—one strong enough so that it could not be kicked aside. Well, the thing is done! Six weeks, Hugh Payne, and there will be a new flag flying—do you hear that? A new flag! It will be a place for men who want to make a new start—and I need not tell you that it will be a place where there will be fighting a-plenty."

"Well?" Payne said sharply.

"In Melchistan," Krupp went on, "there will be needed a man who has done nothing but pull triggers all his days. He must know more than the value of good sights. He must know whether the Austrian is better than the French style of gun emplacement, and what sort of fortifications are best against lyddite. It is not a six months' or a year's work—it is a lifetime's! He must be a big man, and he will leave a big work behind him. He will leave the state of Melchistan—which will be another way of saying the keystone to the map of that part of the world. And it will be his country!"

Payne had commenced to pace rapidly back and forth across the room.

"By glory, Krupp," he said finally, "it is a miracle. It is what we have prayed for!"

Krupp shifted in his seat very slightly. He had driven the first parallel of the hardest siege in his career of persuasion!

"I don't lie, do I?" he demanded sharply.

"No," answered Payne, stopping short in his walk.

"Well, then," continued the Swiss, "in the name of certain powers I do not need to specify, I offer you the command of the forces of Melchistan!"

The sharp indrawing of Payne's breath sounded clearly in the room.

"That isn't all!" he answered, in a low tone. "Tell me the rest, Krupp."

He listened intently while Krupp traced the wriggings of certain bits of diplomacy which were not recorded in the archives of those nations that had had a hand in them. Gradually the trend of Krupp's logic became apparent, and Payne sat down suddenly, his mind in a turmoil.

"It surprises you, doesn't it?" Krupp demanded. "It would surprise some of those red-coated gentry in the next room, too. Kelmark has been fooled, you have been fooled, a good part of humanity has been fooled!"

Payne found his words with some little difficulty.

"So, if Kelmark should win to-morrow," he said, "the state of Melchistan becomes a thing as impossible of existence as the fourth dimension!"

"There is no chance of Kelmark's winning," Krupp replied confidently. "But that is not the question. Kelmark's army must be destroyed, wiped out, and the army that annihilates them ready to entrain for the other frontiers in thirty-six hours."

Payne left his seat, crossed the room, and lighted a small lamp, which he placed on the table.

"Some one besides Kelmark has been fooled," he said shortly. "See here." He watched the Swiss while he bent over the map. "Does that look as though Kelmark would lose?" he demanded.

Krupp fingered his yellow beard.

"Ten thousand thunders!" he swore under his breath in French. "You're a devil, Payne!"

Payne shrugged.

"You see?" he asked.

"I see that you hold the possibility of Melchistan between your thumb and finger," the Swiss answered evenly.

"You don't mean——" Payne commenced, and then stopped.

Krupp was too wise in the ways of men's minds to speak. He let Payne struggle with the things that flashed into his brain. The American walked again to one of the open windows, while his visitor sat down by the table. They remained so for several minutes.

"See, Hugh," Krupp said after the pause, "you have only to do this and this, and you may have the designing of the Melchistan uniform!"

He stretched out his fingers; and Payne, conscious of a sudden tremor, saw the Swiss make exactly the same moves with the red counters that he himself had made a few hours before. Then, while Payne stood with his back turned, Krupp went on quietly:

"A great chance that for a fighting man like yourself. Thirty thousand men, I think it is planned that the army should be, thirty thousand men and a round dozen good batteries of horse artillery beside the mountain batteries. I have looked forward to planning the details with you—you and the Frenchman and I, Hugh. What keen joy it would be to decide upon the uniform for our Melchistan lancers, and to test out those new English rifles and some of the American automatics before we let Sauer have the contracts, after all."

Payne whirled suddenly, and took two strides toward the door.

"Where are you going?" his prisoner demanded sharply.

"To turn you over to the guard," Payne said, in a hard voice.

Krupp shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said casually. "But it's foolish; it's worse than foolish. Haven't I told you that it won't matter the price of a cartridge whether Kelmark wins or not—as far as Kelmark's future is concerned! This little country doesn't matter; it's a pawn that has to be knocked over at this stage of the game. And you're deliberately blocking big things and your own interests to give a lot of soldiers in red coats a foolish victory to shout themselves hoarse over. And listen," he finished. "Do you think that if Kelmark balks our friends now, and the Melchistan project dissolves in thin air before it's fair-

ly born—do you think our friends will forget? You're not doing Kelmark a service."

Payne took two more steps, and laid his hand on the knob of the door. Both men could hear a slight clank as the scabbard of the waiting subaltern struck the wooden post of the porch.

Krupp got to his feet with another gesture of resignation.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I like being a man without a country no better than you do, and I had found one for us both—a new one, whose making might be in our hands. I don't know what lies behind you; I only know the thing I did wasn't enough to make me the wanderer that I am, and you and I and a lot more than we could name might have given something to the world in Melchistan. Now they won't even know its name—and Kelmark will win a battle which had been better lost! Go on," he added almost nervously, "open the door and end it."

Payne jerked the door open quickly.

"Come in, lieutenant," he ordered.

The young subaltern came in and stood stiffly at attention, his eyes traveling from Payne to Krupp and back again.

"Lieutenant Halle," Payne announced, "this is Herr Krupp—perhaps I should say Colonel Krupp, late of the Turkish army."

The two men bowed to each other rather stiffly, both looking at Payne—Krupp with wonder in his glance.

"By a stroke of fortune," Payne went on smoothly, "Herr Krupp, with whom it has been my good luck to serve in several campaigns, was traveling well within the disputed territory, and has been in a position to observe the operations of our opponents. Only tonight, indeed, he has observed movements which had escaped our own scouts, and which necessitate immediate changes in our own dispositions. Will you be good enough to arouse the gentlemen in the next room, lieutenant, and impress upon them the necessity for haste?"

Halle's heels clicked together, he saluted, and went quickly out of the room.

Krupp stood motionless, looking at Payne's back. They were still standing thus when the officers of the staff came into the room.

Payne's explanations were brief, his orders even briefer. The Kells scowled somewhat, and some questioning glances were directed at Krupp, who was smoking a cigarette with an air of polite interest.

"We shall have to thank Herr Krupp for the loss of a few hours' sleep," Payne said smilingly. "We must see that Nielsen is in his new position before dawn."

While the horses were being saddled, Payne turned for an instant to the Swiss.

"God knows," he said, "what's right and what's wrong! Will you ride with me?"

Krupp shook his head.

"No," he answered. "Until some time to-morrow I'm Herr Lupsch, of Vienna, stopping at the inn at Deppel."

II.

As his horse carried him forward through the darkness, his staff splashing through the mud behind him, Payne seemed to have been suddenly cursed with two minds. One fairly gloated on the pictures Krupp had drawn for him; the other was with the grim, earnest men who galloped at his heels. He was not one to take a step and then be consumed with regrets. Hesitation was no part of him. Another man might have questioned the truth of what the Swiss had told him, but Payne knew the stuff of which Krupp was made.

Yet it was the second time in his life that he had done a thing which had two sides, and the memory of that first time had been fresh in his mind that night. Come what might, Kelmark would know him one day for a man who had deliberately brought defeat upon it. Payne was not one to split hairs, nor to dodge facts. He faced the ugliness of his position squarely, uncomplainingly, as a strong man bares his wound to the surgeon's probe.

Deliberately he thrust all thoughts of the last two hours out of his mind, and turned to consideration of the battle which daylight would bring—a battle he would have to fight, knowing that he had beaten himself by his own act before ever a gun was fired. He swung round in his saddle, and called to the group behind him.

"Will you ride with me, Dahlgren?" he asked informally.

The same broad-shouldered, gray-haired officer who had thanked Payne for saving Kelmark earlier in the day pushed his horse forward until he rode at the American's side. Almost eagerly Payne talked to him of the shifting of forces which had been begun to meet this supposed change of plan on the part of the foe.

"Nielsen's four regiments and the lancers should give us weight enough on the right to hold them in check," he explained, "or even to assume the offensive if occasion arises."

The old Kell rode for some distance without replying, then said, with a sort of stubborn diffidence:

"I confess, sir, I have wondered why you left the bridge standing after you ordered Nielsen's forces moved."

One of those queer twists of the will that make men suddenly desire to throw themselves from the tops of high cliffs or buildings suddenly caught Payne. He had actually to grip himself to prevent his tongue from telling the true reason—that the bridge had deliberately been left unguarded in order that the blue-clad troops might secure a quick and easy pathway into the unguarded flank of the Kellish army.

"It is what you might call my American instincts, I suppose," he replied lightly. "There is, I will admit, a faint chance that the enemy might perceive his opportunity, and push a few troops across—even follow them with more and gain a leverage against our left—but the chance is of the slightest. I could remove this danger by destroying the bridge, but by doing so I would lessen my own chances."

"I don't quite follow you," Dahlgren said.

Payne's answer dealt with the numbers of regiments, the state of roads, the slopes of hills, the protection to be had from certain cloaking forests. He could hear the veteran's breath come faster as he followed the details of the plan.

"You see," he concluded, "it is no more than what a boxer would call a 'shift.' He pulls his strength to one side, we do the same to meet the added weight, and then suddenly switch back the force we have pulled from in front of him and drive it home where he is weakest!"

Dahlgren took a long breath.

"It is a risk," he said, "but, by Heaven, sir, it is worth the taking!"

The road they followed plunged suddenly between two bare, rugged hills, one paralleling, the other running at right angles to the road. Two miles to the north, Payne knew, another road was choked with Nielsen's two regiments, the Eighth and Thirteenth, trudging through the darkness in answer to the order which he had given. The big hill on his right might well, in a few hours, form a screen behind which the enemy should gather those regiments destined for the swinging blow which would scatter the red-coated troops.

A moment later the staff stumbled onto the rear guard of the reserve regiments also plodding through the mud with their faces to the east. Somewhere ahead of them were the lancers who should have been guarding the bridge.

A bonfire had been lighted to guide the infantry around the edge of a quagmire formed in the road by the drenching rains of the past few days, and Payne and his officers sat their horses and watched the infantry march past in the flickering light.

For the first time Payne felt a little thrill of pride in the men he commanded. He had said "Do this!" and "Do that!" to the wearers of a dozen uniforms. He had seen more brilliant, more dashing troops than these Kells—the line regiments in dingy campaign uniforms, the guards in the scarlet and bearskins worn in deference to tradi-

tion. But there was a stolid cheerfulness, a quiet, muscular purposefulness about these light-haired, sober-faced linesmen and guards which suddenly awoke new sensations in the man who watched them. They were not typical fighting men; they were farmers and artisans, clerks and petty shopkeepers, conscripts every one of them—but conscripts of a strangely willing sort. Love of country was strong within them!

"By George!" Payne exclaimed, almost involuntarily, "these chaps are leggers! I had not looked for them this far along for half an hour!"

"The Twelfth there has a marching record of eighteen miles under full equipment over poor roads in four hours and a half," Dahlgren said, with quiet pride.

The staff pushed on, following a road which ran straight east, behind a line of hills on which the Kells lay waiting for the morning. A thin light, accompanied by a drizzle of rain, was breaking as they pushed their horses up a steep slope and dismounted. The hill which had been picked for headquarters during the battle had already been marked by the telegraph corps, and dim figures were visible through the mist, stringing a single wire.

Payne sat his horse, muffled in an un-military-looking slicker, Dahlgren and one or two other officers beside him, the rest of the staff and aids grouped a little behind. Payne was suddenly conscious of Dahlgren's voice in his ear—so low as to be inaudible to the other officers.

"Do you realize, sir, what victory will mean to the army and to Kelmark?" the old man was saying. "You come from a land that is young, but has done much. Kelmark was ancient before men had dreamed of America. Yet it is centuries since a Kellish army has triumphed over a foe. Our troops have paraded the streets; our drums have beat in the sleepy squares of peaceful towns. Our guns should have rusted, but we have kept them bright, waiting for the chance. Men have laughed at us, or worse, forgotten us. We have not counted—and now!" He paused,

and Payne felt the sudden, viselike pressure of the big, stubby fingers on his arm. "It is a new lease of life, it is an epoch, it is a new birth for a land that was old!"

Payne stared down the wet slope of the hill with a face turned suddenly hard as flint. A strange feeling of resentment toward the men of the army he was leading burned within him. Always they had showed themselves to him hard, heavy, unfeeling. And now, in a single instant, and, after it was too late, this rocklike figure at his side had burst through its reserve and showed him the bruised pride of a nation!

From far across the river came a low, sullen report that rolled and echoed among the hills. Even as the enemy's first gun sounded, the drizzling rain ceased, and a yellow tinge shot into the gray sky in the east. Whatever thoughts had been in the minds of Payne and the men about him dropped suddenly away. Dawn and the battle had come together, and the work of this greatest of all days for most of them had begun.

Payne looked down into the broad, deep valley of the river. He knew that the Kellish forces, invisible as yet in the dim light, stretched in a jagged line five miles to his right, and a mile to his left. Straight in front of him lay the great masses he had held in reserve, the cavalry in a fold of the hills behind them. On somewhat lower ground their exposed position strengthened by every known artificial means, lay the six batteries, pushed daringly close to the river, that their blows might strike the harder.

Gradually the volume of the enemy's shell fire increased as battery after battery took up the work, but the Kellish batteries waited in grim silence according to orders. Slowly the hostile shells worked down to the faint, yellow-brown lines of the intrenchments, as the shadow of a passing cloud moves across a field—only the shells stopped as they caught the yellow line. Then, with a roar, the Kellish batteries flared into life.

Those things which were passing in front were passing as had been planned.

The staff looked upon the progress of the artillery duel with contented eyes. Only Payne of the group of horsemen was thinking of something else—of the dark regiments who must already be pushing forward toward the bridge, inexplicably left free to their pleasure.

Straight below the hill on which the staff sat their horses lay one of the three bridges, two miles beyond it the second, a mile farther the third. Behind each one were the scars of trenches. About them the enemy's shells were curving, dropping, bursting. Minute after minute passed, with no seeming cessation of the bombardment, then slowly the curving white arcs grew fewer. The hostile batteries were being checked!

Payne sat with his watch in his hand. From one corner of his eye he watched the man behind him who sat on a camp stool with the receiver of a field telephone strapped to his head. The American hardly turned his head to watch the enemy's first attempts to rush the bridges. They failed, as he had known they would fail.

Dark masses of infantry, slashed here and there by blocks of white where the crack regiments of the enemy's guards moved, rolled out of the screen of timber beyond the river, broke into smaller sections, and swept down toward the bridges. Three times the thudding batteries and rattling Krags in the Kellish trenches swept them back.

On all sides of him, the phlegmatic, wooden-faced officers of his staff were giving way to emotions of whose very existence Payne had never guessed. Dahlgren sat his horse like a man of stone, his hands folded on the pommel of his saddle, the tears streaming unnoticed down his furrowed cheeks. Some of the younger officers shouted, and wept like children. A sweating subaltern of a dragoon regiment dashed up with a plea that the cavalry be allowed to charge if the enemy's next rush were driven back.

"Not yet," Payne answered. "We may need every lance in another hour!"

His eyes were fixed on the man at the telephone, his ears strained to pierce

the din and catch any of those sinister sounds which must come soon from the west. The voices of the men about him and the crash of volleys in the river bottom told him that another rush of the enemy's regiments had been beaten back from the bridges.

He saw the cheeks of the man at the telephone go suddenly white. An instant later an orderly was gasping at his side.

"They've crossed the bridge to the west," he panted. "The heads of their columns are over already!"

The man's voice, fairly shrill with fright, sounded clearly above the roar of firing. Payne knew that every man of his staff had heard. For an instant, as he raised his head in answer to the man's words, he seemed carried away from all that surrounded him, alone with his own thoughts.

He saw the town of Melchistan, ten times larger and finer than the town he had known, with trim cruisers lying in the blue harbor, smart cavalymen in the streets and markets, foreign diplomats in the lobbies of the government buildings—and a new, clean flag snapping in the winds which came down from the mountain barrier in the north.

Then he looked up and saw Dahlgren's face!

Payne had never seen such an expression on human features. There was no suspicion, no anger, no fear in the old soldier's face, yet Payne seemed to see in it all the terrible, mute disappointment of the world-old, plodding, patient people, led to the very edge of a splendid triumph only to be dashed back at the very moment of victory.

Melchistan became suddenly the fragile dream of visionary diplomats, the wild scheme of mad plotters. The real, hard things of life were the face of the old man with the tear-stained cheeks, and the somber-hued regiments edging into his rear.

With a gesture which none who saw him could interpret, Payne flung all thoughts of the Swiss and his plans, all the hopes of long years of fighting and dreaming, into the past. He whirled in his saddle, and barked orders like an

angry terrier. The group of aids and orderlies vanished, their horses' hoofs scarring the soft slopes of the hillside. The officers of the staff caught their breath as they realized what Payne was doing.

"General," protested a dozen voices, "you will break our center!"

Payne swung on them with the tense fury of a man fighting a well-nigh hopeless fight, intolerant of the least delay.

"Shall I break it or let them do it?" he thundered. "Letsch, ride to the cavalry, and tell them to move out along the first road behind them, follow it straight west, and when they find the enemy, charge him!"

Men scarcely breathed while the seconds ticked and the enemy's batteries across the river thundered and hammered, paving the way for another rush. Four splendid regiments of cavalry swung from the fold of the hills which had sheltered them, and took the road at a sharp trot, spurring straight for the center of unguessed thousands of the enemy.

In response to Payne's orders, the eight regiments of the reserve, held in readiness for that counterstroke across the river which had been planned, swung into four great columns, faced to the west, and with their flanks to the roaring batteries, bent toward this new danger point, leaving behind them a mere skeleton army, holding its position by sheer effrontery.

A young fellow in a dragoon's uniform stood at Payne's side, forgetful of everything but the tragedy that he sensed before him.

"It is the end," he faltered. "We are in a vise!"

Payne shook his big shoulders.

"Dahlgren," he called, "those bridges are in your hands! Hold them two hours. You may reach me by courier on the left!"

He rode like a madman, a few of his staff making poor work of holding his pace. As he galloped, the roar of the new battle belched out to meet him from behind the rugged, sullen hill he had seen bulking grimly in the darkness. Up the first slope, already strewn with

wounded, he put his horse, overtaking some straggling linesmen who went forward yelling at the mere sight of him.

From a flat rock on the summit of the hill, Payne looked down into a veritable furnace. Not in vain had he counted on the marching powers of those eight regiments. Light and dark-blue waves were rolling toward the hill, against whose foot lay the eight thousand. Payne sat down and waited; time alone held the answer now.

An hour passed, and with it came a message from Dahlgren, scrawled with a blunt pencil on a leaf from a notebook:

We are where we were.

Twice the blue waves lapped the foot of the hill, and broke back, and the eight thousand stood firm. Once a flashing swarm of dragoons, red plumes dancing beside black above sky-blue tunics, splashed through the shallow water of a brook, floundered across a marsh which would have made many a cavalryman hesitate, and bore down on the flank of the eight thousand. Timed to the minute, the eager regiments which Payne had refused their chance three hours before, lashed out into the open, and met the swooping dragoons. And even as the blue horsemen broke under the shock came the second laconic message from Dahlgren:

We are where we were!

Time seemed to stand still to watch. Payne found himself clinging to the rock beside him, fairly straining to hold it in place as his mind struggled to hold the Kells at the foot of the hill. He had called them wooden; he knew now that their heaviness was of better stuff. Outweighed man for man, outnumbered, the Kells held their ground with a quiet immobility that served far better than any dashing fury. They made no countercharges; when the blue waves fell back, they breathed deep, and waited for the next one.

Yet Payne saw the danger, and moved to meet it.

"Bring up the fifth and sixth batteries," he ordered.

Even the "galloper" who carried the

order started at the nature of it, and Payne felt again the eyes of his staff upon him.

"If they back off and use magazine fire," he explained, with a wave of his hand at the struggle below, "we're gone. They'll charge or run under shrapnel, but they won't stand still!"

For the first time the eight thousand were staggering when the batteries rattled up.

Almost the first shell set fire to the bridge. A single blue figure ran out upon it, and beat frantically at the flames. Another shell burst, and the blue figure vanished while the flames grew, and spread. Belated batteries on the far bank took up the fight, but the moment had passed. The "undertow" of the blue waves surged suddenly stronger than the forward rush. Straggling lines of blue surged back onto the bridge. From the eight thousand went up a hoarse shout that was more than a cheer.

Payne turned almost wearily to an orderly. He felt spent, weakened, suddenly sapped of his strength.

"Now the lancers," he ordered casually, "if there are any left!"

He walked his horse back over the half-dried roads in the red afternoon sunlight. The horse walked with hanging head and faltering hoofs, completely winded. Payne, who had won a battle from himself, rode with bowed head.

Dahlgren and some of the other officers were still on the hill from which Payne had ridden on the heels of the eight thousand. As the American rode forward, the Kells were suddenly bare-headed before him. Dahlgren, on foot, walked forward and rested one hand on the flank of Payne's horse.

"It is Kelmark's one regret that you are not one of us in blood, sir," he said.

Payne looked at the old man, then past him to where the white cross snapped victorious on its red field. For an instant he thought of Melchistan and the things which were not to be, then into Dahlgren's face, and saw the thing he had done.

"I wish I were, Dahlgren," he answered. "I wish I-were!"

E b e n e z e r

By Emerson Hough

Author of "John Rawn," "The Mississippi Bubble," Etc.

Raccoons don't belong on the cow range, but Curly tells how a very sociable one drifted into the corral and made himself so much at home that he became formally adopted and learned to play as good a hand of poker as any of the boys. "The humanest coon ever was," Curly declares

YOU oughtn't to kick, Sir Algernon," said Curly one day in camp, as we were cleaning a meager half dozen whitefish instead of the trout we had intended to take in that day's fishing. "It ain't no real difference what folks eat, when you stop to think of it. Now, you take them eight-play dinners some city folks gets up—everything in it from vinegar to prunes, an' sardines to ice cream. Put all them things together in one pan, an' stir before usin', an' what livin' man could go against it? I'd ruther look a plain case o' beefsteak an' onions in the face. Yet folks survives even that kind o' eatin'. It's all a matter o' habit, er imagination; an' the real facts is that almost anything is all right to eat ef you want it, an' can git it, an' can swaller it.

"I don't never like to see a man kick about his vittals. When a feller begins to select his food right careful you'd better begin to select another man. It's right fashionable these days to go on a diet; but when yore friend begins to diet, best thing you kin do is to go git a cold chisel an' a piece o' rock, an' figger out what nice things you kin put over him after he's dead. Eating is made fer folks that intends to keep right on livin', like you an' me, Sir Algernon, same as a grizzly bear or a cow horse.

"It's the same way with the soft part o' eatin', too, which some folks calls drinkin', speakin' of it scornful, as ef

it was wrong to git thirsty. It ain't wrong. Cow hands gits thirsty, an' look at them! Now, you take a man from back East that will only drink out o' a bottle with four colors in the lay-bill—he's marked fer a early tally in the new angel class. Not so with them like you an' me, Sir Algernon, who know that everything is all right ef you want it an' kin git it. All the animiles know that. Ain't no doctor tells a cow horse when to eat grass, or hay, or sagebrush, or cottonwood bark—he jest takes 'em as they come, same as fresher alkali water. Ef you jest examine the animile kingdom you'll know how foolish this whole doctor business is."

"Curly," said I, "your story doesn't hang together. Animals know what's good for them, and they never give way to intemperance, like cow-punchers and other depraved classes."

"Huh!" said Curly. "Is that so? Heap you know about it, ain't it?"

"Well, of course, animals drink water——"

"What else kin they git to drink?" demanded Curly. "S'pose you was deprived o' the power o' speech, as well as the price o' the drinks, an' was dressed up in a hide worth anywhere from six bits to fifty dollars, an' had feet to run away with—would you be saunterin' down to the Lone Star fer a drink, er would you be pullin' fer the tall woods? An' what is they to drink in the tall woods but water? Look at us right now, an' you git the answer to

that. Only reason animiles don't drink coffee er something else is that they can't *git* it. Now, I can prove that."

"I hadn't thought of it in that way, Curly," I admitted.

"That's the trouble with a heap o' people," said Curly, sitting back in the shade and sticking his knife in the sand to clean the blade. "Folks don't stop to think things out right close. Now, me—I'm plumb thoughtful. I have in my mind right now the case of Ebenezer. You maybe never heerd o' him?"

I had again to admit my ignorance, so Curly, picking up a stick, began to whittle as he enlightened me.

"This here story about Ebenezer," said he, "it proves everything I been tellin' you 'bout eatin' an' drinkin' things, an' it shows how animiles is jest like folks.

"Who was Ebenezer? Well, he was the fattest, sassiest, ring-tailedest coon that ever was raised. I reckon maybe he come from Arkansas er Missouri originally, an' was follerin' ol' Pap Price's trail out to Oregon after the war. He'd only got as far 'long as Wyoming when we found him—an' you know coons don't belong here in the cow country—not none at all. It was right odd how we found him, an' nobody knows to this day how come him to be there in ol' man Wright's cow camp on Birch Creek.

"There was several of us boys in that camp, ridin' sign an' mendin' the dash-blamed fences, an' sometimes we didn't have nothin' to do much but playin' cards, 'long in the early spring, before the calf round-up. Sometimes I have knew one of our games to last all night, an' have knew me er Billy Wilson, er Sandy, er some one else, to win as much as forty cents in real money, beside several guns an' handkerchiefs an' best wishes.

"Well, one mornin' we'd been havin' a little game all night, an' come good daylight we starts out to the horse pen. You know, they was a tall post each side o' the gate o' the round pen, an' all at once Billy Wilson—who was jest in from town, where he'd been after

the mail—he looks up, an' lets out a shriek, him bein' still sort o' jerky, fresh from town.

"'Tell me, boys,' says he, 'is they anything there?'

"Well, we all looked up, an' when we seen a large, dark objeck up on top o' the post, lookin' down, ca'm, with his p'inted face, an' a nice, long black-an'-white tail hangin' down the post, we all of us felt like makin' our last will an' testerment, because they didn't no such thing belong on the cow range, let alope on top of our corral. Sandy an' Billy, they hadn't never saw a coon, an' they was too bad scairt to shoot. Ebenezer—fer it was none less than him—he set up there, ca'm, an' looked down at us thoughtful. I reckon our surprise was mucherl, fer maybe he had never saw anything like us.

"'Ef it was anywhere but right here,' says I to Billy after a while, 'I'd say that was a coon, an' a blamed big one. But it can't be a coon, an' it can't be here, which leaves me in some doubt,'" says I.

"'It might as well be a elephant,' says Barney Oldham. 'But it shore ain't a elephant, fer elephants don't have rings on their tails.'

"'No,' says Sandy, 'ner they can't climb a post.'

"Well, we all went an' stood around the foot o' the post, an' looked up, an' Ebenezer he looked down. I seen him wink one eye at me plain.

"'Say,' says Sandy, 'ain't he a awful human-lookin' thing? An' look at his tracks here in the dust—he's got real feet!'

"'Well, he's scairt me awful,' says Billy, 'whatever he is, an' I got a notion to shoot him.'

"'No,' says Barney; 'he give me a awful jolt, too, an' I'm some grieved about it; but let's take him prisoner an' ast him where he come from way out here. Curly,' says he, 'it's moved an' seconded that you skin up the pole an' welcome this here little stranger to our midst.'

"'Seein' they was no two ways about it, I clim' up on the fence an' begun to reach up the pole. Ebenezer, he

fluffs up his fur an' meets me half-way.

"You'd better rope him, I reckon," says I.

"So then Sandy goes an' gits his rope, an' makes a throw which-katches Ebenezer round the waist. He hits the ground with a soft chug like coons does when they fall offen a tree. It don't hurt 'em none—they need a jolt like that to start up their carbureter.

"You ought to of seen Ebenezer spark up! He didn't run. I reckon he was peeved, anyhow. He stood his hair up on end like a little bear, an' before we had time to git away from him he had bit every one of us from eight to nineteen times. Then he laid down on his back, put up his feet, an' begun to growl, cheerful, like he was askin' fer us to come on an' tackle him in his own style o' fightin'. It was a mercy to him that somebody hadn't of shot him, er else shot somebody else, but things was too mixed fer a while to make shootin' anyways safe.

"We all lined up a little ways an' taken a look at Ebenezer, layin' there on his back, lookin' fer more trouble.

"Now, I never seen a coon before," says Sandy, 'but he shorely is a game little cuss, ain't he?'

"He's got the makin' o' a good cow-puncher in him," says I. 'Besides, coons makes fine pets. I move an' second we adopt him. Sandy, you take your rope offen him.'

"I don't see how I kin," says Sandy, thoughtful. 'I ain't used to brandin' things quite as active as this party. But we shore orto brand him, too, ef his hair wasn't so long, fer he's a shore maverick on our range, an' there ain't nobody else never branded him none, fer's I kin see.'

"Well, sir, some folks thinks that animiles don't understand human talk, but they do. We hadn't only 'bout got this fur along when Ebenezer he turns over on his feet, kicks the rope offen him with a hind foot, an', not payin' no more 'tention to us, he walks straight to the open door o' the shack like he had bin invited to make hisself at home.

"We seen then he classified hisself as folks, an' not critter.

"When we come in after him, we seen that he had clim' up on the bench an' was drinkin' outen the water pail like one o' the hands. Then he wiped his face on the towel, walked over to the bench by the table, an' says he: 'Please to pass the beans'—er words to that effect.

"Anyhow, we did pass him the beans, an' Ebenezer he set in to make hisself a square meal. Then he goes over to the water pail, takes another drink, an' casts a eye over the bunks at the side o' the room. How'd he know which blankets was mine? Nobody hadn't told him, but he hears this talk I'd been makin' 'bout adoptin' him, an' he adopts me, too. Without hesitatin' beyond that first look, he clim's up into my bunk, lays his head on my goose-ha'r piller, an' goes to sleep like a gentleman that has been out late.

"'Speakin' o' *adoptin'* things!' says Billy, who was still kind o' jerky an' not right shore about what he was seein'.

"Ef it's a coon er a human I dunno," says Sandy, 'but, anyhow, it looks like he's moved in.'

"Yes," says I, 'an' it looks like I couldn't go to bed none until Ebenezer gits his rest out.' We called him Ebenezer.

"You-all think I'm right ignerant," says Sandy, 'because I've never saw no coons; but I've done read about them. Besides, I got a heap o' respect fer this party. When he gits normal again he'll clim' down an' give you a chanct, Curly. Coons sleeps nateral in daytime, an' a feller don't need his blankets then.'

"Anyhow, he's got his nerve along," says Billy. 'I've a notion to paste him one now he's asleep.'

"No, don't paste him," says Sandy. 'He's just ridin' the grub line same's you an' me has many a time. An' it ain't right to ask him no questions 'bout his past life. Maybe when he comes to he'll tell us his story ef he wants to.'

"That's right, boys," says I. 'Any traveler has his right to eat an' sleep

without no questions asked. I can't even guess how this gentleman come 'way out here, but 'long as he ain't charged with stealin' no horses we got to respeck his privacy. Let him alone; it's my blankets.'

"Well, we all let him alone, an' we moved round kind o' quiet like, so's not to disturb him. At exactly half past four he woke up like he'd been wound up fer jest that long. Then he clim' down outen the bunk, went to the water pail fer a drink, an' strolled around the place to sort o' git acquainted a little better, not payin' much attention to us, an' not makin' any kind o' break to run away.

"'This here thing kind o' makes me feel like sweatin',' says Billy at last. 'He ain't a bear, an' he ain't a dog, an' he ain't a human; but, whatever he is, he's a perfeck gentleman, an' I kin see right now he means to tote fair. Ef he's as good a performer outside as he is in, we kin work the force in two shifts after this, him standin' guard at night, an' givin' us more time fer poker.'

"Well, Sir Algernon, that was how Ebenezer moved in on Birch Creek Camp. He dropped in like a old cow hand, never askin' no questions, never kickin' on the grub, ner even askin' what the pay was. I reckon he'd looked up ol' man Wright before he'd moved in, an' knowed he'd do the right thing.

"Now, he hadn't been in our camp more'n a month before they wasn't one o' the boys would o' took less'n a thousand dollars fer Ebenezer. I got rather the best o' the break, owin' to bein' Ebenezer's first friend, an' owin' also to his bein' a nateral-born retriever. He carried up into my bunk 'most everything they was loose, from socks to latigos, all the time solemn as a judge, an' performin' open an' above-board, like he knowed he was doin' only what was right.

"Just to show you like I told you, he et an' drunk everything there was. He liked coffee, an' he et everything, without no regard to diet whatever. He come to weigh about sixty pound, I reckon, an' his tail was big around as a

pilller, an' the rings on it was enough to dazzle your eyes, he got that shiny all over. Even his whiskers got longer. You know, coons has to feel with their whiskers in the dark, like a cat, an' this made it necessary fer them side hairs to stick out about eighteen inches on each side, so's to tell how narrer a place he could git through.

"He never had been afraid o' none o' us from the start, an' seein' him git so sizable they wasn't none o' us cared to plague him beyond a certain point. He slep' in my bunk daytimes, always goin' to bed right after breakfast, an' gittin' up at half past four in the afternoon. In the night he'd saunter around outdoors to suit hisself, goin' fishin' er diggin' herbs. It wasn't long before I got used to findin' crawfish an' frogs an' pieces o' garter snake hid in my blankets, though the crick was more'n two miles away, an' we all didn't know they was a frog on the range.

"I got right fond o' Ebenezer—he was so faithful to me, an' so useful. He could play as good a hand o' poker as any one o' the boys. He'd set on my shoulder an' look at my hand when I'd made my draw, an' ef I happened to need a extra king er ace—why, Ebenezer'd go an' git it without no trainin' at all. He'd hand me a card with one hand while he was attractin' the attention o' the next feller by puttin' his foot down the back o' his neck. His front feet was always right cold, so this was hard to git used to, although it was one o' his favor-ite amusements.

"You needn't tell me that coons can't think. Ef luck'd be runnin' against me, so's I'd seem to be shy a few chips, this little friend o' mine would pass around the table an' take up a collection fer me—Curly. He had a nateral eye fer color, an' he always would pick the blue chips first, an' red ones next. He'd bring 'em all around to me an' pile 'em up nice, an' sometimes cover 'em up with the corner o' the tablecloth. Sometimes he'd vary the performance by goin' around an' takin' up a collection o' watches, keys, penknives, an' loose change—all o' which he brung to me, his poppa.

"'Ef I wasn't shore he'd take a pair of scissors an' cut 'em open again,' says Billy Wilson, complainin', 'I shore would git me a needle an' thread an' sew my pockets tight shut. Thataway I might manage to keep some o' my tobakker.'

"He was right clean, like all coons, an' he never et nothin' without washin' it first. As he didn't know no better'n to wash everything in the water pail, we give him a little pan o' water fer his own, right by his plate, an' he'd wash everything he et, an' sometimes pile things up beside him in a little pile—pieces o' corned beef, an' onions, an' dried apples, an' beans—'most anything we happened to have. Thataway, piecin' out his diet with things he'd caught, like I told you, fer a side line, he come through fatter'n any beef critter you ever seen.

"Could he of talked? Shore he could ef he had wanted to—but he didn't. I reckon the only reason Ebenezer didn't talk was that he was afraid we'd put him to work night herdin', like he heard Billy Wilson threaten. Every other way he was just like a human.

"Well, sir, spring come along, an' the grass got green, an' 'long around spring round-up time we begun to expeck old man Wright'd come up an' pay us a visit. One day when we come in we see a buckboard standin' in the yard an' a parasol against the side o' the door, so we knowed old man Wright an' his daughter, Miss Evie, had come up together, like they sometimes done. When Sandy seen this he wanted to run away. Sandy, he was plumb gone on Miss Evie, an' he knowed it wasn't no use spite of all the nice stories he'd read in the magazines 'bout cow-punchers marryin' the boss' daughter. We was all standin' laughin' at Sandy when all at onct we heard from the inside o' the shack somebody a-sayin' in a large, deep voice, sort o' giggling, too: 'George, now you stop! You tickle!'

"Well, when we heard them words we all wanted to run away. Now, wasn't that a strange thing fer to happen in a law-abidin' cow camp like ours? Here we are standin' in the sun-

shine, boss' buckboard in the yard, Miss Evie's parasol against the door, an' a voice that ain't Miss Evie's sayin' them words! We all begun to think maybe the camp was ha'nted, after all.

"Billy Wilson he walks over toward the winder, an' he looks in; then a grin comes on his face, an' he puts his hand on his mouth to keep from hollerin'. We all looked in then. There, settin' on the only chair we had, was a large, strong, female lady, with a bonnet an' a linen duster. Evident ol' man Wright an' Miss Evie had gone somewhere an' left this lady here, an' she had set down, bein' tired, an' went to sleep.

"From a hasty glance at this lady, takin' in several seasons which she probably had knew, I could not have suspected her o' bein' light an' frivolous; but at the same time I could see some sort o' reason an' explanation fer happy dreams. Ebenezer was settin' on the back o' this lady's chair, laughin' to hisself, an' I reckon them long whiskers o' his was ticklin' her ear.

"'Wait a little while,' says Billy. Then we all drawed a little ways apart, an' stood there a-huggin' ourselves an' waitin'. By and by we heard a shriek, an' a sound like somethin' heavy fallin'. We knowed then that Ebenezer, after his usual fashion, had simply been passin' the time o' day by stickin' his cold front foot down this lady's neck—which was some startlin', even for us that was used to it. We didn't have no time to figger, though, fer out through the door come this large party, fifty some years old, with specs an' gray hair.

"'Save me!' hollers she, when she seen us standin' there. She didn't look like she was worth it, but we saved her. We explained to her that Ebenezer wasn't nothin' no more harmful than just a pet coon, an', takin' her back in the house, we showed her Ebenezer hisself, which now was layin' in my bunk, pretendin' he was asleep, lookin' bored. That ca'med the lady down some.

"'Did I say anything?' ast she.

"'No, ma'am,' says us.

"'Right soon now ol' man Wright

come in, Miss Evie with him, an' I taken him to one side an' ast him who this party was.

"'Curly,' says the ol' man to me, 'I couldn't help it, an' it ain't my fault ef I couldn't prove a alibi. That lady is the Reverend Mrs. Reginald Jones-Valentine, from Colorado,' says he, 'an' she's one o' them permanent ladies that goes in fer sufferage an' temperance, an' everything else that men don't like. I didn't ask her to come along, but she just got in the buckboard with me an' Evie, an' she talked a arm offen me all the way up from Billings—said she heard I had the most depraved lot o' punchers up here in the Birch Creek country—an' I reckon that's right, too,' says ol' man Wright to me. 'But how kin I help it? She's come out here to uplift you all,' says ol' man Wright, 'but don't blame me. I told her it was hopeless.'

"'Uh-huh!' says I. 'Fine, ain't it, colonel? As ef we didn't have to stand enough to earn our forty-five a month without this sort o' thing,' says I. But then I told ol' man Wright about Ebenezer an' Mrs. Reginald. Well, sir, he fell down on the ground an' laughed fer ten minutes straight. When he come to he seemed to have a sort o' idear in his head.

"'Curly,' says he, 'you watch your boss now. Here is where the uplift begins on Birch Creek.' Then he calls Miss Evie out to where he was at, an' tells her to go an' git the basket from outen under the buckboard seat.

"'Evie,' says he, 'it's nigh 'bout dinner time, an' I want you to mix up fer your paw an' these young men one o' your justly famous punches—the sort which makes our place so popular o' afternoons to the Billings' Ladies' Society fer savin' o' the heathen. Make it good an' strong, Evie, an' have a-plenty; ef you ain't got no punch bowl, take the dishpan.'

"Miss Evie she gits busy with the basket, an' digs out lemon an' sugar an' canned pineapple an' things, an' she uncorks a couple o' bottles an' sends me fer some water, an' before long she has a dishpanful o' something

that smelled so much like peace an' joy that even ol' Ebenezer quits bluffin' about bein' asleep. He sets up in bed an' looks at the pan, same like us other punchers.

"'Now, then,' says ol' man Wright, after drinkin' a dipperful er so o' this, to see ef it was mixed all right, 'you may go call Mrs. Reginald Jones-Valentine, Curly,' says he, 'an' tell her dinner is ready.'

"Well, sir, I went over to where the lady had gone to do some thinkin' about savin' us depraved wretches, an' I told her respectful that she'd better come an' set up an' eat.

"Well, when Mrs. Reginald come in, she begun to sniff like a pointer dog. She walks straight up to the dishpan, where Miss Evie has her bilin' o' punch, an' says she: 'Sir, what is this?'

"'Ma'am,' says ol' man Wright, git-
tin' on the other side o' the table, 'this is the punch that has made my sewin' circle famous. Help yourself.'

"'Sir!' says Mrs. Reginald, pointin' with one finger down into the dishpan. 'This is a insult!'

"'No, it ain't,' says Miss Evie; 'it's a pineapple. You've got to have that. It's better with oranges, too, but they don't come canned.'

"Then they was what is knowed as a tab-leau, Sir Algernon. Nobody said nothin' fer some time. At last the eye of Mrs. Reginald fell on old Ebenezer, which was clim'in' outen his bunk an' headin' fer the table. 'You have not even the intelligence o' that pore dumb brute,' says she. 'Men—vile men—are the only creatures knowed in nature which will put a enemy into their mouths fer to steal away their brains.'

"'Ma'am,' says Billy Wilson, who was standin' on one foot, kind o' thoughtful, 'excuse me, fer I don't want to make no kind o' breaks. Now, so fur's I know—although we have never asked him none about his past—Ebenezer has never saw a panful o' anything like this before in his whole life. But I'll bet you four dollars he'll try to clim' in the pan, fer that's just the way I feel.'

"'Depraved young man,' says she, indignant, 'what you say is both false an' ridic'ulous! Dumb animiles, at least, they keeps their purity o' heart.'

"'Oh, well,' says old man Wright, takin' another dipperful fer luck, 'mere assertion ain't no argument, ma'am. Ast the coon hissself about it.'

"Well, sir, we all stood around the festive bowl, so to speak, an' Billy an' me we just moved a little ways apart so's Ebenezer could git by. He didn't say nothin', but he clim' first upon the bench, an' then upon the table, an' walked straight up to Miss Evie's punch pan. He looked over into it, then he turns an' gazes up at me, winks one eye, an' breaks into the happiest smile ever seen on anybody's face. I knowed then he come from Arkansasaw.

"Now, a coon cain't take hold o' a tin cup with his hand, although he kin do 'most anything else. We just left Ebenezer alone to figger it out for hisself. He still kep' up to be a perfect gentleman. He reaches over easy an' gentle like, an' fishes out two pieces o' pineapple, an' then looks round fer his washin' pan. Billy he goes an' gits the pan, puts it on the table, an' Ebenezer he washes off one piece o' pineapple. After a while he taken a bite out o' it. Then a idea seems to come acrost his head. He taken a bite out o' the other piece that *hadn't* been washed. Now, you could tell easy enough whether animals kin reason er not. Ebenezer he puts down the washed slice o' pineapple on the table, an' he devotes hissself exclusive to the one that *ain't* been washed. Havin' finished that, he strolls over to the punch pan fer some more. We all let him alone, an' he repeats this softly till they wasn't no pineapple left, after which he begun to lick his fingers.

"'Ma'am,' says old man Wright, 'I know not what these things may prove in Colorado, where you come from, but in Wyoming there's only one answer: It ain't only man is vile on Birch Creek.'

"Well, Mrs. Reginald she begins to argue that pineapples is not strong drink, an' that the coon has been de-

ceived, thinkin' it was a article o' food, an' that oncet he knowed what he was up against his instinct would save him from makin' another mistake. It was along in there Ebenezer took a hand in the argument.

"Well, sir, I reckon ef there ever was a coon that had a bright an' contented outlook on life it was Ebenezer in about five minutes. He just clim' down offen the table an' started acrost the floor toward a chair, but seemed like he couldn't find the chair, er else saw several o' them, and didn't know which one to take. Findin' his feet wasn't any too certain, he'd sit down several times an' laugh fit to split his sides. At last he clim's up on the chair an' put his head against his hand, an' I'm right sure ef he'd o' been alone he'd o' burst into some sort o' song.

"'Oh, bury him not on a lone prairie!' says old man Wright. 'That coon's on the pay roll from this time on. I'm a-goin' to take him home with me. Curly, you ain't worth it, but I'll have to raise your wages five, account c. o. d.—coon on delivery.'

"Well, o' course, the old man was boss, an' we boys couldn't say much. An' he did take Ebenezer home with him, too. Fer two months they wasn't anybody said a word at that cow camp, an' they come pretty near bein' a killin' every time anybody looked crossways at any one else. We missed old Ebenezer just that much; life didn't seem the same no more.

"O' course, old man Wright didn't start home that day, an' we had more reason fer to see that Ebenezer was shore human. The next mornin' his jag was all gone, an' he was broke an' his hair pulled. His eyes was red, an' his temper was somethin' awful. He even bit me—his warmest personal friend—when I tried to take a-holt o' him; an' he was the sourest, ugliest, meanest-dispositioned party in that whole camp. Remorse? That was him!

"Did it reform him? Not to notice sost to mention. Well, Sir Algernon, from that time on, long as Ebenezer was with us, so fur from bein' uplifted,

he didn't keep his eyes nowhere 'cept on the dishpan. It was hung on a nail against the wall, an' he'd climb up on the bench an' raise one aidge o' it, an' peek under it, an' smell at the rim of it, an' then turn around an' look at us, an' go an' stand up on his hind legs in front o' Miss Evie, an' just beg her to load up the pan again fer him. Human? Why, o' course he was human!

"What become of Ebenezer? Why, he was fer a long time the delight o' the ladies' missionary society down to Billings, where he always lent a hand in the uplift. Not that Mrs. Reginald was there—she couldn't leave Wyoming too soon, an' I heerd tell later she said there was somethin' in the climate o' Birch Creek that was depravin' even to dumb beasts. Now, it wasn't the climate—it was just human nature.

"We fellers kep' on eatin' what we could git, an' drinkin' everything there was when it come along, an' you couldn't o' killed any one o' us with a ax. No more you couldn't Ebenezer, neither. He's still a member o' old man Wright's family, in good an' regular standin'. Miss Evie watches him to see that he don't git in wrong with the booze, same as any lady ought to watch a man. Onct in a while Ebenezer, ef they don't watch him, he strolls off down the street an' into the Lone Star, an' he climbs up on the bar an' orders hissself a drink like any other puncher—I told you the only reason animiles drinks water is they're mostly where they can't git nothin' else.

"O' course, too much o' this ain't good fer Ebenezer, so when he comes home too much lit up—why, Miss Evie she boxes his ears an' scolds him an' puts him to bed, an' next mornin' wraps

his haid up in a wet towel. I'm tellin' you, Sir Algernon, that Miss Evie girl's goin' to make some feller a mighty fine wife.

"Die? Why, no, Ebenezer ain't ever goin' to die. He's rational, an' he plays the only safe system—he eats anything an' everything when he kin git it, an' he drinks the same, recognizin' the guidin' hand o' the boss that don't allow him to do that last only onct in a while. That's why you can't kill coons ner cow-punchers—they don't never die. Did you ever see a dead coon that hadn't been shot full o' holes er run over by a train? Yet that is just how coons is when you come to study 'em.

"Same time, you take a lot o' your friends, Sir Algernon, that's worryin' about their diet, an' wonderin' whether there's typhoid in the water, an' weighin' how much they ought to eat fer breakfast, an' troublin' theirselves about mi-crobes—well, you just watch an' see what good friends they are of people who make a livin' engravin' things on headstones. Ebenezer he don't need none. He has his lovin' friends, an' every time we go out with the beef cut us fellers pays him a visit down to Billings, an' buys him a few drinks, when Miss Evie ain't watchin'. He's the humanest coon ever was, though he's still silent on why he came to Wyoming.

"All of which shows, Sir Algernon," concluded Curly, gathering up his whitefish, "that people oughtn't to kick on their vittals. Me—I'm believin' that these here little fish, with plenty o' creek water, will make us about the best meal ever was—unless'n it *was* that one Miss Evie begun with the dishpan."

In the next POPULAR Emerson Hough will tell you about Lord Bill. On the stands in two weeks, December 7th.



FROM THE SANCTUM TO THE SACKS

CHARLES W. MURPHY, owner of the Chicago Cubs, once worked in Cincinnati as a sporting editor for the paper owned by Charles P. Taft, the president's half brother. Murphy's friend in National League politics, Horace Fogel, president of the Philadelphia club, was once a baseball writer in Philadelphia.

The Inn of the Seven Sins

By Captain Hector Orme Blanding

Author of "In Defense of Honor," "Bill Wilson, Renegade," Etc.

The beautiful señorita again. This time charming an American soldier and bidding him turn traitor to his country. Does love go so far as that? Not according to the ethics of Kirby Rae. But the Señorita Ynes Ybarra is not only a beautiful woman; she is wealthy and has a great cause at heart—the reclaiming of the Philippines from the Americans. When a woman of her type commands, she expects to be obeyed; and after all Rae is a man as well as a soldier. It is a big human-interest story well worth the reading.

(In Two Parts—Part I.)

A BREEZE had blown up from the Pasig and from the bay, sending the gray clouds scurrying before the face of the moon to reflect frosted silver on the water. Lights, lights, myriads of lights, metamorphosed the Luneta into a ribboned line of soft radiance, twisting and turning along the waterside. Bands were playing at scattered points of the great nocturnal playground; and, from all parts of Yntramuras, came those who would listen, look, and be observed; came in victorias, *carromatas*, *quelises*, on horseback, on foot. It was before the day of the motor in the islands, and no raucous ear-splitting note of horn, no fuming and puffing, or wafted odor of gasoline disturbed the placidity of the tropic scene.

Kirby Rae looked upon it all, and found it good, smiling happily, occasionally glancing down to see the reflection of the lights upon his brand-new leather puttees, the glint of his gilded constabulary buttons. It was his first night in Manila, his first day in uniform, and he was uplifted with a sense of romance, of adequacy to meet the new conditions that surrounded him. By

stretching a point, one might call Kirby Rae a man, but he as yet lacked three months of his legal right to that title. Certain it was, however, that he was a very manly youngster, and attractive to female eyes in his new uniform, topped by closely cut crisp brown hair under his gold-eagled cap, his ingenuous enjoyment reflected from his laughing blue eyes.

"There goes the governor," said his companion, a bronzed, somewhat hard-featured, and dissipated man perhaps five years Kirby's senior. He added, under his breath, some expletives not particularly flattering to the official's ancestry, general habits, and appearance.

Kirby Rae repeated the name with somewhat bated breath.

"Him?" he asked ungrammatically.

"Sure!" confirmed his companion, with a prophecy as to the governor's future state.

The boy stared at him in sheer amazement.

"That's a funny way to talk about the governor," he said, and his tones were not well pleased.

"When you've been in the Islands as

long as I have, and have had to put up with a government that's all for the brown man, and nothing for the white—when you realize that it's all because one big fat man is playing to the gallery at home, I guess you'll feel the same way, son."

"What's he done, Mr. Lyle?" asked the boy.

Lyle, who wore the insignia of a first lieutenant of constabulary, shrugged his shoulders, and spread his palms.

"Let's forget him," he said. "This is a great night, son."

"Isn't it?" agreed Kirby Rae delightedly, taking a deep breath.

Now it seemed that the great circle of open land was one enormous playground of lights, for the carriages were pouring out of all the *calles* that opened on the square, lights yellow, white, green, red, as their owners' tastes in colors might incline. Soldiers in khaki swaggered past, and officers in white drill, sailors blue-bloused, pop-eyed, flat-nosed Filipinos in misfit two-piece attire, barefooted, smoking placidly; lean, close-cropped Spaniards in pongee clothes, red cummerbunds about their waists; half and quarter-castes—called "mestizas"—in such costumes as their tastes and pocketbooks might provide—weird for the most part in their combination of European and Oriental attire: Parsees, Jews, Chinese, lascars—a sprinkling of all nations, a touch of all national traits; and over all the changing lights from poles and carriages.

In the latter were women, ranging from the pure-blooded, thick-lipped Filipino, through the various combinations of Filipino, Chinese, Spanish, and Portuguese, to the race-proud señorita or doña of unmixed Castilian descent, and the wives, daughters, and sisters of the American military and merchants; in costumes varying from the hunched-up, low-cut bodices of piña and jusi cloth to the latest mode in white lacy stuff from Paris, Vienna, or New York—all mysterious and tropically feminine in the swift play of lights and moon, with the swinging refrain of the music from the band stands to suggest a background of love and romance.

Lyle, the elder constabulary officer, seemed to know the people of the Luneta as Kirby Rae knew those of his little Maryland town, saluting army and constabulary officers, hailing civilians by their first names, speaking with grave courtesy to Spaniards and Spanish mestizos, and bowing and smiling gallantly to women of all races in the carriages, pointed out personages whose names Kirby had held in awe, treating them lightly, after the manner of the Orient, telling little anecdotes which had to do with their failings.

It was in the crush around the second band stand that Kirby became separated from Lyle, and, not finding him, sat down on a bench near by and watched the circling crowds. But although the atmosphere was languorous, it yet had motion, and one did not sit long inactive. The swaying of the music sent Kirby's feet to pattering, and after a while he arose, hardly conscious of his action, and wandered toward the carriages. Although he knew no one among the crowds, he was filled with the radiant joy of youth in a strange, interesting land, and he turned a cheery, smiling face and a pair of laughing eyes to men and women alike, finding companionship in their mere presence about him.

The harmony of lights, moon, music, and magic night was suddenly disrupted while he wandered. There came to his ears the *thud-thud* of beating hoofs. The crowd in the roadway melted away. He heard shouts of warning, and looking up found himself alone on the beaten carriage path, two great eyes of yellow bearing down rapidly upon him. Back of them he heard a woman's frightened scream. A commonplace enough thing, after all, he decided, but one apt to prove serious—a woman in a runaway carriage. So far the roadway had been clear. Ahead, *carromatas* and *quelises*, victorias and pony carts were in the act of being wildly disentangled from the crush about the band stand. For the runaway to plunge into that mass meant deadly danger for all concerned. There were many women there—and evident-

ly there was a woman in the head-loose carriage.

He had been in close touch with horses all his life; at four he had ridden bareback. As captain of the cavalry troop at his military school, he had established a record for putting his boy troopers through difficult equestrian maneuvers. The mere matter of stopping a runaway did not therefore occur to him as either a difficult or dangerous thing to do.

He stepped to the side of the roadway, crouching, measuring his distance. The pony, with dilated eyes and blowing nostrils, plunged toward him, rattling the light cart after it. Kirby made ready for the spring; and, as the mare's head came level with his, he launched himself forward, gripping the shaft on the far side with one hand, fumbling for the bit with the other.

The pony reared in air, dragging Kirby Rae's feet from the ground. At the same moment Kirby threw a leg over the mare's back, and caught the bit rein on either side, drawing her mouth up and up until her nose pointed almost directly at the moon.

The pony came to a whinnying, furious stop, twisting in pain, trying to snap with her great white teeth; but Kirby Rae, his knees pressed into the heaving sides, strained at the bit rein inch by inch, working his way over the pony's back to the tail, and then, loosing suddenly, stepped to the right shaft and over the dashboard, and, as he sat down in the seat, held the reins taut again.

Not looking at the woman at his side, nor hearing the admiring cheers from the assembled crowd, he kept his eyes directly at the pony's head easing up and tightening the lines as the beast's temper seemed to warrant.

"I imagine, madam," he said, "that you had better allow me to take you home. The mare is frightened, and you would not be able to manage her. Besides, I imagine it is embarrassing to you to be made so conspicuous."

"Quite—so—señor," she gasped, speaking in English, and quite correctly, but with a creamy roundness of ex-

pression which was foreign, peculiarly Latin. "But I cannot allow you to so inconvenience yourself——"

"Madam," said Kirby Rae, still not seeing her, and speaking in the old-fashioned Southern manner inherited from his father, a gallant of antebellum days, "it is the duty of every gentleman to assist a lady in distress. And if you will allow me that pleasure, I will be most happy."

He did not wait for her permission, but turned the mare's head out of the crush, and let her drop into a canter, swift but absolutely regulated by him. Once the pony shied, and had a taste of a firm hand on the lines; several times she tried to bolt, and on both occasions suffered punishment therefor. In the few minutes that elapsed between Kirby's last speech and his glimpse of the lady, the mare found she was mastered, and like a sensible equine tried no more tricks, loping along in the manner her driver thought best for her. With the strain of the lady's safety removed from his mind, Kirby Rae turned his head to her, and his eyes took in dazedly the full measure of her loveliness.

Rae knew little of women, apart from those who had been his friends from earliest infancy. His military-school experience had been near the place of his birth, and at the dances and small affairs he met just the same people. Coming across the continent, and on board the liner—a small one—which had brought him from San Francisco to Manila, there had been no women of any particularly attractive qualities. He had been too busy, too sanely and boyishly healthy heretofore to feel the need of love. Besides he had a mother he adored and two sisters to advise; and then there was study, care of his horse, drilling his troop, football, baseball, and riding with the hounds.

Therefore, having no experience with women, as has been said before, it cannot be written that he enjoyed the situation in which he now found himself, nor that he knew how to cope with it. He knew that he was blushing, and hated himself for it. All the certainty

and resolution he had displayed in handling the runaway left him; and on his face a stern look and a conciliatory smile battled with one another, forming a combination absolutely boyish and helpless.

"You have been very brave, señor," said the girl, for now it was apparent she was hardly more than that.

"Oh, it's n-nothing," he stammered, and turned his eyes to the horse. "Not so fast," he added, growling at the pony when a growl was not in the least necessary.

"Nothing to have saved my life?" she protested, laying a hand on his arm timidly.

"I—I didn't mean *that*, of—of course, señorita."

Without really wishing to do so, he found himself looking into her eyes again. Those eyes! He gasped.

"What beautiful eyes you have!" he blurted out; then, becoming suddenly inspired, and forgetting his shyness and surroundings: "What beautiful, beautiful eyes! Do you know what they make me think of? Night in the forest, and deep pools in the black sedge, with ever so many brown leaves at the bottom, and the stars shining through just a little break in the branches of the trees overhead."

The girl clasped her hands, her gesture as natural as his own outburst.

"Señor, señor—that is poetry!" she said.

He had no words for a minute or two, then he asked prosaically:

"Which way, please?"

She indicated the course the pony was to take.

"My name is Kirby Rae, señorita," he explained, as he drew in the near rein, slightly altering the direction of the pony. "And I am an inspector—or lieutenant of constabulary."

"I knew that, señor," she said. "And you come from the big military academy——"

"Oh, no; not West Point," he told her. "If I had gone through that I should be an army officer. My people didn't have the influence to get me there, so they did the best they could,

and sent me to a little military academy near my home—Rockhurst, that is, in Maryland. Do you know about Maryland?"

"That is where they have tobacco, isn't it?" she asked. "I have seen in Paris packets of cigarettes with 'Maryland' upon them."

"Why, yes," he agreed. "I believe they *do* have tobacco."

"And black men picking it with chains around their ankles," she continued. "Oh, yes, I know your Maryland, señor. And at night they play on the—what you call guitars—no!—jijos——"

"Banjos," laughed Rae. "Yes, I reckon some of them still do. But you're thinking about slave days—that was long ago, when the darkies were happy and contented, and used to work—before they set them free."

"Just as did these Filipinos before the American pigs came and put false notions in their silly heads," she cried indignantly, then, with a little frightened "Oh!" touched his arm with gentle fingers.

"Oh, señor, may I ever be forgiven? You are American, and I have forgot. But I did not think of you being American. You are good. You would not steal from churches, or teach Filipino dogs to hound the Spanish because they are beaten men. And you do not speak as do the Americans, señor—with the strange nose talk and hard, scratchy voice——"

"Oh, you're thinking of the Yankees," explained Rae tolerantly. "But they are not *all* the people of America. I am a Southerner—you know.

"Way down South in the land of cotton, Cinnamon top and sandy bottom,

Look away——

"Dixie land that is. Well, I'm from Dixie."

"Dee-see," she repeated slowly, "Dee-see. That is pretty, I think. I am glad, then, that you are not a Yankee. My cousin does not like them. He is Spanish, and much older than I am. And he is my guardian. He is Señor Don Ambrosino de Rufelo, and I am Ynes Ybarra."

She spelled it carefully for him.

"E-e-nays E-e-bar-ra," he pronounced, just as carefully. "I think that is a charming name—and so different from any I ever heard. Then you are the Señorita Ynes, aren't you?"

He was somewhat anxious now.

"Oh, yes, Señor Rae," she laughed. "I am still a señorita—although I am almost as old as are you. But you see," she added, as though in apology, "I have been to schools in England and France, and I have spent many years in Paris with my cousin."

The pony cart swerved out of the street and into the Luneta again.

"We've been going around in a circle," said Rae, somewhat ruefully.

"I meant that we should," she said, clapping her hands and laughing softly. "Let us remain here for a while. Draw up the bad pony there. An open space—see! She appears to be gentle and tractable under your strong hands."

"Well," he admitted, not without some pride, "I *am* rather strong, you know."

He brought the cart into the desired position.

"Tell me, señor," she said abruptly, "tell me of yourself. You—you are very young to be out here, and you must have much to tell."

He welcomed the opportunity.

"Well, you see," he complied, "I *am* young, but then I have had a military education. I was trained for a soldier, just as they train West Point men. I was studying civil engineering when this chance came. I heard of this constabulary outfit, which was just like a colonial army, and I took the civil-service examination, and passed with quite a good average. I got an appointment almost immediately—and it was inspector, second grade, too—that is, second lieutenant. I didn't have to go into the lowest grade at all. Of course, mother and sister Ada and sister Alice didn't want me to come out here. They think it's a wild sort of place, with people lurking behind every corner to take a shot at you. But I told them that dad and granddad had been soldiers, and that I felt I wanted to be, and now that

I had the chance I was going to take it—although of course I hated to leave them behind. And I had a jolly trip as soon as I got over being homesick. This is my first day in Manila. I like it."

"You are going to live here?" she asked.

"Don't know. Don't reckon so after they get me whipped into shape. They'll send me away off to some little place, I suppose."

"You should come to Melangete," she said softly.

He repeated the name, puzzled.

"Melangete," she repeated. "That's on the island of Minegnay—Min-e-gni. It's not a large island, just to the south of Panay and Negros—one of the Visayan group. That is where my father's estates are, and it is where I am going to go."

"G-go? When?"

"I do not know," she replied, her narrowed eyes viewing him, and flashing golden light.

"Not soon?" he begged.

"Well," she smiled, "maybe—not soon——" She broke off suddenly.

"And now," she said, "you must drive me to the casa, Señor Rae. It is growing late. The band has ceased to play. Ahead!"

"And you will let me call at your casa soon?"

"*Si, señor.* I shall believe myself very lacking in attraction if you do not come."

"To-morrow?"

She laughed. "To-morrow if you wish, señor—if you wish. And I shall have tea for you after the English fashion—at four. And you shall meet my cousin, Don Ambrosino. Although he likes Americans little, still he cannot lack Castilian courtesy, and he must be grateful to the American who saved his little cousin from death—ugh!"

She shuddered.

"How strong, how brave——"

He turned, looking into her eyes.

"——and how young you are."

"You are young, too, señorita," he reminded her.

For the first time, her golden-brown

eyes were dull, dull as is the sun through a mist.

"Nineteen in years, señor—a hundred and nineteen in experience. And—old enough to be your grandmother."

She was laughing again.

They had driven up and across streets, and now she indicated an archway on Calle Sta. Aña through which the pony now glided. Within, two servants in rope sandals shuffled forward, one carrying a lantern, the other taking the pony's head.

"*Dios* be thanked, señorita," said the one with the lantern. "We have shivered and shaken with fear since first you drove forth with this mare of the devil's own brood."

"Devil's mare for devil's daughter," she returned lightly in Spanish.

Rae swung down, and his cap fell. Not regarding it, he put up a hand, and helped her to the ground. Then, as a man does when bareheaded, passed his fingers through his hair, smoothing it up from his forehead, and incidentally revealing a brown birthmark which had the shape of a cross inverted. The man holding the lantern, catching sight of it, drew back his lips, baring his teeth, a frozen yell in his mouth. The lantern clattered to the ground.

"*El Diablo Dagorro!*" he muttered, and dropped on his knees before Kirby Rae, catching at his putteed legs.

Rae turned a puzzled face to the girl, who in turn poured out a string of questions at the kneeling man. He answered briefly. She picked up the lantern, and holding it up to Rae's face pushed back his hair. At the sight of the birthmark, her eyes dilated.

"Señor," she said, "keep always your hair down upon your forehead. Show that mark never. It is dangerous. Show it never—never——"

She switched to Spanish, speaking to the *mozos*:

"As for you, swear to me now you will tell to no one that you have seen a stranger with the mark! Swear!"

Trembling, they complied.

"Get you then into the cart," she said to the one holding the pony's head, "and

drive the señor to his casa. *Buenas noches*, Señor Rae."

She gave him her hand. He bent over, kissing it.

"To-morrow at four?"

"At four."

II.

Ynes Ybarra did not immediately enter the house, waiting, smiling, until the sound of wheels and pony's hoofs had died away. Her face seemed very young in the moonlight, her figure slight and girlish; and in her eyes and about her lips was a tenderness that glorified her beauty. For some little while she stood there, her hand on the marble balustrade, her eyes turned to the moon.

Then she sighed, and pushed open a glass-paned door, entering a lofty-ceilinged room, lighted cathedrallike by a six-sprayed candelabrum on the teak-wood table, by which sat two men conversing in low tones. One rose at her entrance, coming forward and offering his hand—a man above the average in height, squarely built, broad-shouldered. His blue eyes were in marked contrast to his intensely black hair, and they had in them a certain contemptuous recklessness that provoked curiosity where it did not attract. One reckoned him a soldier, a hard drinker, a harder fighter, not particularly scrupulous concerning the means to a desired end. He staggered a bit, and his full, round face was pouchy under the eyes, the skin there being somewhat discolored. Otherwise his complexion was good.

"Miss Inez," he said, pronouncing the name after the English fashion, "I have been dragging out my stay with your cousin here, hoping you would come in before I went."

The girl yawned, putting up pink finger tips to hide it.

"I am sorry, Captain Greenough," she returned, "that I am too sleepy to entertain you."

His eyes were free of contempt now, but the recklessness was allied with a somewhat conscious admiration.

"'Twas just to have another look at your face, Miss Inez," he said; "the

same that I have not seen since two months past, when we dined at the Ritz. This is different from Paris, eh?"

One was undecided whether he was English or Irish by his speech. His intonation was distinctively the former; but he used the construction of the latter in places. As a matter of fact, he was both: Guy Desmond Greenough—pronounced Gren-uff—the son of a penniless third son of an English peer by a Dublin doctor's daughter, thirty-seven in years, a man without a country, a mercenary who had fought under many flags; and whose last appointment had been in the French Foreign Legion stationed in Algeria, a post from which he had resigned, it was said, under circumstances involving a woman's name and reflecting upon him no particular credit.

"I am tired," said Ynes Ybarra, "and am going to my room immediately."

"You have been driving?" he asked.

The man who had remained seated at the girl's entrance now looked up for the first time. He was gaunt, bronzed, forty at least, with eyes deeply sunken, uncannily black eyes, so black, indeed, that the outline of the pupils was lost. There was a queer inward look in them, and now, as he turned them toward Ynes, it seemed that he was gazing past instead of at her.

"You drove alone," he said, "and drove the most unmanageable pony in the stables." His voice held a reproof.

"Yes," she replied indifferently.

"And you were not alone when you returned?" he continued.

"Good night, Captain Greenough," she said. "Ambrosino intends to quarrel with me, and I do not wish you to see him humbled. He *will* not learn it is unwise to match words with a woman."

She held out her hand to Greenough, who raised it toward his lips. She suddenly jerked it away.

"Not that," she said.

"Why?" he asked, surprised.

As she could not very well tell him it was because another man had kissed that same hand but a few moments before, she only shrugged her shoulders.

"A fancy."

"A beautiful woman is permitted as many fancies as she chooses," said Greenough, "and the woman who was the three years' toast of Paris, more. But fancies sometimes run to the opposite extreme. I trust I shall be here at the time."

She had never noticed before that his smile was odious.

"There will be no such antithetical fancy while you are here, Captain Greenough," she said cruelly. "Good night, and pardon our lack of hospitality."

It was the Briton's turn to shrug his shoulders, which his Irish blood permitted him to do effectively. Shaking hands with Don Ambrosino, and bowing low to the girl, he went out.

Ynes turned her eyes to the black-eyed man who sat caressing his closely cut black beard with bony, blue-veined fingers.

"You were saying, Ambrosino——"

"That you drove alone an unmanageable horse, and returned with an unknown man."

"Yes?"

"You find that in accord with the proprieties?"

"I find whatever I do to my liking," she returned slowly; "and I tell you now never to use that tone of reproof to me again when another person is present. And be very sparing in the use of it even when we are alone. I am no child, Ambrosino. You have made me a woman of the world. Perhaps I may remind you rather forcibly that your great scheme is dependent upon my money, and that if I choose to withdraw my financial support it crumples."

"You speak as though the scheme were for my own betterment," he said, in heavy anger, turning his eyes, now glittering, to her.

She laughed. "The day is over when you hold any power in those eyes to keep me subservient," she said. "Those were the days before I knew my own power. Now I know what may be done with my wealth, and that at the age of eighteen I became my own mistress, to do with it as I choose. I do not care to remind you of this, Ambrosino, but

your own attitude has forced me to it. So long as you are content to be my cousin and my equal, and not my guardian and superior, you will find me agreeable. But under other circumstances I must remind you that you are no more than a hired employee."

Her voice had a hard, metallic ring to it; there was in it no trace of the soft, shrinking, girlish person who had sat in the pony cart with Kirby Rae.

Ambrosino turned his eyes from her. "I respect your wishes, Ynes," he said. "You are right. But the plan," he added; "that is your own as much as mine. You hate these Americans as much as I do. Ever since childhood you have been determined to avenge the death of Manuel, the massacre of our household by Filipinos, for which the United States would mete out no punishment——"

"Perhaps had you not always fanned the flame of my hatred, I might have forgotten," she said. "After all——"

She paused.

He passed easily on to another subject.

"You found it difficult to manage the pony to-night?"

"The bad beast!" she exclaimed. "He ran away with me. Had it not been for the brave señor who aided me——"

Her eyes grew tender with the thought.

"Ambrosino," she said reflectively, "I did not know there were such men in the world. He was taller than you, and broader of shoulder. His hair was crisp—not as black as yours—but yet dark. And his eyes were big and round and gray, and as innocent as a child's. He was very strong——"

She paused, remembering the ease with which Rae had stopped the tearing runaway. The thought thrilled her.

"And very young," she continued; "only a little older than myself. He told me I was beautiful, but oh! so differently from the others. And I played at being a child with him—an inexperienced child-woman. Ambrosino, I don't remember ever before feeling like that. Everything seemed so straightforward, so honest—nothing to hide about him.

And I felt quite safe; knew the more I should be in peril the more I could depend upon him. He is the sort of man who would give freely all his life—prospects, wealth, services, whether his love be returned or not."

Ambrosino drew a long, sibilant breath between his teeth.

"You seem, my cousin, to be on a fair road to losing that cold little heart of yours."

"Perhaps I am," she said, smiling contemplatively. "I hope so. There is something in the air to-night which has never been there; an expectation of the morrow, a thrill of anticipation. He comes to tea at four. When he comes I shall know."

"Whether he loves you?"

"He does love me, he will love me!" she responded fiercely. "No, I did not mean that. It was whether I should love him or not. I hope, I believe I do."

"And he—is American?" Ambrosino kept his voice low, level.

"He is a constabulary lieutenant," she answered. Then, remembering the note in Ambrosino's voice, she asked sharply: "What of that?"

"How is it possible for you to love one whose country you hate? Whose country's supremacy in these islands you are in a plot to destroy?"

The look on her face showed that she realized the weight of his words.

"For a chance acquaintance you are to forget the wrong these Americans have done us? We Rufelos and Ybaras, once the richest in all the Philippines, now helpless in our own lands, our crops rotting away for lack of taos to work them, because this cursed sentiment of liberty, of equality which the Americans have put into the Filipinos has left them useless as laborers; we whom the government will not allow to import Chinese labor to save our crops, our fortunes; we who have been forced to sell estate after estate to American monopolies for a third, a fourth of their worth! We, of the proudest blood of Castile, reviled, spat upon by Filipino dogs who find protection behind American arms; whose lands have been laid

waste by ladrones, houses burned, with no interference from the Americans! You, whose own brother died in Bilibid Prison because American law put him there for killing a Filipino thief; whose father's house was ravaged, robbed, his servants' throats cut—your own nurse among them! You alone of all the old Spanish nobility have the money at your disposal to aid the cause; and you speak of loving a man of the race who are our enemies——”

He paused from sheer want of breath.

“I have forgotten nothing, Ambrosino,” she said slowly, “forgotten nothing. I have not said I intend to abandon the scheme we have determined upon. But I will not let love go out of my life once it has come in. To-morrow, when I see him, I will know if I love him. And if I love him, he shall love me—yes, love me so much that he will give up his country for me.”

“I know these Americans,” said Ambrosino soberly. “They do not do that.”

“This one will, if I love him,” she said, her golden-brown eyes narrowing. “He will give up his country; more than that, he will help me *against* his country. He will love me blindly, devotedly. My thoughts will be his thoughts; my ends his ends. I will win him over to our cause, and he will be one of us.”

III.

“Ynes Ybarra?” repeated Lyle, in some surprise. “Why, wherever did you hear of her, son?”

Kirby Rae blushed, wishing meanwhile that he was able to tell a lie with a straight face.

“Oh, I don't know,” he replied awkwardly. “I—er—heard some people talking about her—some Spanish people last night—er—after I lost you.”

Lyle did not notice his embarrassment. He seemed reflective.

“Been reading the papers, eh?”

It was evident he had not even heard the halting, mendacious explanation. Rae was glad of that.

“Er—yes,” he said.

“Beautiful girl,” commented Lyle,

“but heartless, utterly heartless, from all I can hear. Refused an American millionaire, a French duke, and Lord knows how many others! I guess if I've got one picture of her I've got a dozen. Cut 'em out of the Paris magazines and papers. She comes from these *dhobi* islands, by the bye, but she's lived abroad most of her life. I know some people who knew her father and mother. Fine old Spanish family, the Ybarras. Used to own pretty much the whole island of Minegnay. Their estates got all tangled up for a while. Some crooked business on the part of our lovely local judges, and she had to go on the stage. Made a great hit in Paris with a 'bolo' dance—regular Filipino affair. Played the Marigny and all the swell places. Wouldn't go near the Moulin Rouge or any of the cheaper ones. Guess she wasn't more than fifteen or sixteen when she first went on. Stayed on for two or three years. Then they got the estates straightened out over here, and she proved her right to her father's fortune, so she cut out the stage quick as a wink, and since then nobody has heard much about her. I was just reading in a Paris paper yesterday about her mysterious disappearance—let me see—where is it?”

The two constabulary officers were seated in Lyle's room in the barracks, overlooking the courtyard, from which, ever and anon, came the sound of military directions, the shuffle of feet, the grounding of rifles, as a squad of awkward recruits were being put through their paces by an ex-sergeant of regulars, now a first lieutenant of constabulary. He was Irish and profane, and had an extensive vocabulary of expletives and epithets descriptive of disapproval, extending over the Gaelic, English, Spanish, and Tagalog languages.

Kirby Rae's duties for the day were ended. He had spent the morning since seven o'clock in attempting to teach half a troop of Visayans to sit in a McClellan saddle and gallop in formation, without any particular result except a very severe trying of his own temper. Now, at three o'clock, glowing with anticipation, he had been no longer able to

keep the name of the girl from his lips, and he had mentioned it tentatively to Lyle.

The elder man, after rummaging through a pile of periodicals and paper-covered books, finally unearthed a quarto-sized weekly with chromo cover, and came across to Rae.

"There she is," he said, in tones of genuine admiration. "Isn't she a beauty? That is, if she looks like her picture."

"She's——"

Kirby had started to inform him as to the immense superiority of the real Ynes to the pictured one, when he checked himself. As Lyle seemed to be unaware of Señorita Ybarra's presence in Manila, it would appear that she had some reason for keeping it a secret.

He looked at the picture.

"Beautiful," he said, adding: "That is the one I saw."

He wondered if he looked as uncomfortable as he felt.

"Let's see, what does the paper say?"

Lyle squinted at the French of it, translating slowly:

"Bel Ami Ynes is gone from among us, and boulevardiers are desolate. It was difficult enough for us to accustom ourselves to the fact that we should no longer see her upon the boards, for a mere matter of a few francs; but at least we had the consolation of noting her upon the Bois for the drive and at the Ritz or D'Armenonville for an occasional meal. But now she has fled us, forsaken us, leaving behind no hint of her destination. Gone also is the watchdog, the sullen Don Ambrosino; but—may we say most significant of all—vanished entirely is the handsome Englishman whose surname no Frenchman may pronounce, but whom the girls of Maxim's and the Café Americain know as 'Très Joli Guy.'

"Can it be that the señorita has, after all, a heart, and that this debonair soldier, whose reputation is none of the best, even for a flâneur, has touched it? For the sake of 'Bel Ami Ynes' we trust not."

Kirby Rae was red with anger as Lyle finished.

"Scandalous sheet!" he said indignantly.

"Oh, I don't know," returned Lyle. "It doesn't say anything much. When a Parisian sheet like this one"—he tapped it—"treats a woman's name with such

respect, and that woman a former dancer, you can bet she's good—good all the way through. For I guess there are some good women in the world—not that I know much of them by experience. But somehow that girl's face has always had a funny attraction for me. I've cut out every picture of her I saw, and one of them I liked so much that I sent to a Parisian photographer, inclosing money to buy an original. He returned the money, saying that mademoiselle had forbidden him to sell her pictures. And that's somewhat of a novelty in an actress—eh? I'd like to meet her. She has great possibilities. There's a soul behind all that beauty—but a soul that has never been awakened. If she ever loves a man—well, he'll be lucky!"

Kirby Rae picked up his cap, riding crop, and gloves.

"Yes, I reckon he will," he said soberly. "Well—see you later, Lieutenant Lyle."

The light had died out of his eyes, and the corners of his boyish mouth quivered. He mounted his pony, which an orderly brought out, and let the beast canter as it willed until he realized he was going out of his way, and turned its head to the Calle Sta. Aña. The house had not been numbered, but he remembered its location and appearance, having no difficulty in finding it. The servant who took his pony's reins evidently had expected him, for he shouted up the steps from the patio, and another muchacho in clean white cotton clothes came down, waving his hand to the balcony.

With a somewhat dejected air Rae followed the direction to the stone balcony where orchids and other gorgeous growths grew in the little garden, and was then shown into a room opening off the balcony where the girl's tawny head caught the sunbeams as she bent over the silver tea service.

She rose to greet him, smiling. Kirby flushed, and murmured something indistinctly as he took her hand.

"You are very punctual," she said, "for it is not yet four, and the tea is not quite ready."

He murmured apologies, which she

waved aside, still smiling, and imperiously directed him to a seat. He took it, watching her, and picking nervously at his gloves. She was in a gown of white lace, through which her satiny skin showed its warm petal-pink olive, a high, curved collar of the lace meeting her hair in back, her sleeves short, showing the curves of her arms. But she seemed only a child for all he had heard—a beautiful, willful child as she bit her under lip, frowning, and then drew in the lip, smiling and showing her dimples, the different expressions resulting from her manipulation of the tea service.

There was a *muchacho* at hand to give Kirby his cup and the slice of thin bread and butter, and who vanished silently when he had done so.

"Now," she said, smiling, and nodding at him, "now I have given you your tea, and have been hospitable, we will talk, and you will tell me all about your Maryland, where they have the tobacco and the band-jo-jos, and——"

"It is very kind of you to let me come," he said. "I—I appreciate it awfully, *señorita*."

"Appreciate? Why, it is *I* who appreciate. It was *I* who asked you to come!"

"Yes," he blurted out, "but you were grateful because I happened to be lucky enough to stop that horse last night. I know I'm nothing but a kid, and I reckon I bore you—and—everything——"

"*Amigo mio*," she said gently, "I should not have asked you to come had I not wished to see you."

"Oh, of course you say that," persisted Kirby Rae unhappily, "but I don't know anything about women, and don't know how to talk to them or what to do or say, and I'm just sort of tongue-tied, and I know I must be an awful bore. I *think* things, but I can't *say* them. I think beautiful things when I look at you, but I get all choked up in the throat when I start to tell you about them—and then——"

"Why, you dear boy," she said, and no man on earth had ever heard that note in her voice before; a note that had all the gentle kindness and loving solici-

tude of a sweet, warm-blooded girl whose pulses for the first time were stirring, who was forgetting self, and thinking only of what she would like to do to make the lad across the table from her happy.

"You dear boy," she continued. "That is why I—like you so much. Because you're so different from the rest; because you don't know that you are——"

She did not say "adorable," though it was on her lips; she caught herself in time.

But he was too absorbed with his own shortcomings to hear what she said, too modest to recognize the tenderness in her tone, and his eyes being turned away from her, he could not see the radiance that had overspread her face.

"I was reading all about you in a Paris paper," he said; "how famous and beautiful and how missed you were. And when I think of all the men—well-known men—who must have wanted to be with you, and how clever they——"

She leaned impulsively over and took his wrist.

"Silly boy!" she said. "I did not care as much for all of them as I care about one of those little waves in your hair."

He breathed the rare fragrance of her, and in that moment he considered nothing, thought nothing, weighed nothing; but followed blindly the instinct that told him to catch her in his arms. And she was responsive. Her lips met his.

It was not a moment—hardly a second; then he was on his feet, his eyes ashamed, afraid to meet hers, his head sunk on his breast.

"Oh, *señorita*, *señorita*," he pleaded. "Oh—forgive me, forgive me. I was crazy, mad—forgive me, forgive me. I did not mean it—I—I——"

Her lithe body stiffened; her eyes flamed.

"You did not *mean* it? You do not love me?"

"Love you? Love you! *Señorita*, I—I—love you, love you, love you—so much I can't say it! Oh, but I have no right to tell you. And—can you ever forgive me for—having—done that? Can you—— Oh, you must! I—I——"

never felt that way about a girl before, and it just came suddenly—before I realized what I was doing. Oh, I know it's impossible for a girl like you to care for a—a—just a kid—like me—but I—I—don't expect that. Just let me come to see you—just once in a while. I'll try not to bore you. I'll—I'll do anything for you—and maybe, maybe this love for you will make me a bigger man, a man more worth while. Maybe loving you like this I'll be able to do big things to win you—to make you care—and——”

“Oh, boy,” she said softly, “it isn't what a man does that makes a woman love him. It's—something that nobody understands. It's because you are you; and I am I; and God intended us for one another. That is love. Even if you were never to be more than a captain of constabulary, I should love you. If you became the greatest soldier in the world I could not love you more. It is—you! Nothing more—you—*querido mio*.”

“You,” he gasped, “love—me——”

“With all my heart and soul I love you, sweetheart,” she said, and came forward. But as he would have taken her into his arms, she paused, warning him back.

“First,” she said, “I must know how much you love *me*.”

“How much?”

He paused, his mouth half open; then he smiled with whimsical hopelessness.

“I—I—couldn't tell you that,” he said. “I can't find the words. They come, but they seem to mean so little, and my love for you is so big. I am just yours, yours, and I'd do anything, everything to prove it. Oh, if I only *could* do some big thing to prove it!”

“Suppose,” she said, her eyes meeting his, “suppose you *could*. Suppose I asked you to give up your country to prove your love for me—asked you to resign your commission and work with me——”

“Oh, do you want me to?” he asked eagerly. “Why, of course I would.”

“And work against your own country—against America—the United States?”

Join with me and others to take the Philippines away from them——”

He stared, not realizing.

“They would call you a renegade, a traitor, but I would love you. I would be your wife—yes, I would marry you and be yours, all yours, never any other's, even if you died. I would be yours—you understand? Would you be a renegade, a traitor, and not care, so long as I loved you?”

His lips formed in a tender smile.

“You are only trying me,” he said. “No woman could love a man who would be such a dog as that.”

“I would love you, I tell you,” she cried fiercely, “because you would be a renegade for my sake; because you would have given up your country, everything, for me. I would love you. Would not that be enough?”

“No,” he said slowly, “that wouldn't be love. There's a difference between love—and something else. Love is clean and big and pure. It makes a man want to be fit for a woman; it makes him strive not to do the things that aren't right. My father often told me about those things. He said there was no love where there was not honor. But”——and he broke off, smiling——“I didn't mean to say all those things. They're just what I remember of what my father used to tell me. He was a soldier, and they used to call him the Confederate Cavalier—he——”

“Confederate!” she cried, catching at the word. “Then—then he fought against the United States—fought against his country!”

The boy shook his head. “The United States is *all* the States,” he said. “There wasn't any United States during the Civil War. It was North against South. But there *is* a United States now, thank God”——he hushed his voice as he spoke——“and I am an American.”

He turned to her, trying to take her hands, but she eluded him. There was a determined glint in her golden-brown eyes, an angry resolve.

“Suppose I told you,” she said, very low, “that unless you renounced your country and threw in your lot with her

enemies, you would never see me again?"

"I should not believe you," he returned, still smiling.

"But it is true—*true*, I tell you. I love you, love you, shall never love any other man but you. But I have a purpose, a mission which must be fulfilled. And I want the love of no man who does not love me enough to follow me, to aid me. So make your choice!"

"Make—my—choice?"

"Between me and your country. Before God, I mean it! See—I swear!"

She kissed the golden crucifix that hung from the thin chain about her neck.

"You cannot mean it!"

And she noted that, for the first time, he had the voice, the manner of a man. The boyishness had gone. He stood very straight, his nails tearing his palms.

"Mean it? Yes, yes, yes! Sweetheart, prove your love—come with me." She stretched out her arms to him. "I will make you a great man. I will make others see in you what I see. I will make you famous, feared, and envied, and no other man shall ever speak a word of love to me. I will be yours until death. If you like, when this plan of ours is consummated, we will leave the Philippines—go to France—take an old chateau, and live among the grapevines and the roses—just you and I together; and be happy with only the thought of love between us. Do you realize how much I love you, *querido mio*? Do you realize that in sickness, pain, or danger I will be always with you, always thinking of you? Dear one, it is the only part of the divine given to us—love! And if you love me as you should, you will not let that love go out of our lives. What is your country, your kindred, anything, compared to the marvelous thing that springs up like a glowing flower in a wilderness unaided, unsought—love? All the while I have lived, and men have told me I was beautiful and they loved me, I could only think them silly, for I saw only their faces and heard them speak, and I wished to see or hear neither. But when I looked at

you the first time—deep down into your soul—I felt a little child again, happy over trifles, glad to be alive. And all last night I lay awake, refusing sleep, because the thought of you was too beautiful to lose. My dear one, do not refuse me. I have not loved before, I will never love again. Come with me. Do as I would have you do."

"Señorita—Ynes!" cried the boy desperately. "You do not mean that you wish me to become a traitor to my country. You can't mean it. I won't believe it. A traitor!"

"But true to me—to me!"

"If I were false to my country I could not be true to you; could not be true to any one or anything. I would be lower than the thief, the murderer!"

"And you refuse?"

"To be a traitor? I would not sink so low as to think I even considered it."

"Then go!" she said. "I don't want love like yours—love that sets another thing higher than the one woman. Perhaps—perhaps—I did not mean what I said about sacrificing your country, but the thought that you should refuse—refuse. That is enough to prove you do not love me, and I want you to go—to go—and to never see me again."

But Kirby Rae was no longer the gentle-mannered boy. All the softness had fled from lips and eyes. He faced her with a look in his eyes that set her shrinking back for the moment, afraid.

"And I," he said, "will not go. You have said you love me. To try my love you have proposed a thing so vile that I cannot believe you realize it. You have said you love me, and I choose to believe that you do."

He caught her wrists so tightly that she was powerless.

"You *shall* love me," he said. "Your life is my life. I shall never give you up—never—now that you have told me of your love."

She raised her voice suddenly in a scream.

"Let me go! Let me go! Love—pah! You know nothing of it—nothing—nothing. Go! I hate you! Go—go!"

"And I say you *shall* love me," he said, from behind clenched teeth; "love me as your very life itself—love me now and all the time. I say you shall never love any one else, that the touch of another man shall be hateful to you, his kiss an insult, his love a mockery. I alone shall be the man you love!"

As his head went back, his hair fell from his temple, exposing the little, inverted cross on his forehead, gleaming red now against his dead-white skin. Again she screamed, and this time the scream was answered. The door was flung violently open, and Greenough came into the room. At the sight of the girl struggling in Kirby Rae's grasp, he came forward, and with an abrupt, angry movement he caught Kirby's shoulders, pressed his knee into the small of the boy's back, and broke his hold.

"Ye cur!" he shouted.

Rae turned on him, an ugly smile on one side of his mouth, his teeth showing white. His fist swung hammerlike, and struck Greenough on the point of his jaw. The adventurer staggered, slipped, fell. But as he reached the floor, he reached for his hip, and the black barrel of a gun showed ominously.

The second of his drawing, however, had been identical with Kirby's spring, and the two men came within an inch of each other when Greenough fired. A scream from the girl, a long-drawn hisslike sound from Kirby Rae, and the bullet went into the ceiling, thanks to Kirby's sudden striking up of the revolver. A struggle ensued for the possession of the weapon, Kirby catching Greenough's hand, and holding it high in air, his fingers pressing hard the small bones of the adventurer's wrist, his left hand gripping his throat. He was taller, longer of arm than Greenough, and there was a table between them which prevented Greenough's kicking. His arms could not reach Kirby; and the constabulary officer, his teeth close together, held the older man at arm's length, his steellike fingers burying themselves into gullet and wrist. Greenough's face became pur-

ple, his eyes bulged, the revolver dropped from his hand, and Rae released the man and pushed him into a panting heap on the floor.

"You murdering dog!" he said, and picked up the revolver.

Again the girl screamed shrilly, and her trembling fingers tugged at his shoulders.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "He is the man I love——"

She had misinterpreted Kirby's purpose, imagined he was about to fire at the man on the floor. She did not know that such things were forbidden Anglo-Saxons, that Kirby Rae had struggled for the revolver not because he wished to kill Greenough, but because he had no desire that Greenough should make an end of him. But perhaps she had another purpose at the back of her angry feminine mind—the desire to hurt, hurt cruelly the man who had flung her love aside because of a matter of duty.

Her words recalled Kirby Rae. Had he continued in his rage, he might, by sheer force of his primitive strength and lack of fear, have brought the girl to the point where nothing mattered except him; where from desiring him to join the cause in which she was the moving spirit, she might come to willingly follow wherever he led. But the whiplash of her words had been as effective as a spray of cold water upon a drunken man. His anger fell away from him, and the hardness of cheek, mouth, and jaws relaxed into the curving lines of a boy's face again. He turned eyes to her as helpless as a wounded dog.

"Ynes," he said.

"Go!" The one word was like a death sentence.

He went out, bareheaded, leaving cap, gloves, and crop behind him. In the silence that followed, she stared stonily at Greenough, who had pulled himself painfully to his feet, and was smiling upon her from a distorted face. He caught her hand. Quite suddenly she shrank away, horror in her gaze.

"The touch of another man shall be

hateful to you," she quoted dully, warning him off with upraised hands.

But either Greenough did not hear, or he did not understand. He caught her in his arms.

"One kiss, Inez, darling," he said. "One kiss, and then I'm off to finish that hound."

She wrenched herself free from him.

"You? Hurt *him*?" she said. "*You*?"

There was scornful merriment in her tone, and she repelled his advance.

"Don't touch me," she breathed.

"But you said you loved me."

"Because I thought he was going to kill you, and because I wanted to hurt him. Love you? Why, I love *him*—a man worth a dozen of you. A man, clean, upright, honorable; a strong man, but gentle and chivalrous to women; a man who would sacrifice a great love because he would not betray his country. A *man* indeed—and the man I love! Don't touch me—you!"

Her eyes fell on Kirby Rae's cap, crop, and gloves, which he had left behind. She caught a glove and carried it to her lips; and, with the action, lost herself in a paroxysm of tears, fleeing from Greenough's presence, up the stairs, and to her own room, where she flung herself on her bed, her slender body shaking convulsively.

"I love him—I love him!" she wailed. "Oh, I must bring him back, tell him I did not mean what I said. Oh, dear one, come back to me! I won't want you to be a renegade. I'll be an American like you. I'll give up all my plans to hurt your country. I'll do nothing you do not wish. I'll——"

As a thought flashed into her head, she sat suddenly erect. The tears ceased to flow. Her eyes became absorbed, meditative, considering; then they brightened, beamed, and she ran to remove the traces of grief, soaking a towel and rubbing it over her face. A dry towel, a touch of powder, a pinpoint of rouge on her cheeks, now deathly pale, and she was arranging her hair with deft pats. Hurriedly she thrust several jeweled hatpins through a lace hat, drew on white gloves, caught up a lacy sunshade, and, gathering up

her skirts, raced down the steps to the balcony and the patio.

"Anselmo—Luis!" she called to the *mozos*. "The victoria—quickly. I go down to the Escolta. I must lose no time!"

IV.

Mr. Redmond Morrison, attorney at law, legally certified by the civil government as competent to practice his profession in the city of Manila, was lying full length upon a rattan couch in the far corner of his office, his white tunic unbuttoned at the throat, and showing a liberal amount of bare neck and thin undershirt. He was dictating a letter to his Filipino typewriter intended for his mother in Wuaskegon, Wisconsin. A siphon, a bottle of Scotch, and a box of cigarettes were within easy reach, and Redmond perused the Manila *Sunday Sun* during the interval of sentences.

"*Si, señor,*" said the typewriter, looking up expectantly.

"I am writing this with my left hand, because my right one is unfortunately disabled from a bad gunshot. Did you get that?"

"*Si, señor,*" grinned the typewriter, in sheer delight at such charming mendacity.

"They have insisted on my remaining in the hospital until the wound has healed," dictated Mr. Morrison, returning to his perusal of the periodical. And, after an interval: "They are afraid blood poisoning will set in if I am exposed to any but the pure air of the hospital premises." He spelled out the last word. "The wound I received during an attack on Manila by the insurrectos, a frequent occurrence, but one seldom fraught—f-r-a-u-g-h-t—'with ill consequences——'"

The Filipino typewriter, grinning admiringly, pecked away at the keys. Mr. Morrison reached out the disabled right hand—which showed neither wound nor scar—and struck a match, which he applied to a fresh cigarette. Becoming absorbed in his work of fiction, he dropped the *Sun*, and thought hard.

"I was in the front of the fight," he continued, "bullets raining all about me. The standard bearer of the Four-fifty-ninth was shot down, and the flag trailed the dust. I rushed forward and picked it up. A bullet entered my hand, but I knew that the day would be lost if the flag went down. I held it aloft, the blood streaming from my hand. The soldiers cheered, and, pushing on, drove the insurrectos back. The day was saved.

"Therefore, dear mother, having incurred this wound in the service of my country, they offer to keep me at the hospital free of charge. But I am not one to accept services for what I have done for my native land, and I have refused. But as my law practice is suspended while I am laid up, I will need money badly when I come out of the hospital, and so, if you will cable——"

"Señor, señor," protested the typewriter, who had long ago given up any attempt to follow the rapid stream of words.

"Confound you, Sanchez!" growled Mr. Morrison, reaching for the Scotch. "You spoiled an inspired flow."

There was a knock on the door outside.

"If it's Mr. Saunders or anybody I know well, tell 'em to come in," said Mr. Morrison, "but if it's anybody I owe money to, or don't know well, tell 'em I've just been called over to see the governor about the Friars' land grants. Say he wants my professional opinion in the matter. In other words, tell 'em I've been called into consultation."

"But if it's a client, señor?" suggested the typewriter.

"Sanchez," said Mr. Morrison threateningly, "how many times have I threatened to discharge you for kidding me? Did you ever see a client in this office? Echo answers 'No.' Will you ever see one? Echo answers: 'Perhaps, when somebody else takes it.' Pull up that screen in front of me, and go tell 'em anything you like."

He drank his Scotch, and composed himself for slumber. The knock on the door was repeated. This time it was an irritated staccato knock. Sanchez, the

typewriter, went the length of the long room, and opened the door.

"Ah, señorita," he said, dazzled.

"I am the Señorita Ybarra," she told him, speaking Spanish. "I wish to see your master at once."

"My employer," returned Sanchez, with emphasis, "is at present called into consultation about the Friars' land grants."

Redmond Morrison, who at the first sound of her voice had peeped from behind the screen, now rattled the screen violently.

"You dolt, you ass, you carabao, you lemon-faced loon!" he muttered.

"He will be back some time to-day," continued Sanchez, "but I cannot tell just when. He is a very busy man, and a very good lawyer. All the judges ask his opinion before they deliver sentence on criminals. He——"

"If he is not in I will find another," she said. "I do not know your master, but his sign was the first lawyer's sign I saw on the Escolta, and so I knocked."

Redmond Morrison with trembling fingers fastened his blouse, hooked the collar, and jumped up, nearly overturning the screen. He came forward, his hat on, as though he had just entered from the street, and was as yet oblivious of the presence of the fair visitor. In spite of his haste, he had not forgotten to catch up a bundle of papers which had been on the typewriter's desk; and now, his eyes disregarding the girl, and fastened on Sanchez with professional abstraction, he handed them over one by one, speaking rapidly:

"My opinion on the Friars' land grants. Type that quickly. The governor's secretary is waiting to incorporate it in his report to Washington. Then the brief of General Aguinaldo's case against the government—that must be filed at the Ayunamiento before two o'clock, and——"

He broke off as Sanchez pointed significantly.

"What's that, what's that?" he inquired, with some irritation. "Why do you interrupt me?"

Sanchez pointed again. Mr. Morri-

son turned, and his hat was suddenly doffed.

"Your pardon, Miss—er——"

"Ybarra."

"Your pardon, Miss Ybarra. I did not see you. Just a moment, please."

He handed the rest of the papers to Sanchez.

"The others can wait until I have spoken with Miss Ybarra. Attend to those two at once. Quick, now!"

Sanchez departed, and with his back turned grinned to such an alarming extent that it seemed his face was being neatly divided into halves.

"Now, Miss Ybarra," said Mr. Morrison, with elaborate professional courtesy, as he led her to a chair, from which, unobserved, he had hastily pushed a tennis racquet, a cap, and a pair of spurs, and had kicked them under a desk. "To whom am I indebted for the honor of your visit? Some mutual friend has recommended me to you?"

Sitting down, she studied his freckled, good-humored face, now struggling to show a serious air.

"No," she replied. "I have not been told to come here by any one. I left my house hurriedly, and drove down to the Escolta to find a lawyer, and as you were the first one in the block, I came here."

Mr. Morrison lifted surprised eyebrows at her ignorance of his existence.

"Well, it doesn't matter so long as you are here," he said. "And now I am entirely at your service."

"My case will require some time," she said. "If you are very busy——"

"I am never too busy to serve a beautiful woman," Mr. Morrison assured her, forgetting to look professional.

She took the compliment as a matter of course.

"Very well, then," she said, and put down a package of papers tied with red tape. "I want you to transfer all this property from my name to that of Lieutenant Kirby Rae, of the Philippines constabulary. I do not wish you to ask me any questions. I wish this done. I do not know the legal proceedings in

the matter, but I know that it *can* be done. And it must be done this afternoon. For myself, I keep enough property to furnish me with an income of four thousand pesos a year. The rest is transferred to Lieutenant Kirby with no restrictions. The amount to be transferred amounts, I believe, to about two million pesos. Will you please begin at once?"

Mr. Morrison had a violent desire to gape at the sum mentioned, but he restrained himself, and gave an admirable imitation of a man to whom the transference of such a sum is merely a matter of everyday business.

"Speaking in a broad sense," he opined judicially, "there is no great difficulty in doing what you wish immediately. All that is necessary is to make a list of the various holdings, and the percentage each pays; from this subtract the total sum necessary to bring to you four thousand pesos a year, and transfer the other holdings, mentioning each item by name, to Lieutenant Rae. I will draw up such a paper, and you will sign it in the presence of two witnesses. That, as I said before, would in a broad sense bind the transaction. Of course——"

"That is what I wish you to do, then," she said, looking him squarely in the eyes. "I believe there is some point in law about a person's sanity being called into question."

She spoke in stilted English, forming each word carefully.

"There is, of course," he agreed.

"Coke, on contracts, says——"

"Never mind," she interrupted.

"Look at me. Am I quite sane?"

He caught his breath as the full measure of her golden-brown loveliness struck him.

"The question is," he muttered, "is whether *I* am or not?"

"You said?"

"I said you were quite sane, Miss Ybarra," he returned.

"Very well, then," she sighed contentedly. "Now I will sit here and write a letter. When you have drawn up the paper, please have three copies of it made. One copy I will keep. One

you will keep. The other I wish you to take to Lieutenant Rae with the letter I am going to write. Please waste no time."

He picked up the cap from under the desk, dusted off a place for her, and set pens, ink, and paper before her. As her little golden head bent over the desk, intent on her task, Mr. Morrison watched her, one hand holding the bundle of papers.

"Holy cats!" he murmured. "Is there any dope in those cigarillos, or is the Scotch mixed with absinth? Is this Manila, or is it Bagdad? Am I on a jag in Sampaloc, and will I presently bang my head on the floor?"

He untied the tape, and began to examine the papers.

"Well," he concluded, "I'm having a rattling good time in this dream, anyhow! By all the gods of Milwaukee, Rheims, and Shanghai, I hope it lasts long enough for me to spend some of the mazuma I cop out of the deal. I wonder," he added reflectively, "whether the dream will run to a dinner with her at the Hotel Oriente?"

V.

"You alarm me, my friend," said Don Ambrosino.

"Not half as much as I alarm myself," replied Guy Greenough. "I tell you the girl has lost her senses over this American chap, and that if we don't jolly well mind our points there'll be an end to everything we've planned. I had an idea up till this afternoon that I would be able to make a deep enough impression upon her to make her think she cares for me. But I haven't any such idea as that now. Mark you, I was perfectly straight about the matter. It wasn't any question of the money. I am as much in love with the girl as I can possibly be with any one; and, according to our agreement, I was to receive one-quarter of the money anyhow for my assistance in tricking her into a belief that we were fomenting an uprising in the islands. Of course, this gun-running business is profitable enough as it stands to warrant my being

here; and there's nothing to prevent her believing we are buying the arms for patriots, when really the rascally thieves up mountain are paying for them themselves. When had she agreed to sign the paper making over her property to you for the 'cause'?" He laughed.

"It was to be done to-morrow," replied Don Ambrosino, scowling. "I have got together all the title deeds, statements, bonds, and so forth. She was to keep for herself an income of four thousand pesos a year. The rest was to be used for revolutionary purposes—more than a million dollars in American money. Ah!"

"Of which I receive fifty thousand pounds!" murmured Greenough. "Fifty thousand pounds——"

"And well paid, too well paid," said Ambrosino sharply, "for you have done nothing except carry out my orders, play a part which I myself have written for you."

"Perhaps," agreed Greenough, "but not every man could have played such a part convincingly. Besides, you needed a man who was really employed in some such work—such work as you would have her believe will be continued on a larger scale with her money. Besides that, you are to receive a certain per cent of every commission I make for landing arms for Benito's ladrones."

"You are to use my house, my servants, my lands, for the pursuance of your purpose," Ambrosino reminded him.

"Pardon me," disputed the other, "the señorita's house, the señorita's servants, the señorita's lands."

"They will be mine to-morrow," said Ambrosino heavily.

"And mine!" added Greenough.

They stared at each other, and Greenough read in Ambrosino's dark look something he was quick to put into words.

"Your house—your servants—your lands," he said slowly. "I wonder if I understand? See here, Ambrosino, I am going down to an island where you have a hundred or more rascals who would slip a knife into my back for the mere matter of a bottle of wine."

The Spaniard's face remained impassive.

"When I first met you in Paris," continued Greenough, speaking quietly, "and found that you were one of those interested in smuggling arms into the Philippines, I thought you were a misguided patriot, like the rest of the crowd. Then I found it was simply an investment on your part, that paid a good return. You knew the kind of men you were shipping arms to—not patriots, but thieves and murderers, who preyed on their own people. Now, I was in the thing because it was a business, and I couldn't get into another army. Besides, I took no interest in the Philippines, nor in America. Well, I 'had you sized up' then, as the Yankees say, for somewhat of an oyster, and a man of jolly little moral sense. When you proposed this scheme of relieving your cousin of most of her worldly wealth, I went into it because I needed the money, and also because I was in love with Inez, and thought I'd manage to get her, and the money, too. But I was rather suspicious of the alacrity you showed in offering me one-fourth of her fortune for assisting you in deceiving her. And now, by George! I believe I can see through the millstone. I don't believe you ever intended to pay me the money at all. I believe, on the other hand that, once on your bally old island, Guy Greenough would disappear utterly from things earthly, and——"

In the light of the flickering candles he noted something in Ambrosino's eyes.

"By all the saints, I believe I'm right," he cried. Slyly he slipped his revolver to the table, keeping his hand over it. Ambrosino lighted a cigarette and stared at him, slowly smiling.

"I *am* right," said Greenough, not without an accent of admiration.

Ambrosino smoked on.

"Well!" Greenough drew a long breath, then brought his hand down heavily on the revolver, so that it rattled and jumped. Ambrosino looked at it incuriously, smiled again, and blew some smoke rings.

"D'you notice that weapon?" Green-

ough continued. "I've been carrying that a rather decentish time, and it has played the deuce with more than one man who hasn't played the game fairly with me. Just remember that, Ambrosino! I shan't use it until I have to, but I'll keep my eyes about me until to-morrow. And to-morrow, when she has signed that paper transferring her fortune to you, I'll present your promissory note for fifty thousand pounds, which will be signed in the presence of two witnesses to-night."

Ambrosino looked up to see the revolver pointed directly at his head.

"Hands up, Ambrosino," said Greenough briefly.

The Spaniard, shrugging his shoulders, complied. Greenough reached across the table, and patted his companion's hip pockets, from which his hands went to his breast and under his arms.

"Good enough," said the Briton. "Now write—and write exactly what I tell you."

"Guy, *amigo mio*," said Ambrosino quietly, "I realize that you are in the right. You wish a promise in writing for fifty thousand pounds signed by me. Put away your revolver. I will give it to you."

It was while he spoke that the door-knob rattled, the door opened, and Ynes Ybarra came into the room. Greenough hastily concealed the weapon. Ambrosino lighted another cigarette.

She wasted no time in preliminaries. Abstractedly, a glow in her eyes, she came down to the table, and put two slim hands upon it, looking from one man to the other.

"I have come to tell you," she said slowly, "that I am to have no more to do with the plan. Also, I leave this house, and go to-night to the man I love. He is American, and I cannot plot against his country. So good-by to both of you. I doubt that I shall ever see you again. My life is cast in other lines. It is not good that I should know you, because I go to a man who is unlike you, and I go to live his life!"

Both started up, facing her incredulously. The candelabrum jarred, nearly toppled. Two of the flames went out.

"But the money for the cause?" said Ambrosino, in his heavy, slow tones that she knew for signs of inward tumult.

"That is over," she said. "I no longer have money. To-day I pleaded with him to join us, but he would not because it was the act of a traitor. And I sent him away. But when he had gone I realized that I cared for nothing on earth except him—that the plan was nothing to me—you, Ambrosino, nothing to me. My country—I have none! My life—it is to be his! And so that I might show my trust and love in him, show also that I would use none of my wealth against his country, I to-day went to a lawyer, who has transferred to his name all of my money and holdings, except the four thousand pesos a year which I had meant to keep from the plan. There is the paper! It is legal, and I am sane. And now that you know I cannot help you with money, you will not mind if I go."

Greenough was the first to take the paper, and as he perused it Don Ambrosino looked over his shoulder, his brows meeting, his mouth lengthening into a thin, cruel, red line. Greenough sat down heavily. The paper fluttered to the floor. Ambrosino, his bronze replaced by chalky white, the red of his lips now becoming ashen, blew out a furious breath, snatched up the paper, and tore it across, then into tiny bits.

The girl laughed.

"That is useless," she said. "The lawyer has another copy, and the man I love has, by this time, received one also. So that you see I am determined. And I say good-by."

"You are right," said Ambrosino, after a tense moment, "and I am wrong. It was only my devotion to our country

and my plans that, for the moment, made me forget. But it is your right to use your property as you will. If you wish we will say good-by, Ynes. Forgive me."

He crossed to the sideboard, and, his back to her, dropped into a wineglass some liquid from a little green vial he took from his waistcoat pocket. Pouring three glasses of wine, he brought them forward on a salver, extending them to her.

"We will drink to your health, and to that of the man you love," he said.

She had not seen his action, and was deceived by his smiling sang-froid. She took the glass nearest her. Greenough and Ambrosino raised their glasses.

"To the health of the Señorita Ynes—and her husband!" proposed Ambrosino, still smiling.

They drank the toast. She gave to each a hand.

"Good-by," she said, and left the room.

Greenough turned an inquiring gaze to the Spaniard.

"You drugged that wine?"

Ambrosino nodded. "I have never known when a sleeping potion is not a good thing to carry on all occasions. I need it for my insomnia. A drop puts me to sleep almost at once. I gave her two. By the time she has reached her own room she will be ready to fall upon her bed. She will not awaken until we have taken her from Manila."

He sat down, igniting a cigarette from one of the guttering candles.

"And now," he said, piecing together the bits of torn paper he had taken from the floor, "we will note the names of the constabulary lieutenant and the lawyer."

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The second and concluding part of this story will be published two weeks hence, in the first January POPULAR, on sale December 7th.



AN EXAMPLE OF REVERSE ENGLISH

There is one place in this country where Jews are Gentiles. In Salt Lake City the Mormons designate the members of all other religions as Gentiles.

The Wrecking Boss

By Frank L. Packard

Author of "The King of Fools," "The Guardian of the Devil's Slide," Etc.

The job of wrecking boss on a railroad needs a hard man. Flannagan was more than hard; he was rough, uncultured, primal, a brute man perhaps, full of the elemental; fiery, hot-headed, his passions alone swayed him. That's why, although supreme in a railroad wreck, he was the veriest novice at straightening out the tangles in his own home.

OPINIONS, right or wrong, on any subject are a matter of individuality—there have been different opinions about Flannagan on the Hill Division. But the story is straight enough—from car tink to superintendent, there has never been any difference of opinion on that score.

Flannagan was the wrecking boss. Regan, the master mechanic, said the job fitted Flannagan, for it took a hard man for the job, and Flannagan, bar none, was the hardest man on the pay roll; hardest at crooking elbows in MacGuire's Blazing Star Saloon, hardest with his fists, and hardest of all when it came to getting at the heart of some scalding, mangled horror of death and ruin that a man wouldn't be called a coward to turn from—sick.

Flannagan looked it. He stood six feet one in his stockings, and his chest and shoulders were like the front-end view you'd get looking at a sturdy, well-grown ox. He wasn't pretty. His face was scarred with cuts and burns enough to stall any German dueling student on a siding till the rails rusted, and the beard he grew to hide these multitudinous disfigurements just naturally came out in tussocks; he had black eyes that could go coal black and lose their pupils, and a shock of black hair that fell into them half the time; also, he

had a tongue that wasn't elegant. That was Flannagan—Flannagan, the wrecking boss.

It's queer the way things happen, queer the way they come about—and it's pretty hard to call the turn of the card when Dame Fortune deals the bank. It's a trite enough saying that it is the unexpected that happens in life, but the reason it's trite is because it's immeasurably true.

Flannagan growled and swore and cursed one night, coming back from a bit of a spill up the line, because they stalled him and his wrecking outfit for an hour about half a mile west of Big Cloud—the reason being that, like the straw that broke the camel's back, a circus train in from the East, billed for a three days' lay-off at Big Cloud, had, seeking siding, temporarily choked the yards, already glutted with traffic, until the mix-up Gleeson, the yardmaster, had to wrestle with would have put a problem in differential calculus into the kindergarten class.

Flannagan was very dirty, and withal very tired, and when, finally, they gave him the "clear" and his flat and caboose and his staggering derrick rumbled sullenly down toward the roundhouse and shops, the sight of gilded cages, gaudily decorated cars, and converted Pullmans that were second-class-tourist

equipment painted white, did not assuage his feelings; neither was there enchantment for him in the roars of multifarious beasts, nor in the hybrid smells that assailed his nostrils from the general direction of the menagerie.

Flannagan, for an hour's loss of sleep, with heartiness and abandon, consigned that particular circus, also all others and everything thereunto pertaining, from fangless serpents to steam calliopes, to regions that are popularly credited with being somewhat warmer than the torrid zone on the hottest day in midsummer. But then—Flannagan did not know.

Opinions differ. Flannagan was about the last man on earth that any one on the Hill Division would have picked out for a marrying man, and, equally true the other way round, about the last man they would have picked out as one a pretty girl would *want* to marry. With her, maybe, it was the strength of the man, since they say that comes first with women; with him, maybe, it was just the trim little, brown-eyed, brown-haired figure that could ride with the grace of a fairy. Anyway, the only thing about it that didn't surprise any one was the fact that, when it came, it came as sudden and quick as a head-on smash around a right-angled curve. That was Flannagan's way, for Flannagan, if he was nothing else, was impulsive.

That night Flannagan cursed the circus; the next day he saw Daisy MacQueen riding in the street parade, and—but this isn't the story of Flannagan's courtship, not but that the courtship of any man like Flannagan would be worth the telling—only there are other things.

At first, Big Cloud winked and chuckled slyly to itself, and then, when the circus left and Flannagan got a week off and left with it, it guffawed outright—but when, at the end of that week, Flannagan brought back Mrs. Flannagan, née Daisy MacQueen, Big Cloud stuck its tongue in its cheek, wagged its head, and waited developments.

This is the story of the developments. Maybe that same impulsiveness of

Flannagan's, that could be blind and bullheaded, coupled with a passion that was like a devil's when aroused, was to blame; maybe the women of Big Cloud, following the lead of Mrs. MacAloon, the engineer's wife and the leader of society circles, who shook her fiery red head and turned up her Celtic nose disdainfully at Daisy MacQueen, had something to do with it; maybe Daisy herself had a little pride—but what's the use of speculating? It all goes back to the same beginning—opinions differ.

Tongues wagged; Flannagan listened—that's the gist of it. But, once for all, let it be said and understood that Daisy MacQueen was as straight as they make them. She hadn't been brought up the way Mrs. MacAloon and her coterie had, and she liked to laugh, liked to play, liked to live and not exist in a humdrum way ever over washtubs and a cook stove—though, all credit to her who hadn't been used to them, she never shirked one nor the other.

The women's ideas about circuses and circus performers were, putting it mildly, puritanical; but the men liked Daisy MacQueen—and took no pains to hide it. They clustered around her, and, before long, she ruled them all imperially with a nod of her pretty head, and, as a result, the women's ideas from puritanical became more so—which is human nature, Big Cloud or anywhere else.

At first, Flannagan was proud of the little wife he had brought to Big Cloud—proud of her for the very attitude adopted toward her by his mates; but, as the months went by, gradually the wagging tongues got in their work, gradually Flannagan began to listen, and the jealousy that was his by nature above the jealousy of most men commenced to smolder into flame. Just a rankling jealousy, directed against no one in particular—just jealousy. Things up at the little house off Main Street where the Flannagans lived weren't as harmonious as they had been.

In the beginning, Daisy, not treating the matter seriously, answered Flanna-

gan with a laugh; finally, she answered him not at all. And that stage, unfortunately far from unique in other homes than Flannagan's the world over, was reached where only some one act, word, or deed was needed to bring matters to a head.

Perhaps, after all, there was poetic justice in Flannagan's cursing of the circus, for it was the circus that supplied that one thing needed. Not that the circus came back to town—it didn't—but a certain round, little, ferret-eyed, short, pompadour-haired, wax-mustached, perfumed Monsieur Ferraringi, the ringmaster, did.

Ferraringi was a scoundrel—what he got he deserved, there was never any doubt about that; but that night Flannagan, when he walked into the house, saw only Ferraringi on his knees before Daisy, heard only impassioned, flowery words, and, in the blind fury that transformed him from man to beast, the scorn, contempt, and horror in Daisy's eyes, the significance of the rigid little figure with tight-clenched hands, was lost. Ferraringi had been in love with Daisy. Flannagan knew that, and his seething brain remembered that. The circus people had told him so; Daisy had told him so; Ferraringi had told him so, with a snarl and a threat—and he had laughed—*then*.

One instant Flannagan hung upon the threshold. He was not a pretty sight. Back from a wreck, he was still in his overalls, and these were smeared with blood—four carloads of steers had gone into premature shambles in the ditch. One instant Flannagan hung there, his face working convulsively—and then he jumped. His left hand locked into the collar of the ringmaster's coat, his arm straightened like the tautening chains of his own derrick crane, and, as the other came off his knees and upright from the yank, Flannagan's right swung a terrific full-arm smash that, landing a little above the jaw, plastered one side of that tonsorial work of art, the waxed and curled mustache, flat into Ferraringi's cheek.

Ferraringi's answer, as he wriggled free, was a torrent of malediction—and

a blinding flash. Daisy screamed. The shot missed, but the powder singed Flannagan's face.

It was the only shot that Ferraringi fired! With a roar, high-pitched like the maddened trumpeting of an elephant amuck, Flannagan with a single blow sent the revolver sailing ceiling high—then his arms, like steel piston rods, worked in and out, and his fists drummed an awful, merciless tattoo upon the ringmaster.

The smoke from the shot filled the room with pungent odor. Chairs and furniture, overturned, broken, crashed to the floor. Daisy, wild-eyed, with parted lips, dumb with terror, crouched against the wall, her hands clasped to her breast—but before Flannagan's eyes all was red—*red*.

A battered, bruised, reeling, staggering form before him curled up suddenly and slid in a heap at his feet. Flannagan, with groping hands and twitching fingers, reached for it—and then, with a rush, other forms, many of them, came between him and what was on the floor.

It was very good for Ferraringi, very good, for that was all that saved him—Flannagan was seeing only red.

The neighbors lifted the stunned ringmaster, limp as rags, to his feet. Flannagan brushed his great fist once across his eyes in a half-dazed way, and glared at the roomful of people. Suddenly he heaved forward, pushing those nearest him violently toward the door.

"Get out of here!" he bellowed hoarsely. "Get out, curse you, d'ye hear! Get out!"

There were men in that little crowd, men besides the three or four women, Mrs. MacAloon among them; men not reckoned overfaint of spirit in Big Cloud by those who knew, but *they* knew Flannagan, and they went—went, half carrying, half dragging the ringmaster, oiled and perfumed now in a fashion grimly different than before.

"Get out!" roared Flannagan again, to hurry them, and, as the last one disappeared, he whirled on Daisy. "And you, too!" he snarled. "Get out!"

Terrified, shaken by the scene as she

was, his words, their implication, their injustice, whipped her into scorn and anger. White-lipped, she stared at him for an instant.

"You dare," she burst out, "you dare to——"

"Get out!"—Flannagan's voice in his passion was a thick, stumbling, guttural whisper. "Get out! Go back to your circus—go where you like! Get out!" His hand dove into his pockets, and its contents, bills and coins, what there was of them, he flung upon the table. "Get out—as far as that will take you!"

Daisy MacQueen was proud—perhaps, though, not above the pride of other women. The blood was hot in her cheeks; her big, brown eyes had a light in them near to that light with which she had faced Ferraringi but a short time before; her breath came in short, hard, little gasps. For a full minute she did not speak—and then the words came cold as death.

"Some day—some day, Michael Flannagan, you'll get what you deserve."

"That's what I'm gettin' now—what I deserve," he flung back; then, halting in the doorway: "You understand, eh? Get out! I'm lettin' you down easy. Get out of Big Cloud! Get out before I'm back. Number Fifteen'll be in in an hour—you'd better take her."

Flannagan stepped out onto the street. A curious little group had collected two houses down in front of Mrs. MacAloon's. Flannagan glanced at them, muttered a curse, and then, head down between his shoulders, clenched fists rammed in his pockets, he headed in the other direction toward Main Street. Five minutes later he pushed the swinging doors of the Blazing Star open, and walked down the length of the room, to where Pete MacGuire, the proprietor, lounged across the bar.

"Pete"—he jerked out his words hoarsely—"next Tuesday's pay day—is my face good till then?"

MacGuire looked at him curiously. The news of the fracas had not reached the Blazing Star.

"Why, sure," said he. "Sure it is,

Flannagan, if you want it. What's eating——"

"Then let 'em come my way," Flannagan rapped out, with a savage laugh, "an' let 'em come—*fast*."

Flannagan was the wrecking boss. A hard man, Regan had called him, and he was—a product of the wild, rough, pioneering life, one of those men who had followed the grim-faced, bearded corps of engineers as they pitted their strength against the sullen gray of the mighty Rockies from the eastern foothills to the plains of the Sierras, fighting every inch of their way with indomitable perseverance and daring over chasms and gorges, through tunnels and cuts, in curves and levels and grades, against obstacles that tried their souls, against death itself, taping the thin steel lines they left behind them with their own blood. Hard? Yes, Flannagan was hard. Uncultured, rough, primal, he came from that. A brute man, perhaps, full of the elemental—fiery, hot-headed, his passions alone swayed him. That side of Flannagan the years, in the very environment in which he had lived them, had developed to the full—the other side had been untouched. What Flannagan did that night another might not have done—or he might. The judging of men is a grave business best let alone.

Flannagan let go his hold then—not at once, but gradually. The night spent in the Blazing Star was the first of others—others that followed insidiously, each closer upon the former's heels. Daisy had gone—had gone that night—where, he did not know, and told himself he did not care. He grew moody, sullen, uncompanionable. Big Cloud took sides—the women for Flannagan; the men for the wife. Flannagan hated the women, avoided the men—and went to the Blazing Star.

There was only one result—the inevitable one. Regan, kindly for all his gruffness, understanding in a way, stood between Flannagan and the super, and warned Flannagan oftener than most men were warned on the Hill Division. Nor were his warnings altogether without effect. Flannagan would

steady up—temporarily—maybe for a week—then off again. Steady up just long enough to keep putting off and postponing the final reckoning. And then one day, some six months after Daisy Flannagan had gone away, the master mechanic warned him for the last time.

"I'm through with you, Flannagan," he snapped. "Understand that? I'm out from under, and next time you'll talk to Carleton—and what he'll have to say won't take long—about two seconds. You know Carleton, don't you? Well, then—what?"

It was just a week to a day after that that Flannagan cut loose and wild again. He made a night and a day of it, and then another. After that, though by that time Flannagan was quite unaware of the fact, some of the boys got him home, dumped him on his bed, and left him to his reflections—which were a blank.

Flannagan slept it off, and it took about eighteen hours to do it. When he came to himself he was in a humor that, far from being happy, was atrocious; likewise, there were bodily ailments—Flannagan's head was bad, and felt as though a gang of boilermakers, working against time, were driving rivets in it. He procured himself a bracer, and went back to bed. This resulted in a decidedly improved physical condition, but when he arose late in the afternoon any improvement there might have been in his mental state was speedily dissipated—Flannagan found a letter shoved under his door, post-marked the day before, and with it an official manila envelope from the super's office.

He opened the letter and read it—read it again, while his jaws worked and the red surged in a passion into his face; then, with an oath, he tore it savagely into shreds, flung the bits on the floor, and stamped upon them viciously with his heavy, nail-heeled boot.

The official manila he did not open at all. A guess was enough for that—a curt request to present himself in the super's office probably. Flannagan

glared at it, then grabbed his hat, and started down for the station. There was no idea of shirking it—Flannagan wasn't that kind at any time, and just now his mood, if anything, spurred him on rather than held him back. Flannagan welcomed the prospect of a row about anything with anybody at that moment—if only a war of words.

Carleton's office was upstairs over the ticket office and next to the dispatcher's room then, for the station did duty for headquarters and everything else—not now, it's changed now, and there's a rather imposing gray-stone structure where the old wooden shack used to be; but, no matter, that's the way it was then, for those were the early days, when the road was young and in the making.

Flannagan reached the station, climbed the stairs, and pushed Carleton's door open with little ceremony.

"You want to see me?" he demanded gruffly, as he stepped inside.

Carleton, superintendent of the Hill Division, sitting at his desk, looked up and eyed the wrecking boss coolly for a minute.

"No, Flannagan," he said curtly. "I don't."

"Then what in blazes d'ye send for me for?" Flannagan flung out in a growl.

"See here, Flannagan," snapped Carleton. "I've no time to talk to you. You can read, can't you? You're out!"

Flannagan blinked.

"Was that what was in the letter?"

"It was—just that," said Carleton grimly.

"Hell"—Flannagan's short laugh held a jeering note of contempt. "I didn't open it—or mabbe I'd have known, eh?"

Carleton's eyes narrowed.

"Well, you know now, don't you?"

"Sure"—Flannagan scowled and licked his lips. "I'm out, thrown out by a——"

"Then get out!" Carleton cut in sharply. "You've had more chances than any man ever got before from me, thanks to Regan; but you've had your

last, and talking won't do you any good now."

Flannagan stepped nearer to the desk. "Talkin'! Who's talkin'?" he flared in sudden bravado. "Didn't I tell you I didn't read your —— letter? Didn't I, eh, didn't I? D'ye think I'd crawl to you or any man for a job? I'm out, am I? D'ye think I came down to ask you to take me back? I'd see you rot first! T'ell with the job—see!"

Few men on the Hill Division had ever seen Carleton lose his temper—it wasn't Carleton's way of doing things. He didn't lose it now, but his words were like trickling drops of ice water.

"Sometimes, Flannagan," he said, "to make a man like you understand one has to use your language. You say you'd see me rot before you asked me for the job back again—very well. I'd rot before I gave it to you after this. Now, will you get out—or be thrown out?"

For a moment it looked as though Flannagan was going to mix it there and then. His eyes went ugly, and his fists, horny and gnarled, doubled into knots, as he glared viciously at the super.

Carleton, who was afraid of no man or aggregation of men, his face stern-set and hard, leaned back in his swivel chair, and waited.

A tense minute passed. Then Flannagan's better sense weighed down the balance, and, without so much as a word, he turned, went out of the room, and stamped heavily down the stairs.

Goaded into it, or through unbridled, ill-advised impulse, men say rash things sometimes—afterward, both Flannagan and Carleton were to remember their own and the other's words, and the futility of them. Nor was it to be long afterward—without warning, without so much as a premonition, quick and sudden as doom, things happen in rail-roading.

It was half past five when Flannagan went out of the super's office; it was but ten minutes later when, before he had decanted a drop from the bottle he had just lifted to fill his glass, he

slapped it back on the bar of the Blazing Star with a sudden jerk. From down the street in the direction of the yards boomed three long blasts from the shop whistle—the wrecking signal. It came again and again. Men around him began to move. Chairs from the little tables were pushed hurriedly back. The bell in the English chapel took up the alarm. It stirred the blood in Flannagan's veins—whipped it to his cheeks in fierce excitement—it was the call to arms!

He turned from the bar—and stopped like a man stunned. There had been times in the last six months when he had not responded to that call, because, deaf to everything, he had not *heard* it. Then, it had been *his* call—the call for the wrecking crew, and, first of all, for the wrecking boss; now—there was a dazed look on his face, and his lips worked queerly. It was not for him; he was barred—*out*.

Slowly he turned back to the bar, rested his foot on the rail, and, with a mirthless laugh and a shrug of his shoulders, reached for the bottle again. He poured the whisky glass full to the brim—and laughed once more, and shrugged his shoulders as his fingers curled around it. He raised the glass—and held it poised halfway to his lips.

Quick-running steps came up the street, the swinging doors of the Blazing Star burst open, and a call boy shoved in his head.

"Wreckers out! Wreckers out!" he bawled. "Number Two's gone to glory in Spider Cut. Everybody's killed"—and he was gone, a grimy-faced harbinger of death and disaster; gone, speeding with his summons to wherever men were gathered throughout the little town.

An instant Flannagan stood motionless as one transformed from flesh to sculptured clay—then the glass slid from his fingers and crashed into tinkling splinters on the floor. The liquor splashed his boots. Like one who moves in unknown places through the dark, so, then, Flannagan moved toward the door. Men looked at him in amazement, and stood aside to let him pass.

Something was tugging at his heart, beating at his brain, impelling him forward; a force irresistible, that, in its first, sudden, overwhelming surge he could not understand, could not grasp, could not focus into concrete form—could not obey.

He passed out through the doors, and then for the first time a cry rang from his lips. There were no halting, stumbling, uncertain steps now. Men running down the street called to Flannagan as he sped past them. Flannagan made no answer, did not look their way; his face, strained and full of dumb anguish, was set toward the station.

He gained the platform, and raced along it. Shouts came from across the yards. Up and down the spurs fluttered the fore-shortened little yard engine, coughing sparks and wheezing from her exhaust as she bustled the wrecking train together; lamps swung and twinkled like fireflies, for it was just opening spring and the dark fell early; in front of the roundhouse the 1014, blowing hard from her safety under a full head of steam like a thoroughbred that scents the race, was already on the table.

With a heave of his great shoulders and a sweep of his arms, Flannagan won through the group of trainmen, shop hands, and loungers clustered around the door, and took the stairs four at a leap.

A light burned in the super's office, but the voices came from the dispatcher's room. And there in the doorway Flannagan halted—halted just for a second's pause while his eyes swept the scene before him.

Regan, the master mechanic, by the window, was mouthing curses under his breath as men do in times of stress; Spence, the dispatcher, white-faced, the hair straggling into his eyes, was leaning over the key under the green-shaded lamp, over the key clearing the line, while the sounder clicked in his ears of ruin and of lives gone out. Harvey, the division engineer, was there, pulling savagely at a brier with empty bowl. And at the dispatcher's elbow stood Carleton, a grim commander, facing tid-

ings of disaster, his shoulders braced and bent a little forward, as though to take the blow, his jaws clamped tight till the lips, compressed, were bloodless, and the chiseled lines on his face told of the bitterness in his heart.

Then Flannagan stepped forward.

"Carleton," he cried, and his words came like panting sobs, "Carleton, give me back my job."

It was no place for Flannagan.

Carleton's cup was already full to overflowing, and he swung on Flannagan like a flash. His hand lifted and pointed to the door.

"Get out of here!" he said between his teeth.

"Carleton," cried Flannagan again, and his arms went out in supplication toward the super. "Carleton, give me back my job—give it back to me for to-night—just for to-night."

"No!"—the single word came from Carleton's lips like a thunderclap.

Flannagan shivered a little and shrank back.

"Just for to-night," he mumbled hoarsely. "Just for—"

"No!"—Carleton's voice rang hard as doom. "I tell you, no! Get out of here!"

Harvey moved suddenly, threateningly, toward Flannagan—and, as suddenly, Flannagan, roused by the act, brushed the engineer aside like a plaything, sprang forward, and, with a quick, fierce grip caught Carleton's arms and pinioned them, viselike, to his sides.

"And I tell you, *yes!*"—his voice rose dominant with the power, the will that shook him now to the depths of his turbulent soul. As a man that knows no law, no obstacle, no restraint, as a man who would batter down the gates of hell itself to gain his end, so then was Flannagan. "I tell you, *yes!* I tell you, *yes!* *My wife and baby's in that wreck to-night!*"

Turmoil, shouts, the short, quick, intermittent hiss of steam as the 1014, her cylinder cocks open, backed down to the platform, the clash of coupling cars, a jumbled medley of sounds floated up from the yard without—but within the

little room, the chattering sounder for the moment stilled, there fell a silence as of death, and no man among them moved or spoke.

Flannagan, gray-faced, gasping, his mighty grip still on Carleton, his head thrown forward close to the other's, stared into the super's face—and, for a long minute, in the twitching muscles of the big wrecker's face, in the look that man reads seldom in his fellows' eyes, Carleton drew the fearful picture, lived the awful story that the babbling wire had told. "Royal" Carleton, square man and big of heart, his voice broke.

"God help you, Flannagan—go."

No word came from Flannagan's lips—only a queer, choking sound, as his hands dropped to his sides—only a queer, choking sound, as he turned suddenly and jumped for the door.

On the stairs, MacAllister, the driver of the 1014, passed Flannagan, coming up for his orders.

"Bad spill, I hear," growled the engineer, as he went by. "Five-five's pony truck jumped the rails on the lower curve, and everything's in the ditch. Old Burke's gone out and a heap of the passengers with him."

Flannagan heard no more—he was on the platform now. Coupled behind the derrick crane and the tool car were two coaches, improvised ambulances, and into these latter, instead of the tool car, the men of the wrecking gang were piling—a bad smash brought luxury for them. Shouts, cries, hubbub, a babel of voices were around him, but in his brain, repeated and repeated over and over again, lived only a phrase from the letter he had torn to pieces, stamped under heel that afternoon—the words were swimming before his eyes:

Michael, dear, we've both been wrong; I'm bringing *baby* back on the Limited Friday night.

Men with little black bags brushed by him and tumbled into the rear coach—the doctors of Big Cloud to the last one of them. MacAllister came running from the station, a bit of tissue, his orders, fluttering in his hand—and sprang for the cab. Ten-fourteen's exhaust

burst suddenly into quick, deafening explosions, the sparks shot volleying heavenward from her short stack, the big, whirling drivers were beginning to bite—and then, through the gangway, after the engineer, into the cab swung Flannagan—Flannagan, the wrecking boss.

Spider Cut is the eastern gateway of the Rockies, and it lies, as the crows fly, fifteen miles from Big Cloud; but the right of way, as it twists and turns, circling and dodging the buttes that grow from mounds to foothills, makes it on the blue prints twenty-one decimal seven. The running time of the fast fliers on this stretch is—but what of that? MacAllister that night smashed all records, and the medical men in the rear coach tell to this day how they clung for life and limb to their seats and to each other, and most of them will admit—which is admitting much—that they were frightened, white-lipped men, with broken nerves.

As the wreck special, with a clash and clatter, shattered over the switches in the upper yard and nosed onto the main line, "Bull" Coussirat, who had the shovel end of it, with a snatch at the chain swung open the furnace door and a red glow lighted up the heavens. MacAllister turned in his seat and looked at the giant form of the wrecking boss behind him—they had told him the story in the office.

The eyes of the two men met. Flannagan's lips moved dumbly, and, with a curious, pleading motion, he gestured toward the throttle.

MacAllister opened another notch. He laughed a grim, hard laugh.

"I know," he shouted over the roar. "I know. Leave it to me, Flannagan."

The bark of the exhaust came quicker and quicker, swelled and rose into the full, deep-toned thunder of a single note. Notch by notch MacAllister opened out the 1014, notch by notch, and the big mountain racer, answering like a mettlesome steed to the touch of the whip, leaped forward, ever faster, into the night.

Now the headlight played on shining steel ahead; now suddenly threw a path of light across the short, yellow stubble

of a rising butte, and MacAllister checked grudgingly for an instant as they swung the curve—just for an instant, then into the straight again, with wide-flung throttle.

It was mad work—and in that reeling, dizzy cab no man spoke. The sweep of the singing wind, the wild tattoo of beating trucks, the sullen whir of flying drivers was in their ears, while behind the derrick crane, the tool car, and the coaches writhed and wriggled, swayed and lurched, tearing at their coupling, bouncing on their trucks, jerking viciously as each slue took up the axle play, rolling, pitching crazily like cockshells tossed on an angry sea.

Now they tore through a cut, and the walls took up the deafening roar and echoed and reëchoed it back in volume a thousandfold; now into open, and the sudden contrast was like the gasping breath of an imprisoned thing escaped; now over culverts, trestles, spans, hollow, reverberating—the speed was terrific.

Again and again the wide-swung furnace door shot the black of the cab into sudden, fiery red, and the men in it into grim relief.

Over his levers, bounding on his seat, MacAllister, tense and strained, leaned far forward, following the leaping headlight's glare; staggering like a drunken man to keep his balance, the sweat standing out in glistening beads upon his grimy face, "Bull" Coussirat watched the flickering needle on the gauge, and his shovel clanged and swung; and, in the corner, back of MacAllister, bent low to brace himself, thrown backward and forward with every lurch, in the fantastic, dancing light like some tigerish, outraged animal crouched to spring, Flannagan, with head drawn into his shoulders, jaws out-thrust, stared over the engineer's back, stared with never a look to right or left, stared through the cab glass to the right of way ahead—stared toward Spider Cut.

Again and again, with sickening, giddy shock, wheelbase lifted from the swing, the 1014 struck the tangents, hung a breathless space, and, with a

screach of crunching flanges, found the rails once more.

Again and again—but the story of that ride is the doctors' story—they tell it best. MacAllister made the run that night from Big Cloud to Spider Cut, twenty-one point seven miles, in *nineteen* minutes.

There have been bad spills on the Hill Division, bad spills—but there have never been worse than on that Friday night when 505 jumped the rails at the foot of the curve coming down the grade just east of Spider Cut, shot over the embankment, and piled the Imperial Limited, mahogany sleepers and all, into splintered wreckage forty feet below the right of way.

As MacAllister checked and with screaming brake shoes the 1014 slowed, Flannagan, with a wild cry, leaped from the cab and dashed up the track ahead of the still-moving pilot. It was light enough—the cars of the wreck nearest him, the mail and baggage cars, had caught, and, fanned by the wind into yellow flames, were blazing like a huge bonfire. Shouts arose from below; cries, anguished, piercing, from those imprisoned in the wreck; figures, those of the crew and passengers who had made their escape, were moving hither and thither, working as best they might, pulling others through shattered windows and upcanted doors, laying those who were past all knowing beside the long row of silent forms already tenderly stretched upon the edge of the embankment.

A man, with face cut and bleeding, came running toward Flannagan. It was Kelly, conductor of Number Two. Flannagan jumped for him, grasped him by the shoulders, and stared without a word into his face.

But Kelly shook his head.

"I don't know, Flannagan," he choked. "She was in the first-class just ahead of the Pullmans. There's—there's no one come out of that car yet"—he turned away his head—"we couldn't get to it."

"Couldn't get to it"—Flannagan's lips repeated the phrase mechanically. Then he looked—and understood the

grim significance of the words. He laughed suddenly, jarring, hoarse, as it is not good to hear men laugh—and with that laugh Flannagan went into the fight.

The details of that night no one man knows. There in the shadow of the gray-walled Rockies, men, flint-hearted, calloused, rough and ready though they were, sobbed as they toiled, and, while the derrick tackles creaked and moaned, ax and pick and bar swung and crashed and tore through splintering glass and ripping timber.

What men could do they did—and through the hours Flannagan led them. Tough, grizzled men, more than one dropped from sheer weariness; but ever Flannagan's great arms rose and fell, ever his mighty shoulders heaved, ever he led them on. What men could do they did—but it was graying dawn before they opened a way to the heart of the wreck—the first-class coach that once ahead of the Pullmans was *under* them now.

Flannagan, gaunt, burned, and bleeding, a madman with reeling brain, staggered toward the jagged hole that they had torn in the flooring of the car. They tried to hold him back, the man who had spurred them through the night alternately with lashing curse and piteous prayer, the man who had worked with demon strength as no three men among them had worked, the man who was tottering now at the end in mind

and body, they tried to hold him back—for *mercy's sake*. But Flannagan shook them off and went—went laughing again the same fearful laugh with which he had begun the fight.

He found her there—found her with a little bundle lying in the crook of her outstretched arm. She moaned, and held it toward him—but Flannagan had gone his limit, his work was done, the tension broke.

And when they worked their way to the far end of the car after him, those hard, grim-visaged followers of Flannagan, they found a man squatted on an upended seat, a woman beside him, death and desolation and huddled shapes around him, dandling a tiny infant in his arms, crooning a lullaby through cracked lips, crooning a lullaby—to a little one long hushed already in its last sleep.

Opinions differ. But Big Cloud today sides about solid with Regan.

"Flannagan?" says the master mechanic. "Flannagan's a pretty good wrecking boss, pretty good, I don't know of any better—since the Almighty had him on the carpet. He's got a plot up on the butte behind the town, he and Daisy, with a little mound on it. They go up there together every Sunday—never've known 'em to miss. A man ain't likely to fall off the right of way again as long as he does that, is he? Well, then, forget it, he's been doing that for a year now—what?"



CLEARLY A CASE OF MADNESS

LOUIS TROSKY, of Ohio, is a politician of considerable influence in his State. One evening, when he was in Washington, he was invited to dine at the home of John R. McLean, who dabbles in Ohio politics and costly tapestries.

Every time Mr. McLean hears of a tapestry sale in Europe he peels off a section of his bank roll, hands it to an agent, and tells him to blow it in on the hangings.

Trosky's appetite was very poor that night. Apparently he was in great physical pain or felt the gnawing clutch of a secret sorrow. When he got back to Ohio, he made this mournful announcement:

"I've always heard that John R. McLean was a wise old guy. It's a mistake. That old fellow is as crazy as a loon. He took me in to dinner in a room where there was absolutely nothing on the floor, and all the carpets were hanging on the wall."

Precious Water

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Boss of Wind River," "The Winning Game," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

The Western Airline Railway absorbs the Prairie Southern and secures thereby a large land grant in the foothills. Cromwell York, president of the W. A., decides to put the land on the market. To make it available a big irrigation plant is installed, ditches and dams to be filled from the Coldstream. But the Coldstream is being used by other ranchers adjoining—who when they learn that York will require almost the entire normal flow of the river for his project, protest through one of their number, Casey Dunne. York gives Dunne no satisfaction, although admitting that if the railroad takes the water the other farms will go dry and their owners ruined. Casey refuses York's offer to buy him out. A year before this Casey has been held up in a transcontinental flyer and befriended a young woman in the same car. He meets her again at the home of mutual friends, the Wades, and learns that she is Clyde Burnaby, niece of James C. Hess, of the celebrated Hess Railway System. Dunne returns to the ranch and calling a meeting at Donald McCrae's, makes his report. They promise each other to stand fast. Farwell, the domineering engineer in charge of the railway's dam, meets Sheila McCrae and falls in love with her. Because of this he offers her father \$150,000 for his ranch, but the old man will not break with the pool. The ranchers dynamite the dam, and the railroad people promise dire punishment. Meantime Casey receives a note from Clyde Burnaby and he writes her a long letter inviting her to visit the ranch. Clyde comes, bringing with her the Wades.

CHAPTER XVII—(Continued).

FARWELL put in an appearance after supper. It was plain that the big engineer had not expected to find other guests; also that their presence embarrassed him. Quite unused to dissembling his feelings, he took no pains to hide his dislike for Dunne. Casey, on the other hand, was polite, suave, quiet, wearing the mocking smile that invariably exasperated the engineer.

"You and Mr. Farwell are not friends," Clyde ventured on the way home.

"He doesn't think much of me," Casey admitted. "I rub him the wrong way."

"As you were doing to-night."

"Was I?"

"You know you were. Is there a private quarrel between you, apart from the water matter?"

"Not exactly. But it would come to that if we saw much of each other."

"Then I hope you won't. It's embarrassing to others."

"I'm awfully sorry. It was very bad form, of course. But somehow I couldn't help it."

"Never mind. The McCraes are affected by this water trouble, aren't they?"

"As much as I am. You are surprised that Farwell goes there. I have never mentioned it to them, nor they to me. It's none of my business."

"Nor of mine."

"I didn't mean that."

"I know you didn't. Still, I think I could guess why Mr. Farwell goes to Talapus."

"So could I," said Casey dryly, and the subject dropped.

But Kitty Wade came to Clyde's room for a chat before retiring. "Those McCraes," she said, "are very nice. Mr. McCrae is one of the real pioneers. He told us some of the most interesting things. How did you like Miss McCrae?"

"I think she's a very nice, sensible girl. Good-looking, too."

"H'm!" said Kitty Wade. "Yes, I think she is. Dresses nicely and simply."

No imitation fine things. Shows the correct instinct. You and she might have been having a plain-clothes competition."

Clyde did not respond. Kitty Wade resumed, after a brief pause: "I'll tell you one thing, Clyde; this man Farwell is in love with her."

"I could see that, Kitty."

"And she doesn't care for him."

"I thought that, too."

"I wonder," Kitty Wade went on, "if there is anything between her and Mr. Dunne? Do you suppose he and Mr. Farwell are jealous of each other? They were like two dogs with one bone."

Clyde yawned. "Oh, mercy, Kitty," she said wearily, "ask me something easier. I wouldn't blame either of them. She seems to be a thoroughly nice girl."

Kitty Wade on her way to her room nodded wisely. "You don't fool me a little bit, Clyde," she said to herself. "This Sheila McCrae is probably just as nice as you are, and you own up to it like a little lady. But all the same you hate each other; and, what's more, you both know it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Clyde lay stretched at length in sweet, odorous hay. There was no reason why she should not have taken the hammock in the shade of the veranda that morning, save that she wanted to be alone. Therefore she had taken a book and wandered forth. Behind the corrals she had come upon a haystack, cut halfway down and halfway across, and on impulse she had climbed up a short ladder and lain down. Her hands clasped behind her head, her book forgotten, she stared up into the blue sky, and dreamed daydreams. And then she went to sleep.

She was aroused by the sound of hammering. Peeping over the edge of the stack, she recognized Tom McHale. McHale was putting a strand of wire around the stack, and as she looked he began to sing a ballad of the old frontier. Clyde had never heard "Sam

Bass," and she listened to McHale's damaged tenor.

"Sam was born in Indianner, it was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen young Sam began to roam;
And first he went to Texas, a cowboy for to be—
He robs the stage at——"

He stopped abruptly, and Clyde saw two mounted men approaching. They bore down on McHale, who lifted his coat from a rail, and put it on. To Clyde's amazement the action revealed a worn leather holster strapped to the inner side of the garment, and from it protruded the ivory butt of a six-shooter. McHale was apparently unarmed; in reality a weapon lay within instant reach of his hand.

The two horsemen were roughly dressed. Each wore a gun openly at his belt. One was large, sandy-haired, gray-eyed. The other was dark, quick, restless, shooting odd, darting glances from a pair of sinister black eyes.

"Is your name Dunne?" asked the first roughly.

"Dunne?" queried McHale, as if the name were strange to him. "Did you say Dunne, or Doane?"

"I said Dunne."

"Oh," McHale responded. "Lemme think. No, I guess not. I never used that name that I remember of. No, partner, my name ain't Dunne."

"We want Dunne. Where'll we find him?"

"Why, now," said McHale, "that's a right hard question. You might find him one place, and then again you mightn't. I reckon I wouldn't be misleading you none if I was to tell you you'd find him wherever he's at."

"You workin' for him?" the dark man put in quickly.

"I was, a minute ago. Now I got a job with an inquiry office. Anything else I can tell you?"

"No," said the dark man. "But you can tell Dunne that up to a minute ago he had a —— fool workin' for him!"

Dead silence while a watch could tick off ten seconds. Clyde scarcely breathed.

At different times in her life she had heard noisy quarrels in city streets, quarrels big with oath and threat. This was different. She experienced a sensation as though, even in the bright sunshine beneath the blue, unflecked summer sky where all was instinct with growth and health and life, she were watching a deathbed.

The two strangers sat motionless, their eyes on McHale, their right hands resting quietly by their waists. McHale stood equally still, facing them, his eyes narrowed down to slits, his left hand holding the lapel of his coat, his right hand, a half-smoked cigarette between the first and second fingers, on a level with his chin. He expelled a thin stream of smoke from his lungs, and spoke:

"I reckon you can tell him yourself. Here he comes, now."

The eyes of the first man never shifted. The other instantly looked over his shoulder. McHale laughed.

"You're an old-timer," he said to the gray-eyed man; "but him"—he jerked a contemptuous thumb at the second—"it's a wonder to me he ever growed up. Don't you do it no more, friend. Don't you never take your eyes off a man you've called a ——— fool, or maybe the next thing you behold is the Promised Land!"

But his words had not been intended as a ruse. Casey was riding over on his little gray mare to see who the strangers were, and what they wanted.

"This man tells me you're Dunne," said the gray-eyed man.

"That's correct," Casey admitted.

"My name is Dade; his name is Cross." He indicated his companion by a sidewise nod. "We've bought land from this here irrigation outfit. So have half a dozen other men, friends of ours. Now we can't get water."

"Well?"

"Well, the company puts it up that some of you fellows is to blame. You've cut the ditches so they won't carry. We've come to tell you that this has got to stop."

"That's kind of you, anyway," Casey

observed quietly. He and Dade eyed each other appraisingly.

"What I want to make plumb clear," said the latter, "is that this don't go no more. It's no good. You'll leave the ditches alone, or else——"

"Or else?" Casey suggested.

"Or else we'll make you," said Dade grimly. "We want water, and we'll have it."

"I wonder," said Casey, "if you are trying to hang a nice little bluff on me, Mr. Dade? Suppose, for instance, you have no land, and don't need any water."

"I can show you my deed."

"That's quite possible. All right, Mr. Dade. Is there anything more you want to say?"

"I reckon that's all," said Dade. "If you'll say that the ditches will be let alone there'll be no trouble; if not, there will be."

"What kind of trouble, Mr. Dade?"

"You'll see when it comes."

"Very well," said Casey. "Now, listen to me, Mr. Dade. You and your friend there and your whole outfit can go plumb. Get that? Every ranch here has water, and we're going to keep it. How we keep it is our own business. If you've bought land you may look to the company for water, and not to us. If you haven't bought land—if you're hired to come here to start something—why, let it start!"

He and Dade looked straight into each other's eyes in the silence that followed. Cross made a sudden movement.

"Be careful, partner!" McHale warned him in hard tones.

Once more Clyde, an involuntary listener, felt the presence of a crisis, the chill of fate impending. But, as before, it passed.

"You're barking up the wrong tree," said Dade. "Nothing starts—now. Better remember what I told you. Come on, Sam, we'll get going."

Clyde heard the trample of hoofs dying in the distance, and then McHale's voice:

"You run the bluff, but you took an

awful chance. That there Cross come mighty close to making a break."

"Nervous kind."

"Yep. He's apt to be too blamed soon. T'other one, Dade, is cold-drawn. I judge he's bad. Ever hear of him?"

"No."

"Nor me," said McHale; "but he has the earmarks."

Casey's reply was lost as they turned away. Clyde waited until they were out of sight, and then descended. The morning adventure had given her food for thought. Until then she had been deceived by the smooth current of life at Chakchak. It had seemed an idyllic, carefree existence. Although she had known of the trouble, it had seemed far in the background; it was a skeleton which had not obtruded itself. Now, by accident, she had surprised it stalking abroad in the glare of day.

That afternoon she and Casey rode together. He was in his usual spirits, laughing, joking, full of whimsical good humor. But back of it she thought she detected a preoccupation. Occasionally he would be silent and his eyes would narrow as if he were working out some problem.

Far up beneath the shoulder of a butte a little spring of delicious water bubbled from the gravelly soil, trickled a few hundred yards, and disappeared. It was hidden by willow and cottonwood, draped with greenery, an oasis. Here they dismounted, drank the sweet spring water, watered the horses, and rested. Clyde sat down, leaning against a convenient tree. Casey stretched himself against another, his hands clasped behind his head, a long, thin cigar clenched between his teeth.

Through the fragrant smoke he eyed his companion in lazy content, noting how the mottled sunlight, filtering through the leaves, touched her glorious hair to living, coppery gold.

"Did you ever have your picture painted?" he asked suddenly.

"Why, no," she replied. "Whatever made you think of that?"

"Your hair and the sunlight on it.

If I were a painter I should like to paint you now—and keep the picture."

"The first compliment you have ever paid me," she laughed, pleased nevertheless. "I shall remember it."

"And that's a compliment to me," he responded. "Funny what we recollect and what we don't. There doesn't seem to be any rule for it. But I think I shall always remember just how you look at this moment."

"That's very nice."

"I wonder if I may ask you something without offending you?"

"I don't think you would ask anything that should offend me."

"Thanks! It's this: I want to make things pleasant for you all. I've been wondering in my own mind why you came here. You won't misunderstand me. But why?"

"Have you forgotten your invitation?"

"No. But its acceptance was an unexpected piece of luck. There isn't much here to amuse you. What's the real reason?"

She looked full at him, and then dropped her eyes; her fingers plucked blades of grass and cast them aside.

"I don't think I know the answer," she replied at last. "For one thing, I thought I might help you—if you'd let me."

"Help me! How?"

"With money. You and the others."

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "Whatever put that in your head?"

"The only letter you ever wrote me. I could read between the lines. Afterward Mr. Wade told me more. But he wouldn't take what I offered."

"I should say not—if you offered money. He was right."

"Do you mean that you wouldn't let me help you if you needed money?"

"Certainly I wouldn't."

"Because I'm a woman, I suppose."

"Partly. But I wouldn't let any one throw money away on what is apt to be a losing game."

"You think it that?"

"Size it up for yourself. You talked with Wade. Didn't he tell you so?"

"Practically, yes."

"Then you see! It wouldn't do at all."

"But it's my money. I can afford to lose it. I'll not have a pleasure or a luxury the less. And this is my pleasure. Would you refuse me this one thing? You lent *me* money!"

"Ten dollars—pshaw! This is different. I'm more grateful than I can tell you. But there's no necessity—just yet, anyway."

"Then I won't consider it a definite refusal. That was one reason why I came. And then I wanted to see your country. I wanted something new. I can't explain it very well. I had to come; something made me."

She flushed, but the eyes that met his inquiring gaze were entirely steady.

"Something made me. If the Wades had not been coming I should have come alone. I'm frank with you, you see."

"Yes, I understand the feeling," Casey said. "I've had it myself. I've had to get out of old surroundings sometimes. And I've always gone. Sometimes it has turned out well; sometimes not."

"We shall see how this turns out," she said, with a nod and a little laugh. "I've a feeling that I shall bring you luck."

"I believe you will," he agreed. "We'll say so, anyway. Just now I wouldn't trade places with any man on earth."

She laughed in pure pleasure, bending toward him. "I appropriate that to myself. Don't dare to explain it. Do you come here often?"

"Not very often. That maze of coulee and butte you see is a good cattle range. I come this way looking for strays. The last time I was here Sheila McCrae was with me."

Suddenly, for Clyde, the sunlight lost its golden charm. In an altered tone she said:

"Indeed!" And she added deliberately: "I don't think I ever met a nicer girl than Miss McCrae."

"No nicer anywhere," he agreed heartily. "Well, perhaps we'd better be moving. We have a long ride yet."

Their way led by devious cattle trails

along coulees, over ridges, into other coulees. Clyde lost all idea of direction, but her companion was never at a loss, and finally they emerged upon a broad, well-traveled trail. Then Clyde, after much inward debate, told Casey of her presence that morning at the interview with Dade and Cross.

"Well, they're quite a pair," said Casey. "They came to run some sort of a bluff, but concluded not to push it to a show-down. They'll make trouble for us, I suppose. They're simply hired men, and that's their job."

"What kind of trouble?"

"I wish I knew," he replied, shaking his head.

"Is it all worth while?" she asked. "I haven't asked a question about the blown-up dam and the cut ditches. I'm not going to. But where will it end? You admit that there may be violence—even bloodshed. Why not avoid it?"

"How?"

"By letting the courts settle it."

"If we could have our water till then, that's what we'd do. As it is—well, I'm afraid we can't afford to."

"I've already offered——"

"I know, I know," he interrupted; "but that's out of the question."

That evening dragged. There were long silences. Nobody seemed inclined to talk. Wade went to sleep in his chair, his cigar dropping from his relaxing fingers. He grumbled when his wife woke him.

"I'm dead sleepy. I'm going to bed. I'm too sleepy to care whether it's polite or not; I'm all in."

"So am I," said Kitty, yawning frankly. "I shall follow my lord and master."

"And I my amiable chaperon," said Clyde.

"I'm afraid all I have to follow is an example," said Casey. He came close to her in the moonlight. "Perhaps I seemed ungrateful this afternoon. I didn't mean to be. I can't tell you how much I appreciated your offer, your generosity; none the less because I can't possibly accept it."

"It is nothing," she said. "It is not

even generosity. Real generosity must cost something in renunciation."

"No," he replied; "the cost has little to do with it. It is the spirit of the offer that counts. Don't belittle it."

"It cost me something to make the offer," she said impulsively. "The money would have been the least part of it."

"I don't think I understand."

"I'm glad you don't; and I can't explain now. Some day, perhaps. And now—good night."

He took her hand and looked down into her eyes. He could feel the hand tremble slightly, but the eyes were steady. Darkened by the moonlight they seemed unfathomable pools, deep, mysterious, holding something which he could almost but not quite discern. In the pale light her face lost color. It was idealized, purified, the face of a dream. Her marvelous crown of hair shone strand by strand as of twisted gold; it shimmered with halolike glory. Her slightly parted lips, vivid against the white of the face, seemed to invite him.

He bent forward, and plucked himself angrily back from the temptation. She released her hand.

"Good night," she said softly.

"Good night," he responded, hesitated, and turned away to his own quarters.

But as Clyde sought her room she seemed to walk on air. She trembled in every fiber of her strong, young body, but her blood sang in her veins. The woman within her called aloud triumphantly. It was long before she slept, and when she did so her slumber was a procession of dreams.

She awoke somewhere in the night, with a strange sound in her ears, a detonation distant but thunderous. She rose, went to the window, and peered out.

As she stood, she commanded a view of Casey Dunne's quarters. The door opened, and two men emerged, running for the stables. It seemed not a minute till two horses were led out, ready saddled. The two men went up instantly. They tore past her window in a flurry of hoofs. She recognized Casey Dunne

and McHale. Neither was completely dressed. But around the waist of each was a holster-weighted belt, and across each saddle was slanted a rifle. Because of these warlike manifestations Clyde slept no more that night.

CHAPTER XIX.

As the night air vibrated with the first explosion Casey Dunne and McHale leaped from their beds, and rushed for the door, opened it, and stood listening. There they heard another and another.

"Dynamite!" cried McHale, reaching for his clothes. "I'll bet it's our dam. Jump into some pants, Casey. There's just a chance to get a sight of somebody."

They threw on clothes with furious haste, caught up weapons, and raced for the stables. Their haste communicated itself to their horses, which bolted before the riders were firm in the saddles. Casey, as they tore past the house, thought he caught a glimpse of white at Clyde's window; but just then he had his hands full with Shiner, who was expressing his disapproval of such unseemly hours by an endeavor to accomplish a blind runaway.

Halfway to the river they came upon the first evidence of dynamite in the form of a bit of wrecked fluming. Water poured down a sidehill from a mass of shattered boards and broken, displaced timbers. They scarcely paused to view the ruin, but rode for the dam. There was no dam. Where it had been remained only a few forlorn and twisted posts between which the muddied water whispered softly. The work had been very complete. McHale swore into the night.

"Our own medicine! Well, watch us take it. We ain't like boys that can't build a little thing like a dam. Which way do you reckon them fellers went?"

"Try the old ford," said Casey. "It's all chance, anyway."

A mile downstream they came to the ford, where the river for a brief distance had broadened and shallowed. Fresh tracks of one horse led down to

the water's edge. On the other side, where they emerged, they were still filled with muddy water.

"That's the cuss that blowed the flume," said McHale. "He's met up with another one or two here. They've gone on downstream, but we sure can't trail them in this light. What do we do?"

"Ride ahead and trust to luck," said Casey. "It's all we can do."

"I guess that's so," McHale agreed. "But if we run up on 'em——"

He paused abruptly. Out of the distance came the unmistakable sound of a blast, closely followed by a second.

"Another dam!" Casey exclaimed. "That's Oscar's, or Wyndham's. Our own medicine, sure enough!"

"If I can put a gunsight onto one of them fellers I'll fix him so's he won't hold medicine nohow," said McHale savagely. "No use followin' the river. They'll quit it now, and strike for somewheres. Let's take a chance and hike out sorter southeast. It's as good as any other way."

They struck southeast at a steady jog, angling away from the river. The night was absolutely cloudless; the moon, near the full, bathed the landscape in a flood of white light which threw objects into startling relief, but intensified the shadows. Beneath it the land slumbered in a silence broken only by the soft drumming of hoofs. But for an occasional small band of cattle lying quietly on the slopes, it seemed devoid of life.

They rode in silence, but with eyes and ears keenly alert. At the top of each rise they paused to search the surrounding country. Now and then they drew up to listen. But their watchfulness availed nothing.

"Looks like we're out o' luck," McHale observed finally.

"Looks that way," Casey admitted. "All the same, we'll keep going."

"If we happen across 'em," McHale continued, "I s'pose we round 'em up?"

"Of course. But they may take some rounding."

"Sure! Only I'll tell you, Casey, I'm

awful tired of having it put all over me by fellers that ain't got no license to. Some of these gents that allow they're hard citizens ain't so dog-goned much. I s'pose they figure on us peaceable farmers bein' bluffed out by a hard face and a hostile talk. That's an awful bad bet for 'em to make."

They were approaching a region of broken ground, carved and ridged with coulees and low hills, worthless save for range purposes. There Casey decided that he would turn back. At best it was like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Chance only could serve them. Suddenly McHale checked his horse.

"Listen!" he said sharply.

They were riding by the base of a low hill. At one side the ground sloped away in a shallow depression which marked the head of a coulee. As they sat listening intently the stillness was broken by a hollow, muffled sound, the unmistakable trampling of hoofs. Faint at first, it increased in volume. Plainly, horses were coming up the draw.

Four horsemen came into view. They were riding carelessly, slouching in their saddles. One struck a match to light a pipe. The flame of it showed for an instant above his cupped hands. At a hundred yards they perceived the waiting horsemen, and halted abruptly.

"You there!" Casey hailed. "We want to talk to you!"

A vicious oath came as answer, distinct in the stillness. Then: "You get back and mind your own business!"

McHale's rifle action clicked and clashed as he levered a cartridge from magazine to chamber. "Up with your hands, the bunch of you," he ordered, "or——"

The remainder was lost in the bark of a gun as one of the other party fired. McHale's horse jumped as though stung, just as he pulled the trigger, bumping into Shiner. Immediately that uncertain quadruped wheeled and kicked at him. So quick was his pivoting motion that Casey was almost unseated. He saved himself, but lost his rifle, which fell to the ground. With a furious curse and a jerk of the bit he

wheeled Shiner around, drawing his automatic belt gun.

But the four strangers had taken advantage of the incident to turn and plunge back into the coulee. They were almost out of sight. Casey's gun spat a continuous jet of flame across the night, the rapid reports blending into a roll of sound. McHale, cursing his unsteady horse, fired again and again. But the strangers, apparently unhurt, swept out of sight.

Casey leaped to the ground, secured his rifle, and was back in the saddle again in an instant. They sailed into the shallow head of the coulee at a dead run, Casey struggling to refill the clip of his automatic, McHale cursing his horse and himself because he had used the rifle instead of his six-shooter.

At its head the coulee was merely a slight depression. Farther on it broadened and deepened. Down the middle of its length ran a sinuous grove of cottonwoods. On either side its flanks were bare, white with clay and alkali, rising to steep banks of yellow earth, bald and bleached in the moonlight.

Through this natural theater thundered pursuers and pursued. The latter had secured a good lead. The windings of the coulee hid them from view.

Suddenly Casey became aware that there was no one ahead—that he and McHale were riding madly, to no purpose. At the same moment the latter made the like discovery. Their horses' hoofs slid and cut grooves in the earth as the riders dragged them to a halt. Usually considerate, in the excitement of the moment they used the brutal methods of the "buster."

"They've doubled back on us!" cried McHale. "Cut through them cottonwoods somewheres and let us go by a-hellin'. Fooled us, by glory, like we was a pair of hide-an'-go-seek kids. Yes—there they go now! Look up by the top past that cut bank!" He lifted his rifle as he spoke.

High up at the coulee's rim, some hundreds of yards away, figures moved. At that distance, even in the brilliant moonlight, details were lost. The eye could discern black spots merely; but it

seemed that the men had dismounted for the ascent, and were helping the horses to scramble upward.

McHale fired, shoved down the lever, drew it home, and fired again. Since the light did not serve to show the dust puffs of the bullets, he could not tell whether he was shooting high or low. The main thing was that he did not hit. Casey chimed in. The bluffs and banks echoed to the reports of the high-powered rifles; but the figures gained the rim and vanished. Immediately afterward a tongue of flame leaped from the spot where they were last seen, and a bullet sang in close proximity to Casey's head. They wheeled into the shelter of the trees, where the shadows effectually concealed their whereabouts. At short intervals bullets searched for their position. McHale bit large consolation and spat in disgust.

"I reckon it's a get-away," he said. "I ain't fool enough to go up that bank while they're there. And by the time we'd get around they'd be a couple of miles 'most anywheres."

"We've got ourselves to blame," said Casey.

"Well, that first shot burned up this cayuse of mine," McHale grumbled. "How could I shoot, with him jumpin' around? And that blasted, yeller-hided buzzard head of yours, he don't know no better'n to whale into him with both heels. It wouldn't happen again, not in a million years."

"It doesn't need to," said Casey sourly. "We found our meat, and we couldn't stop it."

"The laugh is on us," McHale admitted. "For the powder we burned we sure ought to have a scalp or two to show. Still, moonlight shootin' is chance shootin', and when a cussed mean cayuse is sashayin' round if a man hits anything but scenery he's lucky!"

"I thought that old-timer, Dade, was doing the talking."

"Sure he was. And I'll bet it was his tillikum, Cross, that took the first crack at us. Didn't waste no time. He's some soon, that feller. I s'pose they got a camp, somewheres. No use tryin' to

find it. We can't prove that they used the powder on our dams. Well, what say if we point out for home? Day-light's breakin' now."

A pale light was spreading in the east, underneath the stars that rimmed the horizon. Objects became more visible. As they rode unmolested from the coulee the pale light began to flush faintly. Rosy shafts shot upward, and the stars vanished. Here and there birds began to twitter. An old grouse scuttled away, wings a-trail, as if mortally hurt, to distract attention from her young brood hidden in the short grass. A huge owl sailed ghostlike on silent wings, homeward bound from midnight foray. A coyote yipped shrill protest against the day. Away to the west, where the mountains loomed grandly, bright lights lay on peaks still white with the remnants of winter snows. Suddenly, driving the shadows before it, the sun seemed to leap above the rim of the world.

CHAPTER XX.

During the next twelve hours there was much riding from ranch to ranch. Of all the small dams constructed and maintained by the ranchers for irrigation purposes but one remained; and that one was Donald McCrae's.

McCrae himself considered this an invidious distinction. He would have preferred to suffer with his neighbors. He did not know why his structure had been spared, and he lent men and teams to others, laboring hard himself in the task of rebuilding.

The temper of the ranchers was at the breaking point. Naturally the blame fell on Farwell; he was the villain of the piece. He had expected unpopularity, but he had no idea of the depth of it. The black looks he met did not disturb him in the least; nor, to do him justice, would he have been seriously alarmed if he had known that more than one man was quite ready to pick a deadly quarrel with him. For some time he had not seen Sheila McCrae, but he found himself thinking of her constantly. And so, one evening he rode over to Talapus.

Somewhat to his relief, neither McCrae nor Sandy were visible. Mrs. McCrae was calmly civil. Her manner gave no hint that he was unwelcome. Sheila, she told him, had gone for a walk somewhere along the ditch.

"Oh," said Farwell, with elaborate carelessness, "then I think I'll just stroll along and meet her."

At the end of ten minutes' walk he came upon the girl. She was sitting, her chin propped on her hands, beside the stream where a little bordering grove of willows had sprung up. The deep murmur of the running water muffled his footsteps so that she neither saw nor heard him till he was at her side.

"Good evening!" he said.

She turned her head slowly, without start or exclamation.

"I did not expect to see you, Mr. Farwell."

"I thought I'd run over," he said awkwardly. "I intended to come before."

She allowed a long minute of silence to lie between them. "And why have you come now?" she asked.

"Why?" Farwell repeated the word. "Why? I wanted to see you. Why shouldn't I come?"

"You ought to know why. It's one thing to do your work; but it's quite another to blow up our dams!"

"Why do you think I did that?"

"Because I have ordinary common sense. I don't suppose you did it with your own hand. But you've brought in a bunch of toughs and gunmen to overawe us and do your dirty work. It will lead to serious trouble."

"I can handle trouble," said Farwell grimly. "Has anybody meddled with your dam?"

"No."

"Then I don't see what you have to complain of. I don't admit anything. But when you get indignant at blowing up dams you ought to remember what happened to ours."

"Oh, as for that"—she shrugged her shoulders. "We had to have water. Nobody blamed you before. But these dams that did you no harm—that's different."

"But you have water. Your own dam is all right," he insisted.

"Yes. And do you know what people are saying? They say that the reason is because we have some sort of an understanding with you. They say——" She stopped abruptly.

"What else do they say?"

"Other things. I've told you enough."

"What do you care?"

"Well, I do care. This is the only house you come to. Your visits must end now."

"End?" Farwell echoed. "I guess not. Not unless you absolutely forbid me to come. And then I don't know. I'd find it pretty hard."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you I would," he protested. "You don't know."

"Bosh! We're not so fascinating as that."

Now, Farwell was of the battle-ax type. He was accustomed to take what he wanted, to smash through opposition. He looked at the girl facing him in the fading light, and a great desire swelled within him. Her words gave the needed spur to his courage, and he went to the point as he would have gone in to quell a riot in a camp.

"We," he said. "Who's talking of 'we'? I'm not. I come to see *you*. You ought to know that. Of course you know it. I didn't think I'd ever fall in love, but I *have*. You might as well know it now. I don't know whether you think anything of me or not; it would be just my luck if you didn't. Anyway, that's how I feel, and I'm not going to give up seeing you just because some people have set a crazy yarn going."

The words boiled out of him like steam from a hot spring. He scowled at her ferociously, his eyes hot and angry. It would have been difficult to imagine a more unloverlike attitude. And yet she had no doubt of his sincerity. She would have been less than woman if she had not suspected his feelings before. But she had not expected this outbreak.

"I'm sorry you said that," she told him quietly. "It's quite impossible. I

can tell you now what I couldn't tell you before. People say that I have promised to marry you in exchange for your promise that we shall have water for the ranch."

"If you'll tell me the name of a man who utters an infernal lie like that I'll wring his neck," he growled.

"I believe you would. But what good would it do? You can't fight rumors and gossip in that way. That's the trouble with you—you depend on force alone. Can't you see the position this puts us in—puts *me* in? You can't come here any more."

"I don't see that at all," he objected. "I'll blow up your dam myself if you think it will help, but as for not seeing you—why, it's out of the question. I've got to see you. I'm going to see you. I can't help it. I tell you I think of you all the time. Why, hang it, Sheila, I think of you when I ought to be thinking of my work."

She would have laughed if she had not seen that he was in deadly earnest. His work was a fetish, all-absorbing, demanding and receiving the tribute of his entire attention and energy. That thought of a woman should come between him and it was proof positive of devotion extraordinary.

"You must not do that," she said gently.

"But I can't help it," he reiterated. "It's new to me, this. I can't concentrate on my work. I keep thinking of you. If that isn't being in love, what in thunder is? I'm talking to you as straight as I'd talk to a man. I believe I love you as much as any woman was ever loved. You don't know much about me, but I'm considered a good man in my profession. From a material point of view I'm all right."

"If I cared for you that would be the last thing I'd think of."

"Why can't you care for me?" he demanded. "I don't expect much. We'd get along."

"No," she said decidedly. "No. It's impossible. We're comparatively strangers. I think you're going to be a big man some day. I rather admire you in some ways. But that is all."

"Well, anyway, I'm not going to quit," he announced doggedly. "I never gave up anything yet. Sheila, you talk as if it didn't matter! Maybe it doesn't to you, but it does to me. You don't know how much I care. I can't tell you, either. This talk isn't my line. Look here, though. About ten years ago, down in the desert of the Southwest, my horse broke his leg, and I was set afoot. I nearly died of thirst before I got out. All those blistering days, while I stumbled along in that baking hell, I kept thinking of a cool spring we had on our place when I was a boy. It bubbled up in moss at the foot of a big cedar, and I used to lie flat and drink till I couldn't hold any more. It was the sweetest water in the world. All those days I tortured myself by thinking of it. I'd have given my soul, if I have one, to satisfy my thirst at that spring. And that's how I feel about you. I want your love as I wanted that water."

"I'm very sorry," she said. "It's out of the question."

"But why?" he demanded. "Give me a chance. I'm not a monster. Or do you mean that you care for somebody else? Is that it? Do you care anything for that Dunne? A fellow that's in love with another woman!"

Even in the dying light he could see the dark flush that surged over cheek and brow. She rose to the full height of her lithe figure, facing him.

"No, I don't!" she flamed. "But if I did what business would it be of yours? Casey Dunne is my friend—a gentleman—which is more than you seem to be, Mr. Farwell!"

She took a step toward him in her indignation. Suddenly, with a sweep of his arm, he clipped her to him, kissing her on forehead and cheek. She struck him in the face with her clenched fist driven by muscles as hard as an athlete's.

"You great brute!" she panted.

With the blow and the words Farwell's moment of madness passed. He held her from him at arms' length.

"A brute!" he said. "You're right. I didn't know it before. Now I do. How can I put myself right with you?"

"Let me go!" she cried.

As he released her she heard the quick pad of running feet. Out of the dusk behind her bounded young Sandy McCrae. He came like a young wolf to its first kill, his lips lifted in a snarl. In his right hand lay a long-barreled, black Colt's.

"Sheila!" he cried. "What's the matter? Who's this? What in—ah!"

The gun leaped up. Instinctively she threw out her hand, striking it as he pulled the trigger. A thin stream of flame blazed almost into Farwell's face, and the sharp report split the evening silence into fragments. Something like a questing finger of death ran through his hair, and his hat twitched from his head, to flutter down softly ten feet away. But he was unhurt.

Sheila locked both arms around her brother's, dragging it down.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "I tell you no, Sandy! Don't shoot again. It's a mistake!"

He wrenched furiously to free his hand. "Mistake!" he shouted. "He was holding you! I saw him. I heard you. Let go. I'll blow his heart out!"

But she clung to his arm. "It's a mistake, Sandy, I tell you! Can't you understand me? Don't use that gun. I won't let you. Give it to me!"

He ceased his attempts to free his arm. "All right, Sheila. I won't shoot—this time. You, Farwell, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Mighty little," Farwell replied. "I asked your sister to marry me, and she refused. I kissed her against her will. That's all—and plenty. If you want my opinion I think I ought to be shot."

Sandy glared at him, taken aback by this frank admission.

"If she hadn't jolted my hand you sure would have been," he said grimly. "You're mighty lucky to be alive right now. After this if I see you——"

"Shut up, Sandy!" Sheila interrupted authoritatively, with sisterly directness. "I'm quite able to look after my own affairs. Mr. Farwell is sorry. You be white enough to let it go that way."

"It's up to you, if you want it," Sandy

replied. "If you can stand for a thing like that once I can. But not twice."

"There won't be any twice. Shall we go to the house, Mr. Farwell?"

Farwell, amazed, fell into step with her. He had expected to be overwhelmed with reproaches, to face a storm of feminine anger. Still, he could not think that she was palliating his offense; and he was quite aware that she had saved his life. Young McCrae, in offended dignity, stalked in front.

"I want you to know," said Farwell, "that I'm utterly ashamed of myself. To prove it I'm going to do the best I can. I'm going to wire in my resignation, and I'm going away."

"Don't."

"What?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Don't. You are sorry, and that's the main thing. We won't mention it again. And neither will Sandy. But for a while you must not come here."

"I'll do anything," he said. "I think you are the best girl on earth."

Sheila did not reply; but she did not reprove him.

Mrs. McCrae, looking somewhat anxious, met them at the house.

"I heard a shot," she said. "Was it you, Sandy?"

"Yes," her son replied.

"What did you shoot at?"

The young man glanced at Farwell from the corner of his eye.

"A skunk," he replied. "I missed him."

Sheila bit her lip angrily. Farwell took his medicine in silence.

CHAPTER XXI.

A week sufficed to put the ranchers' ditches and dams in condition to take care of water; but at the end of that time there was little water to take care of. It was being diverted into the company's ditch system. Their ditches were running full, emptying upon lands on which scarcely a pretense of cultivation was being made. While the actual farmers, just when they needed it most, had each barely sufficient water for their domestic purposes, for stock, and

for their small gardens. There was none for the main crops in the fields.

Naturally the crops suffered, the grain most of all. A series of hot, dry winds came. With water they would have done little or no damage; without it the leaves curled, shriveled, and turned pale, starving for lack of moisture. And the peculiarly galling feature of it was that the water which would have meant so much was practically running to waste.

In spite of these troubles Casey managed to devote time to his guests. His projected excursion to the foothills was abandoned, but he and Clyde rode almost daily. He had reserved his little gray mare, Dolly, for her use, and she was becoming, if not expert, at least confident in the saddle.

She grew to love the long evenings, the soft twilights, the warm, sweet scent of the grasses, and the great stillness broken only by an occasional word and the beat of willing hoofs. On these evening rides she allowed her imagination to run riot. It pleased her to pretend that she and Casey were the only inhabitants of the land—an Eve and Adam of the West, pioneers of a remote civilization. All day she looked forward to this hour or two; at night, in her bed, she lived them over, recreating each mile, each word, each little thing—how the great owl had sailed ghostly across their path, the gray shape of a coyote fading into the dusk, the young broods of grouse hiding in the grass.

Occasionally she undertook to analyze her feelings toward Casey Dunne, but the result was indefinite. She enjoyed his companionship, looked forward to it, remembered his words, his tricks of manner and speech. But these things, she told herself, were not conclusive.

His sentiments she had no means of judging. He was forever doing little things to please her; but then he did as much for others. At times he was confidential; but he seldom talked of himself, his confidences taking the form of allowing her to share his private viewpoint, revealing to some extent his

mental processes. But he had never said one word which indicated more than friendship.

Clyde saw little of Sheila McCrae. The latter had ridden over once or twice to see, as she said, how Casey was treating them. On these occasions Clyde experienced a recurrence of latent hostility. Sheila took no pains whatever with her appearance. She came in a worn riding costume, plain, serviceable, workmanlike; and she talked water and crops and stock with Casey and McHale, avoiding more feminine topics. If there was any understanding between her and Casey it did not appear to Clyde. But it was this unreasoning hostility more than anything else which made Clyde doubt herself. Was it, she wondered, in reality jealousy?

She put the thought from her indignantly, but it refused to be banished. She even catalogued her attractions, comparing them with the other girl's. The balance was in her favor; but in the end she felt ashamed of herself. Why should she do this? She found no satisfactory reply.

After a week of the water famine she saw a change in her host. He was more silent, thoughtful. Often when they rode together he had nothing to say, staring at the horizon with narrowed eyes.

"Do you ever tell anybody your troubles?" she asked abruptly one evening. They were riding slowly homeward, and the silence had been especially marked.

"Not very often," Casey replied. "People I've met have usually had enough of their own. They didn't want to hear mine."

"Well, I haven't many troubles, and I'd like to share yours, if I may. I suppose it's this water question."

"Why, yes," he admitted. "It's getting to be a mighty hard thing to swallow—and look pleasant."

"I know." She nodded sympathetically. "You feel helpless."

"Not that exactly. The difficulty is to know just what to do—whether to do anything or not. The boys are very

hostile. It wouldn't take much to start them."

"In what direction?"

"In any that would give action. They'd like nothing better than open war."

She exclaimed at the words. "Surely there's no possibility of that?"

"More than a possibility," he returned gravely. "Water is a necessity to us. The people who have taken it do not require it. They have established what is practically an armed camp. Also they have brought in a number of hard citizens—what are known as 'gunmen'—to overawe us. These patrol their ditch system, and warn us to keep away from it. It is guarded at every important point. Not satisfied with this, some of these fellows have been apparently looking for trouble in town and elsewhere. One of these fine days they will get it."

He shook his head forebodingly. They topped a rise as he spoke. Below them lay the line of the company's main canal. As they rode down to it a man on a horse seemed to appear from nowhere in particular, and came toward them. As he drew nearer Casey recognized the man Cross.

Cross raised his hat in acknowledgment of Clyde's presence. But his words to Casey were very much to the point.

"You got notice to keep off this property," said he.

"Well?" said Casey.

"Do it," said Cross. "Hike—meanin' you, understand, and not the lady. She's plumb welcome to ride where she likes. I savvy your game, Dunne. You ain't got nerve enough to ride out here alone, and you bring a woman with you to play safe."

Casey paled with anger beneath his tan. "Mr. Cross," he said quietly, "that goes—because the lady is with me. But I rather think that one of us will stay in this country a long time."

"Cheap bluff," Cross sneered. "You ain't goin' to prospect round these ditches, linin' them up for powder. Come here alone, and I'll make you eat the sights off of my gun."

Casey laughed softly—with him most dangerous of signs.

"Mr. Cross, you really amuse me. I won't argue the point just now. Later, perhaps. Good evening."

Clyde had listened in amazement. Once more she had experienced the sensation of standing on the brink of tragedy. Once more it had failed to occur.

"And that's one of the gunmen," said Casey. "That's what we have been putting up with. I think it will have to stop."

"Don't get into any trouble," she begged. "Promise me you won't. What do you care what men like that say?"

"I'm partly human," he replied grimly. "I can stand as much as most men, but there are some things I won't stand. I'm not going to climb a tree for any man. However, I won't crowd things with Cross, though I know plenty of men who would, on that provocation. I'm all for peace and a quiet life. You won't think I'm afraid, I hope."

"Certainly not," she said indignantly. "You don't give me much of your confidence, but I know you better than to think such a thing. I wish you would tell me more of what is going on. Let me be your friend, and not merely your guest. Talk to me as you would to—Miss McCrae."

It was the first time she had spoken to him of Sheila. It was her challenge. She would be on the same footing.

"Sheila's different," he replied. "Sheila's one of us. I've known her for years. She's a good deal like a sister."

"Oh," she said, "a sister?"

To have saved her immortal soul she could not have kept the note of interrogation from the word. He laughed.

"Yes, a sister. Why, great Scott! you didn't think I was in love with her, did you, just because I call her by her first name? I think everything of her, but not in that way. She's a thousand times too good for me. Besides, she knows me too well. That's usually fatal to sentiment. That's why no man is a hero to his wife."

"How do you know he isn't? Kitty Wade simply worships her husband."

"Maybe. But I'll bet his pedestal isn't nearly so high as it was before they were married. When you marry, Miss Burnaby"—he smiled at her frankly—"you will occupy the pedestal yourself."

"Doesn't your rule work both ways?" she laughed.

"I won't admit it—to you, anyway."

"Why not—to me?"

"Because Wade tells me no man can be forced to incriminate himself," he replied.

Clyde glanced at him swiftly, flushing in the dusk. But she did not press for an explanation. She was satisfied. She was no longer jealous of Sheila McCrae.

When they arrived at the ranch Dunne took the horses to the stables. Clyde, entering the house, found Wade alone, deep in newspapers, the accumulation of a week which he had just received. There was a package of letters for Clyde.

"Look here, Clyde," said the lawyer. "Here's a funny thing." He held a newspaper open at the market page. "This Western Air-line stock is as jumpy as a fever chart. For a while it went down and down and down, away below what I should think to be its intrinsic value. There was a rumor of a passed dividend. Nothing definite—merely a rumor. Then came another rumor of an application for a charter for a competing line. Both these stories seem to have brought out considerable stock. There was heavy selling. Likely the traders went short. I'll bet some of them were nipped, too, for the market went up without warning—yes, by George! bounced like a rubber ball."

Clyde looked up from a letter which inclosed a formal-looking statement. "What would send it up?"

"Buyers in excess of sellers—in other words, demand in excess of supply," Wade responded. "That's on the face of it. Probably not half a dozen men know the inside. Orders may have been issued to support the stock—that is, to buy all offered in order to keep

the price from declining farther. It's hard to say, at this distance. It's possible that the depressing rumors may have originated with the very men who are now supporting the stock."

"Why should they do that?"

"To buy more cheaply shares which would be offered in consequence. It's funny, though," he continued, opening another paper. "Now, here's a later date—let's see—yes, here we are. The market opened five points higher than it closed on the preceding day, and it closed ten points above that opening. Holy Moses! do you know what that means?"

"Demand in excess of supply."

"Demand! Supply!" Wade echoed contemptuously. "Economics be hanged! It means a fight for Western Air. It means that somebody is willing to pay a fancy price for shares. Why? Because a few shares one way or the other means the ownership of the road, the dictation of its policy. There's no other explanation. I wonder who is——"

"Look at this," said Clyde. She handed him a telegram. He read:

Sell nothing whatever until you hear from me. Instruct Bradley & Gauss. JIM.

Wade's lips puckered in a noiseless whistle. He did not need to be told that "Jim" was Clyde's uncle, wily old Jim Hess, of the Hess System. It was he who was out gunning for York and Western Air, and he had the reputation of getting what he went after. What his tactics had been Wade could only surmise. But the antics of the stock were proof that he was in earnest.

"Well," he queried, "what do you know about this, young lady? Have you been holding out on me?"

"I haven't much information," she replied. "Bradley & Gauss are my brokers. They have been buying Western Air for me as it was offered. There's their statement. Uncle Jim told me to buy it—said that it ought to be worth as much as Hess System some day."

"Heavens! What a tip!" Wade ex-

claimed. "This will be good news for Casey."

"I don't want him to know."

"Why not?"

"Well, he—he—that is, he might be disappointed. Uncle Jim may not get control. If he does he'll treat everybody fairly, of course. I don't want to raise false hopes."

"Considerate of you," said Wade, "not to say ingenious."

She flushed angrily for a moment, and then laughed.

"It's all the reason you'll get. Be a good friend, do. Promise! Also you are to say nothing to Kitty."

"Afraid of being jollied?"

"Mr. Wade, you are impertinent!" But her eyes laughed at him.

"I'll keep your dark secret," said Wade. "It will be a joke on Kitty!"

And so Casey Dunne was left in ignorance.

CHAPTER XXII.

Tom McHale ambled into Coldstream one afternoon, and dropped his pony's reins behind the station. Thence he clanked his spurs into Mr. Quilty's sanctum. That gentleman, nodding somnolently above a blackened clay pipe, rolled an appraising eye at him.

"Fwhere in Hiven's name is the maskyrade at?" he queried sourly. "An' do yez riprisint Wild Bill Hickox—rest his sowl—or th' 'Pache Kid—th' divil burn him!"

Tom glanced down at his ancient regalia of worn leather chaps, spurs, and the old forty-one that sagged from his right hip, and grinned.

"Guns is coming into style again out our way," he replied. "All the best families wears 'em. There's so many of these here durn hobos and railway men and Irish and other low characters that——"

"Th' nerve of yez!" snorted Mr. Quilty. "And the name iv yez 'McHale!'—as Irish, be hivins, as Con iv th' Hundred Bottles!"

McHale chuckled to himself, having succeeded in his purpose of getting Mr. Quilty going.

"Irish? Not on your life!" he denied gravely. "What put that notion in your head? The McHales is high-grade Scotch. Always was. They come from Loch Lomond or Commarashindhu or them parts. Annie Laurie married a McHale. Of course we're Scotch. You can tell by the Mac. The only McHale that ever was in Ireland went there to civilize it."

"To civ'lize Ireland!" Mr. Quilty cried in derision. "Hear till him! And Ireland the owldest civ'lization in the wurruld, barrin' none, and the best! Faix, we was givin' lessons in it to all mankind whin th' dom raggety-britch'd tatherdemalions iv Scotchmen hadn't th' dacincy to wear kilts, even, but wint about bare to th' four winds iv hivin, a barbarious race lower nor a Digger Injun, a scandal to God, man, and fay-males black and white."

"Well, maybe you're right about them old times, Corney," admitted McHale, with an innocent face. "I meant a little later than that. This here McHale was with William the Conqueror at the Battle of the Boyne——"

Mr. Quilty spat at the mention of this historic event.

"Bad cess till him, then!" he exclaimed. "Yez do be a high-grade liar, and ign'rant as well. Willyum th' Conq'ror was Irish on his mother's side, an' he bate th' heads off iv th' bloody Sassenach, an' soaked their king wan in th' eye wid a bow 'n' arry at a fight I disremember th' name of, brck a thousand years before Willyum th' Dutchman—may his sowl get its needin's!—come out iv his swamps. I tell yez th' McHales come from Galway. In th' good owld days they hanged thim be th' dozen to th' glory iv God an' th' greater safety iv all live stock. An' th' pity is they didn't make a cleaner job iv ut."

McHale, who was enjoying himself hugely, sifted tobacco into paper.

"I won't say you ain't right, Corney," he observed mildly. "I always understood we was Scotch, but I ain't noways bigoted about it. That hangin' business seems to point to us bein' Irish. Did you ever notice how many Irishmen is hanged? Of course, there's lots ain't

that ought to be, but the general average is sure high."

"I hope to glory ye boost it wan higher yerself," Quilty retorted. "Small loss 'tw'u'd be to anny wan. A divil iv a desp'rado yez are, wid yer gun an' all! I'm a good mind to swipe yez over th' nut wid me lantern an' take ut away from yez!"

McHale drew the weapon gently, and spun it on his finger, checking the revolutions six times with startling suddenness. Mr. Quilty watched him sourly.

"Play thricks!" he commented. "Spin a gun! Huh! Why don't yez get a job wid a dhrama that shows the West as it used to wasn't? I knowed wan iv thim gun twirlers wanst. He was all fer pluggin' tomatty cans an' such—a fair wonder he was. But wan day he starts to make a pinwheel iv his finger forninst a stranger he mistakes fer a tindherfut, an' he gets th' face iv him blowed in be a derringer from that same stranger's coat pocket."

"Sure," McHale agreed. "It was comin' to him. He should have stuck to tomatter cans. Them plays is plumb safe."

"They's no safe play wid a gun," Mr. Quilty declared oracularly. "I'm an owlder man nor ye, an' I worked me way West wid railway construction. I knowed th' owld-time gunmen—the wans they tell stories of. Where arre they now? Dead, ivery mother's son iv thim, an' most iv thim got it from a gun. No matther how quick a man is, if he keeps at ut long enough he meets up wid some felly that bates him till it—wanst. And wanst is enough."

"Plenty," McHale agreed. "Sure. The system is not to meet that sport. I don't figure he's in these parts."

Mr. Quilty blinked at him for a moment, and lowered his voice. "See, now, b'y," said he, "I'm strong for mindin' me own business, but a wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse. Nobody's been hurted hereabouts yet, but keep at ut and some wan will be. I don't want ut to be you or Casey. Go aisy, like a good la-ad."

"I'm easy as a fox-trot," said McHale. "So's Casey. We ain't crowdin'

nothin'. Only we're some tired of havin' a hot iron held to our hides. We sorter hate to smell our own hair singe-in'. We ain't on the prod, but we don't aim to be run off our own range, and that goes as it lies."

He rose, flipping his cigarette through the open window, and inquired for freight. They were expecting a binder and a mower. These had not arrived. McHale looked at the date of his bill of lading, and stated his opinion of the railway.

"Be ashamed, bawlin' out me employers in me prisince," said Mr. Quilty. "G'wan out o' here, before I take a shotgun to yez."

"Come up and have a drink," McHale invited.

"Agin' the rules whin on duty," Quilty refused. "An' I do be on duty whiniver I'm awake. 'Tis prohibition the comp'ny has on me, no less."

McHale rode up the stragglin' street to Shiller's hotel, and dismounted. Bob Shiller in shirt sleeves sat on the veranda.

"They's a right smart o' dust to-day, Bob," said McHale. "S'pose we sorter sprinkle it some."

"We'll go into one of the back rooms, where it's cooler," proposed Shiller.

"Oh, I'd just as soon go to the bar," said McHale. "Might be some of the boys there. I like to lean up against the wood."

"Well——" Shiller began, and stopped uncertainly.

"Well—what?" McHale demanded.

"Just as well you don't go into the bar right now," Shiller explained. "You had a sort of a run-in with a feller named Cross, hadn't you—you or Casey? He's in there with a couple of his friends—hard-lookin' nuts. He's some tanked, and shootin' off his mouth. We'll have Billy bring us what we want where it's cooler."

McHale kicked a post meditatively three times.

"There's mighty little style about me, Bob," he said. "I'm democratic a lot. Havin' drinks sent up to a private room looks to me a heap like throwin' on dog."

"I asked you," said Shiller. "It's my house. The drinks are on me."

"I spoke of the dust," McHale reminded him. "That makes it my drinks. And then I done asked a man to meet me in the bar. I wouldn't like to keep him waitin'."

"I don't want trouble here," said Shiller positively. "I ask you in a friendly way not to make it."

"Well, I ain't makin' it, am I?" said McHale. "That's all right about not wantin' trouble, but I got other things to think of. This here Cross and Dade and that bunch don't run the country. Mighty funny if I have to drink in a back room for them gents. Next thing you'll want me to climb a tree. I'm allowin' to stop my thirst facin' a mirror with one foot on a rail. I'll do it that way, or you and me won't be friends no more."

"Go to it, then," said Shiller. "You always was a bullhead."

McHale grinned, hitched his holster forward a trifle, and walked toward the bar. As he entered he took a swift survey of its half dozen occupants.

Three of them were regulars, citizens of Coldstream. The others were strangers, and each of them wore a gun down his thigh. They were of the type known as "hard-faced." Cross, a glass in his right hand, was standing facing the door. As it pushed open he turned his head, and stared at McHale, whom he did not immediately recognize.

"Come on, friend," said he; "get in on this."

"Sure," said McHale promptly. "A little number nine, Billy. Here's a ho!" He set his glass down, and faced Cross. "Come again, boys. What'll you take with me?"

But Cross swore suddenly. "Well!" he exclaimed. "Look at what blowed in off of one of them dry-ranch layouts!"

McHale smiled blandly, pushing a bottle in his direction.

"Beats all how some things drift about all over the country," he observed. "Tumbleweeds and such. They go rollin' along mighty gay till they bump into a wire fence somewheres."

"It's sure a wonder to me your boss

lets you stray this far off," said Cross, with sarcasm. "He needs a man to look after him the worst way. He don't seem to have no sand. I met up with him along our ditch a while back, and I told him to hike. You bet he did. Only that he'd a girl with him I'd have run him clean back to his reservation."

"You want to get a movin'-picture layout," McHale suggested. "That'd make a right good show—you runnin' Casey. You used to work for one of them outfits, didn't you?"

"No. What makes you think I did?"

"Your face looked sorter familiar to me," McHale replied. "Studyin' on it, it seemed like I'd seen it in one of them picture shows down in Cheyenne. Right good show, too. It showed a bunch of boys after a hoss thief. He got away."

"Haw-haw!" laughed one of the regulars, and suddenly froze to silence. Billy, behind the bar, stood as if petrified, towel in hand. Cross' face, flushed with liquor, blackened in a ferocious scowl.

"You ———!" he roared.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mean?" asked McHale innocently.

"Why, I was tellin' you about a show I seen. What's wrong with that?"

"You called me a horse thief!" cried Cross.

"Who? Me?" said McHale. "Why, no, Mr. Cross, you ain't no hoss thief. I know different. If anybody says you are, you just send him right along to me. No, sir; I know you ain't. There's two good reasons against it."

Cross glared at him, his fingers beginning to twitch.

"Let's hear them," he said. "If they ain't good you go out of that door feet first."

"They're plumb good—best you ever heard," McHale affirmed. "Now, listen. Here's how I know you ain't no hoss thief: For one thing, you got too much mouth; and for another you ain't got the nerve!"

Out of the dead silence came Shiller's voice from the door:

"I'll fill the first man that makes a move plumb full of buckshot. If there's any shootin' in here, I'm doin' it my-

self." He held a pump gun at his shoulder, the muzzle dominating the group. "You, Tom," he continued, "you said you wouldn't make trouble."

"Am I makin' it?" asked McHale.

"Are you makin' it?" Shiller repeated. "Oh, no, you ain't. You're a gentle, meek-and-mild pilgrim, you are. I ain't goin' to hold this gun all day, neither. You better hit the high spots. I'll give you time to get on your cayuse and drift. At the end of two minutes this man goes out of that door, and I ain't responsible for what happens. I'm sure sorry, Tom, to treat you like this, but I got my house to consider."

"That's all right, Bob," said McHale. "Looks like you hold the ace. I'll step. Far's I'm concerned you needn't keep them gents two minutes nor one." He turned to the door.

"I'm lookin' for you, McHale," said Cross.

"Come a-runnin'," said McHale. "Bring your friends."

He walked into the middle of the road, turned, and waited. His action attracted little attention. Coldstream was indoors, somnolent with the afternoon heat. Across the street the proprietor of the general store commented lazily to a friend:

"What's Tom McHale doin'?"

"Some fool joke. He's full of them. I reckon he wants us to ask him."

McHale called to them: "Boys, if I was you I'd move out of line of me and Bob's door."

"What did I tell you?" the wise one commented. "You bet I don't bite——"

Out of the door of Shiller's surged Cross, gun in hand. Uncertain where to find McHale, he glared about. Then, as he saw him standing in the middle of the road, the weapon seemed to leap to a level. Simultaneously McHale shot from the hip.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Pale-pink flashes stabbed the afternoon light. Coldstream echoed to the fusillade. Its inhabitants ran to doors and windows, streaming into the streets. One of the store windows suddenly starred. Long lines, like cracks in thin ice, appeared in it, radiating from a

common center. The proprietor and his friend, electrified, ducked and sprang for shelter. A woman screamed in fright.

Suddenly Cross staggered, turning halfway around. The deadly rage in his face changed to blank wonder. His pistol arm sagged. Then he collapsed gently, not as a tree falls, but as an overweighted sapling bends, swaying backward until, overbalanced, he thudded limply on the ground.

McHale, half crouched like a fighting animal awaiting an attack, peered with burning eyes over the hot muzzle of his gun at the prostrate figure. Swiftly he swung out the cylinder of the weapon, ejected the empty shells, refilled the chambers, and snapped it shut. Shiller's door opened. McHale covered it instantly, but it was Shiller himself.

"So you done it, did you?" he said.

"Sure," said McHale. "He comes a-shootin', and I gets him. Likewise I gets them two tillikums of his if they want it that way."

"Billy's keepin' them quiet with the pump gun," Shiller informed him. "You better get out o' town. I'll clean up your mess, darn you! Git quick. Them fellers expects some more in."

McHale nodded. "I ain't organized to stand off a whole posse with one gun. So long, Bob. I'm plumb sorry I mixed you into this. They won't like you much now."

"They don't need to," said Shiller. "Want any money? Want another gun? I got a handy little three-ought-three carbine."

"No. I'll get my own outfit. I may have to lie out for a spell. Well, I'll be movin'."

He mounted swiftly. Men crowding up to the scene of the affray stopped suddenly. Few of them had seen the like before. They shrank back, awed, from the killer. He rode down the street, gun in hand, casting swift glances right and left, ready for any attempt to stop him. There was none. He vanished in the swells of brown grasses, riding at an easy lope, as unhurried as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Tom McHale reached Chakchak, stabled his horse, made a hasty toilet, and attacked a belated supper. While he was eating with hearty appetite Casey and Wade strolled in.

"Did that freight come?" asked Casey.

"Nope," said McHale. "I got a tracer started after her."

"Anything doing in town?"

"Why, I reckon there was a *leetle* excitement there for a few minutes," said McHale. "Sort of an argument in front of Bob Shiller's."

Casey, from his knowledge of McHale, came to attention at once. "Well?" he asked abruptly.

"Well, it was me and this here Cross," McHale explained. "I downed him."

"In the argument?" laughed Wade, who did not comprehend. But Casey asked quickly: "Gun?"

McHale nodded.

"You did! How'd it happen? Is he dead?"

"I miss once, but three times I'm pretty near center," McHale replied. "Course, I didn't wait to hold no inquest, but if he ain't forded Jordan's tide by now he's plumb lucky; also tough. Only thing makes me doubt it is the way he goes down. He don't come ahead on his face the way a man does when he's plugged for keeps; but he sorter sags backward, so he may have a chance. Still, I reckon she's a slim one."

Casey got the full story with half a dozen brief questions.

"Clear case of self-defense, isn't it, Wade?"

"Looks that way, if the evidence corroborates what he says," the lawyer replied. "Are you sure he shot first, Tom?"

"Better put it he meant to shoot first," McHale responded. "Naturally, I ain't standin' round waitin' for no sightin' shots. It comes close to an even break."

"That's good enough," Wade declared. "If his actions left no doubt of

his hostile purpose in your mind you were justified in protecting yourself."

"They sure didn't," said McHale. "He's out to down me, and I know it. There ain't no Alphonse and Gaston stuff when he comes boilin' out, pullin' his gun. I just sail in to get action while I got the chance."

"Exactly," said Wade. "Well, Tom, you'll be arrested, of course. If Cross isn't dead, likely you can get bail. If he is, I'm afraid you'll have to remain in custody till the trial. I'll defend you myself, if you'll let me. Or maybe it would be better to get a man whose practice is more on the criminal side. I'll get the best there is for you."

"I'm obliged," said McHale. "I'll stand a trial all right, but I ain't figurin' on bein' arrested for a while."

"Nonsense!" said Wade. "You don't mean to resist arrest? That's foolish."

"Oh, I dunno," said McHale. "Depends on how you look at it. I ain't goin' to resist to speak of; I'm just lyin' low for a spell. I reckon I'll pack old Baldy with a little outfit, Casey. 'Bout two days from now you'll find him out by Sunk Springs if you ride that way."

"I don't get the idea."

"It's this way," McHale explained. "This Cross is one of a bad bunch. They'll be out for my scalp. They don't want no law in this. I been hearin' 'bout Cross and this old-timer, Dade. They're great tillikums, and Dade is the old he-coon of the bunch. I ain't takin' a chance on some little, tin-starred deputy standin' them off. Furthermore, I figure it ain't unlikely they'll come after me some time to-night. If it was just you and me, Casey, we could stand the hand, and whatever hangin' there was would come off in the smoke. But with women on the place it wouldn't be right. So I'll just point out for a little campin' spot somewheres, and save everybody trouble. If any of these here sheriffs or deputies gets nosin' around, you tell 'em how it is. I'll come in when the signs is right, and not before. Tell them not to go huntin' me, neither, but to go ahead and get everything set for a proper trial. I'll send word when I'll be in."

Wade chuckled. "They can't arrange a trial without somebody to try, Tom."

"They'll have to make a stagger at it, or wait," McHale responded seriously.

It was dusk when he headed westward, old Baldy, lightly packed, trotting meekly at the tail of his saddle horse.

Casey, coming back from a final word with him, met Clyde strolling toward the young orchard. He fell into step.

"Nice evening."

She regarded him quizzically. "I won't ask a single question. You needn't be afraid."

"Did you think I meant to head off your natural curiosity? Not a bit of it. You want to know where Tom is going at this time of night, and why?"

"Of course I do. But I won't ask."

"You may just as well know as later."

He told her what had happened, omitting to mention McHale's real reason for leaving the ranch. Even in the darkness he could see the trouble in her eyes.

"You really mean it?" she questioned.

"You mean that he has killed a man?"

"Either that or shot him up pretty badly."

"I can scarcely believe it. I like McHale; he's droll, humorous, so cheerful, so easy-going. I can't think of him as a murderer."

"Nonsense!" said Casey. "No murder about it. It was a fair gun fight—an even break. This fellow came at Tom, shooting. He had to protect himself."

"He could have avoided it. He had time to get on his horse and ride away. But he waited."

"He did right," said Casey. "This man would have shot him on sight. It was best to settle it then and there."

"That may be so," she admitted, "but life is a sacred thing to me."

"No doubt Tom considered his own life tolerably sacred," he responded. "As an abstract proposition life may be sacred. Practically it's about the cheapest thing on earth. It persists and repeats and increases in spite of war, pestilence, and famine. The principal value of the individual life is its service to

other life. Cross wasn't much good. That old Holstein over there in the corral, with her long and honorable record of milk production and thoroughbred calves is of more real benefit to the world. You see, it was Tom or Cross. One had to go. I'm mighty glad it was Cross."

"Oh, if you put it that way——"

"That's the way to put it. Of course, we aren't sure that he's more than shot up a little. Still, knowing what Tom can do with a gun, I'm inclined to think that Cross is all same good Indian."

For some moments they walked in silence. It was rapidly becoming dark. A heavy bank of cloud, blue-black in the waning light, was slowly climbing into the northwestern sky, partially obscuring the last tints of the sunset. The wind had ceased. The air was hot, oppressive, laden with the scents of dry earth. Sounds carried far in the stillness. The stamp of a horse in a stall, the low, throaty notes of a cow nuzzling her calf, the far-off evening wail of a coyote—all seemed strangely near at hand, borne by some telephonic quality in the atmosphere.

"How still it is!" said Clyde. "One can almost feel the darkness descending."

"Electrical storm coming, I fancy. No such luck as rain."

"I don't suppose it affects you," she remarked, "but out here when night comes I feel lonely. And yet that's scarcely the right word. It's more a sense of apprehension, a realization of my own unimportance. The country is so vast—so empty—that I feel dwarfed by it. I believe I'm afraid of the big, lonely land when the darkness lies on it. Of course, you'll laugh at me."

"No," he assured her. "I know the feeling very well. I've had it myself, not here, but up where the rivers run into the Polar Sea. The vastness oppressed. I wanted the company of men and to see the things man had made. I was awed by the world lying just as it came from the hand of God. The wilderness seemed to press in on me. That's what drives men mad sometimes. It isn't the solitude or the lone-

liness exactly. It's the constant pressure of forces that can be felt, but not described."

"I think I understand."

"The ordinary person wouldn't. There are no words to express some things."

"I'm glad of it; I don't want the things I feel the most cheapened by words."

"Something in that," he agreed. "Words are poor things when one really *feels*. Providence seems to have arranged that we should be more or less tongue-tied when we feel the most."

"Is that the case?"

"I think so—with men, at any rate. It's especially so with most of us in affairs of love and death."

"But some men make love very well, you know," she smiled.

"I defer to your experience," he laughed back.

"Oh, my experience!" She made a wry face. "And what do you know of my experience?"

"Less than nothing. But from some slight observation of my fellow men I am aware that a very pretty and wealthy girl is in a position to collect experience of that kind faster than she can catalogue it."

"Perhaps she doesn't want to do either."

"Referring further to my fellow man, I beg to say that her wishes cut very little ice. She will get the experience whether she wants it or not."

"Accurate observer! Are you trying to flatter me?"

"As how?"

"Do you think me pretty?"

"Even in the darkness——"

"Be serious. Do you?"

"Why, of course I do. I never saw a prettier girl in my life."

"Cross your heart?"

"Honest Injun—wish I may die!"

"Oh, well," said Clyde, "that's something. That's satisfactory. I'm glad to extract something of a complimentary nature at last. You were far better when I met you at the Wades. You did pay me a compliment, and you asked me for a rose. Please, sir, *do* you

remember asking a poor girl for a rose?"

"I have it still."

"Truly?" A little throb of pleasure shot through her, and crept into her voice. "And you never told me!"

"I was to keep it as security. That was the bargain."

"But how much nicer it would be to say that you kept it because I gave it to you. Are you aware that I made an exception in your favor by doing so?"

"I thought so at the time," said Casey. "I expected a refusal. However, I took a chance."

"And won. Are you sure that you have the rose still? And where among your treasures do you keep it?"

He hesitated.

"You don't know where it is! That's just like a man. For shame!"

"You're wrong," Casey said quietly. "I keep it with some little things that belonged to my mother."

She put out her hand impulsively. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "I—I beg your pardon!"

His strong fingers closed on hers. She did not withdraw her hand. He leaned forward to look into her upraised eyes in the growing darkness.

"That seemed the proper place to keep it. I value your friendship very much—too much to presume on it. We are at opposite ends of the world—I'm quite aware of that. When this little holiday of yours is over you'll go back to your everyday life and surroundings, and I don't want you to take with you one regret or unpleasant memory."

"I don't know what I shall take," she replied gravely. "But I'm not at all sure that I shall go back."

"I don't understand."

"Suppose," she said, "suppose that you were a moderately rich man, in good health, young, without business or profession, without any special talent; and that your friends—your social circle—were very much like yourself. Suppose that your life was spent in clubs, country houses, travel—that you had nothing on earth to do but amuse yourself, nothing to look forward to

but repetitions of the same amusement. What would become of you?"

"To be perfectly truthful," he replied, "I should probably go to the devil."

"The correct answer," said Clyde gravely. "I am going to the devil. Oh, I'm strictly conventional. I mean that I'm stagnating utterly—mentally, morally, and physically. I'm degenerating. My life is a feminine replica of the one I suggested to you. I'm wearied to death of it—of killing time aimlessly, of playing at literature, at charity, at uplifting people who don't want to be uplifted. And there's nothing different ahead. Must I play at living until I die?"

"But you will marry," he predicted. "You will meet the right man. That will make a difference."

"Perhaps I have met him."

"Then I wish you great happiness."

"And perhaps he doesn't care for me—in that way."

"The right man would. You're not hard to fall in love with, Clyde."

"Am I not—Casey?" She smiled up at him through the dark, a little tremor in her voice. She felt his fingers tighten on hers like bands of steel, crushing them together, and she was conscious of a strange joy in the pain of it.

"You know you are not!" he said tensely. "I could——" He broke off abruptly.

"Then why don't you?" she murmured softly.

"Why not?" he exclaimed. "I'd look pretty, wouldn't I, a busted land speculator, falling in love with you! I've some sense of the fitness of things. But when you look at me like that——"

He stooped swiftly and kissed her, drawing her to him almost fiercely. "Oh, girl!" he said, "why did you tempt me? I've forgotten what was due you as my guest. I've forgotten all that I've been remembering so carefully for weeks. Now it's over. Some day the right man will tell you how he loves you."

"I am waiting," she whispered, "for the 'right man' to tell me now!"

"What?" he exclaimed incredulously, "you don't mean——"

"But I do mean," she replied. "Oh, Casey, boy, didn't you know? Couldn't you guess? Must I do all the love-making myself?"

The answer to this question was in the nature of an unqualified negative, and extended over half an hour. But Casey retained many of his scruples. He could not, he insisted, live on her money. If he went broke, as seemed likely, he must have time to get a fresh stake. Clyde waived this point, having some faith in Jim Hess. Of this, however, she said nothing to him.

"We had better go," she said at last. "It is quite dark. Kitty will wonder where we are."

"Shall you tell her? Better."

"Not to-night, anyway. She—you see——"

"She'd jolly you, you mean. Of course. But we may as well have it over."

"Not to-night," Clyde repeated. She was uncomfortably conscious of her confidences to Kitty Wade, made without much thought.

They approached the house from the rear, passing by the kitchen, whence issued the sound of voices.

"Let's take a peep at Feng's company?" Casey suggested.

The kitchen was built apart from the house, but attached to it by a covered way. Standing in the outer darkness, they could look in through the open window without risk of being seen, and were close enough to overhear every word.

Feng was resting from the labors of the day, sitting smoking on the kitchen table. Facing him, a pipe between his wrinkled lips, sat old Simon. His face was expressionless, but his eyes, black, watchful, were curiously alert.

"What foh you come, Injun?" Feng demanded. "Wantee glub? Injun all time *hiyu* eat, all same hobo tlamp. S'pose you hungly me catch some *muckamuck*. Catch piecee bleed, catch col' loast beef—loast *moosmoos*!"

"You catchum," Simon agreed. "Casey—where him stop?"

"Casey!" Feng's features expanded in a grin. "Him stop along gal—*tenas klootchman*, you savvy. Go walkee along gal. P'laps, bimeby, two, tlee hou', him come back."

Simon grunted gutturally. "Ya-as," he drawled.

"*Hiyu* lich gal," Feng proceeded. "Have *hiyu* dolla'. You bet. She one *hiyu* dam' plitty gal, savvy?"

"Hush!" Clyde whispered, as Casey would have put an end to this risky eavesdropping. "I didn't think that Feng had such good taste. I'm getting compliments from everybody to-night. I'm really flattered. I want to hear some more."

"Better not," he advised apprehensively.

"But I want to."

"Ya-as," Simon drawled again. "*Hyas kloshe tenas klootchman*—ah-ha. What name you callum?"

"Missee Clyde Bullaby," Feng replied, making a manful attempt at Clyde's surname, which was quite beyond his lingual attainments.

"Clyde!" Simon repeated, in accents of incredulity. "Me savvy 'Clyde.' Him big man-horse—*hyas skookum* man—horse. Him *mamook* plow, *mamook* haul wagon!"

"You *hyas* damfool Injun!" said his host politely. "Missee Clyde Chlistian gal's name, catchum in Chlistian Bible; all same Swede Annie, all same Spokane Sue, all same Po'tland Lily."

Simon digested this information with preternatural gravity. "Ya-as," said he. "Casey like Clyde?"

"Clyde likee Casey," Feng responded knowingly. "Casey call um woman fliend. Lats! All same big 'Melican bluff, makee me sick. Bimeby some time she makee mally him. Bimeby baby stop. Then me quit. Me go back to China."

The prophet's last words blurred in Clyde's ringing ears. The friendly darkness hid her flaming cheeks. Why, oh why, had she listened? She was not even shocked by Casey's muttered curse. She felt his hand on her arm, drawing her gently back into the deeper shadows. In silence she followed.

"I'll fire that infernal yellow scoundrel to-morrow," he growled.

"No, no, it was my own fault," she declared. "Absolutely and entirely my own. I—I—— Oh, don't *look* at me, please!"

"I won't," he promised, but his voice shook slightly.

"You're laughing!" she accused him tragically.

"Indeed I'm not," he denied; but with the words came an involuntary sound strongly resembling a chuckle.

"Shame!" she cried.

"Yes, yes!" he gasped. "I know it. It's too bad. Ha-ha! I really beg your pardon. I—— Oh, good Lord!"

But Clyde gathered up her skirts and fled, whirling up the veranda steps and into the house like a small cyclone, never pausing until a locked door lay between her and a ribald, unfeeling world.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was after midnight when Clyde awoke. She passed from slumber to wakefulness instantly, without the usual intervening stages of drowsiness.

Outside a gale was blowing, and volleys of rain pattered like spent shot on windows and roof. Thunder rumbled ceaselessly. A vivid flash rent the outer darkness, illuminating the room, and the succeeding crack shook the house. It was a storm, rare in the dry belt, of which there were not more than one or two in the year. For Casey's sake she hoped that there would be no hail with it. Better continued drought than a ruinous bombardment of frozen pellets from the heavens which would beat the crops to the ground, utterly destroying them.

As she lay listening she seemed to hear sounds not of the storm, as of some one moving on the veranda. Then came a loud, insistent knocking. She heard the door of Wade's room open, and a long crack of light beneath her own showed that he had lit a lamp.

"Hello! Who's there?" he asked.

The reply was indistinguishable. A violent blow on the door followed it.

She sprang out of bed, threw on a dressing gown, thrust her feet into slippers, opened her door, and peered out.

A single hand lamp on the table showed Wade, clad in pajamas and slippers, standing before the door. His attitude expressed uncertainty. He glanced back and saw Clyde.

"What is it?" she asked. "Who is there?"

"I don't know," he replied. "There are men out there. They want me to open the door. Do you know where there's a gun handy? I haven't——"

The impact of a heavy body cut him short. The lock gave way, and the door swung inward. Wade sprang back and caught up a chair. Framed in the door, silhouetted against the outer blackness, appeared a man. His hat was pulled low over his eyes. A handkerchief cut with eyeholes concealed his face. His right hand held a six-shooter, with which he covered Wade. Back of him, pressing forward, were other armed men.

"Put that chair down!" he ordered. "Nobody's goin' to hurt you."

"Glad to hear it!" snapped Wade, who was the fortunate owner of unlimited sand. "What do you mean by breaking into a house in the middle of the night and frightening women? If you want money I've got about fifty dollars, and that's all. You're welcome to it if you'll clear out."

"Keep it," the intruder returned contemptuously. He stepped into the room, followed by four others. "I guess your name is Wade. We don't want you. We want McHale."

"Well, I haven't got him," said Wade.

"Where is he?"

"What do you want with him?"

"That's none of your business."

"All right. If that's so it's none of my business where he is."

"You'd better make it your business," said the other suggestively.

"Well, I won't," Wade retorted. "He isn't here, and that'll have to do you."

"On general principles it don't do to believe a lawyer. Where's Dunne?"

"He isn't here, either."

"I reckon we'll make sure of that."

He took a step in the direction of Clyde's room. Wade stepped in front of him.

"No, you don't, my friend," said he. "That room belongs to a lady. You keep out of it."

The leader stopped. "Well," he said, "I don't want to scare no women; but all the same I'm goin' to see the inside of every room in this house. S'pose you knock and tell that lady to fix herself up so's she won't mind my takin' a look in. I'm goin' to make mighty sure her name ain't McHale."

Clyde opened the door, and walked into the room. She was surprised to find that she was not in the least frightened. Said she:

"Good evening, gentlemen. Do you think I resemble Mr. McHale?"

"No, ma'am," said the leader; "I don't reckon you favor him much."

Admiration was apparent in his voice. Clyde smiled at him.

"Then perhaps you'll take a look at my room now, and allow me to retire again."

"I don't need to look there, ma'am," the man replied. "I'm awful sorry we troubled you."

"That's the way to talk," said a quiet voice from the door.

The leader whirled instantly to look into the ominous muzzle of a heavy automatic held by Casey Dunne.

"Put that gun down, and your hands up!" snapped Casey. "Quick! No nonsense! I'll kill the first man that tries anything."

The quiet had gone from his voice; it bit like acid. Strange, hard lights danced in his eyes. The hand that held the gun had not a tremor. Clyde, looking at him, saw and recognized in his face the cold deadliness which she had once seen in McHale's.

Without an instant's hesitation the leader put his weapon on the table. "You win once," he observed.

"That's sensible," Casey commented. "Now, perhaps you'll tell me what this means?"

"No objection in the world," the other replied coolly. "We wanted to interview McHale."

"Is that so? Well, Tom isn't here to-night, Mr. Dade. By the way, unless you really like it you needn't wear that transformation scheme across your face. Same remark applies to the other gentlemen. I like to know my visitors."

Dade laughed, removing the handkerchief. "Take a good look. You may see me again."

"Any time you like, Mr. Dade. And what did you want with McHale?"

"Well," Dade answered calmly, "we figured that he'd help us take the stretch out of a new rope."

"Nobody else would do?" queried Casey.

"We wanted him."

"I see. And had our mutual friend, Mr. Cross, anything to do with your desire? By the way, how is Mr. Cross? Or should I say the late Mr. Cross?"

"Not yet," Dade replied. "He's got a chance."

"Then aren't you too previous?"

"McHale laid for him, and plugged him as he came out of Shiller's," Dade declared.

"Cross came out of Shiller's with his gun in his hand to get McHale," said Casey. "McHale was entitled to shoot. It was an even break."

"That's not how I heard it."

"That's what McHale says, and it goes with me."

"It don't go with me," Dade declared. "Me and Cross is partners—has been for years. I'm out to get McHale, and you can send him word. I reckon he ain't here, or he'd be obvious."

"He'd be mighty obvious," Casey agreed. "I may as well tell you, Mr. Dade, that this feud business makes me tired. It's sinful, and, worse than that, it's out of date. You take notice, now, that we won't stand for it. You've pretty well played your string out here, anyway."

Dade stared at him. "I reckon you'll have to talk a little plainer, Dunne."

"Isn't that plain enough? This shooting was square. You let it go as it lies. Otherwise we'll clean up your whole bunch."

Dade laughed. "That's sure plain," he admitted. "I like nerve, and you've

got it a-plenty, but you ain't got me buffaloed at all. You heard what I said. It goes."

"Suit yourself," said Casey. "I'll send McHale word. Anything else I can do for you to-night?"

"Not a thing," Dade replied. "We'll be going—unless you want us to stay. I'm sorry we disturbed the lady, but I sure thought McHale was in here."

"She'll forgive you," said Casey. "That part of it's all right. Better think over what I said. I mean it."

"So do I," said Dade grimly. "You can send McHale word."

As Casey closed the door and set a chair against it in place of the damaged fastenings, Kitty Wade peeped from her room.

"Are the outlaws g-gone?" she asked.

"They have went," her husband replied. "You are saved, m'dear. Your little heart may now palpitate in normal palps."

His wife, looking altogether charming and girlish, emerged.

"Well, I *was* frightened," she admitted. "I'd give worlds to be as brave as Clyde."

Clyde, feeling Casey's eyes upon her, flushed, and gathered her dressing gown closer, conscious for the first time of her attire. "Oh, nonsense, Kitty!" she responded. "I was really shaking in my shoes."

"You didn't show it," Casey commented. "There isn't one girl in a thousand who would have been as cool."

"I agree with you," said Wade. He put his arm around his wife. "Better go back to roost, little girl."

"Not until I hear all about it," said Kitty. "Go and get a bath robe or something, like a good boy. Pajamas are very becoming, and all the best people wear 'em, but——"

"I beg everybody's pardon!" Wade exclaimed in confusion. "I thought I had on my—er—that is, it never struck me that I wasn't clad in orthodox garments." He was back in a moment, swathed in a bath robe. "Now, Casey, tell us how you happened to make that stage entrance?"

"Not much to tell about it," Casey re-

plied. "I had an old Indian bedded down in the hay in the stable, and he saw or heard this outfit riding in, and woke me up. As a matter of fact, the old boy was just outside with a shotgun all the time. We had that much moral support. He came to tell me that this outfit meant to get Tom."

"This McHale business is serious," said Wade.

"Very serious. I don't mean so far as Tom is concerned; he can take care of himself. But you can see that we can't allow these men to bulldoze us. It's McHale now. To-morrow it may be some one else."

"Yes, I see. But what can you do about it? The law——"

"It's outside the law," said Casey. "The law is too slow. We'll make our own law. Hello! What's that?"

He jumped to his feet, gun in hand, as the chair set against the door scraped back from it. Out of the darkness staggered Sheila McCrae.

Water dripped from her old pony hat, and ran in little rivulets from a long, yellow slicker. From head to foot she was spattered with mud. Her face was pale, drawn, and dirt-smeared, and blood oozed slowly from a jagged cut above her left eye. She swayed from side to side as she walked.

Kitty Wade cried out; Clyde rose swiftly in quick sympathy. But Casey was before her.

"Sheila—girl—what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

She stretched out her arms to him gropingly.

"Where's Tom, Casey? They're after him. Maybe they're after you. Father's hurt. Sandy—— I can't talk, Casey. I guess—I'm—all in."

He caught her as she fell forward, lifting her in his arms as easily as if she had been a child, and laid her on a couch.

"No, no," he said, as Clyde would have put cushions beneath her head. "Let her lie flat." He unbuttoned the slicker, and opened her dress halfway from throat to waist, stripping it away with ruthless hand. A bared shoulder and arm showed bruised and discolored.

"She's been in some mix-up—had a fall or something. Wade, get me some whisky and water!" His long fingers closed on her wrist. "She'll be all right in five minutes, unless something's broken. Mrs. Wade, get in here and loosen her corsets. Give her a chance."

Kitty stooped obediently, and straightened up in amazement. "Why—she——"

"Well, how did I know?" snapped Casey. He ran his hand down her side. "No ribs broken; arms all right. Good!"

Sheila's long lashes fluttered against her cheeks, she sighed and opened her eyes.

"Casey," she said, "never mind me. Look out for yourself. Where's Tom? There are men coming to-night. I was afraid——"

"All right, Sheila," he interrupted. "Tom is safe. The men have gone. No trouble at all. Just lie quiet till things steady a little. Have a drink of this."

Clyde brought water, sponge, and towels. She cleansed Sheila's face and hands, and deftly dressed the cut in her forehead.

"You make me feel like a baby," said Sheila. "I never fainted before in my life. I didn't think I could faint. I'm all right now. May I sit up, please?"

"You may lie up, if you like," Casey replied. "Let me put some pillows under you. You've had a bad shake-up, old girl."

"Beaver Boy fell," she explained, "and threw me. I must have struck my head. I don't know how I caught him again. I don't remember very clearly. I had to hang onto the horn sometimes—dizzy, you know. I never had to pull leather before. He was afraid of the lightning, and I wasn't strong enough to handle him afterward. The fall took it out of me. I just had to let him go. He knew it, and acted mean. I'll show him whose horse he is next time."

"You rode on your nerve," said Casey. "Tell us all about it. Tell us about your father and Sandy. You were going to say something when you keeled over."

The girl's keen face clouded. "Oh, heavens! Casey, my head can't be right

yet. I'd clean forgotten my own people. There's been nothing but trouble in bunches all day. The drivers ran away this morning, smashed the rig, threw father out, and broke his leg. This afternoon this man Glass, whom we all took for a harmless nuisance, arrested Sandy."

"What?" Casey exclaimed.

"Yes, he did. Glass is a railway detective. He worked quietly, nosing around the ranches talking to everybody, while the other detective attracted all the attention. Nobody suspected Glass. Who would? Anyway, he and another man arrested Sandy for blowing up the dam."

Casey whistled softly, casting a side glance at Wade.

"Where's Sandy now? Where did they take him?"

Sheila laughed, but there was little mirth in it.

"They didn't take him anywhere, but I don't know where he is. I saw him with the two men down by the stable. I thought they were talking about land. Half an hour afterward he came to the house with his parfleches, and asked me to put him up a couple of weeks' grubstake. He had the men locked up in the harness room, but he didn't tell me how he had done it. He took his pack horse and his blankets and hunting outfit, and pulled out. I didn't know what to do. I didn't tell the folks. The ranch hands know, but they won't let the men out. And then it must have been after ten o'clock when one of our men told me of the shooting. He had heard it from somebody on the road. He said that Cross' friends were talking of lynching McHale, and perhaps you. I didn't believe it at first, but after a while I got nervous. Everybody was asleep, and anyway there was nobody I could ask to go; so I came myself."

"And Tom and I will never forget it, Sheila," said Casey. "I don't know another girl who could have made it after a fall like that in this storm."

"It was perfectly splendid of you!" cried Kitty Wade, with hearty admiration.

Clyde, obeying a sudden impulse,

leaned forward and kissed the bruised forehead. Sheila was unused to such endearments. She had no intimates of her own sex; with the women she was courteously distant, repelling and rather despising them. She had felt Clyde's instinctive hostility, and had returned it. Surprised and touched by her actions, the tears started to her eyes. Clyde put her arms around the slender, pliant waist.

"Come with me, dear, and get some sleep. You're badly shaken up. We'll sleep in, in the morning."

"But I have to go back," Sheila objected. "Nobody knows I've gone. I have to be back by morning. And then there's Beaver Boy! My heavens! I left him standing outside. Oh, I've got to——"

Casey gently pressed her back as she would have risen.

"I'll stable the horse, old girl; and I'll be at Talapus by daylight to tell them where you are. Don't you worry, now, about anything—not even Sandy. If he's gone back to the hills I'll bet he finds Tom. They'll be all right."

"Do you think so, Casey? And will you do that much for me? I'm awfully sore and tired. Every bone and muscle of me aches."

"You poor little girl." He raised her in his arms. "Come on, girls, and put her to bed. I'll carry her in."

CHAPTER XXV.

With the first streaks of dawn Casey and Simon mounted and rode for Talapus. But before they had ridden five hundred yards Casey discovered an extraordinary thing. In his ears sounded a sustained, musical murmur, nothing less than the happy laugh of running water.

"By the Lord Harry!" he ejaculated. "There's water in the ditches."

Simon nodded. "Ya-as. *Hiyu chuck* stop, all same *skookum chuck*," he observed, signifying that there was a full head of it, like a rapid.

The ditches were running to the brim. After the soaking rain of the night the

water was not immediately needed, but it showed that the irrigation company's works no longer controlled the supply. When they reached the river they found a swirling, yellow torrent running yeasty-topped, speckled with *débris*.

"S'pose cloud *kokshut*!" Simon observed.

"Cloudburst, eh!" said Casey. "Looks like it. Then either the company's dam has gone, or it can't take care of the head."

The former supposition seemed the more likely. Somewhere up in the heart of the hills the black storm cloud had broken, and its contents, collected by nameless creeks and gulches, had swooped down on the Coldstream, raising it bank high, booming down to the lower reaches, practically a wall of water, against which only the strongest structures might stand. Temporary ones would go out before it, washed away like a child's sand castle in a Fundy tide.

Ignoring trails, they struck straight across country. The land had been washed clean. Beneath the brown grasses the earth lay dark and moist. A hundred fresh, elusive odors struck the nostrils, called forth from the soil by the rare moisture, a silent token of its latent fertility. On the way there were no houses, no fences, no cleared fields. The land lay in the dawn as empty as when the keels of restless white men first split the Western ocean; and more lifeless, for the great buffalo herds that of old gave the men of the plains and foothills food and raiment were gone forever.

The sun was up when they reached Talapus. Mrs. McCrae had just discovered her daughter's absence; and her husband was cursing the leg that held him helpless. Casey told them the events of the night, and Donald McCrae was proud of his daughter, and but little worried about his son.

"Show me another girl would have ridden in that storm!" he exclaimed. "She's the old stock—the old frontier stock! And Sandy, locking the detective in the harness room!" He chuckled. "Go down and let them out, Casey, and

give them breakfast. A fine pair of children we've got, mother."

"Sandy can take care of himself," said Mrs. McCrae practically. "He always did, since he could walk, and he took his own ways, asking nobody. And Sheila, for a girl, is the same. They take after you, Donald, not me. But now, Casey, Mrs. Wade is at Chakchak, isn't she?"

"Mrs. Wade and Miss Burnaby," Casey replied. "It's all right, Mrs. McCrae."

"Sheila needs no chaperon," said her father.

"Not with Casey," said her mother. "But there's the gossip, Donald, and the dirty tongues. It's not like the old days."

"True enough, maybe," McCrae admitted. And he added, when his wife had left the room: "What have they got hold of to arrest the boy, Casey?"

"I don't know," Casey replied. "But we'll face the music, Donald."

When Casey entered the harness room Glass and another man, a stranger, lay in one corner on a heap of sacks. Sandy had done a most workmanlike job, and he had put a neat finish to it by strapping each man to a stanchion with a pair of driving reins.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Casey.

"Is it?" said Glass sourly. His old hesitating manner had quite vanished.

"Beautiful," Casey replied. "Sun shining, birds singing, crops growing. 'God's in His heaven; all's well with the world.' Like to take a look at it? Or are you too much attached to your present surroundings?"

"You can cut out the funny stuff," said Glass. "I don't ever laugh before breakfast."

"Quite right, too," Casey replied. "Just roll over a little till I get at those knots. There you are, Mr. Glass. Now your friend here. Don't think I know him."

"Jack Pugh, sheriff's officer," said Glass, rising stiffly, with considerable difficulty.

"I'll have him in shape to shake hands in a minute," said Casey, as he worried

at the knots. "And so, Mr. Glass, instead of an innocent landlooker you are a real live, mysterious detective. You don't look the part. Or perhaps you are still disguised."

"I can stand a josh better now," said Glass. "Maybe I'm not such a live proposition as I might be. When two grown men let a kid hogtie them it sort of starts them thinking."

"It sure does," Pugh agreed. He was a saturnine gentleman, with a humorous eye. "I been wantin' to scratch my nose for eight solid hours," he affirmed irrelevantly, rubbing that organ violently with his free hand.

"He's some kid," said Glass. "Where is he?"

"I haven't seen him. He left word where to find you."

"Beat it somewhere, I suppose," Glass commented. "He fooled us up in great style, I'll say that much. At first he acted about the way you'd expect a country kid to act—scared to death. He wanted to change his overalls for pants before we took him anywhere. Said they were hanging up in here. We fell for it. We came in, and there was a pair of pants hanging on a nail. He walked over to them, and the next thing we knew he had a gun on us. I hope I know when a man means business—and he did. He had half a notion to shoot anyway."

"That's right," Pugh confirmed. "He's one of them kids that makes gunmen. No bluff. I know the kind."

"So when he told me to tie Pugh I did it," Glass continued. "Then he dropped a loop over me, and that's all there is to tell. The joke's on us just now."

"So it is," said Casey. "Whatever made you think that kid had anything to do with blowing up the dam?"

"Hadn't he?"

Casey smiled genially. "Why, how should I know, Mr. Glass? I was just asking what you were going on."

"I'm not showing my hand. I don't say the kid did it alone."

"And so you thought you'd round him up and sweat some information out of him. That was it, wasn't it?"

"You're quite a guesser and you show a whole lot of interest in the answer," retorted Glass. "Keep on guessing."

"I don't need to. Come up to the house and have breakfast. And for Heaven's sake don't say anything to frighten the kid's mother."

"What do you take us for?" said Glass. "We'll treat the whole thing as a joke—to her."

Casey breakfasted with them, and after they had gone sought Simon. The old Indian, full to repletion, was squatting on the kitchen steps, smoking and blinking sleepily.

"No see um Sandy," he observed. "Where him stop?"

"No more Sandy stop this *illahee*," Casey replied. "Sandy *klatawa kopa* stone *illahee*, all same Tom." Meaning that Sandy had gone in the direction of the hills, as had McHale.

"Why him *klatawa*?" Simon asked.

Casey explained, and Simon listened gravely. His receptiveness was enormous. Information dropped into him as into a bottomless pit, vanishing without splash.

"Sandy *hyas* young fool," he commented. "Me tell him *mamook huyhuy* moccasin. S'pose moccasin stop, *ikt* man findum, then *heltopay*. Polisman *mamook* catchum, put um in *skookum* house, *maybeso* hang um *kopa* neck."

"What are you talking about, anyway?" Casey demanded. And Simon told him of the track of the patched moccasin and of his warning to Sandy.

Casey immediately fitted things together. He knew that Sandy's right moccasin was almost invariably worn through at the toe before the left. He had seen him patching them, and because they wore through at the same place the patches were of nearly the same shape. So that if Glass had found a patched moccasin it was not necessarily the one which had made the track. But that would make little difference. Either Farwell or his assistant must have told Glass about this track. If he had found a pair of Sandy's moccasins to correspond with the footprint he had come very near getting Sandy with the goods. But Farwell or somebody must

have directed Glass' suspicions to Sandy.

However that was, Sandy had made a clean get-away into a region where he would be hard to catch. He was familiar with the trails, the passes, the little basins, and pockets nestling in the hills. He was well provisioned and well armed. And the last caused Casey some uneasiness, for having once resisted arrest Sandy would be very apt to do so again.

"Simon," he said, "I want you to take papah letter to Tom."

"Where Tom stop?" Simon asked naturally enough.

"Maybe at Sunk Springs," Casey replied. "Maybe not. You try Sunk Springs. S'pose no Tom stop there, you *nanitch* around till you find him."

"All right," said Simon. "Me *nanitch*, me find Tom." He considered a moment. "*Halo* grubstop me?"

"I'll tell them to grubstake you here," Casey reassured him. "I'll pay you, too, of course."

"You my *tillikum*," said Simon, with great dignity. "Tom my *tillikum*. Good! Me like you. How much you pay?"

"Two dollars a day," said Casey promptly.

Simon looked grieved and pained. "You my *tillikum*," he repeated. "S'pose my *tillikum* work for me, me pay him five dolla'."

But Casey was unmoved by this touching appeal to friendship. "I'll remember that if I ever work for you," he replied. "Two dollars and grub is plenty. You Siwashes are spoiled by people who don't know any better than to pay what you ask. That's all you'll get from me. Your time's worth nothing, and your cayuses rustle for themselves."

And Simon accepted this ultimatum with resignation.

"All right," said he. "You my *tillikum*; Tom my *tillikum*. S'pose you catch *hiyu* grubstake."

Having arranged for a message to McHale, it occurred to Casey that he should see whether the sudden rise of the river had swept the company's tem-

porary dam. Accordingly he rode thither.

The storm had entirely passed, and the sun shone brightly. Great, white, billowy, fair-weather clouds rolled up in open order before the fresh west wind, and the shadows of them trailed across the face of the earth, moving swiftly, sharply defined, sweeping patches of shade against the green and gold of a clean-washed, sunny summer world. Off to the westward, where the ranges thrust gaunt, gray peaks against the sky line, the light shimmered against patches of white, the remnants of the last winter's snows. Far away, just to be discerned through a notch in the first range, was a vivid point of emerald or jade, the living green of a glacier.

It was a day when it was good to be alive, and Casey Dunne, hard, clean, in the full power of his manhood, the fresh west wind in his face, and a strong, willing horse beneath him, rejoiced in it.

As he rode his thoughts reverted to Clyde Burnaby. Indeed, she had never, since the preceding night, been entirely absent from them; but because his training had been to do one thing at a time, and think of what he was doing to the exclusion of all else, he had unconsciously pigeonholed her in the back of his mind. Now she emerged.

"Shiner, m'son," he apostrophized his horse, "if things break right you're going to have a missus. What d'ye think of that, hey, you yellow-hided old scoundrel? And, by the Great Tyee! you'll eat apples and sugar out of her hand, and if you so much as lay back your ears at her I'll flail your sinful heart out with a neck yoke. D'ye get that, you buzzard-head?"

Shiner in full stride made a swift grab for his rider's left leg, and his rider with equal swiftness kicked him joyously in the nose.

"You would, hey! Nice congratulations, you old man-eater. I'll make a lady's horse of you if you don't behave; I sure will. And we'll build a decent house and break two thousand acres, and keep every foot of it as fine and

clean as a seed bed, and have it all under ditch, the show place of the whole dry belt. You bet we will. We won't sell an acre. Fancy prices won't tempt us. We'll keep the whole shootin' match till we cash in." His mood changed.

"Cash in! It's funny to think of that, old horse, isn't it? And yet ten years from now you'll be no good, and thirty years from now I'll be near the end of the deal. And Clyde! Why, Shiner, we can't think of her as an old lady, can we? With her smooth cheeks a little withered and the suppleness gone from her body, and her eyes dim and her glorious hair white. Lord, horse, we mustn't think of it! She'll always be the same dear Clyde to us, won't she? 'Sufficient unto the day,' my equine trial and friend. Others will come after us, and there will be evil-tempered buckskins loping this foothill country and maybe a Casey Dunne cursing them when you and I are ranging the happy hunting grounds!"

Out of the sunlit distances a horse and rider appeared, rapidly approaching. It was Farwell, and, recognizing Dunne, he pulled up.

"In case you don't know it," he said, without preliminary or greeting, "I'll tell you that our dam went out with the flood. You didn't need to use dynamite this time."

"Providence!" Casey suggested

Farwell's comment consisted of but one word, which, unless by contrast, is not usually associated with providential happenings.

"Call it that if you like," he growled. "We'll get the men responsible for it one of these days."

"You made a beginning with young McCrae," Casey reminded him.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you know that Glass tried to arrest him?"

"What?" cried Farwell.

His surprise was too genuine to be feigned. Thereupon Casey told him what had occurred in the last few hours both at Talapus and Chakchak.

Farwell listened, biting his lips and

frowning. And his first words were an inquiry as to Sheila.

"Miss McCrae rode through that storm last night!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord! Is she badly hurt?"

"Only shaken up, I think."

"Thank God for that," said Farwell, with evident sincerity. He hesitated for a moment. "See here, Dunne, do you mind if I ask you an impertinent question?"

"Fire away."

"Are you going to marry her?"

"Certainly not. What put that notion in your head?"

"It got there. You were pretty thick. And if she rode there in that storm—unless she thought a lot of you——"

"I'm mighty proud of it. We're good friends—like brother and sister. No more. She has the best brand of clean-strain pluck of any girl I know."

"So she has," Farwell agreed. "She's a girl in a million. She's——" He stopped, reddening.

"By George, Farwell," said Casey, "is it that way with you?"

"She doesn't care a tinker's dam for me," said Farwell bluntly. "That's not saying what I think of her. I'm no ladies' man—don't pretend to be. Let that go. I suppose I'll be blamed for young McCrae's arrest. Well, I didn't know a thing about it. I've tried to give the family a good deal—better than the rest of you, anyway. I don't like the boy, and he doesn't like me. Pulled a gun on me once—well, never mind that. Here, you've been straight with me, and I'll tell you: When the dam was blown up we found the track of a patched moccasin in soft earth. Keeler took an impression of it, or made a cast or something—I don't know just what, but I do know that he photographed it. Since then I've noticed young McCrae's foot, and I believe he made the track, though it didn't strike me at the time. That was about the only clew we found. Mind you,

Dunne, I believe you were in it yourself, but I haven't a thing to go on. If Glass has found a patched moccasin of McCrae's he's pretty near got him to rights. I don't know what he's got, though. About Cross and McHale, I don't care a curse which shot the other. These men—Cross, Dade, Lewis, and some more—were protecting our property. And that's all."

"Not quite all. They blew up our dams."

"Just as man to man," said Farwell, "let me ask you if you expected to run a dynamite monopoly?"

"I'm not kicking," said Casey. "I'm merely stating facts. I can take my medicine."

"You're a good deal of a man," Farwell acknowledged grudgingly. "I hate a squealer. Anyway, it was no part of their job to break into your house. See here, Dunne, the last five minutes has got us better acquainted than the last two months. I'll fire these fellows tomorrow if you'll promise me that our ditches won't be interfered with again."

"As long as we have water there will be no trouble," said Casey. "I'll promise nothing more."

"That's good for some weeks, anyway," Farwell predicted. "I guess we'll have to fight it out in the end. Still, I'm glad to have had this talk. I like you better than I did. And I can tell you there was lots of room for it—is yet, for that matter. Good-by."

Without waiting for a reply, he dug a heel into his horse and swept on. Casey watched him go, with a thoughtful smile.

"Odd devil!" he muttered. "Queer combination. I don't like him, but—well, he's a fighter, and I believe he's straight. To think of him being fond of Sheila! I wonder if he has a chance there? She never mentions him now. H'm!" Finding no answer to the question, he wheeled Shiner and headed for home.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The continuation of this story will appear in the first January POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, December 7th.

The Sand of Mr. Fitzmaurice

By George Van Schaick

In which you will hear of a certain polite gentleman who was shanghaied and who took an original method to browbeat his captors. Mr. Fitzmaurice didn't object to the work on board ship—he felt that the exercise would do him good—but to one of his habit of mind the surroundings lacked refinement and naturally became obnoxious

THE death of Captain Smith at sea might have been hailed with joy by his crew had they not been aware that they were falling from the frying pan into the fire. Pedro Gomez, his first mate, six feet high and very broad, assumed command and enforced his orders with iron fists and Yankee sea talk combining a slight Portuguese accent with faintly negroid inflections.

Within a month he lost a lot of top-hammer in a frightful blow, and, later on, coming across a nice pod of whales, had two boats stove into matchwood, and thereafter fed in idleness three wounded men. Two others had lost the number of their mess, and the sharks had presumably taken care of them.

Landing at Vau-Vau he suffered the penalty of ill repute. Kanaka whalers fought shy of his ship. The natives smiled sweetly, piled coconuts and oranges and bananas on his deck, and always came in sufficient numbers to make kidnaping unsafe.

Remembering the doctrine of half a loaf, and being painfully short-handed, he chanced to meet, ashore, a slim individual who called himself Mr. Courtney Fitzmaurice, who was beach combing, clad in picturesque rags. Some square gin and a polite invitation fetched this gentleman aboard, in a rather sleepy condition, and when he awoke in the fo'c's'le and strolled out on deck, required knocking down but two or three times before he appeared reconciled to his fate.

When they struck fish he managed to avoid catching a crab, and didn't act as if he were scared to death. With becoming resignation he turned for hours the wheel handle of the mincing machine, and, below decks, awed the other hands by the choiceness of his language.

"My dear William," he told one of them, as the two were picking tarred rope into oakum, "I have no occasion for repining save the natural reluctance of a gentleman to obey the discourteous behests of a colored person. My lungs, once considered as slightly impaired, may benefit from a short stay at sea, and the unwonted exercise may be good for me. In fact, I am becoming quite muscular."

He lifted an arm about as thick as a broom handle, flexed it until his biceps rose to the size of a Cape Cod oyster, and looked at the horizon with the appreciation of a nature lover, whereat Squinty Bill stared at him and snorted mildly.

"I calls him a 'armless idjit," he confided that afternoon to a friend who shared with him the accommodation of the crow's nest at a dizzy height up the mainmast head. "Asked me if there wuz a chanst for a toothbrush from the slop chest, he did, an' started explainin' about takin' the sun wit' the hog yoke till me head wuz a flurryin'. Says tobacco makes him sick, he does! He's fitten for a sailorman 'bout as much as a schoolmarm."

"He's got a keen eye all right," replied the other, who suddenly stared

hard, and, with a voice like a foghorn, bawled out: "A-a-a-a-h! Thar she blo-o-o-ows," whereupon Captain Gomez yelled aloft for the direction, shrieked to the men to lay down, howled for boats to get ready, and sprang up the ratlines with amazing agility.

It was a hundred-barrel bull and gave them a long fight. Yet they finally got him alongside after using two bomb lances and three boats' supplies of line with all the drags they could fasten on.

Gomez was pleased. It was the first bit of fishing under his command that had resulted in no loss. After the last tun of oil was stowed below and the men could again breathe without gasping, Mr. Fitzmaurice strolled aft, to the unspeakable amazement of the skipper and a bunch of mates and harpooners. When he failed to stop at the water butt for a drink, the only possible excuse for a foremast hand's coming aft, there was an instant of expectant silence, during which, owing to unusual good humor, the captain forbore to knock him down. Finally, with language picturesquely adorned, he was ordered back.

Fitzmaurice stood still, with a bland and gentle expression.

"But you haven't heard what I was going to say," he finally ventured. "I'd like to go back to Vau-Vau now. My hands are all blistered. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but to one of my habit of mind the surroundings lack refinement, and, I may say, are becoming obnoxious. Besides, I have no other pants; they refuse to give me any from the slop chest, and I really abominate trousers soaked in oil."

Gomez gasped, strode up and towered for a moment over the little chap. Grasping him by his shirt collar and the seat of the garment mentioned, he swung him and sent him sprawling on the deck many feet away. The man picked himself up, and investigated his wardrobe.

"And now you've gone and torn them still more," he said. "I warn you that I shall not stay with you any longer."

"Belay your jaw tackle!" howled the skipper.

Mr. Fitzmaurice walked away and joined his watch in the fo'c's'le, where he was received with the respect his "gall," as they termed it, fully deserved.

Late that night, as the captain strolled on deck while smoking an exceedingly rank Manila, he dimly saw a swiftly creeping form in the dark, but concluded that it was the ship's cat. In the morning, finding that breakfast had been due for fifteen minutes, he searched out the steward and threatened him with prolonged agony.

"Please, cap'n," the man's voice quavered, "some 'un done stole my clock."

"Who stole your clock?" thundered the skipper.

"Dunno, sah! Bran' new one as cost me a dollar in N'Bedford. I woun' it las' night an' put it to ship time, but it didn't never woke me up, count o' bein' gone."

Captain Gomez swore profusely, promised a thorough search and condign punishment to somebody, and called Syme, the second mate.

"Mr. Syme," he ordered, "take the key and open the powder box and bring the keg here. We got to load some more bomb lances."

In a minute the second returned, rather haggard of face, and cast a startled glance around the skipper's cabin.

"Well, what's bitin' you?" asked Gomez. "And where the devil is that keg?"

"Sure you didn't take it out yourself and forget about it?" asked Syme.

The answering roar would have done credit to a bull; an empty bottle whizzed by the second's head as Gomez leaped from his stool and started after Syme, who just managed to keep out of reach as he flew up the companionway. But once on deck discipline and manners of a sort had to prevail, and Gomez gritted his teeth as he hurried to the box on deck, well forward of the try works, where the powder was kept.

"What did you leave it open for?" he snarled.

"It *was* open," sullenly answered

Syme. "Staples pried out and the padlock's lying on that coil of rope."

"Lay aft all hands!" roared the skipper.

Men came running, some of them still pulling on temporarily discarded garments, and Captain Gomez pointed to the box.

"Who's been up to them dog's tricks?" he demanded.

Dead silence.

"I'll haze the hull bilin' of you till you'll all wish you was dead," he cried. "I'll make you know the dog's life. You get for'd now and one of you come back with that keg of powder inside five minutes, or some of you's going to get killed. Hold on! Where's that skinny fool?"

He had suddenly noticed the absence of Fitzmaurice, and directed two harpooners to go forward and bring him by the scruff of his neck. During the interval he paced up and down, in a towering rage, glaring at the uneasy men, who shifted from one foot to the other and forgot to chew their quids. Yet they were glad of the prospect that at least one man was likely to bear the brunt of the skipper's fury.

But the harpooners returned, announcing that Fitzmaurice was not to be found.

"Maybe he's fell overboard," suggested one cautiously.

Inquiry elicited the fact that no one had seen the "idjit" since the first dog-watch. A thorough search was ordered, but the general opinion was that the missing man had preferred a dive overboard to the company of the *Be-luga's* crew.

"N' I can't rightly say I blame him," quoth Squinty Bill, as a sort of funeral oration.

The black cook soon afterward reported to the mate that some one had rifled the contents of the cupboard in which canned goods were kept for the mess aft. The first mate himself missed an ancient huge Colt revolver he always kept fully loaded, besides a box of cartridges. The steward tearfully announced the disappearance of a kerosene lamp and a can of Astral oil.

"It's my opinion this bloomin' ship's full of bloody burglars," asserted Syme.

"I'll make 'em bloody enough before I'm through with 'em," raged Gomez; "but you're a fool. Do you reckon there's a dozen of 'em? There's just one man done it all, that skinny little idjit, an' he didn't take all them things to jump overboard with."

Came the third mate, an ancient stiff-jointed mariner taken on board merely to relieve the chief owner from having to provide for a poor relation. He spoke tearfully.

"Who's been riflin' my berth?" he whined. "My 'lectric battery I uses fer the rheumatiz is gone. I tell you it ain't no decent joke, an' the pains a' comin' on right now."

His tale was received in silence, and the general indignation was mingled with a feeling of admiration for the unknown criminal.

"Why didn't he tuck the bloomin' ship under his arm and walk away with it?" asked Bull McCarthy, the first officer.

"Get them lanterns ready. We got to find him," ordered Gomez, gritting his teeth.

After an unavailing look aloft, the after quarters were thoroughly searched. Then they went through the fo'c's'le with a fine-tooth comb. The forward hatch was lifted and, amid a scurrying of rats and overgrown cockroaches, the spaces between huge tuns were investigated. Up again on deck, and the middle hatch came up in a silence only broken by the sound of creaking pulleys.

"But he couldn't have lifted them hatches all by hisself!" objected the ancient third.

"That cuss kin do anythin' he has a mind ter," asserted Syme.

The hunters drew a blank again, and looked at one another like men becoming convinced of the existence of spooks. The chain locker proved barren, and the cook house only revealed some specially dirty dishcloths which drew down upon the negro's head a hurricane of indignant language from the skipper.

Suddenly the carpenter bethought himself of the trapdoor in his shop, which led to a part of the hold wherein were stored barrel hoops, lumber for boat mending, and shooks for casks. The officers followed him, and Chips pushed away a bunch of shavings from the floor, took hold of an iron ring, and the door came up. Cautiously lying on his stomach, the carpenter looked down.

"We got him," he exclaimed. "There's a light down there somewhere."

Gomez pushed him aside and jumped on the ladder leading below.

"I wouldn't come down any farther!" came a pleasant voice from somewhere in the semidarkness. "You're intruding on my privacy, and, besides, you make an awfully good target. At any rate, your legs do."

"Come out of there before I fetch you," snarled the skipper.

"You are very, very rude," returned the voice. "I am unwillingly detained on this greasy ship and won't take orders from you. Speak politely and get me ashore and I will show no resentment."

"Come on," cried the skipper to his men.

"I just have to do it. Awfully sorry, my dear fellow," came the voice, accompanied by an explosion, and a bullet which plowed away a long strip of skin from the captain's thigh. "If you come down any farther I'll have to shoot for keeps. I didn't really try to hurt you that time, you know."

Gomez hesitated.

"If you 'don't come out of there I'll lower a pan of burning brimstone," he finally yelled. "I'll make you know what a rat feels like when we smoke ship."

"How unpleasant! Then I'll have to explode this old keg of powder, after all. Very good powder, I believe. I only have to stick the muzzle of this pistol in the bung-hole and pull the trigger. I've also rigged a very nice arrangement with the ancient invalid's battery, so that when I'm asleep, if the door is opened again without my permission, I

will find oblivion in the midst of dreams. By the way, next time you want to speak knock three times on the door, but never come down. I don't object to conversation when carried out as among gentlemen."

Four mates, two harpooners, and the carpenter stood around, scratching their heads, while Gomez, holding his scraped thigh, looked at them with the nearest approach to helplessness ever seen on his square-jawed face.

"Let's put down that door and talk it over," he finally said. "Maybe he's just a lunatic, and them's unsafe."

"Oh, captain," came the voice again. "I was able to bring down quite a stock of provisions, but I'm rather short of water."

"Come out and get it," Gomez advised him.

"Oh, dear no! Don't let me get too thirsty, for fear of accidents. I will suggest that if, inside of an hour, I don't have five gallons of water, a dishpan, a piece of soap, and maybe a bottle of square gin, something may happen. Don't forget the three knocks and don't bother me too soon. I'm experimenting how to heat a can of corn with the kerosene lamp. It's quite exciting, with the ship rolling and that keg of powder so near."

The carpenter slammed the door down, and the mates instinctively retreated farther aft. Gomez, for the next quarter of an hour, filled the ambient with lurid language, which, however, hardly seemed to meet the practical requirements of the situation.

Syme kept looking furtively at his watch, as minutes elapsed in the discussion of various schemes, scoffed at as soon as they were presented.

"Time's passing," he finally ventured. "Won't it be best to humor that 'ere lunatic an' let down that water? Maybe he's gettin' real thirsty."

Gomez swore at him, but finally told him to do as he liked. "What about gin?" asked Syme. "He might get drunk, and then maybe we could get at him."

"Oh, my lands!" whimpered the ancient third. "Think of a drunk man

a-tryin' to cook over a kerosene lamp next to a fifty-pound keg o' powder. You're plum crazy!"

The required supplies were finally furnished, but the amount of gin was very moderate.

"You knocked very well," approved the self-constituted prisoner, from a safe distance. "I forgot to say that if you should try to poison me that alarm clock makes a pretty contrivance by which that keg will fire itself unless attended to regularly. If you hear me knocking very hard you'd better send some one to find out what I require. Mother used to say I was a very impatient boy."

Syme went back and reported the conversation. His tale was confided by the carpenter to the steward, who told the cook, and presently every man trod the deck like a chicken on a hot plate. Squinty Bill told bloodcurdling stories about lunatics; the Portuguese hands sought forgiveness of sins from each other, and Captain Gomez began to haze his crew like a slave driver.

Some hours elapsed, and finally, as Bull McCarthy came by, the skipper grabbed him, nearly tearing off the shirt that hid a mossy chest.

"Get ready to come about," he ordered. "I'm going back to Vau-Vau. Call all hands and crowd on sail."

He looked fiercely at his mate, as if challenging a laugh, but Bull remained as a graven image, and Gomez sought his cabin, incapacitated by suppressed rage from attending to the work.

For a few days they bucked head winds; then followed a slant which gave them a fair course. On the sixth day they raised a whale, not four miles off the port bow, yet Gomez, furious, paid no attention, and drove the *Beluga* on.

Meanwhile Mr. Fitzmaurice was proving a nightmare. His wants increased as did the ease with which he obtained them. He actually sent a message to the captain to send down a pack of cards, as he thought that solitaire might beguile some weary hours. With speechless indignation Chips found that he had bored two auger holes through the deck for better ventilation. He

called for rat traps, cheese, and poison, because the rodents were becoming too familiar. His dire needs as to more efficient pantaloons were supplied.

Finally land was raised among the Friendly Islands, and Vau-Vau was in sight, with bold outlines crowned with thick woods. Through easy passes among the reefs the *Beluga*, masterly handled, threaded her way to a bay protected from all winds and lined with a glistening white beach. Native dwellings peeped out of the darker masses of orange and coconut trees, and outriggers began to flock around. The mudhook splashed down, with chain rattling through hawse holes, and the old bark swung to the tide.

Chips hammered three lusty blows on the trapdoor with the back of an adze.

"We're there," he sang out, after he had duly received the answer.

"Do you know," came the pleasant voice of Mr. Fitzmaurice, "that this was getting rather irksome. Pray take my compliments to Captain Gomez, and tell him I would appreciate a cup of coffee. As the natives must be bringing supplies on board, pray intimate that a couple of fried eggs, with a few thin rashers of bacon, will be welcome. I will soon be ready to leave, thank you."

The cook prepared this refection with a light heart, and it was duly lowered in the bucket which served Mr. Fitzmaurice as a tray. Finally, the latter declared that he was ready to leave.

It was useless to expect privacy in the departure. Men aloft who were tying up sail watched, agape; others peered from behind whaleboats and deck houses. The after crowd was assembled.

Outside the carpenter's shop Gomez waited, with a goodly crowbar held behind his back.

"You will kindly clear out the carpenter's shop," directed the beach-combing dictator. "I'm coming, and please do nothing rash, because I'm very nervous."

He came up the ladder swiftly, with eyes blinking a little from the unaccustomed light. He seemed a little stouter.

Suspended before him with strong cord, like the drum of a Hindu snake charmer, he bore the heavy keg, while his right hand held the revolver, with its muzzle inserted in the bunghole. To right and left he smiled pleasantly, and the crowbar, with loud clatter, dropped from the skipper's hands.

"I desire to say, my friends, that the *modus vivendi* lately established has not been without its charms, and for such kindnesses as I have received I desire to thank you. No, I will not go down to one of the outriggers, for fear something might accidentally drop on my head. I prefer an escort from the ship, commanded by our gallant captain."

He strolled to one of the whaleboats hanging from its davits.

"Kindly order a boat's crew," he directed, "and then we can lower away as soon as the captain is ready."

He did not clamber in till crew and captain were aboard. The tortures undergone by the brawny oarsmen, in seeking to hide their grins, were pitiful to behold. Finally the oars struck the water, and the boat made for the white beach.

"It is queer, Captain Gomez," commented Mr. Fitzmaurice, "what a desire there is to twitch one's finger when it has been resting long upon a trigger."

The helpless, furious, unspeakable language that followed may have been a relief to the skipper, though he dared not lift a hand, but Mr. Fitzmaurice listened with a pleasant expression.

"You must feel better now that you have that off your mind," he said sympathetically.

No answer came, and the boat gently grated on the beach, where a dark and cheerful population was ready to receive all hands with open arms; a word in their lingo from Mr. Fitzmaurice

caused them to stand aside, however, and the two men walked up the beach, in silence.

"I still feel the motion of the ship in my legs," finally ventured Mr. Fitzmaurice. "This is very delightful, and the climate is ideal. Sorry you can't make a long stay. May I inquire how far you are going? The best of friends must part, you know, and I desire to thank you for your courteous escort."

"I got to have that keg o' powder," said Gomez sullenly. "Need it for my bomb lances and the darting gun."

"Dear me! How distressing!" exclaimed Mr. Fitzmaurice. "I fear I shall put you to great inconvenience. To tell you the truth, I'm awfully timid about loose powder. You know, I would have made a splendid burglar, but the thought of carrying nitroglycerin about, to blow safes with, makes cold chills run down my back. I'm afraid I spilled it all out in the sea for fear of accidents. See for yourself!"

The amazed skipper saw him tilt the keg, whence issued some of the yellow sand used on board to scrub the decks. His iron fists clenched and then opened again, for the big pistol was staring straight at him.

"I hope I'll be in at your hanging, some day," he raged.

"Oh, I'm quite a reformed character now, you know," Mr. Fitzmaurice informed him. "I've a very nice little native wife up there in the hills, and stealing is no fun when you only need to stretch your hands for what you want. Good by, captain; give my regards to the boys."

Mr. Fitzmaurice, with easy manner, backed out of the skipper's sight. Yet he watched him some time, staring at the empty keg, ere he jauntily started for the hills.

THE POWER OF INVENTION

WHEN it comes to inventing, George Bowers, who is at the head of the United States Fish Commission, is a grand little performer. He has invented three new kinds of fish. One of them is the shad-bass. Another is the salmonide. And, in order to illustrate his confidence that they are good to eat, he is stocking the streams of the country with these particular creatures.

Meanness in the Mountains

By Raymond S. Spears

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART.

Abner Coil, Virginia woodsman, by stern economy had managed to put away five thousand dollars in the Forestport Bank and received the promise of the banker, Alexander Cobvale, to pay four per cent. He returned to his mountain home satisfied that he had provided for old age. But Cobvale was a financial sharper. The bank failed and the town of Forestport was ruined. Cobvale, however, seemed to have plenty of money, and removing to Cumberland established the Aqueduct Bond and Mortgage Company and continued to add to his fortune. After thirty years Abner Coil, now grown old, decides that the time has come for him to reclaim his money from Cobvale. True the Forestport Bank has failed, but the banker is still alive and wealthy. So old Abner starts on the long tramp over the mountains to Cumberland. At last he reached the office of Cobvale and presents his bank book. Cobvale laughs and tells him that the bank has failed. "But you have money," persists the old man. Cobvale retorts that the fact of his being wealthy has nothing to do with the case. He tries to throw the mountain man out of the office, but Coil suddenly pulls a gun and shoots the banker. He makes good his escape. Bolde, manager of a detective agency, himself a mountain man, is offered a big reward for the capture of the murderer. Bolde follows the trail over the mountains and reaches Forestport, where he himself lived years before. It is deserted, but the bank building still stands. Searching there he finds an old ledger and other important documents showing the rascality of Cobvale. Suddenly there is a glare in the sky and Forestport is in flames. As he flies for his life to the hills he catches sight of a tall, lank old man viewing the spectacle with satisfaction.

(In Two Parts—Part II.)

CHAPTER VI.

IN the morning the fire had burned itself out in the greenings down the valley. Wreaths of smoke whirled up from the blackened timbers and cellars. The brick walls of the bank building, a dozen stone fireplace chimneys, and a dozen charred fragments of house frames were erect in the desolation. There, too, stood the great oak tree where the banker's mansion yard had been. The tips of some of its branches were scorched; some of its leaves were browned; but for the most part it stood huge and solemn, a little scarred, but promising to live long after the ruins were hidden in wilderness again.

Bolde went to where he had seen the man on the night before, and was rewarded by the sight of a nail scratch on a stone—the figure had not been a figment of his imagination. It had been a real live man; nor was there any doubt but what he was the same man

who had killed Alexander Cobvale, who had fled before the detective, though not with fear evidently—a bewhiskered hermit, perhaps insane with years of brooding. He was old—very old apparently—and a maniac very likely.

"He's cleaned up Cobvale," Bolde muttered to himself. "He's cleaned up Forestport, too. I wonder what is his name, anyhow?"

He swung the old ledger on his back with a tackle and strap of vines, and, going around the head of the gutted town, he started up the mountainside beyond. It was in that direction the apparition of the firelight had disappeared. Perhaps he had left some track there—and he had.

In one of the runways which deer had followed down to the salt barrels in the old stores of the town he found footprints—one set coming and one going. The detective rejoiced to be once more on the trail, as he said to himself, of a "six-thousand-dollar man." The trail led up into the ridge backs of the

Clinch Mountain chain. It led over the divide and along the sidehill. It disappeared in laurel thicket and oak second growth. It was a wild and lonely country, with more deer and turkeys than men and cattle or hogs. Down one slope the detective found a ledge of red iron ore; in another place he saw gray and beautiful marble croppings; he came to tracts of woodland which were virgin forest, growing as the trees had grown for a thousand years.

Late in the afternoon he found the old road over the bridge. He turned into it, and followed down into the valley beyond. He came to a cabin in a three-acre clearing. The cabin was of logs, and around it was a fence built to keep out the hogs, cattle, and deer. Dogs were in the inclosure, and they bellowed warnings. Bolde stopped at the log-block fence steps and whooped. A shaggy man cautiously showed his face and answered. Then he came out, gun in hand, to talk to the stranger. His expression of doubtful hostility changed to one of tolerance.

"Howdy!" he greeted. "Come in an' set."

Bolde followed the man into his single-room cabin, the dogs sniffing and the children flocking behind the furniture and under the bed, with just their heads sticking out, tousled and staring-eyed.

"Did any one pass this way to-day?" Bolde asked.

"No, suh, there ain't be'n ary man oveh that path this mohnin'."

Bolde knew as much, for the tracks had disappeared from the path. "I came across from the railroad——"

"You say yo' did!"

"Yes; I had to stay in Forestport last night—and it started burning, and burned all up."

"Lawse! That ole town burned? I seen the light."

"Yes; it started up at one end, and swept everything."

"Sho! An' yo' was there ovehnight? They burned it! They burned it—'cause yo' was there, yassuh!"

"Who did?"

"Why—why—the daid done it! The daid burned it—'cause yo' was there."

"Ghosts?"

"Yassuh," dropping his voice to a whisper. "Nobody's be'n there in a long while—not any live people. I'm surprised you ain' daid, suh."

"Did you know Alexander Cobvale?"

The man sprang to his feet.

"Know him? Yassuh, I knowed him! He tuck my money—my land. You reckon I'd live here—way up here—if he hadn't stoled my money?"

"Well, he's dead!"

"He daid? That old scoundrel died peaceable in his bed? He neveh suffered an' agonied like he made we-uns? It warn't right, him dyin' peaceable an'——"

"He didn't die peaceable, old man. He was shot in six or seven places, and he died hard."

"Shot? He died hard? Oh, glory be! He suffered like we-uns suffered! Sho—did he suffer good an' long, an' all oveh?"

CHAPTER VII.

Bolde traveled on through the country beyond Forestport. He had lost track of the old man's trail, and when he came to the mountain cabins no one could, or would, tell him what had become of the old whiskered man who had murdered Alexander Cobvale; of course, the detective did not ask for the murderer.

No sooner had he told the people that Cobvale was dead than there were exclamations, and then through the mountain cabins and down into the houses in the rich and fertile valleys swept a wave of joy and exhilaration. From the little mountain cabin where he first told that Cobvale had died suffering, the man took him down into the valley, and Bolde had to tell and retell the details of the crime.

The listeners hung eagerly on the description of the man as he suffered among the rich fixtures of his office. They gasped and laughed and thanked God that the man whose wealth was

founded on their ruin had been shot in cold blood, for they were a simple people, with scant respect for the laws and courts, which are supposed to be the bulwark of the country's peace and liberty.

Joe Pete Arten took Bolde from place to place, treating him with utmost respect, but eager to lead the bearer of good tidings around; and when Joe Pete had a surfeit Si Rob Cale took him over the next ridge and introduced him as the man who could tell how Aleck Cobvale had died. As the news had spread on before, they found groups of eager listeners at the storehouses, the mills, and the other places where men gathered. There were special sessions, so to speak—matinées—at which the womenfolks in their blue poke bonnets came to listen; and Bolde suffered himself to become a show in order that he might catch a glimpse of the man whom he had followed so far.

Passing himself off as a timber looker and estimator, he stirred no suspicion in the breasts of the mountain people. In fact, they forgot their natural fear and reticence in the presence of a stranger, because this stranger had brought them the good word that a common enemy had at last been searched out and punished for the wrong he had done to the mountain people.

None remembered Bolde; he had gone away as a mere boy, and he was a man now. Here and there he found some one who had lived in Forestport, and who had gone down in the crash. Not only had Cobvale taken their money, but he had deprived them of their ambition and whipped them in their battle with the world almost before they had begun it—a sort of great immoral victory, so to speak.

"Was he rich when he died?" somebody asked.

"Yes, very rich——"

"An' he lived in a mansion?"

"Yes, a fine house."

"What'll they do with hisns money now?"

"Hisns money!" a listener blurted out. "It warn't hisns money—he neveh

owned no money warn't some uns money—mine, er yours, er some uns. But he's daid now, an' he died sufferin'. I expect he ain't so plumb satisfied about it now——"

"An' hisns fam'ly gits it now?"

"Probably——"

"Hisns wife'll live on stolen money then——"

"Sho! Jim, yo' wouldn't hold it agin' a woman?"

"Um-m! No, Bill, but I be'n jes' that mad foh twenty-eight yeahs I'm gittin' onreasonable—yassuh. We don' hold nothin' agin' women up thisaway, stranger. I ain't no man natur'ly to speak thataway about a woman—no, suh. That ain't right!"

To Bolde this was coming back home again, and he fairly reveled in the open hearts and mountain frankness of his boyhood people. He hardly thought of his errand there for days as he wandered around, guest of the mountain victims of Alexander Cobvale, repaying them for their years-long deprivations and poverty by assuring them that the universal law of compensation had really and unmistakably overtaken the man who had used his talents to take advantage of men less able and more honorable than he was.

The news that Cobvale was dead crystallized into a desire to celebrate the event. The wish to make merry over the punishment of the capable thief expressed itself with bursts of song and snatches of whistling. The whole mountain community, one man said, hadn't been so happy and felt so good in thirty years—not since Cobvale had come with his promise to open up the latent wealth and opportunities of the country, in fact. Men who had not spoken to one another for twenty years now stopped one another on the road to talk about the common cause for rejoicing, and the Belk-Coppler feud stopped right short just when every one was expecting the raiding to begin.

It was settled by common consent that every one should come to the Schoolhouse Farm, down in Gourd Valley; and Bolde rode down with Si

Rob's family early in the evening. They picked up Joe Pete's family on the way, and as they came out on the mountainside, where they could overlook the valley, they saw the people of the hills flocking down toward the farm, some in the valleys in wagons, some on horseback, and some footing it across lots.

Many had already arrived, and as the stranger came up with his host they gathered around, for there were still many to hear the story of the shooting and its appropriate consequences. Bolde had the ledger with him, and as he was rather tired of repeating the story over and over again he nimbly diverted the attention of the people to the things the ledger told. He read off entries, and as he named the victims there were exclamations of recognition and mutterings out of the past.

"He died about seven year afterward," one said of a name.

"He war all broke up about losin' that. He died about ten years ago."

"I disremember him. I expect he war a feller come up out the railroad towns with the old feller."

"Why, that air mus' be Missus Wapes. I neveh knowed she had that much money in her life; the neighbors buried her when she died."

"Pete Al's boy that was. He said if they could rob him, he could rob them—I 'member that. He got killed out West some'rs, sticking up a railroad train."

So the audience commented on the names, and some old men and old women for a moment had the eyes of all on them, for they had been victims, and in some measure the renewed sympathy of their neighbors, and the fact that "Cobvale died a-sufferin'," was compensation for the woes that they had endured at his hands.

New arrivals came riding up, and they hitched their horses to the split-rail fence, hastening to join the growing crowd. At last some one thought that they were imposing on the stranger, and a whisper went around the crowd; so Bolde was suddenly relieved of his task. A score came to shake

hands with him and thank him for making the matter so plain to them all. They had never understood just how the crooked financier had robbed them. The grand total of the shortage—more than two hundred and eighty-seven thousand dollars—was far beyond their comprehension as a quantity; but, divided up among the hundreds, they could understand—especially those who had been among the victims.

Most of the afternoon was passed in visiting back and forth. By common consent again the guns and revolvers were put in a little room in the farmhouse, and the hereditary enemies of even three generations discovered, not without a bashful opening, that they had a common cause of mutual good humor; and so the way was paved for peace in the mountains—good will and understanding among the common people, with a common bond of sympathy and rejoicing.

Bolde, a little hoarse from so much talking and almost lecturing on high finance, mixed with the people. He wondered what they would say if they should suddenly discover that he was up there to take the man who had avenged their wrongs away to be tried for his life. It was a situation that tried his nerve and courage, but he watched the newcomers, studied the gaits of the old men, and tried to penetrate their thoughts. Two or three times when a hill billy came in, lean and old and crafty-eyed, Bolde almost felt that he had the man in sight at last; but each alarm proved false.

He wet his lips as he considered that the old man would very likely recognize him, and perhaps lead the mob to kill him, and then use his body as renewed cause for rejoicing. Happily he had several days' growth of beard on his face, and he had purchased suitable woolen clothes and shoes for his part as timber looker, even to compass and hatchet for blazing lines.

Night fell, and with it a feeling of relief. In the darkness, in the event of an attack, he would have some chance of getting away. There was a

great feast spread on tables from which every one helped himself, and the women kept the dishes heaped up. Lighted by bonfires and lanterns and lamps, the house yard presented a scene for the detective to study, having, as he had, an inside view of the situation. He ate and drank with the rest, and praised the hot bread and barbecued meats and the jellies and sauces.

As he ate a sandwich of turkey-gobbler breast and soda biscuit, he became conscious of a sharp gaze fastened on him from somewhere in the crowd. It was not the casual stare of curiosity and wonder, but the fixed observation of a suspicious man or suspicious people. He realized the menace of the scrutiny before he detected the one who was responsible for it.

He moved cautiously away from the lights, and in the most casual manner tried to draw whoever was suspicious of him from the hiding place in the crowd. For him the whole tone of the gathering had changed almost instinctively, and now that his mind was thoroughly aroused to the thought his mountain blood responded to the call of his profession. He felt and believed that the man for whom he was searching was there in the crowd, and had either recognized him or suspected him, which might amount to the same thing in that gathering.

No one seemed to follow him, and the feeling of distrust went by. He had seen a pair of sharp, keen eyes back in the shadows around the table, but they had vanished when he caught their gaze.

After a time he heard music in the house, and, working that way, he found the dancing beginning. The fiddler was playing with all his might—an old man, smooth-shaven, his face fairly shining in the light with sweat and soap. Bolde, who liked music, slowly worked his way around to the corner where the musician sat, and plumped down on a stool some one happened to vacate just as Bolde came along.

The fiddler gave him one glance, and played on boisterously. Bolde had not seen him before at the gathering, and

he was puzzled by the apparent offishness of the man. One of the boys had a banjo, and was picking at the strings ineffectually when Bolde asked for it. The boy gave it over, and the next minute, when he had tuned it to the fiddle, he ripped in roaring chords, and joined the fiddler with the music.

"Hi-i! Hi-i! Hue-e-e!" one of the dancers yelped at the added volume of sound, and then the feet of sixteen mountain couples crashed on the floor as they leaped to the tune of "Cut Me Down, My Husky."

The fiddler looked around with a grin of approval, and called the changes in the singsong chant of the old-time mountain player.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" whooped the men.

The women, with quick rushes, leaped from partner to partner in "Women change!" "Bal-lance all!" "On t' the nex', an' circle the hall!"

Old and young, the heavy and the light, whirled together with great good cheer; and at the end of the turn the dancers were puffing and their cheeks reddening. Then followed other figures—music that was swift and loud—and cheers and whoops that grew louder and longer as they warmed to the occasion. In spite of himself, and in spite of the part which he was playing, Bolde found his own left foot bounding from the floor to the wild rhythm and beat of the mountain music. Beside him the knee of a longer leg worked up and down like a flail, pounding a foot steadily upon the plank which boomed like a drumhead.

Bolde accompanied the mountain fiddler through "Buffalo Gals," and then himself took the lead through "Chase the Squirrel."

"Purty good! Purty good—foh a city feller!" Bolde heard the old man acknowledge at the end of the set.

There was a little twang to the remark, a soft, taunting acknowledgment that stung. Bolde hardly knew what to answer, and he hesitated a moment before looking up; then it was to catch the fleeting glance of the fiddler as he turned away.

"Oh-h, chase away, you huskies!"

drawled the fiddler, as if he had not paused to laugh at his accompanist. It flashed on Bolde that perhaps the man was jealous, and he moderated the exuberance of his booming banjo. As he played, he observed that the man's face was white below the shaved line. Then it flashed across his senses that the man had recently shaved a beard. This led straight to the question—why? Why?

In a moment Bolde had his breath taken by the thought, by the almost certain fact, that this old man, this mountain fiddler, was the one who had gone to Cumberland and shot the banker-broker-thief. Sure enough, now that he thought of it, that pounding foot, that swaying body, and most of all that twanging, jubilant, taunting voice—in a flash the detective had traced the man hint by hint out of Cumberland, along the mountains, through Forestport firelight to this wild orgy, celebrating the cruel death of a grave and honored citizen out in civilization. He wondered if the man recognized him—and with difficulty he restrained a shudder lest the old man was playing him, tormenting him, waiting to do him to death as he had waited years to murder Cobvale.

Change followed change, set followed set. There was an intermission late in the evening for a lunch, when great iron pots were dug out of the fireplace coals, and the roasts of cut-up chunks of meat were distributed around, with hot bread from the ovens. The food was assailed with alacrity and joy. To the musicians were brought plates heaped with the best of everything, including aged, smooth, fruit-stilled mountain liquor, which Bolde tasted doubtfully.

"Drink hearty! Drink hearty!" the old fiddler cackled; and Bolde thought he detected the hint of menace in the bidding. "Good liquor neveh hurt good music."

To be clear of the invidious demand, Bolde picked an opera strain on his banjo; he flashed over bits of music from the latest songs—and at these the fiddler, recognizing their gayety and

beauty, leaned eagerly forward to listen and to remember the strains—a fact that Bolde was not slow to observe. He played quicksteps, waltzes, fragments of venerable classics, seemingly not noticing the sudden wistfulness that made the aged eyes of the fiddler swim.

"Sho!" exclaimed the old man. "You-all play that kind of music? It's written music—it's music—music out of the shows. We don't have that kind of music up yearaway. That ain't ouh kind of music. It aren't mountang music. I 'low—I 'low you-all'd come stay with me, an' show me that kind o' music—huh?"

As he spoke, he seemed to follow the banjo strains almost unconsciously. Bolde was puzzled by the man's tone, but he resisted his inclination to look at him.

"It's for him!" Bolde muttered. "He's daid! This music's for Alexander Cobvale!"

"Aleck Cobvale—sho! It's foh him—the ole scoundral!" the fiddler repeated sharply. "They're glad he's daid—'course they are! He stole from his own folks an' friends. 'Course they're glad he's daid. You know what that man did? Jes' 'fore he runned away he asted a man—his own boss—to len' him one hundred dollars—one hundred dollars—to pay a feller what suspected sunthin'. An' his own boss neveh got no money back. Lots said he'd come back an' pay all he owed, but he neveh did. Some wanted to take the law on him, but—shucks! Some talked this-away, some thataway, an' they ain' no book law foh that kind of man. Hyar I be, an ole, ole fiddling man. I owned timberland onct. I'd be'n rich now, an' owned a house all painted on the outside, like quality folks, but that feller—I 'lowed that feller'd let me have it some time. I neveh 'lowed he'd go away an' neveh leave nothin'; but I learned different—I learned different! I 'lowed he war a friend o' mine—but I learned diff'rent! I never mistrusted him—till—till I seen po'r ole Forestport—daid—daid an' gone. But that music, suh! You'll come to my cabin,

so's I kin learn it—music's all I got now—it's all I got left till I die."

CHAPTER VIII.

The floor manager shouted for four more couples: "Four moh couple this way—foh—three—all set!" At the words "All set!" the fiddler began to play again, and with a roar the dancers stamped to the refrain. They shouted, and, with wild abandon, balanced, swung, circled, and changed. It had been years since Bolde had seen the like, and now he swayed and tapped his heel; he felt like a mountain man again.

Suddenly out on the floor a man began to chant:

"He's daid! He's daid!"

Another echoed:

"But he didn't die in bed!"

And then, in chorus:

"He's daid! He's daid!
But he didn't die in bed!"

A loud guffaw of laughter followed, and from all sides came jeers and jests about the man who had been killed. The old fiddler smiled grimly, never losing a note. He even chuckled when one impromptu doggerel maker sang:

"Out of the mountangs came a man
A shootin' iron in his good right han',
He took a whack at old Cobvale,
Shot him through and made him pale!"

"Hoa-a-a-y!" shouted the prancing listeners, and there was a roar of delight. Till after daybreak, when they could see to go home, and when they were well tired and surfeited with savage jubilation, they danced and shouted. Then they had a farewell hoe-down in which all joined hands to circle all, then balanced all, and finally "Cut 'er Down, McHoover," the old fiddler himself rising to his feet to give a long limb a better purchase on a bull-hide heel and sole mountain-cobbled shoe.

Then as the thundering died away, and quiet fell, Bolde heard the men grunt and the women gasp. Some one remarked, in a loud voice:

"There! We shore danced that old feller out the world!"

Many laughed aloud, and some chuckled deeply—the old fiddler deepest of all; and Bolde glanced at him, startled by the tone and feeling in the sound, which made him fairly shiver. His thoughts spanned the interval between the mountain valley and the splendid mansion back in Cumberland—the fiendish glee of the simple woodsmen and the mourning in the cultured hearts. A word from the fiddler drove the reverie out to make way for the business at hand.

"Ready?" the fiddler asked.

Bolde nodded, though he noted a certain sharpness in the old man's tone that compelled his watchfulness. As he started, the homegoers stopped him to shake hands and bid him stay with them a while when he should come past Laurel Top, Persimmon Orchard, and other places they named. They were glad to meet him, they said. "We jes' love to hyar yo' talk an' play—yas-suh!"

They wanted to ask him about the outside world where he had come from, and especially they desired to hear again the entrancing details of how the quality man who had stolen so much from them had died at last, "sufferin' an' kickin'—he kicked, didn't he, jes' like a hard-hit deer er squirrel?"

Bolde, watching the old man out of the corner of his eye, expected every minute to see him unmask the detective; but as the fiddler worked through the crowd Bolde wondered if the man was not inveigling him out into the wilderness to have the satisfaction of himself murdering the one who was trying to take him back to justice—for Bolde could hardly doubt that the old man knew him to be a detective, so keen was the scrutiny, so watchful and jeering the manner, of the old man; and yet he could not be certain. In any event, he was glad when at last they were striding along the road, farther and farther away from the others. It would be easier to guard himself against an individual than a crowd.

The old fiddler led the way on foot.

His course was up the main valley. He strode along with his violin case under his arm, his broad-brimmed black hat, which Bolde now recognized, crushed down over his brows. His steps, as he bent forward at the hips, were long and swift. He seemed oblivious of his companion, who found the gait trying.

"If he knew me," Bolde meditated, "he'd never turn his back on me up this woods road, where I could capture him and rush him over the mountains to jail."

None overtook the two musicians. They tramped faster than the doubly-laden horses, and much faster than the weary-walking merrymakers. Bolde scanned the country. The bottoms were cleared, but the timber line extended far down the valley side. Some of the farms seemed prosperous, a few of them having fall-plowed corn-fields, surrounded by split-rail fences. Cabins on knolls overlooked long ranges of mountains. He caught glimpses of tiny shacks in little clearings above the timber line.

As they advanced up the valley away from the people, the old man slacked his pace several times to peer into the brush; and, following his glance, Bolde spied a flock of wild turkeys feeding or scudding away, and a late homcomer of the raccoon tribe. In one crossing the old man lifted a leaf out of a deer track to see the clean imprint of a buck that had crossed the bottoms the night before.

So his guide and host tramped on along the bottom road, and miles up the valley, where the ranges of hills drew closer together, and the woods pressed down to the level of the river banks. The fiddler bore up to the left out of the clearing into the woods, and up into the higher mountains near the divide at the head of the streams that flowed east and west down adjoining watersheds.

On the steep grade the old man slacked his pace. He even stopped to drink at a spring which poured out of the pitted limestone. When he was through drinking he waited for his companion to drink. Then he started

on at a more leisurely pace, as if he enjoyed the barking of the squirrels, the drumming of the pheasants, and the distant gobble of a turkey challenging his kind for combat.

On and up through more miles of mountain land, they came at last to a peeled-log cabin set against a mountain rock. There was a little garden partly spaded up. There was no fence, and there was a well-worn chair beside the door. The man dropped into the chair with a sigh, glad to be home again.

He drew from his coat a "snack" which some one had put up for him. He spread it on top of a log, and spoke for the first time.

"Set up," he said.

Bolde, well tired now, ate slowly. He found it difficult to maintain his dumb demeanor. He munched away in silence. Having eaten, the old man led the way into the hut, which was dry and comfortable. There was a bunk covered with deer hides on one side. On the other was another bunk, on which was spread a clean quilt.

"Betteh rest up," the fiddler said, pointing at the quilted bunk.

Bolde glanced at the clean bedding, and then down at his own dust-be-grimed clothes. Without a word, he turned out of the cabin, walked down to the brook, and bathed. When he returned, the fiddler looked at him with a shrewd light in his eyes, remarking:

"I reckon you-all had quality bring-in' up—yassuh!"

Bolde laughed, and crawled into the bunk, nestling down in tired comfort. So they slept away the demands of nature for the long night and long miles they had traveled. It was comfort—real and healthy comfort. Bolde's awakening came to the strains of music. He started up, wondering that he—a man hunter—should have slept so soundly that he did not hear his host stir up the fire and put on the pail of coffee which was simmering over the flames. The man was trying to recall the adaptation from Chopin. He was practicing.

The visitor slipped out of the bunk, and dressed. Picking up a banjo, he

sat down on a block of wood, and joined in with the fiddler's doubtful efforts. He picked away slowly and distinctly, and the mountain man's quick ear selected the notes for his own instrument; so they soon were rollicking along together, to the great astonishment of a gray squirrel which came jouncing out into the little opening, chattering and barking.

After supper they played for hours before the fireplace. Bolde thought time and again to try and get the old man to talk, but something in his bearing prevented an opening. The silence made the detective feel ill at ease. The fiddler almost ignored him except when they were playing together. It was as if the man was brooding, having forgotten how to talk after years of half-hermit life in the timber country.

There was more than mere strangeness in the man's bearing. He moved with uncanny sureness; he stepped with the brisk lightness of an old hunter; and there was in his bearing and motions an untamed grace. Bolde had the uneasy feeling which one notices at sight of a cat stalking a bird or squirrel. He had seen a few men like that before, with the result that he could not rid himself of the feeling that at some time or other he had met this man and had much to do with him. The old man was up before daybreak the second morning, fiddling away.

"It's goin' to rain," he said softly to his guest, who was startled by the music. "Laws! It's plumb lonely when it storms an' storms!"

"Yes—it's as bad as being in a deserted town when it burns up."

"Did you see Forestport burn?" the fiddler exclaimed.

"Yes; I came up to look over the old Dolomo Development patent. I was caught there the night it burned."

"You say you was! That's where you got the old book; let me see it ag'in—what's that old newspaper?"

He opened the sheet that Bolde had saved from the undistributed edition of the Forestport *Bloom*, and read:

"FORESTPORT GOES BUST."

The old man's hands trembled. An angry spot blazed in his eyes, and when he spoke his voice was husky.

"Yes," he said; "I know it—I hearn about it—but I neveh b'lieved it—I neveh los' my faith in that man—till—till——"

He spread the paper on the floor, and Bolde, looking down, saw him read over the page.

"I neveh believed that ole feller Cobvale could lie thataway. I jes' 'lowed it would be all right, an' I neveh paid no 'tention to what these yeah igerant mountang fellers talked. I 'lowed when I jes' went to him, er his, they'd give me that yeah money jes' like I'd 'a' done, er any hones' man. Laws! I neveh 'lowed they was sech men—neveh—neveh! If it had been killing meanness, er thataway—but it warn't. It were money meanness. What for they want to steal a man's money—sho!"

He sat limply in his chair for a time, meditating on his wrongs, and then his indignation began to grow.

"He stole my money! I neveh would 'a' b'lieved it till I seen Forestport. I neveh knowed it war all daid. Laws! It made me mad cl'ar through—yassuh—I was a-b'ilin'—sho! I hearn say there wa'n't no law for the rich man but—but this yeah is law— Han's up! You plumb ridiculous fool boy detector—han's up!"

Bolde was looking into the muzzle of a black pistol, and his hands went up.

CHAPTER IX.

The old mountain man glared into the eyes of the detective whom he had tricked, jeering and hating him with all his heart.

"You-all come here to get me fer punishing the man who stole my money!" he cried. "You-all come here to take me back to hang! You reckon I don't know who you-all was, after I'd watched that air brick house, lookin' fer old Cobvale! Sho! I seen yo', an' I 'lowed to kill ye. You catch ole Abner Coil thataway! Laws!"

At that name Bolde started and stared.

"Abner Coil!" he gasped. "Old Uncle Abner!"

The muzzle of the pistol quivered, and the eyes beyond the sights blinked.

"What you-all know about old Abner Coil?" the man demanded.

"Why—why, you were to Forestport a while in a little log cabin when I was a little chap—Orville Bolde. My mother was a widow woman."

"The Widow Bolde!" the old man muttered, his thoughts racing back into the past. "An' you come here to arrest Uncle Abner—old Abner, who was robbed!"

Bolde's eyes dropped, and he flinched under the old man's stern gaze. In his heart, Bolde was a mountain man, and he had come after the murderer of Aleck Cobvale in order to get back what Cobvale had stolen from his mother by securing the reward money. He had looked at the money, not at the man whom he would bring back to the gallows.

"He robbed mother, too," was all Bolde could answer.

"An' yo' never killed 'im yo'se'f! An' him right thar!"

"I was just waiting," Bolde answered weakly. "Some day I expect I'd 'a' killed him."

"If yo' is like your daddy, you would—yassuh!" the old man nodded. "Me 'n' him fought side by side in the war—yassuh!"

The gun was lowered and shoved across the table against the wall, and the two men stared into the fireplace, neither speaking for a long time, and over them whelmed the weariness of lack of sleep. The intense strain of antagonism gone, they began to nod, and the old man waved his hand toward a bunk. The detective crept under the homespun blankets, and went to sleep sound as a bear.

When they both awoke they could think better. The old man had had a dream; he dreamed, he said, that he saw a deer fawn growing up on the mountainside. It lost its spots, and became a yearling buck. Then it grew

spike horns, bootjacks, and finally great antlers. The hair around its ears and horns began to turn gray, and its eyes dim. One day the deer was eating acorns when a shot rang out, and the animal was killed.

"It has meaning," Coil said. "It has meaning—for me."

He puzzled over the dream a long while, and then he nodded his head.

"I see—I understand. When the deer was old and gray it was time to die; I'm old and gray—I'm the old buck."

Bolde looked at him doubtfully, wondering what the old man meant.

"I ain't no good any more, and the old buck ain't no good no more—but he's meat when he's daid. I'm goin' back with you-all to Cumberland—yassuh. You'll git the reward. I'm your meat, sonny! Your mammy'll git back the money Aleck Cobvale stole."

"Me take you back!" Bolde exclaimed, horror-stricken at the idea, for now, to his mind, the mountain man had been the instrument of justice, as well as his mother's old friend.

"Suttinly," the old man nodded.

"Never!"

Abner Coil began to gather up a little pack of clothes, trinkets, and his fiddle.

"Reckon it'll be some time I'll have to set around the jail," he remarked, "an' I'd miss the fiddle 'twixt giving up an' gittin' hung."

Bolde's mind was stunned by the old man's determination, and in his imagination he saw a lank figure swinging on the rough-sawed gallows.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "You stay here, Uncle Abner; don't you go out with me. It's the Cobvales who offer the big reward. I'll see his son——"

"But he won't give up no rewards till he sees me in jail."

"We'll see—I know that kind."

Three days later Detective Bolde entered the office of the Aqueduct Bond and Brokerage Company, where sat Wallace Cobvale in charge.

"How do you do, Mr. Bolde?" Wallace greeted. "Did you get him?"

"Yes, he's located. It was old Abner Coil."

"Wha—what! That old scoundrel!"

"Yes; and he'll come in for trial if you want him."

"If I *want* him? I want him *hung!*"

"Of course; he said I should tell you so—he got the drop on me. He said he'd stand trial, and bring down all the Clinch County witnesses to tell what they suffered from your father."

The young man started, and wet his lips as he glanced at the Dolomo Development map on the wall. Then he asked stammeringly:

"What—what do they say they suffered?"

"Your father came there and founded a bank—started that company—founded a place called Forestport. When they looked over your father's private account book, they found he was two hundred and eighty-seven thousand dollars short."

The lips of the young man turned blue—his face white. He fumbled with his white hands, picking at the ring his sweetheart—now his wife—had given him.

"And that—and that——"

"Will all come out at the trial."

"But—but we can't have that! Why, man, we mustn't have that! It'd ruin my social position—ruin my whole career!"

The detective, who saw the young man tormented between the idea of letting his father's murderer escape and of ruining his social prospects, made no comment.

"Has it got to come out?" young Cobvale demanded.

"The old man and all his friends have tongues."

The young man shivered.

"Well—why—perhaps—it's done. What's the use? I—I think we'd better let it drop."

He turned, as if that ended it.

"How about the reward?" Bolde asked softly.

"Why—why—you didn't bring him in dead or alive." The young man smiled a shrewd and triumphant little grin.

"Oh," Bolde exclaimed, "if that's it, I'll go bring him in alive. Good day!"

The young man snarled:

"What—what?—hold on! I—I was only fooling!"

"I wasn't."

"Do—don't get mad, old man. I—of course, the reward is yours—naturally."

He reached for his check book. He drew a check for five thousand dollars, and handed it over.

"Of course," Bolde said, "the county can't pay me that other thousand if I don't bring him in."

The young man glared at him, but thought better of making any remark. He drew another check—this one for six thousand dollars. The detective put it into his pocketbook, and rose to go. When his hand was on the doorknob the son, desiring to make certain of his social position, thought of something else.

"Oh, say," he began, "how about that old account book—the ledger?"

"You mean your father's? Why, they said up there in the mountains that they would keep it very carefully in case any one should try to dispossess any of the people from their old rights in the timberlands—they thought they had better. Good day."

As he turned he saw the young man's clenched teeth, wide-open lips, and angry glare—which mollified instantly.

"Say—say, Mr. Bolde—they'll keep that ledger *safe* if we leave 'em alone, won't they?" the young man asked hopefully.

THE END.

In next issue we hope to start a new serial by BURTON E. STEVENSON, author of "The Boule Cabinet." Mr. Stevenson's new novel is called "The White Priest of Shiva."

The Rabbit's Foot

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "The Sweeny Stories," Etc.

How much is it worth to be the owner of the left hind foot of a graveyard rabbit, killed in the dark of the moon or whenever it is they have to be killed to bring luck?

YOUNG Baker was big and broad and brave. His six feet of sturdy manhood, that had ripped to-pieces charging football plays, loomed beside the skinny, stooping frame of Worden like a skyscraper over a dog kennel. The young fellow knew that he need fear no violence at the hands of the old man. And yet he had hesitated before entering the Acme Construction Company's offices. They could not throw him out; that he knew. He was more than a match for old Worden and all of his ænemic clerks put together. But there was not much of assurance in the manner of the trimly dressed young athlete even after he was face to face with Worden and been almost cordially welcomed.

"Sit down," the old fellow had said. And Baker, still bereft of his usual breezy confidence, had carefully seated himself.

"What can I do for you?" asked Worden.

The younger man was silent for a moment. Then he spoke slowly, deliberately, choosing his words with great care.

"I have come to make a request," said he, "but before I make it I wish to tell you my circumstances——"

Worden interrupted:

"See here"—the words came sharply—"I got your father's money away from him fairly and squarely. He couldn't hold onto it. Somebody would have grabbed it. I did. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

Baker flushed.

"Nothing," he answered. "I didn't come to see you about that. You were a bit smoother than my father, and you ruined him. I'm old enough to know that it's 'dog eat dog' in the business world. If father had been a shrewder man than you I'd probably be as big a proposition in the Acme Company as yourself. But it was the other way, and I'm not here to complain about it. I came on a mission that has nothing to do with business."

"What is it?" came the quick question.

"I came," repeated Baker, "to tell you about Louise and me. We have decided to get married."

Worden's shriveled figure straightened. He looked out of the window for a moment, then turned his old eyes upon the caller.

"You have?" he asked. There was a trace of derision in his voice.

"We have," the young man affirmed, "and, we hope, with your consent."

"What if I say 'No'?"

There was no reply. Baker's square jaw was set. It may be that the old president of the Acme Company read an answer in it, for he did not press the question. Instead, he squinted carefully at the man who would wed his daughter. He noted the good points of him—and there were many. The keen blue eyes, the aggressive nose, the determined chin, and the magnificent physique that was there to stand back of these red-blooded characteristics. At the end of a minute, admiration glis-

tened in Worden's look. But he turned his head to conceal it.

"I've had an idea," he said, "that something of the kind was in the air." He dropped into his chair. "I've nothing against you, Baker. You've had it in for me, and I can't blame you. Your father was worth—let's see——"

"A half million," was the prompt information.

"Yes, yes—a half million—all of that." Worden teetered back and forth. "A half million. Your father was wild with anger when he lost it. If he had lived, I'm pretty sure that he'd have got it back—pretty sure. But he didn't live, and he didn't get the money back. I have it. And you haven't a cent. Now talk. What do you want me to do for you?"

"Nothing," was the prompt answer, "in a financial sense. I'm ready to let bygones be bygones. You broke father through methods that the business world calls honest. I don't want the money back. I want Louise. And you're mistaken when you say I have nothing. I made two thousand dollars out of that Whitney case—and the law business wasn't so bad before that. I've saved a little. There are prospects, too. I'm trying to get the Union Traction business, and it may be thrown to me. Then there are other things."

"Outline them," ordered Worden.

Baker went on to explain his circumstances. He told the old fellow of the various irons he had in the fire—a company he was promoting, a real-estate deal, and sundry other items, including an effort he was making to represent an insurance company in the loaning of its money. Any listener would have concluded that Baker would be immensely rich at the end of six months, or that he was a good talker. Worden became absorbed in thought, but he didn't say what he thought. Presently he concluded the interview.

"You're a clean young man," he said, "and if Louise wants you, I——" He waved a skinny hand to indicate that he had nothing further to say. "Only remember, you can't live on dreams."

The young man thanked him, and left the place. And a few minutes later a young lady, unduly pink as to her cheeks, heard over the telephone the result of the interview.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I thought you'd have a lot more trouble with him than that!" There was more conversation which need not be set down here. The girl's last words were:

"I feel that things are going to come out fine. When you get home there will be a package waiting for you—a very small one. I saw something in a window yesterday that I want you to have. It will bring luck. I'm going right downtown now and get it for you."

"What is it?" Baker asked.

"Wait and see," the girl laughed. And that was all he could get out of her.

That evening, though, when he arrived at his apartment the riddle was quickly solved. Sure enough, a small package awaited him. He found a tiny oblong box on the table—something big enough to hold a cigar holder or a scarfpin. Quickly he untied the string, tore off the wrapping paper, and opened the little white box that was inside. Then he laughed.

"I thought it was going to be a horse-shoe," he grinned. Afterward he dug out a note that had been crammed into the box. It was penciled in Louise's writing, and read:

This is the best I could do. The man assured me that it is the left hind foot of a graveyard rabbit, killed in the dark of the moon, or whenever it is they have to be killed to bring luck. Please carry it. Put it in your pocket and always touch it before you tackle any project. The man who sold it to me said that you have to do that to make it work. If it turns out to be no good, I'll know why, because I showed it to old Mr. Ballard, who was in the store, and he said something perfectly horrid—but I know he was only joking. Please wear it for me.

LOUISE.

Baker stood still, stroking the fur that clung to the little mascot. It was a beautiful example of taxidermy, gold-mounted, and highly polished wherever it could be. For some time it lay in the young man's hand. Then he slipped

it into his pocket. But he had scarcely done so when he drew it forth again.

"What did old man Ballard say?" he muttered, turning it over and over. Carefully he examined it, but the only thing of interest he could find was a mark, "18K," stamped into the gold mounting. And presently, as the question appeared unanswerable, he again put the rabbit's foot in his pocket, and decided that Miss Louise would no doubt relieve his mind of worry when he saw her again.

Some mail awaited him. He was about to slit open one of the envelopes when his eye caught the return address in the left-hand upper corner. He paused; and then, like a woman, turned the letter over and over. For the name he read was John J. Mehan, who was one of the big railroad attorneys—a man known throughout the country.

"I wonder——" mused young Baker. He slid a knife under the envelope flap, and was removing the inclosure when a silly, abashed smile spread over his face. Slowly his right hand went into the pocket where the rabbit's foot reposed, and the fingers shamedly stroked the soft fur they met.

"She said that I should touch it before I tackled anything," he muttered. "Maybe it won't do any harm to play the string out according to her rules." He removed the letter from the envelope, and read:

MY DEAR SIR: Can you find it convenient to call at my office to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock? There is something I wish to consult you about. Perhaps you know that this firm is handling the Walsh case. It is a matter of consequence, and one in which you may be of considerable help to me if you can be persuaded to lend your assistance. Drop in and let us have a talk.

Yours truly,
JOHN J. MEHAN.

Mehan! The Walsh case! Still holding the letter, Baker began to pace slowly up and down the room. He had been asked in to help the biggest lawyer in the whole Middle West; and his help had been solicited in one of the most important damage cases against a railroad that had appeared on the court calendar in years. The fee would be a large one—and the reputation! The

young man sank into a chair, overcome. Then at length he began to think. Somehow the words in the girl's note came back to him, together with the query:

"What did old man Ballard say?"

Ballard didn't amount to much. He was merely an old fusser who haunted society affairs and cracked antique jokes. Yet he and his words seemed in some way to belong in the scheme of things—in the new scheme that had come into being with the rabbit's foot. What had he said? And why, in the sacred name of Blackstone, had Mehan picked such an obscure attorney as Baker to assist him in the Walsh case?

The rabbit's foot? Pshaw! The young lawyer was far too sane and healthy to consider that fuzzy little article as more than a keepsake over which one might grow foolish did he so desire. You could rub it if you wanted to, but you only did it because some one for whom you cared a lot told you to. There was no such thing as luck. No, sir; hard work, careful work, conscientious work was what counted. Luck was something for the ignorant to consider and to believe in. There was no place for it in the analytical mind of a lawyer.

Later that evening the young man found himself trying to tease the words of old man Ballard out of Miss Louise. But she would not repeat them.

"Aren't you in on the Walsh case?" she asked.

"I suppose so," Baker replied.

"Well, then," the girl reminded him, "my little mascot is working, isn't it? So what does it matter what that foolish old Mr. Ballard said? You stroked the rabbit's foot, and you found all that nice writing inside of the envelope immediately afterward. So the charm must be working. I don't see why I should tell you what a drooly old man cackled at me; it might spoil your faith."

"But tell me what it was," he insisted.

"I'll not. You keep on stroking that rabbit's foot and getting good luck.

Let well enough alone." And that was all she would say on the subject.

So Baker went home minus old man Ballard's statement, but not at all worried about it. The morning promised one of the biggest things that ever had occurred in his life, and he was happy and contented over the prospects.

The interview with Mehan next morning was brief, but fruitful. The young man was told that he had been highly indorsed by influential interests; that he was regarded as an able youngster who was sure to give an account of himself; that there was some leg work to be done in the Walsh case. Would he do it? His name would be printed in the newspapers as associate counsel. Perhaps he would be given a chance to do some talking in court. Would he take the chance?

He would. And he said so very promptly. From Mehan's office he walked to his own place of business, highly elated. His breast was full of a world-conquering spirit. Old Worden evidently didn't think so highly of him—yet. But wait. Worden was a power in the community, but one of these times a certain Charles B. Baker would wield quite as much influence. The young lawyer had been conscious all along that he had youth and strength and ability. And now he had his chance. Wait!

In his own office a visitor was awaiting him. It was Lawrence L. Moore, a retired capitalist, with whom Baker had been dickering about the merging of three manufacturing interests in the city. The whole deal turned on the finding of one hundred thousand dollars of outside capital. Baker had been trying his best to induce the capitalist to furnish the money. And when he saw the man in his office he knew that the business on hand concerned the merger. Furtively he slipped his hand into his pocket and rubbed the rabbit's foot.

"Good morning, Mr. Moore," he began, opening the door of his inner office, and motioning the visitor to step inside.

Moore was a fussy man of few words.

"I'll go into that merger," he said. "I'll take fifty thousand of the stock. Friend of mine thinks it a good thing, and is going in, too. Make out all the certificates in my name—hundred thousand. I'll transfer them. Friend doesn't want to appear now. He takes the other fifty thousand."

For an instant Baker was almost stunned with the suddenness of it. The successful promotion of that merger meant twenty-five thousand dollars to him.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," stammered the lawyer. For some reason, his hand again went into the pocket where the rabbit's foot lay.

"Fix up the papers," ordered Moore. As has been mentioned, he was a man of few words. The interview lasted only a minute or so longer. But at its end Baker was richer by twenty-five thousand dollars.

Young Baker never forgot the occurrences of the week that followed.

The days had been eventful. One afternoon three men came to see him about a tract of suburban real estate on which he had an option. They told him that the land had been called to their attention, and that they would consider the purchase of it, provided the price was within reason. They were allotment men, who had successfully promoted many own-your-own-home propositions. Baker knew them, and he realized that they meant business. So he named a figure that would give him a profit of ten thousand dollars.

"It looks good to us," the men said. And when they left there lay on Baker's table a check representing the down payment.

The suddenness with which the tide of his fortunes had turned, and the large profit that was coming in, elated and surprised the custodian of the rabbit's foot. Then it set him thinking. He went to the girl with a mind perplexed.

"I don't understand it," he began. "A week ago I had nothing but prospects. Now I have enough to——"

"To furnish a—a home?" she demurely inquired.

"Yes, and a lot more than that. But it doesn't seem right, somehow. The luck just pours in on me. There's something unusual—I'd call it artificial—it's unreal——" He looked at her helplessly.

"But the rabbit's foot?" Louise reminded him. "That ought to account for it."

"There's something queer about that, too," he said. "I've stroked it till some of the hide is wearing off"—there was a sheepish expression in his eyes—"and it always works. Do they always work like that? I had an idea that horse-shoes and luck pennies and such things fell down on the job now and then. But my mascot never misses fire. Tell me, what did old man Ballard say?"

The girl wouldn't tell him.

"He's an old bore!" she exclaimed. "And he doesn't know what he is talking about most of the time. So it makes no difference at all what he said." She changed the subject: "How are you getting along with that case against the railroad?"

He explained the work he had done.

"Walsh has a good case," he told her. "The railroad company will be lucky to get off with paying half of what Walsh is suing for. To tell the truth, I don't think we have a chance of winning. And Mehan tells me that I'm to appear in court for him—harangue the jury, and all that."

"When is the case to be tried?" asked Louise.

"Day after to-morrow," was the reply. The girl thought deeply for a moment, then two bright fires appeared in her eyes, her cheeks glowed prettily, and she earnestly advised:

"Before you say a word to those jurymen, stroke that rabbit's foot!"

Those words were echoing in Baker's brain when, two days later, he faced the jury to tell the railroad's side of the great case. He was not at all confident; even the touch of the furry thing in his pocket failed to reassure him as he looked into the faces of the jurymen.

Most of them were farmers, and Baker remembered that ever so many farmers hold grudges against traction interests because of cows tossed in the air by locomotives, dangerous grade crossings, and tilts in court, always won by the railroads. So he began his plea in a half-hearted manner, fully expecting a verdict against Mehan's client, and heavy damages awarded to Walsh.

During a glance about the room, he was startled and surprised to note the presence of old Worden and Miss Louise. They had come, no doubt, actuated by different reasons. The girl hoped to be proud of him; Worden wanted to determine his ability as a lawyer. And as there seemed to be a sarcastic twinkle in the old fellow's eyes, Baker immediately concluded that his father-in-law to be was there to laugh at a fledgling lawyer's failure in his first big case.

This, however, instead of further discouraging him, spurred him on to better endeavor; and he soon found himself hammering home truths to that jury in no uncertain tones. And every few minutes his hand stole to his pocket and rubbed the rabbit's foot. If it brought him luck in this instance, he reasoned, it could do anything.

The twelve good men and true remained out two minutes. When they again took their seats in the box the foreman handed in a verdict for the railroad company. Baker had won his case!

For a few minutes the young man was busy receiving congratulations. Then Worden pushed forward, crowded through the group of handshakers, and touched the barrister on the arm.

"Let's have a talk," he said. "Louise and you and I will go to luncheon somewhere."

Baker agreed, and soon the three were seated about a table in a downtown restaurant. After the order had been given, Worden began to talk.

"You did pretty well to-day," he complimented; "pretty fair. I've concluded that you have the making of a good lawyer in you. You see, I've been sounding you out."

"How?" asked Baker, puzzled. The girl's face showed intense interest.

"I put Mehan up to taking you in on that case," went on Worden. "You see, I have quite a bit of influence about this town. I wanted to see what was in you—and Mehan is a good friend of mine."

Baker stared. He looked vacantly at Louise. Then his eyes opened wide, as if a flood of truth was sweeping through his brain.

"I understand," he exclaimed; "I understand now." He turned to Louise. "Didn't I tell you that the luck seemed artificial—that it didn't have the ring of the real thing—that it was artificial? Yes, artificial is the word. Artificial!"

Worden grinned.

"Moore and I looked into your merger," he went on, "and as there didn't seem to be any reason why the business shouldn't prosper, we went into it. By the way, how much promotion money did you get out of our hundred thousand?"

"Twenty-five thousand," replied Baker, in a low voice. Worden laughed.

"You're a robber, all right," he commented. "You ought to make good at the law. Well, that will go quite a way in evening up things between us. Boy," he said, lowering his voice, "you're going to have all that I took from your father before I'm through. I'm going to get the deal off my conscience. That is one reason why I advised those fellows to buy your real estate. I'm a highly successful business man, and people take my advice when I give it."

Baker stared, dumfounded.

"Whew!" he whistled. "So that's why they were so easy!"

"I told them," Worden explained, "that the property was about the best buy I knew of. As I said, people take my advice when I give it. I started a few other deals for you. But the Walsh case—well, I knew the railroad would take care of that jury——"

"I know," the young man interrupted. "You needn't explain. I can see your hand in things. But why——"

Worden glanced at Louise.

"She's pretty expensive," he said. "A man's got to have a lot of money to keep her going." Then soberly: "But your father, boy—the trick I turned on him. I'm getting old—and there are some things in the lives of all of us that we'd like to forget—or do over again." He faced his daughter. "There was nothing dishonest about it, but I might have acted differently, and this boy's father might not have died poor. Now, all I can do is to make amends in the second generation. Young man, you'll be the most successful lawyer in the city before a year has passed. Remember that."

During the remainder of the time the party was at table little was said. When the three arose, Louise caught Baker by the arm.

"You'll have to excuse us, father," she said, "for I have something very, very important to talk over with Mr. Baker. Come!" she ordered; and they went out upon the street. The girl, walking rapidly, led the way to a jeweler's.

"Let him see the rabbit's foot," she commanded. The man examined it.

"Is it a real one?" asked Louise.

"No," replied the jeweler; "it's an imitation—an artificial one."

But the girl stopped to hear no more. Dragging Baker out of the store, she hurried him into the street, talking excitedly.

"That's what old Mr. Ballard said!" she exclaimed.

"What?" asked the amazed Baker.

"He said," she went on, "that I'd probably bought an artificial rabbit's foot. And he giggled. He told me that they make them in New Jersey, where they weave the Indian blankets the tourists bring back from the West, and the Japanese art in the auction stores. He said my rabbit's foot was artificial—and he giggled."

Baker smiled.

"Don't worry," he said. "I wouldn't part with the little charm for a million. You see, I can't imagine anything better than the artificial luck my artificial rabbit's foot brings."

A Chat With You

IF you go often to the theater you will probably by this time have come to the conclusion that, after all, the book is better than the play. There are a vast number of plays turned out each year. Practically none of them, even on the road, last beyond the second, or at most, the third season. Undoubtedly it requires more technical knowledge to write a play than a book. Undoubtedly also, it takes a bigger man to write a really first-rate book. The play depends so much on the accessories—scenery, lights, costumes, the personalities and abilities of the actresses and actors. When you read, you yourself can supply the accessories. You have within your own minds a sort of Aladdin's lamp. It will supply for you the palace or the dungeon at your will, and as it is suggested by the writer. Let the author describe his heroine never so minutely she will appear to you as the type of beauty you like best. You can supply scenery and actors to suit yourself. If the story is a good one you can have imaged in your mind as you read finer scenery than Belasco could design, and all without stirring out of the house on a winter evening.



THE stage of the theater, while it presents some advantages, also has certain limitations which hamper the creative artist of the highest type. It has been proved by experience that a real mystery story cannot be presented dramatically. The whole essence of a

mystery story is that the author keep to himself the solution and end of the tale, and that the reader must guess. Think of all the plays you have ever seen. You cannot recall one in which anything was held back from the audience. Everybody on the stage may be ignorant as to where the villain has hidden the papers, or who really committed the crime, but the audience knows from the first. He may have the pleasure of seeing a plot work itself out to a conclusion, but he has none of the keener pleasures of mystification and surprise. To our way of thinking, this is a big drawback. The mystery story at its best affords the keenest sort of enjoyment. It is something more than a passive enjoyment. It is a matching of the wits of the reader against the author in a sort of a game that lends zest to a narrative already of interest. We all have something of the detective in us. We all like to reason to conclusions and discover things for ourselves. And all this is barred from the stage. It is impossible there from the very nature of a dramatic performance. You can only find it within the covers of a book or magazine. We think you have found it more than once in *THE POPULAR*, and we know you will again—very soon.



THE mystery story is one of the most popular types of fiction, and probably almost every writer tries it once or twice. The really successful writers of

the mystery tale are very few indeed, only one or two to every generation. You get all the best of them in *THE POPULAR*, and in the next issue, out two weeks from to-day, you will get the first installment of a new mystery story by Burton Stevenson. Ever since Stevenson wrote "The Holladay Case" and "The Marathon Mystery," he has occupied a place by himself as a writer of this sort of fiction. He builds his plots so well, he tells so much to the reader without revealing the final secret, his manner is so convincing, and his narrative flows with such a rippling ease that it is impossible to stop reading. You know all this yourself if you read this magazine about a year ago when his last story, "The Buhl Cabinet," appeared. It is now in book form, among the best sellers, and his new story, "The Mind Master," is ready for you. You will get the first installment in two weeks from to-day, and you will have read the whole thing in two months. We don't say that it is a better tale than "The Buhl Cabinet," but we do say that it is just as good. We know of few stories easier to read or harder to describe than this new one of Stevenson's, "The Mind Master." All we can say is that we think it a great story.

RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD, who wrote "The Blue Wall," returns to *THE POPULAR* in the next issue with a short story called "Pizen." In it he gives you a vivid picture of the Florida keys, the roll of the surf, the hot gleam of the sunlight; he introduces you to a number of strange and fascinating characters, a remarkable woman detective, and a still more remarkable ex-pirate, Pindar Rowe. It is one of

those intense, vivid short stories that stay with you a long time after reading.

THERE is another Memling story by Rupert Hughes in the next issue of *THE POPULAR*. It takes the whimsical and talented artist and his model to Paris to engage in a most ingenious scheme to defraud the United States government by importing masterpieces to this country free of duty. Memling may try to be a criminal, but nature, more powerful than he, has made him an artist, first, last, and all the time. His skill as a painter, his artistic sincerity and feeling interfere with his progress as a smuggler. Read the story; it is whimsical, funny, and exciting.

THHE next issue opens with a big political novel, "The Spellbinders," by Francis Lynde. Of course you know Lynde's work, but this new story of his is, it seems to us, a little better than the average. It is the story of a stirring political campaign in a Southern State. It is intensely modern in feeling and color, and is in every respect a story of to-day. There is also a splendid story by B. M. Bower, "The Ghost of One Man Coulee," and the first half of the best Norroy story yet, "The Green Hour," which will appear in the magazine in two parts, and which is undoubtedly the strongest thing George Bronson-Howard has done in some time. Then there is a Western story by Emerson Hough, a story of newspaper life by Robert Welles Ritchie, a naval story by Robert A. Bachmann, an army story by Peter B. Kyne, and a tale of the Indians in the Northwest by Hulbert Footner. This is not all, but just to give you an idea.



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In the attached coupon you will find the occupation that has always appealed to you. Now — why shouldn't you win success and happiness in that chosen line of work instead of grinding yourself out on the "steps" of a job that is uncongenial—unprofitable—unrecognized—**UNCERTAIN?**

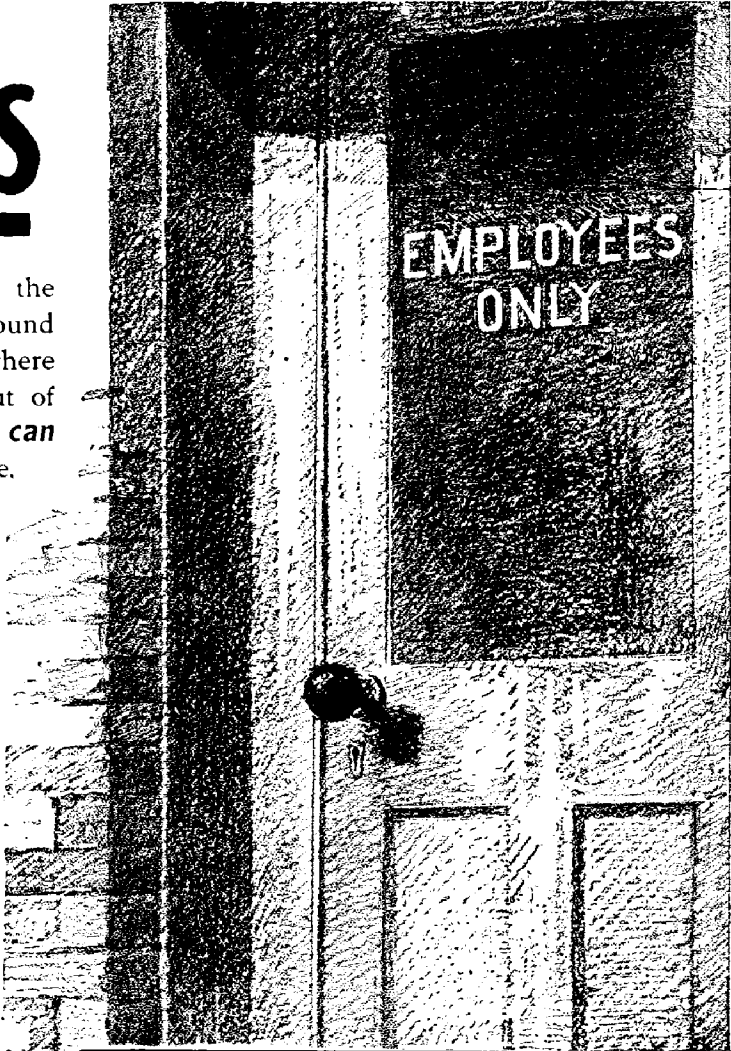


the Steps

You can. If you will only mark the coupon, the I. C. S. will send you sound information and **facts** that will prove there **is** a way for you—that you **can** get out of the rut of the worn-out steps—that you **can** rise in the world—regardless of your age, occupation, address, little schooling, little spare time and spare cash, or previous lack of opportunity.

This is **your** opportunity to give **yourself** a chance. Grasp it, and grasp it **NOW** by marking the coupon. There isn't an obstacle in the way to **your** success—you may **think** there is—but there isn't. The I. C. S. has already smoothed the way for too many poorly paid but ambitious men not to be able to do the same for you. The I. C. S. comes to you, trains you in your own home and spare time.

Don't argue with YOUR opportunity; but mark and mail the coupon NOW.



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Explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I mark X.

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Architectural Draftsman	Advertising
Structural Engineer	Salesman
Concrete Construction	Commercial Illustrating
Mechan. Engineer	Industrial Designing
Mechanical Draftsman	Commercial Law
Refrigeration Engineer	Teacher
Civil Engineer	English Branches
Surveyor	Good English for Every One
Mine Superintendent	Agriculture
Metal Mining	Poultry Farming
Locomotive Fireman & Eng.	Plumbing & Steam Fitting
Stationary Engineer	Sheet Metal Worker
Textile Manufacturing	Navigation
Gas Engines	Navigation
Automobile Running	Navigation
	Spanish
	French
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Name _____

Present Occupation _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____

HARD TO TYPE

☞ It is difficult to type an advertisement of the December Ainslee's. Too many features. Our first impulse is to play up in big letters the name of

JEFFERY FARNOL

☞ His story, "The Return," surely justifies this display. But what about the authors of equally attractive stories? What about such names as Eleanor Mercein Kelly, Anna Alice Chapin, Horace Fish, Anne Warwick, F. Berkeley Smith, Nalbro Bartley and I. A. R. Wylie?

☞ When you have read this splendid number of the "magazine that entertains," you will appreciate our problem.

Ainslee's for December

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—the greatest triumph of the electric furnace. *Will cut glass*—stands filing, fire and acid tests like a diamond—guaranteed to contain no glass. Rémoh Gems have no paste, foil or backing—their brilliancy is guaranteed forever. One-thirtieth the cost of a diamond. These remarkable gems are set only in 14 Karat Solid Gold Mountings.

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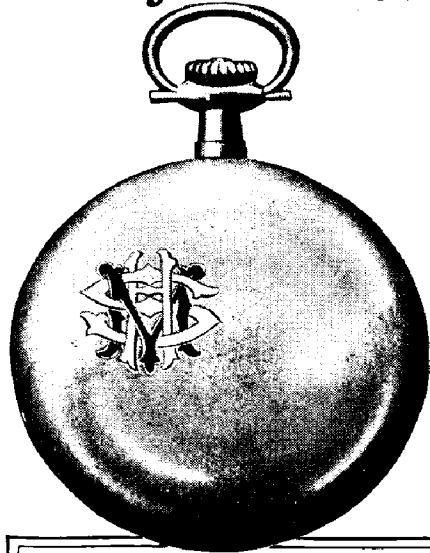
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Open face or hunting cases, lady's or mens' sizes. These can be had in the newest ideas: *Block and Ribbon Monogram, Diamond Set, Lodge, French Art and Dragon Designs, Inlay Enamel Cases.*

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\$2.50 a month for this superb timepiece! The easiest payments at rock-bottom price. To assure us that everybody will quickly accept this introductory direct offer, we allow cash or easy payments, as you prefer.

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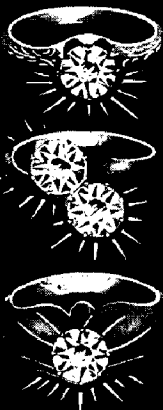
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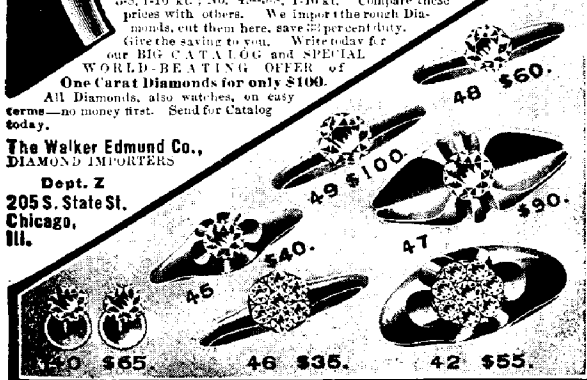
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