

No. 4, Vol. 34

TWICE-A-MONTH

# The Popular Magazine

PUBLISHED  
NOV. 7,  
1914

## "THE CONFLICT"

Adventure Serial from the  
Battlefields of Europe

Also ~ **B.M. BOWER'S**  
**NEW BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL**



PAINTED BY  
L.A. SHAFER



*Good  
morning  
Have you used  
Pears'  
Soap?*

## A Suggestion Worth Acting Upon

At the start of life, Nature endows most people with a beautiful skin—fair, soft and pinky-white—lovely both to touch and to look upon.

And what is commonly done with this great boon? Often, by one neglect or another, the skin is allowed to deteriorate and lose its freshness; and then to make matters worse, recourse is had to cosmetics and other unnatural "aids to beauty." But the truth is, nothing is of any use except what is in strict accord with Nature's own beautifying process—the BEST THING OF ALL being

# Pears' Soap

which is pure in every particle, and of such dainty emollience as makes it

## Matchless for the Complexion

*Nature's Beautifying Process—For keeping the skin in a condition of natural beauty from infancy to old age—always wash with Pears.*



**Victrola XVI, \$200**  
Mahogany or oak

Other styles of the  
Victrola, \$15 to \$150  
Victors, \$10 to \$100

# Will there be a Victrola in your home this Christmas?

You can search the whole world over and not find another gift that will bring so much pleasure to every member of the family.

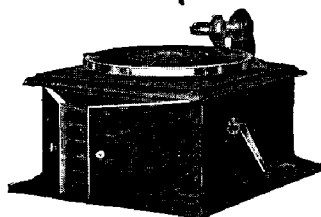
Any Victor dealer in any city in the world will gladly demonstrate the Victrola and play any music you wish to hear.

**\$15 \$25 \$40 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$150 \$200**

**Victor Talking Machine Co., Camden, N. J., U. S. A.**

Berliner Gramophone Co., Montreal, Canadian Distributors

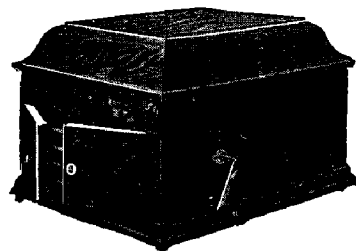
Always use Victor Machines with Victor Records and Victor Needles—  
*the combination.* There is no other way to get the unequalled Victor tone.



**Victrola IV, \$15**  
Oak



**"HIS MASTER'S VOICE"**  
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.



**Victrola VIII, \$40**  
Oak

New Victor Records demonstrated at all dealers on the 28th of each month

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements.



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MEN OF IDEAS and inventive ability should write for new list of "Needed Inventions," "Patent Buyers," and "How to Get Your Patent and Your Money." Advice Free. Randolph & Co., Patent Attorneys, Dept. 63, Washington, D. C.

MAKE money with us. Amount depends upon time devoted. No canvassing. Ambitious local men wanted. Address Ostrander, Dept. 15, 12 West 31st St., New York.

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AGENTS—\$300 every month selling our wonderful 7-piece Kitchen Set. Send for sworn statement of \$12 daily profit. Outfit free. Thomas Mfg. Co., 250 Third St., Dayton, Ohio.

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"AGENTS—400 Snappy Aluminum Specialties and Utensils, means a sale in every home. General Sales Course Free. \$50.00 a week sure. Answer quick. American Aluminum Mfg. Co., Div. S 49, Lemont, Ill."

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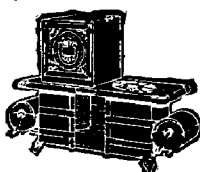
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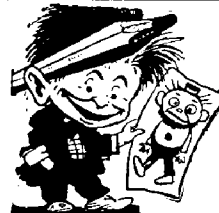


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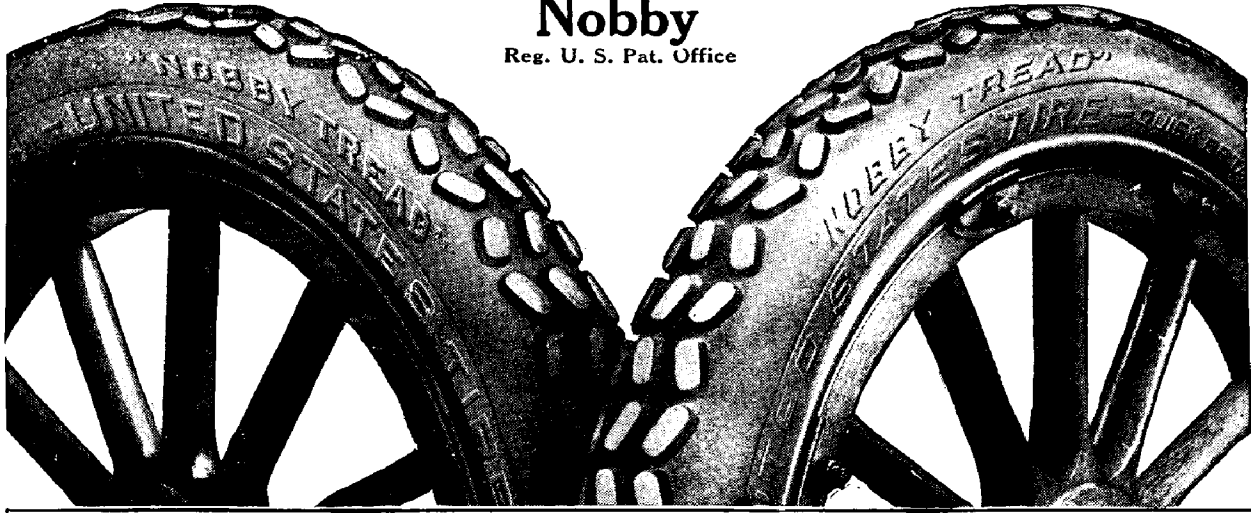
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- ask them why they use "Nobby Tread" Tires.
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The reason will be the obvious reason—the simple reason—the same reason why they buy the best of other things, viz:—simply because they have learned that the best in tires like the best in everything is always the

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And remember this—investigations prove that with "Nobby Tread" Tires punctures are 90% less than with the average tire.

These are the reasons why "Nobby Tread" Tires are today the largest selling high-grade anti-skid tires in the world.

Based upon their remarkable mileage records

# "Nobby Tread" Tires

are now sold under our regular warranty—perfect workmanship and material—BUT any adjustments are on a basis of

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Thousands upon thousands of veteran motorists now use "Nobby Tread" Tires on their front and rear wheels through all seasons, because they give real anti-skid protection and the lowest cost per mile.



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VOLUME XXXIV

NUMBER 4

TWICE-A-MONTH

# The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

NOVEMBER 7, 1914

<b>THE SPOOK HILLS MYSTERY.</b> A Complete Novel,	<b>B. M. Bower</b>	<b>1</b>
In which this capital teller of Western tales opens up a new field of romance under present-day conditions, that bids fair to rival the old scenes of the "Happy Family."		
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# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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NOVEMBER 7, 1914.

No. 4.

## The Spook Hills Mystery

By B. M. Bower

*Author of "Good Indian," "Fortune's Football," Etc.*

No writer of "cowboy" stories can equal B. M. Bower. Ever since "Chip" of immortal memory Bower has been easily first among the writers who stage their dramas in the wide spaces of the cattle country. There is something new about this novel. It has to do with the cow-puncher, but also it holds a mystery, one of those intangible, eerie things that savor of ghostly visitations. The mountains held the secret, and holding it, they were re-christened the "Spook Hills." It took a stranger in the West to fathom the mystery. A fine story.

(A Complete Novel)

### CHAPTER I.

SINCE every story must begin somewhere, suppose we start with the muggy evening when Shelton C. Sherman arrived at the Sunbeam, convoyed thither in a somewhat wilted and deprecatory condition by one called Spooky. Shelton C. Sherman was handicapped by his name, over which unaccustomed tongues tripped most irritatingly, and by his complete ignorance of things Western; and by a certain frail prettiness; and by a trusting disposition which he was soon to lose. But he was wise, with a wisdom learned in school fights, and he did what he could toward getting a fair running start when he landed. He said his name was Sherman, and let the rest go for the present. He was amiable along

with his prettiness, and he listened with avidity to Spooky's rambling tales of that wonderland to which anxious kinsfolk had sent him.

This, as a beginning, may sound a bit hackneyed. Since the first story was told of the West, innocent young males have arrived in first chapters and have been lied to by seasoned old reprobates of the range, and have attained sophistication by devious paths not always unmarked with violence. But when you stop to consider, life itself is a bit hackneyed.

Never mind then how many trustful youths had looked wide-eyed upon the sage before ever Shelton C. Sherman stared solemn-eyed up into the face of his mother. This was his turn, and this is his story, partly. And it was

Spooky's pleasing privilege to tell him a good deal that was true and more that was not—about the Sunbeam outfit and the sagebrush country that wrapped it close.

"Yuh don't want to let Burney put you on the fence first thing," Spooky coached when they were within five miles of the ranch. "Burney's all right, you bet, oncet you git to know him right well. There ain't a straighter, whiter man in Idaho than what Aleck Burney is, you take it from me."

"Well, what's queer about him? Does he really try to put people on the fence? And if so, why?" You see how green the fellow was! "I don't quite get the point."

"Oh, I meant throw a scare into yuh." Spooky explained with some patience because the very frankness of Shelton's ignorance disarmed him. Spooky was not such a bad sort. "He scares kids until they git used to him. But if you go at him right he'll be all right."

"Do I have to go at him?" Shelton laid hand upon his thigh, and stretched a long, lean leg over the broken dashboard to relieve a cramped muscle. Spooky reserved his pitying reply while he took a more careful inventory of his passenger.

"Say, you're all there when it comes to measuring lengthways, ain't yuh?" he observed. "About how high do you stack up alongside a hole in the ground, anyway? Over six feet, ain't yuh?"

"Two inches over," Shelton admitted reluctantly. "The folks sent me out here to get some width to go with my length: Dad's an architect. He said he'd have to use me for a straight edge if something wasn't done pretty soon."

"Unh-hunh! Well, she's shore a great country—I reckon maybe you'll widen out some if you stay long enough. What's your age?"

"Twenty-one," with more reluctance. "Time will help that, of course. If it

will also put some meat on my bones and take off this pretty-pretty complexion I'll be willing to stay ten years."

Spooky touched up the off horse, which was inclined to "soldier" on the up-grade pull through a stretch of sand. "Oh, you'll make out all right," he said finally in a tone of encouragement. "Once you git out after stock—can you ride any?"

"You mean on a horse?"

"I mean—on a horse, yes." Spooky sighed in sheer sympathy with such absolute benightment.

"I never was on one except once. I fell off that time," Shelton confessed cheerfully. "If it was a bike—but this doesn't look like much of a wheel country. Too rough."

Spooky made no reply whatever. He drove on for some minutes in deep thought, his eyes upon the trail ahead.

"You were going to say something when I get out after stock," prompted Shelton C. Sherman, after a silence.

"I changed my mind. In order to git tanned and looking more humanlike, I guess yuh better set on the sunny side of the corral a couple er three hours a day—till your nose peels."

"I'd rather sit on a horse, if it's all the same to you," Shelton objected. "I could learn to ride, don't you think?"

"Oh, I guess—maybe you could." Spooky spoke guardedly. "You're purty old to start in, but—maybe you could learn."

"Gee! I was afraid I'd be too *young* for all the things I wanted to learn. It's a relief to hear I'm too old for something. What's that line of hills called over there?"

"Them! Us Sunbeamers call them the Spook Hills. That's where—" Spooky stopped, spat over the wheel into the sand, and neglected to finish the sentence. He stared morosely at the jagged black sky line, and touched up old Blinker again more viciously than was needful.

"Why are they called Spook Hills? Are there spooks?" Shelton C. Sherman was gifted—or afflicted, as you choose to consider it—with the frank curiosity of a child.

Spooky meditated upon the advisability of answering the young man truthfully. After a space of silence he said seriously: "There is; leastways they's one. They're called that, same as I'm called it. All over the country they call me Spooky, and them the Spook Hills. Do you believe in 'em?"

Shelton stuck both legs out over the dashboard, gazed at the hills, and thought a minute. "I never have," he said simply. "But I expect I could. I came out here into this country prepared to believe almost anything."

Whereupon Spooky regarded him warily, gave a snort, and topped it off with a chuckle. He was not a bad sort, though he was an awful liar when the mood seized him and he could find a pair of credulous ears. Again he spat over the wheel, pointed with his whip toward a certain low ridge blocked at either end by high buttes, and by devious conversational bypaths he proceeded to tell a very creditable ghost story.

"Gee!" was Shelton's tribute, and turned to stare with a new interest at the jagged peaks and gloomy hollows. "I wonder if I could get a sight of it some time? You say it sank into the ground with a low, pitiful moan?"

Spooky squinted at him sidewise. "It went into the ground, yes. I never said it done any moaning. The danged thing hollered so my back hair never settled for four days." He went at Blinker with the whip, set him into a gallop, and then sawed the horses into a heavy-footed trot again. "Maybe you got your doubts about it being true?" he challenged. "Lemme tell you something, young feller. You ain't the first to doubt it. Spider, he didn't believe it, either, when I told about it at the

ranch. 'N' about two months back, Spider he was prognosticating around over there, trailin' a mountain lion, and *he* heard it. And he was so danged scart he dropped his rifle and come foggin' home without it. That's a fact. You can ask any of the Sunbeam boys. You ask Spider what he seen over in Spook Hills. That's all—you *ask* him."

"I will," Shelton promised obligingly. "I wonder if it would scare me if I saw it."

"Hunh!" grunted Spooky. "Don't yuh know?"

"No," averred the newcomer. "You see, I've never *been* scared. I was in a train wreck once—when two elevated trains smashed together—and that didn't scare me. And I was in a theater panic, and I stood upon a seat and watched the people fighting like wild cats to get to the door, and that didn't scare me. And I've been held up and robbed, and upset in a canoe before I'd learned to swim very well. And I was hazed good and plenty at school, of course—but I've never been scared. Not scared like some fellows get, you know. I was wondering——"

Spooky twisted his body around in the seat and looked Shelton C. Sherman over carefully. Shelton took in his legs, gave two perfectly unconscious pulls at his trousers—after the manner of a man who hates baggy knees—and returned the stare with clear-eyed candor.

"I was wondering if that spook thing could scare me," he finished deprecatingly.

"I—Blinker! I'll cut the everlastin' hide offen you if you don't straighten out them trace chains!"

"Was it the looks of it, or do you think it was the noise that scared you?"

Spooky shifted uncomfortably on the seat. "I dunno. I'll take you over there some day and let yuh find out for yourself."

"Oh, would you? Thanks!" The



tone of him was so absolutely honest that Spooky withdrew into his shell of taciturnity, and gave over his half-formed plan of mental bedevilment, and drove on in silence save when common decency wrung from him a yes or a no, or his one safe bet, "I dunno."

He took the young man to the house and left him standing there in the heavy dusk with his baggage stacked beside him and bewilderment in his eyes. The Sunbeam, like many another ranch, did not run to artistic housing, and it is very probable that the young man experienced a keen sensation of disappointment when he stood before the low, dirt-roofed cabin that sprawled upon a sun-baked area of sand, and realized that this was the official headquarters of the Sunbeam Ranch.

Spooky lifted up his head and yelled a summons, and a door opened to let out a huge figure that loomed monster-like in the dusk. Spooky went to the head of Blinker and stood there fumbling with the harness—which was his way of masking the curious stare he fixed upon Shelton C. Sherman.

The gigantic figure came closer and closer until he towered above his visitor; towered, though Shelton owned to six feet two. Spooky grinned in anticipation, and moved closer in the pretense of looping up Blinker's line.

Shelton C. gave one surprised look and went forward, smiling.

"Are you Mr. Burney? I'm Shelt Sherman. I think you expected me—unless mother's letter went astray somewhere."

The giant took the hand of Shelton C. Sherman and crushed the bones in an excruciating grip. Spooky watched the face of Shelton C.—watched and saw him smile wryly, and heard him make the amazing statement that he was pleased to meet Mr. Burney. Under his breath Spooky named the place where little boys who steal watermelons

must go when they die, and led the team away to the stable.

He met Spider on the way, and he stopped long enough to announce that he had brought a pilgrim home with him. "He's a purty-purty, and he ain't never been scairt in his life, and he ain't never been on a hoss in his life but once, and he laid his trustin' little hand in Burney's and said he was happy to meet him. You know how Burney shakes hands!"

"Huh!" said Spider, picturing mentally the incident. "'S he going to stay?"

"I dunno. He *thinks* he is." Spooky was stripping the harness off the horses. "He's got a banjo. He ain't so worse—but he sure is tender!"

"He'll get over it," Spider stated wisely. "If he stays long enough."

"Yeah—if! Wonder what Burney wanted him out here fur? Looks like he's got his hands full enough without takin' no kid to raise."

## CHAPTER II.

In that part of Idaho which lies south of the Snake, the land is spotted with forest, sage flats, lava beds, and grassland. You can find anything there—anything in the shape of wild desolation. In the days when the Sunbeam held by right of possession the range which lay east and south of Spook Hills, you could find more of the desolation, more of the forbidding wilderness than the land holds now. The Sunbeam Ranch—which means that bit of fertile land where stood the Sunbeam buildings—was tucked away in a coulee so hidden that one might ride to the very rim of it before suspecting its nearness.

Idaho is full of such coulees. You ride through miles and miles of bleak desert with nothing to break the monotony save a distant pile of rock-crowned hills. You enter a nest of

thick-strewn boulders, perhaps, and turn and twist this way and that to avoid the biggest of them. Then you find yourself on the brink of a steep hill—when it is not a cliff—and just below is a green little valley with trees; or a gray little valley with sagebrush crowding upon the narrow strip of grass which borders the stream; or a black hole of a valley that looks like the mouth of hell itself, with gleaming ledges of lava interspersed with sharp-cornered rocks the size of your head, and stunted sage and greasewood and no water anywhere. If you go down there you will hear the buzz of a rattler before you find your way out, and you will see horned toads scuttling out of sight in little crevices, and lizards darting over boulders into hiding beyond. You will see the bluest sky in the whole world—or perhaps it only seems so when it bends above so much that is black and utterly desolate.

It was in a gray little valley that the Sunbeam cabins stood. Farther along there was a meadow, to be sure, where hay was cut for the saddle horses to feed upon in winter. But that was around a black elbow of lava that thrust out toward the stream like the crook of a witch's arm hiding jealously the green little nook she had found for herself. The cabins were built upon barren sand—perhaps because the green places were too precious to be used improvidently for mere comfort in living.

The cabin was low and gloomy for want of windows. Burney bent his head level with his chest every time he entered or left his own door, and never thought of building a house to match the immensity of his frame. Burney was six feet and eleven inches tall when he stood barefooted. His cabin was a little more than seven feet to the ceiling inside; so Burney, desert bred though he was, never wore his hat in the house; bareheaded he did not scrape the ceiling when he walked about, un-

less he went close to the wall; when he did that he ducked unconsciously.

Shelton C. Sherman spent the whole of the first evening in watching Burney with something of the incredulity which marks the gaze of a small country boy when confronted unexpectedly by an elephant. When Burney rose from his chair—it was made of planks spiked together so that it formed a square stool that would have borne the weight of a horse—Shelton glanced involuntarily upward to see how close he came to the roof. When Burney turned his back, Shelton C. measured mentally the breadth of his shoulders, and fought with his disbelief at the figures his mind named for him. When Burney sat down before the fire, Shelton stared at the huge boots thrust forward to the heat, half expecting that Burney would presently call out: "Wife, bring me my hen!" If you have never heard the story of Jack the Giant Killer you will not see any sense in that. When Burney filled his pipe Shelton wondered how he managed to avoid crushing the bowl of it in his fingers. Shelton C. Sherman caressed the swollen knuckles of his right hand and stared astonished at the light touch of Burney when he picked a coal from the fire and dropped it neatly into the center of the pipe bowl.

There were two things small about Burney. They were his eyes, which in the firelight looked like little, twinkling, blue sparks, and his voice, which, when he spoke, was high and thin and almost womanish. Only he seldom spoke.

At the bunk house the boys discussed the newcomer and wondered how he felt, shut up alone with Burney. Spooky's curiosity led him as far as the window of the cabin. He peeked in, with Spider looking over his shoulder. The scene within was disappointing in its tranquillity. Shelton C. Sherman was sitting on an upturned nail

keg, smoking a pipe and staring meditatively into the fire. Three feet away, Burney sat upon his plank stool with his great made-to-order riding boots thrust away out toward the blaze, also smoking his pipe and staring meditatively into the fire.

Spider craned for a good look at the pilgrim, saw him lift his right hand, after a quiet moment, and run finger tips gingerly over his knuckles; he glanced afterward inquiringly toward Burney, and Spider snickered and nudged Spooky in the ribs.

"Looka that?" he whispered. "Bet he carries that paw in a sling to-morra."

"Unh-hunh—but he stood for it like a little major, and said he was pleased to meet him," Spooky testified, also in a whisper.

"Huh!" murmured Spider, and led the way back to the bunk house.

Breed Jim was there, having just put up his horse after a late ride from over toward Pillar Butte. That in itself was not far enough away from the commonplace to be interesting. But the look on Breed Jim's face as he glanced up at the two caught their attention and drew their speech away from the visitor.

"Say," Jim began, without prelude of any sore, "where was it you seen that there ghost of yourn, Spooky?"

"Ghost uh mine! I ain't paying taxes on no ghost," Spooky denied indignantly. "What you driving at, anyhow? Come in at this time-a night and begin on me about——"

"Oh, I ain't beginning on nobody." Jim pried off the corner of a fresh plug of tobacco and spoke around the lump. "I seen something out on the aidge of the lava bed. Follered me for about a mile. I couldn't ride away from it and I couldn't git within shootin' distance. 'S too dark to make out what the thing was—but it was *something*. Scared m' horse so I couldn't hold him hardly."

"Whereabouts on the lava bed?" Spider wanted to know. "Up next the hills? That's where I seen something last winter."

"It wasn't there—I was away over on the fur side-a that black coulee. You know the one I mean—the one that heads up into the big butte. I hit the coulee just about dusk—she got dark quick to-night—and I was driftin' along to-ward the Injun trail to come across and on home when I first felt the thing a follering."

"Felt——"

"Yeah—I *felt* it. Something told me I was bein' follered, and I looked back. First I didn't see nothing. I was comin' along through the rocks and I couldn't a seen a hull army of soldiers. I went on a little piece further and looked back again; and I never seen nothing that time neither. But there was something—I could feel my back crawl cold. More'n that, m' horse got to actin' on-easylike, and lookin' back. It went along like that till I come to the Injun trail—and then I seen something back a piece behind me, jest duckin' behind a big rock."

"Do ghosts ever duck?" Shelton was standing by the half-open door listening fascinatedly. Now that he had spoken, he entered the room, his hat in his hand. "Pardon me for listening. I didn't mean to, but I arrived just at the point where your back crawled cold. That sounded interesting, so I waited for the rest of it. Sherman is my name, fellows. I'm just as green as they make them in stories; possibly a shade greener. But Mr. Burney sent me down here to sleep, so I've just about got to force myself on you and crawl into some corner where I won't be too awfully conspicuous." He grinned down at Jim with that cheerful candor which had disarmed Spooky. "Won't you please go on with your story?" he begged. "I didn't mean to



interrupt, honest. But I was so interested I forgot my manners."

"Hunh!" grunted Jim from behind the mask of stolidity which he wore before strangers, and comforted himself with more tobacco. He made no attempt to go on with his story, however.

"This is only the young feller I brung out from town," Spooky explained. "Burney's took him to raise; name of Shep—or something like that. You don't want to mind him, Jim. Go on and tell us."

"What did it look like? A man?" Spider sat down on the end of a bunk and leaned forward interestedly.

Jim shook his head, with a quick glance at Shelton from under his black eyebrows. "I d'no what it was like."

"Didn't yuh see it ag'in?"

"Nh-hn!" Jim rose and went to the door and looked out, mumbled something about his horse, and disappeared.

"Oh, say! I'm afraid I spoiled the whole story," Shelton protested remorsefully. "I didn't mean to do that. What was it all about, anyway? Did he really see something?"

"I dunno," Spooky answered him tonelessly. "You can sleep in that bed over there, Shep. Nobody lays any claim to it. The feller that owned it blowed his brains out right in that there bed last fall."

"Oh, it'll do all right for to-night," Shelton C. assured him amiably. "I'm tired enough to sleep any old place. Don't bother about me—I'll be all right."

"We ain't bothering about you, Shep," smiled Spooky deceitfully. "Not a-tall, we ain't bothering."

He watched covertly while Shelton C., having brought in his suit cases, robed himself in a nightshirt and went to bed. He sent a meaning glance toward Spider because of the nightshirt, which to Spooky seemed absolutely

ridiculous. And after that he lifted his eyebrows inquiringly toward Spider when Shelton C. turned back the blankets and with a long sigh of animal comfort stretched himself out in the bed where a man had blowed his brains out. Spooky was suspicious of Shelton C.'s seeming indifference to the gruesome history of that bed. He picked up a deck of cards, shuffled them absently, and made a "spread" for that game of solitaire which he called Mex.

"You don't want to git to dreaming about pore old Mike," he warned Shelton by way of reopening the subject. "The only feller that tried to sleep there after it happened woke us all up screaming and fightin' the air. He was foaming at the mouth something fierce when we got the lamp lit. Took four of us to hold 'm down. I dunno what got ahold of 'im, but next day he blowed his brains out." He glanced at Spider for the grin of approval he felt he had earned.

Shelton C. yawned widely and involuntarily, and turned over on his back. "Say, you fellows out here must have all kinds of brains to waste," he observed sleepily, and yawned again. "This cabin must have a very brainy atmosphere; maybe—I'll—catch some if I sleep——" He trailed off into mumbling. Presently he opened his eyes with a start and looked toward Spooky. "Good night, fellows," he muttered. "Hit me a punch if I—bother you with—sn-snooring." Then he went to sleep in earnest, and breathed long and deep.

Spooky played in silence until the game was hopelessly blocked. He dropped the remainder of the deck upon the table, got up, took the lamp, and went over and held the light close to the sleep-locked eyes of Shelton C. Sherman. He waved the lamp back and forth twice, saw the sleeper move restlessly away from the glare without waking, and stood up and looked at Spider.

"I'm a son of a gun!" he stated flatly.

"Whadda yuh know about a kid like that?"

Breed Jim went into the cabin where Burney still bulked before the dying embers, his pipe held loosely in his great fingers, his little blue eyes fixed abstractedly upon the filming coals. Jim went over and leaned an elbow on the rough mantel, and stared down reflectively into the fire, the Indian in him being strong enough to induce a certain deliberateness in beginning what he had come to say.

There was no Indian blood in Burney; yet he sat perhaps five minutes before he stirred. At last he shifted his feet, gave a great sigh as if he were dismissing thoughts that were somber, and looked up.

"Well, what did you find out, Jim?"

"They're back, all right," Jim said, without moving his gaze from the fire. "Been back a month or so. They're runnin' three big bands—mostly eyes. Lambin's on full blast. They ain't worked over this side Pillar Butte yet, but they're workin' this way, all right. Feed ain't so good over there and they got to cover lots of ground. They'll be crowdin' up on us purty soon."

"Talk with any of 'em?"

"Nh-hn! I kept back on the ridges and sized things up. Don't think any of the bunch spotted me. I didn't know what yuh might want to do about 'em, so I left the game plumb open."

Burney got up and stretched his arms out full length from his body—and he had a most amazing reach for any human outside a circus. "They needn't think I'll buy 'em out again," he remarked half to himself.

Jim grinned approvingly. "They made good money off'n you last time," he twitted tactlessly. "You can't blame 'em for bringing in another outfit to unload on yuh. I guess they made more on the deal than what you done."

Burney turned and scowled down at

him, and Jim pulled the grin from his lips and backed a step. Sometimes Burney would stand for joshing, Jim remembered, and sometimes he wouldn't; and when he wouldn't silence was a man's best friend.

He waited a minute or so longer, decided that Burney was not going to say any more—or that if he did, what he said would not be pleasant to hear, and went out without a word of explanation or adieu.

Burney walked twice the length of the cabin, hesitated, and then busied himself in his little storeroom, and came out with a bundle under his arm. He went outside, stood upon the doorstep, and stared hard at the bunk house. When he saw the lighted square of the window wink dark and open its eye no more he moved away toward the stable, and for all his bulk he moved swiftly and quietly. In the corral a big, brown horse nickered and came forward expectantly. Burney reached out a hamlike paw and the horse nuzzled it like a pet dog. He went over to where his saddle, a huge, heavy thing made especially for him, hung by one stirrup from the end of a top rail; and the horse followed at his shoulder. He did not speak once to the animal while he put on the saddle and the bridle, but every touch was the touch of affection.

Presently he rode quietly away through the sagebrush, across the little flat, and up the steep hill to the east. In the starlight he looked like the magnified shadow of a horseman moving slowly up toward the stars. Frequently he stopped to breathe his mount, for the hill was steep, and though the horse was big like his master and heavy-boned and well-muscled, Burney was a load for him. At the top Burney turned and rode forward on the trail which Breed Jim had lately followed, and went forward at a slow, easy trot that slid the miles behind him with the least effort.

At the Sunbeam the men slept heavily in the stuffy darkness of the bunk house. But Burney, their boss, rode and rode through the sage and the lava, and crossed steep gullies, and skirted ledges that no four-footed thing could scale—unless we except the lizards that lived there—and still he went on. The Great Dipper tilted more and more, and the wind rose and blew chill across the uplands. A thin rind of moon rose and slid behind a flock of woolly clouds that reminded Burney disagreeably of sheep; and after a while the wind grew tired and blew long, sighing gusts, and then forgot to blow at all. And still Burney was in the saddle, riding alone with no trail to guide him, and yet not aimlessly.

When daylight was close behind the deeper gloom of the fading stars he rode slowly down the hill and back across the little barren flat and stopped at the corral gate.

In the dark he hunted for an old gunny sack in the grain shed, and when he had found one he unsaddled his horse, and with the sack he rubbed and rubbed until he felt certain that the animal betrayed no sign of having been ridden that night. Then he hung saddle and bridle back upon the rail end, closed the gate, and went up to the cabin and got into bed.

In the bunk house Spider and Jim and Spooky were sleeping still, with an occasional snort or a mumble of half-formed words to show that Spooky was dreaming again. Shelton C. Sherman snored rhythmically on the bed of horrible history. And then the window brightened with the first flush of dawn—and the Sunbeam Ranch faced the beginning of a new era of its little, personal history.

### CHAPTER III.

It took Shelton C. Sherman a week or so to get used to Sunbeam ways, and to Burney, and to the blunt "josh-

ing" of the cow-punchers who called Burney their boss. He learned to accept their sudden disappearances and their unexplained absences and their unexpected arrivals as the routine of a cattle ranch. He learned also to accept Burney as a reality, and gave over the fantastic idea that he was part of some fairy tale projected into the sage country. He learned to answer when some one shouted for "Shep"—for that was the way they twisted his self-confessed nickname of Shelt.

He learned that he must not believe all that they told him, however serious might be their tones and their countenances. He learned to look for an eyelid lowered slyly and to recognize that particular muscular contraction as a warning signal, and to doubt whatever assertion the winker might make thereafter. He learned a good many things, as a matter of fact. And since he was young and of a cheerful temperament and much given to fun, he learned faster than one might suppose. In a week he acquired a doubtful smile and a look of inquiry; in two weeks he had forsworn all faith in his fellows and refused to believe anything he was told; which piece of radicalism was almost as bad in its way as was his too-confiding tendency.

Burney drove the first nail into the coffin of his faith, and he did it the first forenoon of Shelton's sojourn at the Sunbeam. He found Shelton hanging blankets and quilts on the sagging barbed-wire fence that inclosed the grave of some gardener's hopes. He stood and watched Shelton examine a calico-covered pillow, and finally he asked what was wrong with it.

"Why, you see," said Shelton cheerfully, "the fellows seemed to think the bedding hadn't been thoroughly cleaned after that man committed suicide in them, so I thought it might not be healthy to sleep in them without a good

airing. They told me it was on this pillow he blew out his brains——”

“They lied to you,” Burney said flatly. “Nobody ever died on this ranch yet.”

Shelton dropped the pillow, and stared at the giant. “Oh, they lied to me!” he repeated disappointedly. “I don’t see why they’d want to do that—do you?” He looked undecidedly at the flapping blankets, and began to pull them off the fence. “I suppose they’d think it a great joke if they saw all this bedding outside,” he explained. “I guess I’d better put it back on the bed and wait for the next move. It wouldn’t do to say I’d found out, would it?” He stopped, and faced Burney, his candid blue eyes looking up at the big man. “I wonder if they did it to scare me?”

“Chances are,” said Burney dispassionately, and went on to the cabin.

After that faith died quickly. Shelton came to that mental attitude of general distrust which demands absolute proof before he would accept anything as fact.

You can see how that would work out in a country where everything was strange and where ignorance must perforce be warned of many things by experience or suffer the penalty.

“What are those hills over there called?” he asked Burney guilefully one day, and pointed toward the east.

“Them?” Burney turned his head slowly toward the high, broken ridge standing stark and barren against the sky. “Them’s the Piute Hills over there.”

“The fellows call them the Spook Hills,” said Shelton in the tone of one who has once again suffered disillusionment.

“They may call ’em that,” said Burney, “but that ain’t saying it’s their name.”

“Spooky says he saw a ghost over there.”

“Ed’s always seein’ things.”

“I’d like to ride over there, if you don’t want me for anything.” Shelton was beginning to find little duties around the place, so that he felt that he was not altogether his own master. “Could I take old Dutch and a lunch and do a little exploring to-day?”

“There ain’t nothing over there,” Burney said, with a shade too much of emphasis. “Better ride over to the river if you want to go somewhere.”

“I’d rather go to those hills, if it’s all the same to you. I’ve heard so much about them——”

“You’d git lost,” Burney scowled down at him.

“Oh, no, I won’t. I’ve got a compass.” And Shelton produced a compass the size of a dollar watch, and dangled it by its buckskin string before Burney. “Ought I to take water along, or are there streams and springs?” He was smiling in anticipation of the explorer’s thrills, until he tilted back his head and looked up into Burney’s face; the smile gave place then to plain puzzlement. “Why don’t you want me to go?” he asked straightforwardly, like a child. “Don’t you want me to use old Dutch? You told me I could ride him whenever I wanted to, so I took it for granted——”

“I don’t care how much you ride him.” Burney was plainly ill at ease.

“Then why don’t you want——”

“Oh, I don’t care. Go where you want to. Only—there ain’t anything to see.” He pulled out his pipe and began to fill it nervously.

“Maybe I’ll see Spooky’s ghost,” laughed Shelton, and stopped short when he looked up at Burney.

“Ed’s a fool. They ain’t any such thing.” Burney spilled tobacco into the wrinkles of his ill-fitting vest.

“Well, I can go, can’t I?” Shelton did not attempt to understand this big man. He looked so different from other men that one would not expect him to act like others, he reflected. In

the week of their acquaintance he had observed many peculiar traits in Burney. He slept sometimes for hours during the middle of the day for one thing. And he had long fits of silence that were almost sullen, and was sometimes querulous afterward with the men, so that they avoided him quite openly as the simplest means of dodging trouble. Shelton thought that Burney was in one of his unpleasant moods this morning.

"You can do as yuh please, I reckon——" And Burney spoke even that qualified consent grudgingly.

So Shelton took long steps to the stable, having spied Spooky there. He wanted Spooky to help him get the saddle and bridle on Dutch—the proper tying of a latigo being still a baffling mystery to him; also, he could not, for the life of him, tell which was the front of the bridle.

He went grinning up to Spooky, and clapped that individual on the shoulder. "I'm going spook hunting," he announced gleefully. "Want to go along?"

"No, I don't want to go along," Spooky retorted, mimicking Shelton's tone. "Spooks don't travel by daylight, Shep. Better wait till toward night."

"I'm going to stay till night," Shelton told him calmly. "I'll take a lunch along. And I've got a compass, and I can travel by the North Star."

"You'll want to travel by lightning if you hear that thing that I heard," Spooky fleered. "Wait till you git out there in them lava hills and it commences to git darkish! Honest to gollies, Shep, they *is* something out in them hills! I wasn't lying to yuh about that. They's three of us now that's saw it and heard it. It ain't human, and it ain't no animal. It—say, I'll bet four bits you'll come home scairt plumb simple—if yuh come. You wouldn't git *me* out there after sundown—not fer this hull outfit."

"Say, that sounds interesting!" Shel-

ton declared, trying to put the chin strap over old Dutch's nose, and wondering what was the matter. "I'll have something to write home to the folks about. Whoa, old boy! Open your mouth like a good sport."

Spooky came up and took the bridle away from Shelton with an air of weary tolerance. "Chances are *we'll* do the writin' home to your folks, if yuh go prognosticatin' around over in them breaks," he predicted ominously. "Yuh better keep away from there—that's straight goods, Shep," he added seriously. "On the dead, it ain't no place for a man to go prowling around, alone unless he has to."

"That's the kind of place little me has been looking for. I'm tired to death of nice safe places that you can pet. I came out here to be real wild and woolly, and Spook Hills keep a calling, and it's there that I would be—hunting ghosts that scare our Spooky soon as it's too dark to see!" He sang the paraphrase, and, like the cheerful young reprobate he was, he went blandly around to the "Injun side" of Dutch and would have climbed into the saddle if Spooky had not grabbed him by the coat and pulled him back.

"Learn to git onto a horse right, why don't yuh?" Spooky protested disgustedly. "Don't go and insult pore old Dutch by mountin' like a squaw."

Spooky watched him go bobbing up the hill and out of sight over the rim, and his eyes were friendly while he made disparaging remarks about the departing one. He liked Shelton C. Sherman with a patronizing, tolerant kind of affection, even though he did lie to him and tease him and bully him.

Shelton went joyously on his way through pungent sage and over hot, barren spaces where was nothing alive except the lizards. Spooky had been human enough to give Shelton C. some really good advice about riding alone. Part of it was to let Dutch use his own



judgment and take his own pace in rough country; for Dutch had grown old in the sagebrush, and he was wise with the wisdom of range cayuses. Therefore, having headed for Spook Hills, he left the rest to Dutch and the god Chance, and rode with his mind at ease.

Barrenness he found, and heat and desolation; and a certain eerie grandeur such as he had never dreamed the land could compass. He did not find anything ghostly about the place, however, and he was disappointed at the prospect of an uneventful day in a wilderness where the stage was set for bold adventure. He was hot, and the canteen he carried dried on the outside and let the water turn sickeningly warm. He did not feel like eating the coarse sandwiches of sour-dough bread and cold bacon, and there did not seem to be any place where he could make Dutch comfortable while he rested in the shade of a black ledge.

He shot a jack rabbit at forty paces with his nice, new thirty-eight revolver, and was astonished to find himself spread-eagling into a sandy space between two thick clumps of sage. It had never occurred to Shelton that Dutch might object to the sudden report of a gun discharged behind his ears—the rabbit had been running before them when Shelton fired.

Shelton got up and dug sand out of his collar, and picked up his hat and laughed at the joke of it. After that he led Dutch to where the rabbit lay kicking in the hot sand. It cried like a frightened baby when he drew near, and Shelton almost cried himself with the pity of it. A shoulder was broken, and the heart of it thumped so hard that its whole body vibrated with the beating; and when Shelton picked it up and stroked it as one strokes the back of a kitten, its eyes fairly popped with fear. He spent ten minutes in bandaging the shoulder with his neck-

tie, and while he worked he talked soothingly to the terrified little animal. He did not want to leave it there in the desert to die, and he could not bear to kill it. He held it in the crook of one arm while he mounted awkwardly and rode on, wondering if he could find a cool, shady little nook where it could stay until its shoulder healed.

After a long while he thought he heard some one shooting, and he turned that way. Not the vicious crack of a large-calibered gun, but the pop of a twenty-two, he thought it was.

Presently he came out from a huddle of great, black bowlders and heard the rifle crack just beyond the next rock huddle. He rode that way, and he came upon a girl sitting at ease upon a flat rock that was shaded by the ledge at her back, staring across a narrow gulch that was a mere rocky gash in the hill. While he stared also she lifted her small rifle, aimed carefully with her elbow resting upon a convenient protuberance in the ledge, and fired. She lowered the rifle, and peered sharply, aimed and fired again. Shelton looked, but he couldn't, for the life of him, see what she could be shooting at.

Dutch snorted and backed, and the girl glanced that way and saw Shelton staring curiously, the wounded rabbit held close under one arm.

"Hello!" she said, and turned her attention again to the gulch.

Shelton got out of the saddle without spilling the rabbit, dropped the reins to the ground as Spooky had told him he must do, and came forward with his best making-friends manner. Secretly he was a bit disappointed in the girl because she was not beautiful. You see, he had read a lot of Western stories, and he had become infected with the idea that all range-bred girls are lovely—real, love-story heroines waiting to be discovered.

This one was not true to type—grant-

ing that the story girls are typical. Her hair was a sunburned brown, and there was nothing lustrous or sheeny about it—the desert winds saw to that. It seemed abundant enough, and all native to her own head. She had it braided and hanging down her back with the end of the braid merging into two wind-roughened curls. There was no ribbon bow at all, by the way, but a twist or two of what looked suspiciously like common grocery twine. She wore an old felt hat that looked as though it had seen hard usage, and a faded calico shirt waist and skirt of brown denim. Her face was sunburned with a tendency toward peeling, and her hands were brown and rough. For the rest, her eyes were a clear blue-gray that changed color with her moods and the light. Her mouth could not be spoiled by a harsh climate and primitive living, so that it was nice also; red and well shaped, and flexible, and curving easily into a smile.

"How-de-do? What you shooting at?" Shelton began ingratiatingly, smiling down at her while the hot breeze fanned the moist hair off his forehead.

"Rattlesnakes. Put on your hat; you want to get sunstruck?" The girl glanced briefly at him again, then aimed and fired across the gulch.

"Oh, say! Are you really shooting rattlesnakes? My name is Sherman. I'm staying at the Sunbeam Ranch. You don't mind if I stop a few minutes, do you? It's horribly lonesome in these hills."

"Don't I know that?" The girl moved aside to make room for him in the shade, and Shelton accepted the mute invitation and sat down beside her. "I guess I know more about lonesomeness than you do, Mr. Sherman. I'm tickled to death to see somebody that don't smell of sheep."

Shelton turned and looked at her as long as he dared. "That's awfully good

of you," he murmured in his week-end tone.

"No, it ain't. It's just human of me. I live right in the middle of 'em. I hear sheep, and smell sheep, and see sheep twenty-four hours a day, except when I saddle up and get out like this for a while—and then the emptiness is just as bad." Her mouth drooped a little. "I go back to the wagon at night tickled to hear the sheep blatting and the dogs yelping—just because they're something alive."

"I didn't know there was a sheep ranch so close," Shelton said, by way of keeping the conversation running along smoothly. "Though I've heard the fellows at the Sunbeam talking about some sheep."

"There isn't any ranch," the girl told him drearily. "I could stand that because I'd have a cabin of some kind to take care of. I live in a sheep wagon with poppy and Uncle Jake. I do the cooking, and that's all there is to do. You can't," she observed dispiritedly, "do much housekeeping in a sheep wagon."

Shelton had learned in the past week to conceal his ignorance, if possible. So now he merely shook his head and said it did seem rather discouraging to try—though he had not the faintest idea of what a sheep wagon looked like.

"There's another snake!" she announced suddenly, and lifted her little rifle. "There must be a regular den over there. I've seen six already—I got four, I think." She fired, and a tiny plop of rock dust told where the bullet had struck. "Missed," she said uninterestedly.

"Where is he? I'll have a whack at him myself." Shelton laid down the rabbit, which was too paralyzed with fear to move. "I haven't practiced any since I came to the ranch," he explained apologetically. "I've always heard what fine shots the cowboys are, and I didn't want them laughing at me. But——"

"But my sample of shooting encourages you to go ahead," finished the girl laconically. "Cowboys don't shoot any better than anybody else," she went on, in the tone of an iconoclast. "It's just the name of it they've got. Why don't you shoot? Can't you see the snake on that ledge just under where I hit? Looks like a crooked stick—there! Now when he quits crawling you shoot at his head." She gave a dry little laugh. "You needn't be afraid to shoot before anybody if you can take his head off from here with *that* gun."

"Oh, say!" Shelton waited long enough to hug himself farcically. "This is going to be real wild-West sport! Gee! Shooting rattlesnakes in their dens——"

"Well, shoot first and talk about it afterward," advised the girl bluntly. "He'll crawl out of sight in a minute."

Shelton obediently raised his revolver high, brought it down in line, and fired—while the girl watched him curiously now that his attention was diverted from herself. Thus she did not see whether he hit the snake or not, and was startled at the whoop he gave.

"Say, I'm the lucky child! Did you see him wriggle? Stirred up the whole family, too! Gee, look at 'em!"

Now, this is not going to be a snake story. I shall not say how many rattlers those two killed in that gulch, while they sat there in the shade and talked and watched and fired when a snake showed itself. The point is that they became very well acquainted before the girl got stiffly to her feet and said she must go, or poppy would wonder where his supper was coming from.

Shelton, having learned that one pinched the rattles off the snakes one killed and kept them for souvenirs—and for proof of the killing—insisted upon climbing down into the gulch and collecting all he could find. The girl—who finally confessed to the name of Vida, and explained that her mother had

gotten it out of the dictionary because it was odd and the feminine of David, and because her mother's father was named David and ought to have a grandchild named after him, anyway—Vida protested and pointed out the danger in vain. Shelton must have rattlers to send to "the folks" at home, to prove the snake story he meant to write. As to the danger—ignorance is frequently mistaken for courage, and he went in spite of her arguments; in spite of her commands, even. And by all the laws of nature he thereby took a long step toward winning her regard. He came back with his nose turned up at the unpleasantness, and with a handful of rattles—no, I shall not say how many—which he insisted upon dividing with her.

He also gave her the wounded rabbit to keep, though she assured him pessimistically that the dogs would kill it first chance they got, and that if they didn't, it would die of the broken shoulder. Womanlike, she was inconsistent enough to carry it home with her in spite of her pessimism, just because he gave it to her, perhaps.

Shelton tried to induce her to promise that she would come again to hunt rattlesnakes on some certain day, and failed. And when they had parted and he was riding home in the early dusk, it occurred to him that he had forgotten all about the spook. It would have been a good story to tell Vida—only they had plenty to talk about without that. He remembered then that she had once spoken of the place as Piute Hills, so she couldn't have heard the spook story. He would tell her next time, sure. He knew she was not the kind of person who believes in ghosts, so it would not scare her. Then he sighed. She seemed to be an awfully nice girl, but it did seem a shame that she was not pretty. Her plainness was the one jarring note in the day's pleasure, and

robbed him of the joy of romantic musings as he rode homeward.

## CHAPTER IV.

Spooky had been to town, and had returned with the mail, a fresh supply of tobacco, and a quart bottle of a liquid he called pain killer. It had been full when he started for the ranch; and when he arrived it had been a good three-quarters full. This condition the other boys speedily changed so that the bottle was presently thrown into the discard, empty and therefore useless.

So it transpired that by dark the Sunbeam boys were jollier than usual, and quicker to see a joke—when the joke was on the other fellow. When Spooky remembered the mail and took a bundle of letters from his pocket, the number of those addressed to Shelton C. Sherman caught his attention. Spooky had never before seen the full name written down on paper, and he studied it curiously.

"Shelton She Sherman," he said aloud, and stood the letter up on a shelf. "*Shelton, She Sherman! C! C, gal ding it! Shelton She—C. Sherman.* Say, that's a peach of a name for a man to pack around for folks to stub their tongue on." He fingered another letter, and stood it beside the first. "Shelton She Sherman," he read again.

"You're boozed up, Spooky," Spider accused, coming up behind and resting an arm heavily on Spooky's shoulder. "I'll gamble you had two bottles when you left town—you swine. Why, anybody can read that right off. Anybody that ain't drunk," he amended.

"You try it," Spooky challenged. "Bet you four bits that you can't say it straight." He stood a third letter up, and after that a fourth. "Now read 'em all—just the names—one after another, and see who's drunk!" he urged. "Bet you four bits you can't do it."

"Shelton—C—Sherman. Shelton She

—C—Sherman. Shelton She Sherman—Oh, thunder!" surrendered Spider, laughing ruefully. "Come on, Jim. You try it."

So Jim, showing two-thirds of his teeth in a grin, came up and stood beside them, studied the letters for a moment, and fell over the very first C.

"Bet a dollar Shep can't say it himself," he said, and took a big chew of tobacco. "Nobody could—sober. If Spooky hadn't went and swallowed that whole bottle, I could do it."

"What-all yuh talkin' about?" A little old man with bent shoulders and a long, graying mustache came trotting up from a far corner, where he had been reading the last Boise paper by a smoky lamp. "When it comes to readin', they ain't a one of yuh that amounts to anything. Yuh can't hardly read a look-out-fer-the-cyars sign on a railroad crossin'!" He gummed a wad of tobacco and slid his spectacles farther down toward the end of his high, pointed nose. "What is it yuh want read out to yuh?"

"Read the names on them four letters, Pike—and read 'em fast," invited Spider, with a wicked little twinkle in his eyes. "We're trying to see who can read the fastest."

"Why, can't yuh read plain hand-writin', none of yuh? Shelton She Sherman—"

Spider gave a howl and swung Pike back into his corner. "Shelton She Sherman shells sea shells by the sheshore," he stated gravely. "I'll bet a dollar there ain't a man in camp can say *that* straight."

They all tried it. They were in the middle of hilarious attempts when Shelton walked in among them smiling his disarming smile of guileless good nature.

"Hello, Shelton She Sherman, who shall shell she sells on the sheshore," Spider greeted him joyously. "Come right in, my boy. You're wanted."

"That's good. I'd hate awfully to think I wasn't wanted," Shelton retorted. "Supper over, fellows? I'm hungry as a she-bear."

"Shelton She Sherman, the she-bear 'shays she shall not shell sea sells——" yelled Spooky, rolling over on a bed and kicking his heels into the air and laughing so he could not go on.

"Say, what's the matter with you fellows, anyway?" Shelton demanded. "Can't you take something for it? Say, Spooky, get any mail for your little friend?"

"Make Shep say it, or don't give him his letters," suggested Jim, spitting tobacco juice into the wood box so that he could grin.

"Say what?"

Spider went over and stood guard before the shelf. His face was sober except for the lurking little devil of fun in his eyes. "Here's four letters from mamma and Susie and Sister Ann and the little fairy that works in the candy store on the corner," he informed Shelton. "If you can say Shelton She Sherman sells sea shells on the sheshore—say it right, I mean—you can have 'em."

"No, he can't!" interjected Spooky, rising up, recovered from his fit. "He can't have but one for every time he says it——"

"He can't have but one try for every letter," put in Jim, coming up.

Shelton took a minute to grasp just what was expected of him. He made Jim repeat the sentence, and he said it over under his breath for practice while Jim muddled the words.

He peered at the envelopes over Spider's shoulder, and his heart swelled with desire.

"Shelton C. Sherman sells sea shells on the sheshore," he recited confidently and reached out his hand for the first letter.

"Sheshore—yuh can't have it. You done lost that one," declared his tormentor. "Try the second one, Shep."

"Oh, say, fellows! That one's from the only mother I've got," pleaded Shelton; but the three were obdurate. The second one he lost, and the third. The fourth, which he suspected of being a bill from his dentist, he refused to try for, and went off to get something to eat in the cabin, more than half angry; because that was his first mail from home, and he had been fighting homesickness ever since he landed. Shelton C. Sherman loved a joke, but he considered this performance just plain meanness.

However, he practiced faithfully upon the sentence while he ate cold boiled beef, sour-dough bread, and a dish of fried corn, and emptied the teapot of reddish, tannin-charged tea. Burney sat smoking before the fire and said nothing at all. So, fed and feeling more equal to the situation, he hurried back to the bunk house.

"Shelton C. Sherman sells sea shells by the seashore," he recited triumphantly the moment he was inside the door, and grabbed the letter he knew was from his mother. "Aw, I guess you fellows are not so smart," he taunted. "Shelton C. Sherman sells sea shells by the seashore and takes number two—and that's from my best girl, fellers. Shelton C. Sherman continues to sell sea shells by the seashore, and gathers in this tender missive from his big sister. And Shelton C. Sherman doesn't care a hang whether he shall sell sea shells by the seashore at your shervish, because that other letters looks strangely like a gentle reminder of a very painful hour in the torture chamber of one Painless Parks who purports to pull cuspids, bicuspid, or molars without pain to himself or money refunded. Thanks awfully, my dear friends. Anything else before I seat myself to peruse these loving messages from home?"

"No fair greasing your tongue, Shep," Spooky complained. "You

ought to be spanked for staying out so late, anyway. Where you been?"

"Hunting spooks. And shooting rattlesnakes and talking to a pretty girl. Don't bother me, fellers."

Spider fidgeted while Shelton seated himself in a chair by the lamp, tilted the chair back comfortably against the wall, and projected himself mentally into the midst of his friends back home. Spider was in the mood to tease some one, and Shelton seemed the logical victim.

"Shooting rattlesnakes, you say?" he inquired banteringly, by way of starting something. He got a grunt of assent from Shelton, and no further notice.

"I used to shoot snakes some myself," Spider observed reminiscently. "It's easy. You see a snake—like it was over there—and you pull your old gat and cut down on him—like this—and *bing!*" He drew his gun, and, by way of illustration, fired between the feet of Shelton C. Sherman and splintered the chair-round.

"Oh, say! You disturb me!" Shelton reproved mildly, without looking up from the letter.

"And when you see another one—*bing!*" This time he made a miscalculation and flicked the heel of Shelton's boot.

"Say! Look where you're shooting, why don't you? How do you expect a fellow to read——"

"By jinks, there's another one!" Spider shot again, this time being careful to aim at the floor under Shelton's chair.

"And there's one, right by your ear!" Shelton, roused to action, whipped out his own revolver and sent a bullet him-ming past Spider's head. "Look out, there's one right behind you!"

Spider's eyes widened perceptibly, and he ducked quite frankly out of range. "Aw, I was only joshing, Shep!" he cried reproachfully. "You don't

want to take things too serious. I never meant anything."

"Neither did I," retorted Shelton. "What are you going to do now? Go on playing snakes?"

"Nah." To prove it, Spider broke his gun, emptied the remaining cartridges in his palm, and threw the revolver on his bed. "What are you fellers grinning your heads off about?" he demanded fretfully of Spooky and Jim. "How'd I know the kid could hit where he aimed at? Stands a feller in hand to duck, and duck quick, when a strange hand points a gun at yuh. No telling——"

"I didn't duck, did I?" Shelton cut in shrewdly. "And I didn't know how straight you could shoot, either. I took a chance, same as a fellow has to take if he wants to have any pleasure in life. Same as the girl said I took when I went down into the snakes' den to get the rattles off the dead ones."

"Yes, you did—not!" Spider might be momentarily taken aback, but he was not the one to subside permanently.

"Yes, I did, too!" And Shelton produced several rattles with the pinched-off place still showing fresh. "And that's only half. I divvied with the girl, just to show what a nice, generous boy I can be. Besides, she shot a lot of 'em herself."

"What gyurl was that?" Pike, roused again from his reading by the disturbance, peered at Shelton over his spectacles.

"Oh, a girl named Vida. She lives in a sheep wagon over somewhere near Spook Hills. I don't remember her last name; she keeps house for poppy and Uncle Jake—say, fellows, she's an awfully nice little girl——"

Pike laid down his paper, took the spectacles from his nose, folded down the bows, and produced a long, metal case while he gummed his wad of tobacco thoughtfully. "Which side of Spook Hills is her folks rangin' sheep



on?" he asked, quite as if he were a prosecuting attorney examining a witness for the defense. Pike had that portentous manner when he approached anything pertaining to the welfare of the Sunbeam.

"Why, I don't know—somewhere around close, I should judge, because it was after five when she said she must go and get supper for poppy." Shelton looked hungrily at his letters, but he was too polite to say that he would like very much to be left in peace while he read them.

Pike was making ready for another truth-compelling question when Burney opened the door and came stooping in, his little eyes fairly boring through the haze of powder smoke that still hung heavy in the low-ceilinged room.

Spider, Spooky, and Jim looked at one another with a trace of uneasiness. The other two met Burney's sharp glances unmoved—Pike because he could only think of one thing at a time, and his mind happened to be occupied now with other matters, and Shelton because the emotion called fear had yet to be born into his mental life. During the complete silence that fell upon the group, Shelton tore open another letter and unfolded the pages, which crackled sharply.

"What's this shootin' about?" Burney's voice might be high and thin and wholly lacking in the timbre one would expect from a man of his size, but the sentence cut deep, like the whip of tyranny.

"Oh—nothin'; I was just—foolin' with my gun, just—to see how she worked." Spider fumbled with his book of cigarette papers, and found it difficult to single out a leaf.

Pike, still ruminating upon the one idea that filled his mind for the time being, unconsciously relieved the pending unpleasantness.

"Say, Burney, them Williams sheep must be acrowdin' up on our range,"

he piped suddenly. "The boy hyar says he seen a gyurl, that b'longs to a sheep outfit, foolin' around Spook Hills. I know ole Sam Williams has *got* a gyurl, but I didn't know she ever come out 'n' camped with 'im. Still, she's liable to 'a' done it—if the boy here's tellin' the truth about it."

"She's done it irrespective of my telling the truth," Shelton amended, and went on with his letter.

Burney stood a little stooped forward, because of his hat scraping the log-and-dirt roof, and stared hard at Pike and at Shelton and at the three others, who avoided meeting his sharp little eyes. He reached out a great paw and fumbled for the door latch.

"You want to cut out this shooting around here," he said to Spider, in the tone of the master speaking to his man. "Guns ain't made to play with." He pulled open the door and stood hesitating on the threshold. "Come out here, kid; I want to see yuh," he commanded, and went outside.

Shelton sighed and folded up his letter. The one thing he missed most at the Sunbeam, it seemed to him then, was neither companionship nor the creature comforts of life, but privacy. Waking or sleeping, he was never quite sure of being left undisturbed for five minutes together—and that in a land where isolation is the keynote of life. He went out wondering what Burney could possibly want him to do at this time of night, or what he could want to see him about that could not be spoken of before the others. So far as he had observed the Sunbeam inhabitants, not one of the lot—unless it should be Burney himself—ever had a thought he would not share; nor anything else, for that matter, except his saddle horse and riding gear.

Burney was waiting for him outside, and, without a word, he led the way over to the cabin where he lived and where the men all ate together. He

went inside, stooping to pass through the doorway, and Shelton followed him. He hoped that whatever business it was that Burney had with him, it would not take many minutes.

The business puzzled Shelton to the extent that he almost forgot his bunch of unread letters. For Burney asked him question after question in his high, shrill voice about his trip, leaning over the smoldering coals in the rough fireplace, his great hands clasped loosely together, his forearms resting upon his huge knees. Where had Shelton gone? How long did he sit there talking to the girl? Just what part of the Piute Hills—Burney never called them by the other name—was it that he visited? Which way did the girl go when she left him? Did he come back the same way he went? Did he see—anybody? These questions and more did Burney ask, and never once looked toward the boy.

To the last question Shelton gave a queer answer. "I tried to see somebody," he said, and laughed a little. "Once I thought I heard some one coming behind me, and I thought Dutch heard something, too. But I didn't see anything."

Burney rolled his little eyes toward him for a quick glance. "You want to keep away from Piute Hills," he said peevishly. "They's—snakes and things. A man's liable to get bit."

Surprised, Shelton looked at him. It was a poor reason to give a man, he thought. "There aren't as many as there was," he returned amusedly. "The girl and I together killed about sixteen. Here are the rattles of half of them."

Burney never glanced toward Shelton's outstretched palm. "It ain't no place for you, over there," he reiterated vaguely. "You better keep away from them hills."

"Well——" Shelton was going to argue the point, to get some better reason from Burney than the one he had

given. But Burney turned his back and bent farther over the coals, and gave Shelton to understand by his very posture that the subject was closed. So Shelton went back to the bunk house and read his letters in what one might call peace, since the rambunctious ones were wrangling amicably over a game of solo, and Pike had gone to bed.

## CHAPTER V.

Of course, since Shelton had been warned to stay away from Spook Hills, he was crazy to go again as soon as possible. Burney might have known that, if he had stopped to consider the matter at all; for he must surely have known a little bit about human nature. There was another reason—the girl. That also might go without saying. It is true she was not pretty; and back home, or anywhere else where there were other girls to choose from, I don't suppose Shelton would have troubled to speak two sentences to her under any circumstances. But she was a girl, and she was the only one in that part of the country. And Shelton really had nothing much to do at the ranch, and had not learned to ride well enough to be trusted out on the range with the men. Burney was particular about not letting him even attempt to ride any horse save Dutch, who was at least eighteen years old and considered absolutely safe.

Well, Shelton went back to the hills, and while he was yet afar off he saw the girl riding slowly down along a brush-fringed gully. He turned and urged old Dutch into a stiff-legged lope that still did not stumble, however rough the ground—and Shelton in his ignorance had no sense at all about galloping a horse over dangerous places. So he came bouncing along through the rocks and sage and buckbrush, showing daylight between himself and the saddle at every jump, and clinging to the horn with one hand, and looking

atrociously pleased and satisfied with himself, and plainly expectant of a glowing welcome.

Shakespeare asserted boldly that welcome ever smiles. He was wrong; this welcome did not smile appreciably. Neither did the girl turn her horse one inch from the way she was going, that she might meet him the sooner. Shelton's grin drew itself in at the corners when he was close enough to see the dead composure of her face. She certainly did seem less impressed at his eager approach than a plain girl ought to seem.

"Hello, Shep," she said uninterestedly, when he was almost alongside. "Why this mad haste? The scenery ain't going to run anywhere and hide; and the snakes ain't, either. And," she added, as an afterthought, "I ain't."

Shelton made wrinkles between his eyebrows. He hated to hear a girl say ain't—unless she was so pretty a fellow could forgive anything. And Vida was even plainer than he had remembered her as being.

"Are you wishing the scenery would run away and hide?" he asked, unconsciously adopting the tone he had always employed toward a pretty girl.

"I don't care what it does. I wish I could hide." Her face settled again into a sullen discontent with life, such as comes sometimes to the lonely.

"Well, the hiding looks good around here," Shelton suggested amiably. "By the way, how is our rabbit?"

"It died," she said indifferently. "I told you it would. I packed it all the way home and got all over fleas from the dirty thing, and it went and died before supper was ready. I gave it to the dogs."

Again Shelton wrinkled his eyebrows and wished that she were different. She had no fine sentiments whatever, judging from her attitude toward the rabbit—after he had bandaged it and carried it in his arms and had given it to her as

a special favor! Any other girl would have——

"That great, overgrown Goliath of yours is going to play hob, ain't he?" she demanded abruptly, looking at Shelton resentfully. He felt that here was the key to her ill humor, and braced himself mentally to meet her latent antagonism. "He's a peach! The great big bully!"

"Why? How has he managed to win your disfavor? He's stayed right at the ranch all the time——"

"Yes, he has—not! He came over to our camp yesterday and told poppy we were on his range and he'd thank us to get off it pretty darned sudden. Just as if he owns the whole of Idaho! I was in the wagon washing dishes, and I heard him. He couldn't wait—he got there before poppy had left to go carry some grub to the other camps. We'd just had our breakfast. And he acted like he owned us body and soul. I stuck my head out of the wagon and asked him where he got his license to come bossing us around, and why didn't he let his own business keep him busy, and he wilted right down! But he talked awful to poppy—Uncle Jake was out with the sheep, and didn't hear him, or there would have been something doing right then and there.

"Why, he told poppy to move right away from Piute Hills and keep away! And there's better water and better grass, what there is of it, in these hills than anywhere around. He wanted us to go back toward Pillar Butte with our sheep—but he'll find out he ain't running the Williams outfit yet."

Shelton began to look uneasy, as if he were being held responsible in some way for the arrogance of Burney. He hastened to declare his absolute neutrality, and he ended by apologizing for Burney. "You know, he doesn't seem to me to be unjust or dishonorable, or anything of that sort," he went on. "I think there must be some mistake. Per-

haps he felt that you were encroaching——”

“He felt that he wanted to hog the range,” Vida interrupted hotly. “But he ain’t going to make that work, not with us. We’ve got just as much right here as he has, and we ain’t afraid of him just because he’s big as all outdoors. Goliath, that’s what I call him—and coming around trying to fight with the jawbone of an ass, too! He’s a coward. I ain’t afraid of him—I’d stand up to forty more just as big as he is.”

Shelton laughed. “Vida is the feminine of David, didn’t you say? David and Goliath—oh, say, that’s rich! I must write that home to the folks. A girl-David at that. Where’s your sling-shot?”

“You shut up! I ain’t in the mood to joke about him. You can stand back and see how funny it is, and write to your folks about us savages fighting among ourselves out here over a pile of barren hills and a few spears of grass and some old water holes. I guess it’ll sound funny to them. But it ain’t funny to *us*, Mr. Prettyboy. It means shoes and flour and bacon to us, if you want to know.

“Do you s’pose I don’t like pretty clothes and things?” Her eyes blazed at him from under her old felt hat that her father had cast aside. “Do you think I *like* to live like a squaw, and tie my hair up with a grocery string, and wear——” She gave an unexpected little sob, wholly feminine and disarming. “I’m living this way so poppy can get ahead of the game enough to afford something better. I *hate* it! I hate the sight of sheep and I hate old clothes and living away out here away from everything a girl likes. But sheep’s the only thing poppy sees good money in; and this is about the only place that ain’t overstocked already. And that great, big, whiny-voiced booby can just

leave us alone! We ain’t hurting him any.

“Poppy sold out to him two years ago, just to keep from having trouble with him, and tried to go into something else. And he lost about half his money and just had to get back into sheep, because they’re the only thing he’s sure of making good at. And he ain’t going to sell out again to please anybody. And he’s going to run his sheep in these hills just as long as he wants to, and you Sunbeamers have just got to stand for it. If you don’t like it, why, you can lump it. That’s all.”

“I do like it,” Shelton declared placatingly. “You mustn’t say we’re all against you and wanting you to leave here, because that isn’t true. I’m not against you, and I want you to stay around here just as long as I stay.” He felt rather proud of that statement, and he was disappointed because Vida was not immediately cheered by it.

“You’re mighty small potatoes when it comes to this range business,” she reminded him. “Sounds nice, but when you come right down to cases, what you think and want stacks up about as high as a hole in the ground. When I say *you* have got to stand for our running sheep here, I mean the outfit you’re stopping with; you Sunbeamers. And we’re going to stay. We’ve got to, or get out of the sheep business—and poppy ain’t going to do that till he gets outa debt. There’s going to be good money in sheep this year. The lamb crop was fine.”

So she talked, and Shelton presently became bored with the subject. To him it looked like a big enough country for all the people there were in it, and more. Big enough for all the sheep and all the cattle, too.

Far as he could see, the country lay wide open, with never a fence nor a house anywhere. To be sure, most of it was barren country. But certain slopes showed green in the sheltered

places where the sage was not too thick. And certain threadlike gulches were also green with woods. And farther up in Spook Hills he could see that there was timber worthy the name. And there was so much of it! For one lone cattleman and two lone sheep owners to quarrel over this big feeding ground looked foolish.

That day they did not hunt snakes. They rode to the brink of a deep, fearsome-looking cañon, and Vida stopped and stared long all up and down it, looking for caves, she said. She did not seem to care enough about them, however, to go down and explore the rocky walls. She was held fast in the net of circumstances and environment that day, and her mind ran upon the everyday sordidness of her life. She had sent to Pocatello by one of their herders for a pair of shoes, and they didn't fit. She wondered how she was going to manage and exchange—there being no prospect of her getting to town herself for goodness knows when. Meantime, she had to wear her best shoes for every day, which evidently worried her thrifty little soul.

Shelton tried to talk of his home and the things he had seen and done, but Vida kept harking back to the petty details of her own life. The other day she had listened hungrily to his patterings; Shelton could not understand why she should seem so different, so utterly commonplace, to-day. Shelton, you see, had never confronted any of the big problems of life—particularly the big economic problem.

They turned up the cañon, skirting it to the very foot of one of the steeper hills. Shelton was beginning to think of starting home from very boredom—only the Sunbeam Ranch, with its sun-baked area of sand and its little, squalid cabins and no human being on the place, unless Burney were home, spelled a boredom more complete than this.

"This hill's full of caves," Vida in-

formed him apathetically, pointing a grimy hand to a rugged slope. "I used to be around here seven or eight years ago—before Goliath had anything to do with the Sunbeam, or poppy went into sheep. Poppy used to be a prospector, and he prospected all through these hills. It was a claim he sold that put him in the sheep business in the first place. One summer I come with him—the summer after mother died. I could show you all kinds of caves and places, around here."

"Why don't you?" Shelton smiled to make the question more especially adapted to a girl. "Maybe we could land that spook the boys claim is in these hills. Come on—let's do some exploring!"

"I don't feel like it; and we'd need candles, anyway. Some day we can bring some, and I'll take you through the biggest ones—if I can find them again. I've got to go pretty quick; I'm baking bread to-day."

"Oh, stay and help me hunt spooks!" pleaded Shelton, suddenly realizing that he hated to have her ride off and leave him. "Honest, there's a ghost. Spooky saw it, and Spider, and so did Jim. It follows folks at dusk—but maybe we could rout it out in daytime if we try real hard—and if you turn back and try to run it down, it gives a horrible screech and disappears into the bowels of the earth. Come on. Let's you and me go spook-hunting!" In his eagerness to persuade her, his tone might almost have been called loverlike.

Vida settled her disreputable old hat more firmly on her head because of the wind that had risen, and looked at him unmoved. "What makes you act so silly?" she inquired. "You smiled at me then just the way one of our herders does when he gets about half shot. He always comes around and tries to propose, when he gets about so full, and poppy has to chase him off. The last time, I set old Whimper on

him." She turned away to study the bold wall of rocks opposite. "There's lions in these hills—panthers, maybe you'd call 'em—and now and then a black bear; and all kinds of lynx and bobcats and coyotes and things. But there ain't any spooks—I guess it wouldn't take more'n a bobcat to put you Sunbeamers on the run, though! I s'pose maybe they seen a coyote and thought it was a spook."

"After that," sighed Shelton, with exaggerated reproach. "I shall have to leave thee. Farewell, heartless one, until we meet under more auspicious skies."

"There ain't anything the matter with this sky," said Vida. "I wish to goodness you would go, if you've got to be silly. I don't see what's got into you. You was sensible enough the other time." The worst of it was, she meant just what she said; you could not look into her eyes and doubt that.

Shelton considered himself offended, and he turned away and rode back down the cañon wall, with no more adieu than the perfunctory lifting of his hat.

"I'll be up here somewhere day after to-morrow," she called after him when he had ridden fifty yards or so.

"I won't," he retorted, and rode on. After a while he began to wonder if she had heard him. At first he wished that he had spoken louder; later on he was sorry that he spoke so loud.

He found a place where the cañon looked crossable, and rode down into it. Then, the opposite side that had looked almost as if it had a crude trail zigzagging up to the top, showed him a ledge at the bottom that even he knew better than ask Dutch to climb. The way down the cañon was blocked by what must have been a waterfall in the wet times, but was now a sheer jump-off ten feet high. He did not ask Dutch to go down that, either; Shelton was learning a few of the limitations of horses. Perforce, then, he went up the

cañon toward the hills—though he disliked that route because Vida might see him from the top and think he was hanging around in her vicinity.

The cañon widened until there was a grassy bottom, with a little creek that kept the place green. Then it narrowed abruptly, with black ledges leaning forward, as if they wanted to see how far they could tilt without losing their balance. It got so gloomy dark down there at last that Shelton looked at his watch to see if it were nearly night. He was not riding now, but plodding along afoot with Dutch following patiently after; and the way in which Dutch negotiated the scattered rocks and deep little washouts proved him the best of his kind.

The cañon walls drew in to hold close a huge thicket of chokecherries, service-berry bushes, and buckbrush, mingled in one glorious tangle. Shelton tried to go through it—he was the kind of persistent idiot that would try anything—and after a few attempts gave it up and started around. The ground was soft and black and rich looking where he skirted the thicket, and somewhere near he heard water gurgling like a newly awakened baby talking to its fists. The sound reminded him that he was thirsty.

He left Dutch standing with dropped reins and went forward, parting the branches before him with both hands to make easy passing. In a minute he came to a tiny stream, evidently fed by a hidden spring, bordered with mint and dainty little grass flowers and shaded deep with the thicket. He felt the thrill of discovery. He was sure that Vida did not know of this cold little brook, else she would surely have spoken of it. She had looked into the cañon and had not mentioned that there was water down there. Probably no white man had ever drunk from it before, he thought exultingly as he knelt down on the vivid green margin so sharply con-



trasting with the black barrenness all around.

He leaned far over to drink, and then drew back, staring at something in the soft, black soil at the very edge. A huge imprint in the ooze; a track so fresh that even Shelton, new to the ways of the wild though he was, could not fail to see that it was but minutes old—perhaps seconds, even. He sat back on his heels and looked at it, puzzling over the manner of beast that could have made it. Almost human it was, and huge—big as the great tracks Burney made when he walked abroad—and yet not human.

Little, trampled blades of grass were rising slowly along the edges to show how lately the thing had passed that way. Like the print of a great, bare foot it was, except that the toes were not the toeprints of a man; nor was the track shaped just like a man's foot. Shelton studied it curiously. Even while he stared at it the water pushed the mud back, smoothing out little details and making the whole a big, long, formless depression in the ooze. Looking at it so, Shelton would have called it a man's track and let it go at that. But it was not a man's track; he was sure of that.

"Must have been a bear," he told himself at last, and bent over again and got his drink. "She said there were bears in the hills—but say, he must be a whopper, to make a track the size of that! Too bad the beggar got off without me seeing it."

He got out his gun and examined it. Pretty small caliber to go hunting the bear that made that track—but Shelton did want to kill a bear, now that he knew there was one about. It would be something to write home to the folks; and a bearskin rug that he had killed himself—say! That would be simply great!

Foolhardily he searched beyond the brook, though the tangle was thick and

exceedingly favorable to an ambush. He was not scared—he did not know enough of the danger to be scared; he was anxious and elated and filled with the eager expectancy of the novice. He beat about in the bushes and then came crashing out into the open near the northern wall of the cañon; and he stood baffled and disappointed before the emptiness.

Surely the creature could not have climbed that sheer wall—and yet Shelton had a hazy notion that bears did climb trees and things. He was staring up at it and wondering what possible route the beast could have taken—since it did not seem to be anywhere in the cañon—when he noticed the gorgeous purple and crimson of the sky. Sunset so soon? It is astonishing how the hours slide past when one is wholly given up to that primitive emotion, the lust of the chase.

He must start back to the ranch, though he hated the idea of leaving that bear alive. Still he could not hunt a bear in the dark, and he could get lost very easily, and worry the life out of the fellows at the Sunbeam. He went back to where Dutch was waiting impatiently with twitching ears and uneasy tramlings; mounted awkwardly, and started back down the cañon. In the narrowest places the gloom of night was already filling the gorge almost to the brim, and Dutch stepped out briskly wherever the footing was passable.

And then a strange sensation seized Shelton C. Sherman. He looked back without quite knowing why he did so. The cañon yawned stark and empty behind him. Presently he turned again and looked, vaguely expectant. There was nothing. Then it came definitely, the feeling that he was being followed. He stopped Dutch still and waited, watching the gorge behind him. There was no sign of any living thing save himself and a belated bird that flew chirping up to the lighter slopes.

Shelton was not frightened, as the word is commonly understood. He was puzzled, and he felt an eerie prickling of the flesh as the darkness advanced and muffled the farther steps. But mainly he was chagrined because he could not see to shoot—even supposing there was something to shoot at. He thought it would make great stuff to write home to the folks, and he kept all his senses alert for fresh incidents or adventures. On the whole, he rather enjoyed the sensations he got out of it.

Once he heard a rock rattle down and bump somewhere—and the sound was so close behind him that he pulled his six-shooter from its scabbard and turned for a shot at the bear, or whatever it was. But Dutch was pulling hard on the reins and stepping along much faster than was wise, and would not wait till the thing overtook them.

It was Dutch that found the trail up the cañonside, where they had come down. He toiled up through rocks and stunted bushes, stopping when he must to get a breath or two, and listening always for something behind, something that followed them still. Shelton could feel the quivering of the horse's flesh beneath him, and it dawned on him that old Dutch was scared, and that he was climbing the hill faster than he ought to climb if he expected to have any wind left when he reached the top, and that he supposed he really ought to get off and walk. It was a shame, when you think of it, to make good old Dutch carry a great hulk like him up that bluff. Shelton dismounted then, and went ahead.

He wondered if he really felt more comfortable in his mind when Dutch was between him and the bear—or whatever it was. To test his own feeling about the matter, he looped the reins up awkwardly around the saddle horn and let Dutch take the lead for a few rods; but he kept looking back, and he

soon decided that Dutch really ought to be led.

At the top he tried to persuade himself that his imagination was playing tricks with him; that there was nothing behind him save the bleak, dark hills and the usual night prowlers abroad on business that concerned him not at all. But there was Dutch, hurrying along with his eyes rolled to watch the trail behind; that did not look like imagination, did it?

Before he had gone a quarter of a mile, Shelton was clinging to the saddle horn while the horse galloped unevenly over the rough ground. It takes a rider with some experience to sit easily in the saddle and ride headlong through the sagebrush country, with a jump here, a quick swerve there, and a longer stride to bridge a cut or avoid one of those bugbears of the range, gopher and badger holes. Shelton had all that to contend with, and he had also the natural roughness of Dutch's gait. So he hung onto the horn and bounded, and more than once was saved from falling by his long legs that instinctively clinched the horse's belly when he jumped sidewise.

Ordinarily the mere feat of riding at a fast gallop was enough to occupy all of Shelton's attention. To-night, however, the weird feeling that he was being followed persisted; increased, even.

Shelton, before he reached the brow of the hill, beneath which winked the welcome lights of the Sunbeam cabins, came as near to being scared as ever he had been in his twenty years of heedless existence. He was riding with his head over his shoulder and his eyes strained into the darkness behind him, the last few miles. For all that, he had not seen anything that need agitate him or goad his imagination into delusions. He would have called it a whim—but there was Dutch, also looking back, and traveling with an unprecedented amount of ambition. Once or twice, from the

way Dutch acted, Shelton felt certain that Dutch saw it—whatever it was.

Then, as he dipped over the brow of the bluff, and rode down the trail into the shut-in valley already grown familiar, he heaved a sudden sigh of relief and went on at peace. Whatever it was, the thing was gone; at least he no longer felt its presence, and Dutch settled down to his habitual shamle and went on to the stables as though nothing had ever disturbed his equanimity.

## CHAPTER VI.

“Say, fellows, how big is a bear that makes a track that long?” Shelton measured a space with his spread palms and waited for some one to volunteer the information.

“’Bout as big as a good-sized elephant,” drawled Spider, after a perceptible pause, holding a lighted match to his cigarette.

“No, but *really*? You know, I ran across a fresh bear track that was that long. I couldn’t find the bear, though. It was in a deep thicket of all kinds of trees and bushes, and I hunted all around—but I never got a glimpse of it. It’s strange, too. The track was perfectly fresh—just made, in fact——”

“How d’yuh know?” Spooky demanded, looking up.

“Why, it was right in the edge of a little stream of water, and the water hadn’t washed any mud into it yet when I first saw it. And at the heel, the grass was just beginning to stand up straight again after being mashed down. I thought that meant the track was fresh and——”

“Purty good, f’r a kid,” Jim observed dryly, shifting his great wad of tobacco to the other cheek and grinning openly.

Shelton spent a few seconds in eying Jim doubtfully, and then he went on with his story, and told the whole of it, even to the conviction that he had been

followed to the edge of the bluff that bordered the Sunbeam coulee.

“Shelton She Sherman shays she shaw a she-bear shelling sea sells on the she-shore,” Spider commented gravely, with the little twinkle in his eyes.

“Aw, say, fellows!” Shelton protested—for the thing was fresh and very vivid in his memory. “It’s a fact, all of it.” He went over the whole story again, adding minute details which he had slurred with generalities in the first telling.

Spider got up, threw his cigarette stub into the fire, and turned upon Spooky. “Say, Spooky, you’re to blame for this,” he accused sternly. “Shep was a nice, innocent, truthful cuss when he come here. And your dog-goned, baneful influence and example has done *this!*” He indicated Shelton with his outflung hand. “You’ve lied to him, and you’ve lied before him, and you’ve lied behind his back ever since he come. We can’t blame Shelton She Sherman. He is more to be pitied than censured. If Shelton She Sherman shays he shees she-bears shelling sea sells on the seashore, why, it’s your fault and his misfortune. If possible, we must keep this from his folks. And if there’s anything we can do to remedy the evil before it becomes virulent and the whole outfit gets infectecated, I for one am ready and willing to do my part. But if it turns out fatal, the blame rests upon you, Spooky.”

Spooky laughed. So did Shelton, for that matter, and Jim, and Pike. And Shelton protested so earnestly that he was telling the truth, that they consented at last to believe that he had seen a track which may have looked like a bear’s track, also the possibility that he had been followed by something.

“But that wasn’t a bear,” Spooky insisted, with perfect sincerity. “It was that same spook I felt and seen, and I’ll bet money on it. You want to keep away from them hills, Shep. I’ve got

a hunch that thing is fixin' to git somebody. Here's four of us been follered now. There ain't a one of us that wouldn't swear to it. Lemme tell you, Shep, them hills ain't safe."

You know what happened, then, the very next morning. Shelton C. Sherman borrowed Spider's big forty-five revolver and cartridge belt and stuffed it with cartridges; borrowed Spooky's skinning knife, and fastened that in the belt; put up lunch enough to last him two meals, dodged Burney and Burney's coldly questioning eyes, and rode back to Spook Hills to hunt for the bear that made so enormous a track that none of the boys would believe him when he told how big it was. Spider had assured him that his six-gun would sure make it unhealthy for any bear in the country, providing Shep pumped enough lead out of it and into the bear. Shelton had also his own thirty-eight, and he had some skill in shooting—witness the rattles he took home with him after that first expedition.

No one worried much about Shelton's personal welfare. They were not the worrying kind, for one thing, and they trusted to Dutch and that providence which is said to watch over children and fools. I don't know just how they tagged Shelton, but they fitted him out and let him go to hunt his bear, and they helped him avoid Burney, who so strongly disapproved of any Spook Hill trips.

First, Shelton rode straight to where he might hope to meet Vida. He wanted to tell her about the bear; and he thought perhaps she might like to join in the hunt, though he doubted the efficiency of her little twenty-two. He meant to lend her his own revolver, if she wanted to come along.

He met her fair, just as he was topping the high ridge that would give him a wide outlook in the direction of her camp. She urged her horse forward,

and her eyes were hard and angry when she came close.

"Say, you Sunbeamers are sure straining yourselves to be neighborly, ain't you?" she demanded truculently, without replying to his gay greeting. "I don't mean you, yourself," she added, in the cause of justice, "but it sure makes me sore at the whole pesky outfit. Do you know what Goliath has done now?"

"Nothing but stay at the ranch and act like a hippopotamus with the toothache," Shelton replied cheerfully. "That's all I know of his doing."

"That ain't all he's done," she retorted sharply. "Where was he last night, for instance?"

"At home, when I got there—and I was late getting in. Smoking in front of the fire till bedtime. Why?"

"Because he wasn't. He was over killin' off about two dozen of our sheep, that's where he was. It couldn't have been anybody but him—the big bully. He twisted their necks like you'd wring the neck of a chicken. Uncle Jake was with that bunch, down there in the foothills behind that butte. He heard the dogs and went out, but it was dark—one of the dogs was killed, too," she added grimly. "Neck twisted just like the sheep. And you know who's the man that done it. You know there ain't any ordinary man could wring a sheep's neck like they was wrung. And the dog musta been just grabbed up and *squashed!* I seen him this morning, and his ribs are all mashed and his neck broke. It was Laddie, and he wasn't afraid. Uncle Jake says the other dog just crep' under the wagon and whined, when he seen what it was——"

"Oh, say, doesn't that sound more as if an animal had been around?" Shelton cut in eagerly. "You know, I went down in that cañon over there, after I left you, and I saw a bear track. A whopper of a track, that the boys wouldn't believe in when I told them

how big it was. Why, it was that long!" Shelton measured the space with his spread palms again, and again he saw frank disbelief in the eyes that looked at him. "Honest," he added, when he saw how she doubted.

"But Uncle Jake *did* see a little bit, just as he was leaving," Vida said positively. "He seen him go over a little rise, and he was big—Uncle Jake would swear it was Goliath. A bear don't go on its hind legs——"

"It might—if it was carrying something. Don't you suppose it would carry a sheep away with it? I've read about them doing those things, and they go on their hind feet at such times." Shelton leaned toward her, and his cheeks were pink, like a girl's with earnestness. "I'm positive Burney was not away from the ranch last night," he said, to clinch his argument.

Finally Vida's conviction was shaken a bit. She let her eyes waver from his face, and she saw then how he was armed. She pointed to the sagging gun belt and the weapon that hung at his hip. "Is that for the bear?" she asked, with her first smile.

"It certainly is—and I brought mine along for you, if you'll take a hand in the hunt. Come on. Say, he must be a perfect whale of a bear! I'll take you where I saw his track, and maybe we can find some trail to his den——"

Vida threw back her head and laughed musically, but with the unrestrained laughter of one used to wide spaces. "Oh, you're the funniest thing alive!" she told him afterward. "Do you want me to be eaten up? Or do you think you're a match for any bear? What are you driving at? To ask a lady to go bear-hunting with you, and take a chance——"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. It never occurred to me that perhaps there might be some risk attached to it," Shelton declared, so convincingly in earnest that she went off into another fit of laugh-

ter. "I wouldn't want you to be hurt, and I'm so horribly green at this bear-hunting that perhaps you *wouldn't* be quite safe with me. Gee! I'd hate to have anything happen to you." He was just as openly sincere in that last statement as he was in the first, but Vida did not laugh. She only looked at him queerly. "I think perhaps I'd better go alone," he added chivalrously. "It certainly must be a whale of a bear."

"Aren't you afraid, yourself?" Vida studied him.

"Afraid? Why, I never thought of being afraid. Would a man be afraid of a bear with a track that long?" For the third time he measured the space.

"Oh, get along with you and bring me his hide, then!" Vida seemed suddenly to have decided that he was making fun of her. "I'll trail along on high ground, where I can kinda keep tab on you. I don't believe I want to sweep out any bear's den and see if he's got sheep bones cached in it, thank you. But you can if you want to."

An hour or more after that, Shelton dismounted from old Dutch at the little stream that led down from the upper cañon. He thought he had discovered another bear track, but he was too ignorant to be sure. In a narrow strip of loose sand which bordered the stream there was a deep imprint of what looked very much like a heel; a bare heel, he thought it, though. A flat rock just even with the surface of the sand had received the rest of the foot, and left no mark to tell exactly what it was.

Shelton blundered about in that immediate neighborhood for a few minutes, and then went on. At the place in the thicket where he had found the track, there was nothing save a faint depression in the mud. And since that was his only clew to the beast he sought, he was patently discouraged. He beat back and forth through the thicket—not knowing the habits of a bear—and finally gave up hovering around the

place where it had been once, but might never be again. He went down again to where he had left Dutch, and turned to ride back whence he had come—at least, to where he had seen that mark.

A narrow gorge that he had overlooked before, thinking it a mere rift in the piled bowlders, he thought he would investigate. He was in no hurry to ride back to the upland and report failure to Vida, who would laugh at him for a greenhorn; besides, he had a vague impression that bears were rather fond of rough places. This was rough enough, in all conscience; even when he pulled upon the reins and clucked encouragingly, Dutch did not want to follow him over some of the worst places. He told himself that the sagacity and sure-footedness of the range horse has been greatly overestimated—but if you should see the places where he coaxed Dutch to risk his poor old bones, you would feel a new respect for that sore-tired animal.

Presently the gorge widened until it was possible to ride instead of scramble over rocks afoot. And then, just as he was coming into another grassy bottom, he saw before him, faintly defined, it is true, but unmistakable, the print of that great foot that still looked weirdly human to his town-trained eyes.

Shelton C. Sherman gave a suppressed whoop and went forward eagerly, triumphantly even. So little did he know of the wild that he fully expected to ride home joyously with the hide of the biggest bear in all Idaho rolled neatly behind the cante. Later it occurred to him that he should have measured that track, so that he might confound Spooky and Spider, chief doubters at the Sunbeam, with actual figures—a diagram, perhaps, or a sketch. But he was too far up the cañon before he thought of it, so he did not turn back.

Shelton went on and on—a mile, he guessed it afterward, though in rough

country such as that, distance is difficult to estimate correctly. At any rate, he eventually came out upon a crude amphitheater formed by the converging hills. On one side the ascent was almost sheer, with loose shale that made it impossible to climb, even for a bear. Shelton was sure of that after he had tried to go up, and after Dutch had planted both front feet stiffly before him and refused to attempt it even. He turned his attention, then, to the left wall; for in front of him was a cliff straight and smooth and high.

Here, on the left, were overhanging ledges bordered with bushes evidently watered from some hidden spring. Shelton surveyed the prospect from a little distance, saw deep shadow under one ledge where should be sunlight, and rode over there. It was the first place he had seen that looked as if it might be the den of a bear.

It really did look like a cave of some sort, even when he came close. Though he stood within fifty yards of the spot, and though the sun shone hotly upon that side of the cañon, beneath that jagged, jutting ledge was black shadow. Shelton got down, dropped the reins so that Dutch would stand, and clambered over the loose rocks that had rolled down the slope during the centuries past.

He stopped just where the sunlight stopped also, and stared at the wide mouth that yawned at him blackly. He could look into it for a little way, and see how rough were the walls, with little excrescences of what he took to be stalactites clinging like barnacles to the rock. The floor, once it left the outer edge, was moist sand. Shelton looked down at it, and saw tracks—a good many of them. Some of them were long and uncannily human, and yet not human—the tracks of the bear; and there were tracks also of a man's boots—big boots, that could belong to no one save Burney, of the Sunbeam. Shel-



ton's jaw dropped a little when he saw those, and he stared and stared before he ever thought of going on.

Finally he turned his head and looked back, blinking from gazing long upon the blackness. Dutch stood where he had been left, his ears flopping lazily in the sunlight, the rest of him hidden by the steep declivity up which his rider had climbed. In the open beyond Dutch a hawk was circling slowly with head dropped forward, watching for unwary gophers, perhaps. It was all very quiet and very reassuring—and Shelton, whether he realized it or not, at that moment needed something stolidly matter-of-fact to steady his reeling fancies.

For Burney was at home, he felt certain. And yet these tracks looked fresh—as fresh as the track he had seen in the edge of the little stream. And those other tracks, the huge impression of feet not quite human, they were fresh also; or so he believed, being ignorant of the fact that in moist sand that is sheltered from the weather a track will remain fresh looking for a long while.

He had come prepared to explore a cave if he found one; that is, he had purloined a candle end that he found in the bunk house, and he had matches. He pulled the bit of candle from his pocket, lighted it, and went into the dark, like the foolhardy fellow he was. He did show a little caution, I must confess; for he carried the light in his left hand, and in his right he held, tight-gripped, the big forty-five six-shooter Spider had loaned him. Afraid? No, but tingling with excitement, his senses atiptoe with enthusiasm for the adventure.

He stooped a little at first, and even then his hat crown scraped upon the rough-rock ceiling. He thought that Burney, if he really did come in here, must have bent almost double. Just a long tunnel straight into the hill, it seemed; an ancient, subterranean outlet for water or lava or something, he did

not quite know what. When he held the light down, he still saw the tracks of the beast and of the man; he did not see any coming out, which did not occur to him as being significant until he had proceeded two hundred feet or so. Then he took a fresh grip on the revolver and went more cautiously. He was not afraid of Burney—though he knew that he had left Burney at the ranch, and therefore could not imagine him as being inside the cave. But the beast—well, he thought it wise to be ready, because a bear of such size might be a pretty nifty proposition if a man failed to kill him with the first shot or two.

So he went on and on. Once or twice his candle failed to reach the rock wall upon one side or the other, and he began to wonder if there might not be branches running in other directions. That made him more cautious still, though it could not dampen his enthusiasm or dull his eager expectancy. He tried to keep always going where the tracks led, which became somewhat difficult, since the floor varied its moist sand covering with a shale rock that left no mark. Still he kept on going.

Finally the tunnel forked, plainly and unmistakably. He could stand before a wedge of sweating rock and look down both fearsome passages, and he hesitated there, flaring the light into one tunnel and then into the other, looking eagerly for some sign of his quarry.

And then, while he stood there undecided, the skin began to creep and prickle at the back of his neck—where the hair of our cave-dwelling ancestors used to rise, perhaps, at the first warning of danger. Shelton did not quite know what ailed him, for the sensation was absolutely new to him. He glanced around involuntarily for some hiding place—and he did not know why. Something was watching him, out there in the blackness beyond the farthest candle gleam. It was like the sense of

being followed, the night before, except that this feeling agitated him and alarmed him. Without reasoning the thing out, he dodged precipitately into the left-hand passage, and ran forward a few steps before he pulled himself together.

He stopped then and listened, his eyes straining into the darkness out of which he had come. He heard the rapid thump, thump, thump of his own heart, and he heard that muffled beating punctuated by the thin sound of water dripping somewhere. That was all. The rest was dead, impenetrable blackness like a wall, and silence that was like a curtain hung before that black wall. And yet—

Shelton C. Sherman stood backed against the wall and knew that he was afraid; and that his fear was a blind, unreasoning fear, born perhaps of tricky nerves rebelling against that dark journey into the middle of a mountain. He saw the candle flaring and fading because his hand shook so; he felt his heart beating faster and faster, until it almost choked him. And yet—

The terrible silence was split suddenly by a scream. Human, it sounded, and yet not human, but beastly—horrible. Shelton dropped the candle and clung to the rock beside him. His heart, he thought, stopped absolutely. His very knees buckled under him while he stood there. And then he heard something running, somewhere, even while the cave was playing horribly with the echoes of that scream. Running down that other passage with long leaps, it seemed to him, and the beat of four padded feet upon the rock floor. Then it must have struck the sand, because the sounds became suddenly muffled and scarcely distinguishable. Indeed, had he not been standing in such a horribly still place, he probably would have heard nothing.

Weak, shaking, scared so that the tremor reached the middle of his bones,

Shelton pressed his back against the uneven wall behind him and waited; and listened; and glared into the blackness, half expecting to see some terrifying thing take shape before him. He wanted light—and he was afraid to stoop and grope for the candle, afraid to light a match and look for it, afraid to move. There was a quick, suffocating beat, beat, beat in his throat. There was a heavy pounding in his chest, and in his brain was a numbness so that he could not think of anything very clearly. He only knew that he was scared—in mortal, agonizing terror.

Shelton said afterward that it took him at least an hour to pull himself together so that he had the nerve to find his stub of candle and light it. But he did find it, and he lighted it, with furtive glances behind him when the blaze flamed up and drove the heavy darkness back so that it did not seem to be pressing the very life out of him. Finally he made his way back toward the entrance—slowly, furtively, with one side of him scraping the wall so that he could set his back against it at the first alarm. Instincts he had inherited from the centuries behind him took the initiative and drove Shelton toward the light of day.

He was panting when he came out into the sunlight, though he had not run except the last few rods when he saw the light glimmer ahead of him. He sat down where the sun shone hotly upon the yellow soil just out from the ledge, and thanked God for the bright light of day. In a minute he remembered Dutch—and Dutch was gone.

Shelton stood up and searched the whole cañon bottom with his eyes. A horse could scarcely hide there, unless he climbed the almost perpendicular sides so as to get behind the bowlders that jutted out everywhere. Dutch must have gone down the cañon, scared by the thing that came out of the cave. The thought served to hearten Shelton

appreciably. There was no shame in being afraid of anything that could scare old Dutch, he told himself. And there was another point: It could not have been Burney, then, that came out of the cave; though Shelton, in spite of the evidence of the fresh boot tracks, had not convinced himself that Burney was ever in that cave. It was queer—the whole thing was almighty queer, he told himself when his pulse became normal and the fear ceased to cloud his intellect. There were a lot of things which he would certainly never have believed if any one had told him about them; Spider, for instance, or Spooky. He wished they were both with him now, so that he could prove a few things which, on the face of them, seemed incredible.

It occurred to Shelton that the tracks coming out of the cave would prove whether it was Burney or the bear—if it really was a bear, which Shelton was beginning to doubt. He had never heard or read of a bear screaming like that. A panther might, perhaps—but a bear? It had been a shriek—a half-human scream that fairly melted one's bones. No, after that scream he was beginning to lose faith in the bear.

He had forgotten to blow out his candle, but when he looked at it he saw that the wind had attended to that for him. He glanced behind him at the wide grin of the cave mouth, debated within himself, and, with a hunch of his shoulders, felt in his pocket for a match.

## CHAPTER VII.

Shelton lit his candle, shielding its blaze from the breeze with fingers creditably steady—when you think how terribly he had been scared. He stood looking down over the sunlit hollow beneath him; his candid blue eyes clouded with distaste for what he was going to do. His enthusiasm for caves had left him completely, yet his doggedness of

purpose impelled him to go back. There *was* something. He had seen the tracks, and he had heard it scream and afterward go leaping down the black tunnel. And there were Burney's tracks, which seemed mysterious; and there were those sheep about which Vida had told him, dead with their necks twisted in the most unaccountable manner. He did not see any connection between this cave and the dead sheep, save the one fact of some great beast that could have done the twisting—perhaps. At any rate, he had to see what sort of tracks, save his own, had been left in the sand with their toes pointed toward the opening. He needn't go in very far to discover that much.

He went in again to where the sand was moist and smooth save where feet had pressed into it the imprint of their passing. He saw his own tracks, the toes deep printed to prove how fast he had run, bowed down to avoid the low roof of the tunnel. He shivered a little when he remembered poignantly the stark terror that had driven him forward at the last. Then there were the tracks of those two—the beast and the man—going back into the dark. But save his own there were no tracks coming out. And yet—

Shelton forced himself to make sure; forced himself to examine the sand floor closely, from wall to wall. Twice he went across the tunnel, holding the candle close to earth, so interested in the search that he forgot to fear what the dark might hold even then. It was a fact. There were tracks going in; his own, and the tracks of Burney and of the beast; and there were his own tracks coming out, with the toes pressed deep. That was all.

And yet—something must have come out, since Dutch was gone; for Dutch would have stood there dozing in the sun all day with his reins dropped, had not something very much out of the ordinary brought his horse instincts to the

front of his long years of range training. Shelton did not know that, though he did have great faith in Dutch's standing where he was left until one went and got him. To be sure, some one might have ridden Dutch off—but there were no tracks!

Shelton came out again and stood irresolute in the sunshine. Of course, the first thing to do was to find Dutch. He realized that, and set off down the cañon—considerably relieved to be out again in the familiar world of bright blue sky and drifting white clouds, and the grays and browns and blacks of the surrounding hills. When he had gone a little distance, he turned and studied the ledges of that hillside; but he could not see where the cave had any other possible opening, and so he went on, puzzling over the mystery of it. What the deuce was it that had screamed like that? What kind of an animal could run over wet sand and leave not a trace of passing? What would Burney be doing in that cave? And then, who had killed those sheep. Vida had told him about, and the dog that had been "squashed"?

He was so engrossed in trying to fit answers to his own questions that he wandered into a branch of the cañon that he knew nothing about. Going up, there had seemed to be no way except the one he traveled; going down, other gorges appeared like the knotted fingers of an open hand. Into one of these he blundered, and thought it strange because he found no trace of Dutch, nor the opening into the larger cañon, nor any rock or turn that looked familiar.

He went a long way before it even occurred to him that this might be a different gorge, and even when he suspected that he was not alarmed. He had his compass, you see. The Sunbeam Ranch lay to the west of Spook Hills, therefore the mere matter of getting home was perfectly simple—to an

optimistic young fellow who knew nothing much about traveling in such a junk heap of nature's left-overs from mountain building.

He must have traveled for an hour and more without getting anywhere. He was beginning to wonder where he would be apt to strike that first cañon and overtake Dutch, when he saw something on a rock before him. A heap of old clothes, it looked like to him, and he was struck by the oddity of it. He went on more cautiously, but very curiously. Where were clothes, there should be people also.

He was quite close when the heap moved and a head, muffled in many grimy folds of some red stuff, swung round to him. Shelton was astonished to find the thing alive. He was more astonished when he discovered the heap to be not only alive, but a woman. A squaw, he knew from the samples he had seen at the railroad stations during the last few hours of his journey West, old and seamed and shrunken to match the hills.

Shelton went up to her and stood still. She appeared to be blind, for her lids were red and gummed almost shut, so that only the tiniest slits of bleary eyes could be seen. Still she stared at him almost as if she saw him. He did not quite know how to act with a creature like this, but his natural instincts impelled him to speech.

"How-de-do?" he began politely. "Do you live around here?"

She looked at him, and she shook her head. "No see," she muttered, and laid a bony finger to her eyes. "Long time headache—no see." Shelton had read of old crones who muttered and pointed and spoke prophecies in halting sentences like that. It tickled him to have stumbled upon one quite up to his ideas of what they should be like. For this crone certainly looked the part, and she muttered worse than he would have believed possible to the human voice, and

she spoke with a perceptible pause between all the words. As to her uttering prophecies, that he still had to determine.

"Blind?" he asked sympathetically, sitting down upon a near-by rock and fanning himself with his hat. He was pretty tired, and it was hot. He looked, as he sat there, like a young man holidaying in the wild, who has stopped to rest and wait for the fellows to come up and join him. "Blind?"

"See—walk—lilly bit. Long time headache," she said, with her wizened palm pressed to her forehead. "What yo' name?"

Shelton told her, and he told her also that he was from the Sunbeam. "You know the Sunbeam? You know Mr. Burney's ranch?" he asked her, while he stuffed tobacco into his pipe. His lunch was tied to the saddle on Dutch—wherever that was.

"Burney—Aleck——" she muttered, and stopped, her jaws gumming words soundlessly. "Aleck——"

"Yes, his name's Aleck, too—though I didn't know any one ever called him that. You know him? *Big man!*"

"Big, big man—fadder—big man. Die long time. I know. I see Aleck—fadder die. Bear——" she waved her skinny hand that was like a mummy's. "Bear kill. I see. Long time. I his woman. I see."

Shelton held his pipe sagging between his knees while he stared at her. Of course, he could only guess at what the old thing really meant, and she might be crazy, at that. But still—— "You mean you're Aleck Burney's mother?" he asked her, his incredulity showing plainly in his voice.

She shook her head at that, and muttered some Indian words. "No, no—Aleck—mudder—no," she denied. "His woman—Aleck—fadder."

Whatever she meant by that, it was about all that Shelton could get out of her. Her mind, it seemed to him, was

as clouded as her vision; though it might be her Indian stolidity or her Indian taciturnity, or shyness, or any of those qualities which we tack upon the Indian nature.

He talked with her for a few minutes longer and got vague answers that meant to him nothing. For instance, when he asked her about any great bears in that country, she muttered Indian words under her breath until he asked her again and again, and then she told him, "Long time big bear kill——" and that was as much as she spoke intelligibly. Shelton wanted to know if Burney's father was killed in these hills, and she shook her head and pointed an arm to the northward.

"Montana," she said, quite plainly. "Long time Aleck—lilly—boy." Which seemed definite enough surely, as far as it went. If she had seen anything of a bear in this neighborhood, she kept the fact to herself. Also she seemed not to know much about caves. "No see," she would mutter, and point to her eyes. Neither could Shelton discover where she lived, or whether she had any family to take care of her.

So presently he left her sitting there like a bundle of old clothes thrown in a heap upon a rock, and went on down the cañon.

Shelton used his compass freely, and by climbing laboriously over the ridge to his right, he got at last into the cañon he knew. After that he began looking for Dutch without any very cheering prospect of finding him, and he turned his toes toward the Sunbeam and plodded up the bluff to the upland thinking more of his own physical discomfort than of the bear whose hide he claimed for a rug. He had things in plenty to write home to the folks, but he was not caring much about it just then. He had wasted the day to no purpose, and it was growing dusky again, and he was ravenously hungry, with that hunger which the newcomer

to the mountain States finds it so hard to appease.

And then he began to feel that he was being watched and followed. He stopped once behind a rock and waited, his jaw set to the point of stubbornness, and his gun leveled upon the way he had come. He waited for several minutes, and went on disgustedly, feeling that he had no time to fool away if he meant to get home before midnight. And when he went on he knew that something else went on cautiously, watchfully, upon his trail.

Curiously enough, he was not afraid; he was filled with a baffled anger because he could neither shake off the feeling nor catch a glimpse of the thing that caused it. He felt, as the dark settled down upon the sageland and left him even more completely isolated than he had been with the near company of the hills, like a child who has been teased to a sulky petulance. I think that Shelton must have owned an unusual amount of native courage, for under it all was forming a grim determination to run the thing to earth in spite of everything. His panic in the cave he called a fluke, a mere trick of the nerves, and he may have been right in that. He intended to go back and make a thorough search, and he debated within himself the advisability of trying to enlist the help of the boys. He did not believe they were really afraid of the spook. He did not believe they were afraid of anything on earth, when you came right down to cases—which goes to prove that Shelton C. Sherman was not, after all, a fool; he was merely a young cub of a man who was growing up faster than he or any one realized, thanks to the rugged life he was leading that threw him more or less upon his own resources.

He dragged his weary bones into the bunk house just when the boys were smoking their last, before-bedtime cigarettes and wondering what had went

with Shep—I am using their vernacular, understand, and I realize that it is a long way from being correct English.

"Why, hello, Shep," Spooky greeted him with a very sincere relief in his tone whether he was conscious of it or not. "We was just talking about ketching you up and putting a bell on yuh. You're gitting to be such a little stray lamb——" Spooky saw then that something was wrong, and he neglected to finish his sentence while he eyed Shelton through a haze of smoke.

Shelton had slumped down upon a bench as if he did not care whether he ever moved again or not. His face was pale under the new coat of sunburn, and his eyes were sunken and had purple shadows beneath, and the muscles of his cheeks sagged with complete physical exhaustion. Spider looked, yawned, and stretched his arms with an ostentatious casualness, and got up from the bed which he had been occupying lavishly with sprawled limbs.

"Better come and lay down, Shep," he suggested carelessly. When Shelton made no move he went over and took him by the arm as though he was impressing obedience upon a child. "That bunk's a whole lot more able and willing to hold you up than that pore little bench," he explained, and led the boy to the bed and pushed him gently down upon it. He pulled a pillow under Shelton's inert head, stooped and lifted Shelton's dragging feet, and laid them comfortably, pulled his own hat down nearer his eyebrows, and went out as casually as he had spoke at first.

He was back before Spooky and Jim had fairly begun questioning Shelton as to the cause of his all-in condition, and he carried the coffeepot and a plate of beans and bread, while a tin cup hung by its handle from one finger.

"Here, Shep, put yourself outside—a some grub," he commanded gruffly. "Coffee's cold, but it'll do the biz just the same—seeing you ain't froze."

He poured a cup of black, muddy fluid, and compelled Shelton to rise to an elbow and drink every drop. Then he pulled a box close to the bunk, set the plate upon it within easy reach of Shelton's apathetic hand, and sat down negligently upon the other bunk, flicked the ashes off his cigarette, saw that it was cold, and fumbled for a match. "Go on and eat," he urged lazily. "Then you can tell us how about it."

Shelton ate a little, and he told "how about it." And the three listened attentively and without banter, while Pike snored raucously from a farther corner of the room. He told of the cave and of the tracks, and Spider leaned with an elbow on either knee and his feet swinging over the side of the bunk, and smoked and stared at the floor while he listened. He told of his panic of fright and of the scream and the sound of running in the dark—and Spooky opened his mouth half an inch and let it stay so, and forgot to smoke while he stared at Shelton's haggard face and listened to the tale. Jim sat with his arms folded Indian fashion, and chewed tobacco mechanically, and glanced now and then sidelong at the other two while he listened.

And so Shelton's story came down to the old squaw sitting in a heap on the rock in the cañon and manifesting such acuteness of hearing while her vision seemed pitiably blurred—and he told about her also and what she had said about Burney's father.

"That's right," Jim testified stolidly around his cud. "Burney's father was a squaw man up in Montana. He got clawed up by a bear in the Bitter Root country when Burney was a kid. I thought the old woman was dead long ago. She had a deformed kid by old man Burney. A feller that prospected up in the Bitter Root Mountains told me about it a long time ago. The kid died; it was half-witted or some darn

thing. I thought the old woman was dead, too."

"Well, she isn't, it seems; but she's pretty wabby in her mind," said Shelton, and went on with the story.

"And say, fellows," he said earnestly when he had described his long tramp home and his belief that he had been followed, "there's something behind all this. I don't know what, but I'm going to make it my business to find out. I don't believe Burney killed those sheep——"

"What sheep?" interjected Spider, lifting his head for the first time since Shelton began to talk.

"Why, Williams' sheep. Vida told me. A lot of their sheep were killed last night, over the other side of that long ridge of Spook Hills, where her uncle is camped with a band. And say, fellows, their necks were wrung, she said. And she said that one of the dogs—she called him Laddie—ran out and was killed also. She said it had been 'squashed,' so that its ribs were broken, and its neck twisted like the sheep. Can you beat that? She thinks Burney did it. She says he's the only one in the country strong enough—and, of course, that's true as far as it goes. But I think it was that bear I saw the tracks of."

"A bear," Spooky asserted, "wouldn't hardly kill sheep like that. He might come into a band and pack off one or two, and he might go through a band just cuffing 'em right an' left, like that." Spooky illustrated with thrashing arms the cuffing process. "He'd break their necks, I reckon, if he done that—or cave in their ribs or something. But it don't look natural—him grabbin' every sheep separate and wringin' its neck. That looks to me more—human." Spooky spoke with a certain reluctance and a certain inquiring look toward Spider.

"Didn't anybody see—it—or tracks or——" Jim stopped to turn his tobacco cud.



"The sheep would tromp out any tracks," Spider told him shortly, shifting his position a little without looking up. There was a certain warped board in the floor which Spider appeared to find absorbingly interesting.

"Yeah—that's right," assented Jim.

"Why, Vida said her uncle ran out and got a glimpse of him going off over a little hill, where he—where it came right against the sky. And"—Shelton unconsciously lowered his voice and glanced toward the door—"she says her uncle would swear it was Burney. She said a person couldn't make any mistake in a man like him. But still"—his head dropped back wearily on the pillow—"I stick to the bear theory. A bear would go off on its hind legs, wouldn't it, if it were carrying a sheep?"

"It might. Probably it would," Spooky agreed relievedly. "Yes, come to think of it, I guess it would."

"Well, I say it was that bear, fellows. And I'm going to keep on hunting till I get him. They think Burney did it—"

"Burney was home last night, wasn't he?" Spooky asked aggressively of no one in particular. "How could it be him?"

Spider cocked one eye in the direction of Spooky, lifted one eyebrow, and said never a word. How did they know whether Burney was at home? his look asked the other. As a matter of fact, it *could* be Burney, and each one of the four knew that it could. More than that, they knew that it probably was Burney. Even to Shelton, had he admitted it, the bear theory seemed a little far-fetched. Still—it did not seem quite like Aleck Burney to sneak into a man's band and kill sheep by stealth in that fashion. Burney would fight, as his men knew well; but always he had fought in the open, and had seemed to prefer that the odds should be against him—if there were odds. The very bigness of him and strength of him had

always made him slow to take action. And the Williams sheep had not yet injured the Sunbeam range; nor had the Williams men done anything that might be construed as a beginning of hostilities. True, they were crowding close—too close to be welcome neighbors—and Burney had ridden over and told them so. That much was perfectly logical, understandable—right and just, according to range ethics. But to come that same night and kill sheep under the very nose of Jake Williams, and to sneak away afterward in the dark—that was something at which even the Sunbeam partisans balked.

Their talk dwindled after that. Shelton wondered once or twice what could have become of old Dutch, and Spooky told him that they would hunt him up to-morrow. Spider went out and stayed for a long time. When he returned he threw his hat down as if it had displeased him, and had no more than a grunt for Spooky, who showed a disposition to talk.

Shelton lifted his head and looked in Spider's direction for a minute. "Say, Spider, come over here and let me whisper in your ear," he said with his old, boyish tone. "I've got a sweet little message that nobody but you must hear. Come on—I promised her."

Spider paused in the act of pulling off a boot, and eyed Shelton crossly, caught a significant lowering of an eyelid, dropped the boot, and went and bent over Shelton, listening. And Shelton, instead of giving a message, asked one question. Spider's light-blue eyes looked steadily into Shelton's for a second before he answered, and the lurking little devil in them had changed to the gleam of steel.

"Gone!" he whispered, and went back and took off the other boot.

There were two in that cabin who slept little that night, and I think perhaps Spooky was inclined to lie awake

and wonder over the mystery of Spook Hills.

### CHAPTER VIII.

Vida Williams, hard of eye and lips, hot from hard riding, and looking ready to fight the whole Sunbeam outfit, rode up to the cabin and pulled her right foot out of the stirrup, ready to dismount. But when she saw Spider and Shelton coming toward her from the stable—they having seen her ride by—she stayed in the saddle and waited glumly till they came up.

"Where's Goliath?" she demanded shortly, with never a greeting.

"In the cabin, I guess. Good morning, Miss Vida. Will you meet—well, Spider is all the name I know that belongs to him. This is Miss Williams, Spider."

Miss Williams gave Spider a glance and a nod far from cordial. "I want to see Goliath—and I want to see him quick," she said. "I wish you'd call him out."

Spider went at once to the cabin and opened the door. "There's a lady wants to see you, Burney," he called within, and turned back. Shelton was asking Vida what was the matter, and wouldn't she get off her horse and rest a while. And Vida was giving him short answers that told him nothing except that her mood was villainous and her time limited.

Burney, bending his shoulders forward to save his head a bump, appeared in the doorway, stared at Vida for a minute with his little, deep-set, twinkling eyes, and came up to her. He was so big that Vida's horse was afraid of him, and when he saw that he stopped, and came forward more slowly. When he stood finally within ten feet of her their eyes were nearly on a level.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked her in his high, falsetto voice.

"I wanted to ask you what's your

object in killing off our sheep the way you're doing," Vida stated harshly, not one whit abashed by the size of him. "You may have poppy buffaloes, and Uncle Jake, but you can't scare me. And I've come over to tell you, Mr. Goliath, that if you kill another sheep of ours I'm going to watch my chance and plant a bullet where it will do the most good. You ain't easy to miss, you know!"

"I ain't killed any sheep of yours," Burney denied, reddening perceptibly under her angry gaze. "I didn't know there'd been any sheep killed. When was it?"

"Last night and night before last, and you needn't try to make me believe you don't know! Who else could grab up a sheep and wring its neck and break its ribs just by squeezing? Night before last it was Uncle Jake's band, and last night it was ours—and last night you killed twenty before I got out where I could take a shot at you. In the dark I missed——"

"It wasn't me," Burney told her again. "I've never been near your camp except the other day—in the morning. I told your father to keep away from Piute Hills, Miss Williams. If you're sensible you'll get your father to move his sheep back the other way. I can't——"

"We ain't going to move, and you can't make us move!" Vida's voice sharpened almost to shrewishness. "Poppy might get scared out—but I won't *let* him move. That's open range over there, and we're going to have our share. You needn't think you can hog all the grass in the country, and you needn't think you can come sneaking into our band at night and kill sheep till you're tired, and not get some of your own medicine. I—oh, I wish I could take *you* and wring your neck just like you done to the sheep!" Tears of rage were in her voice. "Just because you're big as all outdoors, you

think you can run us out, but you can't—you've got another think coming. If you was twice as big——"

Burney took a step nearer. The crimson had left his face, so that he looked actually pale. "Miss Williams, I never killed your sheep. I don't want to have any trouble with your father unless he drives me to it. I ain't a quarrelsome man when I'm left alone. But I can't afford to buy your folks out again—I done that once, and lost money on the deal. I lost a lot of money. And I can't afford to lose no more. Miss Williams, I'm in debt as it is. I've got to make my cattle pull me out, or else I'm liable to go under. And it ain't fair for your father to bring in sheep on me. I need the range for my own stock. I—don't want to act mean about it, Miss Williams, but—you better talk your father into moving back——"

"Sure, I will—not!" Burney's apologetic manner might astonish the boys, but it failed altogether to impress Vida. "We're in just as bad a fix as you are—and there's three of us to think of, and only one of you. We're in debt ourselves, and we've got to make the sheep pull us out. And we need the range. You know just as well as I do that the feed's poor back toward Pillar Butte. We ain't going to back off for you or anybody else. And we ain't going to set down and suck our thumbs while you kill off our sheep just to be mean. I said before, and I'll say it again—and I want you to remember it, all of you: If you kill another single, solitary sheep I'll take a shot at you—in daylight, when I can see where to shoot." She swung her horse away from the giant. "So if you think you're going to make anything off us that way, go to it. I'm taking a hand in this killing game myself. But I ain't like you; I ain't going to sneak up on you after dark; I'll play my hand on top of the table. You kill

our sheep, and I'll kill you—and take chances on the jury."

She looked at Shelton, and then at Spider, turned her face away, and then faced them grimly. "You both hear—I mean it," she said defiantly to them. "Maybe it ain't ladylike, but I can't help that; I've got to be human first. And if somebody in our outfit has got to wade in and fight, I'd rather it would be me than poppy or Uncle Jake—I'll stand more show in court if it comes to that."

"Making capital out of your sex?" Shelton reproved mildly. "You wouldn't do that, Miss Vida!"

"Oh—wouldn't I?" Vida curled her lip at him in a way to crimple his vanity. "Why not? Women never do get a square deal anyway. You men don't show any squeamishness about making capital of our sex, do you? You take every advantage of us that you can get. So when we know where to hit your weak points, I believe in aiming for them. And if it came to working a bunch of mutts in the jury box in order to get a square deal, you can bet your hat I'd work them to a fare-you-well. Men are the limit, anyway." She laughed at him in a way to redden his whole face. "Look at you, for instance. You'd like to flirt a little and make me think you were It, just because you're lonesome and I'm the only girl in the country. You wouldn't give a whoop for *my* feelings, just so you were amused. Isn't that straight? And is it fair? Isn't that making capital out of my sex? And Mr. Burney here—because he's big and strong and can lord it over common men—he thinks I don't count. Just because I'm a girl he passes me up as if I didn't have any interest in them sheep over there. Oh, you all—every darned one of you—think I'm a white chip in the game—less than a white chip. I'm a *girl*—so all I can do is talk! Well—you

go ahead the way you've started out, and see!"

She sent them a cold, gray glance all round, antagonistic, with the bitter antagonism of the consciously weak; gave her head a little, defiant toss, and struck her horse down the rump with her quirt. So she rode away from the Sunbeam, and the three turned and watched her in dead silence.

"She'd shoot, all right—believe *me!*" Spider commented when she was no more than a bobbing black object against the sunlit sage.

"I never killed their sheep," Burney muttered complainingly. "But if they keep crowding up on my range——" He turned sullenly, and went back into the cabin and left the two standing there in that passive attitude which is the natural reaction after a high-tensioned incident.

"Well, come on, Shep. Let's go out after Dutch." Spider turned away toward the stables. "Looks like things are beginning to tighten."

"Shall we take candles?" Shelton fell into pace beside him, and found that the pace required long strides and swift.

"Sure, we'll take candles. Might as well make a clean sweep, Shep—if you ain't scared to go back."

"I'd go, whether I'm scared or not," Shelton declared firmly. "But I'm not—as far as I can feel any symptoms—oh, shucks!" he added impatiently. "What's the use of hedging? What do you think of Vida's stand? Pretty nery for a girl to face Burney that way, don't you think? And she——"

"Yeah—skate a little closer, Shep. What about them sheep?"

Shelton, however, did not care to skate over that particular bit of ice. He said he didn't know, and changed the subject. Whereat Spider grinned to himself and then became much occupied with his own thoughts.

"Well, right over behind that cut-off butte is the cañon where the cave is." Shelton drew up on the east side of a pinnacle and pointed. "We can get down into the big cañon——"

"Yeah—I know that big cañon. I've been in it. That's where I was trailing a lion when—something commenced to foller me." Spider cupped his palms around a match blaze. "Might have been a link," he conceded when his cigarette was lighted and he had blown out the match. "These hills is full of animals a man never sees. I've been thinking maybe it was a link you heard in the cave or a lion. Didn't you happen to notice any round tracks—like a great big cat? Tracks about that big, say?" With his bent fingers he inclosed a circle larger than a cup, just by way of encouragement.

"No. But I did see a bear's track. And I saw Burney's tracks, too," he added doggedly. "I hate to——"

"I don't know why Burney wouldn't have as much license to go into a cave as you had," Spider cut in dryly.

"Well, I suppose he has got. But he don't want any one to come over here—and then comes himself. And then—there are those sheep Vida claims were killed."

"And that's why," said Spider calmly, "I'm going to ride over that way and take a look. No telling which way Dutch went, seeing he didn't come back to the ranch—and that's mighty funny, too. We're liable to find him over that way. Darn it," Spider went on in a tone of complete bafflement, "there ain't one solitary fact that lines up with any other fact. That's what gets me. You saw bear tracks in that cave—and you heard something *scream*, you claim; and only a mountain lion or a link would make the kinda noise you say you heard. Vida says Burney killed their sheep—and Burney ain't that kinda man as I know him; and I've worked for him over two years now.

Burney says he never went near their camp except one morning—and he was gone last night *somewhere*. I got up about one o'clock and his horse and saddle was missing, and I went down again at three and they was there. And he was gone when I went out just before we went to bed. And I can't figure out any errand that would take him out all night. And I never knowed Burney to lie. Gosh! He's so ungodly big he don't *have* to lie. His say-so comes pretty near going as she lays.

"And to pile the agony up still higher, there's Dutch. There ain't no reason why, if he was scairt off from where you left him, he wouldn't come straight on home—and he never come. Oh, thunder!" said Spider as a brief way of summing up his perplexities. "Come on, Shep. We'll go take a look at them dead sheep for a starter; I know about where old Williams would be camped. And after that we'll take a look at the cave."

To look at the dead sheep was easy. The Williams camp had moved since daylight, but when they saw the white-topped wagon moving in leisurely fashion up nearer the hills, and farther away the moving patch of gray which was the sheep, they swung in on the trail and followed it back to where Spider knew was a spring.

There they found the dead sheep, lately skinned for their pelts, and left to fatten the coyotes. Spider forced his horse close to the fly-blackened carcasses, and sat there looking down with frowning brows. Every sheep had its neck twisted to dislocation, and nearly every sheep had been squeezed flat—squashed, Vida had called it. He raised his head, and studied the low ridges and correspondingly shallow gullies of that vicinity. He scowled down again at the skinned carcasses. He looked across at Shep, who was hovering agitatedly in the immediate background because of his horse's distaste for dead sheep,

and he hunched his shoulders and rode away.

"Well, what was it—a bear?" Shelton quizzed him after an expectant silence.

"Ask the sheep," suggested Spider, and added: "They can tell you as much about it as I can."

"But what do you *think*?" Shelton, remember, was of the persistent type of individual.

"I'm thinkin' damns, right now, mostly," said Spider.

Shelton did not cover himself with honor that day. To begin with, he could not find the cañon that ended in the crude amphitheater where was the cave. He led Spider into two blind pockets in the hills, and in each instance he discovered only, after a prolonged search, that it was not the right cañon. He persisted in riding with too loose a rein in spite of Spider's repeated warnings and profane instructions, and the horse shied unexpectedly and violently and threw Shelton into a patch of brush, and bolted while Shelton thrashed around in there trying to get out. Spider chased the horse a quarter of a mile over some nasty rocks and washouts before he caught him and led him back—and you can judge what his temper was like after that.

Being unable to find the cañon that held the cave, Shelton could not find the gulch in which he had seen the old squaw. He had scraped the skin off one forearm in falling, and had hurt his knee so that he found walking painful, and he was not enthusiastic over riding, either. The sun blazed down upon them more pitilessly than it had done before that spring—there were plenty of reasons for the sulky silence that held the two at last.

And then, just when they were picking their way gingerly across a steep sidehill to where a bare ridge gave promise of a precarious trail into the cañon they must cross if they would

reach the Sunbeam without riding an extra ten miles, Spider's sharp eyes caught a glimpse of something moving along the opposite side of the cañon. He pulled up, and stared steadily, shading his eyes with his hand like the pictures of Indian chiefs gazing out to the setting sun.

When Shelton, looking also and seeing far less than did Spider, asked what it was, Spider told him that Shelton could search him, and went on in the same moody silence.

Shelton waited a minute longer.

"It looked to me like a bear," he volunteered when he overtook Spider. "Or else maybe it was a cow. Did you see it go behind those rocks?"

Spider grunted, and let Shelton interpret the sound to please himself. It was not until they descended into the cañon bottom that Spider was surprised into speech. They came full upon Dutch, feeding dispiritedly upon the scanty grass there. Dutch had neither saddle nor bridle, or anything upon him save the marks of hard riding and a twisted rope that hobbled his front feet so that he must hop if he would move forward.

Spider got off his horse and went up and examined closely the hobble. "Well, I'll be——" he began, and, leaving the sentence unfinished, squatted on his heels that he might pick the knots loose and free poor Dutch.

"Did somebody try to steal him?" Shelton was looking on, round-eyed, from a respectful distance. "Why, that isn't rope—what is it?"

Spider stood up with the thing in his hands. "Don't you know what that is?" he demanded, more humanly than he had spoken to Shelton for three hours. "That there is a strip cut from a fresh sheep pelt, with the wool hacked off with a knife."

Shelton had a gleam of understanding. "He couldn't get far with his feet tied together," he said. "Don't you

suppose, if we looked all around here, we might find some tracks?"

"I expect we might."

With that encouragement Shelton dismounted awkwardly because of his knee, and went limping back and forth where the soil gave promise of receiving and holding tracks. It was Spider who discovered some trace, and he puzzled over the tracks—there were three, close beside a crumbling washout where the bank was sandy—much longer than Shelton, who limped up, thought was necessary.

"Oh, say!" he jubilated. "That's the bear whose track I saw the other day. If we could just follow it up——"

Spider turned and looked at him sarcastically. "You sure are an observative cuss," he commented dryly. "Take another look at them three tracks. How high do you figure a bear would have to be to step as long as that?" He placed one foot beside the first track and stepped out with the other toward the next track. Spider was not a small man by any means, yet his longest stride fell short of the second bear track.

Shelton watched him, and grasped his meaning. "Then—what the deuce do you think it is if it isn't a bear?" he wanted to know when Spider stood off looking again at the tracks.

Spider looked up at him, and hesitated. "Just between you and me and the gatepost, Shep, I'll tell yuh what it is. It's a man trying to make out like he's a bear. Wearing bear fixin's on his feet, I take it," he explained further, "to hide his own tracks—and making a dern poor stagger at it, if you ask me!"

Shelton looked long at Spider, and then down at the tracks. He followed Spider's example. He placed his foot alongside the first track, and measured the stride with the other. Shelton, you know, was six feet two, and at that he had to step as far as he could reach

in order to place his foot alongside that second track. He looked up quickly.

"Well, there's only one——"

Spider stopped him with a gesture and a look. "Some things is better off inside your head," he told Shelton bluntly. "We can't help what we think, but we needn't go around shooting off our faces. Call it a bear track and let it go at that. I ain't going to build up nothing on a few marks in the sand, and you ain't." He glanced moodily toward Dutch. "We've found what we was hunting. Let's be drifting toward home."

He stopped first and scraped the edge of his boot sole carefully over the tracks until they were quite obliterated. Then he took his rope and tied an end around the neck of the brown horse Shelton had been riding. "I guess you might as well ride Dutch back," he observed. "You're a heap safer on him." And he changed the saddle quickly, as if he were in haste to be gone.

Shelton was studying the mystery that had enveloped him in the last week while they rode a mile or so. Then it had to come out—some of it—in speech.

"What I can't see," he said suddenly, "is what object he'd have. Aside from scaring off Williams and his sheep, it looks—well, childish to go around the country——"

"I don't know," quelled Spider, "as you're expected to see any object in it. I don't know as any one is."

That did not settle the other, however. "Well, it doesn't account for my being followed——"

"If you *was* followed."

"Nor that screaming and running in the cave——"

"If you didn't just imagine it."

"Oh, say!" Shelton protested. "What do you think I——"

"Aw," cried Spider impatiently, "can't you get some kinda gait on that old skate? And if you don't keep your

face shut," he added unkindly, "you're liable to get sunstruck on your insides."

As you may guess, there was little conversation between them after that. Spider seemed to be revolving some intricate puzzle in his mind, and Shelton, I think, was sulking because of Spider's bluntness of speech.

They came slowly down the hill and up to the high pole corral beside the stable. And when they dismounted Burney himself came out of the corral, carrying his saddle in one hand.

"I've got to go to Pocatello," he told them querulously. "I may not be back for three or four days. You kinda keep things moving, Spider——" Then he seemed to notice Dutch for the first time. "Oh, you found him," he said, with feeble interest. "Where was he at?"

"Over in the Spook Hills," said Spider distinctly, looking up into Burney's little twinkling eyes. "In a gulch, hobbled with a strip of sheep hide. We couldn't find the saddle and bridle."

Burney looked down at him sharply before he turned away toward his own horse. "Some of them sheep-herders caught him up, most likely," he said carelessly. "Might as well let the saddle go; didn't amount to much—and we don't want to have any trouble with 'em if we can help it. Don't want any trouble with anybody," he muttered, while he saddled hastily. "The girl thinks I killed their sheep." He mounted, and without farewell or further orders he rode away, while Spider stared after him meditatively.

## CHAPTER IX.

Burney had not yet returned from Pocatello—indeed, he had been gone not much longer than twenty-four hours when Vida Williams came riding again to the Sunbeam; riding a heaving-flanked, sweat-roughened pony, and looking harder of lip and eye than be-



fore. Spooky had just called to the boys to "Come and get it"—meaning supper—and he stood now in the cabin doorway with his hands on his hips, waiting for them to appear. Then came Vida, galloping straight down the trail from the hills and never deigning to pull up or turn out when she overtook Shelton and Spider and Jim. The boys ducked out of her way and came on in the cloud of dust kicked up by her pony's flying heels.

Vida swung down from her horse, and walked purposefully toward Spooky in the doorway. Her sunburned braid of hair was roughened in the wind; her denim riding skirt was stained with her pony's sweat; her face was pale under the freckles and tan, and her eyes—well, her eyes held the light of battle. A six-shooter swung at one slim hip, and as she neared the cabin she jerked the gun from its scabbard and held it hanging at her side. Without any more definite reason than that one action, the boys broke into a trot and so came presently up to her.

"Where's Burney?" she asked, more quietly than one would expect from the look of her, though it was the quiet that spells danger.

"Burney's in Pocatello," Shelton volunteered before Spooky had more than opened his mouth. "He went yesterday—early in the afternoon."

"You lie!" Vida turned and flung the words at him as a driver flicks his lash. Her breath was coming quickly and unevenly; she was holding herself to calmness, and it was not easy, as they could see. "Where is he? You might as well produce him," she said, eying them one after the other with that cold antagonism which she could make one feel with a glance.

She met blank surprise in every pair of eyes into which she looked, and she bit her lip and pushed the gun back into its scabbard.

"Well, anyway, he isn't in Pocatello,"

she asserted defiantly, "because he was over on the east ridge of Piute Hills about three hours ago. He—he killed Uncle Jake!"

"No! You don't——"

"He did! And I'll kill him on sight—so help me! He—boys, that man is a fiend! I—don't blame you boys—I don't believe you had anything to do with it, or know——"

Spider took a step nearer. "You're dead right, Miss Williams," he told her with that quiet earnestness which was Spider's way sometimes. "If you'd tell us—we don't know a thing about it. We—Burney left for Pocatello yesterday."

"Well, it was a blind, then, because this afternoon—I guess it was early—and Uncle Jake was herding a band of ewes and lambs on that long slope from the big hill, and he was killed"—her eyes widened with the horror of it—"just like the sheep have been killed." She caught her breath, and went on as if she were anxious to tell the thing and be done with it. "He was just grabbed—from behind, I guess—and—his neck was twisted—just like the sheep!"

Spider leaned and gripped her by the arm. "Girl, are you sure of that?" And his tone was stern.

"It's the truth! And Uncle Jake's pretty strong himself, and—he didn't have a ghost of a show. I—I saw him. And his head was twisted 'way around—like that." She turned her head far to one side, and Spider shivered and let go her arm.

The four of them stared at her incredulously. The thing was too monstrous for them to grasp all in a minute.

"Killed!" said Shelton, just above his breath. "Are you sure? Maybe he wasn't dead."

Vida turned and eyed him scornfully, and seemed to think the remark too puerile for reply.

"Wasn't there any sign of a scuffle?"

asked Spooky. "Didn't anybody see it?"

"He was out alone, with just the one dog," Vida explained, turning toward him. "Poppy and I rode over to see him—because some more of our sheep was killed last night, and we wanted to see if Uncle Jake had been bothered and what he thought we better do about it. Poppy wanted to swear out a warrant. And—we found him—like that. He—he wasn't cold yet."

"No, there wasn't any sign of anything. He just laid there like he'd been grabbed up and then throwed down again. It was on a little rocky ridge. I suppose he was setting on the ridge where he could see the sheep, and Burney just crawled up on him from behind. He could easy enough; it's all little ridges and washouts there where the water has gullied out the sidehill. And Burney——"

"What makes you keep on saying Burney?" Spooky asked her somewhat aggressively. "You want to be kinda careful about saying——"

"Who else but Burney *could* 'a' done that?" she countered hotly. "Could *you* grab a man the size of Uncle Jake and twist his neck clear around so you broke it? And him not able to put up a fight even? It ain't easy to do, I should think."

"No," Spider agreed, "it ain't easy to do. At the same time——"

"And who else would want to?" she demanded. "Uncle Jake never had any trouble with anybody around here but Burney. And he's been trying his best to drive us off ever since we came in with our sheep. And that ain't all." She stopped and bit her lips again, and fingered the sagging gun belt. Her blind rage was cooling with speech and the unspoken sympathy of these four, and she seemed almost reluctant to go on. She was growing more normal—more like the Vida Williams whom

Shelton had met out on the high stretches of the Piute foothills.

"That ain't all. I ain't the killing kind—but I'd 'a' killed Burney when I rode up if I'd seen him. It would take a lot to make me do that, too. I—I was putting up a bluff the other day," she owned, with a faint flush of embarrassment. "I was mad, a-course; and if I'd been a man I'd 'a' tried to lick him, I reckon. But this is different. I *know* he killed Uncle Jake. I didn't see him, but I seen his tracks. Down in the gully, right behind where Uncle Jake was. It's plain as print—and there ain't a man in the country that's got feet the size of his. *Is there?*"

There was no need of her emphatic question. They all knew there was not.

"I guess we better ride over," suggested Spider, after a minute. "If Burney didn't go to Pocatello we can easy find it out; a man like him ain't going to be overlooked. And if he done what you say he done——" Spider stopped short, and when he continued it was from a new angle of thought. "I've knowed him a long while," he said, "and I've never knowed a thing against him. At the same time you never do know *all* that's in a man." He turned toward Spooky challengingly. "I ain't going to back any low-down play like chokin' a man to death just because he owns a bunch-a sheep," he stated flatly, "whether it's Burney or my own brother."

"Same here, Pete," Jim shifted his cud to say—diffidently, because of the girl.

"Well, come on and eat, seeing's it's ready," urged Spooky, "and then we'll hit the high places to make up. There ain't nothing in startin' out empty. If they's tracks," he said to the girl, "we'll foller 'em up. You better come in and have something to eat."

"I—*couldn't*," she told him, and looked into the cabin and shuddered.

But she sat upon a box near the door and drank a cup of hot coffee which Shelton brought her. "I just can't go in," she apologized to him and Spider, who had lingered outside. "It's like the den of some beast to me. I—I just keep seeing Uncle Jake—and I can just see Burney creeping up the ridge behind him."

"You want to cut that out," said Spider. "You'll get nerves for fair if you don't keep your mind off it. I guess I'll take my coffee outside, too."

Which he did, somewhat to the disgust of Shelton, who felt that Vida was in his especial charge, in spite of her pitiless analysis of his motives; perhaps because of it—for he had certainly thought a great deal about Vida since then.

The sun was low when they rode away from the Sunbeam. Close-grouped and silent they climbed the hill and galloped straight away through the sage and lava rocks toward where Spook Hills hunched their black shoulders against the sky. Grim of lip, somber-eyed they hurried out to look upon the telltale footprints which branded their boss a murderer of the foulest type.

Spooky and Jim, not having seen the things which had planted in Spider's mind the seeds of distrust, were inclined to be incredulous still. They were going to see for themselves before they would believe. As to Shelton, he glanced often at Spider in the hope of meeting his look of understanding, and he was plainly puzzled at Spider's coldly noncommittal glance.

They rode with the girl between them, but they did not talk to her very much; she did not seem to want them to talk. Her eyes were frequently blurred with tears, and her lips were trembling. For she had lived a lonely life, with but few persons who were more to her than strangers, and although Uncle Jake had been an utterly

commonplace individual, for whom she felt no definite affection, he was her uncle, and he had helped to fill her life—and she had lately looked upon him dead. So, now that the first shock of horror had passed and she had sensed the sympathy of these men who were logically her enemies, but essentially her friends, she was feeling the sorrow of a personal loss.

"You mustn't mind if poppy talks mean," she said once, when they were nearing the hills. "He's awful worked up over this. He blames the whole Sunbeam outfit. He said he'd shoot the first one of you he got sight of—but he won't. Poppy—just talks like that."

Unconsciously she had revealed where lay the heaviest weight of responsibility for the family welfare. Her own slim shoulders drooped under their burden. Her tone betrayed the fact that she was stronger than her father, who "just talked like that." She would have fought, and fought hard, in defense of their property. Her poppy talked.

Spider, sensing it all, turned and looked at her pityingly. In the dusk his hand went out and clasped briefly her arm.

"Don't you worry," he said, so low that the others could not hear. "I'll see you through with this—if nobody else will."

Vida turned her face toward him, and she did not pull her arm away. "I know you will," she told him simply. "I—don't feel so *alone* as I did a few hours ago."

Spider's fingers slid down her arm and clasped her hand close, and let it go. In this wise did he take the oath of fealty, and none but Vida knew anything about it, not even Shelton, who was inclined to be watchful of Spider during the last couple of hours.

It was dark long before they reached the gruesome slope where Jake Williams lay as he had been found. A

camp fire blazed up into the dark, and beside it the figure of a man flared into distinct outlines and faded into vague shadows. As they rode closer they saw him lift his head and listen, looking their way. He had a rifle, and he pointed it toward them with a menacing gesture. The firelight must have blinded him, however; he stood up and craned, then ducked suddenly back into the shadows beyond the light of the flames. A spurt of fire and the sharp crack of his rifle showed how he had mentally placed the newcomers, but the bullet sang its song of flight high over their heads.

"Quit that shooting! I've just brought the boys——" Vida kicked her horse and plunged ahead, where the firelight touched her and quite enveloped her in its golden glow. "Put down that gun and come in outa the dark!" she commanded impatiently. "There's nothing to be scared of. Has Pete got back yet?"

"No." Her father came slowly forward, his bushy beard quite concealing any emotion his face might otherwise have revealed. "Who are these men?" he challenged.

"They're some boys from the Sunbeam. They came over to do what they can. They want to look around, and try and pick up the tracks, but it's pretty dark for that, unless we can make torches do."

"I don't want no Sunbeamers prowlin' around my camp. I won't have it, neither." But he stood there passive while they dismounted. "The Sunbeam has done about all the damage it needs to do. I ain't going to stand fer no more monkey business now, I can tell yuh!"

Vida had dismounted, and she turned her back upon him as if he were not speaking. "Over here—a couple of you bring torches and you can see for yourselves," she was saying to the boys while her father was still speaking.

"And you can see the tracks, too. I don't want you to take my word for a thing. I told poppy not to move him—we just covered him up is all. We sent Pete out after the sheriff, you know—and the coroner. So be careful about your own tracks till we get a light. You can see from one side, I think—just keep back so things don't get mixed all up."

She was taking the lead quite naturally—one suspected that she had been in the habit of asserting her superior intelligence in every emergency—but her voice was harsh with the repression she had put upon herself. Spider picked a blazing sage branch from the fire and moved up alongside her.

"You needn't come," he said. "You can stay back by the fire."

"No, I'm going to see the thing through," she told him. "I've got to. I stand for our side; and you—you naturally stand for—the other."

Spider knew that she had meant to say Burney, and could not bring herself to mentioning his name.

She stood back a little when he stooped and pulled off the dirty square of canvas that covered the dead man. She did not retreat, but still she stood with her face averted a little and her eyes drooping so that they saw only the rusty, run-down-at-the-heel boots of her Uncle Jake, with the deep, hard creases which time and weather give to cheap footwear. In a minute she looked up at the faces of the four, bent forward while they stared in absolute silence. The flicker of the torch flames upon their faces gave that weird Rembrandt effect which stirs vague savage instincts in one's blood. Their brows were frowning unconsciously, their breath sucked in at the horror they looked upon.

Spider bent closer, put out a reluctant hand, and felt the crushed bones in the neck with his finger tips. He lifted an arm and felt along the ribs.

Then he stood up, drew in his breath sharply, and backed away. It was Spooky, looking true to his nickname, who replaced the grimy canvas.

"Whereabouts are the tracks?" Spider asked the girl, who gave a great sigh of sheer nervous reaction and turned from the still, covered heap.

"Down here. I'll show you." She took his arm and led him around the great, flat outcropping of lava rock upon which her uncle must have been sitting when surprised from behind. "Let me take the torch. We want to keep back ourselves. He came up on these rocks, I guess. There ain't any mark till you get down in the bottom of the gully."

She led Spider down the rocky bank, the other three following. At the bottom she stopped and passed the smoldering brand slowly above the sand, hesitated while she looked back up the bank to get the line fixed in her mind, and went forward again.

Spider caught her hand, and pulled her back protectively.

"Let me look!" He took the torch, whirled it around his head to fan the blaze, and bent forward, searching.

He found it, and stopped; the plain imprint of a boot—long, wide, pressed deep into the soft soil with the weight of the man who trod there—Burney's boot without a shadow of doubt to cloud Spider's certainty. And the toe was pointed up the bank, toward where the dead man lay crumpled upon one side with the bones of his neck crushed and his head twisted horribly upon his shoulder. A long stride down the gully—a long stride for Spider, that is—was another track to match the first.

Spider waited until the others had come up, bent down, and looked upon the tracks. Then, holding Vida by the hand, he picked his way slowly down the gully. Other tracks he found; tracks leading away from the place—leading toward the gloomy scars of the mountain a mile or so away.

Down the gully across the wider depression, and part way up the farther hill they went. There the burning brands died to charred embers, winking sullen, red eyes at them. They stopped, and gave much time to the making of other torches, while Vida sat down on the steep slope and waited, a huddled little figure under the stars; a lonely little figure who gave no response when Shelton tried to lighten the quest with talk.

She sat with her elbows upon her knees and her chin in her cupped palms, and stared at the Great Dipper tilted brim up toward the North Star. Behind her a week-old moon slid out from behind a cloud bank where it had been hiding and stood a moment upon the highest peak of the mountain before it dropped down into the shadow world beyond. In the somber camp across the ridge a sheep dog barked shrilly.

Vida lifted her head, thinking the boys had lighted their torches unknown to her. She turned, looked up the long slope silvered briefly by the moon, gave a little start, and sprang suddenly to her feet.

"Spider, look! Oh, there he is—I saw him on the hill, looking down at us!"

Spider dropped the match he had been nursing between his palms, looked the way she was pointing a shaking finger, and leaped forward, running up the hill. He, too, had seen just for an instant a huge, dark figure outlined against the crescent moon.

At his first move it disappeared, but he ran on, his six-shooter in its scabbard under his hand. Vida ran after him, panting a little toward the last. Behind them came Spooky and Jim and Shelton, who had been slower to start, and, not having seen the figure, were more hazy as to their reasons for running at all.

At the last Spider and Vida climbed side by side more slowly, too breathless

to do more than gasp a word now and then. And when they finally reached the top, and stood looking down into the deep, jagged cañon beyond, where the moon could not send a single faint ray, but only made the shadows blacker in contrast to the lightened hilltop, they knew that there was nothing more to be done. For Burney, running downhill with those immense strides of which he was capable, while they panted laboriously up the other side, at that minute could easily be half a mile from there. And a half mile in such a place was just as good as a hundred, so far as their chance of overtaking him was concerned.

## CHAPTER X.

They went back to camp, looking frequently behind them; fearfully, too, if the truth were known. They offered to relieve Williams from his mournful vigil, and were repulsed with such a tone of finality that they could not well insist. So Spider and Shelton convoyed the girl to her camp wagon and left her there, while Spooky and Jim went back to the Sunbeam.

Spider did not feel like leaving her altogether alone, he told Shelton when they had ridden well away from the wagon. A man who would kill as Jake Williams had been killed, he asserted, might do any horrific thing. And the girl had threatened Burney, and had probably won his enmity even though he had given no sign of it in their presence. For that matter, neither had he given signs of any murderous intent toward the Williams men.

"I'm going to stick around till morning, anyway," said Spider. "And if he does come back it'll just about be a case of shoot first and ask him what he wants afterward. I believe the man's crazy myself."

"You believe he did it, then?" Shelton questioned in an awed tone. "It

doesn't seem possible. Burney always acted——"

"Maybe it ain't possible," Spider retorted glumly. "But there's the dead man—you seen him yourself, and you seen how he was killed. And you seen the tracks leading up the hill behind him."

"Say, those tracks—they won't be there to-morrow," Shelton said impulsively. "Spooky scraped them all out with his foot as he went past, like you scraped out the tracks over there where we found old Dutch."

"Hunh!" said Spider. "But all the same, I could swear I seen Burney up on top of the hill looking down at us."

"But if he went to Pocatello, how could he get back so quickly?" Shelton eased his long legs down in a sandy spot where they had stopped in plain sight of the white-topped wagon and yet far enough away to relieve the girl from any sense of being watched.

"If he went to Pocatello," Spider repeated meaningly. "I kinda believe he did go. But if he did he sure didn't stay long. You seen his tracks, didn't you? And a man can't leave his tracks around where he ain't been, can he?" He snuggled down behind a rock, and made himself a cigarette where the glow of it could not be seen at the wagon. "Everything points to Burney," he went on musingly after he had smoked for a time in silence. "I believe it was him done it. At the same time——" He settled his hat more firmly upon his head. "At the same time I've got a hunch he didn't. There's something in this deal that don't look right to me. Unless you lied or was crazy, there's things that Burney don't seem to fit into."

"I know it," Shelton conceded gloomily. "He doesn't fit into any of it, as I see it; anything except those tracks. And it has occurred to me," he added, moving closer to the other, "that you or I or anybody could put on a pair of

Burney's boots and make big tracks, Spider. It would be a clever way of hiding our own tracks, wouldn't it? And if these Williams men had an enemy, it would be a pretty smooth way of shifting suspicion——"

"It would if he could take as long steps as Burney," Spider cut in dryly. "You couldn't step in them tracks, Shep—and you're taller than the average man."

"A fellow could step that far, by——"

A scream—a shrill, woman's scream—brought them both to their feet, their hearts thumping wildly. They ran, leaping long through the sage and rocks. Shelton stumbled over a root and went headlong, and Spider went on. Without knowing why he did so he shouted—and in the faint starlight a great dark form left the wagon and went tearing off along the ridge. Over where the sheep lay huddled the dogs barked and barked, with growlings rumbling between the sharp staccato of their clamor.

Spider reached the wagon out of breath and weak with terror for the girl. "Vida!" he gasped when he could lay hand on the wheel. "Vida—for God sake, girl!"

From over his head she answered him, pushing open the narrow door in the canvas wagontop. "Oh, I—oh, Spider! He—came!" She crouched in the doorway, her hand reaching out so that she could touch Spider's shoulder for comfort. "How did you happen to be here?" she asked breathlessly, after a minute.

Spider pulled himself together and climbed up beside her. "We never left," he said. "We was standing guard. I was afraid maybe—— What did he do?"

Vida shivered. "I was trying to get to sleep, and I couldn't. The whole thing just—*haunts* me. And then I heard something outside, and I listened

—and I was so scared I didn't seem able to move, not even to reach for my gun. And then this door was pushed open, and—I screamed. But he couldn't get through it like anybody else could. He was too—big. He blocked the whole doorway. And then you hollered. And he backed out and I heard him running. "Oh," she shuddered, "it's—horrible! He—might have killed me like he——"

"He's crazy," Spider muttered. "Burney wouldn't hurt anybody in his right mind."

"That don't help any," she retorted sharply. "Oh, he's—*horrible!*"

She broken down then completely. She sat crouching in the wagon, just inside the narrow doorway, and sobbed hysterically, her arms folded upon the doorsill. Outside, Spider tried to calm her with a diffident pat now and then on her heaving shoulders and with muttered imprecations and sympathy strangely intermingled.

It was too dark to get out after the marauder. In that faint light which the stars gave it was too dark to see anything clearly. From where he stood beside the wagon door, the ridge from which he had run was a vague blotch against the horizon. Shelton he did not see or hear anywhere. At first that did not mean anything to him; he had forgotten Shelton in his fear for the girl and in the reaction from his fright. When he did remember, he expected momentarily to see him appear out of the dark. When he did not come, and Vida's sobs had lessened to quiet weeping, Spider called to him. He waited, called again, and whistled.

He turned to the girl and laid his hand on her arm. "Say, Shep was back there with me," he told her uneasily. "We both started running when we heard you holler, and he ain't showed up yet. I guess I better go back and see what's wrong. And," he added more uneasily, "I guess you better go

along with me. I don't like to leave you here."

Vida seemed at first not to hear him, but soon she got up and went back into the vague interior of the wagon. In a minute she returned with her hat and a man's coat—her father's probably—which she was buttoning when she came to the door. In one hand she held her six-shooter. She let Spider help her down, and she closed the door carefully. She was crying still, in a subdued, tired way that went straight to the big, soft heart of Spider. He took her by the arm and led her slowly back toward the ridge.

"Yuh don't want to feel so about it," he said bashfully. "A man's got to go when his time's called. And as for *you*—why, I reckon we'll take mighty good care *you* don't get hurt. Anyway, we'll round Burney up to-morrow. He can't git away. He's so ungodly big he can't beat it outa the country and hide anywheres in town, no more than an elephant could hide in a cabbage patch. And if he stays in these hills we'll git him."

"I know it," she assented apologetically. "I ain't a coward, either. I could kill him myself if I had a chance. I—I guess it was just nerves. I don't cry very often. If I cried every time I was unhappy," she said impatiently, "I wouldn't have time for anything else. But—I did get an awful scare. I—I thought I was alone, except for the herder over there with his sheep, and I knew he wouldn't hear anything. They're bedded down out there on the flat, where nothing can't sneak up on 'em so easy after this. So I—I——"

"I know. I'd oughta told you we was going to hang around close. But I was afraid maybe you wouldn't like it. I wasn't so awful much acquainted, and I didn't know——"

At that they came upon Shelton, lying just as he had fallen, face down in the sage. With lighted matches

Spider saw what had happened. He had struck his head on a rock, and he was stunned; how badly they had no means of knowing.

Between them they carried him to the wagon and got him inside. By the light of a lantern they bathed and bandaged the purple lump and laid him out comfortably on Vida's bed. After that they sat and talked, and waited for the sun.

## CHAPTER XI.

Shelton came to himself in a little while, went through the common stages of mental confusion, and groped his way back to clear thinking. By sunrise he was master of his muscles to the extent that he insisted upon crawling out of the wagon and helping Spider look for tracks. But he owned finally to a roaring headache, and even admitted that he felt "groggy." He was therefore persuaded to stay at the wagon while Vida and Spider went forth upon the man trail; vengefully, determined not to be fooled by any cunning stratagem; ready to kill, even, if they were brought face to face with Burney. They were armed—Spider with an old shotgun which Vida lent him and his own forty-five; and Vida with her revolver and the little twenty-two that seemed ridiculously inadequate in a fight with a giant like Burney. And they were armed also with the fine courage that had been born of sturdy pioneer stock and nurtured by the life each one had lived.

Tracks they found; the great, tell-tale footprints of a giant's boots marking the length of a giant's stride. Spider's eyes clouded anew when he discovered them in the sandy soil, for he had liked Burney well—and Burney was his boss. He had eaten at the same table with Burney, had slept under the same tent, had used tobacco from the same sack with that democratic freedom which is the true essence of



the Western type. He had watched over Burney's cattle; with Burney's money he had paid for the clothes he wore. He was proud of Burney's immensity of frame, of his tremendous strength, of his fairness, and the quiet masterfulness of his manner. Big in every way he had believed Burney to be. Too big, certainly, for petty crime or foul murder; so big that he did not need to defend himself or his rights with the weapons of ordinary men. Burney, in the two or three years that Spider had known him, never had owned or carried a gun. He never hunted animals, for pleasure or profit—and for men he did not need one. That was why he killed with his hands—if he killed at all.

He went forward grimly enough upon the trail, did Spider, but he went with a great bitterness in his heart. He would kill Burney if he came close enough, but he would sorrow always over the memory of Burney's fall.

The trail wound here and there through the sage, and there were times when they lost it altogether, but the general trend of the tracks was toward the hills—rather, toward the highest, roughest peak of the hills—so that Spider, heading for the logical route into the heart of its deep-scarred cañons, picked up the trail twice after several minutes of traveling by guess over rocky ground.

Vida kept beside him or close behind. She seemed tireless as he, yet her face was drawn and colorless from worry and lack of sleep and food; for the breakfast that she cooked hastily for the two men she left untouched herself, except for a few sips of black coffee. Spider tried to save her strength for her, since she seemed to have no care for herself. But she would not have it so. If he sat down to rest after a sharp climb, Vida went on ahead—which brought Spider some fearful moments and made him hurry

after her. Once he remonstrated with her for hurrying too fast; her answer then was characteristic.

"When I hear a rattler," she said, "I never quit till I find him and kill him. I'm scared of snakes. And I'm scared of that great big beast of a Burney—and I won't take a long breath till I catch him. While he's free and I don't know where he is, I'm—I just expect every minute he'll sneak up and grab me."

"Not while I can stand on my two feet," Spider interjected, repressing a shiver of horror at the thought. "Only, I don't want you going on ahead. And you've got to save yourself, too. We're a long ways from camp a-ready. I wish we'd brought the horses."

"You don't either," she contradicted flatly. "You knew he'd take to the hills where we couldn't ride. Being afoot, he'd be sure to pick the roughest going he could find. And—it looks like we're up against it right now."

This, because they came to a stand before a bare cliff which shut off the small box cañon which they had entered at its mouth, led on by two of the tracks they were following. These they had found in the loose sand of a dry channel leading up the cañon. The cañon walls had been high, overhanging ledges of rock, unbroken save where slides had ripped off great sections here and there and left the spaces unclimbable because of the banks of shale. The hills were full of such cañons, and sometimes they were passable at the head and gave access either to a higher plateau or to other cañons leading on into the hills. Here, however, the head was cut straight across with a cliff.

"Maybe Burney could get up there," Spider said dubiously, eying the narrow ledge two feet above his highest reach. "But I can't, and you can't. Unless there's some other way outa here we're done for the present."

Vida searched the cliff from wall to

wall. She stood back and stared up at the ledge, and puzzled over some means of getting up. She gave up after a little, and consented to go back—at least as far as the cañon's mouth. Perhaps by following the top of the cañon to its head they might pick up the trail beyond, they decided.

They went back, climbed laboriously up the bluff which became the right wall of the cañon, and went on. The way was rough—so rough that Spider began to feel more and more uneasy on account of Vida. But until they reached the point where they could look down the cliff that had halted them in the cañon below she had been deaf to his arguments. Then she saw how fruitless the search was. Like the black cañon they had reached the night before, they faced the fact that Burney might be an impassable mile or two away—absolutely safe from their most eager pursuit—or he might be hiding almost within the reach of his long arm from them.

Certainly he was safe, so far as their presence in the hills might be termed a menace. They rested a while—Spider taking care that they were not exposed to any sudden onslaught—and then they went dispiritedly down to where the land rolled gently out to the arid plains where her father's sheep had foraged among the sage for the grass which the winter snows and spring rains had coaxed into growing there.

When they could look down over the slopes to where the dead man lay still under his canvas covering, Spider's sharp eyes saw movement there, the moving about of various black objects he knew to be men and horses. It might be fellows whom Spooky and Jim had brought or sent. It might as easily be the coroner whom Vida said one of their herders had gone after. Whichever it was, they turned that way and hurried down a long, sloping ridge that would bring them to the camp.

Well, they came to the gruesome spot, and they recognized Spooky and Jim among the group. Spider, after a minute of fast walking, recognized others also: Bell, the sheriff, and also the coroner, whose name was Walters. And there were men whom he had probably brought with him to make up a jury. Spider knew most of them, having lived in that country for more than two years.

But there was one, at sight of whom Vida gave a suppressed scream and gripped Spider by the arm: Burney—huge, quiescent, towering above the others with the patient inaction of a great Newfoundland dog in the midst of a pack of terriers. He was not handcuffed nor under any apparent restraint, and at that Spider wondered.

Vida hung back, for the first time afraid to face the situation. But Spider reassured her with a sentence or two, and she went reluctantly up to the group and sidled close to her father.

Spider went straight to the sheriff, a broad-shouldered, red-faced man with a bull neck, who stood a little to one side filling an age-blackened pipe. The sheriff glanced up at him from under his black hat brim, nodded a greeting, and looked sidelong toward the giant. Spider looked also.

"Where did you git Burney?" he asked in an undertone. And then: "I should think you'd want to chain him up instead of leaving him loose."

The sheriff made two attempts to light a match on his lifted leg, got it going at last, and cuddled the flame in his pipe bowl. "I didn't git him," he said when he was through. "Burney got me. The fellow Williams sent in caught the night train to Pocatello—I was down there on business. He was hunting around for me, and Burney happened to hear about it. So Burney come and told me about it. We got the p'tic'lars from the man, and Burney, he come on up with us. Seems

Williams accuses Burney—but you've gotta show *me*." He jerked his head backward toward the coroner. "It's up to him," he said. "He'll likely be able to place the time of the murder, but if it was yesterday Burney's got a gilt-edged alibi. He was in Pocatello all day——"

"*Sure?*" Spider plucked Bell by the arm, and drew him farther away. "Last night," he stated deliberately, "Burney came to the wagon where Miss Williams was and tried to git in. She saw him at the door and screamed, and I heard her and run up. Burney beat it when he heard me running——"

Bell had been shaking his beefy head throughout the speech. Now he began to tap Spider impressively on the chest with his forefinger. "Burney was with me last night in Pocatello," he said. "We caught the early train to Corona together. It wasn't him."

"But we saw his tracks," Spider insisted bewilderedly. "We tracked him up into the hills. And earlier in the evening I seen him myself for a minute——"

"Oh, piffle!" exclaimed the sheriff impatiently. "Man, I seen him from nine o'clock till now." He put his pipe back into his mouth, sucked hard on it for a few breaths, and then grinned wryly. "They say you've got a spook out here in the hills," he said. "Maybe that's what yuh seen. You sure didn't see Burney. They's a dozen men—yes, a hundred!—that'll swear to that. Burney ain't a man that's easy mistook."

"No, you're right. He ain't," Spider agreed, and went away and sat down on a rock and rested his elbows on his spread knees and stared hard at the ground. He wanted to think the thing out, and he was too bewildered to think. As he had told Shelton before, not one single, solitary fact seemed to fit in with any other fact. "The things you know for a fact are plumb impossible," he muttered to himself while he made him-

self a smoke. He glanced up at the stark, frowning hills above them. "I guess it must be spooks, all right," he added. And that was as far toward a solution as Spider could go.

## CHAPTER XII.

Vida sidled around Burney at a distance of two rods, and so came up to Spider. She was shaking with nervousness, and she was white and full of wrath.

"What are those men thinking of?" she demanded resentfully. "Why don't they fix Burney so he can't git away? Poppy says he ain't even under arrest."

Spider lifted his head. "I know he ain't. The thing's all balled up and there don't nobody know where they're at. Burney come up from Pocatello this morning with the sheriff. He was there yesterday and las' night. The sheriff says Burney hunted him up and come along with him."

"But how *could* he? He was trying to git in the wagon last night. I seen him—and I'd swear to that on a stack of Bibles ten feet high. How could he be in Pocatello when he was here?"

"Search *me*," said Spider glumly.

"What are they fooling around about, doing nothing?" Vida sat down beside him and watched the group as though they were all her enemies.

"Gitting ready for the inquest, I guess. That's the cor'ner monkeying around the body now. And all them other fellows are the jury. You and me and your dad and the herder'll have to testify, I reckon. Maybe they'll want Shep, too—but I guess they can git along without him; there's Spooky and Jim—they'll make out enough."

"I wish to goodness they'd get busy," said Vida peevishly. "I'll break loose and scream if somebody don't do something pretty quick. Say, even yet I can't realize it. It's just like a nightmare.

I can't make myself believe it's Uncle Jake under that tarp——”

“You don't have to. Just slide through this deal as easy as you can—if you want my advice. It's pretty tough at that. I can't believe it, either. I can't believe Burney would stand there like that with his hands in his pockets if he—done it.”

“Nobody else could do it,” Vida pointed out insistently. “And it was *done*, all right enough.”

The coroner raised himself from where he had been kneeling, beckoned to the sheriff, and conferred with him briefly. Informal though it was, the inquest that followed had an atmosphere of grim dignity that served to comfort Vida and reassure her as nothing else had done. The law had taken charge of the matter. She drew a long breath and lifted her shoulders as if the weight of responsibility had been a tangible burden. The sheriff and the coroner and all those other men—they would deal with Burney as he deserved. She no longer felt that hot desire to shoot him down into a heap of inert flesh like her uncle. Though he stood free, a little apart from the others, with his pipe in his mouth and his great hands in his pockets, he was still in the grip of the law. The sheriff would not let him get away. He would shoot him first.

And then, as the inquest proceeded and her father testified, and Pete and Spooky and Spider and Jim, Vida began to feel a vague discomfort. The jury went solemnly down into the little gully to look at the tracks Burney had left, and returned a nonplused group of men. There were tracks enough, but there were no tracks that could possibly have been made by Burney's feet. Vida could not understand that. And then the sheriff was sworn, just like any common man, and declared that Burney had been in Pocatello when the murder was committed.

Vida could not understand that, either. Her father told of the sheep that had been killed and of Burney's visit on the morning when he had ordered them off the range. But that did not offset the sheriff's amazing statement nor the mystery of the tracks that had disappeared.

There was a minute or two of whispered consultation and a question which the foreman asked the coroner concerning the manner of death.

“I find,” replied the coroner, “that the deceased undoubtedly came to his death by having his neck broken by twisting. Four ribs were broken also, evidently by crushing. There are no bullet wounds—the only other marks of violence on the body being some scratches on the scalp behind the ear. These, I judge, were made by finger nails, in gripping the head to twist it.”

Vida shivered. And then came the most amazing thing of all in her opinion. The jury whispered, and gave their verdict. And the verdict was that her Uncle Jake had met death at the hands of some person unknown to them—with Aleck Burney standing there within twenty feet of them, his great, murderous hands hidden in his pockets!

She sprang to her feet to denounce them all as cowards and fools and liars. But when she stood up and had gone as far as “Oh, you——” things went black, and the whole scene was blotted out of existence as far as she was concerned.

When she came to herself again she was on her bed in the sheep wagon, with a wet towel wadded on her forehead and trickling water down her neck. Her father was scorching the bacon outside, and the coroner was talking to him about free wool.

Vida lay there trying to piece things together and trying also to muster enough energy to call to poppy that the bacon was burning. But neither seemed worth any effort, so presently she went to sleep.

When she awoke it was night, and a cool wind was stirring the sage and flapping a loose bit of canvas in the doorway. She did not know where her father was, but she supposed he was asleep under the wagon where he made up his bed always when they were together. She wondered if they had buried Uncle Jake—or would they have a funeral to-morrow? Not much of a funeral, with no coffin and no preacher or anything. How could Burney be in Pocatello when he was here in the hills? How could he make tracks where he hadn't been?

She went to sleep again, and dreamed that she was tracking Burney and that the tracks came and went in the sand without any human aid or explanation. Then she dreamed that she was in a blind cañon with no way out except through the mouth where she had entered. She had gone in there looking for Burney. But her dream shifted, as dreams have a fashion of doing: Burney was looking for her, and she was hiding in there. And she saw him creeping up the cañon, a gigantic figure in the deep shadows of the high walls. And suddenly there was no place to hide. And Burney was coming closer and closer, peering this way and that with his little, deep-set, twinkling eyes. He had not yet discovered her where she cowered against the bare wall of the cañon, but he would see her presently. He was so close that she could hear his footsteps crunching—

The wagon tilted six inches, upheaved from below, and woke Vida. She found herself sitting up on the hard bunk, and her heart was not beating at all; then it gave a heavy flop at the base of her neck. She screamed automatically, without any conscious volition; shrilly, without any articulateness.

The wagon heaved again so that she clung to the boarded edge of the bunk. Like a rabbit scared out of its hiding, she darted suddenly away from the bed

and down the lurching length of the wagon box to the narrow doorway, jerked the door open, and looked out. She knew then what it was she feared. And she knew that she was afraid for her father, whose bed was always made up under the wagon and who slept heavily, as tired, slow-thinking men do sleep when their lives are spent in the open. The wagon settled down suddenly on its four wheels. There was a scurrying rush of some large object—but it was behind the wagon, where Vida could not see because of the canvas top. She did not know where her gun had been put.

"Poppy!" she called in a perfect frenzy of terror. "*Poppy!* Where are you, poppy? *Oh, poppy!*"

From behind the wagon—out in the whispering sage, a hoarse scream answered her. Human—and yet not human—mocking, maniacal, horrible. The most awful sound that Vida had ever heard in her life; a squall, a cry—a shriek she could not find a name for. Her memory flew back to the tales of ghosts and demons that an old Scotch woman had told her years ago. Warlock—that was it! A warlock, such as Maggie MacDonald had told about, that haunted the heath behind the village where strange deaths occurred periodically in the dark of the moon. When men and women were found strangled—and none knew how or why.

Vida crouched down in the wagon box, back in the shadow where the moon—a little later in its dip behind the high peak to-night—could not betray her to the devil that roamed without. She had laughed at those old tales of the warlock—except when she shivered over the actual telling. But now, to-night, the thing seemed real—a tangible menace. She felt its uncanny presence bounding away over the sage; a horrible thing; blue, with horns and a long tail; taking what shape it would; leaving

what trail it would for men to puzzle their wits over.

She hid her face in her circling arms and shivered. She saw now why it was that Burney had seemed to be in two places at once; why it was that Shelton and Spider and Spooky had felt some eerie thing following them. They might have been killed! No one was safe from a warlock. No one.

She could not have spent more than a minute crouching there in the grip of superstitious fear, but it seemed to her that she must have cowered in that corner, against the grub box, at least an hour. She heard a stir beneath the wagon, a sound between a grunt and a groan.

"Poppy!" she cried again, and lifted her head. "What was it, poppy? Are you hurt?" The sound of her own voice steadied her wonderfully. She went back, and, in the dim light of the moon shining faintly on the canvas, groped with her fingers along a rough shelf over the bed where she thought her father might have laid her revolver. Her hand struck against the cool barrel of it. She caught it up eagerly and went hurrying back to the door that was open and swung slowly back and forth in the breeze like the pendulum of a clock almost run down for lack of winding. She climbed down over the front of the wagon box—if you are familiar with sheep wagons, you know that they are not very convenient as to getting in and out—and crept between the front wheels, where her father always put the head of his bed.

It was dark there, and the moon had set a black shadow of the wagon top down upon the eastern side. Vida groped with one hand—the other held her revolver. "Poppy! Why don't you answer me? Where are you?" she called sharply.

The vague outline of his squat figure detached itself from the shadow of the wagon, and he stood plainly revealed in

the moonlight. "'F I could git a sight of 'im, I'd shoot 'em down like I would a *ki-oty*," he snarled. "Where be yuh, Vida? Tore m' shirt half off'n me, tryin' to git his hands on m' throat! All saved me was the bigness of him. He got hung up between the wagon wheels, and he didn't know jest how I was layin'. 'F I'd 'a' had m' bed out'n the open he'd 'a' killed me, sure. Man like that'd oughta be hung up by the heels—over a slow fire! Killin's too good f'r 'im. D'you hear 'm holler, Vida? Tried to sound like a mount'n lion, so's to fool me—but it didn't work worth a cent. He can't fool *me*! I seen him when he raised up 'n' turned tail 'n' run. I seen 'im plain as day."

"And was it—Burney, poppy?" Vida had crawled back from under the wagon, and the two stood together just within the shadow, staring off into the moonlit, whispering sage which the breeze moved so that it seemed alive.

"A-course it was Burney! He can't fool *me*! He got out in the moonlight f'r a minute, and I seen him, plainer 'n' what I see you. A-course it was Burney! He's a cute one—purtendin' t' be in Pocatello, 'n' at home, 'n' everywhere but where he is. But he can't fool *me*. He ain't cute enough. He crawled out 'n' stood up in the moonlight. 'F I'd 'a' had m' gun in m' hands, then I'd 'a' fixed him! Tried t' murder me in m' sleep! He woulda, too, 'f he hadn't 'a' been so all-fired big he couldn't git under the wagon."

Away off on the flat, where the sheep were bedded down in the care of a herder, a dog barked hysterically, in the sharp staccato of alarm; yelped once, and was still. A few mother sheep blatted, and a man yelled some shrill command; yelled just once, and did not yell again. Vida shuddered and clung to her father.

"I'll bet he went over there, among the sheep," she whispered terrifiedly. Then she took a fresh grip on her cour-

age and her gun, and started to run toward the disturbance. She had forgotten her conviction that a warlock was abroad working his will upon defenseless humans.

"Come on, poppy!" she called back at the man, who still hesitated and grumbled threats in the shadow of the wagon. "Come on and help me get him! Big as he is, a bullet'll stop him—come on!"

"You c'm on back here!" cried her father, with futile authority in his voice, and stayed where he was. "C'm on back! You can't do nothin' in the dark that-a-way."

"He might be killing Walt Smith!" Vida flung the sentence back at him and ran the faster. But her father stayed by the wagon and shouted commands and imprecations after her as she ran.

She topped the last low ridge that marked the edge of the sage-covered flat where the sheep had been held for safety, and stood still for a minute, panting heavily and trying to see what was taking place out there where the band was huddled. The moon silvered softly the plain. She could see as far as Pillar Butte, even—a vague, dark blur against the star-sprinkled purple which was the sky. Then, quite suddenly, the moonlight darkened so that she could not see ten rods. She turned to see why, and a streak of vivid yellow gashed the night through like a flaming sword.

A thunderstorm, common enough in that country, was sweeping up from the southwest. Already it had swallowed the moon so deeply that Vida, staring upward, could not even see where it had gone. And while she stared with her face turned upward, she heard a cry down there below her on the plain, a man's cry for help. It was not so very far away, either. She swung instantly and faced that way, and wished for the

lightning that would cut away the darkness.

"This way! Come this way!" she called, as loudly as she could, and with her thumb pulled back the hammer of her gun. It was Walt Smith, the tow-headed Mormon herder. He was running—she could hear him rustling the sage bushes that came in his way.

And then the lightning came—a bright opening in the clouds like a black velvet curtain drawn aside suddenly to give a glimpse of the brilliance behind. The whole plain was lighted more clearly than by the moon. And Vida, standing there with the lightning behind her, saw Walt Smith running toward her like a scurrying rabbit toward its burrow. Saw behind him the huge figure of a man who came on with giant strides, leaping clean over what bushes came in his way.

The darkness dropped and made the night blacker after the glare, so that she could see nothing. The heavy roll of thunder beat down whatever cry might have come from the quarry. But the lightning came again—and Walt was close—so close that she could see he had no hat on, and that his tow hair was bushy with the wind he faced. And that giant who came behind—he was close, too; quite close. In a minute he would overtake Walt.

Involuntarily Vida raised her hand and fired straight at his middle. The big man swerved sharply, and she fired again, and yet again. She saw him whirl and start back—and then it was black dark again. Walt Smith came puffing up the slope, and Vida waited for him. A little contemptuous she was—a little impatient because men ran from Burney instead of shooting as she had done. Walt had a gun—why didn't he use it instead of running like a scared rabbit? Burney would not have come after him if Walt had used his gun rather than his legs. She was beginning to understand that Burney was

afraid of a gun. A gun was the only thing more powerful, more dangerous, than he was. He could not fight and overcome a bullet; he could not catch it on its singing flight and twist the neck of it and kill it. Burney was afraid of a gun. And Vida, once she felt that it was so, lost all her fear of him.

So her lips curled in the darkness while Walt came panting up to where she stood, and told breathlessly how Burney had got among the sheep, and how a dog had run out, and Burney had killed the dog. How he had shouted for the other dog, that was off chasing a coyote from the far side of the band, and how Burney had then come at him like a charging elephant.

"And you didn't have sense enough to shoot," she finished for him coldly. "You and poppy make me tired! I'll bet you dropped your gun when you started to run."

"No, I never!" Walt hastened to deny. "I kep' it—but I never had no chancet to use it. He—he was comin' right at me!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

Vida made her way in the face of the freshening wind to where her father stood guard over the empty sheep wagon and waited impatiently her return. Behind her tagged Walt Smith, puffing and pasty-white from the scare he had gotten.

"Poppy, either you or Walt will have to go and stay with the sheep," she announced firmly, when she came near and the lightning split the darkness and revealed him to her. "Burney killed one of the dogs—but you needn't be scared, either one of you. I put him on the run, shooting at him. He won't bother again to-night—he never has, after he has been shot at."

"He oughta be killed!" snarled her father ineffectively. "A man that'll murder——"

"You can suit yourself which one goes back to the sheep. It's going to storm pretty quick—and storm hard, too. I've got to git me something to eat, and rest up. I'm about done up, as it is." She started to climb up into the wagon, but stopped in the doorway and turned toward the two. "Where's the sheriff at?" she asked. "And what's he going to do about Burney?"

"I ain't runnin' the sheriff," her father retorted, with the petulance of the weak-souled. "How sh'd I know where he's at? Went back to town with the cor'ner, I guess, after we buried Jake. He couldn't do nothing about Burney—not after the cor'ner's jury let him off. Sheriff can't run a man in without a warrant," he explained, in the tone of weary tolerance for a woman's ignorance which some men love to assume. "He didn't have no warrant. Yuh got to *git* something on Burney 'fore he c'n be 'rested."

"Yes, and he'd run loose a good long while before *you* ever done anything about it—but talk!" she accused bitterly. "'N it was your own brother, too. And your sheep. Walt Smith, you git back there and look after 'em! What you gitting paid for? You needn't be scared-a Burney. All you gotta do is shoot if he shows up, and he'll run. You seen how quick he headed the other way when *I* shot? He won't show up, though. He's halfways home by this time."

She waited until she saw Walt turn reluctantly and go off toward the sheep. She upbraided her father again for his weak passivity that spent precious minutes in useless clamor, and told him to keep watch while she slept. In the morning, she declared, she meant to get out after Burney herself, seeing no one else had the nerve to do it.

When she had made her feelings and her intentions perfectly clear to him—and thereby claimed and clarified her own mind—she ate hungrily of cold,



fried bacon and some very good bread which she herself had baked, and finished with a dish of stewed, dried apples and a cup of cold tea.

After that she lay down upon her hard bed, with her six-shooter cuddled under her pillow and her fingers touching the cool butt of it, and listened to the grumbling mutter of the storm and watched the searing lightning flash intermittent glares of light upon her bowed, canvas roof.

She fell asleep so. For she was young and healthy and sturdy of spirit, and she had seen Burney, the giant, turn and run from her and her gun—and she had lost her fear of him.

The rain came suddenly, and pelted the sageland with great globes of cold water hurled earthward. Sheets of it, like a gray wall, with the gashing sword-thrusts of the lightning and the splitting crash of thunder—and still she slept. All her life she had known those terrific thunderstorms of the plains country, and the shelter of that twelve-ounce canvas over her head spelled security to her nerves.

Her father potted peevishly about, piling harness and saddles under the wagon and lifting his blankets up under the canvas top. He muttered querulously to himself at the vileness of fate and the passionate fury of the storm, while he spread his bed upon the floor between the stove and the hinged table, and, with a grunt, laid himself down at last for his belated rest. And Vida slept quietly, heavily, utterly worn out and gathering strength for what was to come.

In the morning came Shelton and Spider to see how she had fared and to learn whether they had seen or heard anything of the murderer of her uncle. That, at least, was their professed errand; probably they merely made that an excuse for riding over.

Spider had been made a deputy before the sheriff left, so that he might

feel behind him the authority of the law in case an emergency rose. The sheriff, he explained to Vida apologetically, would have stayed and hunted the hills over—if he had known who, or what, he was to search for.

"He's plumb up ag'inst a mystery," Spider asserted, "and he ain't got the time to turn out and play detective. Shep and me's going to try our hands at that. And if we get anything that looks like a clew, we're to let him know. You see, since Burney's proved he never done it——"

"That'll take a' lot more proof than he's furnished yet," Vida cut in stubbornly. "He tried to kill poppy last night, but he got hung up trying to get under the wagon. He tore poppy's shirt, and then he run. And he went down to the band and killed a dog, and tried to kill Walt Smith. But——"

"How do you know?" Spider moved closer, and his eyes were sharpened while he stared into her face. "How do you know it was Burney?"

"Because I seen him, and poppy seen him. I seen him chasing Walt, and I took a couple of shots at him. He turned and run then, like a scared rabbit."

"You're sure it was Burney?" Spider still stared hard at her.

"Of course I'm sure! Do you think he's easy to mistake? He wasn't more'n fifty yards away when the lightning lit up everything, and I shot at him. He was as plain as you are this minute."

"What time was that? It started in to lightning about half past ten——"

"And it was the first bright flash that showed him up. It was moonlight till then, and then the storm rolled up in front of the moon. Poppy seen him by moonlight——"

Spider turned and looked inquiringly at Shelton. "You know what time Burney came home," he said.

"Then he was gone last night?" Vida stood up, quivering for the hunt. Till

then she may have had a subconscious doubt of Burney's guilt in spite of the evidence of her eyes.

"He was gone," stated Shelton mystifiedly, "but he came back just after the storm started. Spider and I were going to follow and see where he went. But we didn't miss him till just before the storm came up, because he'd left a candle burning after we'd all gone to bed. Spider got up and looked, and the light was out. And we went down and found out that his horse was gone—and that was just when it begun to thunder and lightning. And we were going to saddle up and come over here, anyway, when it started to rain like all get-out. We were waiting for it to let up a little, when Burney came back. We saw him ride down the hill—it was lightning something fierce by that time—and we beat it back to the bunk house before he came up. We didn't want him to know we were watching him, you see." Shelton had still a purple-and-green lump on his forehead, but he was otherwise his old, cheerful self.

"You don't know how long he'd been gone?" Vida was plainly puzzled. This might prove another alibi.

"Not more than an hour or two. Because I made an excuse to go to the cabin just about nine o'clock, and Burney was in bed then, reading a novel by candlelight. He'd acted pretty gloomy—didn't he, Spider?—after we all got home. Didn't eat any supper, but sat and smoked and looked at his toes as if he were thinking pretty hard about something. So when I saw him reading in bed, Spider and I kind of made up our minds that he had settled down for the night. So we went to bed. We meant to put in the day looking around, whether Burney liked it or not. And then Spider saw the light go out, and got up to make sure—and Burney was gone. So——"

"How about the other fellows?" Vida was putting bacon sandwiches in

a flour sack with the evident intention of spending the day in the hills.

"Oh, they claim that Burney don't know a thing about the—killing. They're off riding the other way to-day." Spider took it upon himself to explain. "I'm supposed to be, too. I just pulled out with Shep and never said a word to anybody. I'm liable to git my time—but that'll be all right. There's other jobs. I might herd sheep for a change," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, if you're going into the hills, I'm going with you," Vida announced decisively. "I ain't afraid of Burney any more, and"—she gritted her teeth over the thought—"I'd just like to have a hand in rounding him up. I ain't afraid of him. I've found out that a gun is bigger than he is—and he knows it. And I can shoot just as well as either of you. So I'm going."

"It'll be pretty hot," Spider objected weakly. "And it's rough going, too—where we're going."

"It won't be any hotter in the hills than it will be in this wagon," Vida argued. "And I was raised on rough going."

"Well, we'd like to have you with us, all right"—Spider flushed over the admission, which to him sounded extremely significant—"but we ain't going after Burney exactly. We don't know *what* we're going after. That spook, maybe. Put it any way you like, Miss Williams, it's a cinch Burney never killed your uncle. He *couldn't*, when he was in Pocatello all that day."

"The sheriff lied, maybe." Vida had a streak of stubbornness that was slow to yield.

"No, he never. And there was the coroner, too. *He* seen Burney in Pocatello, and talked with him, and they was together. Him and the sheriff was both down there from Shoshone, and your herder went there after 'em, 'stead of waiting at Corona till they come up.

He'll tell you himself he seen Burney in Pocatello. No, we got to look for some one else that's hiding out in these hills."

"There's last night, too," Shelton pointed out to her. "How do you suppose Burney could ride twelve or fifteen miles in less than an hour?" This was secondhand wisdom which he had picked up from Spider's deductions on the way over.

"How could there be another man the size of Burney in the country and nobody know it?" Vida came back at him. "Tracks and everything prove—and, besides, didn't I tell you I *seen* him?"

"At night," said Spider patiently. "Always at night. Why, I could strap a pair of stilts onto my legs and fix to look like Burney—at night. Lord!" he ejaculated. "I believe I've fell onto the answer to the whole blame thing!"

Vida looked at him with her lips parted. Inwardly she was seeing how plausible that solution was, after all. She herself had gone striding over this very country on crude, homemade stilts, just for fun, when she was a child. Still——

"How would stilts make a man so—strong in his hands?" she questioned, with a catch in her voice over the horror her words called up.

"There's tricks to help a man seem a whole lot stronger'n what he is," Spider told her, with something approaching cheerfulness. "There's somebody prowling around these hills trying to git something onto Burney," he declared boldly. "Why, it'd be a cinch, the way he's worked it—only he can't be in two places at once, and he can't watch Burney and do his dirty work all at the same time. So Burney slips alibis over on him now and then, and that kinda spoils his play. Come on, folks!—we'll see what we can figure out on this trail. Anyway, I'll bet money I've got the answer right here—that it's just

a common-sized man we want to look for that hates Burney and wants to get him in bad."

"But who'd want to?" Vida persisted in her doubts. "It would take a man half crazy with hate to think up a scheme like killing sheep and—folks—that way, and making big tracks around over the country——" She brought the package of sandwiches and gave it to Spider. "That would take the worst kind of an enemy to do that."

"Well, it don't take much to start some men loping along the hate trail," Spider asserted confidently. "Lots of men hate Burney. He's so ungodly big he's got a cinch in everything but a gun fight, and he's kinda queer in his ways, all right. He don't mix with folks, and he don't try to make friends with nobody. So he ain't got so awful many. Well, I'll go git your pony and we'll drift—if you're bound to come with us."

"Poppy's going to be out with the sheep all day. And that's where I draw the line—at sheep-herding. I'll feel lots safer with you boys."

That, of course, settled any lingering reluctance to take her with them. She mounted the pinto pony which Spider saddled and led up to her, and they rode toward the hills. There was no encouragement to look for tracks, after that heavy, pelting rain; they loped along in silence for the most part until they reached the first real climb and were compelled to go slowly.

Vida was studying the mystery from the new angle which Spider had taken with his theory. For that matter, so was Shelton and Spider himself. Spider pulled a foot free of the stirrup, slid over in the saddle so that he was resting mostly on one thigh for relaxation, and sifted tobacco into a cigarette paper.

"Yes, sir, that accounts for pretty nearly everything," he said, apropos of their thoughts. "If we can locate that cave that Shep went prognosticating

around in, I'll bet you money we'll nab the gentleman that's been doing all the mischief. Chances are that's where he hangs out. And between you and me, I've got a notion I could name the man. I won't, because I ain't dead sure, and it's a nasty proposition, tacking a crime like that on a fellow till you're dead certain he done it. But there's one fellow, and only one, that might frame up a deal like this and put it through. He's strong as a bull, pretty middling big, and he hates Burney worse'n a schoolma'am hates a worm down her back. He's on the dodge for a killing he done in Hailey a year ago last winter. It was Burney's evidence that put the diamond hitch on him—and he broke jail and ain't been seen since. He left word he'd git Burney and git him *right*."

"Would he be afraid of a gun?" Vida put the question quite seriously.

The twinkling devil showed in Spider's eyes when he looked at her.

"My experience is that 'most any man is afraid of a gun when he ain't behind it," he informed her dryly. "Everybody knows that Burney never packs a gun, so he couldn't very well produce one and go on acting the part of Burney—sabe? And he wouldn't be crazy about being shot, either. It would be up to him to drift, unless he wanted to give the whole deal away."

"Is he in this country?" Shelton studied the hills before them with that frank curiosity which was almost childish.

"If he's the man, he sure must be in this country. I don't hardly think he's in South America. Ask another one, Shep."

Shelton flushed, glanced quickly at Vida, and refrained from asking another question.

They worked their way up the more open slopes until they were in the heart of Spook Hills. All about them the steeps rose sheer above cañons whose

roughness was hidden beneath the deep green of pines, mottled along the middle with the lighter foliage of cottonwoods that told where flowed the tiny streams which never reached the desert beyond.

"It's a great place to hide out in," Spider observed once when they stopped on a high, bare ridge and gazed out over the jumble. "And it's an almighty poor place to find anybody in. It's just a case of ridin' by guess and by gosh, and taking a chance on runnin' acrost anything."

"What about the cave? Aren't you going to hunt around there?" Vida asked him somewhat diffidently. She might bully Shelton and assert her wider experience and laugh at his ignorance, and she might—and did—order her father about like a hired man; but with Spider she was all woman, who recognized man as the leader. Save when she argued over the guilt of Burney, her deference to Spider's masculinity was perfectly noticeable.

"We are if we can find it. Shep, he went and lost it out of his pocket after he got through playin' with it, and he ain't found it again." Spider was finding it easy to joke over the matter now, since he had a theory that left Burney clear of guilt.

"I'll bet I could find it," Vida declared, quite suddenly. "What kind of a place was it, Shep—on the outside? Did it open out onto a rocky knoll, like that over there?" She pointed with her quirt.

"No, it didn't. It was under a ledge on the side of a cañon. It was down east of that ridge where I left you that day—and it went straight back like a long tunnel, and then there were branches, after one went in quite a long way."

Vida studied the hills frowningly. "Lots of caves are like that," she retorted, her eyes smiling across at Spider in a way that Shelton did not find pleasurable to himself. "I could show

you a dozen long tunnels that open under ledges in cañons. The hills are full of them. Wasn't there anything else to remember it by?"

Shelton twisted his lips ruefully. "Several things: I lost old Dutch there, and had to walk home, for one. And I met that old Indian squaw that—— By Jove!" He turned to Spider eagerly. "If we could find her again, she might know whether there's anybody else living here in the hills, don't you think?"

"I thought you said she was crazy." Spider's enthusiasm seemed to conserve itself for his own ideas. "And blind."

"Well—yes, she was. But still——"

"If she's blind, she couldn't see him, and if she's crazy, we couldn't depend on anything she said. So what's the use? If you know any caves that might do for a hang out, Vida, let's take a look at 'em. I've got candles."

"I know lots of them. Not on this side, though." Vida examined the nearest bluffs critically. "We'll have to get across this ridge first. It's just like these hills was piled up hot, and before they got cold they crumpled all down on one side and left lumps and hollows all through them. Over on the other side is where 'most all the caves are."

That meant a wide detour, because they were already up so high in the hills that the cañons were not to be crossed except afoot. Shelton wanted to keep straight on, but the other two did not pay much attention to his opinions or his wishes. After all, he was a tender-foot, and they two were Western to the bone; and, say what you will, there is a certain clannishness among rangefolk, a perfectly natural drawing together of congenial spirits, even when there is no sex attraction to emphasize the partiality. Shelton felt it and became moody, and rode by himself quite pointedly, which did not displease Vida, so far as one could tell by her manner, and which visibly elated Spider, who wanted her to himself, anyway.

Thus they reached again the lower country some distance apart, and, in crossing a series of low ridges, became separated. Shelton did not mind that in the least; in fact, he had assisted the accident by loitering behind a ridge and in letting Dutch climb at a slant that would eventually land him in the home trail. Shelton was sulking as much as it was in his nature to sulk. He had been overlooked in the conversation; he had seen Vida smile at Spider as she had never smiled at himself, and he had been laughed at when he offered suggestions which he considered perfectly good. He had begun to suspect that the quest of the murderer was, after all, secondary in importance to their pleasure in riding through the hills together. A lot they cared about finding clues, so long as they could ride side by side and make eyes at each other, he criticized sharply. *He* was out to solve the gruesome mystery of these hills, and he could do it a lot easier without those two along making objections to everything he wanted to do. He saw a spooky-looking gorge, all jutting ledges and deep crevices along the sides, off to his right. He turned deliberately into it in spite of the fact that it led straight away from where he had last seen Spider and Vida.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

It is not wise for a party to become separated in the wilderness. Shelton, born to the easy ways of policed streets and cars which may be counted upon to land all wanderers at home in due time, did not know of that unwritten law of the wild which commands a man to keep in touch with his companions. He went calmly about his own business, and felt no compunctions whatever over the separation.

Spider and Vida, however, knew well the law of the wild, and did their best to obey it. They waited on top of the

ridge, and talked of many things. After a while they rode back where they could scan the long, bare slope they had just climbed; for Shep was green, and there was no telling what might have happened. They did not see anything of him, for the simple reason that he had crossed the ridge lower down while they stood talking, hidden from him by a straggling growth of alders. They went back to the highest point and waited there, and watched all the slopes. Spider yelled, with his cupped hands for a megaphone, to the four quarters of the earth until he was purple.

They retraced their steps to where they had last seen Shep, and from there they tried to track him. They did track him halfway up the ridge, and then lost all trace of him in a patch of thick, short grass all matted with last year's growth. They called him names, relieving their minds a little. They told each other, over and over, how blameless they had been, and how they had taken it for granted he would have sense enough to follow them and not go wandering off by himself. They went back upon the pinnacle and waited again, and watched the hills and cañons spread all about them as an eagle must watch from his aerie. They repeatedly declared that they ought to go on and leave him—it would serve him right and "learn" him a lesson. But they lingered still, held by that law of the wild that stragglers *must* be accounted for before a party may continue its journey. Perhaps the law itself might not have held them, had there not been a very real menace to wanderers in those hills. Somewhere this wilderness held concealed a man who would murder, fiendishly and wantonly. They could not go on and leave Shep unaccounted for. He had started out with them, and he had given them no hint that he intended to leave them. And yet he had disappeared completely and without warning.

"Aw," said Spider at last, when the

sun hung high and hot over their heads, "there's no sense in waiting here any longer. He'd 'a' showed up long ago if he was coming. We've done our share, and then some. We've waited here, and hunted and watched two good, long hours—and I've hollered my head off. If that other fellow's anywhere within ten mile of us, he knows just where we're located by this time. Let's get on over the other side—a the mountain and take a look at them caves."

"But I don't see where Shep could 'a' went to!" Vida complained nervously. "I guess my nerves are all upset lately; I know it don't take much to worry the life outa me."

"Let's go back to camp." Spider had suggested it four or five times, but he tried it again in the hope that Vida, like all other women, would change her mind. "This ain't no business for a girl, anyway—tracking down a murderer. We'll go back, and I'll get Spooky and Jim, and we'll make a still hunt all through here. I never meant to——"

"Oh, I know all that. But I consider I'm just as good as Spooky or Jim, either one. I can shoot—and that's what will count if we meet him. I don't scare easy—honest, I don't. You mustn't feel as if you've got me on your hands, to take care of. I can take care of myself. I—killed a mountain lion once."

"I don't know of anybody I'd rather have along," said Spider, softening his voice unconsciously. "You've sure got most-a the men skinned for nerve. I never seen a woman as nervy as you are." He paused, and leaned a trifle closer. "'F there's anything I hate, it's a coward," he added guilefully. "All I meant was that I ain't as brave for you as you are for yourself. I d'no' what I'd do if anything was to happen to *you*."

Vida was not schooled to coquetry. She blushed and looked away from him,

across the uneven crests of the hills. She had no pert answer ready; she was acutely conscious of his hand behind her on the high cantle, just as if he had his arm around her, she felt. And she was conscious of her own awkwardness.

"Why, there's Shep, away over there! Ain't it?" She pointed a slim brown finger. "It's a white horse, anyway—I bet he's headed for home."

Spider frowned and took away his hand. Even at two or three miles' distance Shep could be a confounded nuisance, it would seem, and interrupt just when he shouldn't. "It's him, all right," he conceded briefly. "Now you'll quit worrying about him, maybe. What shall we do? Go back, or take a look around them caves?"

"I won't go back." Vida started her pony forward, wondering why she should feel such a sudden depression. "It's awful hot. Let's hunt for a spring, and eat our lunch, first thing. We'll have to go pretty near as far as Shep went to get where there's any caves that I know anything about."

She rode part way down the ridge in silence. "I just can't make myself believe it wasn't Burney," she broke out abruptly. "A man with stilts on could make tracks—I can see how that would be easy enough, but——"

"But what?" Spider looked at her unsmilingly. He had thought her convinced. She had been convinced, so far as he could see; it was like a woman to fly back on an argument and have to go through the whole deal again! "What makes it hard to believe?"

Vida turned in the saddle so that she faced him. Her eyes held a worried look; she did want to please Spider, but she was so uncompromisingly honest that she could not pretend to believe just because he wanted her to do so.

"I hate this talking and talking, and never getting anywhere," she protested impatiently. "But I just *can't* believe it wasn't Burney. He was big—not

just tall, but *big*. He was so big he couldn't crawl under the wagon like a common man would, to get poppy. He waked me up, tilting the wagon up on one side, trying to crawl under between the wheels. Our brake sticks out quite a ways, but any common man coulda got under easy enough—— It was Burney. I know it was. When I seen him chasing Walt Smith, he was *big*—big every way. We ain't after any common-sized man, and I know it. And he don't live in any cave, either. He lives right at the Sunbeam Ranch. It's all foolishness, hunting through all the caves. If he was there, we couldn't git him. He'd see us coming with our lights."

"Why didn't you say you felt that way about it?" Spider's voice was hard and even.

"A person feels things without knowing it, sometimes. I knew all the time I didn't feel right about it, but——"

"If you don't want to hunt the caves, what's the use of going on?" To prove that it was of no use whatever, Spider pulled his horse to a stand. "I'll take you back to camp, and then I'll have a free hand to look where I want to look. Come on—I'll want a little time before dark."

"Oh, you needn't get mad," Vida told him quickly, her own eyes burning the anger light. "I'll go through the caves, if that's what you want. But——"

"I don't want you to. I told you all along I didn't. It ain't safe for a girl." Then, just because he was a bit angry, he spoiled his last chance of sending her back. "If it was Burney, you'd be dead safe," he said. "It's because it ain't him, and I know it ain't."

"Seems to me it's poor policy to know so much about who it is and who it ain't!" snapped Vida, and sent her pony on down the hill. She did not mean anything by that, except that his positiveness irritated her at that moment.

But Spider, inflamed by his anger and made abnormally sensitive by his growing love for the girl, fancied that she was hinting at a guilty knowledge of the crime. He turned white around the lips and nostrils, and fell back a couple of rods in the rear. Save for the fact that she really was not safe in those hills alone, he would have left her, just as Shelton had left her a few days ago. He compromised by keeping her in sight, and in remaining so far behind that she must stop and wait for him openly before there could be any further speech between them.

Vida looked back once or twice very cautiously, and saw that Spider had no intention of overtaking her. She flamed hot with anger which she tried to believe was directed toward Spider rather than herself. She had been pretty mean, but so had Spider. If he really believed she wasn't safe alone, why did he lag along behind like that? Well, all right, if he wanted to keep his distance—she'd see that it was easy to do!

So she urged her pony down that hill at a shuffling trot, and when he was at the bottom she put him into a lope. She felt hateful, and she meant to act just as hateful as she felt. No Sunbeamer need think he could whistle *her* to his heels! He wanted to hunt through the caves? Very well, she would lead him to all the caves she knew, and he could hunt through them to his heart's content. Much good it would do him, with the murderer hanging out at the Sunbeam Ranch all the while!

Vida was a girl, and she was given to moods. Though she was accustomed to hard living and to worrying over material things—even to tragedy in a small way—she had been stirred deeply by the outrages upon her family. She could have killed, had the opportunity risen when she was in the killing mood. She had run the gamut of emotions in the past forty-eight hours, from fear

and horror and hate to shy, dawning love and the sense of security which love brings to women. But nerves are tricky things at best. Because she became quite absorbed in the tormenting of one called Spider—she did not even know his real name—and she pushed into the background of her mind the real object of their quest. To lead Spider through the hills, to dodge into this cave and that cave ahead of him—always to keep ahead of him—that became a matter of importance. To make him think that he had lost sight of her permanently, and to watch from some hiding place in the rocks while he hunted for her—that raised her spirits immensely.

As to Burney—she thought of him sometimes, in the wildest places, and sent uneasy, seeking glances around her. But then she had her gun safe in its holster at her hip, and the belt sagged with loaded cartridges; and Burney was afraid of a gun. So she put the unwelcome thought of him from her, and went on teasing Spider. Nerves are tricky things, and they take strange whims. But Fate is trickier, and her whims are stranger.

Fate, for instance, sent Shelton C. Sherman straight down a cañon up which Burney was riding slowly, purposefully, saving his big horse deliberately, that he might get from him much in the way of endurance if the need came later. Shelton stopped, a good deal surprised at the meeting. Burney stopped—perhaps surprised also, though that was hard to determine just by looking at him. It was as if Burney, being given the normal amount of human emotions, had to spread them out thin to fill his great self, so that they reached the surface of his face so diluted as to be scarcely discernible. His little eyes twinkled sharply at the young man who was supposed to be somewhere else—but since they always did twinkle



sharply, there was no especial meaning to be read into their expression.

There was one thing queer about Burney: he did not ask many questions, and yet he had the knack of squeezing one dry of information. He certainly squeezed Shelton dry, in the ten minutes they stood there talking. Where he had been told, truthfully and because Burney's eyes impelled the telling. What had happened at the Williams camp, and what Vida thought of it, and her father; where he and Spider and Vida had started for that morning, and why; Spider's theory of the man who wore stilts and a pair of big boots fastened on somehow to look like Burney's tracks; everything, in fact, that Shelton C. Sherman knew about the whole affair he told, just because Burney sat there on his big horse and looked down at him fixedly, with an expectant look in his little eyes, as if they were always saying, "Well, is that all?"

Shelton was not prudent, of course. He should have kept some things to himself—but he did not; not one single thing that he knew or that had been said in his presence.

"Whereabouts was they headed for when you left 'em?" Burney, having gotten the whole story, seemed to desire that certain points should be made exceptionally clear.

"For some caves that Vida knows. They wanted to find the one I was in when I saw the—tracks. The tracks of your boots," he explained, in obedience to Burney's sharp glance, "and the big bear tracks. They think maybe they'll find some clew around there. I tried to find the cave again, to show Spider, and I couldn't." Did Burney look relieved at that? "We looked all over, and we couldn't find it, or the squaw I saw, that said——"

"Said what?"

"Said she knew your—father. She said——"

"Did they go straight up from Williams' camp?"

"Straight as they could. I left them climbing that long ridge."

Burney glanced up at the sun. "You better go on home," he said, in his high, querulous voice. "You can work on the corral, so we can throw in some stock I want the boys to bring in to the ranch. I'm going to see Williams. I'll be back in a couple of hours. You can have dinner ready when I git there." He gave Shelton another sharp glance, seemed to hesitate, and rode past without having made up his mind.

So they separated, the one going down the cañon toward the more open country and the other going up into the heart of the roughest part.

Shelton looked back, when he had ridden a few yards; he caught Burney looking back also, and there was something furtive in his posture. Shelton faced confusedly to the front again, and rode on, but his mind was busy with the man behind him. If Burney were going to the Williams camp, what was he doing riding up this cañon? That would make the way longer as well as rougher, without giving any advantage that Shelton could determine. If he were not going to the Williams camp, why should he explain that he was going there? Burney was not in the habit of volunteering information except when it was necessary to do so; it was not necessary to account to Shelton for his riding in the hills.

A qualm of uneasiness struck Shelton. Why had Burney been so particular about wanting to know just where Vida and Spider were going?

What was that to Burney? Shelton rode a few rods farther, thinking hard. He began to wish that he had not told Burney quite so much. What if Burney——

A dryness came into Shelton's throat. He turned impulsively, and rode back up the cañon as quietly as he could, and

before him as he rode was a vision of the scattered carcasses of dead sheep killed mysteriously, and the twisted corpse of a man lying cold under the stars; and of Vida and Spider, riding together over the ridge, talking together, careless of what danger they might meet in the hills. He shivered, though the day was hot.

## CHAPTER XV.

Vida stopped halfway up a forbiddingly barren gulch and looked inquiringly behind her. She had been riding rather slowly since she turned into this small cañon, and it seemed to her that Spider should have overtaken her ten minutes ago. She was certain that he had seen her turn off from the larger cañon they had been following with a good two hundred yards between them. For an hour she had played hide and seek with him, and in the playing had insensibly recovered her usual calm self-reliance. The horror of the past two days was there still, but Vida felt herself perfectly able to cope with it and any emergency that might arise from it.

She wanted to tell Spider that, after all, it might not be Burney who had done the murder. It had occurred to her that a man with stilts strapped on his legs would find it awkward to crawl under a wagon in the dark—and any strong man, heaving up with his bent back, could tilt their camp wagon. She realized now that the imagination is prone to play tricks upon a person whose nerves are strained to the snapping point. Believing the marauder to be Burney, she would of course imagine that it *was* Burney whom she saw; given the height, the rest would be quite natural.

She would tell Spider that, and make up with him and behave herself. But she would not ride back to meet him—that would be too abject a surrender. He might say that she went back after

him because she was scared, or because her conscience hurt her, and neither would be true, because her conscience was perfectly clear of guilt. She had not run away from him really; he had simply lagged behind. She forgot that she had all but accused him of being an accomplice of Burney in the murder of her Uncle Jake. Her conscience was clear, and she certainly was not scared.

Vida looked behind her, and shivered. She had stopped there to wait for Spider, and she had been looking back expectantly, thinking that she would see him ride around the bend. But now she felt as though something horrible was presently going to come around that very point—something menacing. She kicked her pony in the flanks, and rode on hurriedly, looking this way and that for a way out of the gulch. She felt the blood oozing from her veins, hiding in her heart, and pounding there heavily. *Where was Spider?* Why didn't he come?

She kept looking over her shoulder, her eyes wide with terror. Vida had never before felt that undefinable fear, though she had ridden alone in these hills at various times since she was a child. She had been scared when she shot the mountain lion, but it had been a perfectly normal, healthy fear lest her bullets should fail to do their work.

She shook herself mentally, and tried to reason with her unreasonable dread of something she neither heard nor saw, but only felt. But all the while she kept thinking of the *something* that had followed Shelton and Spider and the others—the something they could not name but had felt behind them in the dark. She had not thought much about it before; indeed, save those few minutes of terror in the wagon when she visioned a warlock, she had believed the story to be some obscure joke and so had paid no attention. But—but this was early afternoon!

Had she not been afraid to do so,

she would have turned then and ridden back to find Spider. She would have borne any repulse and reproach, and would have been glad just because he was there with her, close enough to scold her and tell her—politely, of course—what a fool she had been to leave him. But she was afraid. Nothing could induce her to turn and ride back down the gulch. She struck her pony sharply with the quirt and went on, clattering over the rocks in a way to rouse the echoes and let them clamor her whereabouts to any one within a quarter of a mile.

Soon she stopped, because she saw how the gulch was drawing together ahead of her. Unless it widened, just around the next point, she would be caught in a pocket. If she could get up the bluff, she reasoned swiftly, she might follow back along the edge until she saw Spider, and then call down to him and have him join her up there. She gazed longingly up at the frowning rock ledges above her. Up there, she believed, she would be safe. Even the scattered fringes of service berry bushes and buckbrush looked comforting, as if they could protect her from something that was creeping up on her from behind. But there was no place along the cañon wall where her pony could climb, and Vida caught herself sobbing hysterically as she rode along seeking a way out.

Then her terror mastered her completely. She pulled up and slid off the horse in a panic, and ran to the shadowed side of the gulch and began to climb. When she had reached a ledge that stood out flat-surfaced from the steeper front of the ravine wall, she stopped and stood panting while she watched with straining eyes the rough trail she had ridden over but a few moments ago. Something was coming stealthily, swiftly, surely upon her trail. She knew it, though she could see nothing but the black, barren rocks and the

stunted bushes and the wavering heat lines where the sunlight struck full upon the opposite wall.

And then a huge, black head peered cautiously around a sharp projection of rock; paused motionless for a long minute and moved forward, pushed by the broad shoulders of a figure grown horribly familiar. Even at that distance Vida fancied that she could see the little twinkling eyes that searched the cañon. He was coming on, with swift, stealthy strides that carried him forward with amazing speed; a noiseless, swinging trot that was half a lope and that would, in the long run, outstrip a horse. A few steps so, and he stopped and crouched behind a boulder so that she could see only the slope of his shoulders.

With a sob suppressed in her throat Vida ducked into a crevice, and began to climb. It was like her dream, except that in her dream the cañon wall was smooth and perpendicular, and now, in reality, it was broken and not too steep, if she chose her way very carefully. For the rest, it was horribly true—with Burney stealing swiftly along, looking here and there for her. In the crevice she was hidden from him, but she dared not stay there. He would come upon her pony and know that she had taken to the cañonside. He would even know which side, because the opposite wall overhung the gulch in a thin shelf that had no hiding place beneath. He would not puzzle one minute over her whereabouts—he would know. And he would climb up after her. And with his long arms and his long legs and his enormous strength to lift him up the bluff, he would climb ten feet while she was toiling five.

She climbed, and cursed the denim riding skirt that caught on sharp points and impeded her progress. She tried to keep her wits and to climb intelligently, and she kept an angle that

would take her farther down the cañon. If she reached the top she would be nearer Spider and safety—for she felt that with Spider she would be safe. There was no reason in that, of course, for Burney, if he chose, could kill her and Spider together with his hands. That was the horror—the great, strong hands of Burney, and his powerful, long arms. Even while she climbed she kept glancing over her shoulder, terrifiedly expectant of his huge hands reaching out even then to clutch her.

A rock which she had seized that she might pull herself across a treacherous space of loose earth gave way beneath her fingers and went clattering down the bluff, bouncing off ledges and gathering speed and din as it went. Breathless she watched it. She could not see Burney, but she knew that he was down there and that his little twinkling eyes were seeking, seeking. She knew that he would hear the rock, and would know that she had loosened it in her flight from him.

She shut her eyes, sick with fancying what would happen then. Strangely it would seem to her in calmer moments, she never once thought of using her gun, though it swung heavy on her hip and even hindered her movements when she pressed close against a ledge. That is why I say that nerves are tricky things. In her nightmare she had not thought of her gun, and now when reality was more horrible than any dream she did not think of it. It was as though she had never heard of such a weapon. Flight, primitive, wild flight—that seemed to her the only possible means of escaping those monstrous, clutching hands.

Spider—where was Spider? Why didn't he come? Her pony, left alone down there, snorted suddenly. She heard the rattle of rocks as he whirled and fled back down the cañon. She opened her eyes and looked, for the sound was almost directly beneath her.

Down below her the pinto came galloping, amazingly sure-footed among the scattered rocks that strewed the bottom. Behind him, running with great leaps that ate up the space between them, came Burney. Bareheaded, evil-faced, intent on the chase. The pony ran into a jumble of rocks, stumbled, picked himself up, and swerved to find an easier passage. Burney leaped directly in his path. His long arms shot out like the tentacles of some predatory insect. He caught the pony in a close embrace around the neck. He gripped it, leaning, straining his great body against the pinto's shoulder. Vida hid her face against the rock. Her knees sagged under her with the ghastliness of the thing.

Her own danger galvanized her presently to action. She did not look below again—she did not dare. She looked up instead, and took heart when she saw how high she had climbed. Another five minutes and she would be at the top, unless the bluff merely receded and went on up, as sometimes they did. Instinctively she nerved herself for that disappointment—she who had learned well the ways of the hills—and climbed desperately, doggedly, breathlessly. She would get to the top—she *would!* And she would run and run and run till she found Spider; that was the end and the aim of all her efforts, all her hopes: to find Spider and be safe with him.

She had gone thirty feet perhaps when she heard the half shout, half scream that told her she had been seen. She did not look back—she only climbed the faster. There was something maniacal in the sound; she sensed it even in her fright, and she knew that Burney was crazy—that it was an insane giant who was hunting her down. She knew then that had Burney faced her sane she would not have feared him—not so much. She would have felt

that by sheer will power she could dominate over even his bigness. But a crazy man could not be dominated by anything save superior force. She climbed and climbed, and never stopped for breath. And she heard him knocking rocks loose, down there below, as he lunged up the cañon wall after her.

With a dry sob of thankfulness she topped a low, mossy ledge, and stood upon comparatively level ground; rough enough to prevent swift flight, but after that terrible climb looking smooth and safe. She stood still for a moment, straining her eyes to see down the cañon. A narrow tongue of a ridge this was, and she could look down upon either side. The one up which she had ridden lay empty of so much as a rabbit. But when she looked down into the other she gave a cry of relief.

"Oh, Spider! Spider, hurry!" Far down the cañon he was; she could distinguish nothing save the outline of his form and the color of his horse. But she waved her hand and shouted, and started running toward him.

From the bluffside below her came a laugh, and the sound was so close that she glanced that way in fresh terror. She saw the bare head of the giant show briefly over the top of the last ledge, and with a scream she ran on down the ridge, stumbling, tripping over rocks, yet somehow keeping her feet and making little, moaning sounds in her throat.

She did not look again for Spider; she thought that he was too far away—that he could never reach her in time. Perhaps he did not even see her; or, if he did see her, perhaps he did not care—was glad, even, to see her punished for leaving him. The ridge sloped sharply downward toward the point where the cañons had forked. Even as she ran she remembered that she had noticed the bare slope of this dividing ridge, and had even thought

of riding up it to get a clear view of the surrounding country. Why hadn't Spider ridden up here instead of keeping to the cañon?

She did not look again behind her. She knew too well what she would see. She knew that if she saw Burney on the level, coming after her with those terrible, long strides and those horrible, twinkling little eyes fixed greedily upon her—she knew that if she saw him like that the sight would paralyze her and place her in his power. So she ran and she did not look back.

## CHAPTER XVI.

When a man has spent nearly all his life in the midst of great, open spaces, certain of his faculties attain a high state of development—unless he is one of those incompetents who never does grow up to the requirements of his vocation. Spider was not an incompetent; he had learned to see a great deal in a short space of time, and to rise instinctively to an emergency. Though he had lost Vida in the cañon it was because he had not suspected her of deliberately trying to evade him and so had kept to the logical course, which was up the main ravine. He had not been greatly concerned over her immediate welfare—he had too great a confidence in her ability to take care of herself, and he believed himself to be within shouting distance of her; indeed, he had been until she turned up the side gulch and so widened the distance between them.

But even if he did not worry very much about her he kept his eyes open and let no living thing move unseen within his range of vision. He saw Vida the instant she came out upon the crest of the ridge, and he saw that she was running from something. Instinctively he knew what that something was, and he dug the spurs into his horse and charged the bluff as if

he were leading an army against some puny breastwork. The slope was steep there, and the half sterile soil was baked hard between the grass tufts. His horse went lunging up to where he was stopped by the broken rim of lava rock which tops two-thirds of the desert bluffs and makes hill traveling so laborious.

Spider jumped off and scrambled up the rocks much as Vida had done upon the other side of the ridge, but with better progress. Once, when he was feeling for a handhold above him where the ledge was almost straight above his head, he heard a shout on the level above. It sounded like Burney's high-pitched voice raised in a command to some one. It seemed odd that Burney should be up there with Vida. He had believed that Burney was riding off the other way, toward the river.

He clutched a splinter of rock, pulled himself up half his length, and looked over the ledge upon baked soil that still sloped steeply up to the crest. He drew himself up by sheer muscular strength over the smooth, black rim and ran up the bluff on his toes until another ledge blocked the way and he must climb again, foot by foot, clinging with his hands and his feet to the face of the rock. Had there been time he might have found a crevice and gone up more easily, but there was not time; at least, it was not for him to take for granted anything save the girl's dire need of him.

He was still a few feet from the rim of the ledge when he heard her scream somewhere above him. And close upon the sound of that came the hoarse bellowing cry that once before he had heard and had never been able wholly to forget. His breath caught in his throat, but he went on, climbing now like a madman to reach the girl in time.

It seemed to him hours that he spent on that ledge, toiling upward with Vida's scream and that other horrible

cry ringing still in his ears. It seemed to him that he made no headway at all, but climbed and climbed in one spot. Yet he presently found himself somehow on the top, running up the bare crest of the ridge toward a titanic struggle of some sort; what he could not at first determine. He did not see Vida anywhere, and when he realized that she was not a part of the struggle he drew his breath sharply and slowed a little, conscious of his exhaustion.

Then, just when he was steadying a little from that nightmare of fear for the girl, he saw her lying on the stunted grass, all crumpled in a heap where she had fallen. Close beside her they were straining and struggling—two giants of men whose breath came in great gasps while they fought.

Panting, dazed to blank uncomprehension, Spider drew near and watched the amazing spectacle. There was Burney fighting doggedly, silently—fighting for his life. And there was another huge human, and yet not all human, fighting with little, harsh snarls of sheer animal rage and the lust for killing—fighting not for his own life, but for the lives of these others. He was dressed in Burney's old clothes—Spider remembered the gray-striped trousers which Burney had worn a year or so ago; tattered now, torn short off at the hairy knees of the giant. He was like Burney in size and general outline of face and figure, and yet his face was the face of an animal, with its protruding jaw and receding forehead and broad, flat nostrils. His eyes were little and twinkling and set deep under his bushy brows. His arms were hairy, his legs were hairy, his feet, which were bare, were huge, misshapen things with queer-looking toes.

While he stared, Spider began to understand many things that had been muffled in mystery. Here was the answer to the puzzle: the thing that had followed them through the desert in

the dark; the maker of the "bear" tracks which had so excited Shelton; the killer of sheep and dogs—and of Jake Williams; the monstrous shape that had tried to get in the wagon that night, and could not because the door was too small—a wave of physical nausea swept over Spider at the thought of this great savage trying to get at Vida. It passed, and a spasm of terror seized him as he realized suddenly that she was lying there almost within reach of the Thing, in deadly danger still except for Burney's straining strength.

Spider darted forward, lifted Vida in his arms, and ran with her to a huddle of great bowlders with bushes growing between. In the shade of a buckbush he laid her down, and stood at bay between her and the Thing, his gun in his hand ready to shoot at the first menacing movement.

It came sooner than even his strained nerves expected. For, though Burney's strength was prodigious, the strength of this other was something monstrous. Burney was being beaten back step by step, inch by inch; he was being borne down. Great sweat drops stood on his face. His teeth were clenched in a frozen snarl of supreme physical effort. His knees were bending slowly, slowly—his back was yielding. The huge, hairy hands of the Thing were reaching, reaching—the great talonlike fingers were spread and tensed for the death clutch. The snarl broke suddenly into a scream to freeze one's blood; the scream which Spider had heard behind him in the dark—the scream that had terrified Shelton in the cave. And on the echoes of that scream came a groan, wrenched from Burney in agony:

Spider sprang forward, leveling his big forty-five and pulling the trigger as instinctively as he would have shut his eyes in the face of a blow. The Thing recoiled, swayed on his great, hairy limbs, and sank to his knees;

swayed there and toppled over, struggled uncertainly to rise, and then lay still.

Burney removed the gripping hands—relaxed now and harmless—and staggered to his feet, wiping the sweat from his forehead with a trembling palm as he stared stupidly down. He looked up, when the Thing had ceased to move, and took a tottering step toward Spider.

"'S the girl all right?" he mumbled dazedly, his high-pitched voice trembling a little. "I seen 'em—and I run my horse—and got here just——" He looked down at the dead giant, and his face clouded.

"Come over here and sit down," Spider suggested shakily. "You're about all in." He turned back and knelt beside Vida, and felt her small, brown hands and laid his fingers gently against her tanned cheek. She lay as she had lain the day before, lightly breathing, deeply unconscious. He began to chafe her hand, changed his purpose, and put it softly down at her side. She had recovered from the other fainting fit with no permanent ill effect. Better let her remain unconscious for a while—until they could get her away from here, he thought. His eyes, tender and full of pity, dwelt for a minute longer on her face. Then he rose and found himself a level place on the rock and sat down, looking curiously from Burney to that other giant.

"You must 'a' knowed all the time about him," he said abruptly, jerking his head toward the trampled battle scene. "He's got on your pants."

Burney lifted his chin from his heaving chest, and stared somberly at the dead. "Sure, I knowed about him," he admitted dismally. "I never knowed he was dangerous, though—till he commenced killin' sheep. Even then I didn't think he'd—tackle a human being. He's—always been harmless. Just—simple-minded and wantin' to live around in caves like an animal. He never hurt

nobody—before. It must 'a' just growed on him, kinda, from killin' them—sheep." He heaved a great sigh, took his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his face, and then shook it out and went over and spread it over the dead face that was still snarling, and came back and sat down heavily.

"I wisht we could keep this thing quiet," he said gloomily, after a silence. "A-course he wasn't responsible fer what he done, and he wasn't hardly human, but he——" His face flushed darkly. "I s'pose you'd call him a half brother of mine," he said with a certain sullen defiance of the fact. "My dad was a squaw man up in Montana. That was when I was just a kid. Him and his squaw got mixed up with a grizzly—and my old man was hurt so he died. The kid that was born afterward was—him." He nodded toward the inert heap. "He wasn't right from the very first. Soon as he could walk he had the ways of an animal more'n a human. Yuh see his feet—a good deal like a bear's. Old Mary—that's the squaw—she just about worshiped him. And when he growed up and took to the hills, she went with him and lived the way he lived and took care of him."

Spider glanced toward the dead, shuddered, and looked away. It is no light thing to take the life of a human—even a half human such as that Thing was. He looked at Burney strangely, and wondered what were his thoughts, whether he felt any stirring impulse of regret or sorrow or resentment toward the killer of his kin. Burney glanced up and met Spider's eyes, and answered the unspoken questions.

"Maybe I hadn't ought to be, but I'm glad he's gone," he said soberly. "He's always hung over my head like a—a disgrace. A Thing like that oughtn't to be left alive. I always felt that way about it ever since he was born. He couldn't talk—not words you could understand. The squaw, she

could understand what he wanted. There was something about him always give me the shivers. But I took as good care of 'em both as I could. I used to send money up to a feller in the Bitter Root that knew where they hung out and used to pack grub and clothes out to 'em. He"—Burney nodded toward the corpse—"never showed up in daytime, so nobody knowed about him except this man that used to be my old man's pardner.

"He died a couple-a years ago, and Mary she struck out with—*him*—and come on down here. Traveled nights, she said, and there didn't nobody see *him*. Mary never wanted him seen. It made her sore to have folks know he was—*different*. She used to hide him like a deer hides her fawn when anybody come around. So they located here in these hills, and I packed grub to 'em myself nights." Burney sighed heavily, as though the burden had taxed all his strength and patience.

"Us fellows would 'a' stood right by yuh if you'd told us about it," Spider said with grave sympathy. "We could 'a' helped, instead of yawping around about a spook. We'd 'a' kept our faces shut if we'd had any idee——"

"I know yuh would. But it wasn't a thing a feller would want to tell unless he was obliged to. I never thought he'd harm any one. I dunno what made him start in killin' sheep fer Williams—he must 'a' got a notion they was enemies. I tried to git Williams to move back, away from here. I s'pose I'd oughta told him why—but I didn't, and so I'm responsible fer a man's death." He humped forward, brooding over the tragedy.

"I tried to git Mary to pull out," he went on as though he was pleading the case with his conscience sitting in judgment. "I *told* her he was gittin' to act queer—when he commenced fol-lerin' you boys—and wasn't safe. I told her the sheriff'd take 'im and shut him



up if he took to botherin' anybody. But she wouldn't budge, and she wouldn't do a thing. Well," he added justly, "there wasn't much she could do. She couldn't keep him from running around nights, and she couldn't foller him and keep him outa mischief. I guess she done all she could do.

"I was in Pocatello to see a doctor and try and find out what could be done fer him—I'd heard about operations on the brain that'd change a person, and I didn't know but what something could be done with 'him to make him quieter and keep him from wantin' to kill. I got uneasy when he commenced killin' sheep. Well, I didn't go soon enough. I'd oughta had him tended to when I first growed up and seen what he was like. But he seemed so harmless—and it would 'a' been hell to cage him up—and I hated to have folks know about him. It's bad enough," he said doggedly, "to be so big you're pointed at on the streets like you was a side show broke loose; and to feel you're different, and to have folks think you're a whole lot more different than what you are. They don't consider that I'm just a *man*—just like everybody else—and just being bigger don't make any difference in my feelings. If folks knowed I was related to a Thing like *that*—they'd think I was some kinda beast myself. I tried to do what was right by him, but I wanted some kinda fair show myself."

"Well, you've sure got it coming, if anybody has," said Spider, after a thoughtful silence. "You'll git it from me. If we could do something with the body," he ventured tentatively without looking at Burney at all, "I don't see why anybody'd need to know there'd ever been such a—person."

Burney lifted his bent head, and looked at Spider almost eagerly. Then his face dulled again. "There's the girl," he said.

"Well—her, maybe. But you can

bank on that little girl, Burney. She's the real goods. You needn't be afraid of *her*. If we can just manage to—to bury him on the quiet."

"His cave's just down below," Burney said. "One of 'em, anyway. We could put him in there. That kid started out to foller me back; I met him down in the foothills. I guess I throwed him off the trail, but I ain't sure. We better hurry if we're going to do anything; if you think we can, and it would be right. There's that murder——"

"Well, there won't be no more. And it won't be the only killin' that never was accounted for. We'll tell the girl about it, so she won't worry no more or be scared. And what the rest of the country don't know about it won't hurt 'em any." He stood up, patently eager to do his part. "How'll we git him down?" he asked, not because he did not know, but with an impulse toward speech that would make the thing less horrible.

"I can carry him. You look after the girl. You better stay here and kinda keep a lookout for the kid. And if Mary—the squaw—shows up, don't try to tell her anything about it. I'll 'tend to her. She ain't right in her mind, and she packs a knife. She might——" He did not feel that it was necessary to finish that sentence.

Spider stood sober-eyed, and watched Burney gather into his huge arms that monstrous shape of a man, and go staggering to the edge of the rock huddle. He watched him part the bushes in a certain place with one hand, pause a minute there to make sure of his footing, and go down slowly, surely, like a man feeling his way down a crude stairway, bearing the limp Thing with the frozen snarl on its beastlike face.

Then Spider turned and knelt beside Vida, and began to chafe her little, sun-browned hands pityingly, tenderly, and to watch her face for the first quiver

of an eyelash that would tell how close she was to returning consciousness.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"And so yuh see," Spider's voice droned in soft monologue, "it wasn't anything anybody could help. Burney, he done all anybody could do; he'd 'a' prevented it if he could. Burney's a fine man, Vida. He's big—big-hearted as well as big-bodied. I wisht you'd try and like him. He ain't to blame for what that idiot thing done. He feels pretty bad about it. He feels shut off from folks, kinda—as if he didn't have no friends or anything. I wish——"

"My foot hurts something awful," Vida interrupted, groaning a little. She moved her head restlessly in the crook of Spider's arm. "I stepped in a hole when I was running and gave it an awful twist. He—it was coming right after me when I fell. I—I remember I heard a horse, too—and Burney hollering. But I was too scared to look back or think that maybe there was two of 'em. I'm—glad It's dead! I'm glad and thankful. Ain't you?"

"I'm—thankful," said Spider, and pressed his lips tight together. The cold-steel look was in his eyes, and something else. He pressed the girl closer, and bent his head and kissed her with a grave tenderness.

"You mustn't feel bad about it," she told him, comprehending a little of what was in his mind. "You saved my life."

"No, I never," Spider disclaimed quickly. "Burney done that. You've got him to thank for that."

"But you said he would 'a' killed Burney. You said you shot because he was going to kill——"

"I know—let's not talk about it. You owe Burney a whole lot. I want you to remember that, and I want you to be good to him and not treat him any

different just because he's big. Where's your horse?"

"Oh!" Vida shivered in his arms. "It—killed my pony. Just the way it—did——"

"Never mind." Spider was pitifully anxious to dodge discussion of the subject. "We'll say it fell, or something, and broke its neck. And that's how you got hurt—sabe? Your horse fell with you. Whereabouts was it? We better go back down that way, I guess, in case Shep comes prowlin' around. You want to be careful what you tell Shep. He's a good kid, but mouthy. He'd let the whole thing out to the first feller he talked with."

"Anyway, he'd write it home to his folks," supplemented Vida, with a pain-twisted smile. "He won't get anything from me."

Spider eased her shoulders gently back against a rock, and stood up, scanning the high-piled ridges and the deep-gashed cañons anxiously. It would be just as well if they got off that ridge before Shep or some other prowler came within sight of them, he was thinking. With that end in view he went around the cluster of bowlders to where the big brown horse of Burney's browsed apathetically upon the tender twigs of a stunted currant bush. He came back to Vida, leading the horse by the bridle.

"I oughta take Burney's horse down off the ridge to where mine is," he explained in a worried tone. "Shep's such an inquisitive kinda cuss he'd want to know what we was doing up here—and you crippled so you can't stand. You see, don't you? It won't do at all for Shep to spot us up here. I won't be gone but a few minutes—you ain't afraid, are yuh?"

Vida was, but she lacked the courage to admit it; instead she dissembled in the most feminine manner and deceived Spider to the extent that his eyes brightened with pride in her.

"You've got them all skinned for nerve," he told her in a whisper, and kissed again the lips that tempted him. "If Burney comes back before I do, you tell him I'll bring both our horses around the point and up the gulch where you—got hurt." He grinned mirthlessly over the stratagem. "He can help you down the bluff—say, you ain't afraid of him, are you, little girl?"

"No," lied Vida faintly, "I ain't afraid."

"You hadn't oughta be. Burney's a prince. I'd like to carry yuh down myself, but you better not wait. We got to think of Burney, and if we're going to keep this thing quiet we can't take any chances—see? So I'll meet you around there just as quick as I can, and if you ain't there," he hurried on, because of her anxious eyes, "I'll come back up here after you *pronto*." He held her close, hating to let her go even for a few minutes after the terrors of the past hour. "You like me, don't you?" he whispered close to her cheek.

Vida held him tight, and it was not altogether love that strengthened her clasp. She was afraid; horribly afraid. But she was more afraid that Spider would suspect her fear and love her less because of it. She forced herself to laugh a little, and she reached up a brown hand and straightened his hat and pinched his ear, and then pushed him from her.

"I wish my foot didn't hurt so—I'd go with you," she said. "Hurry up, won't you? I ain't afraid of Burney, but—I ain't in love with—*him*." An artful emphasis she put upon the last word—an emphasis that would make Spider grudge every minute that separated them. So did Vida prove herself wholly feminine in spite of her environment and the things she must do because of it. "Go on," she commanded tenderly, "and don't be a big silly. But—hurry back, kid, if you don't want

me to change my mind about—liking you."

He went then because he wanted to help Burney with his trouble. A good deal dazed yet was Spider, what with this miracle of a girl's love that had come to him quite suddenly and the amazing solution of the mystery that had grown so sinister. He looked back frequently while he was yet on the ridge, just to assure himself that Vida was real, and to see her brown hand waving him a message, but he could not make that other gruesome happening seem real—not yet.

As for Vida, she watched Spider with sinking courage. She was afraid, up there on the hilltop alone; horribly afraid. Her foot pained her dreadfully, and she was thirsty. Her head throbbed heavily, and she was lucky to get off so lightly. Surely there are not many women who could have borne what she had suffered and borne it so calmly.

Most of all she dreaded Burney's return. It was foolish, but one's nervous system does not adjust itself automatically to changed conditions, and she had been so certain that it was Burney who pursued her up the bluff—

She heard a rock kicked loose somewhere behind her, and she turned sick with fresh terror. She heard him coming heavily toward where she lay, his great feet crunching the gravelly soil like the tread of a horse. She shut her eyes—and then, when she felt that he was standing close beside her, she opened them wide and stared up at him. There he was, towering miles above her—so her overwrought nerves told her—and his little, twinkling eyes were fixed anxiously upon her face. He had something in his hands, and while she stared at him she saw his face redden with embarrassment. It had been pale.

"I brought up some water from a

spring down there," he said in his high, querulous voice. "I thought maybe you'd like a drink."

"Oh, thanks!" Vida sat up and reached for the leaky old tomato can he carried. She had never dreamed of thanking Burney for anything, but the words came rather easily, after all.

"Where's Spider?" he asked, standing aloof while she drank thirstily.

Vida took a last deep swallow, and set down the can. Burney could not have reassured her so much in an hour of friendly protestations as he had done with that one little thoughtful act. Her eyes lost their fear and antagonism, and became almost friendly.

"He took your horse down the hill. He's going to get his and bring them around up the gulch where—mine is," she explained. "He said—he said we were to meet him down there. He's afraid Shep might come, and he'd wonder about our being away up here."

"Well, it's a good idee. We'll go on down, then." Burney still stood fifteen feet away from her, and he spoke with a timid hesitation oddly at variance with his hugeness. Still, they say an elephant is afraid of a mouse.

Vida eyed him queerly. "I—stepped in a hole and gave my foot a twist," she informed him with an amused quirk of the lips. "I—can't walk." Then she watched him. No, she was no longer afraid of him; she was a woman, you see, and he had betrayed the fact that he was afraid of her. It makes a difference.

"Oh, that's too bad——" Burney shifted his weight to the other foot, for all the world like a bashful boy before company.

Vida watched him covertly. "Spider offered to carry me down, but he had to take the horses——" she observed demurely.

"Oh, did he?" Burney looked ready to perspire. His little twinkling eyes

wandered to the peaks high over her head.

"He said—maybe you wouldn't mind—helping me—a little." Vida reached down and felt her injured foot, and screwed her face into a grimace at the pain of her lightest touch.

"Oh, I—I'll be glad to—help——" From collar to hatband Burney was purple with confusion.

"I'm afraid you'll have to—carry me." Vida blushed a little herself, but her lips still had the amused quirk. "If it won't be—too much trouble," she added.

"Oh, no trouble—don't mention it!" Burney grew pale. "I—I hope we can—be friends," he stammered, advancing slowly. "I——"

"Never mind hashing things all over," she interrupted him hastily. "I want to forget things. Be—careful not to joggle my foot——"

Not much of a reconciliation so far as words went, but Burney's breath became uneven with emotion. Did you ever see a man take a butterfly from his net carefully, so as not to brush the bloom from its wings? Just so gently did Burney lift her into his arms and carry her down the bluff. And all the while he did not speak. He could think of nothing to say that would not sound irreverent.

Vida spoke but once when he had carried her with safe gentleness down the steepest ledge. "It must be an awful comfort to be so strong," she said. "I wish I was as big as you are."

Burney did not answer her, but his eyes lightened gratefully.

Since this story began with Shelton C. Sherman, I suppose it ought to end with him. And since our editor man thinks that you have heard almost enough about these people of the desert, I may not tell you just what happened after that trip down the bluff, or what Shelton did and thought and

wanted to do and couldn't. But I'm going to let you do something rude, just for revenge upon the editor man who refuses to let a story go on and on and never stop: I am going to let you read over the shoulder of Shelton C. Sherman while he writes to "the folks."

He is in the bunk house, writing at one end of the table while Spooky plays solitaire upon the other end. The lamp stands between them, and the chimney is foggy for want of washing, so that the light is none too good and Shelton is hunched over with his nose so close to the end of his fountain pen that you will have to lean close also. Pike—we didn't get very much acquainted with old Pike, did we?—Pike is gumming a wad of tobacco while he reads a half-column article in the Boise paper, telling what has *not* been done toward apprehending the murderer of the sheepman in the Piute Hills country. Never mind that—we'll just read what Shelton C. Sherman has to say.

Shsh-sh-h—wait now till he takes his fist off the upper half of the page. Well, since he shows no disposition to move his hand—perhaps fearing that Spooky may be rude enough to cast a curious eye over what has been written, and is able to read upside-down writing—we'll begin with that line just below his thumb:

—marry Spider, so I'm all out of girls at present. She wasn't my kind, anyway, so I don't care much. There hasn't been anything more happened, since I wrote last. We had a big bunch of excitement, and then it all fizzled out, like the time the town fireworks all went off in a bunch—remember? Excitement a-plenty while it lasted, only it didn't last. Well, that's the way out here. Everything's at a dead level. I don't even hunt rattlesnakes with the girl any more—seeing she got crippled and couldn't, and then got stuck on Spider and wouldn't. We haven't caught the fellow that killed her uncle, either. Nobody seems trying to catch him. I've rid-

den Spook Hills till I'm sick of the sight of them, and I can't find so much as a bear track any more. I found a cave or two, but there was nothing in them but rat nests.

Burney found that old squaw, that I told you folks about seeing, wandering around in the hills, and he brought her in to the ranch. I wish you girls could see her. I've taken her picture, and will send you one as soon as I get the roll developed, but I'd give anything if you could hear her mumbling around the ranch. She walks with a crooked stick, and she goes hobbling around, looking for something—nobody knows what. Sometimes she gets wandering off in the desert, and then Burney hunts her up and brings her back. He's good to her—makes me think there's something in that story Jim tells, about Burney's father being a squaw man. There can't be any other reason for Burney taking charge of the old hag. She's almost blind, and plumb nutty. Burney never says anything about it, and, of course, nobody would have the nerve to ask him—not little me, anyhow.

Tell sis I haven't given up hope of getting that bearskin rug yet. It'll be a whopper, if I can find the one that made the tracks I saw. Spider did think it wasn't a bear but a man disguising his tracks. But he admits now that it was a bear, most likely. He says, though, that bears have a habit of changing their range every once in a while, and that this one may be a hundred miles from here by this time. I hope not. I've got my heart set on his hide for a rug—

"For the Lordy sake, Shep, what you writin'? A *novel*?" asked Spooky just then, sweeping the cards together with his palm and speaking in a tone of deep disgust. It always makes Spooky cross to have the game run consistently against him when he is playing "Mex." The clerical industry of Shelton C. Sherman has always roused within him a futile irritation. "Honest to gollies, I should think the hind side of a picture postcard would hold all that happens in this derved desert, but some folks can write all day and never say nothing. What yuh tellin' 'em? Did yuh put in how Spider went and cut yuh out with the girl?"

# The Great Cardinal Seal

By Robert Welles Ritchie

*Author of "The Sandlotter," Etc.*

A brand from the fire which the inscrutable Japanese brother kindled in Korea at the close of the war with Russia. The hitherto unwritten story of the search for the great cardinal seal of Korea, relic of three hundred kings, which played a mighty, and might have played a mightier part in the history of the ancient kingdom.

## CHAPTER I.

### CONCERNING A GRAY, STRAY CURL.

SOME old duffer of long ago, who prided himself on his neat and trenchant wisdom, witnessed a little domestic near-tragedy on his hearthstone one day, and straightway coined a very hefty saw, which has passed down through the ages as a brilliant truth. "A burned dog is afraid of the fire," this ancient party said, and since then folks have blindly accepted this aphorism as one of life's simple verities; it has place along with "Spare the rod" and "As the twig is bent" in the World's Institute of Pious Frauds.

At this late date I rise to object.

It depends upon the dog.

And in some measure upon the fire.

There is a dog of my acquaintance named Happy, who sacrificed one eye and a leg to an automobile; let a gasoline wagon approach him on the side of his good eye, and he will give that machine the finest exhibition of three-legged and one-eyed defiance any dog could put up. It was the same way with Bethell and myself. We got badly burned by the fire the Japanese brother kindled in Korea at the close of the

war with Russia; yet we went right back to it and risked a second singe.

We were such gay dogs, you see. And it was such a fascinating fire. In short, we proved the maker of that Ben Franklin model proverb a parietic.

Of course, tipping over the wisdom of the ages is a foolish business. Nobody but fools, and youthful fools at that, ever tries it. As I sit in my ten-by-twelve apartment-house library and wonder whether the lady in the apartment below is going to put "Too Much Mustard" or "The Rosary" on her canned-music machine next, I am convinced of the fact that when good old Bethell and I went to the shadows of that mournful Land of the Morning Calm to have our second little fling at the fire we were neither of us a good insurance risk. A pawnbroker prints on the back of his ticket disclaimer of responsibility for "acts of God, fire, flood, and the public enemy." No ticket would be big enough to contain the jokers an insurance broker would insist upon in case the party of the first part planned to go to Korea and attempt to put a spoke in the wheel of Japanese diplomacy there.

How we tried to kidnap the Emperor

Bugs and how "the Girl," Bethell, and I miserably failed when we had the old simpleton well outside the walls of Seoul on the road to freedom: that was our first flirting with fire, and I published the chronicle of it about a year ago, as some may remember. Bethell, the slashing, bull-headed editor of the *Korea Daily News* the Japanese caught red-handed, and they contrived to have him sentenced by his own British consul to a year's imprisonment in Shanghai. He served his term, came pluckily back to Seoul, revived his paper, and was ready for another go at the masters of the tottering empire. I piloted the girl to Shanghai on the yacht we had waiting down the Han River to convey his majesty to a Russian asylum, and there I left her, never expecting to see her again. Her mission, inspired by a very clever Russian politician, had come to naught; she was broken-hearted.

As for myself, I followed a foolhardy impulse to return to Seoul and face the music; I went and found no music—not even a lisping fife note. Either the Japanese governors had not full proof of my complicity in the daring coup or, what was far more likely, they knew everything and were willing to bide their time until they could accomplish my removal from this ball of dust quietly and practically with no pain—just a dagger stroke in the dark. I lived, therefore, in all the pleasurable excitement of a wild thing surrounded by pitfalls and spring guns, and on nights when I went out alone I wore a very light and strong shirt of steel mesh under my evening dress. You might call it a Chinese Ypsilanti, very cooling to the nerves.

In the summer of 1907, two years after our abortive attempt to smuggle old Bugs out of the country, Marquis Ito sat supreme over the dust heap of Seoul as resident general. Ten thousand bayonets spiked down the coun-

try for Japan. All sovereignty save the shadow of the old emperor on the throne was swept away, and he, poor duffer, was a prisoner in his own palace. He didn't dare sneeze without license from Hagiwara, his keeper.

His imbecile son, the crown prince, squatted among his favorites in the women's quarter of the palace and played *go* days on end; he didn't have the intellectual equipment of a turnip. The Korean ministry, a craven lot who licked the hand that fed them, gave the semblance of authority to whatever measures the resident proposed. The imperial Korean army, barracked in Seoul, performed dreary evolutions with rifles whose ammunition did not fit and artillery with the breech blocks missing. A farce, the whole sordid business, at which the Japanese usurpers smiled indulgently. When they were ready they would ring down the curtain and stage a new play—made in Japan.

Aye, it was a shadow land, wherein the shadows clotted, drew closer in strangling grip, netted themselves like serpents of poisonous mist over crumbling pagoda tower and tottering throne of three hundred kings.

A day in June I rode from Chemulpo, the port, to the capital. When the train drew into the station at South Gate only one white person beside myself, a woman, stepped from the carriage. Because she was a white woman and appeared to be traveling alone—an unusual circumstance, particularly in the disturbed condition of the country—my attention was attracted to her, and I suppose it was some vague sense of service that kept me lagging on the platform to see how she was going to fare with the hurly-burly of porters and rickisha men. I soon saw she was not faring well. What with the shawl rolls, the umbrella straps, accordion baskets, and what-not of impedimenta that mark the English traveler and the clamorous bids of Jap and native porters who sur-

rounded her, snatching at each bit of luggage she could not actually tuck under her arms, the stranger appeared quite at her wit's end. I hurried across the platform, gave two of the nearest coolies a whack with my stick, and offered my services as interpreter and cicerone.

She turned her head and her eyes, as they met mine, suddenly opened wide in surprise. The lady actually jumped, so startled was she. At the time I set her start down to the twittering of harassed nerves; perhaps she did not expect to encounter one of her color there in that welter of Orientalism. She was such a queer old bird, anyway. Gray-headed; no, her hair was a streaky gray—rusty like the collar mark on a white horse; pinched face regularly plastered with kalsomine bleach so that when she attempted a smile it cracked; wide mouth with lips frankly rouged; and eyes—— Well, the eyes didn't fit the rest of that picturesque ruin. They were violet and sparkling and strangely youthful against the painted mask of cheek and hair. One would have said the old girl had dropped her youth overnight through some tragic decay of her charms, but the ghost of what had been still sat in her eyes. The last withered stalk of wild aster in November with two purple stars of blossoms looking bravely into the face of winter; that was she. And she was dressed to the part, with flouncy skirt, a rather mannish traveling coat built like the fatigue jacket of a grenadier, and Scotch bonnet of some roughish material which sported a great auk's wing feather. I have seen pictures of English "militants" who greatly resembled her. A genteel English maiden on the reticent side of forty, I set her down; one of those self-reliant members of the Restless Sisterhood who, failing to bag a man in youth, devote their spinsterhood to shooting big game in Uganda, or measuring the heads of

Solomon Islanders, or carrying the light of feminism to the oppressed females of Nepal. The type is commoner in the Far East than in our own country.

"Ah, thank you; thank you, kind friend!" she piped, in that peculiarly shrill voice the fogs of England breed. "This is quite too strange—and—ah—confusing a welcome to Seoul. The coolies, you know, they tear a body to little bits unless some one intervenes."

She laid the tips of her fingers on the back of the hand I had extended to relieve her of her bundles. I would have said the lingering touch was a bit bold had she not been so adequately protected against misunderstanding by her crackleware style of beauty. As it was, I was constrained to a quick look into her eyes, and I thought I caught just the fleeting of an impish spirit of mirth there.

"You live in this city, I take it," the rare old dodo hastily put in. "You can therefore direct me to the best hotel. I neglected to inquire about the hostleries before I left Shanghai."

"There's no choice, madam," I answered promptly. "One goes to Looie's Astor House, or sleeps on a futong at a Jap hotel, which isn't comfortable. I am on my way to Looie's, and if I can be of any service——"

"Very good; very good!" She accepted my offer as a matter of course, and I summoned three rickishas.

The stranger's multiform luggage was piled to the canopy top of one, I handed her into another, gave direction to the leading coolie, and off we started, skirting the great wall of the city. I was mildly amused at the adventure; speculated on what the men at the club would say when the news that I had piloted such a rare bird of passage to Looie's nest should come to them. Of course, it would not be three hours before word of the strange lady's arrival would be all over town, so searching and so busy is the wireless of gossip in Seoul.



What could this elderly female person be doing alone in such a backwater of the tides as the Korean capital? Surely she was not a new missionary, else she would have gone directly to the Mission Compound on the hill. Nor a tourist; tourists come to Seoul only rarely, and then in batches of ten or a dozen piloted by a Japanese Cook's man. A plain, unattached freak, then. Undoubtedly. But—and I admit most of the ride to the Astor House was devoted to a consideration of the subject—those eyes; those youthful, strangely misplaced eyes in the kalsomined face of faded freshness! They did not go with the part. And somewhere—yes, somewhere, some time—I had encountered eyes like those—deep and untroubled amethyst intaglios possessed of a power to glow with a light all their own like a jewel cut with a "buff top."

But that crazy Scotch bonnet with its spike feather, the rakish fatigue jacket, and the flouncy skirt! Ah, perish the hazy vision of amethystine eyes in some forgotten face.

Looie, the excitable Gaul, who presided over the blighted destiny of the Astor House, gave me a reproachful look, heavy with meaning, when I escorted my discovery into the office and up to the register. She told him in blunt English that she wanted his best rate by the week; she didn't know how long she would remain in Seoul, but the length of her sojourn would greatly depend upon the comforts he gave her and the price he charged.

"And, mind you, my good man, I have traveled a great deal, and I jolly well know when I am not receiving proper worth for my money," she shrilled, as she put her fist to the register.

Looie made his most voluble guarantees, and the lady was led to her room by one of the pussy-footed native chambermen. Looie was no less alert

than I in pouncing upon the register to see what she had written there.

"Theodosia Tooling, Dorsetmount, England."

The scrawl, bold and masculine, of a part with that furry Scotch bonnet and fatigue jacket, told us nothing. Not even a "miss" preceded the signature to give it the softness of sex. Looie groaned when he read it.

"Ah zees man-oomans! Better I should an elephant receive in my hotel. Magnificent troobles now attend!"

For perhaps a half hour we sat in the deserted office listening to the banging and bumping of Theodosia unlimbering her luggage. She called for hot water. She called again to protest against the cake of geological soap on her washstand. She summoned Looie to her room to inquire if the site of his hotel was altogether sanitary—which it wasn't; nothing being sanitary in Seoul. I found unholy delight in goading the Frenchman's volcanic anger to the exploding point. After the third response to Theodosia's summons Looie called upon the twelve little Buddhas of Mokpu to witness that he, Louis l'Homme-miedieu Levanner, would on the morrow expel this sottish Englander into the ditch. But the crowning comedy bit came when Miss Tooling was descending the stairs to enter the dining room. The Japanese intelligence officer, who in those days was one of the busiest adjuncts to the resident general's secret police, intercepted the lady at the foot of the stairs, notebook in hand and pencil poised. Through the open door of the office we could catch the whole conversation that ensued.

"Ex-coos, kind madam—your name, plees?"

A very audible snort—a snort of high dudgeon.

"Ex-coos, kind madam; it is—necessity."

"And why, my good man, should I tell you my name?" icily replied Theo-

dosia. "Furthermore, do not address me as 'madam.' It is impertinent."

There was a sound of a sucking in of breath—the idiotic Japanese mark of politeness. The intelligence officer began all over again with his "Ex-coos, dear madam."

"Well, my name is Theodosia Tooling. I am a native of Dorsetmount, Somersetshire, and my maternal grandmother's name was——"

"If so kind, plees to spell—slowly." The purring Japanese was unperturbed.

"A very uncommon name, I grant you!" Falling barometer and signs of storm. "T-o-o-l-i-n-g, and the family coat of arms is a griffin rampant with a——"

"And, kind madam, you have—come from where?" Looie and I had our arms about each other by this time; his tears splashed on my bald spot.

"Do you wish my whole itinerary?" Theodosia snapped, "or shall I confine myself to the Eastern Hemisphere?"

"From—where, kind madam?" Oh, the sublime patience of the East!

"You may put down Luang-Pharabang, Kyoukmyong, Bahawulpore. And in Tonkin—but I'll wait for you to get this all very carefully down." There was a pause; then the unruffled little intelligence officer began again:

"Your bus-i-ness, plees?"

"Landlord! Oh, landlord!" Imperativeness lay in that rasping shout. The Lady Theodosia had evidently reached the end of her patience. Looie wiped the tears from his eyes and bounded into the hall.

"Landlord, rid me of this impertinent man!" Ah, the fine British scorn on the rasp edge of her voice! I could see Looie's hands go up in expostulation; his shoulders lift to his ears.

"*Mais non*, madame! Eet ees ze law of zees con-try to make zose inquiries. I am responsible for you to make answer."

"Mumpf! Then tell this wretched person my business is to lecture on theosophy—to spread the light of pure reason in a dark world." She said this with a startling emphasis of finality.

I confess her statement caught me between wind and water. I had expected militant suffragism, Swedish massage, or even an encyclopedia canvass; but theosophy—in dead-and-buried Korea! Looie evidently was even more flabbergasted than I. I doubt if he had ever heard the word before; certainly he didn't know its meaning. He thrust his head into the door, and made a frantic appeal for aid with eyes and twisted mouth. In my security of the office I smiled blandly back at him, and waved my confidence in his ability to rise to the situation.

Just then I heard the front door bang, and Bethell's roaring voice:

"What's this; what's this? Uh? Oh, at your service, madam. Name's Bethell—Bethell, of the *Daily News*. Just out of jail and proud of it; but want to warn you of my character. What's the row? Oh, I see. Little Question Mark here. Jolly little beggar when you get acquainted with him—so intelligent and persevering. Knows what I had for tiffin to-day; ask him and see."

Miss Theodosia and Looie clamored together, explaining to Bethell the international difficulty that had arisen. When finally he had grasped their meaning he turned to the Jap and began a wonderful translation. I, understanding the vernacular, was convulsed with mirth. Here is what he told little Question Mark:

"Mirror-of-life understanding before and after august-putting-away to do. Heaven-and-hell's honorable side unpleasantness to put-in-the-head. England's honorable side knowledge everywhere teaching wishto-put-in-the-head honorable devil and honorable god go-making to do."

If that is not a succinct Japanese defi-

nition of theosophy teaching the language is at fault; not Bethell.

The intelligence officer, half the pages of his notebook covered with ideographs, made his exit, the Lady Theodosia trundled truculently into the dining room, and sniffed loudly from time to time during the course of her meal. As for Bethell, he joined me at the bar with a quizzical pucker about his eyes.

"I say, Billy, noble old ruin, isn't she? Honor to Albion, she is; quite so. But did you see her eyes?" The little editor's flushed face was all alight with boyish interest. "Ripping; that's what! Girl's eyes in an old woman's face. 'A stone bearing blossoms,' as the Japs say."

I did not confide in Bethell my foolish superstition concerning the power of Theodosia's eyes to awaken half-formed memories; he would have laughed. But when we took our seats in the dining room some distance away from the table the English vixen occupied I noticed Bethell chose the seat which gave him a view of her face, and during the course of our discussion of her and her outlandish mission to Seoul he kept muttering, "Those eyes—deuced strange." Once he used the word "haunting." I chaffed him unmercifully, begging him to give me an opinion on the Scotch bonnet and the lady's peachblow complexion; but Bethell's unconscious affirmation of the strangely reminiscent effect of Theodosia Tooling's eyes upon my own mind cloaked the gawkish figure at the near-by table with undoubted fascination.

The much-traveled theosophist did not invite closer acquaintance. Though we three were the only ones in the dining room, and she was the single woman guest in the establishment, she preserved a frigid aloofness when a bending to companionship, even without the rigid formalities of introduction, certainly would not have been forward of

her under the circumstances. As soon as she had finished her meal she called for a lamp and retired to the mystery of echoing hallways upstairs. Bethell and I, hard ridden by the lonesomeness of Seoul at night—a jungle of shadows unrelieved by a single light—went listlessly about our billiards on Looie's rickety table in the bar. We were alone in the room, and, after nine o'clock, the only persons stirring about the hotel. In the dark outside prowled the night watchman; the clinking of the little metal rings on his staff was like the shivering of crisp icicles. The night was hot, and the three windows in the bar were opened to the assorted odors of the city.

Perhaps it was eleven o'clock and we were still knocking the balls about the baize. Suddenly—"Bethell!" came a sharp whisper at my very elbow. I whirled in time to see a scrambling shape of white launch itself through the window; then there was darkness. Bethell had blown out the lamps. An instant of pregnant silence there in the dark. Bethell's hoarse whisper broke it:

"You—Yong?"

"Yes, Bethell; I've come."

"Hands here—join hands—Yong, Billy!" I felt Bethell's hand fumbling for mine along the edge of the table.

"Now—quiet!" he whispered, and he led me and that other—that ghost shape out of the night—around the billiard table, through the door, and into the hall. I heard the first tread of the stairs creak under Bethell's foot; then I was mounting; a padding foot kept pace and pace with mine. We crept down the long corridor on the bedroom floor and turned into a room I knew, by the distinguishing odor of rank tobacco, to be Bethell's. A match scratched and flickered and a very tiny wick in a night lamp by the bed caught the flame. Bethell closed and locked the door, then took his metal match safe from

his pocket, and delicately adjusted it to even balance on the upper face of the doorknob—an old trick of his; “putting the combination lock on eavesdroppers,” he called it. The lightest touch on the outside knob would cause the match safe to drop.

Do I catch a smile here? Do I hear some reader say, “Comic-opera stuff! Enter the villain, to shivery music?” Very well; I smile with you—and at you now. In my snug five rooms and bath, with dumb-waiter, janitor, and canned-music perquisites, perhaps I get your viewpoint. But back in those days when Bethell and I fooled with matches over the powder pit of Korea, recklessly throwing ourselves into the Koreans’ cause because of Anglo-Saxon sympathy for the under dog, we had to play *opéra bouffe* occasionally. Death was as handy as whisky and soda—and as bad.

In the feeble light of the night lamp I could take a survey of Bethell’s mysterious visitor. Even I, who knew him well, did not instantly recognize Yong Chi-sun—Baron Yong, he was called. In the dirty white rags of a coolie—a coolie of the night-soil class—the young fellow’s identity was almost completely hidden. Barelegged and with the ideograph denoting his degraded trade on the back of his linen shirt, his top-knot rising from his head without the covering of hat or band, this tall, rangy young fellow would hardly pass as the scion of a house ancient as the stones of Kyeng-pok Palace.

Baron Yong Chi-sun, eldest son of a former prime minister under the Regent Tai-Wun, held his bachelor’s degree from one of the largest universities in the American Southern States, had lived in Paris and Petersburg, was, in short, a cosmopolite. Also he was one of the few real Korean patriots. In the black days of the Japanese occupation Baron Yong had first thrown his enthusiasm with Il Chin Hoi, a pa-

triotic society whose purpose was to fire Korean resentment against the swift encroachment of the little men from the neighbor islands. But when, through the liberal use of Japanese gold, Il Chin Hoi suddenly shifted its mask and came out as strong supporters of the invaders, Baron Yong went to America in disgust.

He had but recently returned, via Europe and the Trans-Siberian. In ten days since his arrival in Seoul the baron had made several ineffectual attempts to see Bethell and myself alone, but the vigilant espionage the Japanese kept upon the fighting British editor as well as himself had frustrated his plans. We only knew, Bethell and I, that Baron Yong had something of greatest importance to tell us; that much we got through the “wireless” of servants’ quarters.

For all his rags, Baron Yong was every inch the patrician as he stood, smiling, his hands outstretched to grasp ours. None of the doltish impassivity of the typical Korean yangban in his features. The high forehead of the man bespoke intellect, and even though his face was cast in the oval mold distinguishing the high born in the peninsula, the breadth between his fine, sharp eyes and the firm lines of nostril and mouth negated the effeminacy of the type countenance. If there were more like Baron Yong in dour Cho-sen, history would be written differently to-day.

“Dear friends,” he said, his eyes kindling with a great enthusiasm, “I bring you good news for Korea. A way out lies open to us if we can only take it.”

Bethell had his fingers to his lips instantly, warning against the other’s lifted voice. We drew together about the little lamp, and there in a shadow-splashed circle we stood while the baron poured out his tale in scarce suppressed whisper.

“One way out—yes, one way out,”

he repeated. "And that's at the Court of the World—the Hague. The conference meets there in September, and Korea must be represented. Korea must make there her open plea to all the world for justice—and her national life."

"What's that—what's there!" Bethell broke in impetuously. "The Japs permit delegates from Korea to the Hague conference? Never fear!"

"Listen," the young man impatiently silenced the editor. "You know the letter I carried from his majesty—carried out of Korea and half across the world in the lining of my shoe. That letter was delivered to the proper person in Petersburg, and"—Yong named a man so high in the secret councils of Czar Nicholas and such a present force in blind European diplomacy that I must give him a pseudonym; say, the Prince Asterisky—"and Prince Asterisky gave me assurance that if Korea had authorized delegates at the conference the czar's agents would stand behind them to the point of making an issue of Japan's conduct in this land. Then the truth—the whole bitter truth of our slow murder as an independent nation—will come out. Japan will stand revealed, the strangling cord in her hands!"

I wish I could reproduce here the *feel* of that minute there in the sickly lamplight—that fine Korean patriot, fired with the lure of his country's last hope; those two white intriguers, Englishman and American, thrilling to it as if their own country's destinies lay in the hollows of their hands. There in the dark night of Korea's existence—under the shadow of a grandeur that was greatest when Columbus sang a *Te Deum* on San Salvador, these three mites heard a promise of help from the other side of the world. To their exalted vision appeared the figure of a czar bending his ear to catch the last gasping cry for help from a nation in

the hands of the strangler. Oh, such minutes are glorious in the dreary monotony of life's little villainies!

"I do not know what Russia's game is," continued the baron. "I do not seek to go behind the promise. I only know that I have the sworn word of a man who never gives his word carelessly."

"True," I put in, "but how can we get his majesty's proper authorization for delegates to the Hague; how get them out of the country under the eye of Ito?"

"Unless their credentials, or what-you-call-its, bear the emperor's signature, or his seal," Bethell supplemented, "the delegates might as well be armed with pawn tickets so far as admission to the conference goes."

"There's the big trouble," Yong answered. "It's kept me awake nights all the way across Siberia. His majesty is a prisoner in his palace under the sleepless eyes of Hagiwara; he is not even allowed to see the crown prince alone. Yet we must get to him, tell him of the hope that lies for us at the Hague, have him put his seal to credentials for two men, and then——"

"Then our troubles just begin." Bethell was quick to take the baron's speech from his mouth. "Once we have his majesty's great cardinal seal on these credentials, how get the men they authorized out of Korea? You're watched like a mouse, Yong; the few others like you who would be good men for the Hague are watched, too. If you've got to sneak here in a coolie's rig how much harder to make Chemulpo or Fusan for a steamer."

Silence fell on us then. The magnitude of the job we were ready to put our hands to appalled us for a minute. How could three men, all of them watched, make through the hedge of espionage the invaders had built around the person of old Bugs—to call majesty irreverently out of name; how combat the guile of the craftiest ser-

pent in the whole Japanese nest, Hagiwara, the ubiquitous eyes and ears of Ito?

"Do you think the emperor still has his seal?" Bethell popped the question with his characteristic explosiveness. "You know he's never set the cardinal seal to the Treaty of Protectorate, and there's a rumor he slipped the precious bit of crystal out of the palace and to some monastery back in the mountains for safe-keeping, so he couldn't be forced to use it on a Jap-made document."

"There's another——" Baron Yong checked himself as if shot. Bethell and I felt the same congealing shock that had stopped his lips.

The metal match safe had dropped from the doorknob. It struck the floor with a sharp knock.

Bethell acted first. He whipped a short-barreled automatic from his coat pocket, swept the night lamp up in his left hand, and was at the door in a bound. An instant he stood there, his ear against the panel. Then he quickly set the lamp down on the near-by edge of the washstand, and, holding his weapon at the hip, threw the lock, and swung back the door with a single movement.

Blackness there; naught else.

Yong and I crowded to the doorway, and as Bethell lifted the lamp above his head we peered up and down the hallway as far as the feeble radiance carried. Not a sound; nor a shadow. Yet the match safe had fallen.

I think we looked into each other's eyes with a half-incredulous, half-shamed air. Then we stepped back into the room, and Bethell started to close the door.

"Hello!"

Yong suddenly stooped, and picked up something that lay next the door-sill, so close to our feet that we had almost trodden on it. He held his find to the light, his face all drawn into little

puckers of surprise. Bethell and I brought our heads together over the Korean's hand.

What it held was a six-inch curl of woman's hair. It was a rusty gray, and at one end was the hairpin that had skewered it to its wearer's head.

## CHAPTER II.

### THEODOSIA RAMPANT; EXIT.

How long we three stood there like dolts gazing at that grizzled wisp of hair I do not know. Bethell's eyes met mine, and a question shot between them. She—Theodosia Tooling; that frumpy owlet from Dorsetmount—she eaves-dropping, and on the night of her arrival? Incredible! Yet this same Theodosia Tooling was the only creature under Looie's roof that night who wore long hair—and gray hair. We couldn't go behind that. The evidence seemed incontestable.

"We'll look into this thing in the morning," Bethell grunted, as he closed and locked the door. "There'll be no more listening at keyholes to-night; that's certain."

Of course, Yong could not share the suspicion that curl of false hair had fired in us. Nor did we reveal our mutual conjecture. Somehow it would have been absurd for two men wise in the ways of the land to accuse a freaky waif just in from the beyond of the China coast of playing the national indoor game so soon after her coming. I confess, though, that when we drew our heads together once more to plot and plan ways for accomplishing the great adventure Yong had outlined, that absurd twist of hair seemed to assume personality, and to take its place as a fourth party to our cabal. It lay under the night lamp where Bethell had thrown it, and, try as I would, I could not keep my eyes from its drab and snaky convolutions. Everything inanimate is perverse in the dreary lexicon

of Korean demonology; a false curl dropped outside a door guarding treasonable conference was not an omen of joy.

We talked until the first streak of dawn light on the rugged face of Pukhan warned Yong that he would have to flit through the wasting dark to regain his home undetected. We saw him fling himself over the rear wall of the hotel compound, one with the slinking cats in stealth; then I went back with Bethell to his room to smoke and drive at the abattis of our problem until the sun came. We found no gap in the bristling hedge about the sacred person of old Bugs; at every angle of attack we saw eyes—the eager, watchful eyes of the Japanese. Eyes at the doors of the royal prisoner's palace; eyes in the coiled shape of the dragon on the screen in his audience chamber; eyes frescoed on the shoji of his bedchamber. Of all persons in the peninsula His Majesty Bugs was the most isolated—one hapless individual under the patient scrutiny of threescore slant eyes. Our single hope for a successful start on the harebrained venture lay in the farewell promise of Yong.

"Unless he has been corrupted like the others," he said, "there is one man still close to his majesty's person who may serve to carry our message through the Japanese lines. Old Tai-Song, the keeper of the wardrobe, has been considered harmless enough to stay in the emperor's household. I think I can get word to him and gold enough to tempt him. You will hear from me soon."

So, perforce, the matter rested with us. We had but to wait in patience while Yong burrowed into the secret places of the palace under the suspended Samurai sword.

There was a matter of immediate interest, however—the telltale lock of hair. Bethell handled this in his characteristic, bull-charging way, while I, a volunteer Greek chorus, stood ready

to carry through the action by strenuous recitative if need be. The stage was the lonely dining room of the hotel; time, about eight-thirty a. m.

Very red-eyed and soggy with tobacco smoke and no sleep, Bethell and I took our seats before the Lady Theodosia made her entrance. We dawdled over the marmalade and coffee until, with a mannish tread and a defiant flapping of her rakish auk's wing, the little sister of the occult flounced to her table and took her seat with her back to us. She did not favor us with so much as a glance. Scorn spoke from the bony angles of her elbows, from the nest of watch-spring curls—veritable mates of *the* curl—which bounced and waggled at their moorings in the nape of her neck. When he had finished with his breakfast Bethell noisily pushed back his chair, rose, and strode toward Theodosia's table. As he neared it he drew from his coat pocket the coiled and hairpin-skewered evidence of a maiden lady's indiscretion.

He came to a stop by Theodosia's elbow, and with a blunt little bow laid the curl on the tablecloth by the butter dish.

"Miss Tooling," he began, in his usual throaty roar, "I believe you dropped this—ah—article of the toilet outside the door of my room at eleven o'clock last night. I found it there just half a minute after you dropped it."

I could see the lady's freshly kalsomined cheek, the smile that wrinkled it, as she turned her eyes to Bethell's. With something like a simper she answered him:

"This is—very considerate of you, Mr.—Bethell, I think the name is. I haven't many of these—er—appendages, and I imagine it would be hard to replace one lost in Korea."

Sublime innocence or sublime impudence? I choked as I saw Bethell's jaw drop; he was so pathetically helpless before the unexpected retort. Theo-

dosia calmly picked up the betraying curl, and tucked it with its kin in her coiffure. The chunky little editor glowered at the twist of hair as it took its place in the fair Tooling superstructure, then he shook his shoulders like a challenging mastiff, and returned to the charge:

"I said, Miss Tooling, that I picked up this—ah—lock near eleven o'clock last night. Some gentlemen were in my room at the time. We were having a private conversation. Yet I found this just outside my door—just below the keyhole, in fact. Might that not be rather embarrassing to you?"

This was drawing it too strong. I was on the point of rising to pull Bethell away when Theodosia answered—ah, so sweetly.

"It would have been embarrassing, indeed, Mr. Bethell," she purred, "if you had found the—ah—lock just *inside* your door."

Bethell whirled and fled out of the dining room. Theodosia applied marmalade to a bit of toast with the least concerned air in the world.

"Guilty, by the Lord Harry!" my vanquished friend stormed when I joined him in the office. "I tell you, Billy, that woman can afford to be watched! She's playing some deep game; that's what she's doing. Tut, tut, there; *maskee* that laugh, or I'll proper well give you what-for!"

Events of the next few days proved, that watching Theodosia could well be counted one of the pleasurable exciting pastimes of Seoul—at least, of the foreign contingent in the capital. Not since the invasion of Hideyoshi had such a restless spirit coursed through the rotting-worm tracks of the old city. Theodosia was a veritable will-o'-the-wisp in Scotch bonnet and fatigue jacket. One minute she would be settled in the living room of the British resident, boring the unhappy wife of that official through and through with

theosophical shafts; the next she would be launching her esoteric doctrines in a machine-gun fire at the head of the third assistant secretary to Marquis Ito in the big residency building. Her voice was that of the pelican in the wilderness; it failed not from morn to dewy eve. There was not a lady of the legations who did not hear its high-pitched, rasping objurgations to follow the light; not a starred and belted baron who did not barricade himself in his office against the descent of this ravaging Hun of pantheism. First she was a joke; then a nuisance; then a terror. When men came to the club for the five-o'clock high ball they ducked into the protecting portals with a hunted, furtive air, and the common hail to them from the chairs was, "Have you met Theodosia?"

But particularly did the Tooling avenger haunt little Hagiwara, the boss of the palace, and in this fact all foreign Seoul found great joy; Hagiwara was not a popular person. His office the determined British proselyter made her favorite roost. She shouted down all of the understrappers who would bar her way to the Hagiwara spider web, patiently sat under her green umbrella on the steps of the office until Hagiwara must either make a dash for freedom or starve, waylaid him on his missions to Marquis Ito's house, pursued him by rickisha, bombarded him with accusing letters. It was a new and bitter experience for the suave little chief of the spy squadron. The hunter was hunted. Whatever professional suspicion Hagiwara may have entertained as to Theodosia's mission to Seoul—and he was suspicious on principle of every new white face in the city—must have been dissipated by growing conviction that Theodosia Tooling was innocent of every form of human frailty except insanity. It is reasonable to suppose that Hagiwara believed her to be some strange and ter-



rible species of British female never before seen in the Far East.

Doubtless it was just this conviction that led to the surprising thing. Theodosia had audience with His Majesty Bugs!

I will always believe Hagiwara hit upon this idea as the most refined of all the little cruelties he and his crew devised to keep the mind of the hapless prisoner in a constant state of terror. Turn Theodosia loose on the emperor, and she would do what fear of poison and the knife had failed to accomplish; there would be nothing remaining to arrange but the formal obsequies.

Whatever Hagiwara's motive, the fact remained that Theodosia Tooling, of Dorsetmount, did what no foreigner in Seoul, man or woman, had done in nearly two years: saw and talked with the Emperor of Korea in his palace. And alone, so gossip buzzed through the city, save for the necessary presence of an interpreter, a Korean. All who marveled at her triumph felt, too, that a distinctly Japanese trick had been played on the old boy; there was a fine sense of derision in thus sacrificing his pitiful dignity to the assaults of such a harridan as Theodosia.

Her audience occurred just a week to the day from the time of her arrival. That night Bethell sent one of his printers to my house with an imperative message that I join him at Looie's immediately. I was at my dinner when the coolie arrived; in half an hour I was trundling through the black streets in my ricksha. A misty rain made the night Stygian. I could hardly see the bobbing head of my puller, so dense was the darkness. Only occasionally did a cranny of light shining through the shutter crack of some house give proof that I was in the heart of a city of thousands, and not a desert in Mongolia. Not half a dozen pedestrians passed me—pale ghosts, swinging tiny star lanterns of white-oiled paper in

their hands. On such a night one shares with the natives the certain belief that the tiger ghosts are abroad. "The rain dragon can snatch a loose topknot," they have it.

At the Astor House I found Bethell in a high state of excitement. He dragged me into a corner of the shabby bar before I had shaken the wet from my coat.

"The word from Yong," he hoarsely whispered. "We're to meet him at eleven in the lotus pavilion of the old palace. He sent just that message, nothing else, by old Hi-dong, his house slave. 'All depends on to-night;' that's the way he put it. Something big—*big*, Billy. Yong must have got a message through to the emperor. The big scheme is moving!"

For two restless hours Bethell and I speculated upon what the tryst in the old palace grounds would bring forth as we knocked the billiard balls about the table. Then, a little after ten o'clock, I left the hotel, bound by a roundabout way for the appointed meeting place. Bethell was to follow, and we were to meet at the breach in the wall on the Puk-han side of the ancient palace inclosure, and then proceed together through the wildwood tangle to the lotus pavilion.

The rendezvous Baron Yong had appointed was in the midst of the strangest jungle in the world—the old Kyeng-pok Palace compound. Set in the heart of dead Seoul are these fifty acres of ghost walk, the hovels of the people pressing against its walls on three sides, and on the fourth the savage granite of Puk-han Cliff. Behind its barred gates decay and desolation are locked—palace halls, pavilions, a royal library of blue-glazed brick, a throne hall whose steps are worn hollow by the feet of thousands of courtiers, deer parks, archery courts, flimsy summer-houses, and toy bridges over fish ponds. All—all in the ruin of neglect. The

lotus flowers in scum; cats prowl through the chambers of royal seraglios; pigeons weave straws above the ebony throne chair for their nests. Capricious majesty in the person of the last emperor forsook Kyeng-pok when Queen Min was hacked to death and burned in the deer park and built him a new palace in the far corner of the ancient inclosure—the palace which was to become his prison house in the black days of the Japanese occupation.

I went on foot from the hotel, taking the full time of an hour to skirt the walls of Kyeng-pok to the breach. No ghostlier sally have I made in all my life. In the wet blackness of the night the guarding stone lions at the palace South Gate loomed large as mastodons, every uptwisted gable was a witches' toboggan, each square tower set on the wall's crest the stronghold of fantastic archers of a dead day. I found the breach, unchallenged, and there crouched behind a pile of the fallen masonry to await Bethell's coming. He splashed through the mud to join me, and together we groped our way through the tangle of ruins to the lotus pavilion. This was merely an unwall'd summerhouse built on a platform over a fish pond. A fancifully gabled roof hung over it on carved pillars; a gingerbread railing of teak rose from the floor. Oh, a dismal, ghost-ridden place!

Together we waited for, perhaps, half an hour, listening to the patter of rain on the lotus pads and the r-r-r-rick—r-r-r-rick of some ghoulish insect in the rotting beams over our heads. Then the snapping of a twig near at hand, the noise of a foot on stone. Bethell whistled very low. A voice out of the dark called "Bethell?"

Another minute and the muffled white figure of Baron Yong stepped out on the little causeway leading to our retreat. Another blurred shape followed.

They drew nearer. Baron Yong

stepped aside, as they gained the platform, with a little gesture of deference, to permit the one accompanying him to pass and greet us first. Curiously we moved forward; so dark it was we almost had to rub noses with the stranger to identify him.

"Theodosia Too—Tooling! Good Lord!"

Bethell stumbled back against me as the exclamation leaped from his lips.

"No, Bethell—no, Billy." The voice in the dark was low and infinitely sweet. "Theodosia Tooling no longer to you, dear friends. Just the girl—the girl whom you helped to kidnap the emperor two years ago, and who failed—with you."

### CHAPTER III.

#### IN THE DRAGON'S NEST.

One who has spent twelve years west of the one hundred and eightieth parallel is supposed to be inured to shock. I discovered that instant there in the rain-drenched pavilion that I was not yet surprise proof. Even when I felt the girl's hand in a heartening clasp and could see dimly under the peak of the Tooling Scotch bonnet the eyes of her with whom I had once traveled the treacherous path of high adventure, I could not believe that the late Theodosia and the girl of stirring memory were the same.

With one voice Bethell and I began to put eager questions.

"Hs-sh!" she cautioned, and put her fingers quickly upon our lips. "Another time. We have something more important than explanations on hand. Come!"

"But look-a-here, girl," Bethell persisted, a grieved quality in his tone. "Why, Theodosia Tooling? Why did you come back to Seoul and fool us—your friends, willing to help? And that gray curl outside my door! Why, you spied on us; you *were* eavesdrop-

ping; I knew it! On us, the only people in Korea who——”

“Listen, Bethell; listen, Billy.” She put her arms about our shoulders in the way of a comrade, and drew our heads to hers. “I was sent here by—by the same big man whom Baron Yong saw in Petersburg to do what the baron and you planned to do that night in your room at the hotel. Yong did not know he—that big man in Petersburg—was sending me. I was told only to find him here in Seoul, and act with him. I had to come as Theodosia”—here she laughed a little at her own Mr. Hyde incarnation, I imagine—“because that was the best way. I *did* listen at your door, Bethell—very clumsily, too, I admit—and discovered you were already playing my game. So—what to do? Play it with you! And I have! Now, come.”

“What’s up?” I asked Yong, who had stood a little apart from us during our colloquy.

“We go to meet his majesty,” the Korean replied simply.

Picture the strange procession through the midnight dark of deserted Kyeng-pok—scuttering phantoms in the pleasure places of long-dead kings. The girl walked with her hand in mine for guidance. We did not speak, but from her strong, confident fingers there passed to mine the bold, full pulse of her soul—the soul of indomitable youth, daring all in the lead of romance. Mercifully the dark hid the physical mask of Theodosia Tooling. Instead of the kalsomined cheek, the penciled brows, the pitiful lines of waning bloom refurbished that made the apostle of theosophy a dreary object in the eye of intolerant youth, I could see in the clear vision of remembrance the radiant beauty of firm, round throat and cheek crowned by masses of hair the color of bronzed autumn oaks. What a sacrifice of her jealous feminine values the girl had made in becoming Theodosia

Tooling of the rusted locks! And what an artist of make-up she had proved herself!

Baron Yong leading, we threaded the wastes of deer park and courtyard until we had come stealthily to the low wall which bounded the small inclosure of the new palace. Yong brought us to an angle in the masonry where the wall swerved to avoid a big rock, and there we huddled together, waiting—for what?

“He will come, though it is dangerous,” the girl whispered. “Little Hagiwara helped me arrange the meeting when he admitted me to audience, though he doesn’t know it.”

The rain swept our faces, and a misshapen pine branch above our heads swayed back and forth in the fitful wind like the arm of some unlaidd ghost. We were cramped, wet, horribly uncomfortable. Minutes dragged.

A stone, tossed from above, fell at our feet with a little startling sound. A voice called softly: “Yong—Yong!”

We were on our feet in an instant. There over the low top of the wall almost flush with our faces the night had breached two mummy shapes of white, swathed and formless.

“Your majesty!”

Yong’s low exclamation in the vernacular suddenly brought us to a realization of the proprieties, uncommon as was the occasion. Bethell and I swept off our hats, the girl bowed profoundly; Yong prostrated himself.

“Hurry—hurry! Say what you have to say before the Japanese discover his majesty’s absence.” The command came from the emperor’s bodyguard, who was the faithful Tai-Song, the loyal member of the household whom Yong had “reached.”

We all drew near the wall. Baron Yong and Bethell began speaking hurriedly to the emperor in the court language. From the little I understood I knew they were putting before him in

the most glowing terms the hazard of the Hague delegates. Occasionally his majesty interrupted with an eager treble piping. The old fellow grew so agitated his stuffed and padded body swayed perkily this way and that.

"What does he say, Bethell?" the girl inquired eagerly. Her restlessness under the handicap of the alien speech would not let her keep silence.

"He's for it," the editor flung over his shoulder, then renewed his earnest conversation in the Korean tongue. For another minute the buzzing over the wall was uninterrupted. Once his majesty uttered a sharp exclamation in a querulous, childish outburst, and Bethell growled an abrupt oath. Then Yong took up the burden of the argument pleadingly. Speech between the three flew so fast I could not follow it; I only knew that some serious objection had been raised by old Bugs, to which he seemed to cleave with a mulish stubbornness.

*"Annoné!"*

The hail, in the Japanese, popped like a cracker in the dark beyond the wall. Then a flash of light, dim in the background of trees behind the emperor.

"A-a-a-ai!" the royal prisoner moaned, and his head dropped below the wall like Mr. Punch's at the arrival of the hangman.

"Quick—quick!" Bethell whirled about and grasped one of the girl's hands. I took the other. Yong, in the lead, gripped Bethell's wrist, and we ran blunderingly away from the wall into the bramble tangle of the old palace grounds. There was a sudden spray of light behind us as a lantern was lifted over the wall. We heard a gruff call to halt, in the Japanese tongue. A whistle trilled, and somewhere off in the dark another answered. All the nerves of Hagiwara's spy guard were thrumming to the alarm.

As I look back at it now, that race of ours away from the trysting place

was something like bad boys' escape from an orchard and a farmer with his gun. Yes—maybe. But, also, I reflect upon the dreary wildwood of Kyeng-pok; how easily it would have concealed for all time the result of a chance shot in the dark.

We ran I do not know how far, and finally came to a stop under the eaves of some crumbling building because breath lacked. There was no sound of pursuit; doubtless none was attempted, the Japanese jailers being content with catching the emperor at a forbidden assignation.

It was here, as we huddled together out of the drip of the rain, Bethell and Yong reviewed their conversation with the royal prisoner and told the girl and me of the stumblingblock the old loon had put in the path of our scheme. His majesty welcomed with the joy of a seasoned intriguer the project of sending delegates to the Hague conference, and on the spot commissioned Baron Yong to be one of them and choose his fellow delegate. But at signing his name to their credentials old Bugs balked—flatly refused.

"His majesty rightly says," Yong explained, "that no document of state bears his signature. It must be stamped with the great cardinal seal, which was the seal of Kija, first ruler over Cho-sen."

"Rot!" Bethell broke in impetuously. "The old boy's afraid to put his hand to the credentials, for if the Japs grabbed them he'd be condemned by his own signature. If the cardinal seal alone is on 'em he can swear it was put there without his authorization. What's more, he hasn't got the seal. Says he smuggled it out of the palace and up to the U-cham Monastery, on Diamond Mountain, so the Japs couldn't force him to use it. There you are—no seal no credentials; no Hague business! Seal hidden away somewhere by a lot

of rooty old monks who wouldn't give it up if Buddha himself demanded it."

"Then there is but one thing to do." The girl bore down Bethell's grumbling by her calm assurance. "We will go and get that seal."

"And this will open the way," Yong supplemented. "His majesty gave it to me just as the Japanese called. His personal luck charm!"

From hand to hand passed the curiously wrought bit of jade Yong produced. We could not see it; could only feel the complicated involutions of that Chinese ideograph which in Korean fetichism represents the all-in-all of favoring fortune. Old Bugs had, indeed, made a sacrifice in giving up the luck stone; next to the soul tablet of his father it was his most precious warder of harm.

We planned, then, the trip to the U-cham Monastery, away back in the shadow land of the mountains two days by chair from the railroad. We planned at that strange hour and place because we were together, and there was no forecasting when at another time we might gather unsuspected. Though Yong and I urged against the girl's making the journey, she would not be put off; she said she could not remain in Seoul while the big adventure was moving forward elsewhere. Bethell, it was agreed, should not attempt to leave the capital; he was too well known outside the central zone of Japanese activity to escape detection once his absence from the city was noted by Hagiwara's men. It was problematical, even, if Yong and I could leave the walls in canopied chairs and await the girl's coming at a certain point on the railroad without being spied upon. It was a desperate sally we were to attempt, and the chances of success were ten to one against us; we knew that. But we had the emperor's luck stone to confound the thousand devils of Japanese interference and the smiling god, youth, un-

calculating servitor of romance, was nudging our elbows.

So, under the dripping eaves of Kyeng-pok we perfected the details of our raid on the great cardinal seal, and after a handgrip all around we parted to pick our way severally—except that I piloted the girl—out of the labyrinth of moldering grandeur to the safety of familiar roofs. So finished a night that even now flashes in memory like the blinding white beam of a searchlight in the dark.

"The mother of all the dragons suckles her young in Keum-kang San," says a Korean legend. And a dragon's nest it is, this spinous cluster of peaks called by the foreigner Diamond Mountain. Fantastic as the painted mountains on a Chinese screen, all needle spires, black gorges, and mist-shrouded pines, the Keum-kang San shelters a community of men no less bizarre than the monstrosities of nature surrounding them—the Buddhist monks and acolytes of U-cham Sa, largest of the few remaining monasteries in Korea. They are the decadent remnant of what was once the national faith—the flotsam marking the high tide of Buddhism in northeastern Asia.

Here in the aisles of the mountains great bells, forged when the Crusaders were before Jerusalem, still send out their booming calls to prayer thrice in the day's round; the sun's rays drop through a slit in the mountain wall to illumine the placid face of a Buddha sitting in bas-relief against the age-gray mother rock; strange carven toadstools stand over the graves of abbots who died no man remembers when. Only the shadow of the Great Teacher lingers at U-cham; the votaries mingle exorcisms of demons with their mumbled Sanskrit prayers. Buddha is far, far away, but the ferocious spirits of mountain crag and blasted pine very near.

Seoul lay three days behind us, and we three—the girl, Yong, and myself—found ourselves in the heavy fist of Keum-kang San at the third setting of the sun. She in a rough mountain chair, hoisted on the shoulders of sturdy coolies, Yong and I following on foot, we traveled in a land raw and crude as on the world's first day. The trail led through the black gap of a gorge, back and forth over a thundering torrent bridged by tottering planks.

As the light gradually failed the bleak sides of the cañon closed in on us like a dungeon's steel walls; against the orange blue of the sky stunted pines on the gorge rim opposed affrighted hands to the approach of night; the narrow vault hummed with the steady diapason of tumbling water. It was a time and place of terror, vague, unsettled.

We walked in the precincts of the gods of primordial things. Yong, the bachelor of letters, the cosmopolite, strode silently by my shoulder, his face grave and fixed under an effort of will. Once I caught the look in his eyes and matched it with the fear that widened the eyes of the nearest chair coolie. Through all the veneer of travel and study the Korean nature of the man was pushing into the ascendancy.

It was dusk when we emerged upon a little plateau. Over the softer voice of the torrent came to us the throb-throb-throb of a great bell somewhere ahead in the graying valley. The heavy bell note was answered by others; the gathering dark pulsed with the beat of wood on metal. Yet not a light ahead, not a sign of human habitation. The wilderness had suddenly become vocal. We passed through an ancient burial place. About us strange tumuli lifted themselves in the shadows; rock lanterns and mushroom growths leaned drunkenly this way and that. Still the booming of the bells. Spirit bells, ringing the requiem of the ancient dead!

Suddenly we came upon U-cham Sa

—a sprawling blot of temple, pagoda, and bell tower against the lighter dark. Little lights pricked out here and there. The glowing of great hidden lanterns cut the porch pillars of a shrine out of the night. We heard the intoning of many voices. The chair coolies began to croon a labor song and quickened their step. We were out of the grip of goblins at last and on sanctified ground.

Our coming to the great monastery made a considerable stir. When the evening chanting was finished—a service we bided in the shadows of the largest temple—fully a hundred shave-polls gathered about us, chattering excitedly, and we were conducted into the presence of the Chong-söp, or abbot. He was a man of benevolent countenance, paunchy and good-humored. He received us in a bare, vaulted room of stone and hewn wood, at one end of which sat on a dais a dingy Buddha, gazing with placid lacquered eyes upon two smoky dishes of burning oil at his knees.

The open door through which we passed instantly became crowded with jostling priests and novitiates, fighting for opportunity to feast their eyes on the strange sight of a foreign woman. The presence of the curious ones, which seemed to disturb the abbot not at all, made it impossible for Yong to state our mission. He had to invent, on the moment, some specious fabrication about our being travelers who had undertaken the difficulties of the road for a view of the wonders of U-cham. Though we sat with the reverend abbot for many hours, balanced on the uncomfortable narrow benches, and Yong talked with him interminably, the vigil at the door did not abate.

"You must remember," Yong answered the girl, when she interjected an impatient protest against delay, "you are in the one place in the universe

where the word 'hurry' does not exist. Time moves like a tortoise here."

The evening was wasted—uncomfortably wasted. In the end the abbot's tardy sense of hospitality overcame his garrulity, and we were shown our sleeping quarters—narrow cells with a pallet of rushes in each; clean, however. At the door of her stone box the girl paused to give me good night.

"Billy," she said, and there was a little quaver of nerves and fatigue in her voice, "I—somehow feel as if—as if — Oh, I'd rather be fighting Hagiwara in Seoul than trying to bore into the—the blind something here! This is not our world. I—I'm afraid we'll —fail."

I took those words to my rushes with me. It was strange, nerve-straining, thus to hear from one who faced every hazard without flinching such a confession of doubt.

With the sun came new hope. After a strictly Buddhist breakfast of strained honey and pine nuts, supplemented by tinned biscuits which the girl in a moment of saving inspiration had added to her traveling bag, we met the abbot. This time, through Yong's clever contrivance, alone.

Never again, I hope, will I have to sit in such a place of horrors as that the abbot chose for this morning's audience. It was the Temple of the Ten Judges, the magistrates who hold the woosack under the dominion of the Lord of Buddhist Hell and pass judgment upon the human chaff whirled down to them on the wind of death. The interior of the temple, smoke-blackened by the candles of thousands of votaries and hung with sable gonfalons of silk, like drooping bats' wings, was dim and shadow-haunted. The only spots of light were those cast by the flickering tapers and the dull-red eyes of the censers ranged on the shrines of the ten wooden idols.

It was when one stood before a shrine

and caught by the flutter of light the outlines of the mural paintings behind it that the chills were spine breaking. For there, in heavy reds, oranges, and blues, were depicted the ingenious tortures of damned souls in torment—ferocity passing belief. As the flames of the candles waxed and waned the mouths of the victims opened and shut in spasms, the eyes of devils gloated, fires in the pictured purgatory leaped and died. Over the whole interior—musty judges, swaying black banners, hell fires—brooded a sullen spirit of malevolence.

It was the abbot's favorite roost.

In Yong's eyes, as we took our places cross-legged on the mats, I saw the same strained look of mastered terror I had observed in the gorge the evening before. Somehow the man's structure of foreign culture seemed to be crumbling, bit by bit; I do not know what told me this, unless it was the look in his eyes and a certain loosening of the corners of his mouth. Reliance and self-confidence appeared to be sloughing away from our friend here in this dim mountain fastness of the unseen.

The girl beside me, her fascinated gaze wandering from one pregnant corner of shadows to another, I bent all my attention at trying to master the sense of what passed between Baron Yong and the Chong-söp. After a lengthy introduction, in which the Seoul patriot tried to give the priest an idea of the swift political changes going on in the capital, he came down to the object of our mission. The reverend master of the monastery listened with close attention, his face bare of the least flicker of emotion, until Yong brought out a silk handkerchief from beneath his linen outer coat, untwisted it, and displayed the emperor's luck stone—the carved ideograph of moss-green jade. Then up went the eyebrows of his reverence; he sucked in his breath with a whistling sound.

"A command to you from the Heaven born," Yong said. "He sends his stone of fortune to bring back to the palace the great cardinal seal of his ancestors."

The monk sat in silence for a minute, then scrambled to his sandaled feet, and shuffled away into the gloom. We heard the hinge of a door creak, a board crack, and then we were alone. None spoke. The spell of the grim place was on us all.

Back padded the abbot, in his hands a bundle wrapped about by purple silk. He eased himself to the mats with a little groan, and then as he fumbled at the knots of silk he began mumbling some jargon of ritual. All of us leaned forward expectantly. The fat hands were an interminable time untying the silk. When the wrapping fell a small silver niello-work casket was revealed. Twice the monk started to open the casket's top and twice his hand hovered uncertainly over the catch. His intoned prayer became of stronger timbre. His little eyes rolled excitedly. At last he turned the hasp, and threw back the cover.

A square ray of limpid light leaped from the silk-upholstered interior. It came from a carved block of clearest crystal quartz—an oblong tablet with a ramping Chinese lion-dog surmounting it as a handle. Through the clear depths of the crystal block the red-crusted involutions of ideographs on its stamping face could be seen.

The great cardinal seal; royalty's stamp of authority since Korea was born a nation from the mists of legend!

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A FOX JUGGLES WITH DESTINY.

Not until I came to reflect upon it in the light of subsequent events did I find full explanation of Yong's curious conduct the minute of the great seal's uncovering. For an instant he sat in petrified awe, as did all of us for that

matter, so compelling was the pure beauty of the ancient relic; then he suddenly bent forward on his knees as if to prostrate himself. He checked himself midway of the sweeping gesture, his face flushed and his eyes dropped as if in shame at the impulse of reverence. Of course, I thought at the time, a patriotic Korean would feel a sense of veneration at sight of this instrument of hoary royalty, just as an Englishman looking through the cage at the crown jewels in the Tower of London might thrill before the scepter of Edward the Confessor; but Yong's involuntary act was different. Again the native in him flashed to the surface—the blind, unreasoning fetishism of the Korean.

It was the girl who broke the awkward silence:

"Well, now that we have it we had better start at once for Seoul."

Yong stammered something in the Korean which I could not catch. Instantly the abbot with a quick, protective gesture slammed shut the lid of the casket and gathered it under his arm. His face was scowling. He muttered some reply to Yong.

"The abbot says," Yong interpreted, "that, of course, we cannot move the great seal from U-cham until the proper prayers have been said and the signs have been consulted to determine a propitious day for its departure."

"What folly!" The girl broke in scornfully. "A bit of carved quartz!"

Here his reverence interrupted with a veritable torrent of words, out of which I picked, "bad luck," "improper," "impious." Yong listened respectfully.

"You may not understand," he explained, when the abbot had finished, "that this 'bit of carved quartz,' as you call it, is a holy relic in the eyes of the monks here. In it lie the spirits of all the old kings, whose hands were set to it from the dim past to the present. I—I—maybe I do not make myself



clear. When his majesty secretly sent this seal up here it was placed before the shrine of his majesty's ancestors—became a part of that shrine. It cannot be moved until the monks have a sign from the spirits of the dead kings, permitting its removal. Even in the face of a living emperor's demands it cannot be moved until then."

"How long will it take them to get this message from the beyond?" I asked, striving to mask my impatience.

"There must be a period of fasting, I presume," the baron answered. "And then they will begin to look for favorable signs in the rocks—the trees—everywhere. Of course——"

"Baron Yong," the girl sternly took him up, "do *you* believe in all this mumbo-jumbo business?"

A deprecatory smile quickly passed over the patrician features; his hands fluttered to his lips.

"Oh, no; of course not! You must remember I do not believe in anything"—this with a conscious air of cynicism. "But, of course—I told you time means nothing to these people—the customs of the country, you know—must be obeyed—I suppose."

He finished very lamely with a nervous little laugh.

"But have you explained the necessity of quick action?" I asked. "The Hague conference convenes in September; this is July; we are on the opposite side of the world, and even with the seal in our possession much remains to be done before you start with your credentials. Come, man; you forget the destiny of a whole people hangs on our success!"

Again Yong loosed a volley of argument at the Chong-söp. He sat like an aged tortoise, his brown, shaven head thrust a little way out from his shoulders, his eyes narrowed to mere slits in the wrinkled, flabby face. The apotheosis of the unruffled, unhurrying East! When Yong finished, the old boy merely

shook his head and smiled, then scrambled to his feet, and, the sacred casket under his arm, pattered away into the gloom. He did not return. We waited there in that hall of horrors for long minutes, none speaking. Yong sat with hands folded across his knees, his face placid. There was something of the Buddha in his pose. The bells began to boom then—a dozen—a score. They roared and moaned and tinkled in every register; the mountains threw back their voices in a jumbled echo. Somewhere out in the sunlight beyond the stern judges of hell and the fires of torment, rose a dreary unison chant of men's voices:

"*Namu—Namu, Amida Butsu.  
Na Mu Ami Tabu.*"

"Oh, I must get out of this!"

The girl jumped to her feet with the strangled cry, and ran for the temple porch. I followed. Yong still sat, hands folded on his knees, amid the ghastly crew of the Inferno.

We walked together, she and I, out into the drenching sunlight under the giant cedars. Past the huddle of temples and cell houses, past the tottering headstones in the burial ground, on and on into the primitive wilderness we went until the voices of the bells were softened to silvery music and the chant was a drone. Ahead of us and on either hand the crags leaped up to smash holes through the solid blue vault of the sky, pink and gray spires of splintered granite. The pines lay thick on the slopes like heavy rugs. Foaming, leaping, twisting snakily among the boulders, roared the stream; liquid jade.

We were two alone in the desert garden of the mountains. And the girl was gloriously a part of the wild beauty of the place. No longer the pinched and kalsomined cheeks of the harridan Theodosia, the dowdy curls, the frump-ery grenadier's packet. Instead the bloom of youth on rounded cheek and throat, lips untouched by art, brow un-

harrowed by lines. The bronze-gold hair I knew to lie beneath the stain of gray was, indeed, unrestored; but even the gray masses, parted simply over the brows, accented the youth and freshness of the face beneath. Her eyes—those sparkling eyes which had wrought such strange reminiscences in me the day I met Theodosia at the South Gate station—were now clouded with anxiety.

“Ah, Billy,” she said, as we found a seat in a circlet of nodding wild flowers, “I’m afraid we are fighting an unmovable obstacle—battering our heads against the eternal do-nothingness of the East. As well try to move that boulder with a toothpick.”

“If they’d only give us a handle against them,” I complained. “Oppose us in the way white men do. But, no; ‘what is, is.’”

“And Yong,” she added. “Yong, the bachelor of letters—Yong, the world citizen familiar with the boulevards and the cafés chantants—our sturdy patriot; Billy, he’s going back! He’s slipping—slipping into the Korean again! Did you catch his attitude there where we left him? Buddha—Buddha of the ten thousand years’ contemplation. Billy, we’re alone—alone here in the garret of the world with nobody around but unpleasant ghosts who—si-sing horrid chants.”

She faltered, and the droop of her shoulders was eloquent. I tried to rally her spirits. Yong, I reassured her, was all right; he would find a way to cajole the abbot into giving up the seal without all the palaver with the spooks. It was natural he should feel the spell of U-cham differently than we did; mysticism and the fear of the unseen were born in his blood. All he needed was a little prodding; I would wield the goad.

“Why do I do these things, my friend?” She turned her eyes to mine; they were filled with seriousness. “Why

do I, a woman with all a woman’s instincts for—~~for~~ domesticity—a home—soft comforts—why do I come to a land the world’s forgot to play the part of interloper? Why did I come here two years ago and lead you, Billy, and Bethell to risk your lives helping to get a stuffy old monarch from Seoul to Shanghai? One night I am stumbling in the ruins of Kyeng-pok here in Korea; the next I may be trying to make a Japanese secretary of legation in Berlin fall in love with me over a dinner table so I may steal his secrets. The Japanese have a fairy tale about a fox woman, who changes her form to do mischief in the dark. I am a fox woman—nothing less.”

“Girl, it’s because you are you; that’s all.” Maybe she did not realize that I had her hands in mine, and, as I knew full well, all my clumsy tongue refused to utter was said by my eyes. Maybe she did not realize; I dared to think maybe she wished it so.

“It is youth—the youth that dares the world to keep romance hidden from it, to deny adventure. Youth is creation’s masterpiece; but it passes, and then——”

Ah, well, I am not going to put on a page for every eye to read all that we said there in that little glade of wild flowers. Enough to say that the half promise the girl made that day, that if ever she really could be Mrs.— Well, she didn’t keep it.

I will leave blank the three exasperating days of inaction that followed and hurry on to the events of the surprising fourth. Yong, who showed strange variableness of character, blowing hot and cold in alternate moods, I roweled unmercifully. For hours at a time he and I walked the mountain paths, I conjuring him by all the dumb mouths of Korea’s helpless millions to cut the knot of tomfoolery binding the seal and take it away at once. We could not stay on at U-cham indefinitely awaiting the fa-

avorable sign of the spirits. Every added day of our absence from Seoul meant that the Japanese spies must inevitably trace us to the mountains and guess our purpose. I tried to shame the man with his superstitious compliance with the abbot's dictum; asked him if he feared the pursuit of vengeful ghosts if he should lay violent hands on a piece of carved rock crystal. At times Yong would flare into anger at my charge that he had become the slave of Korean shamanism; the next minute he would be dodging and ducking with silly excuses against disturbing the custom of the land.

On the third night of our inaction Yong drew me aside after we had left our very æsthetic evening meal in the refectory. He showed signs of great agitation.

"To-morrow—at dawn—we go away from here!" he said. "While the monks are at the five-o'clock prayer service we will slip out. The girl's chair will be waiting at the graveyard."

"That means we take the seal with us," I sternly answered.

"Yes—yes! I know where it lies in the casket on the shrine of the dead kings. I will get it some time to-night."

"But the abbot," I objected. "He'll be furious. We can't go faster than the chair coolies. In case of pursuit we——"

"Beyond the graveyard they cannot pursue," Yong whispered. "It is a law of the monastery. Only the begging U-cham, and they only at certain times."

Yong was very white and shaky, but I was convinced he had come to the sticking point. We said no more about the morrow's flight.

That night after the evening prayer we went to visit the abbot in his cell. While the girl and I sat on our feet and blinked like chessy cats Yong carried on the conversation for us by proxy. His reverence exuded urbanity.

He told us no less than thirty monks had begun the propitiatory fast in anticipation of asking the spirits of the dead kings for a favorable sign; within a month, at the most, he thought everything would be right and the seal could go to Seoul. In the meantime the hospitality of U-cham was freely ours.

I slept little that night, and before dawn I had slipped out of my narrow cell and roused the girl, who occupied a somewhat more pretentious apartment in the government guest house. We waited in the deserted halls of the guest house until the jangle of the bells summoned all of the inhabitants of U-cham to the great Hall of the Four Sages for prayer. Then we stole furtively through the half light of the morning down past the terrible Temple of the Ten Judges, and to the green mounds of the burial place. The chair coolies were there waiting. Also Yong.

I really felt sorry for the man when I first saw his ashen face. His lips were blue, his eyes roved; the whole aspect of him was one of abysmal terror. I asked him if he had the seal. His lips would not move to answer, but he held up his silk handkerchief. A square object was knotted in it. I offered to take it from him, but he shook his head and clutched the precious seal closer to his breast. I suppose he felt the responsibility for it should rest solely with him since he had stolen it from the shrine of the kings.

The girl hopped into her chair, her eyes alight with happiness. I gave the order, and the coolies started forward on a dogtrot. In our ears was the never-ending "namu—namu" and the clashing of the bells. U-cham dropped back into the mists of morning.

Yong and I started together at a swift pace, following the bare feet of the coolies over the narrow, tortuous trail. He said not a word, but his lips moved constantly as if repeating some exorcism of the devil's. The hand that

gripped the ends of the knotted handkerchief, wherein reposed the seal, was pressed against his heart; the knuckles were whitened under the flexure. The trail led down past the Pools of the Three Dragons, three boiling caldrons of white water into which the stream drops with the fall of a mortar shell. According to U-cham legend, it was here the fifty-three Buddhists from India who introduced their religion into Korea met and overcame three dragons who lived in deep dens, and, vanquishing them, caused water to flow into their holes to drown them forever. The drowning potentialities of the pools, at least, are patent, whatever the truth about the unwise dragons. They fairly smoke.

The girl's chair had drawn abreast of the first pool; Yong and I walked beside it. Just as the trail turned to skirt the edge of the second there was a flash of red against the rocks ahead as a fox ran from the bushes almost under our feet. He gave a sharp bark of surprise, and disappeared.

An unearthly yell at my elbow!

I turned to see Yong staggering back as if a bullet had bored his breast. His eyes started from his head. His opened mouth was cavernous. The fingers of his free hand clawed the air. A terrible mask of abject horror!

An instant he stood frozen thus. Then he shrieked aloud. The hand that gripped the silk-wrapped seal suddenly lifted above his head; flew outward.

A square bulk of purple silk soared in the air, caught the sun for a quarter second, then dropped squarely in the midst of the white froth on the dragon's pool.

The great cardinal seal, relic of three hundred kings, disappeared from the sight of man for all time.

Almost before the foam swallowed the precious crystal Yong had whirled in his tracks and was racing back over

the trail to U-cham—and the world of living ghosts. Baron Yong, once the cosmopolite and scholar, but always the Korean, was fleeing the outraged spirits of kings that spoke through the mouth of a fox.

"Ai—ai—ai-yah-h-h-h-h!" We heard his retreating cry diminish, sink to a whisper, cease.

What remains to be written?

Ah, little! The world cares naught for explanations about defeat. It is only the successful who bulk big in the world's eyes. What the history of Korea might have been—what the shadow land might be to-day if the great cardinal seal had not plunged into the throat of the dragon at Keum-kang San I do not venture to guess. Perhaps—perhaps the hazard that youth seized would have repaid something for the good of a stricken nation.

As for youth's votaries in this little comedy of the ultimate East, the girl did not even return to Seoul; she kissed me as the train was pulling out of Kai-song for the Yalu boundary and the great beyond. Now she ventures no more on the rainbow trail; I know because I have a little snapshot picture of her villa garden near London, and her two fine boys stand with her in the rose arbor. Bethell? Well, he slashed and cut at inevitable destiny until Death put a hand on his pen and he lies somewhere under black cedars where the walls of Seoul climb the heights of Pukhan. Baron Yong is not of the world, either, for his head is tonsured, and at dawn, when all the bells of U-cham fling their clangorous voices against the mountains, he stands before the shrine of three hundred kings and chants: "Namu—Namu, Amida Butsu."

Myself? Why, bless your soul, I have five rooms and bath right on the main perambulator track of Brooklyn.

# High Art and the Low Brows

By Henry Carr

A short story you are going to talk about. The limelight is on a prize fighter, but in the lesser light is a high-brow critic who will capture as much of your attention, a man whose muscle had never been tested but whose criticism weakened the pugilist as no strong-armed opponent had ever done.

IT was dinner time at the training camp where Bunch Dorgan was getting ready to defend the featherweight championship of the world from the assaults of a tow-headed Swede from St. Paul.

It was not the coming battle for the championship that weighed on the champion's mind, however. He was watching Moose Seigel, his trainer. Moose was engaged in shoveling green peas into his mouth with a steel knife. He was attacking the difficult feat with such earnest concentration that his breath came hard. His face was lowered to a strategic position about a foot above his plate and the execution was appalling.

"Moose," said the champion at last, "I'll have to hand it to you; you're some sword swallower."

Moose looked up with an embarrassed grin and said, "Yeh." Moose's grin was in itself a remarkable product. At one time he had tried to be a boxer, and there was a gap in the bow of the boat where his front teeth should have been.

"Moose," said the champion meditatively, "I'm going to send you out to my ranch for a while."

"After the fight?" said Moose.

"No—before the fight—right now—this afternoon."

Moose dropped the knife with a clatter to his plate. "What's the matter wit' you; are you crazy?" he demanded.

"Oh, kinda crazy," said the champion cheerfully.

"Ain't there goin' to be no fight?" asked Moose, in alarm.

"Sure there'll be a fight!"

"Then who's goin' to train you fer it? Say, what's the matter with you?"

Moose had half risen from his chair in his anxiety.

"Keep your shirt on!" said the champion coolly. "There ain't nothing the matter wit' me. My brother Artie's coming down from college to stay wit' me while I'm training for this fight, and if he saw you swallering the table knives he'd faint."

Bunch turned with a sort of fierceness on the table lined with trainers, rubbers, and preliminary boys. "I want to tell you right here and now that no rough stuff goes when Artie gets here. Do you get me? If any of youse guys pulls off any rough stuff around here I'll punch a hole through you. The first guy that tries to pull any off-color stories takes up his traps and walks—see? I ain't very strong

for them myself, but Artie's a high-brow, and nothing like that goes wit' him."

"Does Artie wear a wrist watch?" asked Moose sourly.

"No; he don't wear no wrist watch and he don't wear no coon diamonds, either."

Moose hastily pulled down a hairy paw adorned with a suspiciously lack-luster jewel, and they left the table.

That afternoon Moose departed for the ranch. About an hour after, Artie arrived. Artie was a pale, timid boy, whose gentle, blue eyes looked out through thick spectacles. He had come down from college to work out with the champion because he was breaking down from overstudy, and thought the exercise might be medicine for him.

It hurt Bunch to see Artie's thin shoulders and his hollow, flat chest when they stripped that afternoon.

"Don't be afraid; hit me hard; go on, hit me," said Bunch, when they put on the gloves in the afternoon.

"I'm hitting you as hard as I can," gasped Artie, flinging another butterfly antenna at his brother's tin ear.

Bunch confided his troubles to one of the sporting reporters. "I got to have some guy that will give me a real work-out; Artie couldn't get a two weeks' old baby into a sweat; but the sight of old Moose or any of these roughneck sparring partners would kill Artie dead. He's a highbrow."

"I know just the fellow for you," said the sporting reporter. "Wait and I'll telephone for him."

"Who is he?" asked the champion suspiciously.

"Jimmy Krantz."

"Who's Jimmy Krantz? Who did he fight?"

"Don't you know Jimmy Krantz? He's a big swell. His old man is a millionaire. But Jimmy's a nut on boxing. He's sore because he can't be a fighter. Didn't you read in the pa-

pers how he and that British army officer had a ten-round go at one of the country clubs last summer. Jimmy knocked him cold. You must know him; he says he knows you."

"I never pay no attention to them amateurs, but bring him if he can stand the gaff," said Bunch.

The next morning, Bunch Dorgan's new training partner arrived in a twelve-thousand-dollar racing car.

James Warren Hereford Krantz was a young man bearing up under the burden of a secret sorrow. He felt that Destiny had dealt him a ruthless blow in planting him in the Krantz family as the only son and heir, with a lot of steamships and banana plantations to bother about, when it might just as well have let him be champion of the world.

James had a punch in either hand, and the beginning of a cauliflower ear. He had been expelled from three aristocratic boys' schools for fighting, and the faculty of his university had lately intimated that the dignity of the institution had not been increased by having Jimmy appear, stripped to the waist and flapping a wet towel, as the second of Ad Wolgast.

It was a tradition of the Krantz family that the eldest son of each generation should add to the famous Krantz art collection. The prospects seemed bright that Jimmy would add to that distinguished galaxy the autographed photograph of every prize fighter in the ring. Jimmy also owned a wonderful collection of sweaters that had adorned the persons of famous fighters at crucial periods of their careers.

Bunch welcomed him at once as a kindred spirit, and, as Jimmy turned out to be a classmate of Artie's at college, the addition to the camp seemed to be a happy one. Both Jimmy and Bunch stood a little in awe of Artie.

One day as they were trotting along a country road, muffled up in sweaters,

Bunch opened his heart to the scion of the Krantz family.

"Jimmy," he said, "did you ever hear of a newspaper guy named Cabot?"

Jimmy gave a grunt that might have meant anything, and trotted manfully on.

"He writes fer the *Evening Star*," continued the champion. "Artie's a nut about that paper. He reads it all the time, and I guess he says his prayers to this guy Cabot. I tried to read it, but it's too highbrow for me. Darnest paper I ever seen. Why, it don't have no sporting department! I can't understand half the words this Cabot guy writes."

James Warren Hereford Krantz ran on in silence—a silence that was the silence of shame. He owned the *Star*.

Several times after that he noticed the champion making a painful effort to read the *Star*; but he always tossed it away in disgust. It was a new bond of sympathy between them. The *Star* was a great source of mortification to Jimmy. It had been presented to him with the idea that it would "steady" him. The *Star* would steady nearly anything. The *Star* was the kind of paper delivered at the doors of the respectable rich. Its policy was a settled horror of split infinitives, and it spoke severely of the restlessness of the working classes.

The dramatic editor of the *Star* was William Ellington Cabot, who, Artie said, was the dean of American letters.

"What does that dean stuff mean?" asked Bunch of Jimmy Krantz.

"I guess it means that he is a kind of champion among the highbrows," replied Jimmy, in a strained voice. He was anxious to conceal the shameful fact that he owned a newspaper without a sporting department.

"Well, he must be a bear, all right," said the champion respectfully. "Artie says he is."

In the midst of their training, Bunch was asked to appear at a benefit for the survivors of a shipwreck or a fire or something. They left Artie at the camp, and Bunch went a couple of rounds with Jimmy Krantz. It would have hurt Bunch's pride a good deal had he realized that the millionaire sparring partner was the real attraction. They were sandwiched in between a scene from a Shakespearian revival and Miss Billie Burke. To Bunch it was a nuisance and a bore.

When they got home, Artie met them at the door of the camp. His face was white and set. "I—I guess I'll go back to college," he faltered. They saw that his suit case was packed and standing beside him.

"What's the matter?" asked Bunch, in alarm. Artie silently held out a copy of the *Star*.

Bunch took the paper and sat down fearfully on the edge of the porch. Jimmy, always a tactful boy, went on into the house, leaving the two brothers alone. When he came out, Bunch looked as white and shaky as Artie.

Bunch looked up as Jimmy came out and said, in a low, shamed voice: "You telephone that Swede that there ain't going to be no fight. I'll pay him the forfeit money. I'm going out on the ranch." The lips of the champion began to quiver, for, after all, he was only a boy. He held out the paper to Jimmy. "Looka here," he said. "Look at what that fellow Cabot wrote about me. What'd I ever do to him? And, say, what's an abysmal brute? That's what he calls me." And Bunch began to cry.

## II.

A very angry young man with a freckled nose sat across the table from the managing editor of the *Star*. James Warren Hereford Krantz, owner of the journal, had called for the purpose of discharging the dramatic critic.

In view of the importance of the occasion, he wore the red sweater that adorned the person of Battling Nelson when he fought Joe Gans at Goldfield. It took him some time to decide between that and the sweater worn by Ritchie when he won the championship from Ad Wolgast. He finally decided that the Nelson garment would be more terrible.

Jimmy could hardly keep back the tears of rage and mortification as he drove his motor car down to the *Star* office, which a friendly police officer had helped him to locate.

"Do you realize," said the managing editor slowly, "that William Ellington Cabot has been, for twenty-five years, one of the foremost Shakesperian scholars in America?"

"I don't care if he has been the prime minister of the Theater Trust for twenty-five centuries!" screamed Jimmy excitedly. "He called my friend, Bunch Dorgan, an abysmal brute. It's broken him all up, and he's canceled the match."

The managing editor bit his lips. "Who is Bunch Dorgan?"

In his excitement Jimmy had half risen from his chair. He sank back speechless with horror. "Gosh!" he said, when the power of speech returned to him. "Do you mean to say you don't know who Bunch Dorgan is? You're a whale of an editor! Dorgan is the featherweight champion of the world."

"Ah!" said the managing editor vaguely.

"Gee, wouldn't it scald you?" snorted Jimmy. "All he did was to appear at an actors' benefit, and this was what he got handed to him—an abysmal brute—in my own paper—just when I was getting in good with the champion. It queered me, all right. When he found out I owned the *Star* he wouldn't speak to me."

After Jimmy's departure, the manag-

ing editor sat for a long time at his desk, dreading what he had to do. At last he slowly climbed the narrow, creaking stairs that led to Cabot's little den—one flight about the elevator. He paused for an instant at the threshold. Cabot was at work at his desk annihilating a musical show that was defiling the traditions of the drama—and incidentally earning half a million dollars a year. As he wrote, he grunted to himself.

It struck the managing editor for the first time that Cabot had grown to be an old man. The walls of the den were covered with photographs, and it came to the managing editor that they all belonged to a past generation. Directly over Cabot's desk was a picture of Mr. William Winter, the critic, and grouped around it were pictures of Joe Jefferson and Ristori and Rachel. There were no signed photographs of those to whom the press agents referred as the "reigning favorites."

The managing editor sat down and hunted helplessly for a way to break the news to the old man. "Do you remember that actors' benefit?" he began desperately.

"I remember that the afternoon's entertainment concluded with a slugging match by a prize fighter," said the old critic sarcastically.

"Did you—that is, did you personally attend the performance?" asked the managing editor.

"Certainly not," returned Cabot promptly. "I have certain ideals of the drama which I believe I have kept undefiled for twenty-five years. I do not intend to descend to dances by bare-legged women and——"

"Abysmal brutes," murmured the managing editor. In the end, his courage failed, and he went away to send the old critic his dismissal by letter.

The incident of his discharge did not, at first, impress Cabot as having any very serious consequences to himself.



He left his little den for the last time with a grim smile. He regarded his retirement as a fitting punishment for the demoralized *Star*. He intended firmly to decline when the *Star* besought him to return; he hadn't the shadow of a doubt that this humiliation must come to the paper.

He awoke the next morning with an indescribable feeling of desolation. For thirty years he had risen at eight, breakfasted at eight-thirty, and sat down at his desk at ten. He made his simple toilet for the day with the vague, crippled feeling that a man must have who resumes his life after losing a limb. He breakfasted at the same place, but it was as though he were starting on a journey whose destination he did not know.

Before he left the breakfast table, Cabot drew up a list of all the papers he could remember and began crossing off those which were clearly impossible to a man of his standing. He ruthlessly drew his blighting pencil, first of all, through the name of the *Star*. One paper he canceled on the ground that it printed too many illustrations. Another he doomed on the ground that it disagreed with his verdict on the last appearance of Henry Irving, and so on—the pitiful braggadocio of a worn-out old man.

That task being completed to his satisfaction, Mr. Cabot sauntered out upon the streets and was presently lost in his thoughts. Mechanically he opened the door of his little den in the *Star* office. He stood horrified in the doorway, for a brisk young man, in his shirt sleeves, was superintending the work of two porters who were moving out his furniture.

"Here!" cried Mr. Cabot. Then he suddenly remembered, and withdrew, stumbling out of the room, hot with mortification that he should have forgotten.

Mr. Cabot waited a week at his hotel for the editors to call upon him. But no editors came.

This was a crushing disappointment. Mr. Cabot took the blow as another evidence of the demoralization of the times. During the weeks of humiliation that followed, Cabot went from office to office murdering his pride. The editors all seemed to him to be half-fledged boys. Some of them were politely regretful. Some of them were scantily respectful. None of them seemed to have an opening for a Shakespearian purist, who spent most of his time roasting the heavy advertisers.

"Possibly if you went farther West——" suggested the last editor vaguely.

Cabot laughed bitterly. "Why don't you tell me the truth—that you don't want me?"

During the next five or six months the old man gradually dropped from his clubs. He dropped from his café to the coffeehouses. He began studying the "want" advertisements in the theatrical papers. He even wrote a note to the managing editor of the *Star*, intimating that he might be induced to resume his old place on the paper. But the *Star* had a new dramatic critic—a young man who wrote stinging paragraphs about the reigning favorites; sometimes committed slang, and was frankly bored by Shakespeare.

Finally a new evening paper started, and Cabot secured a place by virtue of the name he had once had in New York. When a new paper starts in a large city, the securing of a position means nothing. Men are "hired" and "fired" almost in the same breath. A stream of ambitious youth marches boldly in at one door and creeps dejectedly out at the other. A new paper tries them all. The editorial room of a new paper is a smelter where all the ore offered is tried out.

It happened that this paper had a

particular and special reason for attempting to appeal to conservative people, and it impressed the managing editor that the name of Cabot would make a good feature for the opening splash.

Cabot's first critique written in the new office was a terrific experience for him. He had a desk out in the editorial room where reporters, artists, and editors were all jumbled together. The place seemed to be a madhouse. Boys were rushing around his desk with their hands full of copy and proof. Bells were jangling on the editors' desks, while over his head came the steady clattering roar of the linotype machines. It made his head whirl. He couldn't think; he could hardly see. Every few minutes a young person in shirt sleeves bustled up to the desk and ordered him to hurry.

When at length Cabot had dribbled on to the end of it, the young man snatched up the copy from the desk, glanced down a few paragraphs, and said "Oh, hell!" in a voice tinged with disgust and dismay.

Presently the managing editor sent for Mr. Cabot and explained that the proprietor of the theater Mr. Cabot was writing about was to be one of the heaviest advertisers.

"And you," said the managing editor, "have simply panned the life out of the show. You might as well understand right here and now that all this guff about Shakespeare must be canned. We are not trying to elevate the stage. We want some stuff that will make people sit up. We want something that will make them say 'Gee whiz!' when they open the paper. You understand? Girls! Girls! That's what the public wants. Everybody is sick of this high-brow stuff."

After this experience, Cabot did not try any more newspapers. Some one persuaded him to start a weekly magazine which should uphold the traditions of art and the stage.

The magazine upheld the traditions of the stage for two months during which time it devoured the last cent of Cabot's savings. Then it expired, and the traditions of the stage had to stagger on alone.

### III.

Cabot came at last to a bench in the park. With just half a dollar left in his pocket, his footsteps turned instinctively down the trail of the derelicts. He wandered about, looking with disgust at the sleeping bums, until, at last, he found an empty bench.

Directly across the street was a big, lighted pavilion, with a squadron of automobiles standing in front. As Cabot timidly sought out the bench, a burst of tumultuous applause surged out from the pavilion.

It was a prize fight, and the featherweight champion of the world had gone down for the count. He was on his hands and knees on the canvas, a dull, puzzled look on his young, blood-stained face. One of his seconds had crawled around the edge of the ring and was throwing water over him with a sponge, entreating him to get up and fight.

"Bunch," he cried. "Get up. He's counting you out."

The referee, holding back an eager fighter with one hand, began to toll off the seconds.

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine——"

The champion sighed, and tried dizzily to get to his feet.

"Ten—you're out!" cried the referee. A frenzied yell announced a new featherweight champion of the world.

Cabot watched for a long time in the darkness while the crowds left the fight pavilion. The automobiles sputtered and chattered and dashed away with a crisscross of searchlights. The street in front of the pavilion was being cleared by the police.

A furious cheer burst from those who lingered as a boy in a sweater hurried down the front steps and across the sidewalk to his automobile attended by a dozen men. It was the new champion of the world. As his automobile whirled away, the crowd gave a last cheer.

The cheer was answered by a sob at Cabot's side. He turned in surprise to see a tow-headed boy, about twenty years old, with a peanut cap on the back of his head. He had buried his face in his hands, and Cabot could see that his hands were wound with heavy tape. The boy's sobs hurt Cabot. He wondered if he, too, were a derelict. It was hard to be a derelict so young. Perhaps he was hungry. That last half dollar burned in Cabot's pocket.

"Excuse me," he said. "Are you hungry?"

The boy straightened up and wiped his eyes with his bandaged hands.

"I ain't hungry," he said. "But I am everything else. You can mark me 'Present' for everything else except hungry."

Cabot was offended and hurt. He withdrew to his end of the bench and watched the janitors putting out the lights in the pavilion.

"Did you see the little argument tonight?" asked the boy moodily. Cabot pretended not to hear, but the boy went on: "It was that poke in the stomach that did it. I knew I had got mine when he handed me that hook in the refrigerator."

Cabot sat for a full minute regarding the boy with a kind of horror. At length he asked in a strained voice: "Are you a prize fighter?" Cabot's impressions of prize fighters were based upon illustrations in the old editions of Dickens—human brutes with little pig eyes.

"Are you a prize fighter?"

Bunch Dorgan grinned a rueful grin. "Just about now," he said, "that cheap

skate is sitting around some hotel telling the sporting reporters that I ain't."

After all, Bunch Dorgan was only a broken-hearted boy of twenty. So he sat on a park bench in the dark and told his troubles to the Shakespearian purist who raged when Frohman put *Shylock* into the wrong kind of shoes.

"I wouldn't care so much for m'self," sobbed Bunch Dorgan. "It's Artie, my brother. He ain't any rough-neck, like me," he added warningly; "Artie is a highbrow."

Bunch gulped down a sob, and went on: "You know we're from Frisco. I went to school, same as Artie. Nothing doing. Old Kid Cæsar had the number hung on me before I had Gaul divided into three parts. When the earthquake came it burned my old man's store, and he up and died. My old man was like Artie—classy, but he didn't have no punch. After he died I went to work out in the Union Iron Works, where they built them battle-ships."

"One night a circus come to town and a lot of us boys went down. The ringmaster come out and began holler-ing a lot of bunk about the Demon of the Deadly Fists who would give anybody one hundred dollars to stand before him for one round. On the level, mister, I don't know what I done it for, but when he said that about the one hundred dollars I slid down into the ring and said I would take a chance.

"The ringmaster he yells, 'Beware, boy, the sting of death is in every blow!'

"Just then there was a disturbance in the bleachers. My brother Artie had fainted. They put the gloves on me and somebody rung a bell. The Demon of the Deadly Fists came jumping across the ring at me like a bull buffalo. I just remember wondering what would become of Artie if he killed me; then I soaked him."

Bunch gave a little snicker through his tears.

"Did you—did he——" asked the critic anxiously.

"The next thing I knew," said Bunch, "the Demon of the Deadly Fists was sprawled out on the mat, kicking like a dying chicken. It took five minutes to bring him to. Artie was nearly as bad off."

"And then——" suggested Cabot.

"Then I became a fighter," said Bunch simply. "Artie couldn't never get used to it. When our mother died, I sent Artie to college. Gee, that was all Artie was good for! He is one of them pale kids that would sit down in front of one of King Solomon's banquets and starve to death because he didn't have a clean fork. I thought maybe when he got to college the rah-rah boys and the football lads would rub some of it off him. Nothing doing. Artie come to a clinch wit' a Greek dictionary the first day and never let go.

"One time I went up to college to see him. Artie was a game little sport and took me around just like I belonged, but he slips to me please not to say anything about prize fighting. Of course, I took a tumble, and beat it. Too much class for me.

"I never could get Artie to come within a mile of a training camp until last year, when I was matched wit' a Swede from St. Paul. I got him to come up and work out wit' me for his health. It made me think of back in Frisco when the priest came to make a parish call. I made old Moose Seigel, my trainer, run for his life. Moose is a good old guy, but he ain't got no front teeth, and he calls his wife his 'rag.' I told all the guys at the camp I would beat them to death if they pulled off any rough stuff wit' Artie around.

"Everything was going great when I got a roast in a paper that pretty nearly killed Artie. There used to be a guy named William Ellington Cabot who wrote theyater news for one of the pa-

pers. Artie was nuts over that guy. I guess he thought he invented the dictionary. He used to sit around reading this Cabot's dope all day long.

"Well, you can imagine Artie when this guy Cabot comes out in the paper and calls me an abysmal brute. I don't know what an abysmal brute is, but it was a knock-out for Artie. He just turns white, and drops the paper. He wouldn't even stay for dinner. He just beats it back for college."

The boy bowed his head in his hands. "On the level, mister, it broke me all up. When I asked Artie to come to my training camp when I was training for this fight, he wouldn't do it. He made some excuse. You know how it is, mister, when you're training. Things get on your nerves. Believe me, I was all in before I stepped into the ring to-night. That cheap skate over at the hotel thinks he hung the number on me. It was old Kid Shakespeare W. Cabot that handed me mine, and cost me the championship."

The old critic got shakily to his feet. His face was white and his voice was trembling. "My boy," he said, "I am William Ellington Cabot."

The old man was tremulously searching his pockets. "I regret," he faltered, "that my means of atonement are so limited. I have only this half dollar left. I beg that you will take it. It will save you at least temporarily from hunger. It will——" Cabot's voice became an inaudible mutter.

Bunch Dorgan had eight thousand dollars in greenbacks in his pocket—his end of the purse. But with the intuitive tact that sometimes characterizes men of his class, he silently took the half dollar and put it in his pocket.

#### IV.

A month later the newspaper announced that Bunch Dorgan had been rematched with the new champion of

the world. But Bunch seemed to have disappeared from his old haunts. Jimmy Krantz hunted him for a week and had about given up the search in despair when he happened to meet Bunch on the street. His arms were loaded with squashy-looking bundles, one of which was leaking blackberry pie.

Jimmy screamed with laughter. "Bunch Dorgan's been to a delicacy store!" he yelled.

The dethroned champion shifted his bundles and stared at the young man sarcastically. "Say, that's what I call a real joke. 'Bunch Dorgan's been to a delicacy store.' Gee, but that's funny! Honest, you ought to get that copyrighted. But, take it from me, son, don't go round the corner, because you'll see a whole bunch of people coming out of a delicacy store, and it'll be so funny it will kill."

The scion of the Krantz family instantly sobered his countenance. "Excuse me," he said, "but I've been looking for you."

"Why didn't you inquire at the delicacy store?" suggested Bunch cuttingly.

Jimmy flushed and hesitatingly laid his plans before the great man. He wanted to star the ex-champion in a drama.

"You're sure to win back the championship," he said, "and we will have it all rehearsed and ready to shoot out on the road."

"Who's the sucker that's going to put up the money? You can be sure I ain't," said Bunch suspiciously.

Jimmy reddened. "I—I was going to put up the money," he said meekly.

"What for?"

"I—I thought I would like to be a manager," faltered the millionaire.

"You're a good kid," said the ex-champion, relenting a little. "What am I going to play—*Hamlet*?"

"I'll hire some guy to write a play for you," said Jimmy joyously.

Bunch stopped so suddenly that the pie fell with a squunch and bled red over the sidewalk. "I know the guy that can do it," he cried, whereupon he told Jimmy all about his meeting with Cabot on the bench in the park.

"I'll tell you, Jimmy," he said. "The old guy was all in. He had just half a dollar left, and when I gets through telling him the sad story of my life the old boy shoves me the half, and tells me perhaps it will keep me from getting hungry. Can you beat that—me with eight thousand bucks in my pocket! I was afraid I'd hurt the old man's feelings, so I took the half, and we staked ourselves to the rottenest meal I ever ate in my life.

"I wanted to take him to a hotel, but I couldn't figure how to do it without getting on his pride, so I had to sit up all night wit' him in the park. Wouldn't it jar you?"

"The next day I put it up to him that we should both go out to look for work and split whatever purse we got. I came back that night and let on to him I had earned two dollars. Stalling along that way, I managed to get the old man to resume the eating habit. Jimmy, believe me, he was so hungry he was weak.

"I've been having an awful time. Jimmy, honest I ain't had a square meal for a month. I didn't go too strong on finding odd jobs, and the old boy and I have been living on tenement-house diet. I've ate so many Saratoga chips I crackle inside. Looka here!"

Bunch spread out his bundles on the curb. "What do you know about this? Hash, ten cents; potato salad, five cents; succotash, five cents; pickles, five cents."

"Why didn't you sneak out and punish a beefsteak on the side?" suggested Jimmy.

"I thought of that," said Bunch wist-

fully, "but it didn't seem on the square to the old boy."

"I'll take him back on the *Star*," said Jimmy easily.

"He'd die before he would go back to your rotten old sheet!" snorted Bunch indignantly, "after the way you treated him. You don't know how to appreciate real class on your paper."

"But," pleaded Jimmy, "he couldn't write a play. It would queer everything."

"All right," said Bunch decisively, beginning to pick up his bundles.

"Wait," interposed the millionaire, in alarm. "I'll tell you what I'll do: Tell him to go ahead and write the play. We'll give it a try-out on the ham route. If it makes a hit, I'll pay him a thousand dollars for it."

"You'll pay him a good fat royalty for it!" said Bunch firmly.

"All right, then; I'll pay him a royalty."

The next few weeks were filled with excitement for Bunch and Cabot. Bunch watched the construction of the play with awe—but vague dissatisfaction.

"It's great," he said politely. "But hadn't you ought to put in something to make them holler? Course I'm a dub at this game, but I should think you would have me say something about my poor old gray-haired mother. Gimme a speech to say about how I'd rather starve in rags than sell my honor."

Cabot smiled pityingly, and patted Bunch on the shoulder. "You're a kind-hearted lad," he said.

"Meaning back to the timber line for mine," said Bunch, smiling ruefully. "All right, Mr. Cabot; you'll have to excuse me for cutting in wit' my rough stuff."

When it came the duel scene, Bunch doggedly rebelled. "Ain't there going to be no fighting?" he cried, in dismay.

"Certainly," retorted the playwright tartly. "Don't you see the duel?"

"I know, but what do we fight with?"

"You fight with rapiers."

"What's rapiers?"

"The rapier," began Cabot sententiously—"the rapier was the sword of court—the sword of romance—the sword of honor—the rapier——"

"Aw, nix fer the stickers!" cried Bunch, in alarm. "I ain't no bull-fighter."

After a long argument, Cabot surrendered. "I am disappointed in you," he said. "I had hoped you would appreciate the dramatic unities——"

"The gang that's going to pay good money to see me in this play don't want no dramatic unions," said Bunch. "They want to see me fight."

Cabot merely bowed. But after that he spoke of the play with contempt. He read no more of the manuscript aloud to Bunch. His ideals had received another solar plexus.

In due time Bunch delivered the finished product to Jimmy Krantz. He tried to bluff it through with an air of confidence. "It's great dope!" he said briskly. "Lots of class. You had an awful nerve to fire the old man. Why, he's a reg'lar Shakespeare."

Jimmy Krantz, on any subject except prize fighting, was a level-headed young man. He read a few pages of the 'script and looked up wildly. "What kind of bunk is this you are trying to shoot at me?"

"It's not bunk, it's a play," replied Bunch stiffly.

"Gee, I should say it is a play!" said Jimmy sardonically. "Listen to this." And Jimmy read aloud a few resounding sentences that sounded like Shakespeare doing his best.

"Do I have to say that?" inquired Bunch suspiciously.

"You sure do!"

Bunch stiffened his shoulders. "Well, if it's in the play it must be all right,"

he said. "The old guy knows all about plays."

"For the love of Mike, what do you know about this?" snorted Jimmy, reading on in the manuscript. "The stage directions say that the duke is to wear blue tights and a ruff and a court sword."

"Who's the duke?" asked Bunch weakly.

"You are," said Jimmy, with a grin.

Bunch wiped the cold perspiration from his forehead. "Well, have you got any kick against me wearing blue tights?"

Jimmy snickered. "Certainly not," he said. "You'll be a cute chorus girl, Agnes."

In the end, they conspired against the duel scene. Jimmy invented a somewhat startling scene wherein the noble duke threw aside his sword and fought the villain with eight-ounce gloves.

## V.

It was arranged that the play should be tried out at Cyclone—a village on the dog route—without any reporters around.

While they were engaging the actors, Jimmy Krantz had a number of fits of abstracted meditation. Something was on his mind. He objected to every actor mentioned for the part of the villain who was to fight Bunch in the play. One was "rotten," the next was a "ham," and the rest were "dubs."

"Say, what's the matter wit' you?" demanded Bunch.

"Well," confessed Jimmy, "I was just thinking I would like to play that part myself—just at the try-out, you know."

"Jimmy," said Bunch, with awful candor, "I think I'll let you do it. I'd like to knock your block off. You make me just about that tired."

It was difficult, in the circumstances, to say which of the three waited for the

début of "The Duke's Revenge" most eagerly.

Cabot was at last to see on the stage a play made by his own pen.

No one knew of the manuscripts that lay rejected and yellow and dust-covered in his trunk—unrealized dreams. To Jimmy, it meant a chance to box in public with a real champion, stripped to the waist and with the plaudits of the crowd in his ears. Jimmy was secretly of the opinion that a new star of pugilism would be discovered that night. To Cyclone, it meant a lot of things—mainly financial.

The fatal night came at last. They rented the town hall, and the manager thereof secured an audience by industriously scattering passes all over town. The place was packed with the hottest sports on the commuter route. By common consent the middle of the front row was yielded to the local champion who worked daytimes in the livery stable. There were two spirited fights in the hall before the curtain went up, and Mike, the janitor, was wittily cheered when he came out to trim up the kerosene lamps. Music was furnished by the silver cornet band, led by the clerk of the drug store.

The launching of "The Duke's Revenge" was not auspicious. Bunch couldn't get on the blue tights and rebelled at the rapier. "Say, if I'm a dog, tie a tin can on me," he growled, "but nix fer this thing. It gets down between my legs."

As they didn't want Cabot to see how they had changed the play, they easily persuaded him to stay out in the lobby where the nervous strain would not be so great. The old man walked up and down the foyer, biting his nails, listening to the impatient whistles in the hall. "I'm better out here," he said. "I can tell by the applause whether it succeeds or not; and if they should call for the author, I can be ready—" The rest died in the old man's throat.

Bunch suddenly dropped his sword. "Listen, Jimmy," he said, "if they applaud, you've got to accept the old man's play."

"Go on," objected Jimmy, in dismay. "These rubes would yell for a moving picture of a man eating his supper."

"Aw, well—all right, then," he reluctantly agreed, as Bunch began tearing off his sword belt.

As it turned out, Jimmy was entirely too optimistic about the applause.

Out in the lobby, Cabot heard the overture die away, with the bass drum and tuba finishing in a dead heat. He knew the curtain had gone up. Then a hush—portentous and dismal.

Inside the theater, things were going very badly. Bunch got his sword tangled between his legs and fell down. At this, a snicker broke out. He forgot his part, and stood staring in fascinated horror at Jimmy, who was trying to prompt him. Somebody in the audience meowed like a cat.

"Gee, but this is a dandy play!" whispered Jimmy savagely, as they came close together in one of the scenes.

"You'd queer any play!" retorted Bunch.

"Well, you're not so many—stumbling over your sword." snarled Jimmy.

"You wait till that fight scene; you'll get yours," said Bunch.

The play was hopelessly floundering. All over the house people were beginning to get up and go out. Boys in the gallery began to give catcalls and to mimic the lines. "By my faith, Sir Anthony, this is a punk play," came in a shrill falsetto voice from the orchestra chairs.

Bunch suddenly stopped where he stood and whispered hoarsely to Jimmy: "Remember, if they applaud you gotta accept the play."

"A swell chance!" sneered Jimmy.

Bunch turned to the wings and called to the property man: "Gimme them gloves!"

"But what are we going to fight about? I have to insult you first, and then we fight," protested Jimmy.

"Hurry up and insult me, then," said Bunch shortly.

If the audience had been listening at all they would have been amazed at the dramatic somersault taken by Mr. Cabot's classic one-act drama. Without any warning or any reason, the duke and the villain took off their rapiers, laced on boxing gloves, and began to fight.

The audience suddenly sat up and began to take notice, for it didn't look like a stage boxing match. Bunch's face was drawn up into a menacing scowl. He showed his teeth like a wolf. The audience recognized, by instinct, the fighting face of the former champion of the world. Jimmy recognized it, too, somewhat with dismay.

"What's the matter?" he muttered, as Bunch lowered his head and tore in—a vicious little fighting animal. But Bunch's only reply was a hard right swing.

Jimmy ducked and backed away. He knew that he either had to jump over the footlights or make the fight of his life. After all, this was the chance he had been looking for. Jimmy was a game boy, and real fighting blood surged through his blue veins. He lowered his head and made a swipe at the champion.

Out in the foyer, Cabot, enduring tortures, had to clutch the wall to keep from falling when a mighty cheer and a roar of applause flooded out to him. He tried to imagine which lines had swept them off their feet. But before he could make up his mind, a fresh and louder gust roared out to him.

"Where are they now?" he cried to the doorkeeper. But the doorkeeper had rushed headlong back into the



house, and Cabot was bumped back out of the way by a rush of the departing audience trying to get back into the house.

Could Cabot have forced his way into the theater, he would have seen a very sick little millionaire taking the count, with Bunch standing grimly over him, waiting for him to get up. "Got enough?" whispered Bunch. But Jimmy's only reply was to get dizzily to his feet and make a blind, headlong, savage rush at Bunch.

He could only see dimly the half-naked body of the boy in front of him; but Jimmy was game.

"Give him the scissors blow!" yelled some one in the crowd. The audience answered the voice with a roar: "Give him the scissors blow!"

A hard glitter came into Bunch Dorgan's eyes. His head lowered a little. His arms hung poised like the bodies of two snakes about to strike. As he walked forward to meet Jimmy's rush, he rocked with a curious shuffle. It was the walk of a jungle animal ready to dodge in any direction.

Centuries had been swept aside. Jimmy Krantz was rushing upon the naked strength and brute skill of a paleolithic cave man. Bunch had suddenly taken up the inheritance of his ancestors who swung from trees and killed their enemies with their bare hands.

His little, half-shut eyes ran over the boy's body, coldly and critically like a connoisseur. With a stabbing, vicious motion, the heel of his left fist dug down into the bare white body, a little below the armpit and about an inch forward. Bunch had planted his famous scissors blow. A look of bewildered pain—a dull, puzzled look came into Jimmy's eyes.

Out in the foyer, Cabot's senses reeled before the cyclone of applause. The place began whirling about. The old man had fainted. While the box-

office clerks were dashing about throwing water in his face, the stage hands were waving smelling salts beneath the nostrils of a dreadfully ill little millionaire. Jimmy had taken the count.

As his eyelids fluttered and the color came back to his face, Bunch bent over him and said sociably: "Well, they applauded, Jimmy; you got to take the old man's play."

## VI.

Two weeks later Bunch Dorgan won back the featherweight championship of the world. After the fight he sat with a hack writer at a table in the back of a big café.

"I want you to write me a play where somebody makes a crack about my poor old gray-haired mother and I punch his noodle. I don't want nothing to say—unless you might have me say, 'I'd rather starve in rags than sell my honor,' or something like that, y'understand; but no long speeches about the soul of St. Anthony. And say, the name of this piece has got to be 'The Duke's Revenge.'"

"What's a duke got to do with it?" asked the bewildered writer.

"Never mind; if I'm payin' fer this piece I can call it 'The Duke's Revenge' if I want to, can't I?"

"Sure; you can call it 'The Mud Turtle's Romance' if you want to, but you don't need to get sore about it."

"My young friend," said Cabot one day to Artie, "it is a mistake to suppose that the masses do not appreciate the drama constructed along classical lines. I may mention—ahem—as a case in point my own trifle—'The Duke's Revenge' 'now on the road.

"Quite a curious instance, I may say. Though I have been drawing a royalty—I may say a handsome royalty—this long time, I have never seen my own play acted. Your brother says he could not act if I were in the audience."

# The Age Limit

By Frank L. Packard

*Author of "Owsley and the 1601," "Rat River Special," Etc.*

Despite our talk of peace we love a fighter, the man who sets himself a task and to achieve it is ready to grapple with death itself. Packard has told us of some of the heroes of the Hill Division, hard-tongued, hard-fisted, hard-faced, rough, without much polish perhaps as some rank polish, but with hearts that are right, and big as a woman's. Fighters all, doing a hero's work as any soldier fighting for his flag on the battlefields of Europe. This is a story of one of the gallant fellows who had passed the age limit—and the telling is as though men stood erect, bareheaded, at "salute" to the passing of the Old Guard.

AS its scarred and battle-torn colors are the glory of a regiment, brave testimony of hard-fought fields where men were men, so to the Hill Division is its tradition. And there are names there, too, on the honor roll—not famous, not world-wide, not on every tongue, but names that in rail-roading will never die. The years have gone since men fought and conquered the sullen, gray-walled Rockies and shackled them with steel and iron, and laid their lives on the altar of one of the mightiest engineering triumphs the world has ever known; but the years have dimmed no memory, have only brought achievement into clearer focus, and honor to its fullness where honor is due. They tell the stories of those days yet, as they always will tell them—at night in the roundhouse over the soft pur of steam, with the yellow flicker of the oil lamps on the group clustered around the pilot of a 1600-class mountain greyhound—and the telling is as though men stood erect, bare-headed, at "salute" to the passing of the Old Guard.

Heroes? They never called themselves that—never thought of themselves in that way, those old fellows who have left their stories. Their uniform was a suit of overalls, their "decorations" the grime that came with the day's work—just railroad men, hard-tongued, hard-fisted, hard-faced, rough, without much polish, perhaps, as some rank polish, with hearts that were right and big as a woman's—that was all.

MacCaffery was one of these; and this is old Dan MacCaffery's story, in the days when "Royal" Carleton sat in the swivel chair in the superintendent's office, when Regan, stumpy, fat, big-hearted Tommy Regan, was master mechanic, when Harvey was division engineer, when Riley was transmitter, and Donkin was chief dispatcher. Pretty good railroaders, that little crowd; there will never be better. Some of them have gone up, 'way up to the heads of systems, and some of them have gone into Division for the last time on orders from the Great Trainmaster.

MacCaffery? Dan was an engineer,

one of the old-timers, blue-eyed, thin—but you'd never get old Dan that way; he wouldn't look natural! You've got to put him in the cab of the 304, leaning out of the window, 'way out, thin as a bent toothpick, and pounding down the gorge and around into the straight, making for the Big Cloud yards, with a string of buff-colored coaches jouncing after him, and himself bouncing up and down in his seat like an animated piece of rubber. Nobody ever saw old Dan inside the cab; that is, all in. He always had his head out of the window. Said he could see better, though the wind used to send the water trickling down from the old blue eyes, and generally there were two little white streaks on his cheeks where no grime or coal dust ever got a chance at a strangle hold on the skin crevices. For the rest, what you could see sticking out of the cab over the whirling rod as he came down the straight was just a black, greasy, peaked cap, surmounting a scanty fringe of gray hair, and a wizened face, with a round little knob in the center of it for a nose.

But that isn't altogether old Dan MacCaffery, either. There was Mrs. MacCaffery. Everybody liked Dan, with his smile, and the cheery way he had of puckering up his lips sympathetically and pushing back his cap and scratching near his ear where the hair was, as he listened maybe to a hard-luck story; everybody liked Dan—but they swore by Mrs. MacCaffery. Leaving out the railroaders who worshiped her anyway, even the worst characters in Big Cloud, and there were some pretty bad ones in those early days, hangers-on and touts for the gambling hells and dives, used to speak of the little old lady in the lace cap with a sort of veneration.

There was something patrician about Mrs. MacCaffery. Not the cold, stand-offish effect that's only make-believe,

but the real thing. The Lord knows, she had to work hard enough, but you never saw her rinsing the washtub suds from her hands and coming to the door with her sleeves rolled up. The last thing you'd ever think there was in the house was a washtub. Little lace cap over smoothly parted gray hair, little black dress with a little white frill around the throat, and just a glad look on her face whether she'd ever seen you before or not—that was Mrs. MacCaffery.

As far back as any one could remember she had always looked like that, always a little old lady—never a young woman, although she and Dan had come there years before, even before the operating department had got the steel shaken down into anything that might with justice be called a permanent right of way. Perhaps it was the gray hair—Mrs. MacCaffery's hair had been gray then, when it ought to have been the glossy, luxuriant brown that the old-fashioned daguerreotype, hanging in the shanty's combination dining and sitting room, proclaimed that it once was.

Big Cloud, of course, didn't call her patrician, because they didn't talk that way out there. They said there was "some class" to Mrs. MacCaffery. Not that they ranked her any finer than Dan, for the last one of them ranked Dan as one of God's own noblemen, and there's nothing finer than that, only they figured, at least the women did, that back in the Old Country she'd been brought up to things that Dan MacCaffery hadn't.

Maybe that accounted for their sending young Dan East, and pinching themselves pretty near down to bed rock to give the boy an education and a start. Not that Mrs. MacCaffery had any notions that railroading and overalls and dirt was plebeian and beneath her—far from it. She was proud of old Dan, proud of his work, proud of his rec-

ord; she'd talk about Dan's engine to you by the hour, just as though it were alive, just as Dan would, and she would have hung chintz curtains on the cab windows and put flowerpots on the running boards if they had let her. It wasn't that Mrs. MacCaffery wasn't that kind. Only there were limitations to a cab, and she didn't want the boy—he was the only one they had—to start out with limitations of any kind that would put a slow order on his reaching the goal her mother's heart dreamed of. What goal? Who knows? Mothers always dream of their boy's future in that gentle, loving, all-conquering, up-in-the-clouds kind of a way, don't they? She wanted young Dan to do something, make a name for himself some day.

And young Dan did. He handed a jolt to the theory of heredity that should, if it didn't, have sent the disciples of that creed to the mat for the full count. When he got through his education, he got into a bank and backed the brain development the old couple had scrimped to the bone to give him against the market—with ten thousand dollars of the bank's money. Old Dan and Mrs. MacCaffery got him off—Mrs. MacCaffery with her sweet old face, and Dan with his grim old honesty. The bank didn't prosecute. The boy was drowned in a ferryboat accident the year after. And old Dan had been paying up ever since.

He was always paying up. Ten thousand dollars, even in a whole lot of yearly installments, didn't leave much to come and go on from his monthly pay check. He talked some of dropping the benefit orders he belonged to, and he belonged to most of them, but Mrs. MacCaffery talked him out of that on account of the insurance, she *said*, but really because she knew that Dan and his lodge rooms and his regalias and his worshipful titles were just part and parcel of each other, and that he either

was or was just going to be Supreme High Chief Illustrious Something-or-other of every order in town. Besides, after all, it didn't cost much compared with the other, just meant pinching a tiny bit harder. And so they pinched.

Old Dan and Mrs. MacCaffery didn't talk about their troubles. You'd never get the blues on their account, no matter how intimate you got with them. But everybody knew the story, of course, for everybody knows a thing like that; and everybody knew that dollars were scarce up at the MacCafferys' shanty for, though they didn't know how much old Dan sent East each year, they knew it had to be a pretty big slice of what was coming to him to make much impression on that ten thousand dollars at the other end—and they wondered, naturally enough, how the MacCafferys got along at all. But the MacCafferys got along somehow, outwardly without a sign of the hurt that was deeper than a mere matter of dollars and cents.

Dan was handling the cab end of one of the local passenger runs when things broke loose in the East—a flurry in Wall Street. But Wall Street was a long, long way from the Rockies, and, though the papers were full of it, there didn't seem to be anything intimate enough in a battle of brokers and magnates, bitter, prolonged, and to the death though it might be, to stir up any excitement or enthusiasm on the Hill Division. But when the smoke cleared away down East, the Hill Division and Big Cloud forgot their bridge troubles and their washouts and their slides long enough to stick their tongues in their cheeks and look askance at each other; and Carleton, the superintendent, in his swivel chair, pulled on the amber mouthpiece of his brier and looked at Tommy Regan, the master mechanic, who, in turn, pulled on his scraggly brown mustache and reached for his hip

pocket and his plug. The system was under new control.

"Who's H. Herrington Campbell when he's at home?" spluttered Regan.

"Our new general manager, Tommy," Carleton told him for the second time.

Regan grunted. "I ain't blind! I've read that much. Who is he—h'm? Know him?"

Carleton took the pipe from his mouth—a little seriously. "It's the P. M. & K. crowd, Tommy. Makes quite an amalgamation, doesn't it? Direct Eastern tidewater connection—what? They're a younger lot, pretty progressive, too, and sharp as they make them."

"I don't care a tinker's hoot who owns the stock," observed Regan, biting deeply at his blackstrap. "It's the bucko with the overgrown name in the center that interests me—who's he? Do you know him?"

"Yes," said Carleton slowly. "I know him." He got up suddenly and walked over to the window, looked out into the yards for a moment, then turned to face the master mechanic. "I know him, and I know most of the others; and I'll say, between you and me, Tommy, that I'm blamed sorry they've got their fingers on the old road. They're a cold, money-grabbing crew, and Campbell's about as human as a snow man, only not so warm-blooded. I fancy you'll see some changes out here."

"I turned down an offer from the Penn last week," said the fat little master mechanic reminiscently. "Mabbe I ought—"

Carleton laughed—he could afford to. There was hardly a road in the country that hadn't made covetous offers for the services of the gray-eyed master of the Hill Division, who was the idol of his men down to the last car tink.

"No; I guess not, Tommy. Our heads are safe enough, I think. When I go, you go; and as the P. M. & K. have been after me before, I guess

they'll let me alone now I'm on their pay roll."

"What kind of changes, then?" inquired Regan gruffly.

"I don't know," said Carleton. "I don't know, Tommy—new crowd, new ways. We'll see."

And, in time, Regan saw. Perhaps Regan himself, together with Riley, the trainmaster, were unwittingly the means of bringing it about a little sooner than it might otherwise have come. Perhaps not. Ultimately it would have been all the same. Sentiment and H. Herrington Campbell were not on speaking terms. However, one way or the other, in results, it makes little difference.

It was natural enough that about the first official act of the new board was a trip to look over the new property it had acquired; and if there was any resentment on the Hill Division at the change in ownership, there was no sign of it in Big Cloud when the word went out of what was coming. On the contrary, everybody sort of figured to make a kind of holiday affair of it, for the special was to lay off there until afternoon to give the big fellows a chance to see the shops. Anyway, it was more or less mutually understood that they were to be given the best the Hill Division had to offer.

Regan kept his pet flyer, the 565, in the roundhouse, and tinkered over her for two days, and sent for Dan MacCaffery. There'd been a good deal of speculation among the engine crews as to who would get the run, and the men were hot for the honor.

Regan squinted at old Dan, and squinted at the 565 on the pit beside him.

"How d'you think she looks, Dan?" he inquired casually.

The old engineer ran his eyes wistfully over the big racer, groomed to the minute, like the thoroughbred it was.

"She'll do you proud, Regan," he said simply.

And then Regan's fat little hand came down with a bang on the other's over-alled shoulder. That was Regan's way.

"And you, too, Dan," he grinned. "I got you slated for the run."

"Me?" said MacCaffery, his wizened face lighting up.

"You—sure!" Regan's grin expanded. "It's coming to you, ain't it? You're the senior engineer on the division, ain't you? Well, then, what's the matter with you? Riley's doing the same for Pete Chartrand. He's putting Pete in the aisles. What?"

Old Dan looked at Regan, then at the 565, and back at Regan again.

"Say," he said, a little huskily, "the missus'll be pleased when I tell her. We were talking it over last night, and hoping—just hoping, mind you—that mabbe——"

"Go tell her, then," said the little master mechanic, who didn't need any word picture to make him see Mrs. MacCaffery's face when she heard the news. And he gave the engineer a friendly push doorward.

Not a very big thing, to pull the latch of the Directors' Special? Nothing to make a fuss over? Well, no, perhaps not; not unless you were a railroad man. It meant quite a bit to Dan MacCaffery, though, and quite a bit to Mrs. MacCaffery, because it was an honor coming to Dan; and it meant something to Regan, too. Call it a little thing, but little things count a whole lot sometimes.

There had been a sort of little program mapped out. Regan, as naturally fell to his lot, being master mechanic, was to do the honors of the shops, and Carleton was to make the run up through the Rockies and over the division with the new directors; but at the last moment a telegram sent the superintendent flying East to a brother's sick bed, and the whole kit and caboodle of the honors, to his inward consternation and dismay, fell to Regan.

Regan, however, did the best he could. He fished out the black Sunday suit he wore on the rare occasions when he had time to know one day of the week from the other, wriggled into a boiled shirt and a stiff collar that was yellow for want of daylight, and, nervous as a galvanic battery, was down on the platform an hour before the train was due. Also, by the time the train rolled in, Regan's handkerchief was wringing wet from the sweat he mopped off his forehead. But five minutes after that the earnest little master mechanic, as he afterward confided to Carleton, "wouldn't have given a whoop for two trainloads of 'em, let alone the measly lot you could crowd into one private car." Somehow, Regan had got it into his head that he was going on his mettle before a crowd of up-to-the-minute, way-up railroaders. But when he found there wasn't a practical railroad man among them, bar H. Herrington Campbell, to whom he promptly and wholeheartedly took a dislike, Regan experienced a sort of pitying contempt, which, if it passed over the nabobs' heads without doing them any harm, had at least the effect of putting the fat little master mechanic almost superciliously at his ease.

Inspect the shops? Not at all. They were out for a joy ride across the continent and the fun there was in it.

"How long we got here? Three hours? Wow!" boomed a big fellow, stretching his arms lazily as he gazed about him.

"Let's paint the town, boys," wheezed an asthmatic, bowlegged little man of fifty, who sported an enormous gold watch chain. "Come on and look the natives over!"

Regan, who had been a little hazy on the etiquette of chewing in select company, reached openly for his plug, and kind of squinted over it noncommittingly as he bit in at H. Herrington Campbell, who stood beside him. Carle-

ton had sized the new general manager up pretty well—cold as a snow man—and he looked it. A spare-built man, with sharp, quick, black eyes, a face like a hawk, and lips so thin you wouldn't know he had any if one corner of his mouth hadn't been pried kind of open, so to speak, with the stub of a cigar.

"Go ahead and amuse yourselves, boys." H. Herrington Campbell talked out of the corner of his mouth where the cigar was. "We pull out at twelve-thirty sharp." Then to Regan curtly: "We'll look the equipment and shops over, Mr. Regan."

"Yes—sure," agreed Regan, without much enthusiasm, and led the way across the tracks toward the roundhouse as a starting point for the inspection tour.

The whole blamed thing was different from the way Regan had figured it out in his mind beforehand; but Regan set out to make himself agreeable, and H. Herrington Campbell listened. H. Herrington Campbell was the greatest listener Regan had ever met, and Regan froze—and then Regan thawed out again, but not on account of H. Herrington Campbell. Regan might have an unresponsive audience, but then Regan didn't require an audience at all to warm him up when it came to his roundhouse, and his big mountain racers, and the shops he lay awake at night planning and thinking about. Here and there, H. Herrington Campbell shot out a question, crisp, incisive, unexpected, and lapsed into silence again—that was all.

They inspected everything, everything there was to inspect; but when they got through Regan had about as good an idea of what impression it had made on H. Herrington Campbell as he had when he started out, which is to say none at all. The new general manager just listened. Regan did the talking.

Not that H. Herrington Campbell sized up as a misfit, not by any means, far from it! Regan didn't make that mistake for a minute. He didn't need to be told that the other knew railroad-ing from the ground up; he could feel it. But he didn't need to be told either that the other was more a high-g geared efficiency machine than he was a man; he could feel that, too.

One word of praise Regan wanted, not for himself, but for the things he loved and worked over and gave his soul to. And the one word, where a thousand were due, Regan did not get. The new general manager had the emotional instincts of a wooden Indian. Regan, toward the end of the morning, got to talking a little less himself—that is, aloud; inwardly he grew more eloquent than ever, cholericly so.

It was train time when they had finished, and the 565, with old Dan MacCaffery half out of the cab window as usual, had just backed down and coupled onto the special, as Regan and the new general manager came along the platform from the upper freight sheds. And Regan, for all his inward spleen, couldn't help it, as they reached the big, powerful racer, spick and span from the guard plates up.

"I dunno where you'll beat that, East or West," said Regan proudly, with a wave of his hand at the 565. "Wish we had more of that type out here. We could use 'em. What do you think of her, Mr. Campbell—h'm?"

H. Herrington Campbell didn't appear to take any notice of the masterpiece of machine design to speak of. His eyes traveled over the engine, and fixed on Dan MacCaffery in the cab window. Dan had an old, but spotless, suit of overalls on, spotless because Mrs. MacCaffery, who was even then modestly sharing her husband's honors from the back of the crowd by the ticket-office window, had made them spotless with a good many hours' work,

for grease sticks hard even in a wash-tub, the day before; and on old Dan's wizened face was a genial smile that would have got an instant response from anybody—except H. Herrington Campbell. H. Herrington Campbell didn't smile, neither did he answer Regan's question.

"How old are you?" said he bluntly to Dan MacCaffrey.

"Me?" said old Dan, taken aback for a moment. Then he laughed: "Blest if I know, sir; it's so long since I've kept track of birthdays. Sixty-one, I guess—no, sixty-two."

H. Herrington Campbell didn't appear to hear the old engineer's answer any more than he had appeared to take any notice of the 565. He had barely paused in his walk, and he was pulling out his watch now and looking at it as he continued along—only to glance up again as Pete Chartrand, the senior conductor, gray-haired, gray-bearded, but dapper as you please in his blue uniform and brass buttons, hurried by toward the cab with the green tissue copy of the engineer's orders in his hand.

Regan opened his mouth to say something—and, instead, snapped his jaws shut like a steel trap. The last little bit of enthusiasm had oozed out of the usually good-natured little master mechanic. Two days' tinkering with the 565, the division all keyed up to a smile, everybody trying to do his best to please, a dozen little intimate plans and arrangements talked over and worked out, were all now a matter of earnest and savage regret to Regan.

"By Christmas!" growled Regan to himself, as he elbowed his way through the crowd on the platform—for the town, to the last squaw with a papoose strapped on her back, had turned out to see the Directors' Special off—"by Christmas, if 'twere not for Carleton's sake, I'd tell him, the little tin god that he thinks he is, what I think of him!

And mabbe," added Regan viciously, as he swung onto the observation behind H. Herrington Campbell, "and mabbe I will yet!"

But Regan's cup, brimming as he held it to be, was not yet full. It was a pretty swell train, the Directors' Special, that the crowd sent off with a burst of cheering that lasted until the markers were lost to view around a butte; a pretty swell train, about the swellest that had ever decorated the train sheet of the Hill Division. Two sleepers, a diner and observation, mostly mahogany, and the baggage car a good enough imitation to fit into the color scheme without outraging even the most æsthetic taste, and the 565 on the front end, gold-leafed and shining like a mirror from polished steel and brass.

As far as looks went, there wasn't a thing the matter with it, not a thing; it would have pulled a grin of pride out of a Polack section hand—which is pulling some. And there wasn't anything the matter with the send-off, either, that was propitious enough to satisfy anybody; but, for all that, barring the first hour or so out of Big Cloud, trouble and the Directors' Special that afternoon were as near akin as twin brothers.

Nothing went right; everything went wrong—except the 565, that ran as smooth as a full-jeweled watch, when old Dan, for the mix-up behind him, could run her at all. The coupling on the diner broke. That started it. When they got that fixed, something else happened; and then the forward truck of the baggage car developed a virulent attack of hot box.

The special had the track swept for her clean to the Western foothills, and rights through. But she didn't need them. Her progress was a crawl. The directors, in spite of their dollar-ante and the roof of the observation car for the limit, began to lose interest in their game.

"What is this new toy we've bought?"



inquired one of them plaintively. "A funeral procession?"

Even H. Herrington Campbell began to show emotion. He shifted his cigar stub at intervals from one corner of his mouth to the other. Regan was hot—both ways—inside and out; hotter a whole lot than the hot box he took his coat off to, and helped old Pete Chartrand and the train crew slosh buckets of water over every time the Directors' Special stopped, which was frequently.

It wasn't old Pete's fault. It wasn't anybody's fault. It was just blamed hard luck, and it lasted through the whole blamed afternoon. And by the time they pulled into Elk River, where Regan had wired for another car, and had transferred the baggage, the Directors' Special, as far as temper went, was as touchy as a man with a bad case of gout. As they coupled on the new car, Regan spoke to old Dan in the cab—spoke from his heart.

"We're two hours late, Dan—h'm? For the love of Mike, let her out and do something. That bunch back there's getting so polite to me you'd think the words would melt in their mouths—what?"

Old Dan puckered his face into a reassuring smile under the peak of his greasy cap.

"I guess we're all right now we've got rid of that car," he said. "You leave it to me. You leave it to me, Regan."

Pete Chartrand, savage as though the whole matter were a personal and direct affront, reached up with a new tissue to the cab window.

"Two hours and ten minutes late!" he snapped out. "Nice, ain't it! Directors' Special, all the swells, we're doing ourselves proud! Oh, thunder!"

"Keep your shirt on, Pete," said Regan, somewhat consistently. "Losing your hair over it won't do any good. You're not to blame, are you? Well, then, forget it!"

Two hours and ten minutes late! Bad

enough; but, in itself, nothing disastrous. It wasn't the first time in railroading that schedules had gone aglimmering. Only there was more to it than that. There were not a few other trains, fast freights, passengers, locals, and work trains, whose movements and the movements of the Directors' Special were intimately connected, one with the other. Two hours and ten minutes was sufficient, a whole lot more than sufficient, to play havoc with a dispatcher's carefully planned meeting points over a hundred miles of right of way, and all afternoon Donkin had been chewing his lips over his train sheet back in the dispatcher's office at Big Cloud, until the Directors' Special, officially Special 117, had become a nightmare to him. Orders, counter orders, cancellations, new orders had followed each other all afternoon. And now a new batch went out, as the rehabilitated special went out of Elk River, and Donkin, with a sigh of relief at the prospect of clear sailing ahead, pushed the hair out of his eyes and relaxed a little as he began to give back the "completes."

It wasn't Donkin's fault; there was never so much as a hint that it was. The day man at Mitre Peak—forgot. That's all—but it's a hard word, the hardest there is in railroading. There was a lot of traffic moving that afternoon, and with sections, regulars, and extras all trying to dodge Special 117, they were crowding each other pretty hard—and the day man at Mitre Peak forgot.

It was edging dusk as old Pete Chartrand, from the Elk River platform, lifted a finger to old Dan MacCaffery in the cab, and old Dan, with a sort of grim smile at the knowledge that the honor of the Hill Division, what there was left of it as far as Special 117 was concerned, was up to him, opened out the 565 to take the "rights" they'd given him afresh for all there was in it.

From Elk River to Mitre Peak,

where the right of way crosses the Divide, it is a fairly stiff climb. From Mitre Peak to Glacier, at the cañon bed, it is an equally emphatic drop; and the track in its gyrations around the base of the towering, jutting peaks, where it clings as a fly clings to a wall, is an endless succession of short tangents and shorter curves. The Rockies had been subjected, but they had never been tamed—nor ever will be. Silent, brooding always, there seems a sullen patience about them, as though they were waiting warily—to strike. There are stretches, many of them, where no more than a hundred yards will blot utterly one train from the sight of another; where the thundering reverberations of the one, flung echoing back and forth from peak to peak, drown utterly the sounds of the other. And west of Mitre Peak it is like this—and the operator at Mitre Peak forgot the holding order for Extra Freight No. 69.

It came quick, quick as the winking of an eye, sudden as the crack of doom. Extra Freight No. 69 was running west, too, in the same direction as the Directors' Special; only Extra No. 69 was a heavy train and she was creeping down the grade like a snail, while the Directors' Special, with the spur and prod of her own delinquency and misbehavior, was hitting up the fastest clip that old Dan, who knew every inch of the road with his eyes shut, dared to give within the limits of safety on that particular piece of track.

It came quick. Ten yards clear on the right of way, then a gray wall of rock, a short, right-angled dive of the track around it—and, as the pilot of the 565 nosed the curve, old Dan's heart for an instant stopped its beat. Three red lights focused themselves before his eyes, the tail lights on the caboose of Extra No. 69. There was a yell from little Billy Dawes, his fireman.

"Dan—Dan, we're into her!" Dawes yelled. "We're into her!"

Cool old veteran, one of the best that ever pulled a throttle in any cab, there was a queer smile on old Dan MacCaffery's lips. He needed no telling that disaster he could not avert, could only in a measure mitigate, perhaps, was upon them; but even as he checked, checked hard, and checked again, the thought of others was uppermost in his mind—the train crew of the freight, some of them, anyway, in the caboose. Dawes was beside him now, almost at his elbow, nervy and full of grit as the engineer he'd shoveled for for five years and thought more of than he did of any other man on earth—and for the fraction of a second old Dan MacCaffery looked into the other's eyes.

"Give the boys in the caboose a chance for their lives, Billy, in case they ain't seen or heard us," he shouted in his fireman's ear. "Hold that whistle lever down."

Twenty yards, fifteen, between them—the 565 in the reverse bucking like a maddened broncho, old Dan working with all the craft he knew at his levers—ten yards—and two men, scurrying like rats from a sinking ship, leaped from the tail of the caboose to the right of way.

"Jump!" The word came like a half sob from old Dan. There was nothing more that any man could do. And he followed his fireman through the gangway.

It made a mess—a nasty mess. From the standpoint of traffic, as nasty a mess as the Hill Division had ever faced. The rear of the freight went to matchwood, the 565, the baggage, and two Pullmans turned turtle, derailing the remaining cars behind; but, by a miracle, it seemed, there wasn't any one seriously hurt.

Scared? Yes—pretty badly. The directors, a shaken, white-lipped crowd, poured out of the observation car to the track side. There was no cigar in H. Herrington Campbell's mouth.

It was dark by then, but the wreckage caught fire and flung a yellow glow far across the cañon, and in a shadowy way lighted up the immediate surroundings. Train crews and engine crews of both trains hurried here and there, torches and lanterns began to splutter and wink, hoarse shouts began to echo back and forth, adding their quota to a weird medley of escaping steam and crackling flame.

Regan, from a hasty consultation with old Dan MacCaffery and old Pete Chartrand, that sent the two men on the jump to carry out his orders, turned—to face H. Herrington Campbell.

"Nobody hurt, sir—thank God!" puffed the fat little master mechanic, in honest relief.

H. Herrington Campbell's eyes were on the retreating forms of the engineer and conductor.

"Oh, indeed!" he said coldly. "And the whole affair is hardly worth mentioning, I take it—quite a common occurrence. You've got some pretty old men handling your trains out here, haven't you?"

Regan's face went hard.

"They're pretty good men," he said shortly. "And there's no blame coming to them for this, Mr. Campbell, if that's what you mean."

H. Herrington Campbell's fingers went tentatively to his vest pocket for a cigar, extracted the broken remains of one—the relic of his own collision with the back of a car seat where the smash had hurled him—and threw it away with an icy smile.

"Blame?" expostulated H. Herrington Campbell ironically. "I don't want to blame any one; I'm looking for some one to congratulate—on the worst run division and the most pitiful exemplification of near-railroading I've had any experience with in twenty years—Mr. Regan."

For a full minute Regan did not speak. He couldn't. And then the

words came away with a roar from the bluff little master mechanic.

"By glory!" he exploded. "We don't take that kind of talk out here even from general managers. We don't have to! That's straight enough, ain't it? Well, I'll give you some more of it, now I've started. I don't like you. I don't like that pained look on your face. I've been filling up on you all morning, and you don't digest well. We don't stand for anything as raw as that from any man on earth. And you needn't hunt around for any greased words, as far as I'm concerned, to do your firing with. You can have my resignation as master mechanic of the worst run division you've seen in twenty years right now, if you want it—h'm?"

H. Herrington Campbell was gallantly preoccupied.

"How long are we stalled here for—the rest of the night?" he inquired irrelevantly.

Regan stared at him a moment—still apoplectic.

"I've ordered them to run the forward end of the freight to Glacier, and take you down," he said, choking a little. "There's a couple of flats left whole that you can pile yourselves and your baggage onto, and down at Glacier they'll make up a new train for you."

"Oh, very good," said H. Herrington Campbell curtly.

And ten minutes later the Directors' Special, metamorphosed into a string of box cars with two flats trailing on the rear, on which the newly elected board of the Transcontinental sat, some on their baggage, and some with their legs hanging over the sides, pulled away from the wreck and headed down the grade for Glacier. Funny, the transition from the luxurious leather upholstery of the observation to an angry, chattering mob of magnates, clinging to each others' necks over the jouncing, on the flooring of an old flat? Well, perhaps—it depended on how you look

at it. Regan looked at it—and Regan grinned for the savagery that was in him.

“But I guess,” said Regan to himself, as he watched them go, “I guess mabbe I’ll be looking for that job on the Penn, after all—h’m?”

Everybody talked about the Directors’ Special run—naturally. And, naturally, everybody wondered what was going to come from it. It was an open secret that Regan had handed one to the general manager without candy coating on the pill, and the Hill Division sort of looked to see the master mechanic’s head fall and Regan go. But Regan did not go; and, for that matter, nothing else happened—for a while.

Carleton came back and got the rights of it from Regan—and said nothing to Regan about his reply to H. Herrington Campbell’s letter, in which he had stated that if they were looking for a new master mechanic there would be a division superintendency vacant at the same time. The day man at Mitre Peak quit railroading—without waiting for an investigation. Old Dan MacCaffery and Billy Dawes went back to their regular run with the 304. And the division generally settled down again to its daily routine—and from the perspective of distance, if the truth be told, got to grinning reminiscently at the run the big bugs had had for their money.

Only the grin came too soon.

A week or so passed, pay day came and went. And the day after that a general order from the East hit the Hill Division like a landslide.

Carleton slit the innocent-looking official manilla open with his paper knife, chucked the envelope in the wastebasket, read the communication, read it again with gathering brows—and sent for Regan. He handed the form to the master mechanic without a word, as the latter entered the office.

Regan read it—read it again, as his chief had—and two hectic spots grew

bright on his cheeks. It was brief, curt, cold—for the good of the service, safety and operating efficiency, it stated. In a word, on and after the first of the month the services of employees over the age of sixty years would no longer be required. Those were early days in railroading; not a word about pensions, not a word about half pay; just sixty years and—out!

The paper crackled in Regan’s clenched fist; Carleton was beating a tattoo on his teeth with the mouthpiece of his pipe. There wasn’t another sound in the office for a moment. Then Regan spoke—and his voice broke a little.

“It’s a damned shame!” he said, through his teeth. “It’s that skunk Campbell.”

“How many men does it affect?” asked Carleton, looking through the window.

“I don’t know,” said the little master mechanic bitterly; “but I know one that it’ll hit harder than all the rest put together—and that’s old Dan MacCaffery.”

There was hurt in the super’s gray eyes, as he looked at the big-hearted little master mechanic’s working face.

“I was thinking of old Dan myself,” he said, in his low, quiet way.

“He hasn’t a cent!” stormed Regan. “Not a cent—not a thing on earth to fall back on. Think of it! Him and that little old missus of his, God bless her sweet old face, that have been scrimping all these years to pay back what that blasted kid robbed out of the bank. It ain’t right, Carleton. Sixty years! There ain’t a better man ever pulled a latch in a cab, there ain’t a better one pulling one anywhere to-day than old Dan MacCaffery. And—and I kind of feel as though I were to blame for this, in a way.”

“To blame?” repeated Carleton.

“I put him on that run, and Riley put old Pete Chartrand on. It kind of

stuck them under Campbell's nose. The two of them together, the two oldest men—and the blamedest luck that ever happened on a run!"

Carleton shook his head. "I don't think it would have made any difference in the long run, Tommy. I told you there'd be changes as soon as the new board sat in the saddle."

Regan tugged viciously at his scraggly brown mustache.

"Mabbe," he growled fiercely; "but Campbell's seen old Dan now, or I'd put one over on the pup—I would that! There ain't any birth register that I ever heard of out here in the mountains, and if Dan said he was fifty I'd take his word for it."

"Dan wouldn't say that," said Carleton quietly, "not even to hold his job."

"No, of course he wouldn't!" spluttered the fat little master mechanic, belligerently inconsistent. "Who said he would? And, anyway, it wouldn't do any good. Campbell asked him his age, and Dan told him. And—and—oh, what's the use? I know it, I know I'm only talking, Carleton."

Neither of them said anything for a minute; then Regan, pacing up and down the room, spoke again:

"It's a clean sweep, eh? Train crews, engine crews, everything—there ain't any other job for him. Over sixty is out everywhere. A white man; one of the whitest"—Regan sort of said it to himself—"old Dan MacCaffery. Who's to tell him?"

Carleton drew a match, with a long, crackling noise, under the arm of his chair.

"Me?" said Regan, and his voice broke again. He stopped before the desk, and, leaning over, stretched out his arm impulsively across it. "I'd rather have that arm cut off than tell him, Carleton," he said huskily. "I don't know what he'll say, I don't know what he'll do, but I know it will break his heart, and break Mrs. MacCaffery's

heart—Carleton." He took another turn the length of the room and back again. "But I guess it had better be me," said the little master mechanic, more to himself than to Carleton. "I guess it had. I'd hate to think of his getting it so's it would hurt any more than it had to."

And so Tommy Regan told old Dan MacCaffery that afternoon, the day after pay day.

Regan didn't mean to exactly, not then. He was kind of putting it off, as it were, until next day, and fretting himself sick over it. But that afternoon old Dan, on his way down to the roundhouse—Dan took out the regular passenger local that left Big Cloud at six-fifty-five every evening, and an hour ahead of running time with the 304 was as much a habit with Dan as breathing was—hunted Regan up in the latter's office, just before the six-o'clock whistle blew. For an instant Regan thought the engineer had somehow or other already heard the news, but a glance at Dan's face dispelled that idea as quickly as it had come. Dan was always smiling, but there was a smile on the wizened, puckered, honest old face now that seemed to bubble out all over it.

"Regan," said old Dan, bursting with happy excitement, "I just had to drop in and tell you on the way over to the roundhouse, and the missus, she says, 'You tell Mr. Regan, Dan; he'll be right down glad.'"

Regan got up out of his chair. There seemed a sense of disaster coming somehow that set him to breathing heavily.

"Sure, Dan—sure," he said weakly. "What is it?"

"Well," said Dan, "you know that—that trouble the boy got into back—back——"

"Yes, I know," said Regan hastily.

"Well," said Dan, "it's taken a long time, a good many years, but yesterday, you know, was pay day; and today, Regan, we, the missus and me, Regan, sent the last of that money East,

interest and all, the last cent of it, cleaned it all up. Say, Regan, I feel like I was walking on air, and you'd ought to have seen the missus sitting up there in the cottage and smiling through the tears. 'Oh, Dan!' she says, and then she gets up and puts her two hands on my shoulders, and I felt blamed near like crying myself. 'We can start in now, Dan, to save up for old age,' she says, smiling. Say, Regan, ain't it—ain't it fine? We're going to start in now and save up for old age."

Regan didn't say a word. It came with a rush, choking him up in his throat, and something misty in front of his eyes so he couldn't see—and he turned his back, searching for his hat on the peg behind his desk. He jammed his hat on his head, and jerked it low down over his forehead.

"Ain't you—glad?" said old Dan, a sort of puzzled hurt in his eyes.

"I'll walk over a bit of the way to the roundhouse with you, Dan," said Regan gruffly. "Come on."

They stepped out of the shops, and across a spur, old Dan, still puzzled, striding along beside the master mechanic.

"What's the matter, Regan?" he asked reproachfully. "I thought you'd be——"

And then Regan stopped, and his hand fell in a tight grip on the other's shoulder.

"I got to tell you, Dan," he blurted out. "But I don't need to tell you what I think of it. It's a damned shame! The new crowd that's running this road don't want anybody helping 'em to do it after the first of the month that's over sixty years of age. You're—you're out."

Old Dan didn't seem to get it for a minute; then a whiteness crept around his lips; and his eyes, from Regan, seemed to circuit in a queer, wistful way about the yards and fix finally on

the roundhouse in front of him; and then he lifted his peaked cap, in the way he had of doing, and scratched near his ear, where the hair was. He hit Regan pretty hard with what he said.

"Regan," he said, "there's two weeks yet to the end of the month. Don't tell her, Regan, and don't you let the boys tell her—there's two weeks she don't need to worry. I'd like to have her have them two weeks."

Regan nodded. There weren't any words that would come, and he couldn't have spoken them if there had.

"Yes," said old Dan, whispering to himself, "I'd kind of like to have her have them two weeks."

Regan cleared his throat, pulled at his mustache, swore under his breath, and cleared his throat again.

"What'll you do, Dan—afterward?"

Old Dan straightened up, looked at Regan, and smiled. "I dunno," he said, shaking his head and smiling. "I dunno; but it'll be all right. We'll get along somehow." His eyes shifted to the roundhouse again. "I guess I'd better be getting over to the 304," he said, and turned abruptly away.

Regan watched him go, watched the overalled figure with a slight shoulder stoop cross the turntable, watched until the other disappeared inside the roundhouse doors; and then he turned and walked slowly across the tracks and up-town toward his boarding house. "Don't tell her"—the words kept reiterating themselves insistently—"don't let the boys tell her."

"I guess they won't," said Regan, muttering fiercely to himself. "I guess they won't."

Nor did they. The division and Big Cloud kept the secret for those two weeks—and they kept it for long after that. The little old lady in the lace cap never knew—they ranked her high, those pioneering womenkind of hers in that little mountain town, those rough-

and-ready toilers who had been her husband's mates—she never knew.

But everybody else knew, and they watched old Dan, as the days went by, watched him, somehow, with a tight feeling in their throats, and kept aloof a little—because they didn't know what to say—kept aloof a little awkwardly, as it were. Not that there seemed much of any difference in the old engineer; it was more a something that they sensed. Old Dan came down to the roundhouse in the late afternoon an hour before train time, just as he always did, pattered and oiled around, and coddled the 304 for an hour, just as he always did, just as though he was always going to do it, took his train out, came back on the early-morning run, backed the 304 into the roundhouse, and trudged up Main Street to where it began to straggle into the buttes, to where his cottage and the little old lady were—just as he always did. And the little old lady, with the debt paid, went about the town for those two weeks happier looking, younger looking than Big Cloud had even seen her before. That was all.

But Regan, worrying, pulling at his mustache, put it up to little Billy Dawes, old Dan's fireman, one day in the roundhouse near the end of the two weeks.

"How's Dan take it in the cab, Billy?" he asked.

The little fireman rolled the hunk of greasy waste in his hands, and swabbed at his fingers with it for a moment before he answered; then he sent a stream of blackstrap juice viciously into the pit, and with a savage jerk hurled the hunk of waste after it and swore fiercely.

Regan blinked—and waited.

"Just the same as ever he was," said Billy Dawes huskily, after a silence. "Just the same—when he thinks you're not looking. I've seen him sometimes when he didn't know I was looking."

Regan said "H'm!" reached for his

plug, as was usual with him in times of stress, bit into it deeply, sputtered something hurriedly about new piston rings for the left-hand head, and, muttering to himself, left the roundhouse.

And that night old Dan MacCaffery took out the 304 and the local passenger for the run west and the run back east—just as he always did. And the next night, and for two nights after that he did the same.

Came then the night of the thirty-first.

It was the fall of the year, and the dusk fell early; and by a little after six, with the oil lamps lighted, that at best only filtered spasmodic yellow streaks of gloom about the roundhouse, the engines back on the pits were beginning to loom up through the murk in big, grotesque, shadowy shapes as Regan, crossing the turntable, paused for a moment hesitantly. Why he was there he didn't know. He hadn't meant to be there. He was just a little early for his nightly game of pedro with Carleton over in the super's office. It wasn't much more than half past six. So he had had some time to put in—that must be about the size of it. He hadn't meant to come. There wasn't any use in it, none at all, nothing he could do; better, in fact, if he stayed away. Only he had left the boarding house early, and he was down there now, standing on the turntable, and it was old Dan's last run.

"I guess," mumbled Regan, "I'll go back over the station. Carleton'll be along in a few minutes. I guess I will, h'm?"—only Regan didn't. He started on again slowly over the turntable, and entered the roundhouse.

There wasn't anybody in sight around the pit on which the 304 stood, nobody puttering over the links and motion gear, poking here and there solicitously with a long-spouted oil can, as he had half, more than half, expected to find old Dan doing; but

he heard some one moving about in the cab, and caught the flare of a torch. Regan walked down the length of the engine, and peered into the cab. It was Billy Dawes.

"Where's Dan, Billy? Ain't he about?" inquired Regan.

The fireman came out into the gangway.

"Yes," he answered; "he's down there back of the tender by the fitter's benches. He's looking for some washers he said he wanted for a loose stud nut. I'll get him for you."

"No; never mind," said Regan. "I'll find him."

It was pretty dark at the rear of the roundhouse in the narrow space between the engine tenders on the various pits and the row of workbenches that flanked the wall, and for a moment, as Regan reached the end of the 304's tender, he could not see any one. And then he stopped short as he made out old Dan's form down on the floor by the end bench as though he were groping for something underneath it.

For a minute, two perhaps, Regan stood there motionless, watching old Dan MacCaffery. Then he drew back, tiptoed softly away, went out through the engine doors, and, as he crossed the tracks to the station platform, brushed his hand hurriedly across his eyes.

Regan didn't play much of a game of pedro that night. His heart wasn't in it. Carleton had barely dealt the first hand when Regan heard the 304 backing down and coupling onto the local, and he got up from his chair and walked to the window, and stood there watching until the local pulled out.

Carleton didn't say anything—just dealt the cards over again, and began once more as Regan resumed his seat.

An hour passed. Regan, fidgety and nervous, played in a desultory fashion; Carleton, disturbed, patiently correct-

ing the master mechanic's mistakes. The game was a farce.

"What's the matter, Tommy?" asked Carleton gravely as Regan made a misdeal twice in succession.

"Nothing," said Regan shortly. "Go on, play; it's your bid."

Carleton shook his head.

"You're taking it too much to heart, Tommy," he said. "It won't do you any good—either of you—you or Dan. He'll pull out of it somehow. You'll see."

There was a queer look on Regan's face as he stared for an instant at Carleton across the table, and he opened his lips as though to say something—and closed them again in a hard line instead.

Carleton bid.

"It's yours," said Regan.

Carleton led. And then Regan, with a sweep of his hand, shot his cards into the center of the table.

"It's no good," he said gruffly, getting up. "I can't play the blamed game to-night. I——" He stopped suddenly and turned his head as a chair scraped sharply in the dispatcher's room next door.

A step sounded in the hall, the super's door was flung open, and Spence, on the night trick, put in his head.

One glance at the dispatcher and Carleton was on his feet.

"What's the matter, Spence?" he asked, quick and hard.

Regan hadn't moved, but Regan spoke now, answering the question that was addressed to the dispatcher, and answering it in a strangely assertive, absolute, irrefutable way.

"The local," he said. "Number forty-seven. Dan MacCaffery's dead."

Both men stared at him in amazement, and Spence mechanically nodded his head.

"Yes," said Spence, still staring at Regan, "there was some sort of en-



gine trouble just west of Big Eddy in the Beaver Cañon. I've cleared the line and ordered the wrecker out, but I haven't got the rights of it yet, only that somehow MacCaffery got his engine stopped just in time to keep the train from going over the bridge embankment—and went out doing it. There's no one else hurt. Dawes, the fireman, and Conductor Neale walked back to Big Eddy. I've got them on the wire now. Come into the other room."

Regan stepped to the door, and, with Carleton behind him, followed Spence into the dispatchers' room. There Carleton, tight-lipped, leaned against the table; Regan, his face like stone, took his place at Spence's elbow as the dispatcher dropped into his chair.

There wasn't a sound in the room for a moment save the clicking of the sender in a quick tattoo under Spence's fingers. Then Spence picked up a pencil and began scribbling the message on a pad as the sounder spoke. Billy Dawes was dictating his story to the Big Eddy operator.

"It was just west of Big Eddy, just before you get to the curve at the approach to the Beaver bridge," came Dawes' story, "and we were hitting up a fast clip, but no more than usual, when we got a jolt in the cab that spilled me into the tender and knocked Dan off his seat. It all come so quick there wasn't time to think, but I knew we'd shed a driver on Dan's side, and the rod was cutting the side of the cab like a knife through cheese. I heard Dan shout something about the train going over the embankment and into the river if we ever hit the Beaver curve, and then he jumped for the throttle and the air. There wasn't a chance in a million for him, but it was the only chance for every last one of the rest of us. He made it somehow, I don't know how; it's all a blur to me. He checked her, and then the

rod caught him, and——" The sounder broke, almost with a human sob in it, it seemed, and then went on again: "We stopped just as the three hundred and four turned turtle. None of the coaches left the rails. That's all."

Regan spoke through dry lips.

"Ask him what Dan was like in the cab to-night," he said hoarsely.

Spence looked up and around at the master mechanic as though he had not heard aright.

"Ask him what I say," repeated Regan shortly. "What was Dan like in the cab to-night?"

Spence bent over his key again. There was a pause before the answer came.

"He says he hadn't seen Dan so cheerful for months," said Spence presently.

Regan nodded curiously, as though it were the answer he expected—and then he nodded at Carleton, and the two went back to the super's room.

Regan closed the door behind him.

Carleton dropped into his chair, his gray eyes hard and full of pain.

"I don't understand, Tommy," he said heavily. "It's almost as though you knew it was going to happen."

Regan came across the floor, and stood in front of the desk.

"I did," he said in a low way. "I think I was almost certain of it."

Carleton pulled himself forward with a jerk in his chair.

"Do you know what you are saying, Tommy?" he asked sharply.

"I'll tell you," Regan said, in the same low way. "I went over to the roundhouse to-night before Dan took the three hundred and four out. I didn't see Dan anywhere about, and I asked Dawes where he was. Dawes said he had gone back to the fitters' benches to look for some washers. I walked on past the tender and I found him there down on the floor on his knees by one of the benches; but he

wasn't looking for any washers. He was praying."

With a sharp exclamation Carleton pushed back his chair, and, standing, leaned over the desk toward Regan.

Regan swallowed a lump in his throat—and shook his head.

"He didn't see me," he said brokenly; "he didn't know I was there. He was praying aloud. I heard what he said. It's been ringing in my head all night, word for word, while I was trying to play with those"—he jerked his hand toward the scattered cards on the desk between them. "I can hear him saying it now. It's the queerest prayer I ever heard, and I guess he prayed the way he lived."

"Yes?" prompted Carleton softly as Regan paused.

Regan turned his head away as his eyes filled suddenly—and his voice was choked.

"What he said was this, just as though he was talking to you or me: 'You know how it is. I wouldn't take that way myself unless You fixed it up for me, because it wouldn't be right

unless You did it. But I hope You'll think that's the best way out of it. You see, there ain't nothing left as it is, but if we fixed it that way there'd be the fraternal insurance to take care of the missus, and she wouldn't never know. And then my work is all done, and—and I'd like to quit while I was still on the pay roll—I'd like to finish that way, and to-night's the last chance.'"

Regan's lips were quivering as he stopped.

There was silence for a moment, then Carleton looked up from the blotter on his desk.

"Tommy," he said in his big, quiet way, as his hand touched Regan's sleeve, "tell me why you didn't stop him from going out to-night?"

Regan didn't answer at once. He went over to the window and stared out at the twinkling switch lights in the yards below—he was still staring out of the window as he spoke.

"He didn't put it up to me," said Regan. "He put it up to God."



## MAKING IT A LITTLE TOO STRONG

JUST outside a small town in the South the colored Baptists were conducting a tremendous revival meeting. Great sermons were being preached, religious fervor was at its height, and souls were being saved every day.

In order to keep up the good work, the leading Baptist minister in charge invited the leading colored Methodist minister to coöperate with him in the services. The invitation was accepted.

When the time came for the Baptist to offer prayer for the evening, the Methodist, in order to show his enthusiasm and coöperation, punctuated the various sentences and pleas by shouting out:

"Amen! Amen!"

This happened more than half a dozen times, and the congregation was stirred to an unusual degree by the repeated "Amen! Amen!"

At last the Baptist, reaching the peroration of his prayer, said in a loud, exultant tone:

"An' please grant dat each one of dese sinnahs will come forward and be immersed."

This ended the enthusiasm of the Methodist, who shocked everybody by shouting at the top of his voice:

"Naw, suh! Naw, suh!"

# The Conflict

A TALE OF THE WAR OF THE NATIONS

By Colonel Max Desprez

## SYNOPSIS OF PART I

As Robert Cameron, diplomatic representative of the United States to Luxembourg, awakes from his midsummer afternoon siesta, he is astonished and delighted to find his friend, Fairfax Morgan, a young American physician and tennis enthusiast, at his château gates. Morgan is in love with the diplomat's niece, Charlotte, who even at that very moment is receiving marked attention from Count Von Hollman, a German army officer of high rank. Cameron introduces the two men who are destined to become deadly rivals. An informal party is held on the lawn at which Von Hollman brews "May wine" and indulges in a sinister toast—"To the 'Day'!" Furthermore, he predicts that Morgan will see no tennis tournament at Nice that summer. Hardly has he spoken when the rumble of distant cannon is heard and German uhlans are seen patrolling the peaceful streets of Luxembourg. Germany is preparing for war with France! A telegram causes Von Hollman to leave the Cameron château hastily. Forgetting for a moment these ominous signs, Morgan accuses Charlotte of being in love with the German officer, but she soon convinces him of his folly in entertaining such thoughts. Excitement follows apace. That night a French aviator swoops down upon the Cameron grounds, huge Zeppelins in chase. Etienne Martin, the pursued bird man, begs for petrol that he may reach his country and warn it of its danger. Healy, Morgan's rough but true-hearted chaffeur, gives the needed gasoline to Martin, while Morgan, in his anxiety to help the airman, intercepts a charging uhlán, throwing the horseman to earth and into unconsciousness. Thus Martin gets the precious fuel, and flies into the night sky, the Zeppelins still after him. Von Hollman then appears at the château, furious at the abetted escape of the French aviator, and puts Morgan and Healy under arrest. The indications are that they will be court-martialed for interfering with a German soldier in discharge of his duty.

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(A Novel in Four Parts—Part II.)

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE POWER OF THE MACHINE.

**S**PEEDING along the Boulevard Adalbert, Morgan and his chauffeur, as prisoners, got their first glimpse of history in the making—the occupation of neutral territory by the advance guard of an army of invasion, bent upon striking at a foe beyond.

Reposing in the fancied security of a treaty guaranteed by major powers of Europe, inviolate for many years, the residents of the duchy had never dreamed of such an astounding proceeding—not to say such an unprecedented one. The swift entrance of the uhlans had given no opportunity for an alarm; and even had one been possi-

ble, what could this Pomeranian spaniel principality of less than one thousand square miles have done to check the advance of the gigantic mastiff of Germany, bent on camping in its diminutive kennel for the night?

Or what resistance would have availed on the part of a quarter of a million peaceful, devout inhabitants, against the overpowering horde of expertly trained Germans, every man of whom between eighteen and forty-five had only to take down his uniform and weapons if commanded so to do?

Although the night was now well advanced, nevertheless the atmosphere of disturbance on the one hand and military precision on the other were everywhere perceptible. As the auto containing Colonel Otto von Hollman and

his prisoners whirled past the Central Station and tram terminus, after turning into the Avenue de la Garde, the troops were already in command of the place, and, farther along, little knots of station employees and mechanics were descried being convoyed toward the Plateau du Rham. Morgan shuddered. The prison was on the plateau.

To his surprise, however, their own machine kept straight on across the main viaduct spanning the Petrusse, instead of turning toward the prison. It thundered across the river, the sentries saluting the machine with a respect that was obvious. The deference—not to say reverence—on several faces struck Morgan as rather singular under such circumstances, and he watched Von Hollman narrowly. The count's face, however, was inscrutable.

As they entered the main part of the city of Luxembourg, turning around the Cathedral Notre Dame, passing the ducal palace, and the Place d'Armes where only a few hours before the inhabitants had gathered to enjoy a concert by the municipal band, other signs of the invasion were plainly discernible. Gray-clad sentries in spiked helmets were at almost every corner. Rapid-fire guns, still canvas covered, were in position to command the streets of the city from all directions, fronting the Avenue de la Arsenal and the Eich Road.

They halted under the frowning walls of the Palace of Justice, and hard by the entrance to the Hotel de Ville, whose concourse was bristling with staff officers. Evidently this was to be the brigade headquarters for the night. Morgan and Healy descended at a curt command.

The military efficiency, the steadiness, and purpose of the German occupation drove the iron of despair deeper into the souls of both men as they ascended the steps. They felt themselves caught in the maw of a vast

and complicated machine. Protest or resistance seemed useless.

It was war, war as a business, as the Germans wage it, and not the feverish fantasy of a troubled dream.

The two were left in a small room. A sentry, with fixed bayonet, guarded the window, another stood at the door. Presently a lieutenant came with two more men. They were searched, and the process was courteous but thorough and efficient. Morgan, whose knowledge of German was limited, nevertheless comprehended the mutter of the officer as he left—something to the effect that he was an English spy, sending information to that country by way of America.

"Say!" demanded Healy, as the door again closed upon them. "What does that bird think he's saying—hey?"

Morgan shook his head soberly. "I'm afraid that we made a mistake in trying to help that aviator."

"This is like the third degree," said Healy. "But the count has got nothing on us. He didn't see us hand out the gasoline. He has no evidence."

"He seems to think he has," replied Morgan. A deep, melodious chorus of "*Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles,*" floated through the open window. Another detachment of infantry was marching past—then another and yet another, the last lustily singing "*Die Wacht am Rhein.*"

"A bunch of singing societies," commented Healy, with a levity that was not at all in keeping with Morgan's mood. "Cheer up, doc! On the dead level, we have a chanst to beat this charge, whatever it is! I'll get woid out to me district leader, and then——"

Morgan looked at him seriously. The somberness of his expression caused Healy's mouth to droop and the smile to leave his eyes. But Morgan was not thinking so much of himself as of Healy. Had he warned Healy of the risk which they were both running,

when giving aid and comfort to an acknowledged French spy, Healy might have most wisely decided to allow Etienne Martin to shift for himself—at least he would have had a freedom of choice in the matter, instead of allowing his habitual blind devotion to his employer to place him in this decidedly unpleasant position. Morgan resolved, whatever else occurred, to shoulder the blame. Healy could not be punished, in that event. The chauffeur's education had never included lectures on the rights of belligerents; abstruse discourses on articles of war; the difference between noncombatants and spies, nor any of the other thousand-and-one technical rules by which civilized nations have agreed that their wholesale murders shall be conducted.

The physician's reverie went back to the beginning—to the very hour when he had rolled up in his auto, and received Mr. Cameron's handclasp of welcome, to Count Otto von Hollman's subtle arrogance toward him; to the toast which the German had drunk with the ominous words: "To the day!"

That toast held an unpleasant significance. It was the terse expression of the deep-seated racial ambition and hope—a pledge to the hour when Germany should spring into the sunlight, the ruler of the world. Surely the count, for all his sneers at the impractical, was a dreamer and visionary himself. And surely, too, his dream was a glorious one.

For years it had been drunk—not by the rank and file of German population—but by the hereditary descendants of the house of Hohenzollern and the military caste which had kept all Europe in a state of apprehension since the Franco-German war.

*"To the day!"*

Why had Count Otto von Hollman—a well-bred man—selected such a florid toast at an innocuous lawn party, in neutral territory, and within the

privileged residence of the minister of a foreign power?

He was thinking of the peculiar expression of the count's eyes as Von Hollman gazed steadily at him over the brimming goblet of his fourth drink of the "May wine," when Healy's voice broke in upon his attempted analysis of conditions—as if in answer to his unspoken question.

"Say, doc!"

"What is it, Healy?"

"The count is a nut!"

"What makes you think that?"

"On the dead level, doc, I knew it the minute I seen him. If our machine hadn't been a self-starter, I'd have hit him with the crank handle. He isn't a dope fiend and he isn't crazy, yet—but he's on his way there. Did you ever see eyes like his before?"

In spite of his desperate plight, Morgan laughed. Then he leaned forward.

"Not too loud, Healy. We are prisoners, remember."

Healy lowered his voice to a husky whisper as he continued:

"I don't say he's crazy just because he locked us up here." Healy pushed one of the little iron chairs with which the room was furnished in Morgan's direction and took another for himself. "It was his duty to do that. Nobody could help seein' that Private Strassman had been hurt and that young Frenchy must have had some help in getting away. But that May wine went to his head a little too quick. He's dreamed a lot about that 'Day' he talks about, and he's a nut as sure as you live. A man gets a big idea like that in his head and then by and by the idea gets him. The count ought to cut out the May wine and the 'Hochs' and them fancy uniforms and go and live on a farm on a milk diet."

Another might have treated Healy's ideas as an alienist with scant consideration, but Morgan regarded him gravely. A fixed and dominating idea has always

been a dangerous thing, and certainly Hollman was fixed and dominated by the idea of Germany's future as the greatest of the world powers. And the circumstances that surrounded them now were not such as to calm the mind of a man with the faintest instinct for military glory and display. Even the steady pulse of Morgan beat a trifle faster at the steady, maddening roll of drums that they heard outside, and the shattering blare of bugles. And if Hollman were a little affected it was not a consoling thing to remember that in the near future he was likely to be the most valuable friend and companion that Charlotte could find. There was enough to worry about, however, in their own immediate case without borrowing trouble in regard to the future.

Morgan was tired, and, stretching himself, glanced around the room to see what provisions had been made for their comfort. A small iron cot was set on each side of the room. There were several iron tables decorated with steins and big china pipes. Also the room contained the most complete and variegated assortment of spittoons that it had ever been Morgan's good fortune to behold. Outside of an iron washstand and several small iron chairs this was all.

Morgan was still smiling a little at this Prussian military idea of a furnished bedroom, when the hands of the two sentinels sprang to salute, and Von Hollman entered the room. In the uniform of the Death Hussars, he was an even more notable sight than in civilian clothes. His eye passed over Healy as though he did not see him. He nodded to Morgan, but his face was grave.

"I am sorry," he said, "that this has happened. I am unusually busy to-night, but I have ordered that this room where you are to be held for the present be made as comfortable as possible."

"Oh, that's all right," said Morgan,

"I don't mind this. But how long must I stay here?"

"You are to be tried," said Hollman, "by court-martial for an assault on Trooper Strassman, and for assistance given to a French aviator. I would, if I could, secure your liberty to-night. Mr. Cameron and Miss Cameron have both urged it upon me, but it is a matter entirely out of my power."

"I assaulted no one," said Morgan.

"Strassman, if he is able to talk, will appear against you in the morning. It will be for the court to decide, then."

"And I am liable to an imprisonment?"

"Imprisonment!" Hollman's eyebrows went up at a sharp angle. "Perhaps so; but military necessity is sometimes sterner than that."

Morgan was a man who had always imagined himself quite above the imputation of physical cowardice. He had lived a life adventurous far beyond the ordinary, and, although he had known times when he had been anxious and even worried, it was at this moment that for the first time in his life he tasted the sickening and terrible sensation of absolute fear. He stood upright, but felt as if he were sinking.

The dark figure of the count seemed that of an executioner.

The light from the gas jets gleamed on the bayonets of the two sentries. The early-morning sun might send such a glitter from the bayonets of a firing squad. The room with its paneled walls and hanging candelabra swayed before him, then steadied again. Morgan heard his own voice speaking. It sounded as if it were a long way off.

"You need not say any more," the far-off voice—his own—was saying. "I understand. But I want to go on record now as saying that Mr. Cameron had no knowledge of the affair whatever, and that my chauffeur, Healy, had nothing to do with any accident to any German soldier."

Hollman was watching him narrowly.

"You are a brave man, Mr. Morgan," he said. "I am sorry we have not known each other longer. I will withdraw these sentries and have your chauffeur removed to another room. I hope that you will have a comfortable night. Perhaps you will shake hands with me."

Any feeling of resentment or jealousy that might have been in Morgan's breast was now overcome in the stunned bewilderment of his present situation. He felt his hand crushed in Hollman's. He saw Healy disappear with a soldier on either side of him. The door slammed shut, and he heard bolts shot on the other side. He was left alone in a garishly lit, silk-paneled room furnished with iron tables and chairs and iron beds.

In Luxembourg of yesterday, the Luxembourg which now seemed an old-world place, this might have been a concert room or a ballroom. But now the gilt chairs were gone and iron chairs filled their place. There were soldier's cots where lounges had been.

French grace and luxury and Prussian iron! How long could such a contest last? What chance had France against this new race of conquerors! As if in answer to his thoughts, a new sound of fifes and snare drums arose from the street. Going to one of the tall windows, he looked down at the moonlit square. At intervals of fifteen feet or so were the gleaming bayonets and spiked helmets of sentries. Across the middle of the square passed another fresh regiment of infantry, the men marching steadily and with incredible speed beneath their heavy accouterments. The shrill fifes and rattling drums sounded farther and farther away in the distance, but still remained the steady tramp of feet.

Germany armed and all powerful was sweeping through Luxembourg, south

and west. A great machine of flesh and blood and steel and iron. Armored motor trucks, guns dragged by traction engines capable of doing the work of sixty horses, lumbering vans, even traveling kitchens, swept past under the moon. This was the machine in which he had been caught. He had tried to snatch one life out of its path, and he himself might pay the penalty. The gentle outward bearing of Hollman gave him no comfort. He knew that if ever a man had become the living impersonation of the Prussian system it was Hollman. Something of the fanatic, something of the lust of arbitrary power was in the German's face. Morgan felt no doubt that the count with whom undoubtedly she was in love would pursue Charlotte as relentlessly as he worked for Germany. Such a man, he thought, was not safe to trust with an American girl.

He turned back into the room, put out the gas, which flared and spluttered in the night wind, threw off his coat and shoes, and flung himself on the bed. He was tired, and he soon slept. No dreams broke his repose. Indeed, when he woke and saw the morning light streaming into the strangely furnished room, it was as if he were coming back to a horrible dream world that he had escaped from for a few hours.

## CHAPTER VII.

### COURT-MARTIAL!

At eight o'clock that morning a breakfast of bread and coffee was set before Morgan. At ten a lieutenant—none other than young Franz, who had been detained in his search of the Cameron house while Martin had escaped—appeared at the door. His ordinarily good-natured face was downcast and dejected, and he shook his head gravely as Morgan rose to meet him.

"This is a bad business," he said. "I

have been reprimanded, and lost a chance for honorable mention, but you—you are to be tried by court-martial before Major von Graf."

"Is Von Graf the officer who hit my chauffeur in the face?" Morgan had no very pleasant recollection of the man.

"He is. I tell you you have little chance. I have a file of men outside to take you to the trial, but I give you a minute now—for I believe that I am speaking to a man who is soon to die. Ach! I like not this war. To give one's own life is well—but the other things that a man must do!"

Franz dropped his glance on the floor and turned away from Morgan. His own sorrow and horror were evident enough, but there was something of courtesy and consideration in the averted gaze. He wanted Morgan to have a moment to himself unobserved. It was all that Franz could give him.

The brilliant morning sunshine streamed in across the trampled carpet. From somewhere near by came the trilling of a canary. A thousand birds were singing in the wooded slopes of the Ardennes. That same sunlight was sifting through the lime trees in the peaceful château of Cameron. It seemed impossible that this was to be Morgan's last sight of the sun, that this was his last morning in the world.

"What about Healy?" he said, at length.

"He will be arraigned with you."

"Are his chances any better than mine?"

"No."

"It's a damned outrage!" said Morgan. "War had not been declared. That boy knows nothing about the laws of neutrality. Suppose he did give a little gas to a Frenchman. He was only helping out a man in a hole and obeying one of the ordinary instincts of humanity. You can bet something that Mr. Cameron has wired the secretary

of state about this, and that it will cost Germany something."

Franz advanced toward him and laid a hand on his shoulder. "You are a brave man," he said. "You are honest. You have but a few hours to live, and I can speak freely to you. If any other man than Count Otto von Hollman—any other man of the same rank in the army of the Fatherland—were in command of the forces here, I would say that the worst that could have happened for you and the servant would have been imprisonment in Spandau for the period of the war. But Hollman!" He threw out his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"Hollman is a friend of Mr. Cameron's."

"Friend! What is friendship to him when his wishes are opposed! Hollman is a gentleman of the highest blood, he is an officer of the greatest attainments and skill, but when his wishes are opposed—he is a madman. There are things I could tell you about him."

"Why should he concern himself so much in this affair?"

"In England, perhaps in America, it is not considered the part of a gentleman to discuss ladies, but you are about to die, and the time is one for honesty. Von Hollman is in love with the prinzeßin, the niece of Mr. Cameron. Every one in Luxembourg knows it, and every one who knows Von Hollman knows that if she does not love him she would be better out of the country and back in the United States. You are his rival, and now it is his duty to the Fatherland to remove you from his path."

"He isn't running the court-martial."

"Von Graf is, though, and Von Graf, although he is my immediate superior, is a brute. There are men such as he in every army, and it is men like Von Graf who give an army a bad name."

"I don't see how Von Hollman can



dare put me out of the way. He is responsible to the government in Berlin. They want the friendship of the United States."

"Von Hollman will dare anything—and there are secrets about the government. Von Hollman is a bigger man than his rank or name would indicate. I don't know what—but there is a mystery about him."

"I am confident," said Morgan, "that if we could hold off this court-martial till this afternoon, it would never come off."

Franz shook his head. "You are wrong," he said.

"Hasn't Mr. Cameron cabled to Washington and wired to Berlin?"

Franz nodded.

"Those cables will be answered."

Again Franz shook his head. "There will be no answer to the cables or the telegrams. Mr. Cameron wrote them, and gave them to the telegraph official. That is all. How do you know that they have ever been sent?"

He laid his hand on Morgan's arm just as the little ormolu clock on the mantel struck the quarter hour.

"Come," he said, "I have given you more time than I had intended."

Outside the door was a squad of four infantrymen in grayish-green caps and service uniforms, and with fixed bayonets. With the consciousness that two of these bayonets were very close to his back, Morgan was marched down a flagged corridor, down a flight of stairs, and into a great assembly room. There were chairs for many people in the room, but it was deserted save for sentries at the doors and a sinister-looking group of officers in brilliant uniforms seated about a table on a raised platform.

Healy was there, very pale and quiet, between two soldiers, and Morgan could see, seated in the background, a big giant of a man in the uniform of the uhlands with a bandage about his head.

He had expected to see Mr. Cameron there, but there were none but German soldiers. Morgan moved to the place he was directed, and looked down upon the heavy face and pale, dull eyes of Von Graf in a sort of daze. This speed and expedition, the absence of Mr. Cameron meant only one thing—that what Lieutenant Franz had said was true, and that he and Healy were being railroaded to their death to please a madman who happened to be in love with Charlotte.

He and Healy were left standing while the proceedings went forward. They moved with a businesslike briskness that left both the Americans too bewildered to protest. One officer was busy taking down a stenographic record of the examination while the others made occasional notes. Von Graf left his position as presiding officer to testify himself. He spoke in German. He pointed out Healy and Morgan, and it was evident that he was identifying them. There was no doubt about the official correctness of the proceedings, in spite of the dispatch with which they were conducted.

Morgan and Healy were represented by counsel, a slim young officer of husars, with light hair and a sharp nose, while a staff officer with a red beard was the prosecuting official. When Von Graf had finished his testimony he was submitted to a little cross-examination, and after contemptuously answering a few questions took his seat with the five other officers who composed the court.

Franz followed him, standing very straight and giving his testimony with soldierlike directness and simplicity. Two privates of the Eleventh Uhlands, dressed in their uniforms with yellow facings, followed him. They testified in regard to the pursuit of the aviator. Then Private Strassman was called.

He was an immense, rawboned man, with sleepy, good-natured eyes. After

answering the usual questions as to his name and rank, he was called upon to face the prisoners. He turned his bandaged head in their direction, and Healy and Morgan looked into his eyes. This was the man whose word was to send them to their doom. With a sinking heart, Morgan looked at him, and then—something happened that seemed so bizarre, so unreal as to make Morgan feel again that he was living through some grotesque and horrible dream.

Private Strassman, the man who had been riding after the aviator with lance upraised, who had been left lying senseless on the turf after Morgan's intervention, winked at Morgan!

The rest of Strassman's face remained impassive and stolid, but the left eyelid dropped and raised itself again. It was not an accident. There was no mistaking it. It was a genuine American wink, quite friendly, and with a sort of alertness about it quite out of keeping with Strassman's general appearance. His head was turned directly toward Morgan when it happened and away from the commanding officers, so that Morgan and Healy alone could see it.

Von Graf addressed him in German.

"Can you identify the prisoners as the men who interfered with you last night?" he said.

"*Nein*," said Strassman calmly, "*Ich kann nicht!*"

Strassman made the announcement as one stating the most trite and commonplace fact, but if he had thrown a hand grenade at the group of officers at the table he could not have created more of a disturbance. Von Graf rose to his feet with an explosive exclamation. They all leaned forward, red-bearded counsel, slim, sharp-nosed counsel, and judges all seemed to spring toward Strassman, who stood stiff and straight, as stolid as if his face and head were really wooden, as

Von Graf was shouting forth in German. The presiding officer waved the counsel away and examined and cross-examined Strassman both in German and English. Strassman was absolutely unshaken. He had never seen either Healy or Morgan before. Yes, he understood the nature of an oath, and was telling the truth. Yes, he remembered the men who had attacked him. They were not at all like the prisoners. What were they like? They were men with whiskers, who looked like Russians.

As the examination proceeded, it became evident that Von Graf alone of those present was disappointed and enraged. The other members of the court-martial were doing their duty, but it was evidently a decidedly unpleasant duty, and they were distinctly relieved. They showed it in several ways. One leaned back and began to hum the "Pilgrim's Chorus," from Tannhäuser, in a booming voice. The red-bearded prosecutor produced a cigar from some place in his uniform and lit it. Strassman stuck stoutly to his story, and at the end of half an hour Von Graf sank back in his chair, tired and angry.

"Were he in my regiment," he said, "I would know what to do with him!"

Healy was called next, but it was evident by this time that Von Graf was to be disappointed. Although he was the presiding officer, it was the five judges who voted as to the guilt or innocence of the prisoners, and it was clear that they were all relieved to find that they were guilty of nothing very serious. Healy had evidently been called next as the less intelligent of the two, but he made a good impression.

He admitted having sold petrol to a French aviator, but he denied that he had intentionally done anything wrong.

"If I had known there was a war coming on I'd have kept out of it," he said earnestly. "I've got nothing against Goimany. My mother was

Goiman and my father Irish, and I always liked nudel soup better than Irish stew. We're not spies, and we didn't hurt nobody. We're Americans, and Mr. Morgan's the whitest man you ever saw—his business is to mend broken heads, not to break them—he's a doctor."

"We may need him," said the red-bearded prosecutor, who had a better command of English than the others. He turned and addressed the group of officers who constituted the court.

"It is evident that the wrong men have been detained," he said. "Mr. Morgan is an American doctor of good character, and the other man is his chauffeur. It is plain that they are not the men who attacked Private Strassman. As prosecuting officer, I recommend that the prisoners be dismissed on their parole without further examination."

Von Graf rose to his feet, his voice shaking with anger as he spoke.

"Major Schmidt," he said, "you are a traitor!"

"Major von Graf," said Schmidt, stroking his red beard, "there will be an opportunity for you to apologize for that when my friend calls on you. In the meantime what says the court?"

"Count von Hollman ordered this investigation," said Von Graf. "He thinks this man guilty. Is your authority greater than his?"

"I am neither a tool of Von Hollman's nor afraid of him," said Schmidt. "I do what I think my duty."

He turned to the five judges. "A vote!" he said.

"*Nicht schuldig!*" boomed out the man who had been singing Tannhäuser. "*Nicht schuldig!*" came from each in turn.

"You shall pay for this, Schmidt," said Von Graf, in a low tone.

"When you please," said Schmidt. He bore one scar on his forehead, and he was evidently looking forward to a

duel with Von Graf as carelessly as if it were a breakfast party.

Still in a sort of daze, Healy and Morgan found themselves taking an oath not to fight against Germany, nor to aid, succor, nor assist in any way the foes of the Fatherland.

Still half stunned and bewildered, Morgan found himself a free man, out in the sunlight once more, with Healy beside him and Major Schmidt's arm passed through his in friendly fashion.

He felt weak, and staggered. The peril through which he had passed, the unexpected nature of his rescue, the whole bewildering succession of events, actually seemed to weaken him physically, and it was all he could do for a moment to keep his feet and answer the friendly question of Schmidt, who had lived in New York at one time and wanted to hear from the old town once more.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CHARLOTTE PULLS THE STRINGS.

An hour later, Morgan and Healy, back once more at the Cameron house, learned the meaning of Strassman's wink and his failure to identify them. Charlotte was responsible for his strange behavior. When he was brought to the house, unconscious from his fall, the gallant Lieutenant Franz had been charmed to allow the prinzeßin, whom Von Hollman admired so much, to dress the wound of his uhlan. Over his gallant protestations, Strassman had been carried to Charlotte's room. Charlotte had, as her uncle sometimes remarked, quite a way with her, and Von Hollman was not the only man in Luxembourg who admired her.

When Private Strassman, of the Eleventh Uhlans, came to after his tumble, he thought for a moment that he had died and was already in heaven. He was in a dainty white room, on Charlotte's own bed, and the sight of

a large Bible on a table at his elbow lent strength to his religious illusion, for Strassman, in his simple way, associated Bibles with heaven, and thought that they were the only books allowed there. In still further proof of the belief that he was in heaven, there was an undeniable lady angel bending over him watching him solicitously, with the most beautiful blue eyes. It was quite ten minutes before he realized that he was in the same old world, and that this beautiful room, the like of which he had never imagined, was one of the apartments of the *château*. At the end of that ten minutes he had formed a decidedly favorable opinion of Charlotte.

His head was far too sound and hard to be fractured by a tumble on the turf, and it was only the shock of his metal helmet being driven against some sensitive nerve that had knocked him out for the time being. His greatest wish, the thing that would have made this paradise, quite "paradise enow" for him, was a long, cool drink of beer, but Charlotte gave him tea instead, and told him it was better for him. She talked to him in German, expressing her sympathy, and then found out that he could talk English and that he had once worked as a waiter in a café in Cincinnati. Charlotte knew something about Cincinnati herself and by the time that Strassman realized that he was still on earth they were quite good friends. While Mr. Cameron was making the wires hot sending out dispatches to Washington and Berlin, Charlotte, like Betty, was pulling the strings.

Of course, she sympathized with Strassman; and Strassman himself, as soon as he began to realize what had happened to him, bore no rancor.

"I saw the young man reach for der bridle," he said, "unt then the horse reared, unt I fell."

"I'm quite sure he didn't mean to hurt you," said Charlotte, "and now they've gone and arrested him."

"So!" said Strassman sympathetically. "It iss too bad indeed. Unt the airman, did he get away?"

"He got up in the air, all right," said Charlotte. "But I'm almost certain they've shot him or caught him or whatever they wanted to do," she added consolingly. "But Mr. Morgan is arrested—and what will happen to him?"

"He will be tried by court-martial," said Strassman cheerfully.

"Oh, dear!" said Charlotte. "And what will happen then?"

"I will appear against him," went on Strassman methodically. "I will be called as a witness, unt I will be confronted with der brisoner, unt asked to identify him."

"Terrible!" said Charlotte, clasping her hands. "And what will happen then?"

"I will be confronted with der brisoner," went on Strassman, quite enjoying the interest he was arousing in the breast of this charming young woman, "I will then identify him, unt he will be found guilty of inderfering with a German soldier in pursuit of his duty in time of war."

"And then?"

"He will be led out by der firing squad unt shot. It is der law of war."

"Shot!" said Charlotte. "He mustn't be shot; he can't be shot! He's the nicest man I know, and the kindest. Why, Mr. Strassman, I'm *especially* fond of him, and I'm sure he wouldn't have hurt you for the world if he had known you were performing your duty. Perhaps he didn't think you ought to ride your horse across the grass. You must be a wonderful horseman to have ridden over that hedge. It's really too bad that you fell off just when you were doing so nicely."

"It was nothing," said Strassman patronizingly. "A tumble now and then iss nothing."

"And you are not going to let Mr. Morgan get shot for a little thing like

that! He's one of the best doctors in America, and I am sure he could fix up your head much better than I have."

"It is the rule of war. The law of war."

Strassman was an unemotional man, but when he saw two bright tears actually forming in Charlotte's eyes, his own honest heart was wrung.

"Ach, fräulein!" he said. "I am sorry."

"And you are going to do it! You are going to murder him!"

"Ach, no; it is not murder. It is martial law. But what can I do?"

"Supposing," said Charlotte, wiping away her tears with a small handkerchief and looking very businesslike—"supposing you were to say you didn't know him! Supposing you said you had never seen him in all your life. They would have to let him off, wouldn't they?"

"Yes," said Strassman doubtfully.

"You have a wife and family?" said Charlotte.

"I have a mother, in Hanover."

"Is she wealthy?"

"Wealthy? Ach, no! She is very poor."

"I know that Mr. Morgan, if he were free, would be very anxious to do something for you—just to recompense you for your injury, you know. He didn't mean to hurt you. It was just his clumsiness. And he'd like very much to give you, say three hundred dollars—that is, if he were free."

"So!" said Strassman cautiously, but with interest. He felt as if he were being drawn into some kind of a trap, but somehow he liked the trap, and it was very hard to deny Charlotte anything when she was bent on having her own way. Like most unselfish people, she was generally busy trying to get favors for other people.

"Surely you are not the kind of a man to wish to see Mr. Morgan shot!" she went on.

"Ach, no! I am not that kind of a man."

"Then you won't do it, will you?"

Strassman found it quite impossible to look into those beautiful and pleading eyes. He felt that he might readily be made to cry himself over the fate of Morgan. He looked down at the counterpane.

"But what can I do?" he said.

"Do what is right," said Charlotte. "Get up and say that you never saw him in all your life, and stick to it. They can't hurt you for that, can they?"

"No."

"You'll not only be saving his life, but you'll just be telling the plain, honest truth," went on Charlotte, with an innocent and eager sophistry. "It was too dark to see him there. You couldn't possibly have seen who he was—now, could you?"

"Maybe not," said Strassman doubtfully.

"Then you'll tell the truth. You'll say you don't know Doctor Morgan and never saw him. And you'll save his life! And you'll get the three hundred dollars to send to your mother in Hanover! And you'll be a hero! And I—I'll never, never forget your kindness." Charlotte clasped her hands ecstatically and gazed into Strassman's eyes. Strassman wiggled uneasily, and one large foot appeared from under the counterpane. He withdrew it in great embarrassment.

"Ach, fräulein!" he begged. "Let me think it over for a moment. It is an important matter—my duty as a soldier."

Charlotte rose. "Yes," she said soothingly. "I mustn't bother you now, with your poor head aching so. I don't know whether you remember it or not—perhaps you were just a little delirious from your terrible fall—but you said something about beer when you regained consciousness. In fact, it al-

most sounded as if you actually wanted to drink beer."

"Yes," said Strassman honestly, "I was not out of my head."

"Suppose I send you up some beer, two or three bottles?"

"Three," said Strassman.

"Four," said Charlotte enthusiastically, "or five—nice, and ice cold, although it's bad for you. But you are such a strong man!"

"Yes," said Strassman modestly. "I am a strong man."

"Well, if I send it up will you drink it?"

"Yes." Strassman was quite positive about this.

"And think over what I've said?"

"Yes, *gnädige fräulein*."

Charlotte departed, and the beer, after a short interval, arrived.

Strassman had hoped that it would be light beer, and it was. He had hoped that it would be cold, and it was. He had hoped that there would be five bottles, and there were—also a big stein to pour it into. After the servant had departed, he sat on the edge of the bed in his shirt and uhlan's trousers, and drank the first bottle. The day had been a long and hot one. He had ridden far and hard in his heavy accouterment. The dust of the road was still in his throat. The tea he had drunk had not washed it out; it had only sprinkled it, so Strassman thought. He drank the first bottle rather hurriedly as a preparation to considering the problem before him. The second bottle passed into the beyond a little less rapidly, and by the time he was draining the third he was thinking. At the same time he was beginning to feel deliciously comfortable, too comfortable to think anything unpleasant and disagreeable. It was delightful to have his heavy boots off and these soft slippers on, and it was a nice room. He was whistling gayly at the end of the fourth bottle, and halfway through the

fifth he had quite made up his mind. Von Graf might rage, but he was a German soldier, and would do his duty, and the *fräulein* was a lovely lady, and his mother certainly needed the three hundred dollars. Morgan was saved.

Charlotte gasped with horror as she saw the tray brought down so soon with the five empty bottles—but still it was a good omen, and Strassman, as he had explained, was so strong a man that beer didn't do him any harm.

Upstairs, Strassman having discovered his large china pipe on a table ready to his hand, had filled it with "leichter Canaster" and was puffing beatifically.

How much of it was beer, how much tobacco, how much native imagination and literary genius is not to be discovered, but the moment when the first cloud of smoke left Strassman's lips was the moment when the two fat Russians with whiskers took form out of the void and became dangerous enemies of the Fatherland.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SPIDER'S WEB.

Strassman got his three hundred dollars. By the time it reached him he was firmly convinced that it was nothing in the nature of a bribe, but simply reparation for the injuries he had endured. Also, under the influence of sundry other bottles of beer and a chat with Charlotte, he firmly believed that it was really those creatures of his fancy, two whiskered and villainous Russians, who had upset him from his steed. To his companions smoking their pipes in the Luxembourg barracks he narrated the thrilling tale of his encounter with the Russians, and with each repetition it grew, and Strassman believed it the more. Why Doctor Morgan, after taking the trouble to stitch up his head most skillfully, should send his mother three hundred dollars as a

recompense for injuries inflicted by two Russians was a question that did not at all trouble him. Strassman was a German, but not of the scholarly sort, and logical sequences never kept him awake at night.

The red-bearded Major Schmidt, who had been Morgan's prosecutor in the military trial, in which Strassman had so distinguished himself, was a guest at the château for dinner the following evening. He arrived early, but still earlier in the day Count von Hollman himself had driven up in a motor to inquire as to the comfort of the Camerons, and ostensibly also to offer his congratulations to Fairfax Morgan on his escape.

Remembering all that Lieutenant Franz had told him in that hour when he believed himself about to die, remembering also his own feelings and forebodings in regard to the count, it was still hard for Morgan to believe that Von Hollman was anything other than the polished and civilized gentleman he appeared.

"It is a pleasure indeed to see you free again, Mr. Morgan," he said. "I was sorry that I could not be present at the court-martial. I did all I could for you in the selection of the officers to form the court."

Remembering Von Graf and what Franz had said of him, Morgan was not able to make his gratitude particularly apparent or enthusiastic, but Von Hollman seemed entirely at ease and unruffled.

"The German army is a machine," he went on. "Its military value, indeed its very existence, requires that it move and act like a machine, and it must sometimes grind up ruthlessly the human particles that fall into it. Although I am at the present moment in command of the movement to occupy Luxembourg, I am just as much a part of the machine as Strassman, for instance. It is not for me, as your English poet

puts it, to 'reason why.' I am just a private in the ranks. Long ago, when the plans for the occupation of Luxembourg, in case of an emergency, were made by the board of strategy, every possible contingency was foreseen, and the definite instructions for the commanding officer in charge were drafted. It is my duty to obey these orders to the last detail. I have done my share now. The military occupation of Luxembourg is now complete, carried out according to the provisions of the schedule. Now it is for us to wait until some further movement of the greater machine, the German army, is communicated to this part here and sets it in motion again."

"This occupation of Luxembourg is undoubtedly a great military feat," said Mr. Cameron acidly. "May I inquire what the next triumph will be?"

Von Hollman smiled tolerantly, and laid his hand on Cameron's arm. "My friend," he said, "you know as well as I do that if I knew the answer to that I could not tell you. But surely your ears are good enough to have heard some unusual sound in the air."

"I should say they were!" said Cameron. "I left New York to get rid of the confounded steam riveters—I have a nervous system, although Charlotte and Fairfax don't seem to know what it means. I thought that Luxembourg was a quiet place, if such could be found in this world to-day; but last night and this morning were worse than New York ever thought of being. That confounded vibration never lets up for a minute."

The sound which continually filled the air was not unlike the muffled and distant vibration of a thousand distant hard-rock drills. It was low—more of a steady jarring and shaking of the air than a sound—harsh and distinctly unpleasant.

"Some ingenious German ought to

put a muffler on your war machine," said Morgan.

"Yes," said Charlotte. "If you can invent a noiseless army, Mr. Cameron will think more of you than of the man who invented wireless telegraphy."

Whatever effect the irreverent comments of the three Americans may have had on Von Hollman, none was evident but good-humored amusement.

He laughed softly, and lit a cigarette.

"You Americans!" he said. "Children among the nations, and wonderful, gifted children, to whom everything is possible, to whom nothing is serious, and all of life—peace and war and love—is a great joke. If I were to fall in love with an American girl," he tilted back his head and looked at Charlotte through lowered lids, "I would be more afraid of her sense of humor than of anything else. To be ridiculous is the most fatal thing to a lover's chances, and it seems to me that it is the gift of the American girl to make all men feel ridiculous."

"It's a good thing, too," said Charlotte. "If you people—you men—all knew how ridiculous all this military business really was, you'd be ashamed to wear a uniform. You might as well make a serious business of tennis or croquet."

Von Hollman sat up straight, and his eyes snapped. He was like a man who, sparring lightly, suddenly receives a blow that really hurts but at the same time is resolved to conceal his hurt, to keep control of himself and of his temple.

"Prinzessin," he said, "my work is over for the present. Perhaps you would find it still more amusing to ride out with me in my motor car and see some of the parts of this ridiculous war machine of ours—and how well they work."

Charlotte bit her lips, and hesitated.

"I don't care for war machines," she said.

"Perhaps the prinzeßin is afraid," suggested Von Hollman. "A little afraid as well as amused."

Charlotte jumped to her feet. "I'm ready," she said.

"It is too bad." Hollman turned to Mr. Cameron as he rose. "It is too bad that I have a seat for but one other beside myself and the driver in the car. But I am most anxious to have one American girl see that we Germans, although a race of soldiers, are not a race of barbarians—that although a stern struggle for actual existence forces us to hold a way through Luxembourg for our troops to march, we do it peacefully and kindly, and with as little inconvenience to the people here as possible."

The harsh, monotonous vibration of the air grew louder and harsher. The distant, muffled riveting hammers and compressed-air drills were pounding to a faster tempo.

"The guns of the army before Liège," said Von Hollman. "They are clearing the way so that our right flank may be guarded. When that sound ceases, their work will be done, and we will be able to move southward."

Von Hollman and Charlotte passed out into the hall. The count had left hanging there a long gray military cape and his hussar's busby. It was an almost oppressively warm afternoon, and he left them hanging there, putting on a cavalry fatigue cap which his chauffeur handed to him, while Charlotte took nothing but a linen duster and an automobile veil.

It was not without some misgivings that Cameron and Morgan, standing side by side on the porch, watched them roll off down the driveway and disappear under the lime trees of the boulevard, Charlotte's veil fluttering gayly in the hot breeze. In fact, as they both told themselves, if it had been any other



girl in the world but Charlotte they wouldn't have let her go. She had always been accustomed to having her own way—not as a spoiled child who is indulged—but as a practical, womanly sort of little girl with a thought for others and a sense of responsibility. One whose way was generally a wise one.

"I wish we were all out of here," said Morgan, at length.

Mr. Cameron pulled a black cigar from his pocket and lit it.

"I can't leave here," he said.

"But I could take Charlotte back to New York with me. As the count said yesterday, there won't be any tennis tournaments in France this year."

"We are in the midst of a general European war," said Cameron. "Luxembourg will likely be a safe place. All the fighting will be farther south—in France. But when I think of Charlotte—I don't like Von Hollman."

"Nor I," said Morgan. "Let Charlotte go with me. I have passports, so has she."

"But the railroads!" said Cameron. "The German government owns all the roads in Luxembourg, and they'll take all those in Belgium—and for a long time yet they won't be used for anything but the transportation of the kaiser's troops."

"I've got one of the best motor cars in Europe to-day, and she's in the best of condition. New tires—and extra ones—and provisions and gas for an extended tour," said Morgan. "You know that it's a hobby with me. And whatever in the world you may say about Healy, he's a good mechanic, and one of the safest, fastest drivers I know. And you know that I can drive a bit myself. I know the roads between here and Paris. I was planning to go that way myself."

"I wonder how long Paris will be safe," said Mr. Cameron. "And I wonder why I don't get any answers to my cables to Washington and the wires to

Brussels and Berlin. I spent a lot of money on tolls yesterday, but not a word have I heard—not a word."

"There you are!" Morgan pointed. "There's the answer, now."

An elderly man in a tight blue uniform decorated with numerous brass buttons was riding a bicycle up the drive. He dismounted at the foot of the steps, carefully adjusted the wheel so it would stand upright, and came up to them holding two packages. He was not the telegraph messenger who had brought the dispatch to Count von Hollman the day before. That man had been a native Luxembourgian, who spoke French. This messenger was a German.

"Herr Cameron?" he said.

"Ja," said Mr. Cameron.

He presented the two packages. "*Das geld!*" he said, as he extended one. "*Der brief telegraphische,*" he said, as he thrust the other package into Mr. Cameron's hands. Mr. Cameron studied the packages. They bore numerous official seals, and were addressed to Herr Robert Cameron in businesslike-looking German script.

The messenger now presented a book and a pencil and indicated that he wished Mr. Cameron's signature. Having secured this, he replaced book and pencil in his cap, clicked his heels together, saluted stiffly, mounted his machine in a painstaking, methodical way, and rode slowly off down the drive. He was a quaint figure, this sedentary middle-aged German, in his tight-fitting uniform. There was stiff seriousness and sense of responsibility in every thrust of his short legs as he pedaled off.

"Another cog in the war machine," said Morgan, but the diplomatic representative to Luxembourg did not answer him. Mr. Cameron's face was rapidly growing red and redder. His eyes were flashing angrily. The black cigar was cocked upward at a ferocious angle.

"Look at this!" he said, in a choking voice, slapping the contents of one package with a sheaf of American money which he had taken from the other. "Look at this final outrage!"

Mr. Cameron held in his left hand a bunch of telegraph and cable dispatches all in his own handwriting, and some of considerable length. They were addressed to the secretary of state at Washington, the United States embassy at Brussels, and the United States embassy at Berlin. They were all protests, more or less indignant, against the arrest of Morgan and Healy.

In the other hand, together with a sizable wad of crisp American money, was a message in English to the effect that owing to military necessities the German governor of Luxembourg had taken charge of the telegraph and cable offices, and that press of business had made it impossible to transmit the messages of Mr. Cameron. The money he had paid for tolls was respectfully returned to him.

"This means," said Cameron, in a voice shaking with indignation, "that if Charlotte hadn't thought to get on the right side of that trooper, you would have been shot, Fairfax. This isn't the work of the German government. They have too much sense. It is Von Hollman's orders. And he is crazy. If I don't get reparation for this my name isn't Cameron, and there isn't any department of state in Washington! I don't want their rotten money," he shook the sheaf of bills under Morgan's nose, "but I'm going to get my messages through or kill somebody! Military necessity! A cog in a machine! An infernal smooth-spoken cutthroat lunatic! That's what Von Hollman is!"

It was at this moment that the red-bearded Major Schmidt, who had been invited to dinner, strolled up the driveway, his arm in a sling.

## CHAPTER X.

## TO BREAK THE WEB.

Angry or not, disturbed or not, Mr. Cameron was at all times a gentleman, and when he gazed into the smiling brown eyes of Major Schmidt, who was a gentleman himself, a good deal of the disturbance left him. From the church of St. Nicolas of Luxembourg, clear and sweet above the jarring, faint discord of far-off German cannon came the chimes, which play every two hours in the ancient city the refrain of its national anthem, the words of which are: "We want to remain just as we are."

There was something soothing about the mellow cadence. There was something genial and mellow about the red-bearded Schmidt who spoke as good American English as is to be heard in St. Louis or Cincinnati.

"You are hurt," said Morgan, indicating his bandaged wrist, "and I am afraid I got you into that fight."

"I had an old account to settle with Von Graf." Schmidt shook hands with his left hand. "This scratch will be better in a day—and Von Graf has a bandage round his head. He will not call me traitor again. But my old friend, Herr Cameron, whom I have not seen since I was a young lieutenant, and was appointed to take care of him at the military maneuvers—he seems disturbed."

"I am disturbed," said Cameron. "Look here, Major Schmidt! We are old friends, and you have some sense. I've known you since you were working in the experimental department of the Westinghouse concern in America. What do you think of this?"

Major Schmidt whistled softly as he looked at the telegrams in Mr. Cameron's handwriting and the official stamps across them. He shot a keen glance at young Morgan and stroked his red beard reflectively.

"This is terrible," he said, at length. "When Count Otto von Hollman holds the reins he drives hard. And Von Graf, the brute! is Von Hollman's man—and Von Hollman is attracted by your niece, Mr. Cameron?"

"I suppose so," said Mr. Cameron rather sulkily. He didn't like to have people talk about Charlotte, and every time her name was coupled with Von Hollman's now, had a perceptible effect on his temper.

"You think it not likely," said Schmidt, "that your niece, the Prinzessin Charlotte, would think of marrying Von Hollman? You must pardon me," he went on, raising his unwounded hand in a deprecating gesture. "I may seem brutally frank and inquisitive."

"That's all right," said Morgan.

"Charlotte doesn't want to marry Von Hollman, or any one with a title," said Mr. Cameron. "She's out riding with him now in his motor car, and I wish she were back."

"We are old friends, Mr. Cameron," said Schmidt, "and I remember your niece when she was the most wonderful little girl, with blue eyes and golden hair, and I was a sentimental young German with red hair and not a friend in America but you—and the beautiful little Charlotte."

"I remember your poetry." Cameron forgot the unsent telegrams, and chuckled, "and the way you used to keep us awake at night playing the flute."

"Ach, yes," said Schmidt, lighting a cigar. "The days of our youth were the days of our glory." But the princess. It is no longer safe that she remain in Luxembourg."

"What does it all mean?" said Cameron, jumping to his feet and pulling at his white mustache. "Who is Count von Hollman, anyway? Is there no appeal over his head? What kind of a government have you, anyway?" He strode up and down the floor.

"A very good government," said Schmidt, "but an aristocratic government—and there is some rumor that Count von Hollman's birth is higher than his name or rank would indicate. At any rate, although he is a man of the highest ability, he behaves sometimes as if he were a prince of the blood rather than the colonel of a hussar regiment."

"And you—are you as much afraid of him as the rest? Are you attached to his command?"

"Ach, no!" Schmidt took a long pull at his cigar and stroked his red beard. "I am not attached to his command. I am in the Zeppelin service—I know something of the gas and the machinery and the compressed air—thanks to the good Westinghouse Company, where I worked once for living wage—and to the good Americans. My orders—mobilization orders—were to be here at Luxembourg August 7th to report to the head of my division. I arrive here ahead of time and learn that your friend, Mr. Morgan, is to be tried by court-martial. It is a serious business. They are short of officers for the court, and I volunteer to prosecute. I may help that way, and Von Graf, who presides, does not know me as the friend of Mr. Cameron. But Von Hollman, pouf!" Major Schmidt snapped his fingers. "The kaiser cannot afford to punish a man who knows the secret of the Zeppelin gas that will not burn—to please the whim of Von Hollman. I am a soldier, but also a scientist, and they respect the scientist in Germany."

"Well, what are you driving at, then?" The eternal drone of the distant steam drills had grown a little louder, and the incessant jarring vibration that seemed to communicate itself to the whole house was telling on Mr. Cameron's nerves. "What is Von Hollman going to do? Do you think he plans to abduct my niece by force?"

Major Schmidt knocked the ashes

from his cigar and his red-brown eyes were very serious. "If the rumors I have heard are correct," he said, "Von Hollman comes of a most remarkable race—but a race whose men have scrupled at nothing, in the past, in carrying out their personal wishes and desires. And where women have been concerned, this has been especially so." He turned to Morgan suddenly. "You have a motor car?" he said.

"Sixty-horse power," said Morgan.

"And passports? And identification cards?"

"I can give him all he needs," said Cameron.

"Then," said Schmidt earnestly, "I would advise you to take Miss Cameron out of Luxembourg at once."

"I can get into Longwy, in France, by midnight," said Morgan.

"Longwy!" Major Schmidt shook his head. "You little realize what changes will take place. In a week, Longwy will be a German garrison. In three weeks there will be uhlans scouting between the forts of Paris. Germany is up in arms. She is irresistible in the might of her armies." His eye kindled and his voice grew louder and fuller. "There is but one obstacle Germany cannot pass as yet, and that is the sea. Have you a road map?"

Morgan brought a road map, and, going out on the lawn, they spread it on the very table at which they had sat drinking May wine the afternoon before. The same sunlight filtered through the lindens and checkered the velvet grass with shifting patterns of green and gold. They breathed the same rose-scented air, and the Boulevard Adalbert was as still and deserted as ever, for troops had ceased to pass that way. The only difference was the insistent nervous jar of the siege guns wrecking Liège, borne to them a hundred miles on the northern breeze. And yet the afternoon of yesterday and all its talk and happenings seemed as far

off as if it had been a thousand years ago.

Morgan spread his road map on the table, using a cigar box as a paper weight against the restless winds, and Schmidt traced out roads on it with a stubby forefinger.

"I have traveled these roads but little," he said, "but I know them well, and the whole countryside, having looked down on it often from the car of a Zeppelin. It is an easy run to Arlon."

"Yes," said Morgan, "but what's the matter with running north to Spa and then east to Brussels?"

Major Schmidt laughed down in his throat. "My young friend," he said, "you do not realize how fast the German army marches. Spa is in the hands of a Prussian corps, and wherever you meet the Prussian you may know that Von Hollman can throw a loop about you by telegraph."

"How can he stop him if he has passports?" said Cameron.

"A thousand ways. Do you suppose the hand that had the noose at his throat only this morning, the hand that sent you back your messages unsent, will fail to strike again—and strike harder this time? It was to remove the chances of Mr. Morgan's taking Charlotte from Luxembourg that Von Graf, the butcher and the brute, was made judge advocate of the court-martial. There are other Von Grafes in the German army. Other cogs and wheels in the machine."

"Why not go to Ostend?" suggested Morgan.

"There may not be time. To a stranger, to any one at liberty to communicate with the outside world, I could not talk of the plans of the German army—but once Liège falls, there will be a southward movement. The real invasion of France is here in the east. Our western screen of troops will take Liège and Namur—perhaps they will

hold Louvain and Brussels—but Antwerp shall be safe—for a time—unless I should happen to visit it in the air above some night. We will not delay to take Antwerp—there is not time. Just enough of Belgium to protect our right flank and lines of communication, and then on—on into France, to Paris!”

He seemed a little ashamed of his burst of enthusiasm, for he fell silent suddenly and began measuring distances on the map with a folding metric rule which he drew from the pocket of his coat.

“You wonder at me for talking so, you Americans,” he continued, in a lower tone, “but Germany is fighting for life—for more than life—for a place in the sun, to have colonies and thrive and grow like other great peoples. The Slav, with his millions to the north and east, the Slav and the French in the south and west, the English fleets upon the sea! Germany’s to be smothered! All the patient industry of her peoples, all her science, music, art, and letters will avail her nothing unless we strike—and strike now. To respect treaties is well, but a drowning man may clutch at the property of another to save himself, and we mean no harm in Belgium—nor yet in Luxembourg. All we want is a passage for our armies—our soldiers who carry the future Germany with them in their onward march.”

He looked up suddenly, and the old humorous expression came back to his red-brown eyes.

“Mr. Cameron used to laugh at me when I was a young man,” he said, “and he is laughing at me now. Mr. Morgan, your nearest seaport is Antwerp, and you must strike for Antwerp and drive fast and hard. If Liège holds out long enough, you are safe—but south of Namur and north of France, where the eastern army will enter, must be your course. Drive west as far as Alost, anyway—well, west of Brussels before you strike north for

Antwerp. And from Antwerp you have the sea, ‘the diamond pathway of the sun and moon,’ to take you safe back to America.”

“Just the same wild talker as ever, Julius,” said Cameron, going back to the name he had used when Schmidt was a boy. “But I will say that your heart is in the right place, and that you have some sense. Charlotte shall go with Fairfax, and his confounded chauffeur will have to act as chaperon. Schmidt, I don’t suppose you ever drink cocktails any more?”

“Never,” said Schmidt, “except when I see you, Mr. Cameron.”

“You see me now,” said Cameron, striking the bell.

Just sipping his cocktail, Schmidt turned to Morgan, who was still poring over the road map.

“I noticed Colonel von Hollman’s busby and cape in the hall,” he said.

“Yes,” said Morgan, not looking up. “He left them there. What about it?”

“Hide them,” said Schmidt.

“What for?” Cameron and Morgan both asked the question.

“There’s only one busby like that in Luxembourg,” said Schmidt, “and Von Hollman is the only man with a right to wear it. He has honorable rank in the Death Hussars among other distinctions. If Miss Charlotte wore that and the cape, and it were dark, a too-officious sentry might not ask questions, for he would think it Von Hollman himself in the auto.”

“As dangerous as that—and with passports?” said Cameron.

Major Schmidt nodded.

“Won’t Von Hollman ask for his things?” said Morgan.

“Tell him his orderly was here to report to him, and carried them back to headquarters,” said Schmidt; “and hurry. There’s an auto coming up the drive now, and Miss Cameron and Colonel von Hollman are in it.”

As the count and Charlotte ascended

the front steps, Healy was rapidly removing himself from the house in the direction of the garage in the rear. Under his arm were a gray cape and the black headdress of a colonel of the Hussars of Death.

As Charlotte stepped into the reception hall it was evident at once that something unusual had happened. Her eyes were very bright, her cheeks very pink—almost red, in fact, and her hair, a most unusual thing with Charlotte, was in slight disarray.

"Count von Hollman," she was saying in a high, scarcely natural voice, "I must thank you for a most *remarkable* afternoon. It was quite a lesson—almost a *surprise*—I might say."

Von Hollman bowed.

"I am glad to be of service to the prinzeßin," he said. He bowed also to the others. Then something cold, repressed—almost stern in all three faces—made him straighten up suddenly. He acknowledged Major Schmidt's salute with a sharp movement of the hand, then turned toward the hat rack.

"My cloak?" he said.

"Your orderly called," said Mr. Cameron, "and said that he would take it back with him."

"Ah!" said Von Hollman. "Good evening, gentlemen. Prinzeßin, *auf wiedersehen!*"

There were three masculine "good nights," but no word from Charlotte. She stood, silent, pushing her wavy hair back into place, watching the dark figure mount to the motor car, and the car itself turn and vanish down the drive. She turned to face Major Schmidt, holding out both hands, which he clasped eagerly.

"The same old Julius," she said. "I'd know you anywhere."

"And the same fairy princess," said the sentimental Julius, beaming over his red beard.

Charlotte released herself from him and turned to her uncle.

"Julius is a friend," she said, "and so is Fairfax, so I can speak plainly. I'm going to get out of Germany just as soon as I can. It isn't big enough to hold me and that man," she pointed out the door in the direction Von Hollman had taken, "at the same time."

"What did he do?" said Cameron.

"Don't ask me what he did—or what he said," said Charlotte. Her eyes were blazing and her cheeks were crimson. "And don't you ask me, Fairfax, or you, Julius Schmidt. I never spent such an hour. I won't *think* about it or *talk* about it! But I think he's *crazy*. And he seems to run this whole place—and I'm going to get out of here and back to Boston—and the whole German army can't stop me!" Charlotte's voice, which had been steadily going up, broke into an hysterical little sound, half laugh and half sob.

"My dear prinzeßin," said Major Schmidt.

"Healy!" shouted Morgan. "Roll out the gas wagon. We'll soon be on our way."

## CHAPTER XI.

"THE OPEN ROAD—AND THE BRIGHT FACE OF DANGER."

In the scented dusk the motor car, purring softly, swung about the portals of the Château des Herthereux and started west on the wide road. For the moment the distant cannonade, the far-off growl of the War Lord, had stilled its jarring rumble. Once again the beautiful chimes of the church of St. Nicolas were ringing out the music of "Feirwôn," that Luxembourg patois anthem of Lentz, the refrain of which says: "We want to remain just as we are."

The white road was not as smooth and fair to see as it had been twenty-four hours before. One coil of the great war serpent, the green-and-gray serpent with steel scales, the modern

monster of steel and machinery, of men and horses, had been dragged along it, and even in the dusk the tracks were plain to see. The car slithered in and out of new, deep-worn ruts. Morgan, in the rear seat of the car, leaning out and looking down, could see the tracks of the monster—the impression left by huge, flat, sectional tires—rectangular blotches stamped in the white road metal, like the terrifying footprints of some prehistoric beast.

But no dinosaur could vomit invisible annihilation for miles as this organism could, over a mountaintop or a city—to blot out hundreds at a breath or blast into nothing the cunning warrens of concrete and steel contrived against its onslaught.

Now the rear seat of the machine was piled with a different baggage from that which it had carried the day before. Instead of golf clubs and tennis rackets, Morgan had a pair of Lugar automatic pistols. There was an automobile camp kit, a traveling trunk for Charlotte, and in his pockets Morgan carried a sheaf of passports and letters of identification and introduction from Mr. Cameron to various officers he knew in the French and German armies. Besides this, he had money—not letters of credit—but cash, both French and German.

Charlotte sat in the front seat wrapped in the gray military cape, and wearing the black busby with the white skull and crossbones of the Hussars of Death. Surely she was as strange a soldier as had ever worn this sinister insignia. One of the princesses of the royal house of Prussia is nominally a colonel in this famous regiment, and has been often photographed in the headdress and jacket of an officer. Charlotte was nothing at all like her in figure, which the military cape covered, but in face there was just the faintest resemblance to the Hohenzollern prin-

cess in the photographs, wearing the Death's Head busby.

By advice of Major Schmidt, the lights of the motor car were not lit. It was a black car, with no brasswork, and as they felt their way along the road in the first hours of darkness before the moon arose, the car seemed like a deeper shadow in a place where all was shadow.

Morgan had not overstated the facts when he said that Healy was driving one of the best motor cars in Europe. Its engine was a special one which Morgan had secured from a friend in France. It had the four speeds forward, it was practically silent, and it was driven by a man who knew it and loved it like a brother. Healy soon found out where the ruts and worn spots were in the road, and avoided them.

They moved along at a moderate pace, steadily climbing the slow slope northward and eastward. Luxembourg, with its ancient towers, its quiet, industrious, peace-loving population, lay behind them, caught tight in the grip of that inexorable military machine from which they were now trying to escape. The chimes of St. Nicolas might ring out at every second hour their ancient refrain: "We want to remain just as we are," but Luxembourg was no longer to remain as it was. She was caught in a coil of the serpent. Bugles were blowing in her peaceful market place, her quiet streets were the bivouac of armed hosts.

There were times when both Charlotte and Fairfax Morgan might have thought war a glorious thing, and there were times when Healy, now pale-faced and silent, gripping tensely the wheel of the car, had derided the apostles of peace. But in this hour, as their car climbed the long hill westward, as they listened to the distant reverberation and waited for the moon to arise, they were all oppressed, not by the sense of per-

sonal danger, for all in their respective ways were brave and unselfish enough, but by the horror, the folly, the pathos of war. The thousands dead, the peacefully happy fields plowed up by charging squadrons, the innocent children left fatherless, the weeping and desolate women, the ravaged beauty, the ruined honor—all this and more of tragedy spoke in that sullen rumble to the north.

It was almost moonrise, and they were far beyond Luxembourg city when Healy, whose steady gaze had never for a second been removed from the road ahead, brought his machine to a standstill and pointed. Across the road was a dark shadow two feet from the ground—a rope to stop the passage of a car. Such a trap as a country constable might set, eager for the fines of city speeders.

As they came to a standstill a figure emerged from the shadow at the side. He was a noncommissioned officer, and wore the spiked helmet of a Prussian line regiment. He did not see the black car, but paced back and forth, his hands clasped behind him—for he carried no rifle—across the road. He was singing:

*"Kennst du das Land, wo die Citronen blüh'n,  
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen  
glüh'n——"*

He stopped his song suddenly as Healy threw more gas into the motor and started it humming. He saw them, and came toward them. Now was the test of the value of the Death Hussar's headdress. It was too dark to distinguish man from woman, to see a face, but perhaps he might recognize the white insignia on the black background, and perhaps it might not be necessary to show those passports which they all felt would be of little value anywhere in Count von Hollman's jurisdiction.

The Prussian came nearer, and Healy suddenly threw on the lights, illuminating his face and figure. He was a well-set-up fellow, with a blond beard. He was blinded for a moment by the bright lights, then his eye was caught by the dark, erect figure of Charlotte in the shadow behind them. It was instantaneously evident that he took her at once for Count Otto von Hollman. His heels came together, his figure straightened up, his hand came to his forehead in the old familiar way. He wheeled about and gave an order. Other helmeted figures appeared, the rope was dropped, and Healy threw in the clutch. They shot across it, picking up speed as they went.

They had passed the last vidette of Hollman's troops. The moon was rising behind them, and the road stretched clear before. Each of the three felt that they had passed the first great danger. Healy slumped down in his seat as he held the wheel. Charlotte heaved a tremulous sigh, and leaned back toward Morgan. And Morgan himself relaxed his tense grip on his Lugar pistol, and caught one of her hands instead.

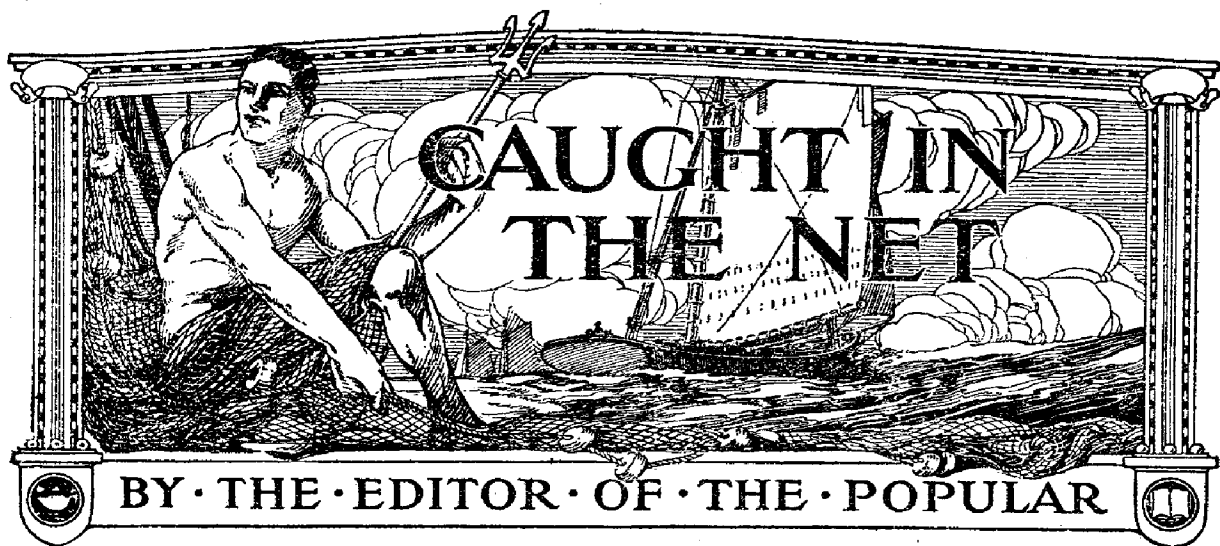
They were climbing the slopes of the leafy Ardennes. Sometimes a rabbit ran across their path. Sometimes a fox barked in the black forest. The cool chill of evening came with the rising moon. Had it not been for that steady rumble to the northward, it might have been a country road in peaceful America.

If they could have pierced the darkness before them! But the forests muffled the stealthy march of thousands, and no sound of drum or trumpet on that night, no rocket nor scouting aeroplane marked the German advance.

TO BE CONTINUED.

*The third installment of this war novel will appear in the next number of the POPULAR, on sale November 23rd.*





## DOVES OF PEACE AND WAR EAGLES

**I**NCREDIBLE as it may strike the casual observer, there have been almost as many wars as years in the past half century. More than thirty nations have been at war since the shocking conflict of 1870 between France and Germany, some of the countries having opened hostilities twice in that comparatively brief period. Here are a dozen of the most important combatants on the list: Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Russia, Spain, Italy, Turkey, and the United States. Altogether quite a quorum of world powers.

In 1899, to the shot-and-shell accompaniment of our Philippine insurrection and the Boer and British conflict in Africa, the first peace conference met at The Hague to assure the world of international felicity. Twenty-six nations were represented, and the dawning twentieth century was heralded as the long-looked-for era of brotherly love and universal comity. Mars must have smiled satirically at this powwow of peace, for hardly had the cooings of the Hague dove ceased when the Boxer uprising plunged the foremost nations into a mêlée of wholesale slaughter. All through the Boxer troubles the Boer war went on, and continued long after the fracas in China. Germany, too, jumped into the African arena with a slogan of "No quarter!" to her dusky neighbors. Terror and rage had no sooner subsided in South Africa when the Russians and Japanese were at each other's throats, and such carnage followed as had never been recorded in modern history. Two instances abundantly prove this: On the plains of Mukden, 600,000 combatants clashed and fought for fourteen days, and the list of casualties was the largest of any single encounter known, totaling 150,000 killed, wounded, and missing; the investment and reduction of Port Arthur involved four and a half months of desperate fighting, the casualties being estimated at 100,000 in round figures.

Came a lull in 1907. Undaunted and idealistic, The Hague held its second Peace Conference, at which forty-four nations were represented. With eyes seemingly blind to the bloodshed of the first seven years of their chosen century of arbitration, the pacificators declared that war was extinct. An article before us in a newspaper of the time puts their conviction succinctly in a paragraph:

The movement for the abolition of war among civilized nations is no longer a Utopian dream of statesmen and philosophers, but has become a popular agitation which literally

encircles the globe. Arbitration, disarmament, and a permanent international congress are being urged by public meetings in America, most of the countries of Europe, and even distant Japan. The movement is not confined to one class. College professors, economists, labor leaders, editors, and socialists join in the demand that war shall cease, that international law shall take the place of violence and bloodshed.

There is little need to refresh our minds that the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, and Italy soon enough dispelled this millennium dream, and that the present gigantic struggle of 1914 is a skull-and-crossbones label to their sweet prescription for peace on earth.

Truly the dove of peace has been brooding upon eagles' eggs!

And for the so-called humanization of war, which has been on every lip, we fear there is no such anomaly under heaven. War has always meant, and can only mean, cruelty, ruin, and death. If the soldiers of Queen Victoria were guilty of barbaric acts during the Indian Mutiny, the French and Germans were equally heartless in Boxer uprising and African butchery, and similar acts must be considered as the concomitant of war anywhere.

Let us borrow for a moment a German classic, entitled "On War," to further convince ourselves. A man named Clausewitz wrote the work, which is rated by military critics as highly as "Faust" is by literary savants. The author, born in 1780, learned from Napoleon; and Von Moltke, Oyama, and other great army heads have used his book as their lexicon. We append a few of Clausewitz's tenets which are being followed by the fighting leaders at war to-day (the italics are our own):

To conquer and destroy the enemy's armed forces is the leading principles of war.

The compulsory submission of the enemy to our will is the ultimate object.

Violence—that is to say, physical force—is the means.

Violence arms itself with the inventions of science in order to contend against violence.

War is an act of violence which in its application knows no bounds.

*Let us not hear of generals who conquer without bloodshed.*

Self-imposed restrictions, almost imperceptible and hardly worth mentioning, termed usages of international law, accompany violence without essentially impairing its effect.

Philanthropists may imagine that there is some clever method of overcoming and disarming an adversary without causing great bloodshed, and that such is the proper tendency of the art of war. However plausible this may appear, *it is an error which must be extirpated*; for in such dangerous things as war the errors which spring from benevolence are just the worst.

We must employ all the resources which we can make available with the utmost energy.

He who uses force unsparingly, without reference to the quantity of bloodshed, is sure to obtain the advantage if his adversary does not do likewise.

The greatest war of all times is now waging on these principles. We can only pray that at the Third Peace Conference, scheduled for 1917, the dove may at last prevail against the eagles—that at least the work of Clausewitz and what it stands for may be relegated to the relics of barbaric days.

## INDEX NUMBERS

**N**OW and then one sees reference in the daily papers to an "index number" in connection with securities, or wages, or commodities, or something else. But what an index number is and what it is good for are mysteries to most persons.

Briefly, an index number is a means of showing the fluctuations in the average price of a group of related things. The basis on which the average is computed is usually the range of prices during the ten years between 1890 and 1900.

In that decade, economists assert, conditions were almost ideally normal. The average wages in a group of trades, the average of business failures, the average prices of a certain number of commodities, or whatever is to be the subject of the index number, is ascertained, and the result is designated as 100. Subsequent averages are compared with this normal average and the percentage of difference is added to or subtracted from the 100 which is the base. The result is the index number.

For example, take the cost of living this year and last compared with the normal period between 1890 and 1900. It began in 1913, with 138 as the index number—which was 38% higher than the normal average of the wholesale prices of a group of 25 commodities selected and arranged to represent a theoretical family's food budget. It climbed to 144 in April, plunged to 136 in June, then rocked up and down between 142 and 144, ending with the latter figure in December. This year's cost-of-living index number was 140 in May, 146 in July, 4% lower at the opening of August, and is now shooting upward again. On the average it will be several per cent higher than last year, and probably will be 50% or more above normal by December.

The rise and fall of the index number is oftenest shown by a chart. If the fluctuations are severe the lines look like a profile of the jagged peaks of the Andes. If they are moderate they curve up and down like rolling country.

The index number is the economist's horoscope. It is more of a guide, showing the general tendency, than a prophet predicting what the end will be.

## AS SAFE AS A BATTLEFIELD

**D**O you want a job at from fifteen to twenty-five dollars a day, no experience necessary? Apply to a powder plant. Those are the wages they pay in the glazing room as the price of courage. No man need be out of work if he cares to take the risk. There is always a vacancy. The whole staff changes on an average of once every six months. Occasionally the inevitable happens. Oftener the men just quit, because they can't stand the constant strain.

The glazing room is the danger center of the powder mill. There is nothing more hazardous than that. Steam and friction there polish the granules of powder. A suggestively perilous combination. The glaze on the powder puts the finishing touch to its highly explosive powers. The better the glaze, the stronger the powder—and the greater the danger.

No one ever goes into a powder plant from curiosity, unless he is childishly inquisitive. Visitors are not welcome. But the few that do appear, after having obtained their passports from those high in authority, are thoroughly searched before they enter. Every piece of metal—suspender buckles, garter clasps, money: everything—must be left outside. Once inside, every move is watched by the attendant. At the first gesture indicating fear or carelessness, the visitor is hurried away. There is no ceremony about it, either.

A visitor in a powder plant, to conceal his nervousness, drew a toothpick from his pocket. Instantly two of the men nearest him threw him to the floor and took it from him. They thought it a match, and were taking no chances.

The men who make high explosives may get used to their occupations, but they live in constant dread. They say that every powder plant blows up

some day. They are very superstitious. A woman in the plant is the worst of bad luck. Therefore no woman ever is permitted to enter. If one got a look in, the men would quit in a body and never come back.

## PHILIP

**A** DEPOSITOR in one of the greatest banks of America went to the president's office one day and told to him a little story he delighted in telling. "Good!" said the president. "Now will you write out what you have said to me?"

The depositor did.

Here is what he wrote:

"Whenever I enter or leave the bank I am sure to receive a courteous greeting and smile from Philip. Philip is the gentleman of color who officiates upon the main floor, answers questions, and directs strangers to their proper anchorage.

"He wears, in addition to his smile, a smart uniform of blue, with white gloves; and West Point itself, even upon a field day, does not boast of a more soldierlike personage.

"Any bank can take and safeguard your money, and even pay it out to you again on demand. Any bank can, upon the presentation of proper collateral, make you a loan, and there are many other conveniences and courtesies which can be extended; but there is only one bank, to my knowledge, that possesses a Philip.

"Philip has that rare quality of not knowing or appearing to know what manner of man or woman you are. To Philip every person entering or leaving this—I came near saying his—bank is a potentate and deserving of all the courtesy and attention supposedly due a potentate.

"It makes no difference to him whether my clothes are ready-made and old or the latest creation of a master, whether I am about to deposit millions or seek a small loan—I am a visitor and a customer, and am, therefore, entitled to instant recognition and courtesy, or, if I require it, attention and help.

"In a bank, capital and surplus are necessary; officers with brains and business acumen are necessary; conveniences and assistance are a part of the service you expect; clerks and tellers must naturally be in attendance. But besides and beyond all these there is something more to be desired, and Philip supplies it. Cold winds may blow or summer's sun beat down, rains may descend and floods come, but the cheerful smile and inherent good nature of Philip are undisturbed. Like the brook, they go on forever.

"Most of us are very human, and we may, at times, be scant with our courtesy, yet kindness on the part of others we never fail to observe and appreciate.

"The little things of life are important. A particle of grit may not wreck the machinery of a great establishment, but it disturbs smoothness, and makes the cylinders knock. A lubricant is a fine thing to have handy when the gears grind. Philip helps supply the grease. He makes things run easier; he saves horse power; he helps us to the best of his ability to conserve our energy.

"What the world needs is more kindness; what the individual needs is more patience; and what banks need is a Philip, for he is more than a faithful watchman, more than an efficient servant—he is an institution."

The president had that tribute printed on parchment. Tens of thousands of copies have been struck off; and Philip—a gentleman whose skin is black—will be known America over because he is a gentleman.

# Fire in the Heading

By Julius G. Furthmann

What happened at the hour of the morning shot at S. B. Cañon in British Columbia where the Grand Trunk Pacific was breaking a hard-rock grade toward Prince Rupert. A story of giant powder and unparalleled bravery.

**K**ENNY sighed, and said women were hard. The remark broke a sort of gloomy silence, and his friend, whom men called "Bonfire" because of a flaming poll of short red hair, threw back his head and laughed at the early sun.

"Oh, I don't know!" said he, and laughed again.

Kenny turned his head. He was a dark-faced young man, with straggly black hair, eyes packed away under black brows, a long black upper lip, and a great, clean-shaven jaw that looked sullen as death.

"What are you laughing at?" he demanded.

"Nothing," said Bonfire. "Why?"

"I just wanted to know," said Kenny.

They sat on the bunk-house steps, looking out over the dusty little construction town. There it sprawled in the white morning sun, a slattern shamble of frame shacks and wooden buildings, flung up the hill, you might say, to follow the road.

About reared the black cake of the mountain, ledge upon ledge, tier upon tier, silent, nebulous in the clear, untempered light.

Breakfast was just over, and a noisy crowd held the bunk-house porch. They stood in sixes and sevens; tall, barbaric-looking men, deep of chest, with

shoulders like broad ledges of rock, careless of speech and gay at heart.

"Let's go," Kenny said suddenly.

"Where?" asked Bonfire, looking sly. For he was a big red animal, and the sun was warm.

Kenny stood up.

"Let's go down to the grade," said he.

"What's the hurry?" protested Bonfire. "It's early yet. Wait till the night shift pulls the morning shot. There's something I want to ask you about, anyway."

"Come on, then," said Kenny; and started off.

Bonfire looked after him for a moment.

"Oh, sugar!" he said mildly; and got up and followed.

On the way down, their speech continued simple and infrequent. Kenny produced a small sack of tobacco and a little red book, and they began rolling cigarettes.

"I should let 'em alone," he said, lighting his.

"What?" asked Bonfire, puffing.

Kenny took a deep inhale.

"Women," said he.

There was a moment of silence, which Bonfire broke.

"Well," said he, "I wish you'd begin with Sandy McCann."

"Huh?" said Kenny.

And the two men stopped in full stride. Sandy McCann was the granddaughter of old Robin McCann, who tended the commissary at S. B. Cañon for the railroad contractors.

"You heard me," Bonfire said evenly; "I want you to let her alone."

Kenny scratched his head.

"That's what worries me," said he; "I can't."

Bonfire stuck out his lip.

"You better!" he said belligerently.

"Why, I've got ten pounds on you, easy," argued Kenny.

Bonfire grinned and showed his strong white teeth.

"You'll need it," said he.

Thus they faced one another, adding irony to menace, two big, young men, clock-full of speed and heat. They stood almost in front of the commissary, which overlooked the lower bend of the road.

"There she goes," Kenny said, in a minute. He was looking by, over Bonfire's shoulder, down the road.

It ended at the grade—a long, level, white concourse of crushed stone that wheeled in a slow, sweet curve toward a quarrylike cut in the flank of the mountain, where, as Kenny spoke, a stupendous pillar of earth and rock of a sudden rose in the air.

Boom!

The great hills shook; and in a nearby shack a pane of glass fell, with a tinkling crash, which accentuated rather than disturbed the momentary silence.

Boom-m!

"Two," said Kenny.

There was no wind; only this low, sullen road, and the sound of a dog howling somewhere.

Then——

"Three," counted Bonfire.

The fourth fell to Kenny.

People could now be seen on the low porches and stoops along the road; men coming out singly and in small

groups, with a few women, and fewer children, all to stand and look at the mountain. There was no excitement; it was merely the hour of the morning shot at S. B. Cañon, in British Columbia, where the Grand Trunk Pacific was breaking a hard-rock grade toward Prince Rupert.

Shot succeeded shot, tearing the earth; a measured crash on crash, as of a battery of big guns. Meanwhile the two big rock men continued their friendly account; Kenny had the ninth, and marked the deeper note of the shot.

"Black powder," he said; and the red-headed man nodded.

"It's good stuff in the middle holes."

"Burns too slow."

"Prime it with giant."

"That's better; but I like fine, white muck. Black powder gives you nothing but great chunks. A good, clean shot of giant, well set down, is the boy to smash the rock!"

"Well," said Bonfire, "this one finishes it."

Boom-m-m!

The earth reeled slightly, and out on the grade there reared a chaotic chimney of rock and dust, towering against the mountain for a moment, then cascading with a pattering roar; a great aura of dust and smoke rising slowly, as on unseen wings, through the golden silence that comes straight from the heart of the early sun.

For a moment the two men stood quiet, looking out on the grade; far below, thin lines of black specks were picking their way back through the wild street of broken rock, toward the unfinished railroad cut. They were the men of the night shift, returning to the scene of the shot, to see what they should see.

Bonfire moved restlessly.

"Well," said he, "that gives us just about a half an hour."

"It won't take that long," said Kenny.

"What d'you mean?" demanded the red-headed man.

"Nothing," said Kenny, without turning his head.

Bonfire regarded him sullenly.

"Well?" said he.

Kenny turned, lifting his lids.

"In a hurry, now, aren't you?"

"No; but the whistle blows at seven."

"Well," said Kenny, looking around, "I guess this place is as good as any."

Bonfire nodded, and, without further ceremony, the two men began to pull off their corduroy jackets. In a minute, they stood facing each other, stripped to the waist; they looked beautifully young and strong, and the light, which had now the peculiar, almost supernatural softness and limpidity of light falling in the early morn of the mountains, came full upon them, and caressed their stark, lithe nakedness.

Kenny looked solemn. "Want to shake hands?" he asked.

Bonfire grinned. "Might as well," said he, advancing; "just to show there's no hard feelings."

This they did; then both men sprang apart.

"Ready?" muttered Kenny, his head down.

"Come on!" said Bonfire, and the two men rushed together.

Smack! Smack! Kenny had Bonfire in the mouth, and the red-headed man didn't like it. He tasted his own salt blood, and saw red. For an instant their figures whirled in a blur; then they stood free, giving smash for smash.

A shout arose up the road. The procession of the day shift had begun, and the leaders hurried down. Knots of men followed on the run. And an old man came out on the steps of the commissary.

He stood on the low stoop for a moment, grinning at the sun; a little, lean man, with white, wild locks sticking out around his crown, like an aureole that

had been drawn through a bramble-bush. Which will do for Robin McCann, commissary clerk for Grant Brothers, the railroad contractors.

The crowd gathered quickly, making a ring. They stood seven and eight deep, picking their men.

"Go in, Kenny!"

"Now, Bonfire!"

For the fighters clipped about, sparing; they moved after one another with short, springy steps, chins up, salient, like the carnivora.

"Come on, Kenny!" yelled a supporter.

Kenny turned his face. "No hurry," he said, and ducked swiftly.

For the red-headed man had swung on the instant; Kenny side-stepped, and caught him in full dash. Driving left and right to the body, he followed up with a rush of his own.

The crowd yelled for him, and Robin McCann went back into the commissary. He went behind the counter, and opened his ledger, turning to the K's.

"Blackie Kenny." So ran the heading of the page, and the storekeeper totaled the account. Then he turned back, coming to the C's.

"Cobleigh," said McCann, "Ross Cobleigh. Here it is, a long, reckless list for a short-stake man."

He made two slips, one for each beligerent. Might as well have them both ready, though only one would be needed, that of the defeated man, who, if he was able, would stop only long enough in camp to call for his time, give away his bed, and go. This is a custom among rock men, a good custom, too, that lends immediate and honorable extinction to the fiercest quarrel, whether it be for a job or a woman or because a man just naturally can't get along. Somebody must go, that is all.

McCann was checking over the two slips when his granddaughter, Sandy, came out from the rear of the store,

where she kept house. She was about twenty, slim and supple as larch, with a bright color, and the round neck and plump throat of a dove. She had abundant yellow hair, long lashes somewhat darker, and a habit, when she spoke, of dropping her lids and smiling.

"Grandfather," said she, and looked at life with the mild blue stare of a merry young nun.

The old man lifted his head.

"Eh?" he said.

"Who's fighting?"

"Two young fools."

A yell bombshelled out in front, and Sandy ran to the window and looked. "I knew it," she said, in a minute.

If the old man heard, he gave no sign.

"How does it go?" he asked presently.

"In a hurly-burly of heads and shoulders. You can't see very much for the crowd. Ah," said she, "I saw Kenny's face then."

"How does he look?"

"Strong—yet like it hurt him to breathe."

"The man lacks his second wind. Is Bonfire any better off?"

"The men are yelling for him."

"He's the lighter man, that's why. The advantage is always with the smaller. But don't you worry about Kenny," he added, after a bit.

The girl tossed her head.

"I'm not worrying," she said; "he's nothing to me."

"He sat on the stoop last night."

"Yes; but Bonfire was there before him."

"I know; and Kenny stayed last. The man is like that, lass; he is, for a fact."

The girl turned her face from the window. When she spoke, she dropped her eyes and lowered her voice as people do when religion or a dead parent is the matter.

"I call him hard," said she, "as hard

and stubborn, I say, as some of his own wild rock!"

The old man leaned forward eagerly. "You've said it, lass—a man draws character from his work. Strange, wild, stubborn stuff, the rock. You can cut it with steel, and break it with giant, but you can't kill it ever. It's smashed, yet it lives, they say, ready to strike back. You've said it, lass; there are men like that. Kenny, for one."

He paused—for the crowd shouted again, and the girl, watching at the window, gave a little cry. McCann glanced across.

"How is it now?"

"Kenny is rushing like an angry bull."

"He's got his second wind, then. How they yell!"

"Bonfire has all he can do to save his head. Ah," she cried, "he's down."

"I told you. Up black, down red," chuckled the old man. The girl was white as windflowers, but she went on calmly enough.

"They're both down," she announced, with a certain satisfaction.

"Eh?" cried McCann.

"Kenny fell over his man, carrying into the crowd. I can't see either of them now; wait, they're both up again."

"Good!" said McCann.

"Bonfire is smiling," continued the girl, and something—the excitement or what?—slowly kissed a stronger color into her cheeks.

"Aye," muttered the old man, "Bonfire would smile; he would, for a fact. So would a wolf, to show his teeth."

"It's a rare, flashing smile," the girl said quickly. The old man sighed; it was an old man's sigh, and he shook his head at his skinny knees.

There was a moment of quiet, which was smashed out o' doors. The men began shouting some one's name; it became a deep, bellowing roar.

"Bonfire!" was the shout.



For up to now the red-headed man had given way, and been clubbed down by sheer weight. Kenny's long game was to give and take, Bonfire's to hit and get away; and now, with Kenny slowing up for breath, he fell in and out of his old snapshot form. Kenny had had his inning, for a while there had been no avoiding this big-bodied avalanche of bone and muscle, and the red-headed man had had all he could do to cover up and run. This he did, saving his head, until the rushes began to fall short, grow more unsteady, more wild, which must be expected if you don't get your man; and then, taking his time, Bonfire began to cut Kenny to pieces. Thus the tide turned; and the crowd, seeing it, cheered.

Kenny still rushed, but Bonfire moved like a wind-driven shadow, hitting hard and fast at every turn. At this moment Kenny paused, and then, as if gathering his last bit of reserve strength, he made a staggering charge, slugging out with both fists. Bonfire sidestepped neatly, parading some pretty footwork; he ducked under a full right swing, and, driving left and right to the ribs, got away. Kenny reeled under the savage impact, but turned and came back gamely; he rocked a little as he came opposite his man, and his arms drooped, as if he felt his fists to be an unutterable weight. His face showed terrible punishment. Every breath he drew seemed a great actuality. The man was all in.

"Finish him!" bellowed the crowd.

Bonfire smiled. His eyes were calm, even pensive; but his face was terrible—livid with the strange, unearthly russet pallor that follows the stormy pageant of red-headed men like a curse of God. A sudden hush fell on the crowd, which had drawn back a little, so that the two men in the middle might have plenty of room to make an end.

This much Sandy saw from her window. The rest she saw from the stoop.

Bonfire sprang in. Kenny raised his right arm, with the motion of a tired child, and Bonfire, playing to the crowd, threw up both arms in a sort of mock horror to save his jaw. He got a laugh, all right, but hard rock is hard rock, and gallery hazards their own crime and punishment. For, whatever happened to Kenny, he shifted to the right on the instant, and, sinking his left as he staggered by, drove the blow home under Bonfire's upraised guard.

It was a terrific bunt. Kenny's fist traveled only four inches, but his shoulder made nine, bringing the whole body behind the fist, which landed flush over the heart—a two-hundred-and-ten-pound jolt. The blow would have dropped an ordinary man. Bonfire it doubled into a tortured knot; and, as he straightened up, Kenny advanced, a bit unsteady but still competent, to finish him.

Something happened then which must be expected.

"Kenny!"

The voice halted the big rock man in full stride; the crowd parted, and Sandy burst into the ring, between the two men.

"Kenny!" she cried.

He lifted his head, saw her, and dropped his arm; he faced her, streaming with sweat, panting as if the laboring breath would rip open his chest. There was blood on his forehead, and a keen, half-cruel look about the tight lips and impatient eyes.

"Huh?" said he, on a great, gasping breath that was like a sob.

"Do you want to kill him?" she demanded.

Kenny put up one hand and brushed some of the blood and sweat from his forehead.

"I would," said he; and Bonfire, pulling himself together, reeled out from behind the girl.

"Come on," he muttered; "I ain't done yet."

Sandy shouldered him off, big as he was, and fronted Kenny. "I can't stand any more of this," she said, in a low voice.

Kenny drew another tremendous breath, and nodded toward Bonfire.

"D'you want him, then?" he asked.

He looked her full in the eyes, and Sandy hesitated; the crowd was quiet, but drawing close—a circle of dark, hairy faces, real yet unreal for her in that moment as the malign masks of a dream.

Bonfire, a little aside, cleared his throat in the silence.

"Well?" said he.

But the girl looked only at Kenny; there was no minx in her now, and if her eyes held his, it was all very frank and unconscious.

"I was just wondering," she said slowly.

Kenny gazed down at her, his dark face of a sudden lighting up with a quizzical, tender grin.

"No hurry," he said; but Bonfire had it otherwise framed.

"Let her settle it now," he said harshly. "What d'you say, Sandy?" he demanded, plucking her arm and swinging her about, so that she once more stood between the two men.

For reply, the girl tore herself free; she turned, regarding the red-headed man for a moment. Then she threw back her head and shook forth a soft, bubbling laugh that filled the place with music—and pure scorn.

"No!" she cried, and so left them.

The crowd opened awkwardly with a shy truculence; the men didn't quite understand it all yet. Sandy mounted the stoop; at the door she wheeled suddenly, her head thrown back, the white throat showing, her face upturned like that of a woman who is kissed upon the lips.

"I hate you!" she said quite distinctly.

Kenny looked up.

"Who?" said he.

"You," said Sandy, and the door slammed behind her.

Bonfire laughed, a pleasant, soundless laugh, through closed lips.

"Now will you be good?" he said to Kenny, who grinned sheepishly.

"I guess I put my foot in it, all right," said he.

"I was a little hasty myself," admitted Bonfire; and they laughed together—silent, friendly laughter.

The men joined in, breaking up around them; there was nothing else to do. For the whistle would blow in a minute, and somebody was fetching up a pail of water.

"Take it," said Bonfire.

"Go on," said Kenny, and the red-headed man grabbed the bucket. Then, when both had drunk their fill, they began to wash up, without further argument, in the same pail.

McCann still sat behind the counter when Sandy flew back into the store. "I told you not to go," he chided her. Sandy had nothing to say till she got her breath.

"When does the minister come up the river again?" she asked.

"The minister?" said McCann; "why, lass?"

"I want to tell you something," said she.

McCann considered.

"Let's see. Doctor Darlison, the Presbyterian, comes up every third Sunday. This is the second week, and Saturday. He should be here to-morrow, then, on the morning work train. Why, now?" asked the old man.

"I shall be wed then," said Sandy.

The old man sat up.

"Ha!" said he; "who is the man?"

"That's the trouble," said Sandy; "I can't make up my mind."

And then, suddenly, with the chaotic passion and abandon peculiar to women and children, the girl put her yellow

head down on the counter and began to cry.

"Hush, child," said the old man; "listen, there goes the whistle!"

By the time Kenny and Bonfire had pulled on their jackets and found their hats, the lower grade was black with the hurrying procession of the day shift; even now the advance guard entered the jagged portals of the great cut, which was to open a way through the flank of the mountain. They started down the hill, following the men. The earth sloped before them in the sunshine; east and south the sky was a vast opal. North, a long spur of purple mountains stretched their rosy flanks; and two big pink clouds came sailing out solemn and stupendous over the world.

"Tell me something," Bonfire began, as they reached the grade. "Have you never been whipped, Blackie?"

Kenny shook his head.

"Never," said he; "but I was close to it this morning."

"Oh, I don't know," said Bonfire.

"You threw it away," said Kenny.

They were nearing the cut; the portal loomed full of shadow, and away from the mountain, on the left, forever separated from the mother rock, there rose a huge white spire, lifting a profile of sheer, beautiful lines. The cut was almost finished. The way lay open save for a big bench of white limestone, about twenty feet high and more than thirty feet deep, which still blocked the far end of the cut.

Kenny marked this as they approached.

"Leaves a pretty good jag of rock," said he.

"We ought to break it with the day shot," said Bonfire.

Kenny considered him. "Figure on using any black powder?"

"I'd like a little," said Bonfire—"in the middle holes."

The other cast a robust sigh. "Well,"

said he, "to-morrow's Sunday, and they were figuring on getting the portals of that new work around the bend opened up by the first of the week."

"What d'you mean?" demanded Bonfire; for black powder, in its place, was his hobby.

Kenny grinned. "Nothing," said he.

"Oh, have it your own way!" said Bonfire. They were the powder men.

They found the cut in a thunder of activity. Men swarmed everywhere; even on the walls, high in the air, clinging to ropes like flies. With picks and shovels others attacked a young hill of broken rock heaped before the bench. This was the product of the morning blast, and these men were the muckers. They ranked with the barrow men, who worked between the bench and the dump. The drills were mounted on the bench; and now, as Kenny and Bonfire walked through the cut, all sounds, the sullen roar of the broken rock down the dump, the shouts and yells of the men on the walls, the clear skirl of pick and shovel, were blotted out in the high note that was the terrific duet of rock and steel.

There were four drills; tripods, driven by compressed air piped up from the power house below town. They stood on the flat shelf of the bench, each machine manned by a drill runner and a helper. The latter knelt before the drill bar, the runner standing aft, turning a little crank. The helper swung a wrench, pointing the drill and seeing to it that the steel ran free in the hole; the runner stood back, feeling things through the crank, while the machine drove the steel down through the living rock.

Over all stood the foreman of the cut—a squat, barnacle-faced man with a hard mouth and a chest like a churn. He grinned down at Kenny and Bonfire as they ascended the little path that led up the side of the bench.

"When are you going to finish it?" he yelled, above the din.

Kenny bent over him. "I don't know," he shouted; "this evening, I guess?"—the inflection falling to Bonfire, who nodded back.

"To-night—after shift," was what they read on his moving lips.

Thus they agreed; but very much happened yet that day. But all things in order. Thus they fell out:

Seven holes of the round were set down by ten o'clock. These were the side holes, and, by the time the men knocked off for dinner, Kenny and Bonfire had six of them ready for the powder. For Bonfire, with hard luck and dry sand, had lost the seventh.

"She was skittish to go with," said Kenny.

Bonfire had showed some chagrin; men counted him a master of his craft, and a lost hole was a lost hole.

"I tried her when they first took the steel out," added Kenny; "and broke a good tamping rod."

"She slid away from me," sulked the red-headed man, "just like she had eyes."

"I always use wet sand in them kind," suggested Kenny.

"I like it dry," said Bonfire—"tamped down with a little fine gravel."

As he pleased! Kenny took another tack. "I don't think you sprung her too strong," said he.

"Wrong again," growled Bonfire; "that was just it—I used her too hard and she let me hold the bag. I made the first pocket with three sticks of giant. That was all right, but I tried to shoot the second with nine; and she wobbled. Seven was enough."

"You never can tell," said Kenny.

At four o'clock the round was complete. It consisted of fourteen holes, set down in the rock about twenty feet deep, loaded with giant and black powder. Kenny had let Bonfire have his way with the middle holes, which are

the king row of the shot, to cheer him up. It had; Bonfire was smiling now like a pleased child:

"Some shot," said he.

And his eye traveled over the orderly array of empty dynamite cases and black-powder cases on the bank.

"Count 'em," said Kenny.

"I have," chuckled Bonfire; "two hundred and four cases of sixty per cent giant, one hundred and six forty per cent, and seventy-one cans of black. Enough powder," he added, with a grin, "to knock white out of the moon at a quarter of a mile!"

It was a big shot; a world of powder, the men said, to get in fourteen holes. The rock foreman came up.

"How are you fixed?" he asked Kenny.

"Look at her," said Kenny.

The bench was cleared for action. Lengths of black fuse lay out on the surface, like the tentacles of a giant devil-fish that had been imprisoned in the rock, showing the position of each hole. The drills had long since been dismantled and gotten out of the way.

"We're all ready to fire," said Kenny.

"Let her go!" said the foreman. Kenny lit a cigarette.

"Get your men out of the cut," he said; "the shortest fuse is seven feet."

"That gives us seven minutes," nodded the foreman. He eyed Kenny curiously, his head down.

For the big powder man had picked up a spare length of fuse and was opening one end with his knife. This done, he touched the cut with his cigarette light; a thin stream of sparks shot forth, and Kenny turned around to Bonfire, who stood a little to one side, just lighting a similar fuse for himself.

"Take the side holes," said Kenny; "and come across to the middle. I'll take the breast holes and finish up with the lifters."

The foreman waited no longer. He

turned and ran down the path. His voice was like a trumpet.

"Fire in the heading!" it rang through the cut.

The men took up the cry. Their voices rose in a kind of chant:

"Fire in the heading!"

And like black water the bulk of the shift rushed out on the grade, carrying the shout. Up on the hill you could hear them. The girl Sandy paused on the road coming down.

McCann had asked her where she was going.

"Down to the grade," said Sandy.

"Have you no shame?" scolded the old man; "those men are going to make an end of it to-night."

"I know," said Sandy; "let me pass, grandfather."

The old man peered at her for a moment; then he moved out of the door.

"I promised your mother," he said slowly, "never to stand in your way. But think, lass, what people will say."

"It's all one thing to me," said Sandy. And so she started down the hill, to see what the end would be.

The sun was very near his setting. Small red clouds floated in the western quarter of the sky. In the east there was a warm dusk, the solemn hush of evening, and a young moon rising over the great hills.

And down on the beach the two powder men were nearly done. Little wreaths of smoke, taking odd forms in the soft light, lifted their heads all over the rock. There was no sound save a sudden exclamation from one or the other of the two men when something went wrong, and occasionally, down in the cut, the voice of the rock foreman, raised in some argument with the drill runners, who were waiting there for Kenny and Bonfire.

The latter squatted over one of the middle holes, and within arm's length knelt Kenny, in some difficulty with the last of the lifters. The fuse, which was

a short one, had slipped back into the hole.

With an exclamation he sat back and looked around for a miner's spoon. There one lay, the long shank half buried in sand, on the other side of the bench. There was no time to get up and get it, so Kenny thrust his hand into the hole and felt for the evasive fuse. The hole was only a little bigger around than his wrist, but Kenny got his hand in somehow, and located the end of the fuse with the tips of his fingers. Presently he got a good hold of it and started to pull his hand out of the hole.

At this moment Bonfire stood up, threw down his improvised fuse, and stamped it out carefully. There was enough fire on the rock.

"Come on!" said he.

"Wait a minute," muttered Kenny.

Bonfire walked over. Kenny's back was turned, but the other could see he was tugging at something.

"I'm all done," said Bonfire; "what's the matter?"

Kenny sat back; he breathed in once, hard.

"Nothing," said he; "I got my hand caught, that's all."

"Quit your kidding," said Bonfire.

"I ain't kidding you," said Kenny; "look!"

Bonfire bent over. One glance was enough.

"My crimson oath," he said slowly, "that's a fine place to put your hand!"

Kenny tugged at it.

"She tried to get away from me," he said fiercely.

"Eh?" said Bonfire, bending over.

"That blooming fuse," said Kenny, in reply.

"I caught my hand like that once," said Bonfire, staring, "when I was a kid. It was in a pitcher, and they had to break it."

Kenny glared down at the rock, and eased his wrist in the hole.

"It's the same thing," said he; "only this pitcher is big as all outdoors!"

"Pull on it once," Bonfire said thickly; "here, let me get a hold of you."

But Kenny waved him back.

"If anybody could pull it out," he said, "I could; and I can't make up my mind to leaving any more skin in this hole!"

A voice came up from the cut.

"Hey," it said, "are you fellows going to take all night?"

Bonfire ran to the head of the path.

"Come up here a minute," said he.

The rock foreman appeared, with three drill runners at his heels. The situation spoke for itself; the foreman shook his head.

"You're just as good as dead," he said briskly.

"Huh?" said Kenny.

"Take a slant at that," said the other.

Kenny turned suddenly. Smoke stood thick on the rock; an ominous curtain shrouded the bench, hanging waist-high, like a pall. When Kenny turned again his dark face had lost a shade, and about the tight mouth there were two new lines, that made you think somehow of medieval knights and sudden death.

"Well," said he, "you lads better be slinging your hook."

The rock foreman coughed.

"Somebody get me a pick!" he snapped.

"I'll go," said one of the men eagerly. Bonfire looked after him with a sneer.

"Something tells me," said he, "that Cockie Wicks won't come back."

"Neither would I," growled one of the others; "you know as well as I do there ain't a pick to be had now this side of the powder magazine," which was a good quarter of a mile.

"Every man for himself," said Kenny.

"That's the old rule," said the rock foreman, "but I——"

"Do me a favor," Kenny said shortly.

"Give it a name," said the other, and Kenny looked up at Bonfire.

"Take him with you," he said.

Bonfire wet his lips. He had been looking for something like this; these three men, who were going to run for their lives, would waste a lot of time trying to take him with them.

"If you let me alone," said he, "I'll go first!"

Which he did, without another word, showing the way down the path. Kenny looked up presently.

"He might have said good-by," he said to the mountain; and somebody laughed.

It was Bonfire, standing at the head of the path—a bit out of breath, but his own man again. And Kenny said:

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"I came back," said Bonfire.

"Where did you leave the others?" Kenny wanted to know.

"At the bottom of the path. They came down one by one; I wanted an even break, that was all. So I came back," said Bonfire, "to make you a little proposition."

"You wouldn't bargain with a dead man?"

"You're good for any man—from where you sit—till you draw your last breath. You're the kind that can always come back; you proved that this morning, and I ain't going to take any more chances. Let me finish, Blackie Kenny; I'm going to bargain with you for your life, and it'll be a good bargain for me whether you say yes or no. I want you to get out of this camp on the night work train, and if she ain't called for six o'clock, I want you to walk out!"

"Somebody'll have to pull this load first," said Kenny.

"I'll do it," said Bonfire.

Kenny looked at him curiously. Among rock men, even with a flying start, this was considered the task of tasks.

"You must want that girl pretty bad," he said.

"She's got in my eyes," Bonfire said simply, "just like the sun."

"Well, then," argued Kenny, "why don't you go away and leave me to the shot?"

Bonfire looked hurt.

"Why, I wouldn't let a dog die like that," he said; "look here!"

He strode to the first side hole. He knew almost to the stick how much giant powder it contained, but his hand held no tremor as he inserted the spoon and coolly dug out the hissing fuse.

"How does she stand?" asked Kenny.

Bonfire dragged out the whole length. A yellow stick of giant powder followed it like a plummet. This was the primer, and contained a fulminate cap, which clamped the fuse at one end. Bonfire stood up, reading the black length as you would a strip of tape from a ticker.

"Oh, you've got about four minutes," he said, snapping the fust below the spark. "What d'you say?"

"No," said Kenny.

"Yes," said another voice; and Sandy McCann stood at the top of the path, binding her yellow hair in the dusk. She was very pale, as one after a long run, and quite calm. Her right sleeve was ripped to the shoulder and the whole arm showed, smooth, rounded, lovely.

"A drill runner brought the news down the grade," she explained; "and I've been standing here a full minute, getting my breath."

"Who tore your dress?" Bonfire demanded suddenly, as if that were all the trouble.

"A man," said the girl; "I met three of them coming into the cut, but the other two didn't stop."

Kenny stared at her over his shoulder, something gradually washing his face of color. He jerked his head at Bonfire.

"Get her out of this," he said hoarsely; "get her out of this, man!"

Bonfire turned to the girl.

"You heard what I said," she told him; "you can make your bargain with me."

"No!" said Kenny. He shouted it at them.

"Hush!" said the girl; "I've made up my mind."

Bonfire stood over him.

"You can't stop me," he said.

"Huh!" said Kenny.

Bonfire sprang back; and the imprisoned man reached for his leg and missed. He fell forward, his free hand stabbing the air; he drew back, tugging furiously at the rock, until the smoke and pain choked him down to his haunches again. He sat there, gazing wistfully at the red-headed man, who now knelt over the second side hole.

The fuse here had been cut a foot longer than the first, but by now the spark had burned down to the three-minute mark. For Bonfire's knife blade nicked it at a point just three feet from the primer. This, you might say, represented his handicap on the whole round, which had been timed to fire at one-minute intervals. Each hole, Bonfire knew, contained a fuse trimmed one foot longer than the last. There were twelve holes to go—no, eleven, counting out the one in which Kenny had caught his hand; he had his handicap, and must keep it, or death would be in good season. Of course, every-second held the chance of a faulty fuse and a sight of eternity; but by the same token, fate and manufacture, as stars in harmony, might smother a spark and return life in a squib.

Bonfire gained nothing at the third hole. Here he sat back, calling Sandy to bring him the spoon, which he had left behind. She came quickly and knelt beside him, watching him work; and thereafter she followed him from hole to hole, fascinated, perhaps, by the

speed of his hands and a dawning realization of the dearness of things.

There was just enough light to see by—between the rose of evening and the glory of the moon; and a fresh young wind, now and then, to take care of the smoke.

Bonfire picked up a minute at the first breast hole, and lost it at the second. The fuse evaded him cunningly, and the rock seemed determined to hold it fast. Bonfire cursed the rock, endeavoring it with the same breath; for of a sudden the fuse came willingly to his hands. It was this way with everything; fuse, fire, powder, rock, and spoon. He personified them all, arraying himself against these things as if they, not he, were possessed. For luck he spat on his palms, and rapped the face of the rock with the spoon to make them both behave.

At intervals now he laughed and sang. It was as one passing the nadir of a frenzy. He would pull the load, all right. Of that much he was certain. Eight holes lay behind him, robbed of their fire, and the honors were almost even. The last breast hole told him that; his knife gashed the spark a good two feet and a half above the primer. Bonfire showed the fuse to the girl, calling her "Woman," and laughed again in gay excitement. The word thrilled her; but it was only a flash, and left her a little puzzled and sad, though she still sat by and handed the man what he wanted. She followed him about, as one walking through a dream; yet if he dropped his knife she picked it up, and felt it a duty to keep the spoon ever under his hand.

Thus they came to the lifters. There were three of them, but only two holes smoked, and Kenny sat with his right hand in the farthest.

The fuses were long and close to the rock, yet Bonfire gained nothing here. He had to take his time, and watch

where he moved, because Kenny was so close.

The latter, however, sat watching him quietly, and made no hostile sign.

"How are they coming?" he asked.

Bonfire showed him.

"There's only the three middle holes left," he said; "and we got something over two minutes."

Kenny nodded.

"They're full of black powder," he said; "but a man ought to know his own tamping." He didn't look at the girl.

Bonfire had begun on the first middle hole, but Sandy still knelt before the last lifter, where he had left her. She watched Kenny curiously. His face drawn, pale, haggard even, like those at the end of a long vigil. The girl thought of physical pain, and, no doubt, she imagined she understood all the misery he was suffering, and yearned to go to him and comfort him as only the woman he loves can comfort a man; but she didn't. She only sat there, and looked at him sullenly. For he wouldn't look at her; he sat with his head turned, looking at Bonfire, his expression that of a man watching a climax in which he intends to share.

His profile was quiet; yet every line spelled alert daring and great hardihood of soul; and the big jaw was set like a plowshare.

The middle holes ran through the center of the bench. They had been set down about six feet apart, the last one, or the one nearest to Kenny, being set out a little, owing to a fault in the rock. So Bonfire, reaching here at length, almost faced Kenny, who sat a little aside; near enough, had he wished, to reach out with his free hand and touch the other on the shoulder. But Kenny sat motionless, with eyes that looked at nothing and seemed to see everything. He moved once, easing his wrist in the rock; and the girl, watching him, knew, in a blinding flash of the intuition God gave to all women and some men, what



his next move would be. What would happen she had no idea; she felt a strange lightness, her thoughts flying out of her head like feathers out of a bag. This much is certain—she retained no thought of warning Bonfire; she could only sit and wait, which is what women are for.

Bonfire worked deliberately now. It was the last hole of the round, and no use taking chances. The fuse, judging from the one before, should be about two feet long now, and a reasonable hazard. He inserted the spoon carefully, holding the long shank lightly in his left hand, the elbow out; in his right hand he held his knife, ready to cut the moving spark. His work was good; there was no lost motion, no falter of hand or eye. He had forgotten the girl, Kenny, everything. He was on the edge of his triumph, making history. Men would talk of this thing for a long time, sitting around red-hot stoves, when the bunk house was drowsy with old songs and rock men singing.

His face told Kenny when the spoon at length clipped the burning fuse. But there, it had slipped away again. The red-headed man sat back, and, unmindful of the girl, spoke in a loud voice.

"There's plenty of time," he added to Kenny; "but this thing gets on a fellow's nerves."

"I should say it does," said Kenny.

Bonfire returned to his task. But now, try as he would, the spoon only brought up sand. Sweat poured down his face; he could feel it welling under his armpits and streaming down his breast. It soaked him, and his throat felt dry as a street in the sun. Meanwhile a little pile of white sand grew beside the hole. Bonfire glanced at it once, saw a few black grains on the peak, and slowly went red, which was his way of turning pale. It meant only one thing: He was down to the load; his tamping gone, and only a few inches

of fuse between spark and powder; black powder, at that! The hole stopped smoking all of a sudden, which was another bad sign. Wait, he had it; no, yes, that was it!

It was then, as Bonfire raised the fuse with a touch light as a feather, that somebody suddenly took hold of his elbow.

"Got it?" said Kenny, over his free arm.

"Uh-huh!" said Bonfire. It was all he could say.

"Well," said Kenny, "I've got you!"

His voice was steady enough; but his eyes seemed to catch fire and blaze up.

"My crimson oath," said Bonfire; "leggo!"

Kenny's grip tightened gently.

"Put down that knife," said he; "there, if you move again, your old black powder will be the death of us all!"

Bonfire relaxed. He loved life; there was nothing else to do. The sun was setting, and he wanted to see it again; that was all.

"Well?" said he.

"Turn and turn about," said Kenny; "you was making bargains a while back. Now I'll have my say."

The girl came toward them, creeping across the rock on her hands and knees, her face a white blur in the half light.

"Go on," said Bonfire, thinking of the burning fuse and kingdom come.

"To go back to where we were in the beginning," said Kenny; "and let the girl make up her mind when she gets good and ready. . . . Make that a bargain, I say, or we'll all start for heaven on the shot."

"Fair enough," Bonfire said, without hesitation.

"What d'you mean?" said Kenny.

"I'll take my chance," said the other, "with Sandy. Now leggo!"

Kenny leaned back; Bonfire put a little purchase on the spoon, and directly he grabbed something from the hole.

He held it away from his face; a yellow stick of giant, with a tiny wisp of white smoke curling from a black stub at one end. He reached wildly for his knife.

"Throw it," said Kenny.

This Bonfire did, without further argument. The little stick flew out into the cut, suddenly exploding with a short, whiplike roar.

In the silence, a few pebbles, loosened by the vibration, could be heard rattling, one after the other, down the side of the mountain.

"Pretty close," said Kenny.

Bonfire stood up and brushed his knees. "I tell you," said he, "I could feel it going off in my hands!"

The girl had arisen a little ways off, and now stood watching them, a little uncertain, perhaps, what she should do. She was in a kind of trouble; so would you be, if you were young, and a woman.

Kenny addressed her for the first time. "You have beautiful hair," he said suddenly.

Sandy discovered that it was undone, and a trifle confused she began to braid it before them, recovering somewhat in the feel of the long, cool bands. "I've heard that before," said she.

A bit of sun, it was the last, thrust along the rock and touched her face, then his; and the other man watched them, standing in the shadow.

"It shines like gold," said Kenny. She shook out a strand, to catch the light; but like that, it had gone.

"It only reaches to my waist," said Sandy.

Bonfire cleared his throat; come, things were getting away from him.

"I wonder," he said pleasantly, "if we'll get to pull shot again to-night yet."

Kenny looked around.

"I don't see why not," said he; "if I had a pick or something I could break my fist out of this hole myself."

Bonfire started for the path.

"I'll go down and call the men," said he.

He stopped suddenly, and looked back at the girl, as a man sure of himself.

"Come on," he said.

She hesitated.

It was casual enough, all of it; but worthy of note is the casual, especially wherein it cross-sections the movement of instinct, which is the movement of life.

Kenny spoke to her.

"Go on, if you like," said he.

Sandy dropped her lids.

"No," she said, in a low voice; "let me stay."

That was all; yet, oddly enough, Kenny showed no surprise, and the man Bonfire seemed to be learning all its misery.

"I knew it," said Kenny.

"Well, wouldn't that kill you?" said Bonfire.

He spoke aloud, but neither Kenny nor the girl appeared to hear him. For Kenny was looking at Sandy, and Sandy was looking at the west, which had suddenly become splendid, all red and gold, like a marriage pageant.

Bonfire turned presently, and started down into the cut. Sandy must have turned at once, for Bonfire heard her say to Kenny:

"Tell me something!"

And Kenny:

"I'd tell you anything!"

"How did you know?" Sandy asked him; and Bonfire stopped for Kenny's reply.

"Ha," said Kenny, "a man with his neck in a noose learns a whole lot about women in two minutes!"

Bonfire started on again.

"Oh, I don't know," he said to the mountain.

# A Motion-Picture Hero

By William Holloway

The motion-picture fan, represented by the office boy, and the anti-motion-picture fanatic, represented by the boss, are brought together by an almost unbelievable happening that proved the office boy was right and the boss wrong

**N**OBODY really knows what would happen should an irresistible force meet an immovable body, though the problem is one that has fascinated the human mind for centuries. Indeed, in various secluded retreats throughout the country thousands of earnest gentlemen in strait-jackets are devoting their lives to a solution of this very question. Which will excuse Jimmy Lannigan's interest in the subject.

Not that Jimmy—office boy of Theophilus Dawson, the great philanthropist—had ever heard of irresistible forces or immovable bodies. But when a boy is crazy about the "movies," and his employer has a grim determination to wipe the whole motion-picture industry from the face of the earth, there surely is in evidence a situation not unlike that which gives the strait-jacketed gentlemen food for thought.

The curious part of it all was that Theophilus Dawson never even suspected that the hateful "movies" had an adherent in his very office. Tall, gray, austere, with a rooted distrust of his fellow man's ability to choose his pleasures wisely, Theophilus Dawson had drifted inevitably and naturally into antagonism to the aggressive and energetic film industry.

At first he had contented himself with letters of protest to the more conservative newspapers, and with an occasional contribution to the funds of the Anti-

Vice Society. Then came the alarming discovery that an East Side boy had stolen a nickel to view a Western "movie," and straightway the city, or that part of it represented by Theophilus Dawson, was ablaze for reform.

In the campaign that ensued, Theophilus Dawson took a prominent part. He it was who presided at the monster Anti-Motion-Picture rally in Carnegie Hall; his money gave financial backing to the nation-wide attack on the film industry; his views, eagerly sought by avid reporters, were spread broadcast throughout the land; in a word, Theophilus Dawson, by one of the whimsies of fate, came to his own! All of which combined to make Jimmy Lannigan's position peculiar.

Jimmy was fifteen, red-haired, freckled, with a glint of humor in his gray eyes, and a laugh spontaneous enough to melt the heart of a janitor and induce him to turn on steam. He lived with his mother in one of those rear three-room uptown flats where the air shafts are so narrow that a stay of merely three minutes at an air-shaft window will enable a woman to qualify as an expert in the domestic affairs of half her neighbors. Which explains why the air-shaft window flourishes in spite of building reforms!

Jimmy's greatest pleasure, as heretofore intimated, consisted in visiting the motion-picture shows. Let there be no mistake about this! Theophilus Daw-

son's office boy, far from sharing his employer's hatred of the fascinating films, actually gloried in them! Other boys might have their great men: their Cobbs, their Speakers, their Brickleys, their Ted Merediths! But for Jimmy Lannigan the world of heroes was bounded by the flickering canvas whereon the leading men of the photoplay world went through their wondrous evolutions.

He knew them all by heart—Wilbur, Costello, Fielding, Anderson, Blackwell, Bushman, Kerrigan, Mitchell; knew them in Wild West thrillers, in down East romances, on the prairies, in drawing-rooms, in offices, in banks; saw them facing dangers with a smile, laughing at accidents, making a fool of disaster! And, bending forward in his seat, he worshiped at their shrine.

This was in the evening. The morning brought disillusionment. There was Theophilus Dawson to be encountered, his prim, austere face antagonistic to the very mention of Jimmy's heroes; there were messages to be carried—messages, as he well knew, to other crusaders in the "anti-movie" cause; there was to be faced a whole atmosphere hostile to the things he loved. Wherefore it was that Jimmy Lannigan at times caught himself wondering what would really happen if Theophilus Dawson discovered the traitor in his camp. The question of an irresistible force meeting an immovable body never—as has been said—entered Jimmy's mind. The situation to him was very simple: "Will he fire me? Or will he not?" And, sad to relate of a man of such really fine instincts as Theophilus Dawson, the office boy's decision was in favor of the expeditious mode of departure known as "getting fired."

If one believes the old proverb every cloud will be observed to have a silver lining. The beauty of this proverb lies in its truth. Virginia Dawson was the

silver lining in Jimmy Lannigan's storm cloud.

On second thoughts, silver is too poor a substance to compare to Virginia Dawson. If she must be likened to a metal, let it be the very purest gold. But, indeed, I have an idea that even refined gold is hopelessly inadequate to represent a good woman. So why not think, as Jimmy did, that she was the essence of sunshine? It is true that Jimmy never put his thought into words. But it was there, nevertheless, in the recesses of his brain from the unforgettable morning when he first saw Virginia Dawson, blue-eyed, sunny-haired, frank and smiling; enter her father's grim office. And to receive a nod as she passed him! Could there be greater bliss?

There was a world of humor in Virginia Dawson of which her austere father never dreamed; there was, moreover, a ready sympathy and gift of intuition which led her straight to the heart of the boy's secret. It happened one day when the girl—she was in the early twenties—was sitting in her father's office listening to one of his endless harangues against the motion-picture evil. Jimmy Lannigan chanced to be standing near by, waiting for a letter, and the restless twitching of his shoulders as he listened told the observant girl his secret.

As they passed into the hall, she flashed him a glance, laughing, quizzical, sympathetic. "So, Jimmy," she smiled, "you like the pictures, do you?"

It needed only one look at her face to make Jimmy understand. Something vaguely indistinct in his mind, a feeling he could not analyze, told him that this girl might be trusted with the secrets of the whole world, and that she would never betray her trust.

"You bet I like 'em!" he whispered, one eye on the office door. "Do you?"

She shook her head, and Jimmy's heart sank. Was it possible that a girl

like that—a real “corker,” if ever there was one—could fail to enjoy the swift, realistic motion of the filmed faces across the canvas? That she could fail to respond to the tantalizing lure of viewing plot, action, life itself develop before her very eyes? Then his heart gave a bound; she was speaking.

“I have never been to the pictures,” she said slowly. “So you see I can’t say whether or not I care for them. I’d like to go—ever so much. But it would make father unhappy. So I stay at home.”

Jimmy nodded wisely, and a profound sense of his own superior opportunities soothed him. “I go every night,” he declared proudly.

“Then tell me about them,” said the girl, giving her chauffeur a signal to wait.

Thus admonished, Jimmy told the story of the “movies” as he knew it; told of stern-faced, indomitable heroes, of bewitching, on-the-level heroines, of scheming villains who invariably ended in disgrace, of strange cities and people, of Western mining camps, of life upon the borders of the mysterious desert sea. As she listened, the girl found herself interested in spite of herself—interested not only in Jimmy’s story, but in the boy himself—in his sparkling gray eyes, his tousled red hair, the eager admiration that seemed to cover him as a garment.

“That’s fine, Jimmy!” she said finally, with a smile. “Another day I must hear more. Only, if I were you, I shouldn’t talk about it in the office.”

As before said, Jimmy Lannigan had never heard of immovable bodies or irresistible forces, yet at her words there came into his mind a dim conception of the world-old problem at which the gentlemen in strait-jackets are toiling. “Talk about it in the office?” he repeated. “Not on your life, Miss Virginia.”

This was the beginning of a long se-

ries of talks between Jimmy and his employer’s daughter, which caused Jimmy to feel as if he was walking on air. And the girl herself was curiously pleased at the boy’s delight. When one is the very essence of sunshine—the warm, beneficent sunshine—why not pass some of it along? Not that the girl ever thought of herself in terms as complimentary as these; she merely happened to be one of those people whose great delight it is to make life pleasant for others. Which, after all, is not a bad sort of disposition to have.

It was Virginia Dawson’s habit to call for her father each afternoon promptly at four, and beguile him with a spin in her motor. Jimmy Lannigan, watchful of the hour, was always on hand to open the door of the high-powered machine, and to receive a smile of thanks and a cheery word about the movies before she passed into the elevator. Which, considering the atmosphere of her father’s office, was manna to the boy’s hungry soul. And then, quite of a sudden—that is to say, with the advent of Count de Ramillies—Jimmy’s pleasure came to an abrupt end. For the count, who had an ardent impetuosity of temperament entirely un-American, generally contrived to be loitering by the curbstone each afternoon at four, when Miss Dawson arrived; which makes it needless to add that Jimmy was no longer permitted to open the door of the machine.

Jimmy’s attitude toward the new scheme of things was not enthusiastic. His admiration for the count was by no means boundless; indeed he disliked him as heartily and generously as a boy always dislikes the man who dares raise presumptuous eyes to his youthful goddess. Nor was this the only reason. There was another which Jimmy could not have put into words if he had tried. Perhaps the easiest way to phrase it is to say that the count, in Jimmy’s opinion, quite failed to look the part. Tall,

well dressed, distinguished looking—the boy granted he was all these. But there should have been a frank, open look in his eyes instead of a furtive one. And he should not have sworn at a newsboy for making an error in changing a dime; above all, he should never have grown impatient while waiting at street corners for Miss Dawson!

And it was a fact that he grew impatient, that he walked restlessly to and fro if she were the least bit later than usual in appearing—all of which Jimmy considered rather out of place, even though their wedding had been announced for the early fall. Jimmy's idea of the proper method of procedure in such a case—as exemplified by his moving-picture heroes—consisted of calm, dignified waiting until the fair one arrived, and then, in one or two speechless looks of devotion which, he had noticed, invariably did the business. The Count de Ramillies, by not conforming to the code of the movies, lost all prestige with Jimmy; except, of course, such prestige as the boy grudgingly admitted would be due him as "Miss Virginia's" husband.

It was on a Friday morning, at ten-thirty-three, to be exact, and on the morning of Miss Virginia's wedding day, to be more exact still, that the question of the irresistible force and the immovable body unexpectedly became a practical one for Jimmy Lannigan. "Jimmy," said Theophilus Dawson, on the fateful morning above mentioned, "run over to Ziggins & Heiter with this cut-glass tumbler. Tell them I sent you. They will know what to do."

Jimmy took the glass in hand. "Yes, sir," said he promptly.

The great philanthropist swung about in his swivel chair. "By the way, Jimmy," he said kindly, "you might like to look at the design. It is really a fine piece of work, and a boy of your age ought to be taking an interest in artistic things."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy, and fell to examining it.

Theophilus Dawson watched him benevolently. He belonged to that large class who are always willing to give their fellow creatures pleasure provided it costs nothing. "Never saw anything like that, I suppose, Jimmy?"

The boy's face kindled with admiration, as he turned the tumbler in his hand. "It is very fine," he said, "but not so fine as the one they made for the president lately."

Theophilus Dawson grew grave. He was not quite sure that the president had a right to receive a piece of cut glass finer than his own. "Did you see the one made for the president, Jimmy?"

"Yes, sir," cried Jimmy Lannigan eagerly; "I saw it in the moving——" He paused sharply while his employer held up an accusing finger.

"Speak out, boy!" was the sharp command. "Moving what?"

Jimmy Lannigan looked helplessly about him. The ceiling was whirling around in a fantasy of pale blue and white; the Persian rug on the parquet floor had grown enormously larger than usual and was stretching out long, slender arms to the surbase, while tables and chairs seemed to be dancing a devil's dance on nothing.

"Moving what?" repeated his employer sharply.

Jimmy Lannigan gasped for breath, and on the instant the ceiling stopped its whirling, the Persian rug shrank to normal size, the tables and chairs ceased their gyrations, as he turned to face his employer's accusing eye. Never in Jimmy's experience had he seen the equal of that fixed, compelling, blue eye. To the boy's gaze it loomed almost as large as the headlight of an engine. He took one fleeting glance, then swung back his shoulders, as he had seen Maurice Costello, Crane Wilbur,

Anderson, and the rest do in times of danger.

"I saw it in the moving pictures, sir."

There was a long silence as Theophilus Dawson gazed at his guilty office boy. The great man was shocked to the innermost fiber of his being. And if you consider the circumstances, you can't altogether blame him. There he was, devoting his life to combating something which he considered a great public evil; and here was his office boy openly avowing his addiction to the hated amusement. And this in spite of the hundreds of times he had heard the whole wretched business denounced in this very office! Manifestly an example would have to be made.

"Jimmy," said his employer sorrowfully, "come here."

Regarding the events of the next ten minutes this chronicle is silent. Theophilus Dawson spoke at length; huskily, because he liked the boy, but very firmly. Then Jimmy Lannigan tucked his week's salary into his pocket and walked out into the clear October sunshine. He no longer had a position; but, on the other hand, he possessed a very clear idea of the problem which puzzles the gentlemen in strait-jackets. He knew exactly what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable body.

On the curb he paused irresolutely. He had forgotten that he still had his office key. Never mind! He would give it to the stenographer when she came out. There was a small park across the street—one of the fragmentary bits of green that dot the desert of New York—where he often used to eat his midday sandwich. Now from sheer habit he crossed the street and sat down on one of the benches.

But to sit on a park bench when one is a cog in the great workaday machine of life and to sit there as an idler are two different things, as Jimmy pres-

ently found out. The minutes passed while he sat brooding, his eyes fixed on the door of the office building through which he had just passed. It was very lonely; so lonely that when Mr. Dawson's touring car drew up at the curb Jimmy watched it with a hungry look. And when Theophilus Dawson, tall, slender, aristocratic, had taken his place and the machine had purred on its way, the boy felt a distinct sinking sensation, as though parting with something very precious—which would have surprised Theophilus Dawson immensely. Then the fair-haired stenographer—who with Jimmy had constituted the philanthropist's modest office force—appeared upon the sidewalk.

Jimmy approached her sorrowfully. "Finished, Miss Roberts?"

She gave him a kindly smile. "Just finished his speech for to-night," she explained. "The wedding speech, I mean. Why, it was fierce! He changed it twenty times. And if the guests are alive when he finishes reading it"—Miss Roberts raised her neatly gloved hands in air—"well, all I can say is I'm sorry."

"I hope it's a happy wedding," said Jimmy moodily. "Somehow I don't like those counts."

"Neither does your Aunt Eliza," said Miss Roberts firmly. "An American for me, even if he is a dishwasher!" She nodded her dainty little head, swung northward on the avenue, and was lost in the crowd before Jimmy had time to remember that he still held the key of the office in his pocket.

With a doleful smile that was almost a grimace, the boy strolled back to his bench only to be confronted by Miss Dawson's pictured semblance in a newspaper a passer-by had flung there. His face lit up with pleasure as he noted the heading: "Young Couple Getting License Yesterday;" then he spread the paper open so that the picture of the Count de Ramillies showed beside

that of the bride elect. After which Jimmy Lannigan whistled softly and grew pale.

It is one thing, the initiated will tell you, to see a man upon the street, and quite another to view him with the ruthless eye of the camera. The difference in the present case was so great that Jimmy Lannigan turned momentarily dizzy. How had he failed to notice it before, he asked himself savagely, when he had seen the man dozens of times?

He turned on his heel, with a wild resolution to make his way to the Pennsylvania Station and take a Long Island train to the Dawson home. He had his week's salary in his pocket, so that the sinews of war were already provided for. He paused a minute. What was the Dawsons' station? Jimmy frowned at the question. It was strange that he had never heard it. Garden City? Or Oyster Bay? Well, what difference? He had a tongue in his mouth, and any conductor on the Long Island Railroad would know Theophilus Dawson. And, shaking his head with decision, he stepped upon the sidewalk only to be confronted with a miracle.

For the Count de Ramillies was walking down the street, frock-coated, gardeniaed, debonair. Behind him came a servant with a suit case, and for the first time the boy noticed that traffic had come to a halt, and that other passengers were pouring out of stalled automobiles intent on making the Pennsylvania Station on foot.

There is one admirable trait common to heroes of motion pictures. Given the most trying problem in the world, and they never delay in its solution more than a couple of seconds! I have often timed them in situations that would have puzzled the keenest intellect, but never have I observed any of them hesitate any longer than it takes the operator to turn the crank of the machine. Jimmy Lannigan, steeped in

the atmosphere of the movies, hesitated no longer than one of his own heroes.

In an instant he was standing before Count de Ramillies, his brain on fire with a stupendous thought.

"Message from Mr. Dawson, sir!" he said sharply.

The tall, frock-coated figure paused impressively. His heavy-lidded, dark eyes examined the speaker with a scrutiny that was startling in its keenness. "Ah! The office boy of Monsieur Dawson, is it not?"

"Sure, Mike!" replied Jimmy Lannigan, with reckless disregard for truth. "The boss left something for you in the office. Was sending me over to the railroad to get you."

"A package? A letter?" asked the Frenchman hurriedly. "What could he leave for me?"

"A package," answered Jimmy unblushingly. "It was a surprise he wanted you to have before you went down to the country. Said he couldn't give it to you down there. Too many rubbernecks around."

"Well, hurry up and get it!" was the impatient rejoinder. "I can't wait here long."

Jimmy's eyes were quite guileless as he gazed up at the eager, almost wolfish face above him.

"That package has gotta be signed for, mister. That ain't no bunch of Christmas presents from the Five-and-Ten-Cent Store. No, sir. The boss went down to the bank himself to get it. Believe me, it's *some* package."

The count's dark eyes dilated with pleasurable emotion, and the hand that stroked his short, dark mustache actually trembled. He made a sign to the man who was carrying his suit case. "Wait here until I come," he said curtly. And to Jimmy he added: "All right. Hurry up!"

A minute later they stood before a door the glass upper half of which bore



the magic letters, "Theophilus Dawson. Private."

Jimmy unlocked the door with the key he had forgotten to return earlier in the day, and the two entered the deserted office. There were two rooms opening into each other, both looking upon the street. In the second of these was the mahogany roll-top desk which belonged to the great philanthropist, and beside it a small, flat table, also mahogany. The count pushed into the room, his eyes flashing with impatience. "I see nothing," he cried, with a ring of disappointment; "where did you say it was?"

But Jimmy Lannigan had had too much experience of the movies not to be dramatic. His right hand slipped gingerly into the drawer of the flat table, emerging with a revolver, which he leveled at the Frenchman's chest. "Put up yer hands!" came his cheerful invitation.

The Count de Ramillies gazed blankly at the end of the very businesslike revolver, then he shrugged his shoulders. "Are you crazy?" he asked hoarsely.

"Put up yer hands!" was the savage answer. "Now—or I'm going to shoot."

For an instant the man hesitated; then a look at the boy's set face and flashing eyes convinced him of the folly of delay. Slowly, reluctantly, he held up his hands.

"You will pay for this!" he cried furiously. "Where is the package?"

"Isn't any," was the tranquil reply.

The very absurdity of the situation calmed the victim. "So you brought me here for a joke, boy?" he said slowly. "Don't you understand I am the Count de Ramillies? And that I'm going to marry your employer's daughter this evening?"

"Wrong three times," affirmed Jimmy Lannigan. "I lost my job, so I have no employer. Get that? Then if I have no boss, how can my boss' daughter get married? Silly question number

two. Then, as to being a count——" Jimmy laughed scornfully. "Say, I saw yer picture in the paper, and I knowed ye. Yer no real count. Yer a play-acting count—the fellow that used to play the imitation French count in the Unigraph Films."

The face of the Count de Ramillies had grown a beautifully livid green. His eyes darted fire. "You lie, you rascal!" he cried sharply. "Canaille!"

Jimmy Lannigan smiled a calmly superior smile. "You can get me, mister, on that French talk, maybe; but when it comes to the movies—huh!—you're not putting nothing over on your uncle. Not if he knows it. I seen you dozens of times in the Unigraph Films; and say, maybe yer didn't give me a pain; ye bum actor!"

"It's a lie!" shrieked the actor furiously. "I tell you, it's a lie!"

"Oh, no, it isn't," said Jimmy, more calmly still. "I seen yer picture in the paper, I tell ye, and I know. That put me hep to ye, quick's a flash." He threw back his shoulders with a gesture that he had often witnessed in the hero of the movies. "I'm wise to ye, old boy. Wise! D'ye see?"

Manifestly the man did, for he grew suddenly silent, staring at boy and revolver in an odd, impersonal way, as though he were engaged in the solution of a difficult problem.

"You've got me," he said finally; "got me dead to rights. It was clever of you, I admit it." He smiled ingratiatingly. "But look here! I've no quarrel with you, and you have none with me. Suppose you let me go. Well! I'll marry Miss Dawson, won't I? And I'll give you twenty dollars a week for the rest of your life. How about that?"

"Twenty plunks a week!" Jimmy's voice was hushed with awe. "Gee! Twenty bucks!" he repeated, his eyes round with amazement. "That sure is going some for me!"

The man in the frock coat made a

step forward. "Then you'll take it?" he asked anxiously.

"Take it?" exclaimed his captor. "Not in a million years! But it sure makes a feller throw a chest!"

The very gardenia in the adventurer's coat seemed to wilt at the rebuff. His shoulders drooped. "Then what on earth do you intend to do, boy?" said he wearily.

"Keep you here until it's too late for the ceremony," said Jimmy politely. "After that"—he shook his head solemnly—"we'll see!"

So saying, the boy backed toward the door, locked it with one hand while he covered his captive with the other; put the key in his pocket, and motioned toward a chair.

"Sit down, Frenchy!" he advised kindly. "You'll get tired out standing, and the day is young."

If black looks could kill a healthy office boy, Jimmy Lannigan's days would surely have been numbered. But, as a mere matter of fact, he was quite oblivious of his captive's scowling face; for the telephone bell was ringing, shrilly and insistently, which rather complicated matters.

To ignore the call was, of course, the safest thing to do. Yet suppose—just suppose—it were Miss Dawson herself? She might think her father still in the office. And in that case—Jimmy hesitated no longer. The revolver in his right hand covering his captive, he caught the receiver in his left. "Hello!" he called.

That it was not Miss Dawson Jimmy knew at once; who it really was he never found out. For at that precise instant the hand, which was holding the revolver, accidentally collided with the telephone instrument; there was a clatter, and the revolver fell harmlessly behind the roll-top desk, quite out of reach of both occupants of the room.

Jimmy's face was a study as he put up the receiver and faced his adver-

sary—no longer a cringing coward, but a man who seemed suddenly to loom immense in the narrow office. "Now, you guttersnipe!" he heard a far-off voice say savagely, and he dimly realized that the big mass of the man was hurling itself toward him. "Give me the key!"

For an instant Jimmy's heart gave an exultant bound. He had the key! And until he lost it, Miss Dawson was safe! With a side step a champion boxer would have envied, he slipped by his bulky antagonist and ran to the far end of the office. With a surprisingly quick turn, the actor followed; there was an instant's dodging; then he had Jimmy by the arm.

"That key!" he cried angrily. "That key!"

Sometimes the hero of the motion picture is in dire straits, his hopes blasted, the villain confronting him in triumph. On such occasions does he whimper? Or yield? Not perceptibly, Jimmy recalled. In fact, a perfectly hopeless situation generally acts as a spur upon the hero's inventive powers. With this thought in mind, Jimmy promptly drove his head into his opponent's stomach, while with his right foot he kicked him squarely on the shins.

"You rascal!" cried the real rascal, flinging the boy upon the floor and clutching him by the throat. "Give me that key!"

It may be doubted if any motion-picture hero was ever in a worse predicament than that of Jimmy Lannigan. The man's weight was so great that at times the boy felt sure his chest must break; his throat was caught in an iron grip, that showed him the folly of further resistance; and yet, where a wiser man would give up, the office boy fought on, raining ineffectual blows upon the actor's face, squirming, struggling, kicking, without the smallest thought of yielding. Once, twice, the man loosened his grasp to reach for the key, only to

find himself attacked with such savage fury that he speedily realized that before anything else could be done the boy must be beaten into submission. In the next few minutes Jimmy Lannigan seemed to himself to live several lifetimes. He was dimly conscious that an overpowering force was slowly mastering him, yet regardless of terrible punishment—he fought on. Then, without warning, the door clicked open and Theophilus Dawson stood upon the threshold!

"Count de Ramillies!" he cried aghast. He took a step forward and his astonished gaze fell upon his discharged office boy, now a rather gruesome spectacle. "And Jimmy Lannigan!" He turned to his intended son-in-law. "I came back because I forgot my wedding speech, and to find you in this condition——" He paused abruptly, as Count de Ramillies scrambled to his feet.

The count's silk hat was gone, the wreck of it fronting him from the Persian rug. Gone, too, was the gardenia and with it a section of his coat collar, while from his split lips a tiny red stream trickled down his chin. All in all, he presented a very different appearance from that of the debonair gentleman whom Jimmy had stopped upon the avenue.

"The boy locked me in," he said furiously. "And I was trying to get the key from him."

"Yes?" said Theophilus Dawson incredulously. He looked at the battered wreck that had once been Jimmy Lannigan, now scrambling to his feet. "You shouldn't have hurt the boy," he commented gravely.

Jimmy Lannigan with difficulty opened one eye. When the motion-picture hero finishes his fight there is always a girl to gaze admiringly at him. This was a part of the program poor Jimmy missed. "Oh, he didn't hurt

me!" he cried, through swollen lips. "I wasn't going to let him go down to marry Miss Virginia because he ain't no real count. He's the feller that used to play the count's part in the Unigraph Films. His name is Peter Kistler." He laid a hand on Theophilus Dawson's arm. "Look at him!" he asked thickly.

But there was no need of further proof. With a face livid with baffled passion the exposed adventurer was slipping out of the room. Mr. Dawson watched him silently, his own face very grave, until the door banged behind him.

"You've seen him in the—the—motion pictures?" he stammered.

"Dozens of times," was the prompt answer.

"H'm!" said Theophilus Dawson. "And how did you come to find him here?"

He listened to the boy's explanation very quietly. "And when he was beating you—poor boy, I'll have a doctor look after you!—didn't you want to give in?"

Jimmy Lannigan laughed as heartily as his battered lips would allow. "Give in? Quit?" he asked. "Say, did you ever see a moving-picture show?"

"Bless me, no!"

"The hero in them never quits," explained the boy. "Never!"

"Oh, he doesn't!" cried the great enemy of the films thoughtfully. "So you learned that from the pictures!" He walked slowly up and down the office, his face working strangely. Presently he paused and laid a friendly hand on the boy's arm. "Next week, Jimmy, after you get looking like a human being again, you are coming back here," he said kindly. "Your salary will be doubled. And some afternoon you are going——"

He swallowed hard. "Yes?" asked the boy breathlessly.

"You are going to take me to the moving pictures," said Theophilus Dawson grimly.

# Master of the Moose Horn

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

*Author of "In Dog Seal Bay," "The Missionary," Etc.*

Aside from A. M. Chisholm we know of few authors who can tell a story of the Northern woods with more charm than Theodore Goodridge Roberts. In the "Master of the Moose Horn" he has a novel that will enthrall you. It has the quality of interest that holds the attention at its highest pitch. A tale of loggers and trappers, of red men and white, of love and hate, of disaster and triumph.

*(In Two Parts—Part One.)*

## CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH SNOW FALLS ON GRAMERCY PARK AND ON THE MOOSE HORN COUNTRY.

**S**NOW was falling in New York City, floating and twirling down silently in large, soft flakes as flat as feathers. The high, iron fence of Gramercy Park was already pointed and outlined in white. Trees and shrubs and garden benches were spotlessly hooded and cloaked. The dauntless sparrows were gone to roost in the martin houses. Windows of homes, the high windows of painters' studios, and the wide entrances of clubs glowed warmly through the falling veils of the snow. The still air was mild; and yet it was pleasant to be able to contemplate one of those glowing porticos with the knowledge of the right to enter unchallenged.

Snow was falling in the Tobique country, in the Northern woods—falling swiftly, relentlessly, in small, crisp flakes. The new ice on Moose Horn Branch was already covered by a white quilt seven inches thick. The sky was

black, for all its spinning of white. No wind moved. The falling and striking of those millions of frost feathers whispered upon the silence. Now and again some incumbered spruce or fir let slip a weight of snow from a bowed limb with a sound as light and vague and hollow as the drumming of a cock partridge. The darkness was like midnight, but the evening was young.

From a square window in a log wall, a smudge of yellow light struck feebly into the twirling veils of the snow. Within the cabin, John Hollis lay in his bunk, silent, motionless, ashen gray of face. The doctor had come up to him for a few hours three days before, all the way from Plaster Bluff; and for three days and nights his daughter had nursed him with unfaltering vigilance and tenderness. But the fight was finished. He was unconscious now, and had been so for hours.

Marjorie, the daughter, crouched on the floor in front of the hearth, grief-stricken and sick with want of sleep. She, too, had given up the fight. A long, gasping sigh aroused her from her stupor of misery and fatigue. She sprang to her feet and darted to the

bunk. Her father's eyes were open now—and blank as the windows of an empty house. The bitter spirit of the man had passed.

Marjorie sank to her knees beside the bunk and gave herself to tears. She made no effort toward self-control. She had battled so long against grief and weariness and fear—and now fortitude and vigilance counted for nothing. Tortured nerves and muscles relaxed beneath the weight of her despair. Even her dauntless spirit fainted now. From tears she passed unconsciously into a deep sleep of utter weariness and misery.

The fire of dry maple fell to glowing coals on its bed of gray ashes. The cheap clock on the chimneypiece ticked the drifting seconds away, heedless and unfaltering. The dead man stiffened beneath his blankets; and still he stared up at the brown roof of poles with wide, blank eyes. The snow climbed against the little panes of the window. A wood mouse appeared, ran across the floor, and vanished. The battered lantern on the table beneath the window continued to burn steadily and to throw its blunted rays against the spinning white curtains outside.

Something soft struck against the door and fumbled blindly there for a moment.

In the wilderness one learns to waken swiftly from any sleep save that of death. Marjorie Hollis turned her face toward the door on the instant of the lifting of the wooden latch. Terror took her, pinching her at heart and throat and striking her face as white as paper. Who visited this isolated house of death at this hour of this night of blinding storm?

The door opened slowly. A squat, muffled figure entered, crusted with snow, and closed the door with a dull thud.

"Peter? Is it you?" cried the girl.

"Yes," replied the visitor, removing

his fur cap and beating it against his body and legs until the dry snow flew in clouds. "Come darn' long ways—from Ben Stickney's place. Mighty bad night for travelin'. How yer pa feel to-night?"

"He—is dead," whispered Marjorie, in a stifled voice.

Peter Paul crossed the room noiselessly and gazed down at the dead man in the bunk. His own face was as expressionless as the face of the dead.

"That right," he said calmly. "John Hollis, he don't trap no more fur on Moose Horn. Too bad. Too darn' bad! What you do now, hey?"

Marjorie shook her head in answer and covered her face with her hands. The elderly Maliseet stooped swiftly and closed the dead man's eyes. Then he patted the girl's twitching shoulders.

"Come long ways for you to-night," he said. "You come back with me now. Little Tom Stickney, he mighty sick an' need medicine darn' bad."

She turned a stricken face up to him; but beauty and youth shone there like pale ghosts, in spite of tear stains and the finger marks of grief and fatigue.

"Is Tommy ill? What is it?" she asked.

"Almighty sick. All choke' up," replied the Maliseet.

"But how can I go—to-night?"

"You come with me an' bring medicine. Yer pa don't care. He don't need you any more; but little Tom Stickney, he need you darn' bad!"

Marjorie packed her very considerable collection of medicines in a leather knapsack, then retired to the inner room of the shack and dressed for the ten-mile tramp up the Moose Horn to Stickney's cabin. Her brain felt like feathers, her eyes and limbs like lead, and her heart was numb; but she saw the way of her duty, and accepted it. She was far too tired to think.

Upon returning to the main room, she found the fire burning, and Peter

Paul awaiting her with a pot of steaming tea. She drank thirstily, emptying the big cup twice. Peter finished the pot, then asked if John had left any tobacco around handy. She pointed to a battered tin box on the chimneysheff. The Maliseet opened the box and helped himself to three cakes of tobacco. From one he shaved a few slices and filled his pipe.

"John don't need it any more," he remarked. "He don't mind old Peter to take it. John wasn't never stingy with his tobacco, anyhow."

They covered the fire with ashes, extinguished the lantern, and left the cabin and its dead. They fastened the door on the outside with chain and padlock. Snow was still falling. They bound their snowshoes to their moccasined feet. Then Peter led the way down the bank and up the river's level floor, through a blanketing darkness that was flecked blindingly with white close against the eyes.

Marjorie followed close in the old Maliseet's tracks. The dear, familiar scent of her father's tobacco drifted back to her. They walked in silence. The only sound in the world was the vast, faint, encompassing whisper of the multitudinous flakes of snow alighting upon the wilderness. Gradually the young woman's brain and blood awoke to the cold stinging of the snow on her face and the keen air in her lungs.

They reached Ben Stickney's cabin after three and a half hours of steady tramping. Stickney sprang forward at the opening of the door and dragged the girl inside.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "I knew ye'd come!"

He brushed the snow from her with his bare hands, removed her short blanket coat, knelt and loosed the snowshoes from her feet.

"Marjorie darn' tired!" said Peter. "Me, too. Get some rum. Get some tea."

Marjorie swayed dizzily with fatigue. Ben Stickney supported her with eager arms; but she freed herself swiftly and gently, and swayed into the embrace of old Peter Paul.

"That a' right," said the Maliseet. "Now you fetch some rum darn' quick!"

Marjorie swallowed a sip or two of brandy and recovered herself in a moment. She threw aside her fur gloves and cap and went to the sick child, who lay flushed and moaning in his boxlike crib. He was in a high fever, and delirious. His breath wheezed in his tender, laboring chest. His small face was flushed; his bright lips and little, balsam-stained hands were hot and dry.

Marjorie asked a few brief questions of the father, then set to work. She administered a dose of some sort of quinine preparation, then rubbed throat and breast with hot camphorated oil. She set Stickney and Peter to the task of cutting out and sewing a little jacket of old, soft blanket. When the jacket was finished she warmed it at the fire and placed it on the child. He opened his eyes and closed them. They were wonderfully blue and attractive eyes; but now they were unnaturally bright on the surface, strangely dull in their depths.

Marjorie had worked steadily for an hour since her arrival. For a few minutes she continued to stand beside the little cot, watching and listening. It seemed to her that the child's moans were less frequent now, and that his breathing was becoming easier. She knelt, then sank lower, with her forehead against the rough-hewn side of the cot. The sleep of utter exhaustion flooded over her like a warm, black tide.

Ben Stickney lifted Marjorie tenderly and laid her in his own bunk. Peter turned the coarse pillow beneath her unconscious head, and spread a blanket lightly over her. Then both

men turned again to the boy's cot. They stooped over it, listening. Ben's tanned face was lined sharply, and his gray eyes were dull with fear and anxiety.

"Will he make it?" he whispered. "Will he pull through? I—I ain't got the courage to lose him! I guess I'd go clean off my head if he was to die."

"Guess he make it, a' right," replied Peter. "Marjorie one darn' good doctor. He get his breath easier now, what you think? Yes."

They sat down on rough stools, still with their unwinking eyes on the boy's cot.

"How's John Hollis gettin' on?" asked Stickney.

"Dead," said Peter. "Die to-night, little while before me an' the girl start for here. He was dead when I git to the shack—an' she mighty nigh dead, too, so darn' sorry an' tired."

"Lord!" murmured the other softly. "An' yet she come right along!"

Marjorie awoke an hour later, and again worked over the sick child. The applications of warm oil in time began to relieve the laboring chest and the medicine cooled the fever a little. The old Maliseet closed his round eyes and slumbered with his back against the wall. Ben nodded and slept by snatches where he sat on a three-legged stool of his own construction. But Marjorie did not relinquish her vigil again until five o'clock in the morning. Then she slept beside the cot.

The little boy ceased to moan and toss. From delirium he drifted into slumber. The father slept, too, crouched on the stool with his elbows on his knees and his face between his hands. Sleep held them all. Peter grunted, dreaming of a long journey through new-fallen snow. The fire failed and fell in the deep nitch of the chimney. The tallow candle on the table burned to an end and expired smokily. The black square of the east-

ern window changed to blue, lightened from blue to gray, warmed from gray to red. The sun was over the frozen edge of the world, striking his first hot glances through the black stems of the forest.

Little Tom Stickney sighed and opened his eyes. Some of the surface brightness had gone from them, and their depths were clear and calm. He saw Marjorie's hands on the edge of his cot, something of her white brow and the coils of dark, soft hair. For a little while he continued to gaze at these things in silent wonder and delight. At last he raised a hand and touched the girl's fingers; they stirred at the touch, turned slowly, and closed upon the little hand. She lifted her face and opened her eyes.

"Oh, Tommy, do you know me now?" she whispered.

"Always know you," whispered the child.

In New York City, the snow ceased to fall at midnight. By that time it lay deep and white over all the thousands of acres of roofs and hundreds of miles of hard pavements. An army of midnight workers arose and commenced the gigantic task of clearing roofs and streets.

Mr. William Morgan Bayford entered Gramercy Park from the west just as the snow ceased to fall and the clocks struck twelve. He walked, for he had been forced to abandon his taxi half a dozen blocks away. The snow had set thousands of others afoot that night. But Bayford did not grumble at having to walk in the snow. He scarcely noticed the cold, clinging stuff through which he waded. His mind was engaged in contemplation of a far more serious inconvenience than this. To call the subject that occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of cold feet an inconvenience is to put it mildly. To tell the truth, he was in a tighter fix,

a more deplorable situation, than he had ever before experienced in all the twenty-seven years of his merry and amiable life.

He turned before two big lights in wrought-iron baskets and stepped down into the glowing entrance of his favorite club. To one boy he gave up hat, overcoat, and stick, while two others brushed the snow from his legs. He sighed as he pocketed his coat check and nodded to a friend who greeted him from the top of the short flight of steps. But he did not go up. Instead, he went down another short flight and around to the bar. A hot Scotch made him feel warmer but not happier. He went upstairs, looking for solitude. It seemed to him that he had never before seen the club so full of happy and prosperous men. Not an actor of them all, nor a poet, nor a novelist, nor an artist, nor a war correspondent, nor even a patron of any art looked as if he had ever known care. He found solitude at last in a little, dim-lit reading room. He sat down at a table in a window and clasped his head between his hands. So he sat for a long time, motionless, trying to think.

Bayford was disturbed by a light footfall beside his chair and a light hand on his shoulder. He dropped his hands, raised his head sharply, and, for several seconds, stared stupidly into the pink-and-white face of Mr. Charles Wayland.

"The devil!" exclaimed Wayland. "Are you ill?"

Boyford laughed and pulled himself together.

"I must have been asleep," he said. "I was nodding, anyway."

"You look hipped, my son. Have you been losing sleep lately?"

"If sleep were all!"

"You've been at it again?"

"Yes—for the last time."

"I've heard that before, Bill. You

said it in September, when they took thirty-six thousand away from you. Take a fresh hold of yourself, you idiot! If you knew just ten times as much about the game as you do you'd know enough to leave it alone."

"I've had my last flutter. Lost my wings entirely, absolutely, this time, and so have nothing more to flutter with. In short, I'm cleaned out. Word of honor."

"Cleaned out? Not you, Bill. Wake up and turn over. A steam shovel couldn't clean you out."

"I have a very considerable wardrobe, some pictures, some books, some chairs, tables, and curtains."

"I'll take you home, Bill. You'll soon wake up."

"Come, by all means! I'll give you a chance to buy some of your own pictures at your prices of four years ago."

Bayford lived just across the little park from the club. Within ten minutes of reaching home he had convinced his friend of the amazing and disconcerting fact that his last hundred thousand dollars, even his last hundred cents, had passed from his possession. Though convinced of the fact, Wayland could not grasp the idea.

"In six years," he murmured. "It couldn't be done. I thought you were made of it."

"What am I to do?" asked Bayford. "Suggest something. I'll sell all this stuff, of course; but what then?"

"I thought you were made of it," murmured the painter feebly.

"You need something to clear your wits," said Bayford. "Can you reach that bell without getting up? Thanks."

Each consumed a Scotch and soda and a long cigar without arriving at a solution of the problem of Bayford's future.

"A fool and his money," said the painter. "But a man who rids himself of two millions in six years without a



scandal, marriage, or divorce, must have ability. How did you do it?"

"I took it down to the market place, in small lumps of fifty or one hundred thousand, and tried to increase it. I have heard that money begets money; but I had no luck as a breeder."

A servant entered with a telegram. Bayford tore it open and shot a glance at top and bottom of the message.

"Saved!" he cried, dropping the tinted paper to the floor and grasping his friend's hand. "It is a cable from London, from my Aunt Jane's lawyers. Aunt Jane salted her two millions away and went to live in England twenty years ago."

"Good! And what has she done now?"

"Died, poor old soul; and I had no idea she was ill."

"And left her whole fortune to you?"

"Most of it, I should think. It's a long message, and I didn't read the particulars. If she has left me only half a million it will be enough—and she wouldn't have the face to leave me less."

Mr. Wayland picked up the tinted paper and narrowed his keen gaze upon it. He scrutinized it in silence for several seconds.

"What is the province of New Brunswick?" he asked.

"A part of Canada," replied Bayford.

"And what is the Moose Horn Branch?"

"Never heard of it. What about it?"

"That is what she has left you in her will."

"The province of New Brunswick?"

"Not quite. Six thousand acres of timberland on the Moose Horn Branch of the Tobique River."

"We'll go fishing, Charlie. And how much money?"

"Not a dollar. Read it for yourself. It seems clear to me."

## CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH MARJORIE HOLLIS IS VISITED  
BY AN UNPLEASANT STRANGER.

Ben Stickney farmed in the summer and trapped fur in the winter. He had lost his wife three years ago, and immediately after her death he had tried another way of life for a few months. He had gone out to Plaster Bluff with the year-old baby; but with the first thaw of March he had returned to the log house on the Moose Horn, with his son and many tins and bottles of infant's food on the sled at his heels. Since then he had devoted himself to his new-land fields, the trapping, and his child.

Marjorie Hollis and old Peter Paul remained at Stickney's place for two days, until Tommy was out of danger. Then they went downriver. Peter dug a hole in the snow, dug a grave in the frozen earth, and buried John Hollis.

"John sleep good now," he said, and went away to his hut on Snowshoe Brook, leaving the girl alone with her grief.

Marjorie did not sleep that night. She sat beside the hearth through the crawling, empty hours, and fed the fire. Her father had been the dearest thing in life to her during the five long years that she had lived in the woods. She had not been blind to his weaknesses; but he had been her friend, her comrade, her protector. She had never loved her mother; but she had always loved her whimsical, gentle, ruined father. She had chosen between the two, and had never regretted her choice. And now he was dead! Now she was alone on the Moose Horn, with no other home in all the world and no friends except Peter Paul and Ben Stickney and little Tom. She nursed her grief that night, holding it close to her heart, the better to know it. But she was not afraid. She did not fear the empty bunk, the shadows beyond

the play of the firelight, or the fingering of the frost on the roof.

Peter Paul proved a friend in need. He went the round of her trap line for her and helped her skin the few mink and foxes taken and stretch the pelts. And he gave her advice. He advised her to remain in the woods for the balance of the winter, at least. She had a snug cabin, traps, provisions enough to last until spring, and six hundred dollars in cash which her father had left her. Peter promised to help her in her work and to look after her as if she were his own daughter. She thought the old man's advice good. She felt no desire to go back to the world.

Marjorie had been out since sunrise in the empty, frost-stilled forest, and the east was as gray as ashes and the west as red as a fallen fire when she got back to her cabin. She lit the lantern and was frying bacon for her supper when a sound at the door caused her to straighten her back and turn sharply. The door opened slowly, with a thin outcry of frosty hinges. A bulky, misshapen figure appeared on the threshold—a tall, stooped shape, that seemed to sway and totter as it peered into the room. The girl's heart leaped and chilled in her side. She could not move. The swaying thing tottered forward and fell flat. A big pack, done up in a waterproof blanket, rolled over on the floor.

The girl's blood raced warm again. She had seen such packs before. Her visitor was human, after all—a lumber-camp peddler. He was not a large man. His pack, carried high on his shoulders, had given him height and that terrible bulkiness. She turned him over and looked into a thin, bewhiskered, swarthy face. She got brandy and poured some of it between his gray lips. He opened his eyes—eyes as black and cold as new ice on a deep river.

"Lost," he whispered. "Three days. More brandy."

She gave him more brandy, then a mug of hot tea. She made him a bowl or oatmeal gruel, which he drank greedily. He sat up and looked about him. His glance dwelt curiously on the long shelf of books against the farther wall and on the silver cigarette box and candlesticks on the mantelpiece. He suggested opening his pack and doing some business; but Marjorie would not hear of it.

"Where is the mister?" he asked.

"He is—out," said Marjorie.

The peddler smiled slyly.

"You live all alone, is it?" he said.

"I guess so, lady."

"I live here with my father," she retorted. "And now I think you had better be moving along, before he comes home. Follow the trail five miles up the river, and Peter Paul will house you for the night."

The peddler chuckled unpleasantly.

"What your father doin' out so late?" he asked.

Then Marjorie lost her temper. She sprang to the door and opened it. She lifted the peddler's pack and threw it out. He rushed after his pack, screaming strange oaths; and she slammed the door and bolted it. She hastily fastened down the sashes of the little windows and covered them with blankets.

He pounded on the door until Marjorie threatened to open it and shoot him. At that, he ceased his kicking and thumping. Again she cried to him to go five miles upriver to Peter Paul's. She received no answer. She filled the magazine of her rifle. Her indignation continued to simmer for an hour, and then a chill of apprehension took possession of her. She began to fear that rat of a man. She thought of his sly, black, heartless eyes and the fear grew. She did not retire to her bunk until dawn.

It was late when Marjorie awoke,

and the incident of the peddler was the first thing that flashed into her mind. She felt angry and uneasy. The wildness which she trusted and loved had produced a thing at once repulsive and menacing. She remained in and near the cabin all day, looking out anxiously for Peter Paul. But Peter did not come.

The next night passed uneventfully; but the morning did not bring the old Maliseet or entirely restore her courage. Toward noon she saw Ben Stickney top the bank and approach across the clearing. She felt a glow of relief. Here was a friend, and a man whom she understood. She was about to tell him of the visit of the peddler, when she suddenly thought of his child. She asked if he had left Peter at home with Tommy.

"Nope. Peter ain't at my place," he answered.

"Then who is? Who is taking care of Tommy?" she asked.

The woodsman hesitated for a moment. He shuffled his feet uneasily and his glance wandered.

"He won't come to no harm," he said. "He's gettin' along fine an' will be up an' out ag'in in a few days. I've come to see how ye're makin' it."

"Do you mean to say that you have left the baby alone—alone in that cabin ten miles from anywhere?" she asked.

Stickney's tanned face flushed darkly.

"Maybe I do; anyhow, I reckon I know how to look after my own youngster," he said.

"You don't, or you wouldn't be here!" she retorted angrily. "Have you no imagination, no heart? He may be crying for you now, and in need of you—and here you are, ten miles away from him, three hours away from him!"

"He's all right, I tell ye," answered the man sullenly. "But that ain't what I come here for. This livin' alone in the woods ain't a decent life for a girl

like yerself. Ye must be terrible lonesome. Will ye marry me, Marjorie?"

Her eyes flamed, and the lines of her young face hardened.

"Please don't worry about my loneliness," she said, her voice low and cutting like a lash. "Think about your baby. He is lonely. He needs you—and I don't. He wants you—and I don't. Go home to him."

"You ain't got no call to talk to me like that!" he cried savagely. Then he turned and strode away.

Marjorie stood for a full minute, motionless, staring unblinkingly into the fire.

"The dull fool!" she exclaimed suddenly. "He does not deserve to own the child. And I suppose he thinks that he loves me—that love for me made him forget and neglect his duty to the baby. Love! The dull beast! And yet he believes himself to be a man—like my father!"

She sank upon her knees, hid her face in her hands, and sobbed rendingly. What particular emotion, or what combination of emotions, inspired her tears, I'm at a loss to say.

Peter Paul arrived at Marjorie's cabin some time about mid-afternoon; but he looked a changed Peter. His legs wobbled from ankle to hip, his eyelids were red and puffy, and his eyes were dull.

"Peter, what is it?" she cried, in dismay. "Poor Peter, have you been ill?"

"That's a' right," said the old Maliseet wearily. "Come to see you. Couldn't come yestiday. Too much rum. Lemme lay down."

"You have been drinking again, Peter; and I thought you had grown too old and wise for that," she said accusingly.

The Maliseet lowered himself to the floor and leaned his back against the wall. He sighed heavily.

"Never too old to be one darn' fool," he said.

"Where did you get the rum, or whatever it was?"

"Gin. Square-face. Peddler sell 'im to me. He stop at my place two, three days. Forgit how long. He sell me plenty rum an' two tin watches. No good. Start 'im off 'this mornin' for Sampson's camp, on Red Brook."

"He was here," said Marjorie. "He is a detestable person."

Peter nodded heavily. His eyes closed slowly.

"And Ben Stickney was here to-day," continued the girl.

Peter's eyes opened swiftly.

"What he come for?" he asked.

"To do me the honor of asking me to become his wife," she replied scornfully.

"That no good for you. You don't want to go marry Ben Stickney."

"I am beginning to hate and fear the woods and this cabin and the Moose Horn—since the peddler and Ben Stickney visited me. Stickney had no right to come here and speak to me as he did. He would not have ventured to do it if father had been here. I think I shall go away, after all."

Peter had nodded again; but at that his round eyes snapped open, and he sat bolt upright.

"Go 'way?" he cried. "Where you go to? You got no place to go to."

"I can go anywhere in the world," she replied. "Why not? Why should I remain on the Moose Horn, now that it has been spoiled for me by that peddler and Ben Stickney. I have six hundred dollars and some good pelts, and I can find work of some sort in a city."

"You stay right here on Moose Horn," exclaimed Peter. "You safe here, with me for to take care of you. You got one darn' good friend on this river, anyhow—me, Peter Paul. You go to a city, you git that six hundred dollar thieved from you in ten minutes. John, he never want you to go

work in no city. What you work at, anyhow?"

"But I'm afraid of that peddler," said the girl. "I know he will try to do me an injury. And I don't want to see Ben Stickney again. I shall start for Plaster Bluff in a few days, and from there out into the world."

Peter grunted, and fell asleep. The fumes of his recent potations enthralled him. He slept on Marjorie's floor all night, for she had not the hardness of heart to waken him and send him away.

By morning, Peter was steady enough in the legs but very dull of spirit. He would not eat any breakfast, but drank a couple of mugs of tea. Then he volunteered to go out and attend to Marjorie's traps. She refused the offer, kindly but firmly. She told him that, with the poison of the gin still in his blood, he was not fit for a hard day's work.

"But if you can spare the time, you will oblige me greatly by keeping house for me while I go the round of my traps," she said.

"A' right," he answered, in a muffled and injured voice. "You think you darn' sight better trapper nor me. A' right. Peter Paul stop at home an' play old squaw, an' keep the kittle b'ilin'."

Left to himself, Peter nosed about the cabin, prying into everything with the innocent curiosity of a child. He withdrew and opened several books from the long shelf; discovered a box of very dry cigars and promptly lit one of them; examined all the pelts on the walls and the floor, and at last happened upon some loose poles in the flooring. He lifted the poles, and discovered a black dispatch box. It was locked, and he had no key; but he shook it about close to his ear, heard the crinkle of paper and the clink of heavy coins, and decided that it contained the six hundred dollars.

"Wish the devil would bewitch it

clean away," he mumbled. "Then she wouldn't go 'way from Moose Horn to them darn' cities."

He replaced the box in its earthy bed, replaced the poles above it, and the caribou skin above the poles. Then he lay down near the fire and slept. The poison of the gin was still in his blood. He slept soundly and did not awake until Marjorie's return late in the afternoon. He felt much better by that time, helped the girl stretch a couple of new fox skins, ate a bite of supper with her, and then departed for his cabin on Snowshoe Brook.

Marjorie barred her door and curtained her windows. For an hour she sat before the fire, planning her desertion of the woods and trying to guess the future. She felt at once excited and sad at the prospect of returning to the great world. She planned the short journey to Piaster Bluff and counted her marketable pelts. Mr. Sam McNair, the storekeeper at the mill, would give her a fair price for her skins. Then she decided to count her money again, and crossed the room to get it. She kicked the caribou skin aside and lifted the loose flooring. The box was not there!

For a few seconds, Marjorie stared at the empty hole in the earth with blank eyes and a blank mind. She recovered quickly. She felt anger rather than dismay. It was a serious loss, of course; but no loss of dollars could daunt her now. It did not spell starvation or any other desperate thing; but it meant that she would not be able to leave the Moose Horn country before spring. That was her first thought; and her second thought was that old Peter Paul had taken the box. Anger toward Peter glowed in her like a hot coal. It was well for him that he had gone away immediately after supper. But not for a moment did she accuse him of being a thief. No, he was simply a silly old busybody—and that was

bad enough. He had not taken the money for himself, and he would surely return it to her some day; he had simply taken it so as to keep her on the Moose Horn.

Without waiting to replace the poles of the floor, Marjorie pulled on her overstockings and moccasins, her blanket coat and mittens, and set out for Snowshoe Brook with the intention hot in her to tell old Peter what she thought of his methods of persuasion, and to recover her money immediately. She would let him know that she was her own mistress. All fear of the peddler had gone from her. She did not give him a thought. The excitement of her anger against poor Peter had driven every other trouble and doubt from her mind for the time. The night was bitterly cold and the stars were bright. The track between her cabin and the mouth of Snowshoe Brook was well beaten, and she made good time on it. She reached Peter's lowly door and straightway fell to hammering upon it with her mittened fists.

"Who there? What you want?" inquired the voice of the old Maliseet from the other side of the door.

"It is I—Marjorie Hollis," replied the girl.

The door was opened on the instant. She stepped inside quickly, purposefully. Peter closed the door and lit his smoky lantern. He was quite presentable, for it was his custom to sleep in most of his clothes. He lifted the lantern high and scanned her face with round, anxious eyes.

"What the trouble?" he asked. "House afire?"

"You can't fool me, Peter," she retorted sharply, "though I admit that you are a clever actor. I've come to tell you what I think of you."

He sighed and set the lantern on a bench against the wall.

"Why don't you tell me to-day? Gimme hell now, I suppose, for gittin'

drunk. That ain't good sense. You have plenty chance this mornin'."

"Don't waste your time trying to pull the wool over my eyes. I am here for my money—and to tell you that you have no right to interfere with my plans—even if you are my friend. Give me my money!"

Peter raised the lantern again and again scrutinized her flushed face. She returned him glance for glance; but his dark eyes did not waver. He set the lantern down again.

"You talkin' 'bout yer six hundred dollar?" he asked.

"Yes. What have you done with it?"

"I don't do nothin' with 'im. You keep 'im in one black box, hey?"

"Yes; but if you are so ignorant about it, how do you know that I keep it in a black box?"

"That a' right. Look 'round cabin to-day an' see that box under the floor. Look at 'im an' put 'im back. Don't take nothin'—nothin' but one cigar. Tell you the truth, Marjorie. You think I rob you?"

"I think that you have hidden the money so that I can't go away."

"I think of that, too; but don't do it. Put 'im back. Then go to sleep. Maybe dig 'im up ag'in in my sleep an' hide 'im. Dunno."

"Are you telling me the truth, Peter?"

"Yes. Never tell no lies to you. You better believe me, or maybe you git me darn' mad."

"I am sorry, Peter. But if you didn't take it, who did? It isn't there now—and you were in the cabin all day."

"Maybe I hide 'im in my sleep."

"Are you serious?"

"You bet! Peter Paul don't make no joke on six hundred dollar."

Late as it was, the two returned to Marjorie's cabin. They hunted high and low, indoors and out, for the black dispatch box; but they didn't find it.

"Perhaps some one came in and took it while you were asleep?" suggested the girl.

"Maybe," agreed Peter.

"That peddler! Perhaps he did not go over to Red Brook at all."

"Maybe. We hunt his track to-morrow, anyhow."

### CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH BAYFORD UNDERTAKES TO  
HIDE HIS DIMINISHED HEAD IN  
THE WOODS.

Mr. William Morgan Bayford remained in New York after the night of the prodigious fall of snow only long enough to receive written particulars from his late aunt's lawyers and to sell his furniture, books, and pictures. He felt thoroughly ashamed of himself. Shame dominated all other emotions in his breast after the first bewildering and unnerving shock of his change of fortune had passed. He swore Charlie Wayland to secrecy. He called upon a certain young woman who had engaged much of his attentions during the past six months, told her that he was a fool, and proved it to her satisfaction, and accepted his dismissal with a very good grace. He was even thoughtful enough to express his satisfaction at hearing that she had never really loved him, for if she had the situation would really have been rather painful.

Bayford's lawyer, and his friend, Wayland, sold his furniture, books, and pictures for him; and while this was going on he lay doggo in Wayland's rooms. In spite of his precautions, the papers had scented enough of his story for elaboration into half a page of their Sunday editions. He was the man who had gambled away two millions of dollars in six years, and yet had never played the game with force or intelligence enough to create so much as a momentary ripple on the surface of the financial river. He was the

gilded youth who had rounded off his education at seats of learning in Europe, who had circumnavigated the globe twice, who had passed as a patron of the arts and sciences—and who was unable to earn his own living.

One possessor of the pen of a ready writer reversed the actual figures of his disgrace and stated that he had squandered six millions of dollars in two years. Another suggested that he become an art critic. He read the papers, and wondered how and when he had made so many enemies. To his knowledge, he had never wished or done any harm to any one in the wide world. He became a trifle bitter—but none the less ashamed of himself for that. So he lay low in Wayland's rooms, ashamed to enter his clubs, ashamed to appear on the streets, ashamed to attend to the selling of his own treasures in his own house. He was the fool who could spend money but who could not earn bread.

Wayland did very well with the sale; but by the time Bayford had settled a score of little accounts about town, he had only twenty-six hundred dollars left.

Bayford started for the north and the Moose Horn country immediately after the sale, feeling that twenty-six hundred dollars would last him longer in the woods than anywhere else. Also, he felt some curiosity concerning his six thousand acres of wilderness.

At Plaster Bluff he outfitted and obtained guides. His guides were Archie Douglas, an old woodsman, and Joe Creamer, a young one. They dragged the outfit on two toboggans. The first ten miles of their way led along a beaten road over which many loads of provisions had been hauled to a big lumber camp owned by one Nixon. At the end of the ten miles this road swung sharply to the right, and Bayford and his party had to take to the river.

Bayford was sound and in fair con-

dition, but he had never done much snowshoeing. He soon began to feel a weariness in muscles that had never before been weary. His snowshoes felt heavy, then heavier and heavier. But he set his jaws and continued to plod onward along the level, white surface of the river. He kept it up for three hours, then fell without a word or a groan. The muscles of his legs were cramped so that he could not rise. The woodsmen lifted him to one of the toboggans and dragged him ashore. Joe Creamer made camp and Archie rubbed Bayford's legs with warm bear's grease.

"You got sand, mister," he said. "You'll be able to step out as loose as ashes to-morrow."

They breakfasted at dawn and reached the mouth of the Moose Horn long before noon. The distance from the mouth to Bayford's lower line was sixteen or seventeen miles by river; but Archie said that three miles or more could be cut off by taking to the woods. So they took to the woods, with the old man in the lead. A keen wind was blowing and the dry snow was drifting in clouds; but in the shelter of the woods they escaped much of the stinging drift. But the "going" was heavier than on the river, and their progress was slow. After covering about five miles, exhaustion halted them in a place of upright and wind-felled timber. Some fierce gale of long ago had uprooted great pines and cast them crisscross upon the forest floor.

"This is about the worst mess of windfall I ever see," said Archie. "Reckon I'd best take a cruise around an' find a way out."

He returned to the others in half an hour.

"I found two things," he said calmly. "A way out an' a dead man."

"A dead man?" cried Bayford.

"Dead as Bill Lundy's sow."

"Give 'im a name," said Joe Creamer.

"It ain't nobody that matters. Abe

Liveen, the peddler. There ain't no marks on him. Got lost, an' froze to death, I cal'late. He'd dropped his pack about two hundered yards from where he laid. Ain't nothin' much gone from the pack but what he sold to the boys at the mill—but he had a bunch of money in his pocket countin' way up 'round six hundered dollars."

"Let's have a look at the money," said Creamer.

Archie produced it—a wad of greenbacks and some gold tied up in a corner of a red handkerchief.

"He's sure robbed a camp," said Joe. "Maybe Nixon's, or maybe Simpson's, over on Red Brook."

"Nixon an' Simpson both pay with checks," said Archie. "But I cal'late he's robbed some one, sure enough."

They got their toboggan clear of the blow-downs, then went to take a look at the dead peddler.

"He's froze all-fired stiff," remarked Archie, in grave and contemplative tones. "I never seen a man froze so darn' stiff before."

"We must bury the unfortunate fellow," said Bayford, shivering.

"He ain't worth it, mister," returned Archie. "It would take us a hull day for to cut out a real grave for him—an' dull our axes into the bargain. He ain't worth it—nor no other thievin' peddler. What good would it do him, anyhow? We'll jist h'ist him up into the top of that there young birch, so's the foxes won't git him."

That is what they did, and it did not take them long to accomplish it; and at the foot of the young birch tree they placed the bulky pack of worthless watches, rings, watch chains, pins, and mouth organs. Then they returned to their toboggans and continued their journey. It was some time before Bayford could clear his mind of the picture of the frozen peddler fastened up in the tree with the rope from his own discarded pack.

After a couple of hours of hard hauling, Archie called a halt.

"We can't make Hollis' place before sundown, an' not then, without strainin' ourselves, so we may's well camp right here," he said.

They were all asleep by eight o'clock, with the heat and glow of the log fire beating into their lean-to shelter.

## CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH MARJORIE RECOVERS HER MONEY BUT NOT HER PEACE OF MIND.

They had not been asleep more than fifteen minutes when Bayford awoke with a violent start from a dream of the frozen peddler. He sat up sharply in his blankets, with the chill of the dream creeping on his scalp. He saw a squat human figure standing between the fire and the front of the tent, not more than seven feet away from him, and black as a bear or a peddler against the yellow glow.

For a moment his sleep-drugged brain was unable to distinguish between sleeping and waking, between the dream and the reality, and it seemed to him that the frozen Liveen had actually descended from the tree and followed stiffly into camp. He did not cry out, for his tongue had suddenly gone as dry in his mouth as a slice of fried bacon; but he clutched Archie Douglas' shoulder with one hand and Joe Creamer's with the other. The old woodsman and the young came up in their blankets as if he had touched a spring in each—and, at the same moment, the squat figure spoke.

"Good night," it said. "See yer fire an' come along an' warm out the frost a little. Almighty cold!"

The minds of the three men in the tent must have been haunted by the same thought, for Joe ducked his head beneath his blankets and old Archie cried out, in a rusty and fear-shaken



voice: "Who are you? An' what d' you want now?"

"That you, Archie Douglas?" queried the visitor calmly.

A sigh of relief escaped Archie's dry throat.

"Sure thing," he replied. "Is that you, Peter Paul?"

"Me, a' right. Give you one darn' good scare, what? You think the devil make a visit on you, what? Guess I come in. Where you headin' for?"

"Make yerself to home, Peter. Glad to see it's yerself—an' that's no lie. Here's a blanket. Have some baccy. This gent from New York, name of Bayford, owns some land up hereabouts on Moose Horn, and figgers on livin' in the woods. Me an' Joe is bringin' him in."

"This country darn' good place to live in," said Peter, staring very hard at Bayford.

"What itch has got hold of you, Peter, to set you trapsin' round the woods this time of night?" asked Archie. "Lookin' for, somethin'?"

"You bet! Lookin' for one darn' thievin' peddler. You see him, what?"

"What d'ye want him for? An' what's his name?"

"Dunno his name. He come in here an' sell me rum, one day, an' two bum watches. Stop with me one night an' one day. Watches stop, too. Maybe forget to wind 'em up. Charge one dollar first bottle, five dollar nex' bottle, ten dollar nex' bottle. Git 'im jes' the same, only stronger, for seventy cents down to Plaster Bluff. Then that peddler go 'way. I go to Marjorie Hollis' place pretty soon an' she tell me how she kick that peddler out one night. Then she ax me to keep house an' she go 'tend the traps. Feel darn' sleepy, an' go to sleep. Sleep all day. Go home after supper. Don't be home long when that girl come kickin' on the door an' yellin' how I better give her back her six hundered dollar. I don't take

no six hundered dollar offen that girl—but think maybe take 'im in me sleep. Think maybe that peddler come back an' take 'im when I keep house for her. Some one take 'im in me sleep, anyhow. Hunt all night. Hunt all day. Hunt three, four day. Go over to Simpson's camp, on Red Brook, but he ain't bin there. Marjorie quit huntin'—but not me. You don't see no peddler, what?"

"Sure we see him," returned Archie Douglas. "See him to-day—dead as dried apples. Froze to death, he was. An' I got the six hundred dollars right now, inside me shirt."

"Good!" exclaimed Peter Paul. "That darn' good talk. Guess we best sleep some now. Gimme one more blanket."

"Hold on a minute," said Archie. "You've talked a lot about the girl an' yerself, but not a word about her paw. What was John Hollis doin' all the time? He wasn't settin' 'round at home smokin' his cigareets—not if I know John Hollis."

"John's quit smokin' cigareets," replied Peter sleepily. "John's dead."

The four made an early start next morning, with Peter leading the way, and broke into the little clearing around Marjorie's cabin before the sun was a man's height above the spruce tops. They found the girl at home, washing her few breakfast dishes. Archie and Joe had seen her before. Archie clasped her hand heartily, and yet with a subtle suggestion of tender sympathy.

"I'm danged sorry to hear as yer father is gone," he said.

Young Joe took her hand awkwardly and waggled it about for several seconds in silence.

But William Morgan Bayford had never set eyes on her before and had not expected to set eyes on anything like her in the Moose Horn country. He pulled his fur cap from his head with both hands, leaving his hair stand-

ing wildly on end, and gazed at her with unveiled astonishment. Why had no one warned him of the fact that this was a highly civilized and favored quarter of the globe? Why hadn't Peter Paul given him the tip to shave? He felt that he looked like a fool in the shapeless garments which McNair had sold to him.

The girl met his eyes, and blushed at the sight of his astonishment and confusion. She extended her hand, and smiled.

"I'm Marjorie Hollis," she said.

"My name is Bayford—William Bayford," he stammered, dropping his cap and several pairs of mittens to the floor.

He seized her hand and waggled it about as awkwardly as young Joe Creamer had waggled it. He tortured his brains for some suitable and commonplace remark.

"I didn't expect to meet you here," he said.

Then he dropped her hand, and recovered his cap and mittens.

"You see her before?" queried Peter, his bright glance fixed on the flushed face of the New Yorker.

"I've never had the pleasure of seeing Miss Hollis before," answered Bayford, with a fair show of composure.

"You act an' talk darn' foolish," said the Maliseet.

Joe Creamer guffawed at that. Old Archie drew the wad of bills and the red handkerchief from somewhere deep down in his breast.

"Here's the money that there peddler stole offen you," he said.

Bayford and his party refused Marjorie's invitation to remain to dinner. They continued on their course upriver for about three miles. There Peter Paul, who had accompanied them, called a halt.

"Guess you somewheres on yer own land now, Bayford," he said, holding Bayford's map wide-spread between his

mittened hands. "Both sides of river, what?" He raised his glance from the map and regarded one shore, then the other. "There one darn' fine place fer yer cabin," he concluded.

They pulled the toboggans to the edge of the level stream and up the drifted bank. They ascended through the sloping grove of spruces and firs to the top of the knoll which Peter had suggested as a building site. Archie and Joe were also of the opinion that it was a good spot for a shack. It was close to the river, yet well above its reach in time of flood. A bubbling spring of sweet water smoked at the base of the knoll, in a cup of green moss rimmed with the ice and snow that could not still nor cover it. On the roomy, flat top of the knoll stood enough timber for a dozen cabins. So they pitched the tent and made a fire. They banked the back and sides of the lean-to high with snow.

Peter joined them at the midday meal and at the afternoon's chopping that followed. He gave Bayford instruction in the art of swinging an ax. Many a big spruce fell and was denuded of his sweeping branches before the sun went down behind the west. Peter took his departure immediately after supper, with a cordial invitation to come again.

Three days passed before Marjorie saw anything more of Peter Paul or of Mr. Bayford and his men. She wondered what had brought Bayford into the woods at this time of year. She had liked his eyes and his voice—and even his manners, which had improved after the first few moments of astonishment and confusion. She did not make any further arrangements toward her departure from the Moose Horn, but decided to mark time for a week or so. She had hidden her money in a new place; and she had nothing to fear now from the peddler; and she felt a strong curiosity concerning the personality and affairs of William Morgan

Bayford. Remembering her father, she was of the opinion that the young stranger had not come to the Moose Horn, in the middle of December, by accident.

Peter Paul turned up at Marjorie's cabin on the morning of the fourth day after the arrival of Bayford on the river.

"Bin watchin' Bayford," he said. "Learnt 'im to chop. Help him build his shack. What you think about 'im, anyhow?"

"Do you mean about the young man who was here a few days ago with Archie Douglas and Joe Creamer?" she asked.

The Maliseet permitted himself a swift, faint smile.

"You think him one pretty fine feller, hey?"

"He seemed very bashful and awkward; but I have not thought of him at all—except to wonder why he came to the woods at such a time as this. Is he a naturalist?"

"He look mighty simple when you first see 'im, an' act mighty foolish—but he ain't no natural. Good feller, Bayford. Like 'im darn fine. He come from New York."

"And what is he doing on the Moose Horn?"

"Dunno. Nothin'. Own some land—six thousand acre. Plenty timber on that land, you bet. He don't know nothin' about timber. You goin' away so darn' quick now?"

"I have not decided. Now that the poor peddler is dead I am not afraid that my cabin will be burned every time I turn my back on it. Perhaps I'll not go out before spring."

"That a' right. You think maybe Bayford kill somebody?"

"No. Why should I think that of him? He does not look like a murderer. What put that idea into your head, Peter?"

"Dunno. Maybe he rob some money

out of a bank; or maybe he git married an' run away from his wife, like John done."

Marjorie's cheeks paled and a shadow of suffering darkened her eyes; but she smiled bravely at the old Maliseet.

"He looked too young to be married—too young to have run away from his wife, at least," she replied. "And he looked far too honest and fearless for a fugitive from justice. Why do you think such dreadful things of him, Peter—and, at the same time, say that you think he is a good fellow? You must be careful how you talk about him."

"Don't think nothin'—jes' wonderin'," said Peter. "Like 'im fine. He ain't so darn' ignorant, like Stickney. Bring 'im over to see you to-morrow, maybe. Smart feller. Talk jes' as good as John used to, soon's he git started good. He ax me all about you; but I don't tell 'im much."

"Asked you about me? What did he ask about me?"

"First thing he ax, 'How the devil come one darn' nice girl like that in these here woods, a-livin' in a shack?' I tell 'im you bin livin' here on Moose Horn five year with yer pa, an' yer pa die little while back, an' that how you come to be a-livin' here now. He study on that five, ten minute. Then he say, 'Her pa must hev bin one darn' superior kind of man.' I say, 'Yes, one fine man, but one darn' poor trapper.' He ax me what night John die, an' I tell 'im. Then he say, 'On that same night I first see what a darn fool I am; and on that same night, mighty late, I first hear the name of Moose Horn.'"

"Did he tell you what kind of a fool he had so suddenly seen himself to be?" asked the girl.

"He say darn fool."

"Please don't talk about me any more to Mr. Bayford—about me or my affairs. It isn't fair to me, Peter."

"That a' right," said Peter.

He went home to his denlike hut. In the morning he went the round of his short line of traps. In the afternoon he called on Bayford.

"You come 'long' with me an' make visit on Marjorie," he said.

"I didn't come into the woods for that sort of thing," replied Bayford.

"You run away, what? Maybe you got a wife back on New York, hey?"

"A wife! Bless my soul, no. I wouldn't be able to support her if I had."

"You ain't got no money?"

"That's about the size of it, Peter. I had some, but I lost it."

Peter Paul went away, grumbling. He went straight to Marjorie's cabin and found the girl at home. Her eyes were bright when he first opened the door; but the brightness slipped out of them when he crossed the threshold alone. He noticed, and understood. The girl wore a lace collar that was new to him, at her round, white throat. Pity and anger moved hot and cold in him. He knew that she had wanted Bayford to come, that she was lonely for folk of her own kind. And the darned fool had refused to come!

"Bayford say he can't come an' see you to-day," he said. "He mighty busy workin' on his cabin."

## CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH BAYFORD FEELS LONELINESS LIKE A SLOW FEVER, AND IS OFFERED A TEMPTING PRICE FOR HIS LAND.

As soon as the cabin was completed, Bayford paid off Archie Douglas and Joe Creamer and dismissed them. Left alone, he devoted several days to chinking the cracks in his walls with moss and to struggling with his chimney, which smoked prodigiously. Stone by stone, he rebuilt the chimney from the hearth to the pitch of the roof; and it smoked more heartily than before. So

he gave it up, and sat around and thought regretfully of his past.

For the first time in his life he was breast to breast with loneliness. It put an edge to his nerves and a restlessness in his brains and feet. From the smoky interior of his new cabin he fled to the empty forest, urged by some hope or longing as potent yet as vague as a summons in a dream; and from the frozen forest he returned to the cabin as if the devil trod upon his heels. Peter Paul had not come near him since the departure of Archie and Joe; so, after five days of solitude, he set out to find the old Maliseet, wondering if he had offended him in any way.

Bayford found Peter's shack without much difficulty, in spite of the fact that it looked more like a snowdrift than a human habitation; but the door was fastened, and no smoke arose from the squat chimney. He found the prints of snowshoes leading away from the door; and, as snow had fallen heavily only twenty-four hours ago, he knew that the trail was fairly fresh. So he followed the trail into the woods.

Within a few hundred yards of the drifted shack the trail swung sharply. Bayford gave no heed to its direction, but followed it intently and at his best pace, driven along by a sense of utter loneliness that haunted him like a ghost or a humiliating memory. He longed to hear again a voice that was not of the wind, of the sliding snow, or of the frost-tortured trees. He longed to smell again the smoke of tobacco that was not of his own burning. He traveled fast and far without overtaking the old Maliseet on the trail. Suddenly he parted a screen of underbrush and stepped into a little clearing. He beheld Marjorie's cabin within twenty yards of him, with smoke going up cheerily from the chimney. He hesitated for a moment, then crossed the clearing and knocked on the cabin door. It was opened to him by Peter.

"That you, Bayford?" said the Maliseet. "Darn' good thing you come! Marjorie cut her foot las' night with the ax."

"Is it serious?" asked Bayford, peering into the dim interior over the top of Peter's head. "Isn't there something I can do?"

"Mighty bad cut. Maybe it git poisoned, what? You pretty good doctor, what?"

"No. I don't know anything about that sort of thing, worse luck!"

"Darn' pity you don't learn something all the time you live. You got long legs, anyhow. You go out to Plaster Bluff an' send in the doctor jes' as darn' quick as you know how."

"Right you are. I'll travel for all I'm worth."

"Wait one minute. Come in. You got to take some grub, an' extry pair of snowshoes in case you bust somethin'. Rig you out in one minute. Step in an' shut the door."

Bayford crossed the threshold bare-headed, and closed the door behind him. The small window and the fire lit the place dimly. He saw the girl in her bunk, covered with blankets to her chin. Her eyes were open, and her white face was turned to him. Her hair lay against her cheeks in thick braids. He approached the bunk diffidently.

"I am sure there is no need of sending you away out to Plaster Bluff," she said. "It is not bleeding now—and Peter has bandaged it very nicely."

"You must have a doctor, Miss Hollis, really," answered Bayford. "I'm ashamed at not being one myself. But I can get one. I can be of that much use, I'm glad to say."

"You are very kind. It is a long trip—a long trip to make for a stranger."

"Pleese don't mention it; and pleese don't speak like that, for we are neighbors."

"You sling these snowshoes on yer back an' put this grub in yer pockets," said Peter Paul. "Drink this mug of tea an' quit talkin'. You got thirty-five mile to go. Stick to the rivers—don't try takin' no short cuts through the woods. There! Now you travel quick as you darn' well know how."

"Au revoir," said the young man.

"Au revoir," returned the young woman. "And thank you again—and again. Don't get lost."

"Put on yer cap an' git out," said Peter.

Bayford went straight over the crest of drifts and down the sliding bank to the surface of the river. Down the center of that level way the winds had brushed a clean track of hard-pressed snow not more than ten or twelve inches deep. As Bayford turned into this wind-swept track he glanced at his watch and saw that the time lacked two hours of noon. He had been early afoot, but he felt fresh and strong. He broke into a jog trot, leaning well forward.

In the first hour he trotted more than he walked, and judged that he had covered more than five miles. During the second hour he did not trot quite so much or walk quite so fast; but he had caught his second wind by then, and made as good speed in the third hour as the second. He rested for a few minutes, loosed and retied the thongs of his snowshoes, sipped at a flask of cold tea laced with brandy, which he found in his pocket, and ate a little bread and cold bacon.

He started forward again at a moderate pace, but as soon as the slight stiffness had been worked out of his knees and ankles, he broke into a trot. When he issued onto the wider floor of the larger stream he halted and looked at his watch again. It was two o'clock. He had done fifteen miles in four hours, and lunched into the bargain. Feeling that this was good, but

not quite good enough, he continued his journey at a somewhat forced pace.

Twenty miles still to go! Bayford jogged along steadily, with his eyes half shut. His thoughts, which had been roaming afar, now came homing to his skull. They refused to deal with anything but the task at his feet. The girl fifteen miles behind and the doctor twenty miles in front were vague as characters in a half-forgotten story.

He counted his steps. Miles are made up of steps, after all. He trotted for one hundred steps, then slowed to a walk for fifty steps, then trotted again. The idea came into his head that it would be a fine thing to keep up his jogging trot for two hundred paces instead of one. The going was good, and he did not feel tired—only a trifle stuffy in the chest and a trifle stiff in the thighs. So he did it—two hundred paces, and ten more for good measure; but when he tried to slow down to a walk he fell flat on his face. He lay still for a minute, feeling very tired all of a sudden, then rolled over, got stiffly to his feet, and readjusted the thongs of his snowshoes.

"I'm making great time," he muttered. "I'll keep it up, and set a record."

He continued his journey with unflagging courage, walking, running, counting his paces and losing the count, staggering to his knees now and then, and now and then falling flat. His falls became more and more frequent, and his recoveries slower, as time passed and the white miles were wound up on his snowshoes. That was a pretty idea of his own—the winding up of the white miles on his snowshoes. No wonder they were growing heavy—heavier and heavier with the gathering in of each mile. He emptied the flask.

Bayford looked up and beheld a big heap, or "brow," of new-cut logs on the nearer bank. He sat down in his tracks, rubbed the calves of his legs

with both hands, and regarded the logs drowsily. He knew that the logs were important, and that he should bring his mind to bear upon them; but his mind was in no mood to be disturbed. He managed to arouse it at last, however.

"Nixon's camp," he said. "Nixon's camp, for sure. How far into the camp, I wonder? Must get into camp and send a fresh man for the doctor."

He staggered to his feet and shaped his course for the shore. He fell half a dozen times while getting to the top of the drifted bank beside the brow of logs. He topped the drift at last and came face to face with a man in a red woolen cap and a green-and-brown jumper.

"All in," he muttered, and pitched into the well-beaten road with a clatter of fouled snowshoes.

He opened his eyes five minutes later and saw that he was being carried by the knees and the shoulders toward a big camp in a big clearing. Though his legs were numb, his brain was clear and alert.

"Hold on!" he yelled.

The man who had him by the knees turned a bewiskered, inquiring face over a bulky shoulder; but neither he nor the man behind paused in their labored stride.

"Miss Hollis, on Moose Horn, has cut her foot," said Bayford. "Will you send a man out to Plaster Bluff for the doctor immediately? I'll pay him for the trouble."

"Doc Wilkins is in the camp this very minute," returned the man who held him beneath the shoulders. "He come in last night to set Bruce McDonald's busted leg."

Nixon himself was in camp. He was a big lumberman, big industrially as well as physically. He carried on his operations against the forests in half a dozen widely separated localities. As soon as he heard Bayford's story, he ordered one of his men to accompany

Doctor Wilkins upriver, another to mix a hot Scotch for Bayford, and yet another to help Bayford into a bunk and to rub his legs with liniment.

Bayford slept soundly after the mugful of hot Scotch. He did not wake until morning, for muscles and nerves were drugged with fatigue. The big room was lit by many lanterns when he opened his eyes, and from the double tiers of bunks along the walls the men were issuing sluggishly and clothing themselves for the day. These were the choppers, swampers, team tenders, and yard tenders. The teamsters had been up and out to feed their horses more than an hour before, and were now smoking their pipes by the high stove near the western end of the room. The cook and his assistants were busy at the wide, low stove near the other end of the shack.

The long table was already laid for breakfast—set out with mugs and plates, platters of hot biscuits, of hot fried pork, of fish cakes, dishes of fried potatoes, plates of doughnuts, cans of butter, tin-topped pitchers of molasses, slabs of gingerbread, plates of white bread, huge pots of tea and coffee. Bayford had never seen, had never even suspected, such a breakfast. He climbed from his borrowed blankets, dressed, washed his face and hands in a tin basin full of hot water supplied by the cook, and then took his seat at the table with the others.

Nixon hunted Bayford up after breakfast, gave him a long cigar, asked a few questions about his life on the

Moose Horn, then offered him twelve thousand dollars for his land on that river. Bayford smoked slowly and thought hard. He shook his head.

"Twenty thousand," said the lumberman.

Bayford looked through the window at his elbow and considered the sum of twenty thousand dollars. It was a considerable sum of money; but what good would it be to him if he went back to his old life with it? And he thought of his six thousand acres of forest—and of Peter Paul—and of the girl whose need of a doctor had sent him out yesterday.

"I'm not selling," he said.

On his way home he decided that he had done a wise thing in resisting the temptation of Nixon's offer; but, for the life of him, he could not understand how he had managed to resist it. He was tired of life on the Moose Horn—tired of sitting in his lonely shack and pondering over his past foolishnesses. He reached the Hollis clearing at five in the evening, and learned from Peter that the doctor had arrived safely, had already dressed the cut foot twice, and was of the opinion that it would heal quickly and cleanly. He saw a young woman with a blanket over her head at the window of the cabin.

"Who the mischief have you there?" he asked.

"That Dolly Sacobie, daughter to my daughter," replied Peter. "She come over height of land las' night, to beg grub off me, so I set her to nursin' Marjorie."

TO BE CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE.

**We are planning to give you, in the next issue, a sea story of unusual merit, that will give you a startling picture of the life of the men who go down to the sea in ships. The story is called "At the Moon Trail's End," and is by William Slavens McNutt. It is a book-length novel, and we will print it complete in the POPULAR on the stands November 23rd.**

# The Engineers

By Alan Sullivan

THE ways of the Lord be manifold, He has fashioned divers men  
To fret the earth for a little space with labor, laughter, and tears,  
To strut in the light till the world forgets and buries them deep—and then  
The Lord He stiffened His good right arm and fashioned the Engineers.

Where the naked ribs of the liner curve, and the straining rivets whine,  
Where the plunging crosshead spatters the oil in the incandescent's glare,  
Where the clanging coal scoop swings in the gloom, and the blistering clinkers  
shine,  
Behold him—cool as an iceberg's foot—the Slave and the Master there.

When you come to the end of the old known land, to the far horizon's rim,  
To the raw, crude plain where the uplands lift and the mountains clamber  
sheer,  
The small, wise men of the ledger halt, and the call goes forth for him  
Who laughs at the everlasting hills—the Master, the Engineer.

By lathe and chisel, by hammer and forge he is shaping the things that be,  
He has harnessed the stream to his dynamo, he has said to the tides: "Beware!"  
He grubs in the echoing womb of the earth, and sits on the floor of the sea,  
And rides athwart of the thunderstorm in the hollow caves of air.

Smooth and silent and very sure, he fingers the locking switch,  
Where the yellow copper is glutted with death as it gleams on the marble wall,  
And he turns on his heel when the red lamps wink, to balance his power and pitch  
Through the gloom of the throbbing cañon streets the might of a waterfall.

He weighs the world and the eye of a fly, and he measures the light of a star,  
And plays with a key at the end of a wire till the slumbering cities hear,  
He whispers low and cradles his words on the curve of a waxen jar  
That the bottom end of the earth may list to the voice of the Engineer.

He has come to grips with eternal truth, and he dallies not with lies,  
He has ravished his mind of its small conceits, and he knows not how to shirk;  
For the Thing—the ultimate perfect Thing, is glimmering in his eyes,  
And a voice, a small, reiterant voice, is whispering: "Will it work?"

When we come in time to the end of the road, to the step of the Golden Gate  
We shall see a fellow in overalls, and he'll probably stop and peer  
To see how the Gate is built, and then, if we only watch and wait,  
We shall notice him oiling the golden hinge—the beggar—the Engineer.



# H i g h S e a s

By Wells Hastings

*Author of "The Dancing Doll," "The Patriots," Etc.*

The dancing master and his assistant unearth a dastardly plot on the high seas and provide a few surprises for two very famous gentlemen who exerted a powerful influence on American finance

WHEN at last, in the heat of summer, we closed our New York Salle de Danse and took up our classes in the semi-open pavilion, which René had leased at Newport and christened "En Plein Air," we entered upon a quite different daily routine. In New York we had treated our patrons as our guests; with the relaxed formality of summer our patrons now treated us as theirs. We began the season with our customary decorum, but it occurred to some ingenious spirit to have a morning class in bathing suits on Bailey's Beach, and one cannot very well execute the Lulu Farde in bare feet and be occasionally upset with one's partner by an unexpected seventh wave, and retain the stiff formality which the stricter etiquette dictates.

Even in this circumscribed class, people began to take on individuality, and, somewhat to my surprise, I discovered a few who were likable and fairly rational. Being, or believing yourself to be, constantly in the eyes of the world tends to smooth out superficial peculiarities, but if a man raised nothing but peacocks and studied them as closely as the sluggard is advised to observe the ant he would probably find that, although his flock was largely commonplace, there were here and there notably sweet or notably villainous individuals.

The two very famous gentlemen who exert such a powerful influence on American finance, and whom René chose to dub "The Gold Bond Twins," we met here for the first time. There was nothing angelic about Mr. Archer—as I shall call him—but he was a spirit of light compared to his powerful rival, Mr. Bemis—as I shall call him. Both of them, as all the world knows, are somewhat past middle age, and conduct their private affairs with a secrecy as strict as their public life is elegantly ostentatious. As a barefoot dancer neither of them was a great success.

We liked Herbert Archer, but it was Julius Bemis who made much of us. In all the brilliant affairs at "Valhalla," the spreading and turreted marble "cottage" of Julius Bemis, René Shawn and I were made the focal points of interest, the evening's stellar attraction. We were Mr. Bemis' guests at the Casino, and, not infrequently, carried out by his speed launch to a select little dinner party on his ocean-going yacht the *Viking*. We smoked his especially imported Havanas, and drank his vintage wines, and thoroughly detested the man; the very sight of him jarred René's æsthetic sensibilities.

"In the public prints he may be passable enough, Frank," he said, "in the black and white of a flattering artist he may get by, but that great bleached, moon face of his has sickened me once

and for all with the fancy that the moon itself is made of green cheese. If vampires walked in real life they wouldn't look like beautiful, sharp-toothed young women, but the spit and image of Julius Bemis. In a large way, too, he is a vampire, for he is busy every moment sucking the lifeblood of the nation. In the smart-aleck American phrase he might very truly be said to be the guy who is taking the transports out of transportation and putting the end to dividend. And I suppose if he knew as much about us as he thinks he does he would be the first one to call us a menace to society. I should like to tell him to go hang with his little dinner."

René straightened the ends of his new evening tie and began vigorously brushing his flaming hair back from his forehead.

"I wonder what he is up to, Frank? We are to be his only guests to-night, you know."

"Give it up," I answered. "Probably it is only a little private instruction. The bigger and grosser a man seems to be, the more confident he is nowadays that he can become a René Shawn."

"To the devil with you, Frank!" René laughed, flinging his long opera cloak about his shoulders. "Hurry, man, the launch must be waiting for us already."

René had not been mistaken; Julius Bemis was up to something. For a man of his presumable intelligence he made his proposal childishly.

"Gentlemen," he said, once the elaborate dinner was over and we were comfortably settled to our cigars on the broad after deck, "as you must have divined by now, I have taken an unusual liking to you." He blew a great cloud of smoke into the air. "I do not make friendships easily, and I think that I may say that my friendship is—well—worth something. I have been trained in a hard school of experience, and have come to the time of life when I am fond

of occasional relaxation. Most of us are inclined to take life too seriously, we can live better and do better work if we get some fun out of living. It is an idea which I have been vainly trying to impress upon Herbert Archer, but you know his stiffness, the man has not unbent in so long that he is in danger of ossification. He is so bound up in affairs that his entire horizon has come to be bounded by Wall Street and the London market. I have tried to do missionary work, but nothing I can say makes any difference to him; so at last I have decided upon a plan which should give us all some amusement, and bring Archer to a view of life for which he is certain to bless me as long as he lives. I intend to present him with a vacation."

Bemis waved the hand which held his cigar in a broad and comprehensive gesture. There was a moment of silence, as if the great man waited for his idea to be caught by lesser intelligences. Frankly, I must own that I saw neither his intention nor how it concerned René or myself, but I noticed that Shawn was stiffening like a high-bred pointer.

"Would it be too much to ask," said Shawn, "just exactly what you mean by presenting him with a vacation, and what part Frank Colvaine and I are to take in a presentation? I suppose that we have some part, or you wouldn't have brought us here to talk it over."

"You are quite right," said Bemis. "My plan is in the nature of a jest, and I find that I need help. You, Monsieur Shawn, and you, Monsieur Colvaine, strike me as unusual men in this stodgy community. The word is peculiar, but if I may say so, you are sprightly—that exactly expresses my feeling about you. You are also resourceful; and in this I need the assistance of resourceful friends." He bared his teeth in a hard smile. "This is a joke at which the whole world will laugh. I am go-

ing to give Herbert Archer a three days' cruise on the *Viking*. He has never been out of sight of land on a private yacht. It will broaden his horizon considerably."

Shawn tossed his cigar over the railing and got to his feet. "You mean that you are going to give him this cruise alone? That you are not going to be aboard yourself?" he asked.

Bemis nodded and rubbed his great, moist hands together.

"It is not a jest I care to have anything to do with," Shawn snapped, and took up his long cloak.

"Come, come, young man, why not? You go off like a spoonful of powder. You know nothing of my plan, and yet you say you'll have nothing to do with it."

"Do you wish me to speak frankly?" asked Shawn.

"Most assuredly."

"Then, Mr. Bemis, to my judgment, which may be hasty, you are proposing nothing more nor less than a gigantic kidnaping scheme, in which Colvaine and I are to be at once cat's-paws and scapegoats. I can only guess at the details of your proposal, but I can tell you now, before you have made confidences which you would afterward regret, that you have come to the wrong people. I cannot imagine what induced you to think that either of us would be party to any such lawless undertaking. We are peaceful, law-abiding folk"—you should have heard the ring in René's voice as he said this—"content to teach what we know of dancing, and to follow the routine of honest toil from day to day. Men in your position, Mr. Bemis, are too prone to feel that you can move the rest of us like puppets. Any simple thing we could do in friendship we should be glad to offer ourselves for, but above all we respect the law, and its voice is sovereign to all others."

Even the great have their weaknesses.

René Shawn's was his sense of situation and humor. More than once it has run him into such great danger that I have trembled for him, and over and over again I have remonstrated with him, but the vice seems to be incurable. When the thing he is saying happens to strike him as amusing he will carry it to perilous limits, which are only tempered by his scornful judgment of the intelligence of his listener. It seemed to me now that these fulsome protestations of virtue must topple over by their sheer magnitude. Bemis had no reason to think us anything but what we pretended to be, but knowing what we had been myself, René's impudent bombast seemed like a cynical and jocular confession.

"Oh, sit down," said Bemis; "you misunderstood the spirit of this thing. I have no doubt of your honesty, and I am not coming to you because I am looking for men to put through a shady operation, but because I thought that you two could relish a joke that I want to play on a mutual friend. Let me tell you all about it. Then you can decide whether you want to come inside or not."

Bemis' scheme was briefly this: He proposed to give a dinner party to Archer and Shawn and me. Archer was known to have something of a weakness for vintage wine, and more than once he had spent the night after a banquet as the guest of a discreet host. Bemis planned to play upon this foible of his friend and to keep him on the yacht overnight. He, himself, then was to go ashore, and Shawn was to be put in authority and to give the captain instructions to make for open sea. The key was to be turned in the door of Archer's stateroom, the supposition being that Shawn supposed him ashore, and when he made so much disturbance that he could be ignored no longer, he was to be discovered and apologized to, but told that the engines had unfortu-

nately broken down. We were to be away three days.

It made me uneasy, while Bemis talked, to see the flicker of those red fires in Shawn's amber eyes, that I had come to know portended trouble for somebody. It was unthinkable that he should lend himself to any such madness as this, but that, in the end, was exactly what he did—he accepted not only for himself but for me. There was something in the back of his mind, but though I questioned him later he refused to enlighten me.

Three nights later, the Bemis launch took us out again to the *Viking*, lying at anchor in the harbor. René, I remember, hummed a little French song under his breath all the way out, while I sat glumly in the stern sheets, filled, in spite of my confidence in him, with the keenest foreboding. If this thing fell through, we wouldn't even have money enough left to pay a lawyer; for the bulk of our earnings had been deposited under other names abroad, and what we had earned since René had sent yesterday to our brokers for his proposed speculation—an act which in itself would go a long way to help in our conviction, as it drew a straight line between the crime we contemplated and our motive for it.

We arrived, as had been arranged, a good half hour before the time set for dinner. Bemis met us as we came up the side, and I will say for him that he showed few evidences of being nervous. He still persisted in his pretense that the crime he had conceived was nothing but a practical joke of gigantic proportions, from which its victim would really derive physical and spiritual benefit. He was chuckling as he took us below to show us what arrangements he had made.

"This is to be your stateroom, Monsieur Shawn," he said, "and this one adjoining it is for Monsieur Colvaine.

You see they are opposite my own. As Archer is to be guest of honor, I have given him that. He should find it comfortable."

Bemis pushed open the door as he spoke and waved us in before him. "Nothing is lacking, I think," he added, as we looked about at its luxurious appointments. "Nothing, not even the key, which I have left, as you see, on the outside of the door, but it has occurred to me to have the electric call bells disconnected, and we will keep the crew and stewards away from this part of the ship as long as possible. It might be managed for a day, or even two days, with luck; so, lest Archer suffer too much—he is too fond of the flesh-pots, but that is no affair of mine—I have made this little arrangement."

He pushed open a second door, and we all went through into a beautifully tiled private bathroom. On a small table beneath the heavy porthole light were three bottles of wine in a rack, a plate of bread-and-butter sandwiches, and another piled with symmetrically arranged slices of various cold meats.

"Even Archer should be able to live a couple of days on that," said Bemis. "I would have had more put up, but it would have been too clear evidence that I had planned to have you sail away with him intentionally. Even this is a little large, but aside from that it is only the lunch which it is the steward's routine duty to place here every night, when I might possibly be aboard. It should easily satisfy a temperate man for two days. Among the poorer classes, I have heard, the life of a whole family is maintained for a period as long as that on a quantity of food no greater, and naturally of a much inferior quality," he concluded piously.

Once on deck again, Bemis sent his steward for the captain and the mate.

"Captain Carlson," he said, when he had introduced them to us, "I am lending the *Viking* to these two friends of

mine. They intend, I believe, to take a three or four days' cruise out to open sea. I shall take it as a favor if you will consider yourselves as much under Mr. Shawn's orders for that time as if he were the owner. I trust that you and Mr. Andrews will do everything you can to make things comfortable. Both of you know that I like my orders obeyed unquestioningly, and I wish Mr. Shawn's orders, or Mr. Colvaine's for that matter, to be followed in the same spirit." He narrowed his round eyes in the queer manner, he had when he wished to particularly impress his hearers. "If they wish to go hunting icebergs or whale, or to make a bonfire forward of the deck chairs, they are to be obeyed. For the time of the cruise the *Viking* is to be theirs absolutely. Do you understand me?"

Without a smile or any other expression of emotion, Carlson, who was a short and stocky Norwegian, nodded. Mr. Andrews, the mate, a tall, stoop-shouldered Scot, forced a reluctant smile, and muttered that he knew his duty.

"Very well," answered Bemis. "Your next orders will be from Mr. Shawn. I go ashore to-night."

"There," he continued, when captain and mate had gone back to their quarters, "you are all arranged for. I have set my heart upon this, gentlemen, and I am not going to run a chance of failure." He took a little, folded square of white paper from his waistcoat pocket, and held it forward for our inspection in the palm of his hand. "I don't think I shall need this," he said, "but if Archer proves unusually hard-headed, I shall start a fit of coughing, which is to be a signal to you to create some sort of diversion that will sufficiently occupy his attention, to give me an opportunity to drop this harmless little powder into his glass. It can do him no harm, and will only give him a refreshing sleep; but, if

I know Archer, there will be no need of using it."

A boatswain's whistle sounded shrilly, and Bemis leaped to his feet. "Here is Archer, now," he said hurriedly. "Everything is clear, is it not?"

"Quite so," said Shawn.

Shawn and I stared into each other's eyes as Bemis hurried to the side.

"What do you know about that!" Shawn whispered. "There is a dime-novel villain for you. I wouldn't miss this for a thousand dollars, Frank. Figure to yourself the scene as one of the richest men in America slips another one a pinch of knock-out. You and I are babes in the wood, Frank, when we travel in this class."

"I hope he knows what he's doing," I whispered uneasily.

"You can bet he does! Here the old Judas comes with his dear friend now."

People that live by their wits must keep their wits clear. Both René and I love to savor life, but neither of us is given to the fleshpots. We believe, with the greatest modern essayist, "that a good bush needs no wine." Yet for mere appearances' sake I had to drink that evening. The dinner started with cocktails, and every one of its numerous, elaborate courses was attended by its appropriate wine, and the silent stewards were constantly busy filling the emptied glasses. I drank as sparingly as possible, but long before the dinner was over I felt my pulses drumming and gay fires running in my blood.

Shawn, to all appearances, was simply raised to the level of his best. He was cool and witty and graceful, full of sparkling anecdote, and as adept as usual at the difficult accomplishment of giving brilliance by a deft word or so to the commonplace utterances of others.

Bemis drank nervously and greedily, tossing off the precious old wines with a gulp, holding himself with a sort of hoggish stolidity, but I saw that his

broad white face began to glisten with sweat as the dinner advanced.

Archer, a gentleman born and bred, as all the world knows, drank more than any of us, but with a control and grace which masked the guzzling and gluttony.

René and I have a handy code of which we often make use. It is simple enough, being merely an adaptation of the Morse alphabet, a spelling in dots, spaces, and dashes. The index finger is a dot, the middle finger a dash, the third finger a space, and, for convenience, the little finger means that a letter is completed, the thumb that a word is finished, and closing the hand that the whole signal has come to an end. The fingers may be moved silently or drummed in a seemingly careless fashion. Toward the end of dinner I saw René's right hand carelessly playing with the tablecloth. He was in the midst of an elaborate story, but the message to me was spelled out without a break:

"Go to the captain, Frank, and tell him to have them get up steam."

I made some excuse, and left the table. I was somewhat vague in my mind as to where the captain of a private yacht should be looked for, but eventually I found him, smoking a cigar, upon the bridge, and he took my orders readily enough, practically repeating them down the speaking tube near at hand. The air was delightfully cool and fresh after the smoke and the heavy scents of food and wine; the stars were out, and the harbor beautiful with the twinkling lights of all sorts of craft; I lingered a moment to refresh my lungs and eyes and brain.

When I got back, René was sitting alone at the littered table, and, surprised as I was, I felt the old thrill of pride that this man was my friend. All about him was elegance in disorder, the heavy damask cloth was strewn with broken nutshells, and stained with

the still-creeping red blotch of an overturned glass of wine, smoldering cigar butts lay in their ashes in the saucers of empty coffee cups, and crumpled napkins had been flung to the floor, or marked the empty places before the empty chairs. There is nothing much more sordid than the wreck of a recent feast, but René, sitting there cool and immaculate, his heavy cigar laid aside and one of his long Russian cigarettes between his fingers, looked as if no disorder or confusion could touch him.

"Where are they?" I asked.

For answer, Shawn put a key, which I recognized as that of Bemis' private stateroom, upon the table.

"You told them to get up steam?" he asked. "Good! We shall start as soon as the launch gets back again."

"But—how could it all have happened so quickly?" I asked. "Archer seemed all right, or right enough, when I left, and I couldn't have been gone ten minutes."

"Ten minutes is a long time, Frank."

Then I saw that his coolness was a little unnatural, that it covered an unusual excitement. To the world in general, René is inscrutable enough, I imagine, but I know him too well to be often deceived. I knew now what had happened.

"The powder?" I asked. "Did he use the powder?"

Shawn nodded. "Listen," he said; "they are hauling the launch aboard, and I must give them their sailing orders."

My stateroom was perfect in all its appointments, my berth was broad and as easy as the clouds which religious artists furnish for their angels' repose, its sheets were the finest linen and its blankets the softest fleece; but, for all that, I slept uneasily that first night, as we headed east northeast for open sea.

René had said he was tired, and had gone to bed as soon as his orders were

given and we were under way. He was quite cheerful, and showed no signs of anxiety, but in spite of my confidence in him, I found it difficult to view the affair with the same sanguine indifference. He might have a very plausible story prepared for the pacifying of his captive, but to my mind it would be only a little short of impossible to soothe the righteous anger of a man of Archer's undoubted mental attainments with a lie or an apology. Bemis' motive would be instantly apparent to him, and our own was to be easily inferred.

Hour by hour, as we left Brenton's Reef Lightship behind and the sea grew heavier, and the *Viking* began to give voice to the multitudinous squeakings and clangors of a steam-driven rolling ship in heavy weather, I expected to hear the thud of fists against the stout door across the passageway and the roaring voice of the distinguished victim of our treachery. No sound came; Bemis' powder seemed to have done its work, but it was only toward morning that I dropped asleep.

I was up early, but I found Shawn ahead of me when I came on deck. The day was a glorious one, with a heavy breeze astern which was blowing the waves flat and catching white handfuls of spray from their crests, and chasing smoke-white streamers of cloud across the brilliant blue above us. The wallowing, wrenching roll had disappeared, and the *Viking* seemed to trip along at her eighteen-knot clip with a swing and sway not altogether unlike the dances from which we were playing truant. The cold salt plunge which I had taken below had much refreshed me. I felt pleasantly reckless, glad to be at sea in any cause, good or bad, and growing keen for breakfast.

"Frank," said René, with his amber eyes sparkling, "there are certainly some advantages in being a millionaire. My ambition has been growing dull, but this sort of thing gives it a new im-

petus. I don't yearn for a marble cottage, but you and I must arrange to have a yacht of our own while we are still young enough to enjoy it."

"I was thinking the same thing, René," I said, and indeed, with the intoxication of air and sun, I believed that René and I could easily come by such a trifle. My present imagination was, however, more immediate. "How about breakfast?" I asked.

"I have arranged to have it sent up here on deck."

"In this breeze?" I protested. "Why, the coffee will be blown out of our cups."

"For all that, I think we shall try it." René's red head was cocked a little to one side, and suddenly I realized that he was listening.

I listened, too. The wind was singing through the low rigging, but above its shrill voice I heard another deeper one, muffled, to be sure, and coming from some distance below us, but with a roaring energy about it that made its anger unmistakable.

"Let us take our breakfast here, by all means," I assented as cheerfully as possible in my abrupt dismay. For the moment I had forgotten Archer, but now it was only too clear that the effects of the sleeping powder had worn off, and that he had found the door of his stateroom locked on the outside and realized something of his predicament. A glance through the heavy glass of his porthole must have been sufficient to convince him that we were well out of sight of land.

My appetite for breakfast had disappeared, but I managed it somehow. If I were not fond of danger, if peril and uncertainty were not meat and drink to me, I should be more than a fool to lead the kind of life I do, but, although this adventure was dangerous enough, Heaven knows, its risks were not of the sort in which I take pleasure. I like a chance to win my

way out by quickness of wit or some physical strength or agility. There is no getting away from a boat at sea, quick thought or quick action cannot help much when there is no possibility of escape; and a great private yacht has the individuality of a person of importance—in a hundred ways its goings and its comings are watched and known.

Even while we ate, I noticed that the commotion below was attracting attention. The well-trained stewards paused a moment as they passed each other, their usually blank faces touched for once with curiosity and concern. Members of the crew drew together in small groups, whispering and questioning, and pausing in the midst of their questions to listen once more to the muffled hullabaloo below. I saw the boatswain go off in the direction of the captain's quarters, and presently Mr. Andrews, the mate, came and stood before us.

"Mr. Shawn," he commenced uneasily, "I hate to disturb you at your breakfast, but the men are asking questions, and—and I wondered if you had noticed the racket that is going on below. One of the stewards tells me that it comes from the owner's stateroom, that somebody is locked up in there, who claims——"

"Mr. Andrews," Shawn interrupted, "will you be kind enough to ask Captain Carlson to step here a moment? Come back with him please."

The mate turned on his heel and hurried away. Probably the captain had been expecting some such call, for it was only a moment before he came back with Mr. Andrews. Both of them evidently were uneasy, and the captain's glance at Shawn held more of suspicion than respect.

"Captain Carlson," René began, "I have asked you to come here with Mr. Andrews because I am sure you must be very much puzzled by all that is go-

ing on at present, and I wish to remind you that I am under orders, and that for the time being you are directly under mine. I should like to acquaint you with what is going on, but I should be exceeding my instructions if I did so. You may remember that Mr. Bemis told you that I was to be unquestioningly obeyed, and that he even went so far as to give you some hint that my instructions might be peculiar. That is all I have to say. I merely wished to remind you, for your own comfort, of your owner's explicit commands. Give the men something to do that will occupy their attention, and forbid any one to go near Mr. Bemis' stateroom. You need not fear any trouble. That is all, I think."

"But he is shouting that——" commenced the captain.

Shawn silenced him with a gesture and got to his feet. "Not another word," he said shortly. "You have your orders."

When René Shawn drops his air of graceful refinement and stands his rigid six feet two, with humor and kindness gone from his face, and his wavy shock of red hair fairly bristling with a kind of spiritual electricity, men do not stand on the order of their going. Like one man, Carlson and Andrews saluted and went forward. The whispering groups on deck broke up, and the *Viking*, as she plowed along, became the scene of much earnest and rather meaningless activity.

The clamor died down after a while, but by luncheon time it was renewed with what seemed to me redoubled vigor. The inarticulate shouting and the thudding of clenched fists was no longer heard, but the occasional crash of some hard object against the panels of the door below made it ominously plain that our captive was making a more intelligent effort at escape. We had been trying to hold a calm conversation on any subject but the one up-



permost in our minds, but at last I could stand it no longer.

"Listen, René," I said, after a particularly loud crash, "that sounds as if he had taken the bed to pieces and was using one of the bars as a battering-ram. No door can stand that kind of thing very long. He will be up here presently."

René laughed. "I never saw you in such a funk," he said. "Come, you need diversion. Go to the wireless house and find out how our little flutter in General Atlantic is getting on. The market should be closing in a few minutes."

The wireless house on board the *Viking* was much like the customers' room at a prosperous broker's, except, of course, that it was on a tiny scale. To his duties as operator, the Marconi man added that of broker's clerk, and kept a miniature stock board of the Bemis specialties constantly checked up with the market, so that the owner could tell at a glance the exact trend of his manipulations. Atlantic General, the Archer specialty, headed the list, and one agonized look was enough to tell me that there had been some dreadful mistake. Bemis was the head and forefront of the bear movement against Atlantic General, and since morning the stock had risen twenty points. Our brokers must have sold us out long ago.

"Atlantic General—you are sure you have the figures right; there is no mistake?" I asked the operator.

He shrugged his shoulders. "The error of a fraction would cost me my job on this boat, sir."

It was hard to tell René what I had discovered. His plans go wrong so seldom that he is apt to take his rare reverses with no very good grace. There was no breaking it gently.

"René——" I began.

"Out with it, Frank! What's the trouble?"

"Nothing much. We have lost our money, but there is more where it came from, I suppose."

"What makes you think we've lost it?"

"Atlantic General has gone up twenty points."

I did not hear Shawn's answer. It was drowned in a deafening crash from below. There was a rush of heavy feet, and the whole deck seemed to ring with the hoarse and strident roar of profanity. I ducked just in time to avoid a blow from the long steel side-bar of one of the *Viking's* brass beds; but although the blow missed me I felt that I had taken leave of my senses, until I heard the astonishment in René's voice.

"Mr. Bemis!" he cried. "You! What has happened? How did you get here?"

"You rascal," shouted Bemis. I am omitting his fluently profane qualifications. "You—even more brilliantly qualified—crook. I'll have you in State's prison for this, if I leave enough of you to put there."

"Why, Mr. Bemis," said Shawn sweetly, "I cannot understand this at all. Have you changed your mind about Mr. Archer? Have you let him out?"

"Out, you fool? He was never in there. I was in there. I, Julius Bemis, do you hear? And you, sir, are at the bottom of it."

Shawn's manner changed. He shoved aside the odd weapon which Bemis carried and gripped the magnate suddenly by both shoulders, holding him away from him and looking down into his face as he spoke.

"We will have no more of this. If the criminal dirty work which you planned for me has gone wrong you have only yourself and your strong wines to blame." His voice rose. "When you planned to kidnap Archer"

—he paused and looked over his shoulder, both Bemis and I followed his glance. The captain and the mate were coming toward us on a run. "When you planned——" Shawn commenced again.

Bemis did not get to his position in the world without certain unusual mental magnitudes. In spite of his towering rage and his inner certainty that he had been victimized, he took in the situation and its possibilities, and accepted defeat before the captain reached us.

"Very well," he muttered. "Look out for yourself for the rest of my life, young man. Good afternoon, Captain Carlson. No, nothing is the matter. Mr. Shawn and I have been deciding a little bet. He had an idea that I could be locked up in my own boat, but I think that I have convinced him of his error. A fine, brisk day to be at sea, is it not?"

The *Viking* put back that night for Newport, bucking the stiff breeze under orders of full speed ahead. It was not a very genial party, but for my part I was happy enough to have escaped the shadow of arrest. Shawn came into my stateroom that night to smoke a cigarette with me.

I am sorry I couldn't tell you, Frank," he apologized, "but I knew you could act your part better if you didn't know, and then this morning it amused me to see you trying to answer your apprehensions with your faith in your worthless friend. It was the only way I could devise to turn that blundering old highbinder's scheme into honest profit. I gave the merest hint to Archer. Our investments in Atlantic General were made with his firm, with instructions to buy—not to sell, as, of course, you expected, Frank, but to buy—and to pyramid all day. Archer seems to be a man of intelligence in spite of his fondness for the grape. The only thing that troubled me was that sleeping powder in Bemis' pocket. I got hold of it as soon as I could—and I flatter myself that even you, Frank, don't know when that was. They are dangerous things to carry. I, myself, should never have thought of using one, but having it handy naturally suggested dropping it into the wine which Bemis had ordered watered for his own consumption. We have made an enemy, but we have made a strong friend, too, and Archer only needed one day to make himself the strongest man in America. How would you like to buy a yacht like this one, Frank?"



## BAITING THE BITERS

ONE of New York's old-time hotel men, who is a bit of a wag as well as a good business man, advertises his table d'hôte with this line: "Eat while the band plays."

A friend commented upon the innovation. "I notice," said he, "that you have put an orchestra in your dining salon. Did you do it on the theory that music aids digestion?"

"Not at all," was the reply. "This is how I figured it out: You see, the orchestra is a wretched one. The music sets the diners' teeth on edge, and they bite the toughest steak with the greatest ease."

# My Friend the Enemy

By Robert J. Pearsall

*Author of "Revolt," "Picked for Service," Etc.*

This thing of "loving your enemy" is all right to sing about, but it has small place in the council halls of the nations when war is declared. Here is an instance—one of the rarest sort—where a soldier makes a friend of the enemy. The results are curious

IT was me," mused Sergeant Nichols. "Lord, it *was* me, though I'd be more satisfied if I could see the muster roll. 'Detached' would be opposite my name, but for what and why I was detached no adjutant ever discovered. And first I was right, or last I was right, and the other wrong, but which was which I've never rightly discovered myself."

Hurriedly, to prevent interruption, I kicked Corporal Gordon on the shin, refilled Sergeant Kelly's glass, and produced cigars. But Nichols refilled his pipe. While he was getting an even glow he surveyed us critically. Then after a long puff he began his narrative.

It isn't every one I'd tell this to, for the most of it does me no credit. But two of you are marines, and the other as good, I guess, and all of you've been younger than you are, so you ought to understand young uns. And that's what we were, boys, the lot of us, excepting the noncoms, and raw recruits at that.

We'd made one liberty in Manila from the deck of the transport, and spent five days leaning over the rail of a gunboat, southbound, and that was all we knew of the islands. And whatever we'd imagined of soldiering in them was knocked cold our first day in Bantaigas. Maybe it was because we were recruits that we were sent there,

but if so it's another proof that all the wisdom of the world doesn't abide with headquarters. One week in the field, and we'd been fit for anything; but as it was, Captain Malden had as neat a chest of human dynamite as ever man was required to sit on, and he was officer enough to know it.

Bantaigas was a lighthouse and cable station on a spit of sand and rock half-way down the western coast of Mindanao. By nature it was an island, but the Spaniards had connected it with the mainland by a narrow stone causeway. It was about five hundred yards long by two hundred wide, not figuring the causeway, and from end to end there wasn't a tree nor a shrub nor a blade of grass. There was just us, twenty-five of us, and we were forbidden to swim for fear of sharks, and to hike for fear of natives, and all the drilling we were able to do on our two-by-twice parade ground wouldn't have put a dint in the energy of a company in the Old Soldier's Home.

I'll not take time to explain how things began to shape up, or why. It was all natural. The only thing that don't seem natural to me is the part I played in it. Me, Sergeant Nichols, steady old plow horse—but I was a two-year-old then. And from the first, as I remember, I led the agitators. I was kicker in chief, sea lawyer in general; and if ever I've heard a rookie ex-

press a fool opinion about the service that I didn't express and swear by, I don't recall it.

I kicked about everything, the food, the restrictions, the drills, the tents—we were sleeping, of course, in shelter halves—but mainly I kicked about being there at all. I got the bug—you see, it's natural for me to refer to it disrespectfully by now—the idea, we'll say, that many a civilian had at that time. The natives were peaceable; all they wanted was to be left alone. If they were treated as friends they'd be friends; but, of course, if they were treated as enemies they'd be enemies. It was all a job, an office holder's job, a trick to keep the army in the islands so as to provide some more swivel-chair patriots and shoulder-strapped aristocrats with easy billets. But why should we sizzle on that blame flapjack of an island for their sakes? That was me, morning till night, and the thing that made me dangerous was that I believed every word of it myself.

And, of course, I had my assistants. Between them and me and natural perversity and the healthy human energy of those cooped-up recruits, I can see now that at the end of a month things were near the breaking point. It's hard to say what would've happened, mutiny, maybe, more likely only a quarrel among ourselves and a free-for-all fight, or a general liberty breaking and a big drunk, for some of us knew the art of making bino—but, as I hinted before, Captain Malden was an officer that knew his trade. One morning at office hours I found myself in front of his desk, with him sizing me up and talking me over to himself much the same as though I'd been a bale of cotton.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked me, toward the last.

"I don't know, sir," and I was telling the truth. Standing before him so, and after his talk, I knew I'd done him an injustice; and yet, so help me, there

was something bubbling up in me that wouldn't let me feel repentant nor yet afraid. That's youth, I guess, that devil-may-careness, that unmoral restlessness, and it's a trouble maker; but, glory me, it has its advantages, too.

"You've done a lot of mischief, and you're liable to do a lot more," went on the captain. "You've got half the men believing that they're not getting their full rations, that there's a leak in the Q. M. Now, I happen to be quartermaster as well as commanding officer here—but we'll let that go. And you've preached that rot about the Malanaos until you've got them believing that, too. Why, I even heard you the morning we planted that alarm on the causeway—the alarm that may save a sentry's life some night, or all of our lives, for that matter—spieling about our lack of trust, and swearing that was the sort of thing that caused all our trouble. Trust! You'd trust those monkey-minded, twist-brained savages! Are you a soldier or a sky pilot?"

"A soldier, sir," I said. *That* rather hurt me.

"Well, you'll have to learn to act like one. There's no room in this detachment for an agitator. You know we've no brig here, and that I'm the only officer in three hundred miles, and no chance of a court-martial, and you take advantage— No, I won't say that; if I thought that was all there was to it I'd ship you back to Manila in irons. But I'm responsible for this command, and you've gone as far as I can allow you to. Here, take these."

They were two perfectly regular orders. One informed me that I was temporarily detached from the command, and would proceed at once with shelter tent and full equipment to a point on the mainland not over one hundred yards from the eastern end of the causeway, and there encamp. My duties were to keep the detachment informed of all movements of natives in

the vicinity. I was to report at reveille and retreat to the sentry on the causeway, but was not to cross his post unless in case of an emergency. The other was a requisition on the quartermaster sergeant for ten days' rations.

I was a recruit, but I'd heard of men being beached before. I didn't need the captain's explanation.

"Report to Cornell," he finished, "and if I find he gives you an ounce more or less than that order calls for, I'll have him broke. You've kicked at the mess; make your own mess. You've kicked at the camp; make your own camp. And at the end of ten days, if you still like it, come in and draw more rations. Whenever you're ready to soldier, come in and stay. That's all."

No, it wasn't murder, as you'll see. He wasn't even putting me in any special danger. If I did my duty, kept my eyes open, remembered that I was in an enemy's country, I'd be safer even than the sentry on the causeway, for the natives would know where he was, and would know, too, that they'd have to pass him in order to get to the detachment. A single boloman might spy me out; but the Malanaos were pretty well disciplined at that time, and made war, when they did, in a body. Of course, I didn't know anything about these matters at the time, but the captain did, and I suppose he weighed them pretty well before taking action.

Well, I went to my tent and packed, while the rest of the men stood around and either cheered or jeered me, according to their turn of mind. But there were more cheers than jeers, and I left them laughing, not at me, but with me, which shows I wasn't an ordinary trouble maker. When I passed the captain's tent I saluted it, sarcastic-like, so that they laughed some more. No one should think he had me bluffed, or even worried.

I whistled my way past the sentry on the causeway, and I sang through the

operation of tent pitching and camp making. And it wasn't pretense; I was happy. That pent-in, cramped-up feeling was all gone, and I felt as free as the wind that rustled through the bamboos, or the birds that sang in them. And there was green grass here instead of bare rock, and cool shade instead of the blazing sun, and by the time I'd got everything fixed shipshape, I was just tired enough to lie down and smoke and enjoy it, and lay out my plans for the next day. For, of course, I considered the captain's instructions about looking out for natives as so much flub-dub; he had to give me something to do. The hours between reveille and retreat were my own.

And I must say, before going on, that I enjoyed them. It was fine to hear the bugle sound for drill and to lie in some cool spot and watch the fellows rushing from their tents and falling into line; it was fine to hear taps sound, and to break out a bit of reading and a second candle, just for contrarities' sake, knowing that over in the camp the sergeant of the guard was passing the hail of "Light's out." And it was finer still to start out in the morning, with haversack and canteen and rifle, and to tramp and tramp and tramp, with no captain to pick my course for me, and no corporal to measure the length of my stride.

Still, I guess I was getting lonesome. I remember the second or third time I reported to the sentry on the causeway I hung around for a minute or two, hoping against hope that he'd forget the regulations and stop and talk a bit. I just wanted to hear the sound of his voice. And I'd catch myself staring, with a sort of empty feeling, across the half mile or so of water that separated me from the camp oftener than I liked. Maybe at the end of the ten days I'd have been glad enough to come in, but a lot was to happen before then.

The third day I took stock of my rations, and found them most amazingly

shrunken. I blamed it on my long hikes and consequent big appetite, and I suppose it was partly due to my wasteful methods of cooking; but, anyway, it was calculated to give me a little better opinion of the men that ran the camp mess. But I had no intention of going hungry as long as there was game; and the next day, along toward evening, I was lucky enough to bring down a deer.

After I'd carried the parts that I fancied to camp, and hung them up, I happened to remember some shooting-gallery instructions, and I pieced together my sections of ramrod, and went after the powder fouling in the bore of my rifle with a bit of cloth. But I'd no more than started when I discovered that there was more than the bore that needed cleaning. The nights had been damp, and there were little specks of red rust all over the bright work, and some had even crept in between the barrel and the stock.

Well, I took it apart and cleaned it; I was soldier enough for that. But the next thing I did wasn't at all soldierly, considering where I was. By the time the pieces were ready to reassemble, I was hungry. I left them where they were, scattered out on my blanket, and started to build a fire in the stove I'd improvised out of some rocks and a piece of tin.

I didn't hear anything. I don't know what made me look up. But I did, just as I'd started slicing the venison, and I found myself staring straight into a pair of round black eyes, set in a brown face, peeping out of the shrubbery. Then, quick as lightning, the eyes and the face were gone, and still there wasn't even the rustle of a leaf.

My own eyes went to the pieces of my rifle, lying there as useless as so many of these poker chips. I won't say I wasn't scared, but I do claim I grinned. I'd fixed things so that my theory as to the innate gentleness and friendliness of the natives was going to

be tested, and that within a very few seconds. A sort of creeping sensation came over my skin, as though every inch of it was shrinking from the touch of a bolo; and my ears strained till they ached for the whir of one through the air; but I kept on, as steadily as I could, carving up the meat.

That lasted about a minute. Then a peculiar sound began in the bushes some dozen feet or so to the right of where I'd seen the face. It was the sound of a man crawling, and yet there was something. I straightened up and faced it, relieved, but puzzled, too, for if the man was coming to me openly, why didn't he walk upright?

But the next minute the bushes parted, and I knew. A head, and as perfect a pair of shoulders as I've ever laid eyes on shoved through, the brown body followed, and the legs trailed behind, just trailed, without a movement. He was crippled from his hips down. He was so strong in the arms and shoulders, though, that he moved, even in that position, almost as fast as I would walk, and as easy. That took away some of the pitifulness of it.

He wore a breechclout and a flaming red sash, and a belt with a three-foot bolo. It was the first I'd seen, but I'd heard enough about them that I stared at it, half fascinated, thinking how easy it would have been for him to have cut me down with it from the brush. Then my eyes came back to his face, and I didn't feel quite safe yet. He was smiling; but it wasn't a healthy smile; there was something forced about it. His eyes were tense and watchful; and I noticed that his right hand, as he came forward, was never placed much in advance of his shoulder; it was always near the bolo hilt.

Well, I smiled my broadest, and was rewarded in a way I didn't expect. He hitched himself around, sat up, well out of my reach, and spoke.

"Goo' day," he said. "Me amigo."

Now "amigo" didn't mean anything to me then. I thought it was his name. I bade "Amigo" welcome in as flowery language as I could find, and the way I used the word seemed to please him. Then I waved my hand at the food and the fire. "By and by we eat," I said.

But he sort of stiffened at that. "Me no want eat," he said. "Me all 'lone, you all 'lone. Me amigo."

You see, he couldn't have said anything that warmed me to him more, though he seemed to draw back into himself the moment he'd said it. But while he sat there, silent as an owl, I cooked up a double ration of everything, and a little more. And he ate, after a great deal of urging. But he insisted again, several times, that I understand that *that* wasn't what he'd come for. And after the meal was over, and I'd pressed upon him a package of *londre* cigarettes that I'd bought in Manila, but hadn't got down to smoking yet, he loosened up, and told me his story.

He was a Malanao, a member of a tribe whose village was some fifty miles inland. He'd been in Manila, though, worked for a white man, which was where he'd picked up his English. He liked white men, some white men, he was careful to qualify. But he'd come back to his tribe to marry, and a rival lover had set a trap for him, a bamboo trap. He showed me how it worked, a bolo fastened between two bent bamboos, a slip cord, how he'd stepped over the bolo into the cord, how the bolo had leaped up and caught him behind at the knees. Hamstrung, he was, for life. And the children of the village laughed at him, and the older people pitied him, and he had gone away to live alone. Oh, he was some romancer! He had seen me, and he liked me, but he didn't want to see the other white men, pointing across to Bantaigas. Some of them would laugh, too.

I hardly believed that; but it was

plain that if I reported his presence Captain Malden would investigate it, and I'd lose Amigo's confidence. And I didn't want to do that. So when retreat sounded I went out on the causeway, walked down as far as the barrier of buried wires, waited till the sentry came up, and reported, "All's well." Then back again, and that night the "monkey-minded, twist-brained savage," as Captain Malden had called him, shared my shelter tent. And never since that time have I taken stock in the idea that a man's instincts warn him of danger. . . . But I woke in the morning safe enough.

Well, there followed four peculiar days. Amigo, as I still called him, stuck to me like a brother. We couldn't travel far in a day, but we didn't have to. He knew his jungle, tracks and trails and watering places; and he could move through it like a shadow and take his pick of what was in it; and before long, from imitating him, I got to be almost as skillful. The only trouble was that his list of food animals was a bit more inclusive than mine; but after we'd spent an hour following a certain kind of cat that will never be domesticated, I took to instructing him in this regard. And I must say that I found him flatteringly willing to change his standards.

And he was good company, too. Of course, he hadn't many words, but he made those he had useful. He told me about his people, how they lived, in bamboo boxes mounted on stilts or perched in the crotches of the palm trees that sprung out of the mud of the river bed; how they tilled their fields of palay and rice with sharp sticks and wooden plows; how they fished and hunted, with their praos and dragnets and harpoons and bows and arrows. Oh, it was a domestic picture he drew. And this was the bloodthirsty tribe for fear of which Captain Malden had cooped his men on Bantaigas! I wondered how

long the men would stand it after they found out the truth.

I believed him. And as the days passed by I got to like him more and more. Of course, that was to be expected. I suppose a man would get fond of a rattler if he was alone with it night and day, long enough. And I suppose the rattler might get fond of him. Not that that's a fair comparison, but—

At the same time, I couldn't hide the fact that there were things about him I didn't understand. For one, there was the peculiar gleam that would come to his eyes sometimes, just when we'd seem to be friendliest, a gleam that made me watch his hand that was nearest his bolo, in spite of myself. And yet my reason told me that he could have killed me a dozen times while I slept. But his face would twitch, and the muscles of his arms, and even of his crippled legs. Of course, I'd never heard then of the juramentado. If I had, it would have been me to Bantaigas, and on the double.

Many a time I'd seen him staring over toward Bantaigas, especially when the men were at drill; he seemed to be studying them. And I knew every move I made he watched. Once he asked me why I reported to the sentry on the causeway, and, when I'd satisfied him as to that, why I always stood just where I did. I didn't like his noticing that. "Why you no walk *to* sentry? Why you stand little ways away? At night. At morning you go close. Why you no go close at night?"

I told him it was the rules; but, of course, that wasn't any explanation. The real reason, that if I took one step farther I'd set off Captain Malden's pet electric contrivance, the alarm that'd bring every man out of his tent, double time and under arms—no, I swear I wasn't fool enough to tell him that. And that the beggar'd have sense

enough to figure it out for himself I never surmised for a moment.

Then there were other things. He'd never touch me. Not once during the four days did his hand touch mine, or any part of me. And whenever I'd seem about to touch him, when we were skinning a deer or doing suchlike work, he'd draw away as though I were so much carrion. And there was the big fact, the thing I'd noticed when I first laid eyes on him, that his useless legs, instead of being shriveled and shrunken, were as tight-skinned and firm-fleshed as the legs of a Marathon runner. I'd seen it, I say, but it was with my eyes only; until the third night I never gave the matter another thought.

That night I woke with a feeling of missing something. I rolled over and discovered that my tentmate wasn't in his place. That puzzled me a bit, and I was considering what to do, when I heard something that made me settle down again, mighty quiet. Some one was moving in the brush—but it couldn't be Amigo, for this man wasn't crawling. It was quite a little distance, and I could hear the footsteps; but the difference was plain enough.

I lay there for about a minute. Frankly, I didn't like the thought of investigating. The night was like a black cat, and if there was anything wrong it'd be two against one, and I'd learned enough the last few days of the Malanao art of bushwhacking to know what chance I'd have. But it seemed like I had it to do, and I'd forced myself to the flap of the tent, when I heard Amigo coming back again. Just Amigo; there was no mistaking that scraping, dragging sound. I crawled back into my blanket, but I got no more sleep that night.

The next morning I noticed something strange about him. He'd look at me sometimes, and his black eyes would kind of soften, like a dog's I had once; and then he'd force them away



from me, and his face would go hard, and that crazy look that had half frightened me the first few days would come back to it. And there was a sort of gloating in it now, the look that you see in a cat's eyes that has a mouse helpless, and is playing with it. And after breakfast was over he sat for a little staring at the brush, and then he announced, abruptlike, that he was going to be away for the rest of the day, but would return at night.

"This big Malanao church day," he said. "All Malanaos go out alone today, stay alone. I like you, you good friend, but me stay alone." And I liked him, and was mighty glad of the excuse he'd given. It didn't take much imagination to see that some such thing might be the explanation of last night's visitor—for, mark you, I still held to the idea that the steps I'd heard had been the steps of a visitor. A courier, probably, to remind him of a religious rite.

So he left—and I missed him. Gee, how I missed him! I guess a man just naturally has to have some one or something to care for, and the few days he'd been alone with me counted for as much as so many months of ordinary companionship. And I was mighty glad to see him come crawling back along toward night, but I wasn't glad for the change in him. The softness had all gone out of him; he was short and curt with his words; and if a stranger had looked at me as he did now and then, I'd have reached for my gun. But he couldn't harm me, he *couldn't*, after all I'd done for him, and so we slept as usual that night, side by side, with either at the mercy of the one that chose to keep awake. And we both woke in the morning, sound. But the same half-mad look was on him.

I hadn't hunted the day before, and our meat was about gone, so after we'd eaten we went out after game. The same as always before, he creeping

along in advance, I on my toes behind him, trying to move as noiselessly as he, and mostly failing. By noon we had three rabbits, and we started to work back toward camp.

All of you've been in the islands, and you know how sudden a *baguio* comes. In the open, if you're a native or an old-timer, you have the warning of it, at first a black spot lying low, with the clear sky above and all around it, then a coppery monster of a cloud that seems to grow and fill the heavens as it rushes on you. But what sky we might have seen through the underbrush was cut off by the palms and molaves, and the only notice we had was a sudden darkening and a great moan, like the jungle knew what was coming on it, and was afraid. Amigo looked back at me, said something I didn't catch, and then the storm struck us.

It was a howling rush of wind and a driving sheet of water, and, though most of the force of it stayed in the treetops, it was all I could do to stand up against it. But I did, and I cleared my eyes and head in time to catch another backward look from Amigo, a swing of the hand ahead, and two words. "Trees fall!" he shouted, and before I'd fully got the meaning of his words, they were interpreted for me. There was a crash behind me; I looked back, and saw that a calentas, about a hundred feet high, and studded with short, thick branches, almost like giant thorns, had hit the ground with all the force of the wind behind it. It would have been taps for any one that had been caught under it.

Amigo had mended his pace; he was straining ahead at what was for me a fast walk. I followed him, glad enough that he was there. I wouldn't have known which way to turn. I kept a sharp lookout, however, and skirted around any tree that seemed dangerous; but Amigo, from his position,

couldn't see as well as I. Which probably accounts for what happened.

He'd almost reached safety, a clear space about a hundred yards across that he'd had in his mind from the start, and he glanced back to see if I was following him. He looked over his right shoulder, and, at the same instant, about fifty feet to his left, another calentas snapped short off at the bottom, and flung itself straight at him.

His ears told him of his danger as quickly as my eyes. For an instant I thought a miracle was going to happen, that his dead legs were coming to life again. Indeed, he did raise part way to his knees, but as I started for him he collapsed again. His arms, however, were working like pistons, but not more than half fast enough to carry him out of the path of the tree.

Yes, you heard me say I started for him. Oh, I don't claim any credit for it; it was just impulse. You know the way a baby's helplessness gets to you—well, his affected me in much the same way. Before I knew it I had both arms around him, beneath the shoulder, and was racing with the falling tree.

I thought I'd lost the race—that thought, and a ripping pain at the back of the head, and an explosion of lights, and then sudden darkness, is all I can remember after the tree, or rather the end of one of the branches, struck me. But I came to after a bit, and found myself lying well out in the clearing, with the rain beating down on my face, and none the worse, except for a headache. Amigo was bending over me. He had one of my hands, but as my eyes opened he dropped it.

"You hurt?" he asked. "You all right—amigo?"

It was the first time he called me by that word, and I wondered what he meant by applying his own name to me, but I let it pass. I twisted around a bit, and then got to my feet.

"I'm all right," I said. "And how

about you?" I remembered he'd been under me when I fell.

"You save me," he answered. "Me thank you. Me no forget."

That was about all there was to it; the Malanao isn't emotional. And in another minute, the wind having died down as suddenly as it had risen, we were on our way again. But for the rest of that hike, and even after we'd reached camp and straightened it up after the storm and prepared supper and eaten it, I wasn't easy in mind. It was plainer than ever that there was something wrong with Amigo.

He wouldn't look at me. He wouldn't really look at anything. He stared off into the jungle, but I knew he wasn't seeing it. Now and then, though, he'd stir restlessly, as though he were trying to wake himself, or make up his mind to something, or change his thoughts. Sometimes, when he did that, his hand would creep back toward his bolo, and the old fanatical glare would begin to show up in his eyes. But it never reached full growth that night. Something else, that doglike softness, seemed to well up and cloud it over and drown it out. And then his shoulders would droop, and creases would come in his brown forehead.

If he'd been a white man, of course, I'd have tried to get to the bottom of his trouble. But you know, it isn't merely that one man's white and the other brown; and even the shape of the brain and the make-up of the body seem to be only the signs of the difference. The real difference is deeper—and yet there must be a deal in common, too. I could see afterward that he tried to do what I hadn't the courage to do; he tried to bridge the gap.

It was about time for taps. We were lying in the shelter tent, and I was beginning to doze, when I heard Amigo stir, and then speak.

"You my friend," he said. "Me your friend. Me think so. Tree hit you,

maybe you die. You no care. You sleep, maybe me kill you. You no 'fraid. We be very good friends." It was a mixture of a statement and a question; he seemed to be considering the thing.

"That's so," I said; and yet, to save me, I couldn't keep a note of doubt out of my own voice.

"You Americano," he went on, more slowly, as though he were searching for ideas as well as words. "Me see in Manila; Americano know all things. You tell me. Why you Americano, why me Malanao; why you white, why me black? Why one day we fight, why one day we be friends? Why one man tell me kill you, why myself tell me love you? You tell me."

"Lord knows," was the best reply I had. "But you're not going to do any killing, are you?"

The answer wasn't quick in coming. "No, me no kill you," he said, at last; but still there was a sort of uncertainty in his voice, as though he had another problem.

Neither of us spoke again, but I was doing a heap of thinking. Oh, I know I should have acted. I should have acted long before that. But, you see, I couldn't give up my theory. Amigo was a friend; he had to be, for I'd treated him as such. And I was right and I was wrong, and the devil and all knows which I was mainly.

After a bit I slept—and then I woke, fighting. Some one had me by both shoulders, and was dragging me to my feet. My first thought, as I aimed a blow at him, was that it couldn't be Amigo, for this man was standing upright, and shaking me with the strength of a giant; and then I began to sense the words that he was pouring into my ears.

"Wake up . . . no too later . . . wake up, wake up . . . save Americanos . . . swimming 'cross! . . . Me amigo, amigo." And my right fist,

that had already started up, stopped just short of his chin.

"Amigo! You! In the name of——"

"No *importe* me. Malanaos, they kill Americanos, they come back, kill you! They no cross causeway; they know 'bout trap wire; me tell them. Me what you call spy, no leg hurt, all right. You no savvy?"

I savvied, and I agreed with him. No *importe* him or me, either. I'd betrayed my trust, he'd betrayed my friendship, and neither of us had many minutes to repair our fault. I was scrambling out of my tent, with my rifle and ammunition belt in my hand, as I fired the next question at him:

"How many?"

"Whole tribe, maybe hundreds."

"Where are they?"

"I tell you, in water, swimming. No 'fraid sharks. Sharks get two, maybe three, rest get 'cross. They swim to sentry, bolo sentry, no noise, then camp, then you. That why——"

I didn't hear any more. I was busy with my rifle. Five times I fired, as fast as I could work the bolt and pull the trigger, and as I fired I ran, and as I ran I yelled. By the time my magazine was empty I was at the jungle end of the causeway, with Amigo just behind me.

"Post number one, the guard!" crackled out ahead of me, and my blood ran warmer. The Malanos hadn't got the sentry yet. Two shots followed, an interval, and then three more, fired irregularly. And I was charging up the causeway, bellowing, "Don't shoot, Nichols, Nichols," at the top of my voice.

The sentry was the cool hand! As I tore over the buried wires and set off the belated alarm in the garrison, I caught sight of him. He was lying crossways of the causeway, with his head sticking over the west bank, studying the water. And whenever he caught sight of a bobbing black spot in it he

fired, but that wasn't often, for the night was black and the water was black, and the Malanaos, knowing that they were discovered, were mostly swimming under water.

I wondered why he didn't make for the garrison, but as I plumped myself down beside him my knee went into something warm and wet. But when I went to feeling for the wound he twitched away from me.

"Never mind," he grunted. "Bolo—thigh—just a scratch. The next time you come up, my brown brother—They'd have got me if you'd been a second later with your shots. They were just coming over the bank—*Look out!*"

He'd caught sight of Amigo, but I gripped his rifle and shoved it down. "He's all right," I said. "Came with me— There it goes!"

It was call to arms. I could imagine the scramble in the tents, the grabbing in the dark for shoes and rifles and bayonets and what-not, the lazy ones who'd have to be pulled out of their bunks, the excitable ones who'd got the wrong accouterments, the wise ones who'd come out half equipped, sure it was a drill, and not a real alarm. As it was they'd have time to straighten up. But if it hadn't been for Amigo's last-minute repentance and the Malanaos had found them in their bunks—well, even now, I'd rather not think of what would have happened to them.

There were no more black spots in the water. The Malanaos, having passed us, were leaving it, taking to the causeway. We could hear them scrambling up the bank. Of a sudden, there was a single yell, then a chorus of them.

"I wonder," said the sentry, "are we out of it, or ain't we? If we are——"

My rifle answered him. I'd heard just the faintest rustling ahead, and by straining my eyes I could make out something moving. But at the sound of my shot the moving something leaped

upright, and four others with it, and they came down upon us side by side, in a rush.

I got one man, the sentry another, and then I heard a whir and a thud, and the sentry slumped down on his face, the bolo that had struck his head glancing off behind him. I fired point-blank, and the third native crashed down almost at my feet. But there were two left, and one was right upon me, his bolo arm darting out and up from his side. I leaped inside his stroke, and heard the bolo whistle down behind me as I caught him around the body.

Then I knew they had me, and he knew it, too, for his arms closed on me. As we whirled I could see the other Malanao whirling with us, looking for an opening. I got one glimpse of Amigo, and my last hope died, for his hands were empty, his bolo still in its sheath.

I tried to use the native's body as a shield, but suddenly he twisted and I knew I was exposed. I threw myself forward, tripping him, and we fell to the ground. But he was on the bottom, I on top, and he held me so, with the whole length of me open for the stroke of the other's bolo.

I waited for it, quivering; but it didn't come. Instead, I heard the sound of a surprised snarl, and of a tearing up of earth, and then heavy, dragging steps, mixed with a regular torrent of angry words. I twisted my head around and saw Amigo, with the other Malanao struggling like a wild cat in his arms, standing at the edge of the causeway. He braced himself, gave a great heave, and his load shot into the water. Then he turned, came back to where I was still wrestling with my slippery foe, and stood silent, looking down on us. He'd do no more for me.

As it happened, though, I didn't need his help. Singly, my native was no

match for me. I could've killed him, or I could've taken him prisoner; but I did neither. He followed the other into the water, and I could hear them striking out for the jungle, and felt, some way, no temptation to send a shot after them.

All this time the air had been filled with the rattling of rifle fire, and I hadn't been too much occupied to feel the chill of two bullets as they ripped past close to my head. Now came a regular storm of them, and I realized that the whole detachment must be firing straight down the causeway. I felt Amigo's hand on my arm.

"My people come back," he said, and I thought there was a great sadness in his voice.

We were in their path, and there was only one hiding place. The sentry was beyond any further hurt, as I knew from the first touch of him; but I couldn't leave his body to be tramped. I dragged it over the edge of the causeway, down to the water's edge, and Amigo slipped down beside me. The next minute there was the pattering of bare feet above us; the Malanaos were being driven pell-mell.

Something came plunging down the bank, almost upon Amigo. It would

have gone into the water; but he caught and held it, and I saw that it was a Malanao, and that his body was as limp and dead as that other body that lay at my right. And then, above us, shod feet followed the bare, and the crackling rifle fire went on toward the jungle.

It was a long minute before I spoke, and then my voice didn't sound like I wanted it to. "We can go now," I said.

I felt Amigo's body stiffen.

"I'll tell the captain what you did," I went on. "He'll be your friend, same as me. He'll send you back to Manila, get you very good job. I——"

Amigo had let loose his hold on the dead body, and it slipped down into the water. I stopped, and I knew what he was going to say before he spoke.

"You go. Me go other way."

"But you can't," I cried. "They'll kill you. That man you let go will tell them——"

"Maybe so. But they my people. I know now. Good-by." With the last word he followed his dead into the water.

And I, lying there with my own dead beside me, was sorry to see him go, and yet glad; and whether I was more glad than sorry or the other way about is a thing I've never been able to decide.



## WHAT THE BOOK SAYS

**M**AJOR J. J. Dickinson is an official of the state department in Washington, and a Kentucky gentleman of the highest order. Having been born in the good old days, he is fully alive to the value of any well-bred person having behind him a long line of distinguished ancestors.

One day his son Julian was reading a book about inventions.

"I wonder who invented the typewriter," observed Julian, turning over the pages.

"I'll tell you who invented the typewriter, suh," said the major, with great dignity. "That book won't tell you. Those infernal books are always wrong. But the man who invented the typewriter was my uncle and guardian, Colonel R. T. P. Allen. That's the inventor of the typewriter. Now look in your darned old book. What does it say?"

"It says Colonel R. T. P. Allen," Julian informed him.

"Fine!" approved the major. "Let me have that book. I'll bet it's the best book I ever read."

# A Chat With You

IF you have never been to a moving-picture show, you might as well go at once—for go you will sooner or later, and it's worth while going now and then. But, unless you want to lose in energy and ambition, don't get into the habit of it. If you feel, however, that you have too much vitality, that your brain is too keen and active, that you have too much enterprise, that you are generally too stirring and successful and getting ahead of other people all the time—then by all means go to the movies every night, get to be a regular "movie" fan, consider a new production at your favorite theater more important than the destruction of a city or the opening of a great waterway. Do this and you will be giving other ambitious and deserving people a better chance in the life struggle. You will surely become a humdrum, contented, and, after a while, rather uninteresting citizen. There are other kinds of dope besides the things the druggists refuse to sell without a prescription, and the movies in excess is one of the least harmful and efficacious.



THE trouble with the movies is that they can't talk. We know enough already of the history of the world to know that language is the thing that counts. It was the ability to speak a few gutturals that picked out some family of apes to be the ancestors of mankind. Everything fades and perishes but the written language. It expresses ideas which music cannot do, it records actions in time where sculpture and painting fail. It gives us everything of life through the medium of the brain and the imagination. An idealistic litera-

ture is the sure foundation of mental and material development. Shakespeare and Milton set free the minds of men so that the great discoveries in material science in the centuries that followed them became possible. Stories and poems are the things that arouse the minds and imaginations of men, that stir the intellect to activity, that create in humans that divine discontent that makes advancement and progress possible and inevitable. And the poems and the stories must be of the romantic, idealistic type or they have none of the divine stimulus in them. Realism may be a good antiseptic or corrective against idealism that is false or spoiled, but in itself realism is barren and can produce nothing. The movies are realism gone mad, or, which is quite as bad, realism carried to its logical conclusion. You see everything on the screen, the actual yacht, which takes fire and burns before your eyes, the hero as he plunges into genuine water—you can see the splash and the spray—and swims off. The trouble with the movies is that all the non-essentials are there, but the essentials are not. It is the soul of the hero that counts, not his appearance as he jumps into the water, but what he is thinking. You can see an urchin take a dive at the foot of any dock, but what your hero feels and thinks can only be told in words.



WE have no doubt at all that the novel, "At the Moon Trail's End," which appears complete in the next issue of THE POPLAR, would make a splendid six-reel picture. There's enough action in it, enough thrill, enough breathless and exciting incident. If you want an

ideal character for an adventurous story on the screen, we can think of no one better or more interesting than Bob Corrigan, the central figure in the novel. We know of no actor, however, no matter how accomplished, who can make Bob seem as real and alive to us as William Slavens MacNutt, the author, does in the pages of his novel. It is quite likely that "At the Moon Trail's End" will appear soon either as a play or a picture play, but we confess that for our part we prefer it as a novel. If a man really knows how to write, if he has something big to say and something interesting to describe, it is ten times more satisfactory and stirring to read what he writes than to look at any pantomimic representation. If a story interests you and absorbs your attention, it is a good story, but if it does a little something more than that—if it stirs your blood and wakens a new life and energy in you, it is a little better than good. The reading of "At the Moon Trail's End" will give you more genuine thrills than watching any picture ever will, because it has in it something of the soul of life which is infinitely more interesting and precious than its outward and visible form.

**A**NOTHER case in point is the story called "The Projectile," written by Edwin Balmer and also in the next issue of *THE POPULAR*. It would be possible to give some idea of this story in a photo play, but all the intimacy, all the finer understanding would be gone. You would be able to see the dash of the aeroplane against the Zeppelin, you might get some idea of the line of gray battleships stretched in a great crescent across the gray North Sea, you might see the hero's wild plunge as he is thrown from the soaring plane and plunges into the deep between the battling fleets. But you can get no idea,

save through the medium of the printed word, of the feelings and emotions of the American and of the strange personality of the girl who has assumed command of the aeroplane and whose will for a moment or so dominates the whole scene of battle. No one can read either of these stories without feeling a certain wholesome stimulus, without being a little more alive and awake for the experience. And of the many great services that literature does, this is one of the most important.

**W**E have given as instances just two items from the table of contents of the next issue of *THE POPULAR*, but if we had space we could give a dozen. Helen van Campen's great story of Alaska, "Split the Wind," is worth a page advertisement in itself. Leavitt Ashley Knight's wonderful story of Arabian adventure, "The Arm of As-Sanusi," is so vivid, so powerful in the impressions it conveys as to leave a lasting effect on any one who reads it. The third installment of "The Conflict" is by far the best part of the story yet published and gives a tremendous and moving picture of the present war in Europe. William H. Hamby's story, "When Lawyers Disagree," is such an intimate, quaint, and shrewd presentment of American life as to be worth a second reading, and A. M. Chisholm's story, "The Peacemaker," is a picture of the Canadian Northwest and of the iron men who are blazing the trail through our newest wilderness that no American, whether Canadian or otherwise, can afford to miss. There's another Canadian story by Theodore Goodridge Roberts, and a remarkable story of the sea by Morgan Robertson. Altogether, the next number of *THE POPULAR* is a genuine mental tonic, guaranteed under the pure-fiction law and warranted to have no bad after effects.



# Five Real Christmas Bargains

WE PAY ALL MAIL OR EXPRESS CHARGES

## Our Catalogue

Our beautifully illustrated Catalogue is the largest wearing apparel catalogue issued in New York City. It contains thousands of illustrations and descriptions of the latest New York styles in ladies' suits, ladies' dresses, ladies' skirts, ladies' waists, ladies' coats, misses' and children's wear, ladies' lingerie, hosiery, colored petticoats, corsets, sweaters, neckwear, underwear, shoes, gloves, millinery, baby clothes, men's and boys' clothing and furnishings, lace curtains, rubber goods, hair goods, linens, toys and phonographs. Send for a copy to-day. Mailed FREE on request.

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cut in a V at the neck where there are chic pointed revers. It fastens visibly in front with fancy buttons, and on each side of the closing is a row of hem-stitching. Another attractive feature is the standing roll Robespierre collar of Crepe de Chine, which is held in place by silk moire ribbon. The front of waist has a yoke effect, formed by a cording of Crepe de Chine, and a similar cording joins the full length sleeves to the body of waist. The sleeves end in corded turnback cuffs. This extremely attractive blouse will be sent to you packed in a very attractive holiday box, all ready for Christmas morning. Colors: Black, white, navy blue or flesh color (an exquisite shade of pale pink). Sizes 32 to 44 bust measure. **Special Holiday Price, All Mail or Express Charges Paid by Us..... \$2.98**

**29R333**—Novelty Animal Shawl Scarf, of soft, warm, lustrous Belgian Coney Fur. This scarf measures 10 inches in width and is finished in triple tab effect, each side having three tabs, one trimmed with silk cord ornament and tassel, the center tab with animal head and the third with tail. Scarf is 44 inches in length. It is lined with guaranteed satin and can be furnished in black or dark brown. Please state color desired when ordering..... **\$4.75**

**29R334**—Large Semi-Barrel Muff, of Belgian Coney Fur to match Scarf 29R333. This muff has large tab edged with plaited satin, trimmed with silk cord ornament and tassel. Tab fastens with cord loop and silk braid button. May be used as pocket. Muff is lined with fine quality satin and has shirred satin ends and silk wrist cord. It measures 18x14 inches. Comes in glossy jet black or a beautiful shade of dark brown. **\$4.50** Please state color desired when ordering.

**29R334A**—Special Price for Set, of Scarf 29R333 and Muff 29R334 if bought together..... **\$8.95**

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**29R388**  
Scarf  
**\$4.25**

**29R389**  
Muff  
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**29R333**  
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**29R334**  
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Building Contractor	Advertising
Architectural Draftsman	Commercial Illustrating
Structural Engineer	Industrial Designing
Concrete Construction	Commercial Law
Mechan. Engineer	Automobile Running
Mechanical Draftsman	Teacher
Refrigeration Engineer	English Branches
Civil Engineer	Good English for Every One
Surveyor	Agriculture
Mine Superintendent	Poultry Farming
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Textile Manufacturing	Languages
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	Spanish
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# DEAFNESS

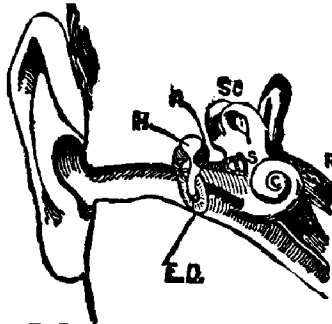
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### By the Simplest Method Yet Discovered

Ninety-five per cent of the cases of deafness brought to our attention are the result of chronic catarrh of the throat and middle ear. The air passages become clogged by catarrhal deposits, stopping the action of the vibratory bones. Until these deposits are removed relief is impossible.

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DIARY *January 18, 1816.*

"I walked to Bob's house over on the Turnpike, last night, and we played at backgammon. Although he plays but indifferently well, the evening was a pleasant one—aided by a bottle of mine

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It has satisfied and warmed the hearts of connoisseurs since the early days of the Nation.

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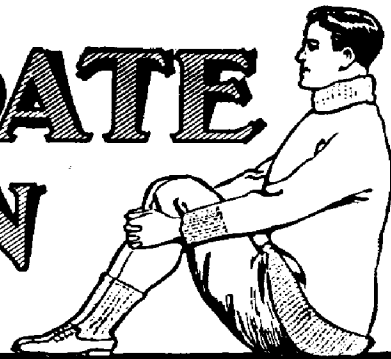
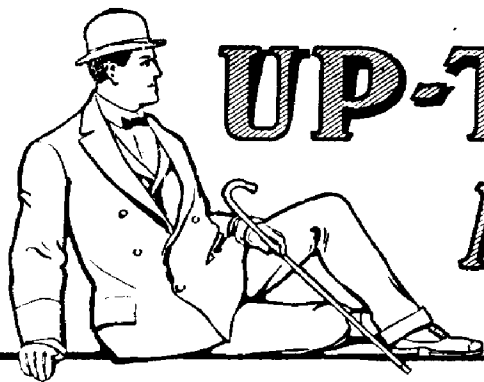
36055 \$300.

36211 \$90.

36080 \$100.

THE

# UP-TO-DATE MAN



The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

**C**ONTRAST, not harmony, is the spice of dress. It is surprising how many men fall into the error of dressing in a single color under the impression that this is smart. It is many removes from being smart or even pleasing.

A brown suit, brown-striped shirt, brown neckscarf, brown hat, brown gloves, and brown boots create a monotony of color which is negative and insipid. Your dress needs "high lights" to throw it into relief, and these are supplied by contrasting colors, as brown with green and gray with purple.

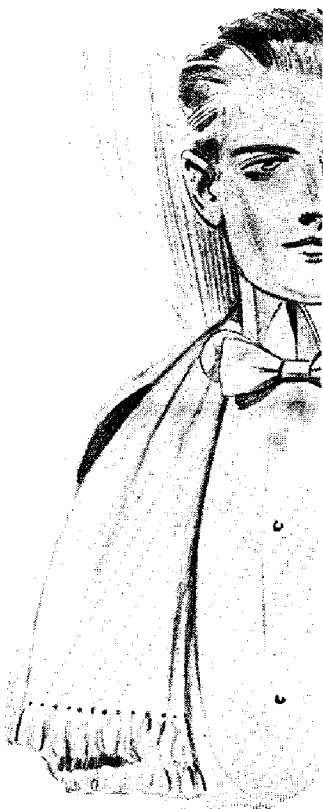
The only thing to consider about a hat is to get a shape that becomes your head and face. If you do this, your stock will go up several points with yourself. Many men wear a hat that would look capital on somebody else. That "it's the latest style" seems but a period after the matter, regardless of whether the hat suits the type.

All wrong! Fashion in hats is a protean affair. It can assume almost any shape it chooses, and it's

right if it's becoming. The new silk hat for 1914-1915 has a tallish crown, slightly belled, and a very narrow silk, not felt, ribbon. It is worn well over the forehead instead of tilted upward.

It's a "smart" shape, if it suits your face. If it doesn't, stick to something less audacious, for a silk hat is "the fly in the ointment" of many a man whose dress is otherwise impeccable.

Many of the fashionable sack coats for winter have the



*The Latest Developmen*

Xmas  
1914

# Shirley President Suspenders

## For Christmas

A pair for every suit makes a man's whole year merry—saves time and temper every time he dresses. Try it and see! The 12 beautifully designed boxes add the final touch to an ever-welcome gift. At stores or prepaid, 50c.

"Satisfaction or money back"

Be sure "Shirley President" is on buckles  
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shirts cut longer than those of stiff shirts, since the limp fabric is very prone to catch in the coat lining and creep up the wrist. Then you are forever playing hide and seek with your cuffs.

A coat fresh from the tailors should be worn buttoned a full week; that is, every button should be fastened. This lets your coat curve to the hills and the



*Picturesque Winter Sport "Rig."*

hollows of the figure, and makes it wrinkle in the right place. After that, you will have no trouble with it.

London has reinstated the frock coat. It is worn with a double-breasted white waistcoat and black trousers, silk-striped in white. The fashionable neckerchief is a cross between the "puff" and the flat Ascot or coaching cravat.

"Spats" are more modish than ever. They are put on over low-cut, not high-cut, patent shoes, and should be in a shade to tally with one's neckscarf and gloves.

A new silk hat for afternoon dress has a scooped or concave brim and a very belled crown, instead of the con-

# Get Rid of Gun Fear

## These War Times Demand It



AIMS EASY  
AS POINTING  
YOUR FINGER

EVERY gun-shy mother and every gun-shy daughter should get rid of gun fear. Especially in these times, which make idlers, which in turn make more burglars and more brutes. For who knows when they, left alone, may hear the brute monster's knock at the back door. Or who can tell when the dreaded burglar, knowing them to be alone, may flash the terror of his light and mask and gun in their helpless faces.

Out into the back lot with your family and a harmless Savage today. When they discover their easy aim cracking ten lightning shots into the bull's eye watch their gun fear change into shooting enthusiasm; their gun hate to gun affection; their burglar and their brute terror to haughty indifference. In other words, watch them get rid of gun fear.

The Savage shoots two to four more shots than any other automatic; shoots only one shot per trigger pull, but shoots as fast as you can crook your finger, and is as harmless as a cat around the house, because a touch or a look tells whether it is loaded or empty.

Get a Savage and get your family "gun-broke" in the back lot today. Or at least send for free booklet.

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### A Brand New Savage Rifle!

This .22 Tubular Repeater has all the original Savage features—hammerless trombone action, solid breech, solid top, side ejection, etc. Price \$12.00. Send for circular.



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My FREE BOOKS, "The 'Whys' of Exercise" and "The First and Last Law of Physical Culture," tell you, if you are weak or underdeveloped, how to grow strong; if strong, how to grow stronger. They explain how to develop the lungs and muscle, the strong heart and vigorous digestion—in short, how to improve health and strength internally as well as externally. Send TO-DAY—NOW—for these FREE BOOKS. Enclose 4c. in stamps to cover postage.

PROF. H. W. TITUS

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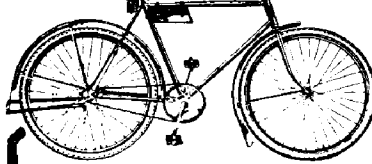
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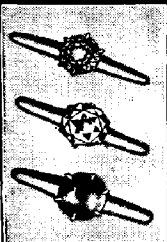
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cal crown to which Frenchmen and Americans have been tolerant.

Thick watch chains are no longer the fashion. One wears a thin, fine-linked gold chain. This should not stretch taut across between the lower pockets of the waistcoat, but should arch in the center.

Pins are only correct in neckscarfs like the Ascot, which cannot be held in place without them. They should not be worn with lounge suits.

Since collars were out with open-spaced, rounded-off fronts, the waistcoat openings were lowered, neckscarfs had to be broadened to let them be pulled up right and tight. An innovation is the "four-in-hand puff."

This is made with a longish, narrow knot and very broad, puffed aprons that are flipped out from the shirt with a marked bulge. The effect is midway between that of a four-in-hand and the Ascot.

To get this "carefully careless" bulge or flip to your scarf, it should be pinned up underneath. A small gold safety pin serves admirably and will not become undone.

Figured designs—traceries, vine and leaf patterns, "splash" treatments, and the like are more fashionable in neckscarfs than stripes, which have staled from excessive use, though they are in no wise outmoded.

Evening suits are now seldom worn in plain patterns, but rather in bird's-eye, basket-weave, diminutive check, and crisscross designs so loomed that artificial light throws them into clearer relief.

If you dance much, the weight of your evening suit makes an appreciable difference between comfort and an involuntary Turkish bath.

If you dance little or not at all, heavier fabrics are preferable, because they keep shape better—sleeves are not so prone to rumple, trousers don't "kick up" behind, and the like.

In the present season tailoring of a "smart" evening coat all the softness is put into the lapels and tails which are made as crushable as a handkerchief. The chest and body are kept tolerably firm to drape well and ward off wrinkles.

BEAUNASH,

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Don't wait till the bargain you want is gone. We have unredeemed diamonds now in all sizes, but their number is limited—hardly two alike. Remember, these offers are made by one of the oldest and most responsible firms in the United States in this business. Rating over \$750,000.00. Over 60 years in one location. Read these startling offers.

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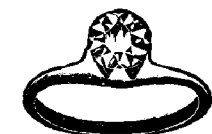
—Diamonds, the finest and most sought after of all precious stones—are ideal gifts for all purposes. Their beauty and fire never dim. They increase in value as the years go by. Everybody knows they can be turned into ready cash if a time of need ever comes. Our guaranteed cash loan plan specifically provides for this.

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No. 326547. 1-1/2 kt. magnificent blue-white perfectly cut quality diamond. Try to match in this platinum crown at \$50 to \$60. Guaranteed ring at \$250. **Unredeemed cash loan \$125.** Unredeemed price.....\$3135 deemed price.....\$150 in Lady's Ring.....\$30.00.

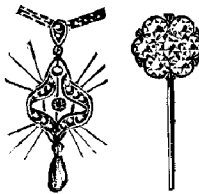
No. 331419. 3/4-3/8 kt. weight of this very beautiful blue-white perfect cut quality genuine diamond in 14-cut quality ring. Try to match in this platinum crown at \$50 to \$60. Guaranteed ring at \$250. **Unredeemed cash loan \$25.** Unredeemed price.....\$3135 deemed price.....\$150 in Lady's Ring.....\$30.00.

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No. 243876. 1-1/2-1/2 kt. full cut genuine diamond of fine color and genuine pearls in magnificent solid gold Lavalier, solid gold chain. Try to match at \$16 to \$20. Picture 1-3 actual size. **Unredeemed price.....\$7.50**

No. 276859. 7 fine quality blue-white diamonds remounted from unredeemed jewels in up-to-date scarf pin. Try to match at \$45. **Unredeemed price . \$21.25**

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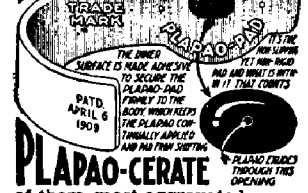
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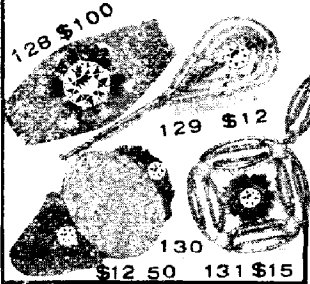


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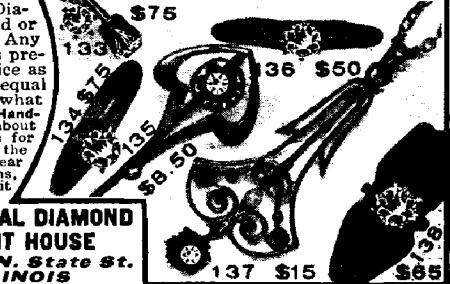
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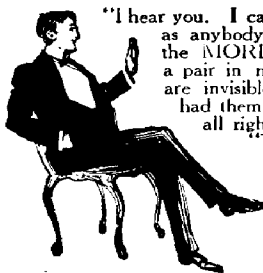
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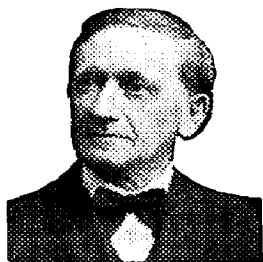
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It isn't the cost that will make him come back on your birthday with silk stockings or a bracelet watch. It's the thoughtfulness with which you chose good old



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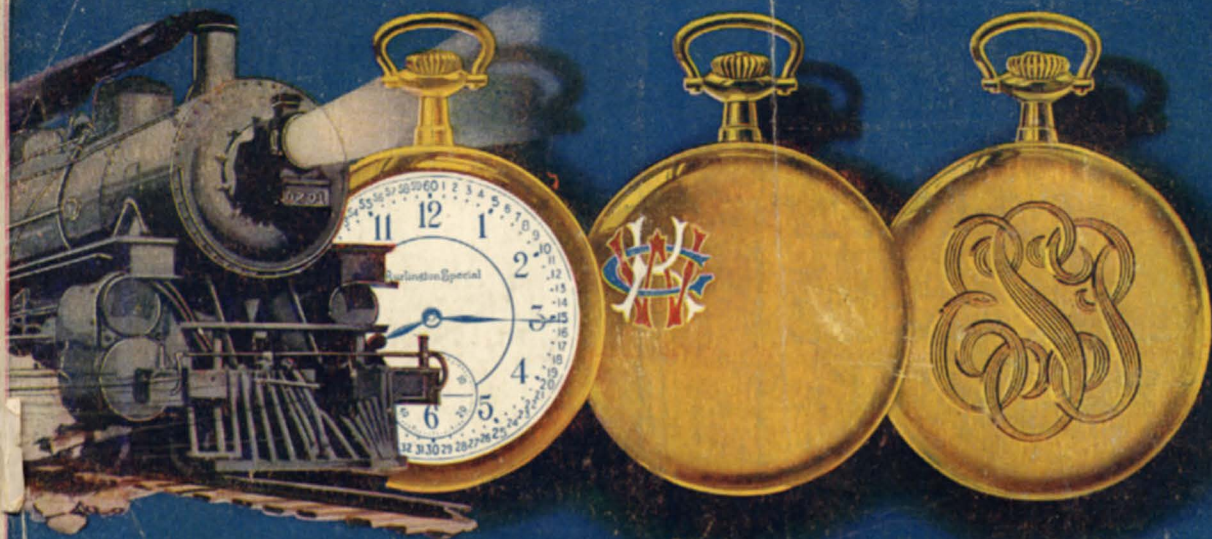
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