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F. FOSTER
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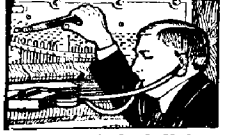
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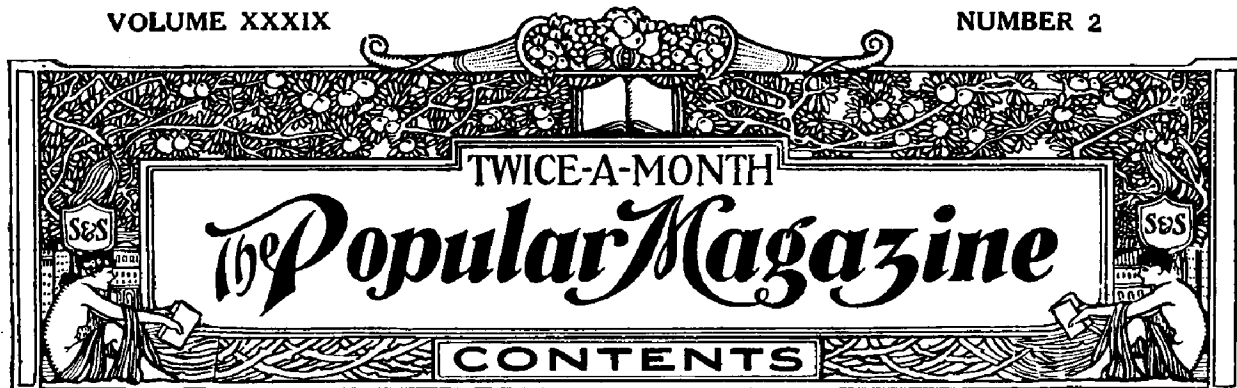
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VOLUME XXXIX

NUMBER 2



JANUARY 7, 1916

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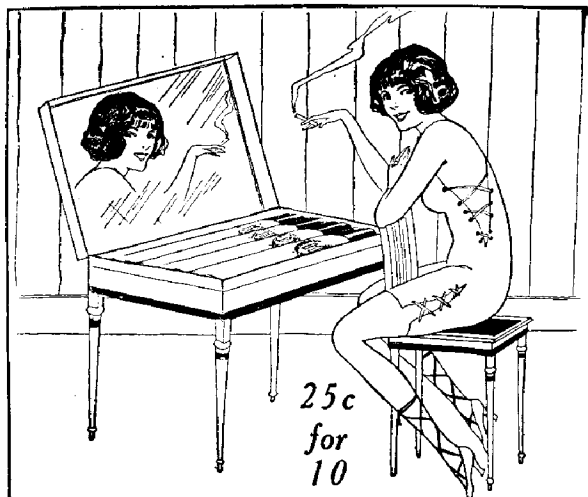
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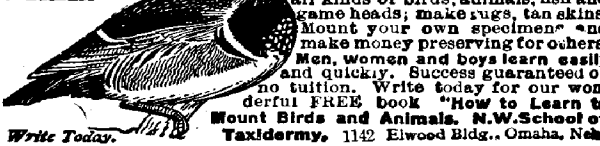
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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXIX.

JANUARY 7, 1916.

No. 2.

A Princess of the Balkans

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "The Movies Man," "Leontine the Mysterious," Etc.

Ground between Turk and Russian and Austrian, the Balkan States have clung to life with a tenacity that speaks volumes for the character of the people. Romance is bound up in their countries' history and traditions—traditions that W. E. Gladstone declared "exceed in glory those of Marathon and Thermopylæ and all the war traditions of the world." It is the romance of the Balkans that Rowland has given us in this novel. Three of the characters will stay in your memory: the American who gets his first glimpse of underground diplomacy; the girl from Novibazar who is being used as a pawn in the great game of statecraft; and the banker who boasts that he has made rebellions, and put kings on their thrones.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THE men look poisonous, but the girl is rather pretty," said Stephen Dallas.

"'Poisonous' is scarcely the word," answered Sir James—"unless you apply it to the big Jew in the same sense that it might refer to the hind leg of a mule. The girl is Austrian, I fancy, with perhaps a dash of Italian. She would be rather a beauty—when you got used to her."

"She does not look to me as if you would ever get used to her."

"So much the better. That is worth far more than beauty."

The Englishman let his big frame sink back upon one elbow, stretched his long legs on the hot sand, and looked

off to sea. Dallas lit a cigarette and glanced curiously toward the trio sitting on the beach at a few yards' distance.

"The stones on that big Jew's hands give me a vertigo," said he, "and his accent suggests a toucan with a cold. What beastly language are they talking?"

"I don't know. It seems to be all spits and sputters, with now and then a bark."

Sir James stopped spinning his monocle around his finger, to screw it into his eye and survey the trio. Under the fixity of his British stare, all three turned with the same impulse and looked at the two young men. Then with equal unity of action all three

scowled; the girl with a sudden intensity that brought a swarthy flush to her clear skin, the Jew with a diabolical raising of the outer ends of his black, bushy eyebrows; the third member of the party, a thickset, sulky-looking young man, whose personality suggested an overfed black cat, muttered something which could not have been amiable.

"Better not stare at her, James," said Dallas. "If she were to run over here and bite you, you'd certainly go mad."

"I shall risk it," said Sir James, "to find out if she's pretty." He stared placidly for a moment, then blinked out the monocle and turned to his friend. "You are quite right, old chap; she is."

"I am beginning to change my mind," said Dallas. "I don't think that I like yellow eyes and blue hair. The color scheme should be reversed. Now she's angry and going off to sulk. She gets up like a cat or a puma—all part of the same swing. Gad, she's got a figure! Now, *don't* stare her off the beach until I've looked! My word, but you English have beastly manners!"

The girl had risen, and was standing, beautifully poised, looking at the sea over the heads of her companions. She said a few words, then moved off toward the bathhouses.

"She's going to bathe," said Sir James. "Believe I'll have a dip myself. Coming in?"

"No, thanks. Too late in the season. I haven't thawed out yet from yesterday's swim, and I've got to run the car this afternoon."

The Englishman rose to his feet and strode off toward the bathhouses. It was late in September, and the little resort was almost deserted. Dallas and his friend had dropped in *en tour* on the motor car belonging to the former.

In a few moments Sir James came stalking down the beach, an attractive masculine combination of fresh, athletic

skin, long, clean muscles, and yellow hair, his very blue eyes like lapis lazuli against his brick-red complexion. The two friends were of markedly different type, as Dallas was of medium height, slender, wiry, of a high, nervous tension, and with the face of a very handsome and thoroughbred woman. His eyes were a clear gray, with lashes very long and black. No one had ever seen him thrown out of poise.

Sir James stretched his naked limbs luxuriously upon the hot sand and looked with cheerful expectation toward the bathhouses.

"Why don't you loll out your tongue and prick up your ears and wag your tail, James?" snapped Dallas irritably. "Can't you decently cloak your emotions? And I must say you have plenty of cheek to calmly go in swimming with that girl."

"The Channel is free to all, and why is a woman made pretty if not to attract the eyes of men? Ah!"

Dallas looked around and saw the girl coming down the beach. She was enveloped in a white peignoir and followed by an exceedingly pretty and smart-looking maid. Her blue-black hair was tied up in a yellow handkerchief, and her feet were bare and beautifully shaped. As she passed her two companions, the younger man followed her with his eyes. The Jew was writing or making some calculations in a notebook and did not look up. The girl threw a quick glance toward Sir James, which was observed by her friend, who scowled.

"Jealous brute, the cubby-faced beggar," drawled Sir James. "Did you see that look? How he'd like to slide a knife into me for presuming to tub in the same ocean with the beauty! Oh, I say, old chap, look at her! Isn't she stunning?"

"She makes the sea look quite dingy," Dallas admitted.

The maid had taken her peignoir, and

the girl was standing at the water's edge, her superb figure cut sharp and pure against the vivid background of the sea, ruffled by the strong land breeze to a deep-toned ultramarine which was flecked with wisps of snowy spray. Her arms and legs were bare, and the rich sunlight lent to the flesh tints something of its saffron tone. As if against her will, she glanced back over her shoulder at Sir James, then gave a little involuntary toss of her chin, which caused the two young men to look at each other with a smile.

"Then tuck yourself into the water if you hate so to be admired," muttered Dallas, and perhaps his thought reached the girl, for she waded rapidly down the steep beach, and, plunging in, began to swim seaward. Sir James watched her, and tugged thoughtfully at his wiry mustache.

"I wonder if she knows about the offshore current," he said.

"Don't worry. She's bound across for Ramsgate."

There were some women and children bathing, and a few people sitting here and there about the beach. Near by, a big fishing boat was hauled up, and a man was calking her seams. Dallas observed that he had stopped work and was watching the girl, who was swimming steadily seaward. Higher up on the beach were some other and larger boats, but the place was an open roadstead, with no inlet for miles, and there were no boats in the water.

"She is getting too far out," observed Sir James. "Believe I'll swim out and warn her. But you'd better tell her friends to call her back."

He rose lightly to his feet and waded down the beach. Dallas hailed the two men who had been with the girl.

"Beg pardon," said he, "but I think you had better warn madame not to swim so far out. There is a strong offshore current at this tide."

The big Jew swung sharply about

and stared first at Dallas, then seaward toward the girl.

"*Sapristi!* I believe you," said he, and hove himself awkwardly to his feet, raised both huge hands to his mouth, and shouted to the girl. She was swimming on her side, and as the hoarse hail reached her she looked back over her shoulder, then held steadily on.

"*Tiens!*" cried the Jew. "But she will not come."

Again he shouted, and this time the girl threw up one hand with a mocking gesture, but held on seaward with her strong, rhythmic stroke. Sir James had entered the water and was swimming after her.

Dallas looked about him in extreme vexation. There was probably not a man in France who was in the habit of taking as frequent and hazardous risks as he when on the road with his big car; and he was also a fearless hunter of big game and an almost reckless cross-country rider. But he was one of those individuals of nervous temperament, who, while willing to take chances themselves, are nevertheless extremely disturbed at the sight of others exposed to danger. Moreover, he was himself an inlander, a poor swimmer, and one to whom deep water represented treachery and danger. He had never found himself on or in the water without a certain instinctive dread.

"Call her again," he said almost sharply. "My friend swam out there yesterday and had hard work getting back."

The younger man glanced at him with an almost insolent expression, but the Jew nodded his big, shaggy head, then looked doubtfully at Dallas, who observed that his eyes were very large, of a muddy brown, and shot with small, hazel-colored spots.

"Unfortunately, mademoiselle is of a very obstinate disposition," said he. "She does not like to be told what to

do. But she is a very strong swimmer."

Dallas frowned, then glanced over to where the fisherman was working at his boat. As he did so, the man laid down his calking iron and walked toward the group.

"Madame has swum out farther than is safe," said he, touching his cap. "At this tide the current is very strong. I do not believe that madame will be able to get back."

"Then we must shove your boat into the water," said Dallas.

The man shrugged. "I do not believe that the boat would float, m'sieu," he answered. "The calking is all pulled out of her seams, and the water would run in very fast. Besides this, the oars and sail are in my cabin, up on the top of the cliffs."

The big Jew scowled, then looked anxiously seaward. By this time the girl was over three hundred yards from the beach and swimming straight out, quite unconscious of the strong current on which she was borne—for the splash of the water about her had prevented her hearing what had been shouted. One hundred yards in her wake, Sir James was plowing along in an effort to overtake her.

The Jew puffed out his cheeks, and stared at Dallas in doubt and perplexity.

"This is very bad," said he. "These silly women! Is your friend a strong swimmer?"

"Yes," answered Dallas; "but for all that, he had his work cut out for him yesterday, and to-day there is an off-shore breeze which will blow the water in their faces when they turn."

"Then," said the Jew suddenly, "leak or no leak, we must get that tub in the water. Let us go and look at her."

Followed by the American, he strode over to the clumsy fishing boat, which was shored up on her beam ends. As the fisherman had said, the oakum had been ripped from her gaping seams.

"Is there no other boat fit to take the water?" asked the Jew in his harsh, raucous voice.

"None except these others, m'sieu," answered the fisherman; "but they are very large and heavy, and it would require at least eight men to launch one."

"Then," said the Jew, "go as quickly as you can and get more men. For we must have one of the boats. *Sapristi!* Why will these women insist on being so contrary?"

The fisherman set off, and Dallas and the Jew stood watching the swimmers with deep anxiety. The handkerchief about the head of the girl had become a mere speck of yellow. Sir James had nearly reached her, and as they looked they saw that both swimmers had turned, and were facing the shore. Then presently the two heads approached more nearly together.

For five minutes they watched in silence, then the Jew looked at Dallas and shook his head.

"They are losing ground," said he. "Every minute they are being carried farther out."

As he spoke, both saw the yellow handkerchief flutter violently, waving back and forth.

"*Tiens!*" cried the Jew. "They are in trouble! That water is like ice! Perhaps one of them has been seized by a cramp. Come, my friend, we cannot wait for the men. We must get this tub in the water."

"But she will not float!" cried Dallas.

"*Sapristi!* But she will have to float. I will paddle, and you and the prince can bail."

"The prince?"

"Yes. My friend is the Prince Emilio of Rascia. The lady is his cousin. I"—he threw out his big chest—"am the Baron Isidor Rosenthal. Come, we have no time to lose. Let us right this tub and run her down the beach."

He gripped the gunwale in his power-

ful hands, then kicked out the shores, and with a strong thrust rolled the boat onto her keel. As the beach was very steep and composed of a shingle of round, smooth cobbles, the launching of the boat, heavy as she was, did not present much difficulty.

Rosenthal picked up a plank and flung it upon the thwart, then called to his companion:

"Your highness must help. There is no time to lose."

There was an imperative note in the harsh voice which permitted of no question. The prince got up, walked over sulkily, and laid hold of the gunwale opposite Dallas.

"Now, all together!" cried the Jew, and put out his herculean strength, which was far greater than that of the other two men combined. Once started, they ran the heavy boat down the steep beach to the water's edge. Here they paused for breath, and Dallas, looking seaward, was startled to find that the heads of the swimmers had almost disappeared.

"We must wade out with her," panted the Jew. "Come!"

Staggering forward, splashing thigh deep in the water, they soon had the boat afloat, and Dallas, looking inside her, saw the water spouting in through the open seams.

"*Ach!*" cried the Jew. "But this thing is like a grating. We must be quick, or she will sink before we reach them." He looked at Dallas and grinned. His bushy black eyebrows were pushed up at their outer corners, and his heavy mustache was lifted, baring his big yellow fangs.

"*Peste!* We shall all be in the water directly—and I cannot swim. Ugh! I have never liked water"—he made a grimace—"except in wine. But it does not matter; there is lumber enough in the tub to float the lot of us until we are picked up." He leaped aboard, and Dallas, rather pale, and with lips com-

pressed, followed him, and, picking up a bucket, began rapidly to bail.

"Come, lend a hand!" he snapped to the prince. "There is a pan in the stern."

But the prince took several backward steps up the beach. "Thank you," said he in a guttural voice, "but I am not such a fool as to go to sea in a boat like that."

"But you must!" cried the Jew. "There is the Lady Thalia."

The prince shrugged. "It is her own fault," said he; then, turning on his heel, walked away.

"Cowardly little beast!" growled Dallas. "Never mind. Shove off!"

Rosenthal picked up the heavy plank, thrust the boat ahead until the water had deepened; then, seating himself in the stern, began to paddle with long and powerful strokes. Dallas, looking up as he bailed, saw that the Jew was chuckling to himself.

"Ridiculous, my friend, is it not?" growled Rosenthal, without desisting from his tremendous effort. "Ha, ha, ha!" He barked like a hoarse alligator. "Can you swim?"

"Not in my clothes," answered Dallas, who was bailing furiously in an effort to reduce the volume of water before the next open seam should be submerged. "Your Prince Emilio is a filthy little coward, but *you* are the right sort."

"I!" cried the Jew. "But I am a fool, an imbecile! Listen, my friend: if the lady were to drown, I should be the gainer by forty thousand pounds!" He chuckled.

"What?"

"Yes!" cried Rosenthal, paddling with even greater vigor. "*Sapristi*, but this tub is hard to move! Yes, I have sunk forty thousand pounds in silver mines in their accursed country, and now I cannot work them because the Lady Thalia is in the way. It is a long story. If she would marry the prince,

it would be all right, or if she would drown, it would be all right." He increased his efforts until the veins stood out in double cords upon his swarthy forehead.

"If that is true," answered Dallas, bailing rapidly, "I am rather proud to be in the same sinking tub with you."

"*Sapristi!* You flatter me. But I am that kind of a fool. I want to get my money, of course, but one cannot let people drown for the sake of a filthy forty thousand pounds."

They toiled away in silence. Driven by the strong offshore wind and Rosenthal's tireless paddling, the boat moved steadily through the water. Glancing ahead, Dallas saw that the swimmers were nearer. Despite his efforts, the water in the boat was gaining on him, and he wondered how much longer they could keep afloat. He looked shoreward; there was a knot of people gathered on the beach, but he saw no sign of the fisherman returning. Then he glanced at his huge shipmate; the Jew's yellow teeth were bared as they clenched his nether lip; his big nostrils were dilated, and his face congested. Merely to wield the heavy plank which he gripped in his thick, bejeweled fingers would have been a feat of strength for the ordinary man, but Rosenthal was getting a powerful shove on the water with every stroke. Moreover, he was constantly shifting his paddle from one side to the other, giving Dallas a shower bath each time that he swung it over his head. The young man observed how the huge deltoids bulged the shoulders of the Jew's serge coat, and presently the seams ripped under the strain. But the paddling went on with the unabating rhythm of a machine, nor was there any symptom of fatigue.

As they drew near to the swimmers, Dallas discovered, first to his relief, then to his irritation, that they were paddling along easily and comfortably,

and that Sir James was making an effort at conversation. He looked at Rosenthal, who grinned.

"So!" said the Jew. "They seem to be quite comfortable."

As the boat reached them, the two swimmers laid hold of the gunwale. With a muscular effort of his strong arms, Sir James hove himself aboard; then, turning, took the girl by both wrists and lifted her out of the water and onto one of the thwarts, where she sat like a lovely mermaid, her bare arms flashing and her legs hanging over the side.

"I say," exclaimed the Englishman, "have you no oars?"

"No," snapped Dallas; "and you had better get hold of that basin and throw the water out, or we'll have no boat, either."

The girl glanced sharply at his face, then dropped her head and stared into the sea. Rosenthal had laid down his paddle and was opening and shutting his cramped fingers. Then, taking a penknife from his pocket, he slashed off a piece of rope from the painter, quickly unlaidd it, and began to force the rope yarn into an open seam.

"If you will help with the bailing, mademoiselle," said he, "and you"—he glanced at Dallas—"will help me to calk, we may be able to keep our ship afloat."

For several minutes the four worked rapidly and in silence, Dallas and Rosenthal plugging the open seams, while the girl and Sir James bailed. The Jew's suggestion proved an excellent one, as the seams of the lower strakes had already been calked and the water was coming in through the higher ones, which were within reach. It soon became apparent that they were gaining rapidly upon the leak. But the boat had by this time drifted over a mile from the shore, the wind was freshening, and there was no sign of any one coming to their rescue. When

the level of the water became only ankle-deep, Dallas took the basin from the girl's hand, then slipped off his coat.

"Put this on, mademoiselle," said he. "The breeze is chilly."

She made a little gesture of dissent.

"Put it on, put it on!" said Dallas, with a touch of impatience. "One might as well drown as catch pneumonia."

Again the girl's eyes turned on him with their searching, curious look. Dallas noticed that they were of a deep amber color and marvelously clear. He also observed that they held in themselves as much expression as one finds in the sum of all the features of most people.

Almost with brusqueness he held out the coat for the girl to put on.

"Come!" said he, giving the garment an impatient twitch. Again her eyes flashed up at his, this time with an expression of resentment. But some quality in the cool gray ones of the man caused them to drop instantly. With a muttered word of acknowledgment, the girl slipped her round white arms into the sleeves. Dallas, his manner that of a kind but rather impatient nurse, buttoned the garment snugly to her soft throat, then gave a little twitch, drawing the skirt over the bare knees.

"Now you had better bail a little," he said, "not hard, but enough to keep you from getting chilled."

Sir James had stopped his bailing, and was working at the open seam. The wind was freshening and carried a certain sharpness which was soon felt by the Englishman, after his long swim in the cold water of the Channel.

"I s-s-say," he began, "you m-m-might have b-b-brought our clothes."

Rosenthal pulled off his coat, and handed it to him.

"Put this on," said he. "When we came after you, we were thinking less of your comfort than of your safety. Besides, it looked as if we should all

be in the water before many minutes, and no doubt we should have been but for the quick work of Mr.—" He looked inquiringly at Dallas.

"I am Stephen Dallas," said the young man. "My friend is Sir James Fenwick."

The big Jew lifted his hat with a flourish.

"Permit me to thank you both," said he, "for the service which you have rendered to the Lady Thalia—of Novibazar," he added as if in afterthought. "I"—he rose awkwardly to his feet, placing four fingers on his bulging chest—"am the Baron Isidor Rosenthal, of Hayti and Buda-Pesth."

"Ch-ch-chawmed," chattered Sir James. Dallas compromised with a brief nod.

"Is Prince Emilio also of Novibazar?" he asked. There was an intonation in his voice which caused the girl again to glance at him sharply. Her clear eyes slightly contracted.

"Yes—unfortunately," she answered in a low, throaty voice.

"I quite agree with you," snapped Dallas. Sir James glanced at his friend in surprise.

"Oh, c-c-come, Stephen," said he. "You are not very p-p-polite."

"I don't mean to be. The prince declined to come to the assistance of Lady Thalia. We needed him to help bail."

"N-n-no! Really?" Sir James stared.

There was a moment of awkward silence.

"Please pardon my ignorance," said Dallas, "but just where *is* Novibazar?"

"Ig-ig-ignoramus!" shivered Sir James. The girl slightly raised her pretty chin.

"Well, then," snapped Dallas, "where is it, if you know so much about it?"

"It is n-n-near"—Sir James glanced critically at the girl, in a violent effort to guess at her parent stock—"n-n-near Austria."

"Humph!" grunted Dallas. "So are Italy and Switzerland and Germany and Russia and the Balkan Peninsula."

"*Sapristi!* But I can tell you where it is," growled Rosenthal. "It is a handful of hills between Servia and Bosnia, that is owned by Turkey and governed by Austria, and it is full of holes where I have buried forty thousand pounds."

"And where we Albanians," cried the girl fiercely, "have buried forty thousand warriors—and more!"

"Ah!" said Sir James. "Then you are Alba-ba-banian?"

"Yes." The girl spoke a soft but strongly accented English. "I am Albanian." She drew herself up with as much dignity as was possible for a lady sitting with her bare legs cuddled under her, and buttoned up in a man's serge coat. "I am Albanian, or Shkipetari, as we say. Our blood is the purest in Europe. We are the direct descendants of the ancient Illyrians. We should be to-day an independent state if it were not for cowards like Emilio and"—she tossed her head—"Jew adventurers."

"Permit me to remind you of the fact," said Dallas severely, "that you, personally, would be paddling around the English Channel if it were not for Baron Rosenthal, who, although he cannot swim, embarked to your rescue in a leaky, open boat, with neither oars nor sail."

For an instant the girl stared; then she leaped to her feet and stood with the water swirling about her pretty ankles. A sudden flush had risen under the pallor of her fair skin, and her eyes were sparkling with anger.

"I will not be spoken to in that way!" she cried. "Nor will I be under obligation either to Baron Rosenthal or yourself. I did not ask you to rescue me." She slipped off Dallas' coat, and stood for an instant with her su-

perb figure straight and poised as if to plunge over the side and into the sea.

"Sit down, mademoiselle!" said Dallas sharply. "There is no use in making things any more complicated."

"B-b-brute!" shivered Sir James. "D-d-don't notice him, Lady Th-Th-Thalia. Or, if you l-l-like, jump in again, and I will g-g-go with you."

The girl turned and glanced at him. More color rushed into her face, and her lips began to twitch. Then she turned toward Rosenthal and smiled.

"Mr. Dallas is right," she said. "I am sorry, Rosenthal."

"It is nothing," said the baron. "We Jews are accustomed to such remarks. Come, children, let us stop squabbling."

The girl reseated herself on the thwart, and Dallas, a little ashamed of himself, picked up the coat and turned to the girl.

"I am sorry I was rude," said he. "Won't you please put this on again?"

She gave him a forgiving smile, and slipped into his coat.

"You must not judge the Lady Thalia from her Cousin Emilio," said Rosenthal. "The prince is of quite different stock. He is a Serb, and connected with mademoiselle only by marriage. His title is merely one of courtesy, because he is descended from a line of feudal chiefs."

"We have no titles which correspond to yours in England," said the girl, "but many of them are just as old."

"Myself," said Rosenthal, "I am a papal baron."

"A p-p-papal baron!" cried Sir James.

"Yes," replied the Jew, "and with good right. *Sapristi!* But with very good right! My title was conferred upon me by the pope himself because I prevented the massacre of a whole Christian community by a swarm of Moslem fanatics. It cost me a thousand Turkish pounds—and a bullet in the ribs."

"G-g-good for you!" cried Sir James as heartily as his congealed condition would permit.

"Here comes a boat!" cried the Lady Thalia.

All four looked back toward the distant shore, where they saw a brown sail fluttering in the breeze. Directly it belied out, and a few minutes later a heavy fishing boat came foaming up and rounded to alongside.

The castaways quickly transshipped, when their own leaky vessel was boarded by two of the fishermen, who stepped the mast, and both vessels started to beat back toward the beach.

CHAPTER II.

That night, as Dallas was smoking a final cigar on the terrace of the little hotel, he was joined by Sir James, who had quite recovered from his immersion.

"I have been walking on the beach with the Lady Thalia," said the Englishman cheerfully.

"So I observed," answered Dallas. "Your philandering was likewise noted by Rosenthal and the prince. The former laughed, but the latter appeared to be displeased."

"The beastly little rotter! He would have been even less pleased if he had known what the princess was telling me."

"The result of which is, I presume, that you have decided to elope, and wish me to lend you the car."

"Right-o!" answered Sir James cheerfully. "But that is not all. We look upon you personally to conduct the elopement."

"Well," replied Dallas shortly, "I won't."

"Don't be pig-headed, Stephen. The Lady Thalia is an exceedingly clever and attractive girl. She has honored me by her confidence."

Dallas grunted.

"The whole situation," said Sir James, "is very interesting. It appears that the kingdom of Servia wants to annex this *sanjak*, or district, which is known as Novibazar, and which belongs to Turkey, although by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 it came under the administrative control of Austria-Hungary, together with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Now, the Prince Emilio, backed by Rosenthal, who is half wolf, half fox, is intriguing with the Servian government, and the Lady Thalia has discovered a plot by which they intend to stir up a frontier war with Servia, which will give that country a good excuse for grabbing Novibazar. There is reason to believe that Austria will not be sorry to see it exchange Turkish ownership for Servian."

"What does the prince get out of it?"

"He is to receive a lump sum of money and a governorship which will permit him to squeeze the people even tighter than he has already, while Rosenthal is to get certain concessions to work his silver mines."

"And the Lady Thalia?"

"Ah, there's the hitch. The prince's people are all south Slavonic Serbs and precisely the same breed as the Servians themselves. They can't be made to see the sense of fighting with Servia, which is quite natural, as all of their warfare from time immemorial has been against the Turks and with the Lady Thalia's Shkipetari. So what the prince and Rosenthal are trying to do is to persuade the girl to incite her people to start a ruction on the Servian frontier."

"And she won't do it?"

"No, she's far too clever. The girl is really patriotic; she hates Servia like poison, and so do her people, who are mostly Mohammedans, while the prince's crowd, like the Servians, profess Christianity. But the Lady Thalia is intelligent enough to see how much her country has advanced under

Austrian rule, and now she strongly favors the annexation of Novibazar by Austria-Hungary. She says that she has positive information that Bulgaria is shortly going to assert her own independence, and that when this happens Austria will grab Bosnia and Herzegovina, and she wants Novibazar to be included in the annexation."

"How does she hope to bring this about?"

"Merely by keeping her people quiet until Bulgaria effects her coup d'état. Her Shkipetari are forever flaying Emilio's Serbs, and what Thalia wants to do now is to get out there and persuade the chieftains of the clans to keep the peace for another six months. You see, failing to persuade her to assist in their plans, Emilio might try to stir up a fight between his faction and hers, and as the fighting would be along the Servian frontier, even that might give Servia a pretext for interference, although it is really Turkey's job."

"You make my head swim," said Dallas. "But if the princess is so anxious to hold in her hairy mountaineers, what is she doing here in France?"

"Ah, now here we come to another complication. Did you notice that very pretty maid who took the girl's peignoir when she went into the water?"

"I did."

Sir James leaned toward his friend, and dropped his voice: "She is the Countess Rubitzki!"

"Indeed! It struck me that she was rather classy for a maid. And who is the Countess Rubitzki? Upon my word, I feel very common in this crowd!"

"She is Polish, and all her family are rampant nihilists. They have been mixed up in bloodthirsty plots to slaughter every monarch in Europe—and she herself has been more or less implicated."

"Really? A nice young person to be trailing around with your inamorata!"

"The Lady Thalia met her a good many years ago in Pesth, and they have always been bosom friends. Just now her father and brother are in hiding, and there are extradition papers for the whole lot in almost every country in Europe. When the chase got too warm the countess went to Thalia in Paris, and since then has been living with her, disguised as her maid. The two have been spending the summer in a quiet little place in Normandy, where the prince and Rosenthal discovered them. Rosenthal immediately recognized the countess, and is now using this knowledge to coerce the Lady Thalia. The poor girl is at her wits' end. They have tried twice to give Rosenthal the slip, but the big Jew seems to have second-sight. What she wants to do now is to run away and get back to Novibazar."

"I see. And she has persuaded you to take the oath of allegiance and help her carry out her plans."

"Quite so," replied Sir James calmly. "I have taken it for both of us."

"For me, too? How kind of you!"

"Don't be disagreeable, Stephen. It will be no end of a lark! And just think of those two lovely girls hounded about from place to place by these two semicivilized bounders!"

"Are you trying to make me cry?"

"All it means," said Sir James, ignoring the irony of his friend, "is a night run to Paris. Once there, they will want to keep out of sight for a few days, so I told her that you would no doubt be very glad to put your apartment at their disposal. You can come and stop with me at the studio."

"Infatuated insular ass!" was the polite comment of the American.

"Um—ah!" Sir James spun his monocle about his finger. "If you really must be nasty about it, old chap, I will give them the studio, and go and stop with you."

"Are you sure that you would be

comfortable, James?" inquired Dallas solicitously.

"It would be only for a day or two. Then we can take your car and the two girls and make a run for Fiume, via Switzerland, the Simplon, and Venice. At Fiume we would get a steamer for Cettinjé, and then overland for— for—what the deuce is the name of that blooming country?"

"Novibazar. Oh, this is so sudden!"

"We will start," said Sir James placidly, "to-night. Rosenthal and the prince have retired. As soon as you can get your car ready, the garçon will bring down the ladies' things. I have arranged everything. All that you have got to do is to drive the car."

"And pay the bills."

"Don't be vulgar, Stephen. You have often complained to me about having had to lie awake nights worrying over what to do with your surplus income. Really, old chap, you astonish me!"

"I beg your pardon. Pray go on."

"It can't be much over two hundred kilometers to Paris from this place. Fact is, nothing could be jollier than a fast run on a lovely moonlight night like this."

"Unless, perhaps, to feel that we were performing a disinterested and unselfish act," said Dallas in his driest voice.

"Jus' so!" agreed Sir James, with his usual cheer.

Dallas lit a cigarette, and blew the smoke meditatively upward.

"Look here, James," said he, "this all sounds like a lovely lark, I'll admit. The ladies are very pretty, and the prince a miserable coward, but I rather like old Rosenthal, and hate to play him a scurvy trick. Besides, the whole affair is distinctively none of our business."

"Ah, but you forget, old chap, that I've already agreed for you. You see, you're pledged—in a manner of speak-

ing. Why, bless my soul, those two girls are packing up their things now!"

Dallas sighed deeply, then turned to his friend with an air of weary resignation.

"Oh, very well; then come on, Don Quixote. I'll run them as far as Paris. But I'll be hanged if I'll give up my apartment. Tell Armand to get the car ready at once; I will go up and pack."

A few minutes later, as the two friends walked across the court to where the big, high-powered car was garaged, they were met by Dallas' *mécanicien*, an alert, intelligent French youth.

"Do not strike a match, messieurs," said he in a low voice. "Some careless idiot has upset a *bidon* of essence, and the place is flooded."

"I should say it was," growled Dallas, sniffing the reek of petrol. "Who did that?"

"It must have been the chauffeur of the prince," said the man. "We had better push the car out of the court before starting the motor or lighting the lamps. The garçon will lend us a hand."

Very quietly the four men rolled the big car out upon the road. A full moon was blazing down from the zenith, and the sea lay sparkling and flashing in its brilliant light.

"I wonder," whispered Dallas, "what the fellow was doing with essence at this time of night."

Nobody answered, and a moment later two figures, closely veiled and followed by the garçon carrying two big valises, emerged from the back door of the inn and approached the car. Dallas, who had seated himself and was examining his levers, merely touched his cap. Sir James stepped forward and helped the ladies into the tonneau, where he proceeded to tuck them up with great care. Glancing over his shoulder, Dallas observed the face of the countess, and was struck by its

singular beauty and the classic purity of feature.

"Nihilist—rubbish!" he thought to himself. "She looks more like a school-girl. Can't be more than twenty at the outside." He leaned forward and addressed his *mécanicien*. "Crank the motor and get in," said he. "We will stop down the road to light the lamps."

The man obeyed. The hotel menials, who saw in the whole performance merely an adventure of gallantry, stepped back and touched their caps. Sir James took the seat at Dallas' side, and the *mécanicien* seated himself upon the floor. Dallas let in the clutch, and they glided out upon the gleaming road.

A kilometer from the hotel he brought the car to a stop.

"Light up," said he to the *mécanicien*; then, twisting about in his seat, looked at the Lady Thalia and smiled.

"Now, just where is it that you wish me to take you?" he asked dryly. "What particular part of Novibazar?"

Through her chiffon veil, he caught the answering gleam of the girl's white teeth.

"Dakabar, if you please," she answered, without a moment's hesitation. "That is up on a plateau of the north Albanian Alps."

"Precisely. Perhaps we had better stop for a bite in Paris, then *déjeuner* at Munich, and dinner at Buda-Pesth. From there on, it will be a nice moonlight spin across the plains of Hungary to Belgrade."

The two girls laughed, the Lady Thalia in her throaty, low-pitched contralto, and her companion in a deliciously clear and contagious higher note. Dallas observed that when she laughed she threw back her head, her very blue eyes—which looked black in the moonlight—almost closed, and her pretty lips curved upward like the mouth of a bacchante.

"I have not yet presented you to my fellow prisoner," said the Lady Thalia.

"Countess Rubitzki, Mr. Dallas, and Sir James Fenwick."

The two men bowed.

"For the next three kilometers, until we strike the big Dieppe-Paris route," said Dallas, "the road is a bit rough. I hope," he continued, looking at the countess with mock anxiety, "that Countess Rubitzki does not happen to have any—er—bombs among her personal effects."

The Polish lady elevated her pretty nose, the classic character of which was slightly marred, or improved, according to the taste of the observer, by the suspicion of a tilt. Her rather wide mouth—Anglo-Saxon in its firmness, though Oriental in its softer sensibilities—became a trifle haughty.

"If monsieur is afraid," said she, "he had better take me back to the hotel. There are a great many things more dangerous than bombs."

"I well believe you," said Dallas. "My word, I don't see why you should need to bother with explosives! I am sure no sovereign would refuse to abdicate if you were to ask him real prettily to do so. Tell me, are you really blacklisted?"

"So Rosenthal has told us," said the Lady Thalia.

"Never you mind," said Sir James comfortingly. "Once out in the Balkans, you can lie doggo for a few months, and the whole thing will blow over. Then you can promise to be good, and we will see what we can do."

The *mécanicien* had lit the lamps, and the powerful reflectors were rivaling the moonlight in their vivid twin beams.

"Everything is ready, m'sieu," said the man, wiping his hands.

"Very well," said Dallas. "Get in!" He started ahead, and the conversation was for the moment interrupted.

Proceeding at as fast a pace as the character of the road would permit, they presently turned into the big Paris-

Dieppe highway, where Dallas began to raise his speed until presently the monster bearing them appeared to be rushing through the shimmering night like a planet torn from its orbit. On either side the tall poplar trunks tore past, like the palings of a fence, while the gleaming road before them suggested a broad band of flashing white ribbon which was being flicked into the wheels as a tape snaps into the roll of the tape measure. Higher mounted the speed, and still higher; the route was perfect, free of traffic, and brilliantly lighted, while the damp night air seemed to combine with the fuel to give the highest explosive power in the six smoothly running cylinders.

Neither of the women in the tonneau had ever experienced such speed, which, terrific as it was, became still more intensified by the vague illusiveness of their moonlit surroundings. Breathless and giddy, they clung to the sides of the tonneau as the flying car tore up the short kilometers and flung them astern. Dallas, a brilliant driver and a hopeless "speed maniac," was beginning to feel the deep, encompassing repose of soul with which such a pace always enveloped his nervous disposition, and Sir James was mentally conjecturing on which particular star he would strike should anything go wrong, when suddenly the tense, vibrant hum of the spinning mechanism began to drop in tone. Deeper and deeper it grew; the fierce buffetings of air diminished in their force. Dallas squirmed in his seat, and turned a startled face to his *mécanicien*, who flashed his pocket lamp upon the oil cups. Then, as they were breasting a gentle slope, the cylinders began to miss, the motor stopped, the terrific momentum was quickly lost, the car slowed, arrested its wild course with a whine of entreaty when Dallas flung on his brakes and sat in speechless anger, staring at his man.

CHAPTER III.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" gasped Dallas. "No essence!"

"Impossible, m'sieu!" cried the *mécanicien*. "I filled the tanks this afternoon."

"Then there must be a leak," snarled Dallas, pale and furious. "It was the escaping essence which we smelled in the garage."

"That cannot be, m'sieu. The tank and piping are new. The essence in the garage came from an overturned *bidon*. I found it myself, still with the essence——"

"Then what the devil is it? I tell you that there is no essence!"

He leaped down upon the road; Sir James did likewise, and the *mécanicien* produced a measure. A hasty examination showed that the tank was empty.

"It is just as I said," snarled Dallas, furious more at the sudden and unexpected relaxation from his high, nervous exhilaration than at the predicament in which they found themselves. "Get out of the way!" He himself examined the drip cock before the *mécanicien* could touch it. The tap was firmly closed.

"Then it must be a leak," he growled.

"Impossible, m'sieu," protested the unhappy man.

"Then what is it?"

The *mécanicien* pulled off his cap and scratched his head. His birdlike face betrayed a growing suspicion.

"If some one at the hotel could have stolen our essence——" he began, then broke out explosively: "But the garage was locked! No one could have got in but that camel of a chauffeur of the prince."

"Um! Ah!" observed Sir James pensively. Dallas' face was torn between rage and doubt.

"I have heard of such things," he muttered. "What sort of a pig was he, Armand?"

"I think that he was Hungarian, m'sieu, and a big, ugly brute of a fellow. He was not at all amiable."

"What a beastly low trick," said Sir James calmly, "to leave us stranded for a few francs' worth of petrol!"

Dallas compressed his lips and held his peace. He was far too enraged to express himself appropriately with ladies in the tonneau. The latter had made no comment, but sat awaiting developments in the bewildered silence peculiar to passengers when things go wrong with the motor.

They had stopped on a deserted section of the road, so far as one could discover. Across the bleak, rolling hills a light or two sparkled from some farmhouse, but there was no sign of town or village. Although they were on the highway, it was very possible that they might have to wait for some time before another motor car should pass, as in France automobiling at night is not the popular pastime it is in America, where so many men are engaged in business affairs throughout the day.

In the glare of the lamps, Dallas consulted his road map, and discovered that there was a village about three kilometers ahead of them. He turned to his *mécanicien*.

"You will have to walk to this place, Saint Croix, Armand," said he. "You will certainly find petrol there. Get a few *bidons*, and then secure a carriage and return as quickly as you can. If a car arrives in the meantime, we will try to borrow enough to go after you."

The *mécanicien* hurried off, and Dallas turned to the ladies.

"This is very annoying," said he, "but it ought not to delay us for very long. It looks as if some scoundrel, possibly that animal of the Prince Emilio, has stolen our petrol. It seems to be my unfortunate destiny to try to rescue the Lady Thalia in boats without oars and motor cars without fuel."

"It is not your fault," replied the girl. "The night is lovely, and we are so happy to have made our escape from Emilio and that dreadful Rosenthal that the delay does not matter. I am only sorry to make you so much trouble."

"The moonlight is delicious," murmured the Polish lady, who had pushed up her lunettes.

"I say," observed Sir James, who, being young and British, turned naturally to physical effort as a means of killing time, "wouldn't you like to get out and stretch your—um—ah—take a little stroll?"

"Yes," said Dallas, with irony; "you've had no exercise to-day, barring an hour's swim and shifting half the water in the Channel."

"Nevertheless," said the Lady Thalia, "I should love a little walk."

"And I," said the countess, "a cigarette."

Sir James threw open the door of the tonneau, and handed out the Lady Thalia as if she had been a creation of moon webs and spun glass.

"We will walk down the road a bit, Stephen," said he. "If anything happens, blow your horn."

Dallas grunted, and, pulling out his cigarette case, offered it to the countess, then struck a match, and was forced to admire the glow of the flame against the girl's fresh, lovely features. She threw back her head, and blew the smoke slowly into the face of the outraged moon.

"Tell me," said she, "do you really mean to take us all the way to Turkey?"

"Turkey!"

"Yes, Novibazar—that is a Turkish *sanjak*, you know, although under Austrian administration."

"I didn't know. Do you want me to take you there?" He leaned both elbows on the rim of the tonneau, and looked at her curiously.

"Of course we want you to; but I don't know of any reason why you should."

"Nor I," said Dallas, with an utter absence of undue gallantry. "But I can think of a good many why I should not."

The countess laughed, and glanced at him from under the corners of her long, dark eyelashes.

"All this is Sir James' doing, is it not?" she asked.

"Entirely. I am merely the *deus ex machina*."

"What is that?"

"At present, a helpless god; let us say, Cupid with his wings clipped."

"You hate to stop on the road, do you not?"

"Yes, don't you?"

"N-no."

"Excuse me. But, you see, when I start to do a thing, I like to finish it without a break. Don't you?"

"Yes. But then, you see, I was not doing anything—except being frightened nearly to death."

"At what, pray?"

"The speed. You are a very daring driver, Mr. Dallas. One feels utter confidence, but at the same time the mere pace is terrifying."

"But a nihilist should not be frightened at anything."

"*Zut!*" The countess struck the side of the car sharply with her small hand. "But I am not really a nihilist, Mr. Dallas; I am merely the victim of circumstance. Really, I would rather be killed myself than to hurt any living thing."

There was an earnest note in the girl's voice that caused Dallas to glance at her keenly.

"Then why——"

"Because—oh, I could never make you understand."

"Try," said Dallas gently.

"It's difficult. You are American.

I am Polish. You grew up in an atmosphere of liberty in thought and speech and action, and I in one of oppression. I was taught that the assassination of despots was fine and noble. All my family lived in a mesh of intrigue, and some"—her breath came quickly—"have paid the penalty. But when I grew older I began to feel that it was all so cruel. I am weak, perhaps, but I cannot plot to kill people!" Her voice grew plaintive. "I do not want suffering, nor to cause it. I want sunshine and flowers and sweetness and——"

"And love," said Dallas quietly.

The countess looked up at the moon.

"Perhaps. I don't know much about the latter, but it sounds rather nice." She laughed.

Dallas regarded her thoughtfully. "You have about as much right to be a nihilist as I have," said he in his dry voice. "What you really need is a husband, and, in the course of time, a—ahem—family. Then you would not have time to think of blowing anybody up, unless it were the cook, and you couldn't do that or she'd leave. Tell me, if you were to get out of this mess, would you cut the whole thing for the future?"

"Yes," whispered the countess.

"Promise?"

"Oh, yes. But why?"

"Because, if you'll promise, I will agree to see you safely to Novibazar."

"Mr. Dallas!"

"Yes. You are much too nice to be mixed up with a bloodthirsty gang of murderers or to be in the clutches of men like the prince and Rosenthal."

The countess dropped her hand upon his arm as it rested on the rim of the tonneau. Her eyes looked deep into his, and something in their expression, or perhaps it was the magic of her touch, sent a thrill through the young man. Dallas could be outwardly as unmoved as an Iroquois when his

whole, sensitive inner nature was warm with the impulse of the moment.

"That is very sweet of you," said the girl softly, "but it is asking far too much!"

"You haven't asked it. It was James. We will say that it is for the sake of the Lady Thalia."

"But I don't want to say that it is *all* for Thalia! I want just a little of it to be for *me!*"

"Then it is for you."

"But why?"

"Because—oh, because I am an Altrurian, and a reformer of young ladies with nihilistic tendencies, and feel sorry for the poor kings."

The countess slightly raised her chin.

"I had hoped that it might be something more—chiv—er—roman—er—interesting. And what is an Altrurian, Mr. Dallas?"

"An Altrurian is a person who does for nothing what most people want to be paid for."

"Oh!" The countess regarded him thoughtfully. "And you are that sort of person?"

"In moments of folly, and when under the influence of—James."

"Then you consider this a moment of folly?"

"Worse!" Dallas looked deep into her eyes. "It is a moment of madness!"

The countess dropped her elbows on the rim of the seat, rested her pretty chin on the knuckles of one hand, and regarded the young man fixedly. Her lovely face was filled with the softest of shadows, and her deep blue eyes shone like stars after the moon has set.

"But you don't want any pay?" said she.

"Not for myself. Only for you—and the poor devils of kings."

"Why are you so sorry for the wretched kings?"

"I'd be sorry for anybody so unfortunate as to be in your bad graces.

Then a person in grave danger is always a fit object for compassion."

"And how about a person in my good graces?" asked the countess mischievously.

"That," said Dallas, "would be more dangerous still."

"Indeed!"

"I think so. What if you happened to get jealous—with your knowledge of unpleasant explosives!"

"You are chaffing me!"

"Not a bit of it! I shouldn't dare!"

The countess tossed her head. "For a man who drives a car as you do, it seems to me that you are singularly lacking in courage!"

"Ah, but, you see, you can't drive a woman."

"Would you be afraid to try?"

"Very! One always goes around in such a small circle that it is impossible to tell who is in the lead."

"Ignorance," observed the countess to the moon, "is sometimes said to be bliss."

"Very likely—while it lasts."

"Coward!"

"Guilty!"

"But, in spite of your craven fears, here you are, knight errant!"

"That is James' fault."

"Then it stops at Paris," said the countess, with decision.

"Just as you wish."

"What is *your* wish?"

"To be of service"—Dallas smiled—"and to reform you from the evil of your ways."

"But—why?"

"I have told you. Call it altruism."

"I'm afraid," said the girl slowly, "that it is pure kindness of heart, and must cease at Paris."

"Very well."

"What?"

"I said, 'Very well.'"

The countess leaned back in the tonneau and folded her hands in her lap.

"Have a cigarette?" said Dallas,

offering his case. She took one, lighted it, then glanced at the moon, that treacherous counselor and lenient, visemouthered chaperon.

"Still," said the countess presently, in a meditative voice, "I don't suppose I ought to be selfish. There's Thalia—and Sir James."

"Quite so," said Dallas dryly.

The girl beat a little tattoo on the back of the seat with her gloved fingers, then looked at Dallas aslant.

"It would be a lark," said she. "Do you really want to take us?"

"Yes. I have already undertaken to see you safely out of your troubles. But remember, it's a bargain. Do you promise to reform?"

"Yes," murmured the countess; "I promise. Oh, you Americans!" She turned suddenly and flung herself against the rim of the tonneau, her face very near that of the young man. "I beg your pardon," said she softly. "I should have said—you American!"

Dallas took her hand in his strong, nervous grip and gave it a slight squeeze.

"Then it's agreed," said he.

"It's agreed. Oh, look! Here comes a car!"

The young man turned and looked back over the road upon which they had come. Far in the distance he caught the sudden flare of a searchlight. At the same moment the cheerful voice of Sir James hailed him from the gloom ahead:

"I say, Stephen, here comes a car."

"I see it," said Dallas. "We will stop them and try to beg a little essence."

With painstaking care, the Englishman placed the Lady Thalia in the tonneau. "We saw that fellow's lights," said he, "and hurried back."

Far down the road there appeared another vivid flash, then two lurid eyes, as the car swung around a slight curve. Apparently it was high-powered, for

on striking the foot of the slope upon which Dallas had stopped it came flying up with no change of speed. A moment later Dallas' car fell within the beams of the twin lights, when there came the sound of shifting gears as the new arrival, a big limousine car, glided gently alongside and came to a stop. At the same moment there reached the ears of the runaways a harsh, discordant laugh.

"Rosenthal!" cried the countess.

Sir James flicked away his cigarette. "I say, old chap," he drawled to Dallas, "I believe that we've been had!"

Three dark figures descended from the car, and two of them approached. Rosenthal was in advance, looming dark and Titanesque. At his elbow came the chauffeur, and Dallas' quick eye caught the flash of some metallic object in the man's hand. The prince remained standing by the door of the limousine.

"Looks like a row," muttered Sir James. "Go slow, Stephen; remember that we are in France."

As the big Jew approached, his raucous laugh burst out again; then, observing the silent and ominous attitudes of the two young men, he stopped.

"Goot efening!" said he, in thick, guttural English. He took off his hat with a flourish. "Excuse me if I laugh, but this is so very, very funny! Vell, vell, boys vill be boys, is it not?"

A deep chuckle rumbled in his chest.

"I must say that I fail to see anything funny about it!" snapped Dallas. "We invite two ladies to take a moonlight ride, and then get stalled on a lonely stretch of road because some thief has stolen all the essence out of our tank."

"No!" cried Rosenthal in a tone of mock surprise.

"You might let us have enough to go on with, you know," suggested Sir James placidly.

The big Jew's laugh gurgled deeper. "Goot!" said he. "Be a sport, as they say in the States. After all, it would be no more than fair if we were to give you some petrol—because it is yours that we are now burning in our motor! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ours!" snarled Dallas. "Have you got the cheek to tell me that you stole my essence?" He took a step forward. Sir James lounged easily at his elbow, his hands in the pockets of his ulster.

"Hold on!" The Jew raised one big arm and shook his finger at the two men. "Don't do any'ting foolish, my dear boys. Let me state my case. You made a little plot to steal away our ladies. That was all right; I do not blame you. I was once a youngster minesellef! But now I have a wife in Buda-Pesth whom I love very much."

"Oh, rot!" snapped Dallas.

"That is not polite, Mr. Dallas," remonstrated Rosenthal, "but no matter. When you made this little plan, you did not appreciate two t'ings: feerst, who those ladies were, and, second, that you was playing the game mit Isidor Rosenthal!" He smote his chest with one big hand.

"The game is not yet played out, my dear baron," murmured Sir James.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Chames." Again he shook his finger at the two men. "But do not try any'ting rash, because I could take one of you boys in each hand and cr-r-rack your heads together!" The harsh voice had become stern and menacing. "More than that, the prince has a revolver, and would, I am afraid, be fool enough to shoot it at you. Then here is the *mécanicien* mit a spanner!. It is no goot. It is not vorth while. Besides, there is somet'ing more. You do not know about this lady's maid of the Lady Thalia."

"Yes," said Dallas impatiently; "we know all about her. She is the Countess Rubitzki and said to be a nihilist."

"She is a nihilist," said Rosenthal.

"Bosh!" said the Englishman.

"It is no bosh, Sir Chames. There are extradition papers out for her in France and Italy and Austria. If she is taken, she goes to Siberia."

"It makes no difference," retorted Dallas. "Maid or nihilist or countess, she is our guest, and she is not to be interfered with."

"By chingo!" exclaimed the Jew, "but that is goot spirit! Belief me, I am sorry to spoil this little spree, but business is business, and there is that matter of my forty t'ousand pounds. Come, my friends; we do not want a row. You must see that you are out-classed. *Mein Gott!*" he exclaimed in vexation. "Who are you boys to pit your brains and bodies against Isidor Rosenthal? I have made rebellions in South America and the Balkans, and all the West Indies takes off its hat to me. I have put presidents on their t'rones, and outfinanced statesmen, and received the t'anks of potentates. Come, we will not have any troubles! You would not be so foolish!" He turned and said a few sharp words to the chauffeur, whereat the man walked back to the car and put away the spanner. Rosenthal turned again to Dallas and threw out his hands, palms upward. "So you see, my dear boys, I play big games. And I play little ones, too! I knew you would try to steal the Lady Thalia. It had to be—after Sir Chames went valking mit her on the beach. So, not to make a r-row by the hotel, and because we needed some fuel, I ordered our man to draw the essence from your tank and put it into ours. There was forty liters, which at thirty-five centimes makes fourteen francs. I will gif you the money."

He drew his purse from his pocket, counted out some silver, and offered it to Dallas.

"I don't want your filthy money!" growled the American.

"Take it, my friend. Business is business." Rosenthal stepped to the car and put the money on the seat; then, turning, he brushed past Sir James and laid his hand on the latch of the door to the tonneau. "Come, ladies," said he.

But it was just here that Rosenthal, hardened adventurer and keen judge of men that he was, committed a faux pas. Accustomed all his life to carrying his wishes through by the sheer weight of his tremendous vitality, he would not admit the possibility of any active resistance to his will. But in all his rough dealings with men, the Jew had never had much contact of a hostile character with thoroughbreds. As he truthfully said, he was physically powerful enough to take the two young men, one in either hand, and knock their heads together, and this and the fact that they were unarmed and apparently at a loss seemed to him quite enough to insure his carrying off the affair high-handedly.

But the big Jew had quite failed to consider the fact that there is a certain type of man who, under given conditions, will fight to the last, not through any hope of winning out, but merely because he feels that he owes it to himself.

Both Dallas and Sir James belonged to this class. The Englishman had been standing with his feet apart and his thumbs hooked into the side pockets of his ulster. His cap was pulled down over his eyes, and his face looked calm and unruffled. But as the Jew stepped forward and laid his hand upon the latch, Sir James swung easily about, taking the weight of his athletic body on his forward foot.

"Oh, look here, baron," said he in a voice of calmest protest. "This won't do at all. We can't have you making free with our guests like that, you know. Suppose you take your hand off that door."

"Sir Chames," said Rosenthal in his harsh voice, "I am very sorry, but these ladies are in our care, and they must come with us."

His great hand fell on the latch, and as it did so Sir James' fist shot out. So quick was the blow, and so true and hard, that it would have been all that was necessary to stretch the ordinary man upon the road. But Rosenthal was very far from being the ordinary man. Although confident that he would meet with no resistance, yet as the veteran of many a swift and deadly *mêlée* where knives and pistols were used as well as fists, he was not caught altogether napping. The indolent shifting of the Englishman's weight had not been lost to his practiced eye, so that when Sir James struck out, Rosenthal, although he had no time to evade the blow, slightly turned his head, with the result that what would otherwise have been a solid impact glanced from the heavy bones under his woolen cap.

Seeing that he had failed, the Englishman sprang in and struck with his other fist, but this blow was knocked aside by Rosenthal's arm, and the next instant the two had clinched.

Dallas, who fully understood his friend's nature, was quite prepared. As Sir James grappled with Rosenthal, Dallas sprang upon the prince, and before that startled royalty could snatch his revolver from his pocket he received a blow between the eyes that sent him over backward and to the ground, his head striking the step as he fell. The *mécanicien*, taking it for granted, from the assurance of Rosenthal and the quiet demeanor of the two young men, that there would be no violence, was also taken unprepared. Before he could secure his spanner, Dallas had sprung upon him and struck him in the face with a force that sent him spinning in his tracks. But the American, although strong and quick, was light of build, while the chauffeur

was a thickset, powerful man. Recovering himself, he sprang at Dallas, and the two went to the ground together in a very active "rough-and-tumble."

The prince, half stunned from the rap which he had given his head as he fell, remained quite *hors de combat*, so that the fight was man to man. But Sir James, although a splendid athlete, was no match for the herculean Jew. Rosenthal tore him off as a gorilla might free himself from the clasp of a man, and, getting one great arm clear, smote the Englishman a hammerlike blow on the top of the head, which laid him senseless and quivering in the road. Then, ignoring the struggle going on between Dallas and the chauffeur, he flung open the door of the tonneau, and, plucking out the countess as if she were a child, carried her to the prince's car and pushed her into the limousine.

"Keep quiet, Paula!" he panted. "Remember, if there is any alarm—Siberia!"

He strode back to Dallas' car. "Come, Thalia," said he. "Do not oblige me to use force. Come!"

Without a word, the girl descended from the car; but, catching sight of Sir James, she paused.

"You brute!" she cried chokingly. "Have you killed him?"

"Nonsense! It is nodding," panted the Jew. "He is yust asleep. I took care to hit him on top of the head and not too hard, or his skull would be c-c-crushed like an eggshell! I do not like to kill a gentleman; they are too few! *Sapristi*, he *would* fight! Vat could I do? Come!"

He pushed the girl toward the other car, into which she crept without a word, when Rosenthal turned and secured the two valises. The chauffeur had overcome Dallas, who was lying on his back, cursing vigorously, while the man sat upon his chest, pinning both his wrists to the ground. The prince had struggled to a sitting pos-

ture, with his back against the wheel, and was holding both hands to his head and groaning. As Rosenthal's eyes fell upon him, the Jew's face was lit for a moment by his sardonic grin. Leaning down, he raised the prince bodily by both shoulders, and thrust him into the limousine.

"Get in, my dear fellow!" said he, and slammed the door. He turned to where Dallas was lying on his back in the road, under the weight of the burly *mécanicien*, and his deep chuckle rumbled out again.

"Vill you be good if you are let up, and not try to fight?" asked Rosenthal.

Dallas' reply was a somewhat torrid blast in the expressive terms of his native city, Chicago.

"*Peste!*" exclaimed the Jew. "All this fuss for some br-r-ight eyes! Such foolish boys! With me it is different; it is a matter of forty t'ousand pounds. Vy can you not be sensible?" His harsh voice carried a note that was almost plaintive. "Here we are fighting with r-r-rage in our hearts, and yesterday ve might have been all drowned together!"

Furious as he was, something in the tone of the big Jew struck Dallas' sense of the ridiculous. In spite of himself, he began to laugh. Rosenthal's harsh cackle joined him.

"That is better—to laugh! Come, get up!" He hauled the chauffeur roughly off Dallas, who rose to his feet, shook himself, eyed his big antagonist for a moment, then shrugged.

"Where is Sir James?" he demanded, looking around.

"Over there. He is hurted a little—not much." He jerked his head toward the Englishman, who was beginning to stir. Rosenthal turned away.

"Good night, Mr. Dallas," said he affably; then in French to the *mécanicien*: "Get in and drive!"

Dallas walked stiffly to the side of his prostrate friend. The *mécanicien*

climbed to his feet, cranked the motor, and took his seat. Rosenthal glanced at Sir James, then got in beside the chauffeur.

"Good night," called the Jew again.

"Good night," answered Dallas, in spite of himself.

The big car moved forward; as it gathered speed and glided off into the darkness, Dallas heard the Jew's harsh laugh, scarcely distinguishable from the clash of the pinions as the chauffeur went somewhat awkwardly into the speed ahead. With a wry smile, the young man turned to look at his friend. At the same moment, Sir James sat upright.

"Ouch!" said he.

"How do you feel, James?" asked Dallas.

"Little groggy. I say——" His wits, scattered by the crushing force of Rosenthal's big fist, rallied quickly. He looked somewhat vacantly about him, then groaned.

"Very bad, James?"

"Oh, I say, Stephen!" Sir James' two hands were raised to clasp his head. "We've been had!"

"Couldn't help it," muttered Dallas. "We did our little best."

"How did *you* make out?"

"Nothing to brag of. I did put the prince out of action; then the chauffeur sat on me."

"The chauffeur! Oh, come! *Not* the chauffeur!"

"Rather it were he than the prince—or even Rosenthal!" snapped Dallas.

"Oh, my soul! And our ladies?"

"They've got 'em."

"Oh, no! No! Stephen, Stephen, this is too awful!"

"Don't blame *me*," snapped Dallas. "You started the Donnybrook!"

"I know it. But—to get polished off and our ladies taken away from us by an outfit like that! Let me die!" Sir James groaned, then sat up with a

feeble grin. "Did you say you had some brandy in the car?"

Dallas produced the stimulant, of which both partook.

"I thought I heard somebody laughing as I was waking up from my nap," observed Sir James.

"Very likely. Rosenthal was laughing, and so was I. Just think it over a bit, and perhaps the humor of the thing may strike *you*."

Sir James cackled feebly. "Downy old bird, Rosenthal," said he. "To think of his having foreseen the whole thing and drained all of the essence out of our tank except just enough to take us into the wilderness. Hope we meet again."

"I have an idea," said Dallas softly, "that we will."

"Where, pray?"

"That I don't know. But this adventure, James, has only just begun."

Sir James' face brightened. "I wish that I could think so," said he.

"Well, it's so. Let me tell you something. About two minutes before Rosenthal arrived on the scene, I had passed my word to Countess Rubitzki to see the two girls safely to Novibazar."

"The deuce you had!"

"Yes. I had agreed to get them safely away from Rosenthal and the prince, and deposit them in the Lady Thalia's country, wherever that is. What I meant to do, of course, was to make a run to the eastward in the car, and, even while I was talking to her, I had figured it all out. My plan was to stop in Paris for a few hours' sleep and to get some things, and then, before Rosenthal and the prince could arrive, to get away for Switzerland, go over the Simplon, and then on through Italy and the Dolomites for the Dalmatian coast, eventually escorting them across Montenegro, as we had planned. Now the whole thing has

got complicated—but there's my promise just the same."

Sir James scrambled to his feet and seized his friend's hand.

"That's the talk, old fellow!" he exclaimed. "You can count on me. Besides"—he rubbed his head—"we can't decently drop the thing after being mauled about like this. And I say, Dallas, did you ever see such eyes?"

"No," said Dallas, "nor such a mouth and chin. And she is no more a nihilist at heart than I am. She has simply got mixed up in all this trouble through the fault of circumstance. She is the sweetest little person that ever lived! And so game! Upon my word, James, I caught a glimpse of her as that hairy brute was stuffing her into the limousine, and her cigarette was still going as——"

"I say!" exclaimed Sir James. "You are talking about the countess! I was referring to Thalia."

"Thalia!" exclaimed Dallas. "Oh, you can have Thalia."

"Wish I thought so. Anyhow, we'll have a try, eh?" Sir James raised the flask which he held in his hand. "It's a go, then, old boy! Here's confusion to Rosenthal and the prince; and long live Thalia and the countess and—and—what is the name of their bally country?"

"Novibazar."

"Long live Novibazar!"

The two friends drank.

"Here comes a wagon," said Dallas, as he set down the flask. He raised his voice: "Armand!"

"*Me voilà, m'sieu!*" came the distant answer.

CHAPTER IV.

"The question is," observed Sir James, the following day, as the two were at *déjeuner* in Dallas' luxurious apartment on the Avenue de l'Alma, "how to find 'em again."

"That should not be hard," said Dal-

las. "Rosenthal is too conspicuous a figure to lose himself in Paris."

"Look here," said Sir James, "tell you what I'll do. I know a South American woman here in Paris who is acquainted with all the unusual people. Her salon is usually full of Oriental nabobs and abdicating presidents and nihilists and shady Balkan royalties and that sort of truck. She is Señora Gonzales, of Buenos Aires. Got a card from her the other day. She comes back to town early to see something of the South American and West Indian gang before they go home for the winter. Suppose that I go around there to see if I can learn anything about our friends."

Dallas nodded.

"That is a good plan. Meanwhile, I will attend to a few matters, and we'll meet at the Traveler's for dinner."

"Right!" said Sir James. "Then I'm off."

Returning to his studio, he gave orders to his manservant to get ready to leave at a moment's notice for a hunting trip in Austria. A few hours later, he presented himself at a small private hotel upon the Avenue Henri Martin, where, on entering the salon, he was welcomed by a handsome woman of Andalusian type, who greeted him very cordially.

"It is so nice of you to come, Sir James," said she. "You are just in time. There is such a fascinating girl in the other room. She's Albanian; her father was Constantine Bey, and her home is high up in the north Albanian Alps."

"Not the Lady Thalia!" exclaimed Sir James.

"Yes," cried his hostess in surprise. "Do you know her?"

"Uh—ah—we've met. Is the Prince Emilio with her?"

"The prince is playing bridge."

"Indeed! And, speaking of the

prince, Señora Gonzales, do you happen to know a Baron Rosenthal?"

"Oh, everybody in South America knows Rosenthal. Such a *type*! He has promised to come in later."

"What do you know about him?" asked Sir James.

"Rosenthal is a Czechian Jew who has made an enormous fortune in promoting all kinds of—er—doubtful enterprises, principally revolutions, in all parts of the world. He knows everybody, speaks every language after a fashion, and is a papal baron. Fancy, a Jew a *papal* baron!"

"Does that account for his being received?" asked Sir James. "I thought him an awful brute!"

His hostess threw out her hands. "But nobody could keep Rosenthal out of any place where he wanted to go!" she cried. "He is as insidious as the cholera, with the forward impetus of—of——"

"Of an auto bus," suggested Sir James reflectively.

Madame Gonzales laughed. "I see that you have met him. But then," she added, "I doubt if anybody would wish to close the door to Rosenthal. He is very interesting, and would do anything for a person whom he liked. Then he is really very decent and well-behaved, and perfectly devoted to his wife."

Sir James was on the point of pursuing his inquiries when some other guests arrived, and the hostess turned from him with a smile.

He crossed the room and passed into a salon adjoining, where, sitting in an alcove and chatting with an immaculate young Frenchman, he discovered the Lady Thalia of Novibazar.

CHAPTER V.

The Lady Thalia looked up, and as her eyes fell upon Sir James they opened to their fullest width and the rich color faded from her cheeks. The

next instant it came pouring back again, considerably deeper in tone, while her long lashes fell.

The man to whom she had been talking, and who was looking into her face at the time, observed the flash of emotion, and, swinging in his chair, glanced up curiously at Sir James. The two were slightly acquainted, having previously met at the same house. Sir James crossed the room in his usual calm and cheerful manner, bowed before the girl, then, with a pleasant word, turned to shake hands with the Frenchman.

"And how do you find yourself, mademoiselle," said he in French, "after our little accident of last evening?" Without waiting for her reply, and in order to give her the cue, he turned to the Frenchman and continued: "While motoring last night with a friend, we had the misfortune to come in collision with the Prince Emilio and Baron Rosenthal."

"Indeed! And was there any damage?"

"None whatever to the cars," replied Sir James placidly. "The prince, my friend, and myself were thrown about a little and slightly shaken up."

The lips of the Lady Thalia began to twitch, and the Frenchman, suspecting some understanding between the two, murmured his felicitations on their escape from serious injury, and, with a comment on the dangers of motoring, excused himself.

When he had gone, the girl leaned back in her fauteuil and looked at Sir James smilingly.

"Awfully jolly, finding you here," said Sir James cheerfully. "Saves such a lot of trouble."

"Are you quite sure?" she answered.

"Positive. We had set ourselves to comb Paris to find you."

"And now that you have found us?" asked the girl.

"We can make our plans," answered

Sir James, in his most matter-of-fact tone.

"Indeed!" The hazel eyes opened a little wider. "How is Mr. Dallas?"

"Quite furious. You see, the chauffeur sat on him."

"No!"

"Really. And I'm not quite sure that the brute did not cuff him once or twice. Stephen would not admit it, but I noticed that one ear was a trifle puffed up, and when he brushed his hair he swore."

The Lady Thalia leaned back in her chair and laughed until her eyes were misty. Then her lovely face grew serious.

"And how are *you*?" she asked. "I have been horribly anxious. When we left, you were quite unconscious."

"Merely a little nap," replied Sir James calmly. "The baron knows his work. When I awoke, quite refreshed, I found Dallas raving with a thirst for revenge and a deep appreciation for the charms of a certain lady."

"And you?"

"Um—ah—my own emotions were not so complicated. I harbor no ill will against Rosenthal."

The girl's eyes fell. "Paula is very fascinating, is she not?"

"So Stephen tells me. No doubt he is quite right."

The rich color deepened in the cheeks of the Lady Thalia, and her long lashes swept down to hide what was in the amber-colored eyes.

"But about our plans," said Sir James. "We have undertaken to get you out of the hands of the prince and Rosenthal and land you safely in—ah—"

"Novibazar?"

"Quite so." Sir James adjusted his monocle, and, taking a small gold pencil from his pocket, scribbled something upon his cuff. The girl's lips twitched.

"We must give these chaps the slip," said Sir James. "Then we'll run you

two ladies down through Switzerland and across to the Dalmatian coast. Get into your country by the back door, so to speak."

The girl's face became grave, and she shook her head.

"That is very dear and chivalrous of you," said she, "but it is quite impossible. We are leaving in two days for Belgrade, and Rosenthal has threatened to inform the police of Paula's identity if we try to run away in the meantime. It would not be safe."

Sir James knit his brows and spun his monocle around his finger.

"Besides," said the Lady Thalia slowly, "we could not think of letting you put yourself to so much trouble and expense."

"As for the trouble," said Sir James, "that doesn't count, because, you see, we've neither of us a blessed thing to do, and as far as expense is concerned, Dallas swears that he would cheerfully put up forty thousand pounds against old Rosenthal's, just to get even. He's shockingly rich. What will happen when you get to Belgrade?"

The Lady Thalia's face clouded. "I have no idea," she answered. "To tell the truth, the thought is a little terrifying. Serbia is a very wild country, and Emilio has great influence there."

"You mean that he might do something nasty?"

"N-no. Rosenthal, who is kind-hearted in a way, would see that no actual harm happened us. But I think they are quite capable of keeping us somewhere under guard until they have either carried out their plans or——" The small white teeth came together.

"Or you have consented to marry Emilio?"

She nodded.

"In that case," said Sir James, "we will try to give them the slip at Belgrade. No, don't interrupt, please." The young man's pleasant voice had grown suddenly crisp, and his habitual

indolent cheerfulness had disappeared. "You don't quite understand, Lady Thalia. The affair has ceased to be a lark, nor is it a matter of gallantry. Dallas and I have made a promise not only to you and Paula Rubitzki, but to ourselves. We have been knocked down and beaten and made fools of, and we cannot drop the undertaking now with honor. There is also, of course, the desire to be of service to you. Unless you forbid us, which I am sure you will not, we mean to see the thing through."

"It is dangerous work, Sir James. You do not understand what you are undertaking."

"I understand enough, and so does Dallas. Will you accept us as your knights-errant? Surely you will not refuse now, and go on and leave us disgraced?"

"But you are not disgraced. Last night you were outnumbered; the odds were too heavy, and there are very few men, Sir James, who would care to attack a giant like Rosenthal. There is nothing for you to feel ashamed of, and besides"—she slightly raised her chin—"I do not consider mere personal pride to be enough of a motive for what you wish to do."

"It is not the only motive. You see, Dallas and I are mere idlers. I paint bad pictures, and he plays with motors. We have often bewailed our lack of objective. Now *you* are trying to do a very fine thing, and if you succeed in getting away from these two animals and out to your own country, you are going to try to prevent a border war and to bring your country under the control of a civilized administration. That is fine. It's splendid! If one could do something like that, one would not feel such an unpardonably useless member of society; so, you see, Stephen and I would like to help, if you don't mind."

The Lady Thalia smiled.

"You men are dears!" she said impulsively, in her soft, accented English. "Paula and I should consider ourselves very lucky to have found two such friends. Come, then, if you wish." She held out her hand.

Sir James took it quickly in his, and, with his brick-red face slightly brickier, leaned over and brushed it with his lips. At the same moment there came from the doorway behind him an explosive "*Sapristi!*" followed by a hoarse, gurgling chuckle. He turned in his chair, and looked up into the sardonically grinning face of Baron Isidor Rosenthal.

"*Mein Gott!*" cried the Jew. "You vas at it again!" He shook his great head, and his craggy, satanic features became suddenly grave. "My friend, this vill not do. The prince is in the other r-r-room playing bridge; if he finds you here, there vill be a scene." His brown eyes, shot with their multiple hazel dots, grew somber. "I should have hitted you harder," he growled.

"Mr. Dallas," observed Sir James pleasantly, "should have hit the prince harder. By rights, he ought to be in bed with his face in a towel."

"His face is not pretty," said the Jew, with a grin. "His eyes are very bad. We have told the people that we vas in collision last night. But you must be careful, Sir Chames."

"Suppose you go in and keep him busy for a few minutes. I will not be long."

Rosenthal hesitated for an instant; then his diabolic grin pushed up the corners of his bushy eyebrows and bared his great, yellow fangs.

"Goot!" said he. "I vill do it—because you are a goot sport! I like you, and I t'ink perhaps I owe you somet'ing. But do not be long, Sir Chames. I vant to show some stones to mademoiselle—a tiamond and ruby necklace I have yust bought for my

dear wife in Buda-Pesth!" He turned and left the room.

Sir James and the Lady Thalia looked at each other and laughed.

"We must make our plans quickly," said the young man. "You say that you are going to leave for Belgrade the day after to-morrow?"

"The day after that—Thursday."

"Then Stephen and I will go on ahead of you as quickly as possible. We will take all our shooting things and give it out on our arrival that we are going up country after moufflon or ibex or chamois or whatever they have out there, and we will travel under the names of 'Mr. James' and 'Mr. Stephen.' On arriving at Belgrade, we will try to secure an intelligent native servant, in whom we will confide as much as seems necessary. For the rest, we shall have to trust to opportunity. It ought not to be difficult—Serbia is such a wild country."

Again their eyes met. At the same moment there came from the other room a burst of laughter and many voices talking together, with the sound of chairs being pushed along the parquet.

"They have stopped playing," said the girl breathlessly. "You must go."

Sir James rose to his feet, then looked down at her with a smile.

"*A bientôt,*" said he softly. "At Belgrade, then."

He turned on his heel and strode out of the room. In the salon he came face to face with Rosenthal.

"You are going?" asked the Jew. "That is goot. The prince is a hot-head."

"Is he? He did not act that way last night."

Rosenthal's yellow teeth shone between his mustache and his imperial.

"It is different in a salon," he said. "He has no polish, like you and me. He is a Serb—half civilized—*pouf!* Goot-by, Sir Chames."

The Englishman took the huge hand which a few hours earlier had landed closed and with crushing force upon his aristocratic head.

"Good-by, Baron Rosenthal," said he, smiling.

CHAPTER VI.

Three days later, in their suite of rooms, from the windows of which one looked out upon the palace where King Alexander and his queen Draga were murdered, Stephen Dallas, Sir James, and Connors, the latter's servant, sat calmly discussing their plans for the abduction of the Lady Thalia and her persecuted friend, Countess Paula Rubitzki.

Scattered in some confusion about the room were the arms and accouterments of the sportsmen: costumes of canvas and khaki, puttee leggings, heavy, hobnailed hunting shoes, cartridge belts, camp gear of aluminum, flasks, high-powered binoculars, and weapons. With the last they had experienced no difficulty from the local authorities. One glance at Sir James' brick-red face, his monocle, and the faultless costumes of both men had been sufficient passport; the official ones had not even been asked for. Sir James was so obviously the ubiquitous British sportsman, to be found wherever there are animals to kill, and there is no lack of game in the Servian highlands. Moreover, England is about the only one of the powers held in esteem by the Servians, despite, or because of, the fact that only Great Britain withdrew her minister and kept him withdrawn after the bloodthirsty royal massacre which immediately preceded the accession of King Peter to the throne.

As Dallas and Sir James discussed their plans, the man Connors was carefully studying a map which was spread on the central table, and as the two friends talked they occasionally glanced toward the Irishman, as if for confir-

mation of their statements. For Connors, when the truth were known, was far better qualified for the work in hand than either of the two, being a veteran campaigner with a large fund of personal experience where dealing with savage peoples was concerned. For many years he had served as the orderly of Sir James' father, the late Colonel Sir Henry Fenwick, and had been through one campaign in India and another in the Sudan. Connors was a silent man, past middle age, of an iron physique, resourceful, highly courageous, and possessed of a keen sense of Irish humor. In appearance he was of medium height, very broad, with a lean frame and large, heavy bones. He had, of course, been fully informed as to the nature of the enterprise, which, while it jumped entirely with his inclination, he nevertheless felt under obligation outwardly to condemn.

"There will be fightin', sorr," he had said to Dallas, "or I'm no judge. I see be the map that this same Novibazar do be a mountainous counthry, and 'tis my expayrience that where there's mountains there do be paypul who w'u'd rather fight than ate. An' fightin' is bad in these days phwin kings talks p'ace and their subjec's do be smugglin' long-range rifles into the hills agin' the time phwin their naybors have laid down their arrums."

"But fighting is your proper trade, Connors," Dallas had said.

"Troth, sorr, and so it is, an' sh'u'd be Sir James' trade as well. But where there's wimmin mixed up wid it, sorr"—he shook his grizzled head—"fightin' is wan thing, sorr, an' wimmin is another, an' phwin the two is mixed 'tis no great job a mon will be doin' at ayther—unless maybe 'tis wid the wimmin."

Having thus expressed himself, the Irishman had set about to overhaul the weapons with a loving care which was

scarcely consistent with his theoretic disapproval of the undertaking.

The proprietor of their inconspicuous hotel had promised to secure them a proper guide who should be familiar with the country and the local dialects of its inhabitants. As they were deep in the discussion of their plans, there came a rap at the door, and the German waiter—for the Serbs dislike menial work of any kind—ushered into their presence a swarthy-looking ruffian in a sheepskin cap, an upper garment of white which was half shirt, half smock, and white trousers, very full about the hips and fitting snugly about the legs, which were swathed in homespun stockings with a broad red band. On his feet he wore rawhide sandals, thonged across the instep and about the ankles. He was not a prepossessing-looking individual, but appeared to be clean; and his face, although sullen, showed an unmistakable intelligence.

Dallas looked up sharply, at which the man pulled off his sheepskin cap.

"Goo' morning, sar," said he, with a grin.

"H'm!" said Sir James. "So you speak English."

"Yes, sar. I American citizen."

"The deuce you are!" said Dallas.

"Yes, sar. I work three years in slaughterhouse in New York City. I belong to Fif' Ward. Vote for Tammany. Get two dollars."

"What do you do here?" asked Sir James.

"Raise hogs in beech woods over by head of Morava River."

"Do you know the country across the border in the *sanjak* of Novibazar?" asked Dallas. "The country in the neighborhood of Rascia?"

The man threw him a quick, cunning glance.

"Yes, sar; know all that country well. My landlord live there. He Prince Emilio. No good."

The two friends exchanged glances.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Dallas.

"He boss grafter. Sometime he make me pay rent twice. All his people very bad. Got bands of Bulgarian Christians. Don't do a thing but cut throats other Christians."

"Are you a Christian?" asked Dallas.

"Me? No, I good man. Been to New York. Out for the dough."

"The Christian community," observed Sir James, "does not appear to stand particularly high. I think this man is what we need. Suppose we tell him. What do you think, Connors?"

The Irishman had been eyeing the man keenly, and did not appear to be favorably impressed, but he shrugged his shoulders.

"No doubt he knows the country, sorr, an' he looks to be a smart divil enough."

"One's as good as another, James," said Dallas in French. "It's only a question of money, and we will pay him well. Besides, he doesn't like Emilio."

Sir James nodded. "Suppose you tell him what we want, then," said he.

"What are you doing in Belgrade?" Dallas inquired.

"Jes' come down with bunch of hogs. Now they all shipped for Vienna. Pretty soon I go back."

"Did you ever hear of a place called Dakabar?" asked Dallas.

The man scratched his matted head.

"Yes, sar. That high up in the mountain. People there all Shkipetari. They tough gang. Don't like Serbs." His beady eyes fastened keenly on Dallas. "You goin' there?"

"Yes," said Dallas. "Now listen to me: The Prince Emilio will be here in Belgrade to-morrow or next day. There are with him two ladies. We want to steal these two ladies and take them to Dakabar. Do you understand?"

The man looked at him keenly. His

sullen face showed a quick flash of intelligence, then became dull again.

"That tough job."

"You will be well paid."

"How much you pay?"

"How much do you want?"

The man's eyes narrowed, and a crease appeared across his low forehead.

"This tough job," said he. "Suppose prince he get wise?" There was a significant gesture of his finger across his swarthy throat. "This job no cinch."

"Then you are afraid to tackle it?" asked Dallas.

"No, sar, not afraid. Suppose you pay good price—one hundred dollars"—he looked keenly at Dallas with his cunning, beady eyes—"then I fix it."

"All right. I will pay you one hundred dollars; and when we get safely to Dakabar, if you have done well, I will give you another fifty. Now what do you think is the best way to go about it?"

The man pondered.

"What's your name?"

"Dimitri, sar. I think best way for two ladies to take a drive some night. I give coachman fifty kroners keep his mouth shut. Then we get ponies and wait on the big road to Nis. Then I know crossroad through the hills by Rudnik. That very long—four days, five days—but railroad not safe. Then I think ladies better wear boy clothes, so nobody get wise."

Dallas and Sir James exchanged glances.

"All right, Dimitri," said Dallas. "You appear to know your business. Go ahead, then, and buy your horses and the boys' clothes for the ladies, and mind you get clean, new ones. Until we get well away from Belgrade, we will push along pretty fast," he said to Sir James.

"S'pose you write note to ladies, sar,"

said Dimitri. "Tell 'em go driving one night very soon."

Dallas picked up his portfolio and wrote a few lines, which he inclosed in an envelope and handed to their guide.

"All right," said Dimitri. "This tough job. This no cinch, but I fix it."

CHAPTER VII.

High up on a little shelf of the wild Kapaonik Mountains the runaways had made their noonday halt at the cabin of a shaggy swineherd, whose pigs were rooting in the beech wood which clothed the flanks of the hill.

Above the cabin the mountain reared precipitously to a height of some six thousand feet. Beneath, the slope fell away more gradually to a narrow, thickly wooded valley, where the tumbling waters of the Moravitzza foamed and roared and could be seen in places flashing like snow through vistas between the trees, the leaves of which were beginning to show a tint of autumn coloring.

The air was still and sweet with the odors of moss and fern, for it had rained the night before, and the hot midday sun was now beating down to distil the steaming earth in its own fragrance. The soothing murmur of the river arose in pulsing beats to the ears of the travelers. Overhead, the sky was clear and blue, and two eagles were weaving spirals as they mounted toward the zenith, calling to each other in clear and piercing notes.

Immediately around the cabin itself there was a little clearing which had been planted in maize; beyond this, the forest, which grew thickly on three sides, while on the fourth rose the bare, precipitous shoulder of the mountain.

Daintily perched on a block of wood, the Countess Rubitzki, attired in the costume of a Servian peasant boy, blew wreaths of smoke from her cigarette, and listened with a faint flush on her

soft cheeks to some argument advanced by Dallas, who, with his back against a log, was basking luxuriously in the sunshine.

At a little distance, Sir James, in tweeds and puttees, was mixing some water with the strong native red wine for the refreshment of the Lady Thalia. She was clad like the countess, in a long smock of homespun wool, caught about the waist with a belt, and falling in a kilt which reached mid-thigh; full trousers of the same material, and heavy woolen stockings, with rawhide sandals laced across the ankle and half-way up the leg. Both girls might easily have passed as young European lads who, for comfort and convenience, had adopted the native costume. Their abundant hair was entirely hidden by their *kalpaks*, or round caps, fitting low on the head and supplemented by scarfs twisted turbanlike, as though to protect the back of the head against the rays of the sun.

For three and a half days they had pushed on rapidly, journeying through a wild and beautiful country, sparsely populated, and, for the greater part, forest-covered. The abduction had been skillfully managed by Dimitri, and had been unmarred by the slightest hitch. Returning from a banquet at the palace, their well-bribed coachman had driven to a lonely spot on the outskirts of the city, where their two cavaliers were awaiting them. The night being fine, they had put some thirty miles between themselves and Belgrade before the sunrise, when they had stopped to rest at the lonely farmhouse of a plum grower. Since then they had traveled throughout the day, and stopped for the night wherever a shelter presented itself.

"To-morrow," said Sir James, "we ought to get a glimpse of your hills, Thalia. 'Pon my word, I'll be rather sorry when we do! This has been no end of a lark."

The girl looked at him thoughtfully; then her eyes flitted across to where Dallas was sitting, and a faint shadow crossed her lovely face.

"I shall be sorry, too," she answered, in a low voice.

"What will you do when you get there?" asked Sir James.

"I will call together the chiefs and explain to them what Emilio wants to do, and try to show them the necessity of keeping the peace. We Shkipetari are composed of different clans, a good deal like the Scotch Highlanders, Sir James. Although most of my people are Mohammedans, they are quite unlike the Turks, whom they hate. My father was a bey, and had a great deal of authority; he was once called to Constantinople by the sultan, who did him a great deal of honor and persuaded him to do what he could to stop the incessant fighting and the attacks that were always being made on the Turkish *caracols*, or outposts. I think that they will listen to me and try to keep their people quiet. My father was killed by a band of Christians of the Bulgarian Church, and ever since there has been a blood feud with the Serbs of Emilio's district."

"I fancy your people are a pretty bloodthirsty crowd," observed Sir James.

"They are savage," Thalia admitted, "but they are straightforward and chivalrous, not treacherous, like the Serbs. A woman could go anywhere alone through our hills with perfect safety, and so could a traveler whom they had nothing against. But there is no such thing as law and order, and"—she smiled—"we settle our disputes in our own way. Nobody ever tries to interfere with the Shkipetari."

Sir James laughed, and, stretching his long limbs luxuriously in the warm sunshine, lit a cigarette. Their luncheon had been a hearty one, as the day before, Dallas, a splendid shot, had

killed a red deer far across a rocky gorge through which their trail had wound. Dimitri's beady eyes had narrowed at sight of the buck tumbling down the bare hillside, and the expression of the guide's face had not been lost on Connors.

"'Twas not the look a mon would wear, sorr, at sight of meat in camp," said the Irishman later to Sir James and Dallas. "He will stand a lot of watchin', this Dimitri. I c'u'd see the workin's o' the scalawag's brain as plain as ye see the innerds of a glass travelin' clock. Thinks he, 'I'll take good care that niver ye get the chance to draw a bead on me!'"

Connors was unpacking a few delicacies when Sir James saw him stop in the act of unbuckling a strap, and, shading his eyes with his hand, stare up at a ledge which almost overhung the cabin.

"What do you see, Connors?" he called.

The Irishman turned.

"There's three chamois, sorr, wan a buck, just passed around that ledge of rock beyant."

Dallas, a keen sportsman, sprang to his feet. "Do you think I could get a shot?" he asked.

"Yis, sorr, but 'tis a bit of a climb."

Dallas quickly entered the cabin, to emerge a moment later with his 30-40. "I'm going to have a try for the buck," said he.

"May I go with you?" asked Thalia, rising.

Dallas glanced dubiously at the almost sheer face of the mountain.

"It's a rough climb."

"I'm a hillwoman."

"All right; come ahead, then."

Dimitri, hearing their voices, had come to the door of the hut and was looking at Dallas through narrowed lids.

"Better not go, sar," said he. "We start now pretty quick."

Dallas glanced at him in surprise. "Thought you said we shouldn't leave for another hour," said he.

"That pass very quick when you chase goats."

"I'll be back," said Dallas shortly, and had turned toward the mountain when Dimitri spoke again.

"Better stay here, sar," said he. "This fella"—he pointed at the goat-herd, who was giving some fodder to the horses—"he tell me we better start right away, to get across those hills before dark. Road very bad; straight up and straight down."

"All right," said Dallas indifferently. "I will be back by the time that you are ready to start."

He turned away, and Dimitri scowled and went back into the hut.

"Come on, Thalia," said Dallas, "if you really want to go; but it's going to be a hard climb."

The girl glanced at him and smiled. Throughout their journey there had been in her manner toward Dallas a hint of mockery which had rather puzzled the young man, who had gradually come to the conclusion that the Albanian lady was inclined to regard him as a somewhat effete production of over-civilization.

They started to climb in silence. For the first hundred feet, the ascent presented no especial difficulties, but a little higher up they found themselves confronted by sheer cliff, seamed and eroded, and, although quite surmountable to the experienced mountaineer, yet dangerous from its steepness.

Dallas glanced up in some dismay.

"This job is not so easy as it looks from down below," said he. "You'd better not tackle it, Thalia."

She glanced into his flushed face with her mocking little smile.

"Are you quite sure that you had better tackle it yourself?"

"I am not crazy about it—with this rifle," he admitted.

"Then give the rifle to me."

"What nonsense!"

"Then come ahead. I'll go first and pick out our route." She glanced at him over her shoulder and smiled again. "You see, Mr. Dallas, this is my country. Have you a steady head?"

"Fairly. If I get frightened, you can come back and carry me up."

Something in the dry tone brought a quick flush to the girl's cheek and a little sparkle in her eyes. Without answering, she turned and started to pick her way up the rough side of the cliff. Dallas, pausing to sling the rifle across his back, followed her.

For about a hundred feet they worked their way up from ledge to ledge. Then came a stretch of turf, firm but so steep that a fall would have meant rolling down over the brink and death on the jagged rocks beneath. A hundred feet up this almost precipitous bank, Thalia paused, and, standing beautifully poised, looked back at Dallas, who was working his way gingerly up on all fours.

"Better not look back," snapped the young man. "And I say, Thalia, *don't* stand up like that. It makes me rather sick to look at you!" He glanced back over his shoulder, then rested, digging his toes into the turf and flattening his body against the almost vertical incline. "My word! This is worse than sheer rock."

Thalia glanced at him sharply, and the smile left her lips.

"Give me the rifle," said she.

"Don't be silly."

"No, I insist. This is only dangerous if one gets giddy, and heights have absolutely no effect on me. Come, slip it off!"

"Thalia, don't lean forward like that!" Dallas dug his fingers into the soft mold. "Hang it, it's worse to watch you than it is to climb the bally thing! Come on, let's go up."

She threw him a quick, anxious look, then turned and began to climb rapidly upward. On a narrow ledge of less than a yard in width, she stopped and waited for Dallas to join her.

"There are only about fifty feet more," said the girl, "and then it will be easier. But the next fifty feet are rather sheer; will you not give me the rifle?"

"Look here, Thalia," said Dallas, "if you keep on bothering me about this confounded rifle, I'll throw it over the edge of the precipice."

"Better that than to risk a fall."

"I don't intend to fall. But it's some time since I've done any climbing, and my head isn't quite as steady as it might be."

"Then I insist on your giving me the rifle."

"Stop it!" growled Dallas. "Come on, let's get it over with."

Without answering, the girl started to work her way up a narrow fissure on the face of the cliff. A little higher, the seam widened into what is known to alpinists as a "chimney." Nearly at the top, Thalia, who was in the act of swinging her lithe body over the rim of a broad shelf, heard a gasp, and, poised as she was, glanced back into Dallas' pale, upturned face. While he was reaching up to grip a spur of rock which offered a safe handhold, the stock of the rifle had struck the face of the cliff in such a way as to upset his balance, for the moment insecure. As a result, he had pitched sideways, and only saved himself from falling by throwing his outside foot across to the opposite wall of the "chimney," so that he stopped for the moment wedged in something of the position of a circus performer riding two horses, with one foot on the back of either. Beneath him, the "chimney" widened so that if he had slipped down a few inches his purchase would have been lost, and he would have fallen to the ledge, and

thence to the jagged rocks a hundred feet or more beneath.

As Thalia glanced down, her practiced eye saw the danger, which was for the moment extreme. Swinging herself face downward across the ledge, she gripped the shoulder of Dallas' loose khaki coat. Although unable to hold his weight, she could nevertheless take a good deal of it, and, what was more important, shift it to the side of the foot which was well planted. Dallas, feeling the other foot beginning to slip on the face of the rock, and realizing the danger of his position, knew instinctively that if he fell he would drag the girl after him. He turned his blanched face up to hers.

"Let go!" he gasped. "I'm all right."

Thalia's own face was like chalk.

"Kick yourself back to the ledge!" she panted. "Quick!"

Dallas' hand, as well as his foot, was braced against the outer wall; the fingers of his other hand were hooked in a little crevice.

"I'd lose my balance."

"No, you won't! Do as I say!" Thalia spoke through her clenched teeth.

"All right, here goes!"

Putting out all his strength, Dallas thrust himself violently back against the face of the cliff. As he did so, Thalia swung his body with all her force in the same direction, and for a moment held him barely balanced against the sheer side of the rock. But Dallas felt that he could not keep his position.

"Let go!" he gasped.

"Now reach up and grab that knob of rock with your free hand."

"Don't dare!"

"Do as I say!"

Like a man in a nightmare, he swung his arm upward; for a moment he hung poised, on the verge of falling; then his fingers closed on the projection, and for the moment he was safe.

"Now climb up!" said Thalia. "Slowly!"

With his heart in his mouth, Dallas slowly raised himself to the rim of the ledge, then over it, and a moment later was lying face downward on the rock.

For a few seconds he neither moved nor spoke. Then he turned his haggard, colorless face toward the girl. Thalia's breath was coming quickly, her cheeks were like chalk, and her eyes dark and luminous.

"That was a close squeak," said Dallas.

She nodded. Dallas raised himself and crawled back from the brink.

"Thalia," said he, "if I had fallen, you'd have come, too."

"I should have wanted to."

Dallas held out his hand, and Thalia dropped hers into it. Their eyes met for a moment; then those of the girl looked away.

"We are all right now," said she. "The rest is easy."

Dallas did not answer, and for a moment the two sat side by side in silence. Then Thalia, who had been looking down upon the cabin far beneath, uttered a little exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Dallas.

"Those people." She pointed downward.

Staring in the direction indicated, Dallas saw a company of men ascending the trail which led to the hut. There appeared to be about a dozen, all of whom were carrying guns. As far as he could see, for the distance was considerable, the men were dressed like the shepherds and swineherds which they had met from time to time.

"Who are they?" he asked.

Thalia shook her head.

"I don't like it," muttered Dallas.

"Nor I."

He glanced at her quickly. "Brigands?"

"Look!" cried the girl. "There! Behind the hut! What is Dimitri doing?"

In the rear of the cabin they could see the guide apparently pawing at something under the edge of the wall. As they watched, puzzled and disturbed, the man hauled a gun from underneath the cabin. Laying the weapon aside, he reached in again and hauled out another, then a third and a fourth. And then suddenly Dallas understood.

"It's a trap!" he snarled, turning his pale face to Thalia. "The swine is stealing the rifles! You see? He knocked a hole in the mud wall and shoved the guns through, then went around behind so as not to be seen. It's a put-up job, Thalia! He's been waiting for that gang down below."

As he spoke, the Serb gathered up the four guns and stood for a moment as if listening. Dallas quickly unslung his rifle and flung himself face downward on the edge of the cliff.

"What!" cried Thalia breathlessly. "You are going to—to——"

Her voice failed her. But Dallas was measuring the range with a cold, practiced eye.

"Seven hundred—eight hundred—but it's a drop," he muttered, fingering the sight of the beautiful weapon.

Thalia clasped her hands over her mouth. Her light hazel eyes had grown suddenly black.

Down below, the treacherous Serb had turned and was stealing away. In front of the cabin, Sir James and Paula were standing side by side, apparently looking up toward the ledge. Connors was not in sight. The company of men coming up the trail had stopped under the brow of the hill, and appeared to be waiting.

Lying face downward, Dallas cuddled the stock of his rifle under his chin. Thalia, her hands still clasped over her mouth, was watching Dimitri, who presently paused again and looked back.

Dallas was as rigid as the rocks beneath him. The long, thin, blue-black

rifle barrel had lost its slight oscillation and was motionless as he.

Then all at once there leaped from the muzzle a pale-blue jet; there was a sharp report, which was the next instant rolled out from the sheer side of the mountain in echoing reverberations. Dallas jerked his head quickly to the side, while as if by instinct his hand went to the lever and threw a fresh cartridge into the chamber.

But there was no need. Far below, the small, crouching figure of Dimitri lurched suddenly forward, his arms flew out, and the rifles went scattering in all directions. The body straightened, and a faint yell was wafted up in thin and tremulous tones. Then the guide's figure swayed, tottered, and fell upon the ground, where it lay motionless.

CHAPTER VIII.

Thalia stifled a little scream, then "Well shot!" she cried, with spirit.

Still lying on his face, with the muzzle of his rifle projecting over the edge of the cliff, Dallas turned to her a white face in which his gray eyes shone like two pieces of jade.

"Thanks. It *wasn't* so bad, considering the range—eh?"

But Thalia was looking down upon the cabin far beneath.

"Look!" she cried.

At the sound of the rifle shot, Connors had come quickly out of the hut; then, as Dimitri's death scream rang out, he and Sir James had rushed into the hut, as Dallas guessed, to secure their weapons. An instant later they emerged, passed around the cabin, and when Thalia spoke they were leaning over the body of the Serb. Presently Connors rolled it on its back in a manner which showed Dallas that the guide was quite dead; then the Irishman looked up toward the mountainside and waved his hat, as if in acknowledgment of the success of Dallas' long shot.

"You killed!" said Thalia between her teeth.

"That was my object. He deserved it, don't you think?"

The girl threw him a quick, curious look.

"Did you ever kill a man before?"

"No. But it looks as if I might have to kill a few more pretty soon. See there!" He waved his rifle toward the cabin. The wild-looking band of armed men had passed around the edge of the clearing and come in sight of the hut. Sir James had returned to Paula, and Connors, who had gathered up the rifles dropped by the Serb, was standing by the cabin door, apparently loading them. Suddenly Sir James turned and stared at the band, which was distant about a hundred yards; then, preceded by Paula, walked to the hut and entered.

"Ah!" muttered Dallas. "They see them. Wish we were down there. What do you think they are, Thalia? Brigands?" He looked up at the girl, who nodded. They were both rather pale, and Thalia's eyes had darkened.

"Yes," she answered; "brigands for the time being, probably recruited by Dimitri to rob us and perhaps hold us for ransom. It was arranged, no doubt, between him and the herder at the cabin of whom we stopped last night. See"—she pointed downward—"the swineherd is talking to them, and they are looking up here."

"They will be hunting us directly," growled Dallas, "and I've only four rounds left. What rotten luck, to have been up here just when that gang arrived! But if we had been down there, the chances are that Dimitri would have got away with the guns," he added thoughtfully.

"We are much better here than there," said Thalia. "Those other people are trapped; but they are two good fighting men, and have rifles and plenty of ammunition, and there is venison

and water and wine and other food in the hut. They can stand three days' siege, and by that time we can rescue them."

"We can?"

"Yes. Don't you see what we have got to do? We are just on the edge of my country; it is only the other side of those hills." She motioned across the valley. "Two days' journey on foot, and we shall begin to fall in with the Shkipetari. The first Albanian we meet will raise his clan in no time when I tell him who I am, and we will come back here and feed that carrion"—she tossed her head toward the herders—"to the jackals."

Dallas glanced at her quickly. The girl's voice carried a fierce little ring, there was a bright red spot in either cheek, and her eyes were aflame. For the first time the young man realized that the girl beside him was herself pure Albanian, a native of the wild mountain fastnesses which had been the scene of so many sanguinary feuds, and that she herself possessed no very thick veneer of what is generally understood as civilization. But he cast his eyes in the direction of the wild country which intervened and shook his head doubtfully.

"Do you think that we could do it?" he asked.

"We have got to!"

"But first we must get past these people; then we would not dare to take the road, but would have to go cross country, and we have no food nor shelter—not even a blanket. Where could you sleep?"

"On the ground. We can build a fire. What else is there to do?"

"Give ourselves up," said Dallas, "if it is only the question of a ransom."

Thalia's mouth grew scornful.

"You may if you like," she answered. "I shall try for Dakabar!"

Dallas turned to her a slightly reddened face. "It is for the safety of

you girls, of course," he said. "This is my expedition, and I will stand any incidental expenses—such as a few thousand pounds' ransom. I should far rather do that than to expose you to danger and hardship."

Thalia's face softened. She stooped and patted Dallas' shoulder as he lay half sprawled on one hip, his rifle under him.

"You are a dear," said she. "But my plan is not so difficult. We can slip past those men in the beech woods on the other side of this mountain. And you still have four shots. The others can hold out. Oh, look! Look down there, Dallas!"

The herders were advancing in a body toward the hut. When they were within fifty yards of the door, Sir James stepped out, rifle in hand, and waved them back. They halted, and there appeared to be some sort of discussion going on, the hillmen, from their gestures, apparently asserting their friendly intentions, while the Englishman made from time to time the backward motion with his rifle barrel.

Then all at once the palaver came to a sudden and startling end. There was a commotion among the herders; Sir James sprang quickly back into the hut. Sudden jets of blue-white smoke leaped out from the clustered hillmen, and a moment later the crash of a scattering volley came up in multiple reverberations.

"The murderous swine!" snarled Dallas, instinctively shoving out his 30-40. But Thalia, crouching beside him, laid her hand quickly on his arm.

"Save your shots," said she. "We may need them."

"That's so." He lowered the rifle and looked at her over his shoulder. "Hope nobody got hit. That shack is built of stones and mud, and ought to stop bullets. Ah!"

The hillmen had opened their ranks, and were approaching the cabin, when

two thin puffs of smoke leaped apparently from the solid wall. A faint yell quavered up from beneath. One of the herders pitched forward on his face, while another reeled backward and fell across a pile of stones. Again came the fatal spurts of smoke from the cabin, and another hillman was down and crawling away on all fours. The herders scattered swiftly, flying for shelter in all directions, while the air was filled with the rumbling reverberations thrown back from one side of the valley to the other.

Dallas turned a pale but exultant face toward Thalia.

"Fine! Oh, fine!" he cried, and clapped his thigh. "They've knocked loopholes in all four walls! Gad! There are three of the beggars out of the running, Thalia! How many more were there in the gang? A dozen, perhaps?"

"More than that. But, Dallas, we must go."

"Then you want to try for Daka-bar?"

"What else is there to do? Those animals mean murder and loot. And we have no time to spare. They know that we are up here."

He nodded and swung himself to his feet.

"Yes; they will be stalking us presently. The war is on now. We will try to get around into the woods on the other side of the mountain, then work down to the river. Do you think we can get across?"

"We must—even if we have to swim for it."

Dallas did not answer, but led the way along the little shelf, which presently broadened into a sort of grassy terrace, almost a mountain pasture. Crossing this, they came upon a steep, boulder-strewn slope which a quarter of a mile below was met by a heavy growth of beech woods extending all the way down into the valley. Far be-

low they could hear the roar of the Moravitza.

Down the rocky slope they plunged as fast as safety would permit, then presently the forest closed in about them: splendid beeches and oaks, with here and there scattering conifers, pines, and firs. There was very little underbrush, and their eyes were kept alert for any sign of the enemy.

Both were beginning to think that they would reach the river unmolested when from close at hand upon their right there came a loud report, and a bullet hummed past their heads.

"Jump behind a tree!" cried Dallas.

Five paces to their left, a big beech reared its sheltering trunk, and under the cover of this they slipped like Indians. About a hundred yards away, a blue cloud of smoke was dissipating in the thick foliage overhead.

"He's behind that oak!" whispered Dallas. "Crouch down, Thalia; I'll shoot over your head if I get sight of him."

For a moment they waited; then Dallas muttered: "Stop here; I'll run him out."

It had crossed his mind that their enemy was probably armed with a muzzle loader; also that they had little time to lose. Between them and the oak about which the smoke was swirling there were several big trees, and, leaving his shelter, Dallas ran for the cover of the nearest. Just as he reached it, he caught a glimpse of a dark figure running back into the woods. Dallas sprang clear of his tree, threw up his rifle, took a quick shot at a range of not more than fifty yards, and saw the man plunge headforemost into a clump of bushes which looked like laurel.

"Got him!" he called to Thalia. "Come on!"

Together they ran on down the wooded slope. A little lower, they encountered a thick growth of scrub, into which they slipped like hares, plunging

through thorns and brambles, from which they finally emerged upon the bank of the river.

"Listen!" said Thalia, as they crouched in the dense willow growth that fringed the shore.

Not far behind them there had broken out a clamor of savage yells, which were answered faintly from higher up the mountains.

"They are coming!" panted Dallas. "We can't stop here. Let's try to get across."

They had struck the river at one of its still reaches, and, as the autumn rains had not yet begun, the stream was low, with pebbly bars and broad, standing pools. Close to the opposite bank, however, they could see a narrow channel of swift, dark water, which a little farther downstream was hidden from sight by what would have been when the river was high a long, narrow island thickly covered with bushes and a growth of willows. Dallas pointed toward it with his rifle barrel.

"Let's get over there," he said. "It seems to be a good cover, and we can cross on the other side without being seen. That is, if we *can* cross."

Pushing their way through the bushes, they came out upon the shingly river bed, where for a hundred yards they were exposed to great danger of being seen. But their enemies were apparently higher up in the woods, and they reached the island undiscovered and crawled into the scrub, where they sank down for a moment to rest and breathe.

"Looks deep on the other side," said Dallas.

"We can wade it, I think."

"Hope so."

"Can't you swim?"

"I'd rather smoke. Besides, here's the rifle."

"Give that to me."

"Look here, Thalia, you leave that rifle alone. I'm a good deal of a duf-

fer, I know, but I haven't reached the stage where I must have my gun carried up cliffs and across rivers for me by a girl."

"You are a little new to climbing," said Thalia, "and you may not be much of a swimmer; but you can shoot!" She rose to her feet. "Wait here; I want to see how deep it is."

Dallas waited, closely watching the opposite bank. A moment later, Thalia returned.

"We can wade it," she said. "The water is not more than waist-deep, and the current is less swift than it looks. What is the matter?" For Dallas' face was very grave.

"I was thinking," said he, "that it's a pretty serious matter to have to lie out in the woods soaking wet. There is frost almost every night up here."

Thalia smiled; then the color poured into her face.

"We can take them off," said she.

"What!" Dallas turned to her so shocked and startled a face that she burst into a laugh.

"Don't look so scandalized, Dallas. You can stop here until you hear me whistle. Then I will go up into the bushes and you can come over. There's no Mrs. Grundy in the Kapaonik Mountains."

Dallas laughed. "My word, Thalia, but you are a good little sport! Go ahead, then, because we haven't any time to lose."

For a moment their eyes met. Thalia's cheeks were very red and her lips like coral. Thorn and brier had left their cruel marks across her flushed, lovely face; the scarf of her *kalpak* was gone, and stray wisps of her bronze-black hair had escaped from under the rim of her cap and were curling about her delicate ears. As Dallas looked at her, his face was lit by a sudden glow of admiration, and at the expression in his habitually cynical eyes Thalia

first looked questioning, then turned away with a deeper flush.

"Gad! But you're a wonder!" said Dallas. "You look as if you actually liked it all."

"I should not mind—if it were not for the others."

"It is James that should be here," said Dallas, "instead of me."

She slightly raised her chin. "And you ought to be with Paula."

"Had I? But run along, Thalia; we've got no time to lose."

She turned and slipped into the bushes, and a few moments later Dallas heard the clinking of pebbles behind him; for the little island, although perhaps fifty yards in length, was not more than four or five in width. He was reflecting on the gravity of the situation and keeping a keen watch upon the opposite bank of the river, when from almost the very spot where he and Thalia had come out there emerged three of the hillmen.

Dallas' grip on his rifle tightened instinctively. The three men stood for a moment looking up and down the stream, then across in his direction. As they were a little above the head of the island, it suddenly occurred to Dallas that from where they stood it might be possible to see Thalia when she reached the opposite bank. He climbed to his feet, and, crouching low, pushed his way through the dense bushes to the edge of the channel. Halfway over, Thalia was wading bosom-deep in the clear, icy water. Her clothes, wrapped into a snug bundle, were held poised upon her head by one round, gleaming arm. Although the current was not swift, the girl was having a hard time to keep her footing, as Dallas could see from the unsteady movements of her head and shoulders and the oscillations of her free arm in the water. She wore a single white undergarment, which was apparently impeding her bal-

ance, for she paused occasionally as if to disentangle herself from its folds.

Dallas whistled softly, and she looked back over her shoulder, when he made a sweeping gesture downstream, then pointed toward the bank which they had left. Thalia threw up her free arm in answer. Dallas turned and crept back to his ambush.

The three hillmen had separated and were walking out across the cobbly river bottom. Suddenly the one farthest upstream paused and pointed to the ground. The others joined him, and for a moment all three studied the cobbles attentively. It was evident to Dallas that they had found the trail, for they looked toward the little island and half raised their weapons, then proceeded warily in his direction.

"There is nothing for it," he thought grimly, "but to pot all three."

He raised his rifle and covered the man to the right. But for some reason he found himself unable to pull the trigger.

"I'm a fool," he thought, and, rising to his feet, strode out upon the edge of the bar.

The herders saw him instantly and stopped in their tracks. Dallas motioned them back. The men did not move. Dallas repeated his gesture. Two of the herders fell back a pace; then the man on the left threw his gun quickly to his shoulder and fired. Dallas staggered back with a sense of sharp, violent pain. There was a stabbing through his chest and a burning sensation on the side of his head and through his left forearm.

With a little snarl of rage, he dropped on one knee, threw his rifle to his shoulder, and, sighting on the man who had fired, pulled the trigger. The fellow screamed, flung out his arms, and went over backward. The soft-nosed hunting bullet had struck him fairly in the chest, mushroomed, and torn its way through, killing him instantly.

One of his companions turned and fled back toward the bank. The other raised his weapon and fired, then wheeled about and followed him. Dallas, pulling himself together with an effort, fired again, but missed. Quite by instinct, he threw his last cartridge into the chamber, and, setting his teeth, for the pain in his arm was intense, got the man's back fairly before the sights and fired again. This time the bullet found its mark, and the man went down, his weapon clattering among the stones.

Sick and giddy, Dallas turned and crept back into the bushes, where he sank to the ground. The blood was streaming down the side of his face, and his left arm felt numb and powerless. There was a burning pain on the right side of his chest. He pulled up his flannel hunting shirt and discovered a small hole from which the blood was trickling in crimson drops. But a spot on the outer edge of his right shoulder blade was giving him intense pain, and, placing his left hand over it, he felt a small, hard object just beneath the skin.

"Guess I'm rather badly hit," he thought, "but I must get across before I get any weaker."

Laying down the rifle, now useless for lack of ammunition, he staggered through the bushes and into the icy water. Directly opposite stood Thalia, clad in a long white garment which fell from her shoulders to her knees.

"Are you hit?" she cried tremulously.

"Yes," he answered, and waded out into the stream.

Halfway across, the water deepened suddenly; an eddy of the current caught him and swept him off his feet. Down he went, but came up to find a fresh footing. The trees on the opposite bank were blurred and misty, and he seemed to be drifting with the current. All at once the river bottom dropped from under his feet. Acting by instinct, he struck out feebly. Then there

came a roaring in his ears, and green, swirling lights before his eyes, but he struggled to the surface, and as he did so saw Thalia's face close beside his own and felt a strong grasp on his shoulder. The bottom seemed to rise up under his feet again, and he tottered up the bank, to sink down helplessly upon the sun-warmed pebbles.

Thalia was kneeling beside him, her face drawn and white and tense.

"Are you badly hurt?" she cried.

"Don't think so," muttered Dallas. "Go and dress." He struggled to sit up, but Thalia flung one arm across his chest and drew him back until his head rested on her knee, where it lay with a little stream of blood trickling down from his forehead.

The girl's swift fingers explored the wound. From the side of the forehead to the temple the scalp was plowed open. Thalia gave a sigh of relief.

"It glanced off."

"Yes," muttered Dallas; "the brute peppered me with buckshot."

"Where else are you hit?"

"In the forearm; and there's a slug somewhere in my chest. But I'm feeling better now. Go and dress, Thalia."

But Thalia was examining the forearm. Apparently the bullet was imbedded somewhere in the muscles, as there was no wound of exit.

"Where else? In the chest?" She drew up the woolen shirt, and at sight of the small, sinister-looking bullet hole, gave a little gasp.

"It doesn't hurt," said Dallas. "I don't think it went through. Probably hit a rib and went around, because I felt it over here on the side. What nasty brutes—to sprinkle you with buckshot!"

"Are you in much pain?"

"No, I'm not in any pain. That cold water made 'em all numb. But you go and dress. Do you hear me? *Go and dress!* You will catch cold!"

Thalia rose slowly to her feet, and

stood contemplating him with an utter disregard for the scantiness of her attire, which had in it something primitively heroic. Her expressive face was knit in lines of anxious thought.

"Could you get up the bank and into the bushes?" she asked.

"Yes, of course. I'm not badly hurt. It was only the first shock that knocked me out."

"But that wound in your chest?"

"Don't believe it went in. There would be blood in my mouth if it had. Probably followed the rib around, or it would not be there just under the skin." He clambered to his feet and stood for a minute, as if gauging his strength. Seeing the pallor of his face, Thalia stepped to his side and passed her round, bare arm under his.

"Lean on me," she said.

Steadied by the girl, he walked up the short, pebbly beach and pushed his way into the willows, where he half fell, half sank to the ground, his head swimming and his vision vague and misty. Thalia, startled at his pallor, leaned over him.

"Lie down," said she. "You're still faint."

Distressed more by his faintness than by the pain of his wounds, Dallas closed his eyes and let his head fall backward. He was dimly conscious that it was being gently supported; then it seemed to him that he heard a sound of tearing cloth. A moment later his head began to clear again, and he opened his eyes and looked up under the brim of a bandage bound snugly across his forehead, and into the face of Thalia, who was bending anxiously over him.

"What's this thing?" He raised his hand to his head.

"A bandage, my dear."

Where did you get it?"

"At the chemist's around the corner."

Dallas raised himself till he sat up-

right. He looked at Thalia, who was sitting cross-legged, an anxious smile on her lips and her wet garment hanging limply from her shoulders.

"I thought I told you to go and dress," said Dallas sternly. "Now go! I shall not speak to you again until you get your clothes on."

He turned his back upon the girl, and sat for a few minutes trying to fight off his light-headedness. A little time elapsed; then the bushes behind him rustled, and he looked over his shoulder to see Thalia, a Servian peasant boy again. She looked at him inquiringly.

"I feel quite fit now," said he. "But, Thalia, we are in a bad fix."

She nodded, her lovely face very grave.

"There is only one thing for us to do, Dallas. I have found a little path which must lead up to a house not far above us, because I followed it for a few steps and came upon a spring, all stoned in, with footprints in the ground about it. We must go up and take our chances."

"You think it's safe?"

"There's no choice. You are wounded and soaking wet, and must have shelter. Besides, hospitality is a very sacred thing all through these mountains—all over the Balkans, in fact. Perhaps I can talk to the people and make them understand that it would be to their profit to treat us well. Can you walk a little distance?"

"Oh, yes; I'm all right now. You are right, Thalia; we've got to have shelter."

Pushing their way through the bushes, they came presently upon a little footpath which wound up through a pine grove to come out a short distance beyond upon a small plateau covered with splendid oaks. The spot was charmingly picturesque: one hundred feet below them flowed the Moravitz; on three sides of the plateau the land

fell away steeply, and on the fourth rose the precipitous side of the mountain. There was no underbrush, and through the vistas between the big tree trunks they could see far down the valley and catch glimpses of the distant hills bathed in the brilliant yellow sunlight of the late afternoon.

"There's the cabin," said Thalia, pointing toward the mountainside.

Snugly built in the shelter of the overhanging cliffs was a clean little dwelling, tidy and picturesque, constructed of stones and clay, with a roof of hand-hewn pine slabs. Behind it, at a little distance, was a shed or stable, and about the door of this some she-goats were browsing quietly, their kids tucked here and there asleep in the sunny patches, fluffy little balls of fur. The door of the cabin was slightly ajar. There was not a sound about the place, nor was there any smoke coming from the chimney.

Thalia and Dallas walked straight up to the cabin, then paused, and the girl called aloud. There was no reply, but as they waited a large yellow cat came walking calmly out, and, with its tail straight in the air, approached the girl and rubbed, purring, against her leg.

The man and the girl looked at each other and smiled.

"A kind welcome at least," said he.

The wise-faced nanny goats had been regarding them curiously, but with no sign of alarm. The kids also had raised their baby faces to look, and, as Dallas spoke, one of the little creatures hopped upon its stumpy feet and came bounding toward him, first to butt playfully at his knee and then to sniff at his fingers with a soft, expectant little nose. The mother followed more slowly and sedately and with no trace of fear.

"If the people receive us as kindly as their animals," said Dallas, "we shall be in luck."

Thalia, who had been closely scru-

tinizing the cabin, turned to him a face which showed great relief.

"I think we have come to the right place," said she. "This is the cabin of a holy man, probably a hermit."

"Christian?"

"No, Mohammedan. But he must be really a good man, and no doubt kind, from the way his pets behave. Do you see those little scraps of rags fastened to the window shutters?"

"Yes. What are they?"

"Prayers—or, at least, reminders of prayers. Votive offerings of a sort. Let's look in."

They walked toward the cabin, and the cat followed, purring. As they reached the door, there was a fluttering over their heads, and a large jay came tumbling from the treetops, a flash of blue and gray shimmering feathers. The bird fluttered about their heads, then lighted on the window sill and hopped inside.

Thalia glanced at Dallas and smiled; then, slipping a loop of cord from a peg in the door, pushed it open and entered.

Within was a single large room, quite bare and scrupulously neat and clean. There was a big, open fireplace, and in one corner a sort of raised platform, on which were spread some sheepskins and a heavy woolen blanket. In the other corner were some shelves filled with what looked to be manuscripts. In front of the window stood a rough table, on which was an earthen vessel holding a cluster of late roses, beside which were a pair of big, steel-rimmed spectacles, an inkwell, a long plume pen, and a large leather-bound book. The jay bird had entered through a crevice between the shutters and was pecking at some crumbs of bread on the table. It cocked its head, gave them a bright, inquiring look, then strutted back to the window and flew out with a burst of melody which sounded like bird laughter.

"There can't be much harm in this man," said Dallas. "Suppose we consider ourselves his guests."

He crossed the room and seated himself on the edge of the platform. Thalia, glancing at him, saw that his face was very pale, and that his lips were blue and trembling. She was at his side instantly.

"Lie down," said she. "I will build a fire, and then we must get off those wet clothes and see to your wounds."

Dallas stretched himself out and drew the blanket over him. His teeth were beginning to chatter, and all his strength had suddenly left him. He pulled out his match box, which was fortunately water-tight, and handed it to the girl. Thalia went out, to return presently with an armful of wood, and in a few moments there was a fire blazing on the hearth.

"Now we must make you comfortable," said she. "Are you in pain?"

"No—just a little stiff and sore." He began to struggle with his coat. Thalia went to his aid.

"I can manage," muttered Dallas.

"Nonsense! You are a wounded man, and I am your nurse."

"But——"

"Don't talk. Keep the blanket over you. Now let us get off this wet shirt. Now let me see your arm. What a wicked-looking little hole! The bullet is in there. Shouldn't it come out?"

"I don't see how we're going to manage it. Let it stay." Dallas sank back and pulled the blanket over him.

Thalia was tearing some cloth into strips. Hearing the ripping noise, Dallas turned his head and looked at her.

"What are you doing?"

"Don't ask questions."

"But you mustn't——"

"Hush! I am going out now to get some pine balsam from one of those trees to smear over the wound. That is Shkipetari treatment. It stings a little, but it is clean and healing."

"You're a wonder!" muttered Dallas.

The girl went out, to return presently with some of nature's ointment on a piece of bark, when the wounds were quickly bandaged. Dallas, wrapped in the big woolen blanket, with his head on a pile of sheepskins, fell into a doze. When he opened his eyes again, he saw that his clothes were drying in front of the fire, while Thalia stood beside him with a smile on her red lips and a bowl in her hand.

"I have been milking the goats. Come, Dallas, drink this. We *were* fortunate to find this place. There is corn meal and cheese and olives and some dried plums, and I have found a little cave outside stored full of beet roots and turnips and cabbages. Besides, there are some chickens shut up in a coop between the cabin and the cliffs. We shall not starve."

"Any sign of our host?"

"No. Do you know, Dallas, I have an idea that he may have heard the firing and gone across the river to see what it was all about. Perhaps he has persuaded the herders to go away."

"You haven't heard any more firing?"

"Not a shot."

"Then perhaps you are right."

"Oh, I hope so! I hope so!"

"He may have gone on with James and the others."

"But do you think that they would go without us?"

"Very possibly; because, you see, they would be likely to guess at our plan, and they must have heard the firing down there by the river. They could tell the crack of my 30-40, and very likely think that by this time we are miles away."

Thalia nodded thoughtfully, and for a few moments neither spoke. Presently Dallas muttered as if to himself: "Poor old James!"

"Why?" asked Thalia quickly.

"Think how worried he must be about you, Thalia."

"Why not about you?"

"Oh, well, I'm a man; and, you see, he's—in love with you."

"Indeed!"

Dallas looked at her curiously. "Of course he is. Has he never told you so?"

"Never."

"Well, he is."

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh, several things. Among others, his telling *me* so about sixteen times a day."

"And Paula? Are you not horribly worried about her?"

"Naturally. But I don't see what there is to do about it. I say, Thalia, it is James who ought to be here now in my place."

"Wounds and all? How nice of you!"

"I'd forgot all about the wounds."

"But not about Paula," said the girl, in a low voice.

"But I'm not in love with Paula, nor she with me. I'm very fond of her, and think she's a little brick and the best little sport in the world, barring one. I say, Thalia, aren't my clothes almost dry?"

Thalia got up and examined the garments, which she had wrung out and hung before the hot blaze.

"Quite. Perhaps you had better put them on."

"I think so. I can manage; just give them to me, and then go out and play with the kids."

The girl obeyed in silence. A little later, when Dallas called her, she came in to find him dressed again and puzzling over the big book on the table by the platform.

"What's this thing?" asked Dallas.

"The Koran. Do you find it interesting?"

"Very. The whole state of affairs

is that, but you are the most interesting of all, my dear girl."

She threw him a quick look, then walked to the door of the cabin and seated herself upon the threshold, where she remained in silence, watching the setting sun as it sank in a crimson glow behind the hilltops far down the valley.

Presently she arose, and, walking to the table, poured some milk into the bowl, and, setting it on the hearthstone, called the yellow cat, which came purring and placidly proceeded to make its evening meal. Dallas looked at the two and smiled.

"Quite cozy and domestic," said he. "But, really, I ought to be James."

Thalia turned to him swiftly; a little line had drawn itself between her eyes, which were dark and glowing.

"Can you think of nothing but James?" she demanded, with a little toss of her chin.

"But, Thalia——"

"It is just James, James, James. I must say I don't think that it is in very good taste, Mr. Dallas."

"Oh, come, Thalia, you know perfectly well——"

"I don't know anything," she replied sharply, "except that you seem to be very much upset because it is you and not James here in this cabin with me. I have *tried* to take good care of you and to be cheerful, and not to show how anxious I have been, and worried, and—and——" She turned away with a little stamp of her sandaled foot.

"But, Thalia, don't you see—don't you think I'm appreciative of your pluck and resource and cheerfulness and all that? I am thinking about *you*."

"Indeed! One would never guess it! It seems as though you were thinking of nobody but James!"

"I am sorry."

"So am I—very! I wish it were—James." She stopped and began to stroke the cat. Dallas, lying on the

platform, regarded her with a puzzled face.

"Do you really? Of course! Why shouldn't you?"

Outside, the late summer sunset had softened to a rich, delicious afterglow. Thalia got up suddenly and walked to the door, where she stood for a moment, breathing deeply the sweet evening air. A kid ran up to her and began to push its hard, downy little head playfully against her knees. The girl leaned down to stroke the small animal, then pushed one finger into the moist little mouth, when, play forgotten, it began to suck lustily and to bite with its baby teeth.

Dallas moved restlessly, when she turned and looked at him, her lovely face filled with shadows, and her eyes large and dark and inscrutable.

"I say, Thalia, you've had no supper."

"Indeed I have! Some corn bread and milk and cheese. That is a feast for an Albanian. You see, Mr. Dallas, you are of a different race and one accustomed to luxury, whereas I am a Shkipetari hill girl, and able to live royally where you would starve. To-night you can have only warm milk, because you are an invalid and there is danger of fever from your wounds. But tomorrow, if you are doing nicely, you shall have some eggs and other delicacies, and be as carefully fed and cared for as if you were—James. There is not a great deal to do with, but I shall do my best, Mr. Dallas."

"Stop calling me Mr. Dallas!"

Thalia did not answer. Presently Dallas said: "Where are you going to sleep?"

"On the floor in front of the fire."

"Indeed you shall do nothing of the sort! Besides, you have no blanket."

"But where else can I sleep? And I do not need a blanket. You see, I am just a Balkan hillwoman, and——"

"Stop it, Thalia! What is the matter with you?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"You shall sleep here. I am going to sleep in front of the fire myself."

"That is nonsense." Thalia crossed the room and walked to the side of the platform.

"I mean it. Do you think I'm going to pig everything, just because I've got a couple of buckshot under my pelt? I shall camp in front of the fire." Forgetting his wounded arm, Dallas shoved himself upright, then sat swaying giddily from the pain caused by the effort.

"Dallas! Don't! Can't you be good? Lie down! Oh, please, please, please! If you only knew how worried I am about you!" Thalia's rich voice broke.

The man was too weak to contend further, so it ended in the girl's having her own way in sleeping in front of the fire, while Dallas sank back, exhausted, onto the platform.

CHAPTER IX.

Dallas was awakened by a thin sunbeam which had found its way through a crevice in the shutters and was shining directly into his eyes. He blinked and sat up, dazed and bewildered.

A stab of pain in his arm brought him quickly back to a sense of his surroundings. The wound of his head did not bother him, but his side was very sore. Otherwise he felt himself quite fit and with no indication of fever.

Resting on one elbow, he looked about him with a smile. Outside, the jay birds were protesting violently at the late opening hours of their restaurant, and the goats were bleating expectantly. From the brightness of the sunshine, Dallas guessed that the day must be well advanced, but as door and shutters were closed, the light in the cabin was still deeply subdued.

Snuggled up against the young man

lay the yellow cat. In front of the fire slept the Lady Thalia; and Dallas, glancing with a smile from one to the other of his companions, found it impossible to determine which appeared to be the more at ease. Thalia's face was turned toward him; her cheek was on one palm, her lips slightly parted, and her wavy hair tumbled about her face, which was a little flushed and dewy with sleep. Her heavy, double-breasted tunic of homespun wool was loosened at the neck, and her soft throat looked very white and delicate against the rough fabric. In spite of her hard bed, she appeared to be sleeping as easily as a child tucked up in its crib.

As Dallas looked at her, his eyes grew tender. "Dear little girl," he thought. "No wonder James is crazy about her! Not many women could go through such an ordeal as yesterday and come out of it as fresh and undismayed."

He could not take his eyes from her, and perhaps the girl felt in her sleep the intensity of his gaze, for presently she sighed, yawned, straightened out her limbs like a pussycat, and sleepily pushed the hair back from her face with one small hand; then the long, dark lashes slowly lifted, and her tawny eyes looked straight into his. Wider they opened, and wider still, with an expression of such hopeless bewilderment that Dallas laughed outright. Then intelligence came flooding back, and her face turned rosy pink.

"Oh!" she gasped, and sat up, gathering her tumbled hair in both hands. Her lips parted with a smile of embarrassment.

"How do you feel?" she asked, a trifle breathlessly.

"Like a fighting cock. Did you have a good sleep?"

"Delicious! This mountain air! It got rather cold in the night, and I built up the fire. How do the wounds feel?"

"Wouldn't know that I had 'em! I think that they are going to close without making any trouble. There can't be much infection in this climate, and, besides, I always heal quickly."

Thalia leaned forward and began to lace up her sandals, then she rose and crossed the room.

"What are you up to now?" asked Dallas.

She threw him a saucy look. "I must give the baby his milk. Then I am going down for a dip in the river."

"You'll freeze!"

"I like cold water. Then I must milk the goats, and see if I can find some eggs for your breakfast. You are to lie still."

"It can't hurt me to get up."

"Yes, it can. You are to keep still."

"All right."

She threw him a suspicious glance, then went to the fire and heated some of the goats' milk, which Dallas drank with a wry face. Thalia laughed, then walked to the door of the cabin and threw it wide, letting in a flood of sunlight. On the threshold, she paused.

"Now I am going to bathe. Be good!" She blew him a little kiss.

"Stop it!" said Dallas.

"Stop what?"

"Throwing me kisses."

Thalia raised her eyebrows mockingly.

"What would James say?" growled Dallas.

"I hadn't thought."

"Well, you must think! What if I were to throw a kiss back to you?"

"Dreadful! What would Paula say?"

"Oh, bosh! Run along and take your bath, and be careful."

When she had gone, Dallas got up and went out into the fresh, fragrant morning. Rather to his surprise, he found himself a little unsteady on his feet; also he discovered that moving about gave him considerable pain in his wounded side. When Thalia returned,

fresh and glowing, she found him sitting on the threshold, basking in the warm sunlight.

"This is very naughty of you," said the girl. "Go straight back and lie down!" And Dallas was forced to obey.

Upon the man's repeated refusals to allow her to sleep another night on the floor, the Lady Thalia collected some loose willow boughs and made for herself a rough, but effectual, screen around the platform corner. She consented to this arrangement only after she had moved the sheepskins over in front of the fire, so that Dallas could rest there in comparative comfort.

The day wore on, and the two remained in undisturbed possession of the little cabin. When the late shadows began to lengthen, Dallas was permitted to get up, and the two sat upon the threshold and watched the crimson afterglow flaming the skies over the dim hills to the westward. From the valley beneath, came the deep, caressing murmur of the river, and a faint breeze brought to them the night smells of the forest, sweet with the odors of balsam and fern. Soon the darkness came, and the ruddy light from the fire began to dance and flicker on the walls of the cabin. Then Dallas was sent to bed again and fed more milk and a vegetable soup, thickened with cornmeal. For a while the two discussed the continued absence of their host, and what it might portend, and why it was that nobody came near the little cabin.

"He is probably a holy man," said Thalia, "and no doubt does miracles, and the herders are afraid to come near. There was once such a *santon* who lived on the top of a mountain not far from my father's castle. He was a very holy man, and very kind, but all the people were afraid of him because he used to talk with the dead and bring messages to the families of some of the Shkipetari from people who had

been killed in feuds or perhaps murdered. Nobody would go near his hut when he was away or in a trance. Perhaps this man is like that."

"Are you afraid of such things, Thalia?"

"A little." She threw an apprehensive glance about the cabin.

"Afraid of the dead?" asked Dallas, amused.

"I like live people better." She moved a little closer. "We Shkipetari are rather superstitious. But I have lived so much in England that I am not like the others."

"How did you come to live so much in England?"

"My father was a very enlightened man, and a great student. He sent me to Paris to school, and there I made the acquaintance of an English girl and used to visit at her home in England. Up here in these mountains it is different. But I am not afraid when I am with you."

CHAPTER X.

So the days went by, but the girl would not hear of their leaving the cabin until all the soreness should have gone from Dallas' wounds. No human being came near to disturb the peace of their little haven of refuge. Their life became a quiet routine of home-like duties: mornings Thalia milked the goats and ground maize, of which there was a plentiful store, and cooked their simple meals, scarcely permitting Dallas to lift a hand in physical work of any kind. Late in the afternoons, the two sat upon the threshold and watched the early autumn sunsets, discussing many things, and watching the coming of darkness.

One evening, as they sat at the cabin door, a splendid red-deer buck stalked out of the forest and stood for a moment stamping and snorting and watching the two with bright, curious eyes.

The night following, there was a great bleating and scurrying among the goats. Thalia threw open the shutters and flung out a blazing firebrand, when the tumult ceased. In the morning, they found the tracks of a wolf in the damp sand about the cabin.

And so a week passed. Then Dallas announced that he was fit for the trail. His wounds had healed, as a surgeon would say, by "first intention." The encysted buckshot caused him no inconvenience, and there seemed no reason why they should linger on.

The two took counsel sitting on the floor in front of the blazing fire. For some reason, both were sad at the thought of leaving the little home which they had come to regard as their own. Nothing had occurred to mar their perfect comradeship, although twice, when discussing the possible fate of their friends, Thalia had burst suddenly into a storm of self-reproach, asserting herself to be the cause of whatever tragedy might have happened and finishing in a paroxysm of tears. The second time, Dallas had thrown his arm about her shoulders and talked to her as soothingly as though she had been an overwrought child, a method which proved singularly effective. The frenzy of her grief abated, he had drawn a little apart and reasoned with her quietly until she had recovered her self-control.

From time to time the young man had talked to her of Sir James, describing his many admirable qualities and dwelling at some length upon the Englishman's oft-asserted devotion to herself and the many excellent results which might accrue to both if they were to marry. To all of this Thalia had listened with downcast eyes, an occasional sidelong glance, and a rather pale and inscrutable face.

"We can make Dakabar easily in two days, Thalia," said Dallas, as the two sat staring into the flames. "That scoundrel, Dimitri, told me that the trail

crossed the river at a ford a little above here."

Thalia nodded. "You are right," she answered listlessly. "We will go tomorrow. I will put some bread and boiled potatoes and chestnuts in a sack, and we will start. I suppose that the wolf will get the goats, and poor Mimi will have to catch mice, but you are right; we must not stay here any longer."

The odd note in her voice caused Dallas to look at her sharply. Thalia's face was quite pale, and her eyes were dark and misty.

"You speak as if you did not want to go," said he.

"Really?" She gave him a masked look. "Why should I want to stop here any longer?"

"I can't imagine. I should think that you could hardly wait to learn what has happened to Paula and James."

Thalia looked at him with glowing eyes and a bright red spot in either cheek.

"Of course I want to know what has happened to Paula and James," she retorted. "Have I not been nearly mad from anxiety? But I have tried to be patient, and not to show it, and have cooked and gathered wood and milked and slept on planks because I did not think that you ought to travel until your wounds were healed."

"Thalia!"

"And now you look at me with surprise and say 'We have wasted time enough.'"

"But I haven't said anything of the kind!"

"You have implied it!" Her voice rose slightly in pitch. "I'm sure I don't know what would have happened to you if we had started sooner."

"But, my dear little girl, don't you suppose that I appreciate——"

"No!" cried Thalia furiously. "I don't think that you have sense enough

to appreciate anything! Unless it is—James!”

“Thalia!”

“Or Paula!”

“Thalia! Stop it!” Dallas stared at her in bewilderment. Thalia looked back defiantly. Her chin was thrust out, and her eyes, somber and half veiled by their long lashes, were staring into the fire over the curve of her flushed cheeks. Her black hair, with its lurid tones of sienna, was tumbled about her ears, and her breath was coming quickly.

Dallas reached for her hand, but the girl snatched it angrily away.

“You’re overwrought, my dear, and I must say I don’t blame you,” said Dallas. “The strain has been enough to make any woman——”

“Oh, so you think I am complaining?”

“Not a bit of it; but I do think that you are feeling the strain of it all.”

“I am not feeling the strain of anything, unless it is that of being continually criticized and misunderstood.”

“But, Thalia, I understand.”

“Really?” Thalia’s red lip curled.

“Well!” cried Dallas, in desperation.

“Then what *is* the matter?”

“There is nothing the matter.”

“Then why are you so angry?”

“I am not angry. What is there to be angry about?”

“But why do you blame me for wanting to go on?”

“I am not blaming you. It is you who are blaming me, and hinting that I am not as anxious as I ought to be about Paula and—James!” She struck her sandaled foot repeatedly against the floor, then leaned over to tighten the thongs about her round ankle. “I know why you are so restless and anxious to be on.” She threw him a sidelong glance. “It is because your tobacco is all gone.”

“No,” answered Dallas softly; “it’s

because my—something else is almost gone.”

Thalia half turned her head and looked at him under lowered lashes.

“What do you mean?” she asked, rather breathlessly.

“I mean,” answered Dallas slowly, and without looking at her, “that you are the dearest and sweetest and loveliest woman I have ever known; and that sometimes I find it very hard to remember that my dearest friend has told me that he cares for you.”

Thalia looked at him fixedly, her amber eyes almost black, and the glare of the fire reflected crimsonly on her lovely face.

“But I don’t care for him,” she answered, in a very low voice.

“You ought to.”

“Oh, but I do in one way. He is splendid and chivalrous and straightforward, and of course I appreciate all that he has done for me. But”—her voice fell—“I don’t love him.”

Dallas looked into her face; his eyes were glowing like embers.

“But you did. At least you cared a good deal—before we went up the side of that mountain.”

“And what if I did? I had never told him so, nor had he ever said that he cared for me.”

“That’s because he’s too fine and generous, and you were, in a way, under his care.”

“And how about yourself? Did James tell me to let go when I was holding him half balanced on the side of a cliff? Did he tell me to let go for fear I’d be dragged over and killed, too?”

“He would have done so quickly enough if he had been the one,” muttered Dallas.

“I don’t doubt it!” Thalia gasped, and the words came pouring out pell-mell. “And did James fight for me? And was he wounded for me? And did I swim out and save him when he

was struggling in the current? And did I nurse him and feed him and——”

“Thalia, Thalia!” Dallas groaned. “Stop it! Oh, my dear, don’t you see how hard you are making it for me?”

She turned her lurid eyes to his.

“And don’t you suppose that you are making it hard for me, and have been right along, with your everlasting talk of James, James, James! Oh, Dallas, Dallas, it is *you* that I love! Just *you*, *you*, *you*! I have never loved anybody else! I shall never love any one else! Oh, my dear, my dear!” She began to sob, and her body swayed back and forth and threw dancing shadows on the cabin walls.

Dallas turned to her swiftly, his face very pale and his eyes aflame.

“Thalia! My own darling! I adore you!” His voice choked.

She turned her face to him, the tears sparkling on her cheeks. Dallas raised both arms, but before he could clasp her Thalia’s own were about his neck and her face crushed to his. Her sobs broke out afresh.

“Thalia!” cried Dallas, crushing her to him. “My own darling! I love you more than anything in the world.” He kissed the tears from the hot, flushed cheeks. “I shall tell James all about it, sweetheart. He is big and generous. He will understand. But, until I do, you must help me, dear, or I would despise myself for all the rest of my life.”

The minutes flew by, and still he held her close, talking to her soothingly until presently her sobs ceased and she looked up at him with a smile.

“Yes, dearest,” she whispered; “I understand. I will help you. And you really love me—and don’t love Paula?”

“Darling! I love only you!”

CHAPTER XI.

Noon of the following day found them climbing a high pass in the hills, with the river a silvery thread far be-

low. On either side was dense forest, alternating with bare, bowlder-strewn hillsides, and the air was fine and keen and filled with sunshine.

Presently their trail led out across the shoulder of a high hill, whence they were able to look away for leagues to the southward, over a wonderful expanse of hill and valley, the whole of which seemed to be inclosed by a high, broken wall of mountains blue with distance and filled with marvelous shadows of saffron and amethyst.

“Those are the north Albanian Alps,” said Thalia. “They form part of the southern boundary of Novibazar. My people came originally from the other side of that range, but the Turks drove them northward, and now we occupy those slopes which you see down toward the end of the valley. Near the castle where I lived when my father was alive, there are two little streams which rise almost side by side, and one of them flows into the Danube and the other into the Ægean Sea.”

“Really? And where does Prince Emilio come from?”

“From a place called Rascia, not far from the town of Novibazar. We are quite near neighbors; not more than a six-hour journey on foot.”

“Do you know this road, Thalia?”

“I have never been here before, but I know it a little farther on, where it strikes the valley of the Lim. Higher up it crosses the main road from Cetinje to Nis. Look, my dear!” She pointed down the steep slope. “Here come some people.”

Twice during the morning they had avoided other travelers. The first whom they had met were Mohammedan plum growers, packing down their dried prunes on a train of meager mountain ponies. The others were Serb swineherds, a savage, filthy crew.

Climbing up the precipitous bank, they crouched behind a clump of bracken and waited for the newcomers

to pass. These proved to be a troupe of *Chingéni*, or Balkan gypsies. They were a ragged lot of nomads, perhaps twenty in all, with warm, swarthy skins, features of markedly Hindu type, and dark, lustrous eyes. The *hamals*, powerful young fellows, were carrying packs almost as large as those borne by the dozen wretched ponies. Two young women, superbly made, were swinging easily up the steep incline, each with a child carried in a sort of sling. A lame man sitting astride an overloaded pony was playing a violin, and playing marvelously well, it seemed to Dallas. The caravan passed, chattering, up the trail, when the two refugees came out of their hiding place.

"They are striking across the mountains for the big road from Belgrade to Constantinople," said Thalia. "They will meet it on the Morava, then pass on up through Trajan's Gate, and probably hold right on for Stamboul, where no doubt they have their winter *mal-hallah*."

Presently the path began to descend, and a little later led through a gorge, marvelously beautiful, with bare, rocky walls and a cataract foaming at the bottom. The two had paused to admire the savage wildness of the place when Thalia exclaimed:

"Some one is coming!"

Dallas listened and heard the clatter of many hoofs on the rocky trail below them. He glanced quickly about for a place where they might get under cover, but there was none to be had. Above them rose sheer, bare crags, and below, the ground, while not very steep, was naked of bush or boulder.

"We shall have to run back up the trail," said he.

"Too late!" answered Thalia. "Here they come!"

"What are they—soldiers?"

A troop of horsemen had appeared around a curve of the road ahead and was approaching at a rapid walk. The

riders looked to be uniformed, and were armed with guns. But the two fugitives gave scarcely a glance at the men, for riding at their head was a colossal figure, khaki-clad, with a *kal-pak* of fine astrakhan set over a fierce, deep-lined face, which even at that distance portrayed its characteristic features of black, bushy eyebrows and heavy black mustache and imperial.

"Rosenthal!" cried Dallas.

At the same instant the Jew had recognized the fugitives. With a harsh exclamation, he spurred his horse forward to rein up with a jerk in front of them.

"*Sapristi!*" cried Rosenthal. "What luck! What good fortune! I was afraid you was killed!"

He flung himself from his horse, threw the reins to one of his men, and strode toward Dallas, his diabolic face working with emotion and one big hand thrust in front of him, the palm opening and closing spasmodically.

"Py chingo!" he cried, in his harsh voice. "But this is a pleasure to find you alive and unhurt!" He seized Dallas in his great arms and actually embraced him, then turned to Thalia and laughed. "*Sapristi!* But who is this handsome boy?" Before the astonished girl could avoid it, he had embraced her also, and would no doubt have kissed her on both cheeks had she not twisted her head aside. Rosenthal was bubbling over with delight. "Belief me, I could not be more overjoyed if I had sold my silver mines for one hundred thousand pounds. Nefer haf I been so worried! I had come to t'ink that you must haf been killed!"

He beamed upon them with a grin which was almost a physical violence in itself. His bushy eyebrows worked up and down, and his yellow teeth were bared like those of a grinning wolf. But the big, deeply scored, vital face was filled with such a real benevolence as to disarm its savagery of feature.

Dallas felt himself ridiculously like a runaway child caught while playing truant by a kind but undesired pedagogue. As for Thalia, the girl was regarding the big Jew with the peculiar expression of half repulsion, half fascination, which quite expressed the emotions with which he inspired her.

"But where haf you been, you naughty children?" cried Rosenthal. "Sapristi! If you only knew how I haf worried! And if you knew what a bad time I haf been giving Prince Emilio since I discovered it was all his doing!"

"His doing?" echoed Dallas.

"Ah, yes. You did not guess? You see, Dimitri was my man, and he had instructions to see that you came to no harm."

Dallas was staring at the Jew through narrow lids, and eyes as cold and green as jade.

"So it was all a trap arranged by you and Prince Emilio?" he asked.

"Let me egsplain," protested Rosenthal. "We knew, of course, that you were in Belgrade. Such foolish boys! Because, you see, you played right into our hands. I vas afraid that Thalia might haf appealed to the Turkish and Austrian ministers, and then we might haf had to let her go. But I t'ought that you would be there, and when I learned you were, I sent my man Dimitri to you. He is my confidential agent."

"He *was*," corrected Dallas grimly.

Rosenthal grinned at him like an indulgent parent.

"You shoted him! I do not plame you. Yes, he vas my confidential agent. I haf t'em eferywhere. You see, it all suited my plans and looked like a very easy way to get Lady Thalia safe to Rascia wit'out any fuss and scandal. I had told Dimitri to be sure that no one vas hurted."

"Rather tough on Dimitri that I

didn't have the same instructions," said Dallas ironically.

"Ah, my poor poy, you did r-right. Ven I had gone, Emilio bribes Dimitri to haf you two boys shoted. He has nefer forgiven you for that blow in the face. But then he is a pig of a Servian. Dimitri was to come and say that you resisted and were shoted, which might have happened."

"How did you find this out?" asked Dallas.

"From the gossip that goes over these hills, and then I made Emilio confess. It appears that there vas a hermit, a holy man, who put a stop to that nonsense and brought Sir Chames and Paula to Dakabar."

Dallas and Thalia exchanged glances of infinite relief.

"And Sir James' servant?" asked the girl.

"He is t'ere, too. Sir Chames got a buckshot in his neck, but he is not hurted bad. This hermit is now making lots of troubles at Dakabar. He is himself Albanian." He turned to Thalia. "It is Ishmi Bey."

"Ishmi Bey?" echoed the girl. "He was my father's dearest friend," she said to Dallas, "and he has a blood feud with Emilio."

Rosenthal nodded. "Yes," said he. "That was a very bad business. A band of Emilio's burned his house and carried away his wife und daughters. T'en he vent away and nobody knew what had become of him. Now he is back in Dakabar, gathering the Shkipetari from all ofer the hills. There is going to be troubles, and"—he grinned—"myselluf I am not so sorry, because I see a chance to get back my forty t'ousand pounds. But come, children! Ve must go."

"Go where?" demanded Dallas.

Rosenthal lifted his bushy eyebrows.

"To Rascia, of course," said he.

"Why not to Dakabar?"

The Jew shook his big head. "Ah,

my boy, you may go if you like; but Thalia must come with me. I am very sorry, but business is business. If she went back to Dakabar, she would spoil it all, and I would lose my forty thousand pounds."

Dallas bit his lower lip, and his face hardened.

"Look here, baron," said he suddenly, "we are your prisoners. If you will take us to Dakabar, I will buy your filthy silver mines and pay you forty thousand pounds."

For a moment Rosenthal stared. His big eyes opened very wide, and their hazel-colored spots seemed to grow more accentuated, while the outer corners of his bushy eyebrows were pushed up until they almost met his grizzled hair. Then suddenly he threw back his great head and roared with laughter. Still shouting hoarsely, he clapped Dallas on the shoulder, almost knocking the young man off his feet.

"By chingo, but it is funny! Excuse me if I laugh, Mr. Dallas, but it is so very funny! No! Business is business, but Isidor Rosenthal has not yet turned brigand! No! That would not be business!" And again the raucous laugh burst out, to come echoing back in hoarse cachinnations from the rocky wall on the other side of the gorge.

The Jew turned and mounted his big black horse, the back of which sagged under his great bulk. He gave a harsh order in the Serbo-Croatian tongue, at which two of the troopers dismounted.

"Come!" said Rosenthal, wiping his eyes with a silk handkerchief heavily scented with musk. "We must go, children. Get up on these horses. No"—he waved his big hand—"it is no use to argue, Mr. Dallas. You shall leave us where the road turns off for Dakabar, just beyond Iverntsk. The Lady Thalia must come with me to Rascia. Business is business"—he laughed again—"but Isidor Rosenthal is not yet a brigand!"

Seeing the utter futility of argument, Dallas put Thalia on her pony, and mounted himself when Rosenthal wheeled, and the little cavalcade moved forward. They descended into the valley of the Lim, then turned southeast. Rosenthal went on ahead, followed by some of his men, in the midst of whom rode Dallas and Thalia side by side, the dismounted troopers being left to find their way back on foot as best they might.

For several miles Dallas rode in silence, pale and furious, and answering Thalia's remarks in curt monosyllables.

"Who are these men?" he asked finally.

"Emilio's servants and guards."

"Soldiers?"

"No. The only actual militia in this country are Turks. You see, it is a Turkish *sanjak*. But Emilio stands very well with the Porte, and he is permitted to maintain a sort of constabulary to protect himself from the Shkipetari, who hate the Turks almost as much as they do the Serbs. You see, the whole state of affairs is horribly confused; and what the Turks want more than anything else is to keep the peace. As a result, they are friendly with both parties, so far as they can be."

"So we've got to part," said Dallas bitterly.

Thalia looked at him with a sad smile. "When you get to Dakabar," said she, "tell Ishmi Bey not to fight."

It was still early in the afternoon when the little cavalcade arrived at a village situated on the bank of the swift stream.

"Iverntsk," said Thalia. "The people of this *sadruga* were nearly all massacred a few years ago by one of Emilio's bands. The same old story. Emilio's people are mostly Christians of the Bulgarian Church, and his *sadruga* belongs to the orthodox Greek Church.

That is their method of converting each other."

The little hamlet appeared deserted as their troop clattered through. Opposite a modest edifice of mud and stone, Rosenthal drew in his horse, tossed the reins to a trooper, and swung his great body to the ground.

"This is a *han*—a tavern," he said to Dallas. "Let us dismount for a cup of coffee and some olives."

He lifted Thalia to the ground as if she had been a child. Dallas also dismounted, and all three were about to enter the door of the inn when one of the troopers called out sharply to a man who appeared to be the captain of the guard.

"What is that?" said Rosenthal. "Does he say that there are horsemen coming?"

He raised his hand for silence, and for a moment they stood listening. The white, dusty road led straight through the village, the small houses built close together and facing it on either side. At the extreme end of the street there was a high mud wall, above which one saw the dull green foliage of an olive orchard, and, beyond, the roof of a rather more elaborate dwelling than the others, apparently the home of the patriarch, or communal head of the *zadruga*. In front of this estate the road turned sharply at a right angle and was hid from view by some low mud cottages.

From this direction there came the distant rumble of many hoofs. The sound rapidly increased in volume, indicating that whatever the party which approached, it was traveling at a rapid pace. Rosenthal's Serbs were glancing from one to the other with knit brows and muttering interrogations, while the face of the big Jew himself wore an expression of extreme disgust.

"*Sapristi!*" he growled. "Who can this be?" He called out sharply to his

captain, who shrugged and answered a few guttural words.

"A Turkish *hamdié*," muttered Rosenthal, scowling. "*Peste!* But that will be embarrassing! I have no official permission to be leading a troop of armed men through these hills. The commanding officer will ask awkward questions. He will want to know why I did not refer this matter of looking for the Lady Thalia to him!" -

"And I shall tell him!" said Thalia maliciously.

Rosenthal threw her a look of reproach.

"*Peste!*" he growled. "You would not do that! You would not do anything so ungrateful!"

Dallas laughed outright, and the Jew grinned. At the same moment the rumble which had developed into a sharp clatter of many hoofs diminished. A cloud of dust rose suddenly over the low, tiled roofs at the end of the street, and the next moment the head of a column of horsemen turned the corner, then quickly halted.

There was a moment of silence, followed instantly by a clamor of voices from Rosenthal's men, and a sharp order from the captain.

The troop was thrown into confusion. With an oath, Rosenthal sprang to mount his horse. With one hand on the animal's neck and one foot in the stirrup, he turned to look at Dallas over his shoulder.

"Get out of the way!" he cried harshly. "Into the *han!* There is going to be a fight!"

But Dallas and the girl had scarcely heard his words. Their eyes were riveted on the horsemen clustered at the bend of the road, for at their head were Sir James, Connors, and a tall, bearded man in fez and tunic, who, even as they looked, snatched the yataghan from his sash and whirled the blade above his head.

"The Shkipetari!" cried Thalia.

Rosenthal's men, taken completely by surprise, were struggling to unsling their carbines. But the Albanian leader gave them scant time. Swinging in his saddle, he shouted a harsh order and pointed toward Rosenthal's Serbs with the blade of his yataghan. The next instant the Shkipetari were hurled in assault.

Dallas had barely time to drag Thalia up the steps and into the *han* before the Albanians had struck their enemy. The street was narrow, and the powdery dust of the road swept up in such dense swirling clouds that for several moments it was impossible to follow the fortunes of the fight. Horses and men were down, and the combatants were so tightly wedged as to be unable to use rifle or carbine. But the yataghans were busy; and presently, as the dust slightly settled, the two in the doorway of the *han* were able to see what was happening.

Sir James, his face as fierce as any of the savage ones about him, was firing to right and left. Once, at the elbow of the Englishman, they caught sight of Connors, who had emptied his revolver and was fighting with the steel, like those about him. A moment later, a gaunt, black-bearded man came hewing his way through with blows of terrific force and quickness, while his fierce face peered constantly this way and that as if in search of some one.

Thalia put her lips close to Dallas' ear. "That is Ishmi Bey," she said.

But the pivotal center of the fight was Rosenthal. Squarely in the middle of the street, the Jew's big bulk loomed through the swirling dust, while his harsh voice, admonishing friend and foe, rose above the din of the fight. He had been armed only with a carbine, but as the crush was so thick he had seized the weapon by the muzzle and used it as a club.

The uproar was appalling. Above the clash and clatter of steel rose the

yells of the Shkipetari and the screams of the wounded men and stricken horses; but over all blared out from time to time the deep-chested roar of the Jew. The Serbs were fighting for their lives, knowing well that no quarter would be given by their savage, kilted enemies, to whom such slaughter was as the very breath of their nostrils. The Shkipetari were considerably fewer in numbers, but no living bone and muscle could withstand the fury of their attack. Backward down the road they forced the Serbs, while the blinding dust rose thicker and thicker. Rosenthal alone appeared to hold his own; planted in the middle of the street, he fought like a huge, raging Mephistopheles, his clothes in ribbons and the blood streaming down his satanic face. Now and then Dallas caught a glimpse of Sir James; the Englishman had torn the carbine from the hands of a Serb and was fighting like the Jew, his weapon clubbed. Backward the Serbs were forced, struggling over the bodies of men and horses, until presently Rosenthal alone blocked the road. Ishmi Bey had fought his way on past him, and was the center of a swirling vortex, his streaming yataghan flashing up and down like a tongue of red flame.

By this time many of the Albanians were on their feet, leaping here and there, now pausing to thrust at a fallen enemy or springing aside to lash at a mounted one. Then a rift in the swirling dust showed Sir James knee to knee with Rosenthal. Dallas saw the Jew strike a savage blow, which the Englishman parried. With a hoarse shout, Rosenthal raised in his stirrups to strike again, when Connors, who had stuck close to the elbow of his master, sprang forward and cut savagely at the Jew with his yataghan. Rosenthal parried with his gun barrel, but the blade glanced and found the side of his shaggy head. The Jew swayed in

his saddle, then lurched sideways and came crashing to the ground.

Sir James and Connors wheeled to plunge again into the fight, which had surged on down the street. Dallas leaped from the doorway, and, seizing Rosenthal under the arms, dragged his huge bulk across the threshold of the inn. The road was strewn with men and horses, while the fight itself was completely veiled in the swimming clouds of dust, which presently began to dissolve when from the distance came the sound of scampering hoofs. What was left of the Servian troop had broken into flight.

Dallas and Thalia stared at each other with pale faces. At their feet the body of the big Jew heaved convulsively, then struggled to a sitting posture. From head to foot the man was a grimy mass of blood and dust, and his breath was coming in great, labored gasps. For a moment he looked about vacantly; then the expression came back into the big brown eyes with their multiple hazel dots.

"*Mein Gott!*" he panted. "It vas not vort' it! Forty t'ousand pounds! Bah!" He raised both hands to a long, jagged cut on the side of his head, from which the blood was oozing sluggishly.

"So you're not dead?" said Dallas.

"I don't t'ink so. But I deserf to be! Forty t'ousand pounds! Bah!"

He spat and wiped his mouth with the back of his grimy sleeve, then looked up at Thalia and grinned.

"*Sapristi!* I do not like to fight! It is not goot business, and bad for the health! *Sapristi!* But it is very bad for the health. I might easily have been killed, and then of what good would be my forty t'ousand pounds? And t'ink of the grief of my dear vife in Buda-Pesth! But vat could I do?" He spread out his grimy hands apologetically. "You cannot arbitrate ven a friend is clubbing at you vit' a gun barrel!"

"Let me tie up your head," said Thalia.

"T'anks. Sir Chames is a goot boy. It vould haf broken my heart to haf split his skull. *Mein Gott!* Vat a business!"

CHAPTER XII.

Dallas and Thalia, with the assistance of a few of the frightened villagers, were doing what they could for the wounded when up rode Sir James and Connors, both covered from head to foot with blood and dust, but neither seriously hurt. Some distance behind them strode the tall, bearded man whom Thalia had recognized as the hermit, Ishmi Bey.

Sir James dismounted and came toward them, his grimy face glowing with delight.

"Thank God!" he cried huskily. "We had almost given you up. We were starting out to look for you this morning when we ran headfirst into this gang of Emilio's. I tried to prevent a row, but there was no holding Ishmi Bey and the Shkipetari."

He took Thalia's hand in both of his and carried it to his lips, then turned to Dallas with glistening eyes.

"Might have known you'd win through, old chap! I say, that was a ripping shot you made on Dimitri! It was all a put-up job of those two scoundrels, Rosenthal and Emilio."

"Rosenthal had nothing to do with the plan to murder us," said Dallas.

"Didn't he? I'm glad of that. It didn't seem to me like the old baron to play that sort of a filthy game. Too bad! If we had known that, we'd have passed him by just now."

"He's not much hurt," said Dallas.

Sir James' face expressed relief. "Glad of it," said he heartily, then glanced up to see the baron himself standing in the door of the *han*, his head swathed in bandages.

"Hello, baron!" called the English-

man heartily. "Glad you were not killed, old chap."

"T'anks. And I am glad you were not hurted, Sir Chames. This fight vas not of my choosing. Now I am finished. My forty t'ousand pounds can go to the devil. I am not afraid to say ven I am beat. Vonce I vas beaten in Macao by a Chinaman, and vonce in Hayti by a nigger named Fouchère. Now I am beat in the Balkans by two boys and two girls." He grinned.

Sir James looked about him and shook his head.

"Nasty work," said he, "but there was no help for it. When our crowd saw these people of Emilio's, they went crazy. We had better get to Dakabar as soon as we can, or there will be a hanged sight worse row than this. The Shkipetari have been pouring in from the mountains, and nothing will do but they must attack Emilio."

"How is Paula?" Dallas asked.

A peculiar expression of embarrassment appeared on the battle-stained face of the Englishman.

"She is very well, but awfully worried about you two."

Ishmi Bey had greeted Thalia, and the two were talking in low tones. The surviving Albanians had come straggling back, a few mounted and some on foot. There was not a man of them who did not carry some wound.

"Let's get out of this," said Sir James, "before we have a Turkish *saptié* down on our backs. The whole thing is a bit irregular."

"How about the wounded?" asked Dallas.

Sir James shrugged. "The villagers will have to look after them. They will do it, I fancy, for fear of both parties." He turned to Rosenthal. "How did you leave the dear prince, baron?"

"I am finished vit' Emilio," he answered harshly. "I do not hold vit' murderers and assassins, Sir Chames.

If you do not object, I vill go to Dakabar."

CHAPTER XIII.

Two hours later found them winding up into the hills. At the head of the cavalcade strode the tall, gaunt figure of Ishmi Bey, walking at the stirrup of the Lady Thalia, with whom he was in earnest conversation. A short distance behind them, Rosenthal rode alone, sitting his big horse droopingly, a huge and somewhat dejected figure, with his massive head swathed in bandages. Sir James and Dallas came next, followed by Connors and such of the Albanians as were fit to travel.

"There is going to be the very deuce of a row, Stephen," said Sir James. "The most of the inhabitants of this *sanjak* of Novibazar are south Slavonic Serbs. This whole district is the cradle of the Servian race, and the Prince Emilio is the ranking feudal chief. Thalia, on the other hand, is pure Albanian, only connected to Emilio by marriage, and her people are all Albanian, Græco-Latin stock, and descendants of the ancient Illyrians. They have no fixed religion; they are Christians of both Greek and Bulgarian Churches and Mohammedans of all grades. The Turks first drove them up into these hills, and so they hate the Turks, and the Serbs have always been trying to drive them back again, and so they hate the Serbs. Also they are forever fighting among themselves, and so they hate one another."

"A cheerful crowd," observed Dallas.

"Are they not? They have always got to be fighting somebody. When Constantine Bey, Thalia's father, was alive, he did a lot to keep the peace, and in reward got assassinated himself. His friend and cousin, Ishmi Bey, laid the murder to Emilio's door, and Emilio discovered it, and one night paid him a visit and burned his castle and carried off his womenkind."

"Nice young man, Emilio."

"Quite so. He appears to have formed the habit. Ishmi Bey was not strong enough to retaliate, and finally appears to have decided that he was cursed of Allah, and hauled off into the woods and built himself the cabin which you and Thalia found, and turned holy man. When he heard the firing, he came across the river and persuaded the herders to clear out, and then conducted us to Dakabar. We did not worry about you as much as we might have done, because one of the herders came back and said that you had shot three of the gang and got across the river unhurt. So we hurried along, hoping to overtake you on the trail to Dakabar. It never occurred to us that you might be wounded, as the last that we heard was the crack of your 30-40."

Dallas nodded. "I should not have been shot if I hadn't been a fool," he said.

"When we found nothing of you," continued Sir James, "we hurried on to Dakabar, collected a mounted force, and came back the next day to look for you. This is the third searching expedition that we have made, and this time we took a strong party with the idea of combing the hills all over the place until we got some news of you. Meanwhile, Ishmi Bey has passed the word into the hills that the Prince Emilio has tried to murder the Lady Thalia and her party, and the Shkipetari have been pouring into Dakabar from all sides. There must be five hundred of them there now, all spoiling for a fight, and I do not think that Thalia and Ishmi Bey combined can keep them from attacking Emilio within the next forty-eight hours. They are led by a crazy fanatic, Sheik Izzat, and they mean to make a clean sweep of Emilio and all his tribe."

"I should like to be at the party," said Dallas.

"So should I. We've got a little score with Emilio. Suppose we go along."

"All right. I might even so far forget myself as to take a snapshot at his highness if opportunity offered. How did Paula stand the ordeal?"

Sir James glanced up quickly, and his swarthy color grew slightly darker. Dallas, staring between his pony's ears, failed to observe the confusion of his friend.

"Like a veteran," answered Sir James. "I got a slug through the muscles of the neck, and she——" He paused awkwardly. Dallas, intent on his own thoughts, did not notice it. For a while the two friends rode in silence; then Sir James remarked in a voice slightly different from his usual tone:

"Odd how sharing mutual danger appears to draw people together."

Dallas glanced at him sharply. "Why shouldn't it?" he asked.

Sir James' swarthy color deepened, and for a moment he did not answer.

"Look here, Stephen." He turned abruptly to his friend. "Do you consider that a situation can arise such as—er—the sharing of mutual danger, which could possibly justify—or at least—h'm—ah—extenuate the circumstance of a man's forgetting his duty to a friend where—h'm—ah—a woman was concerned?"

Dallas turned and stared at him with a rigid face. He could scarcely believe his ears. He had intended at the first opportunity to tell Sir James of all that had passed between Thalia and himself, and to offer such amends as lay within his power. But to be, as he supposed, subjected to an inquisition which was founded on mere suspicion and narrow-minded jealousy aroused his quick and keen resentment.

Sir James met the steely look, and his own face hardened. Then he glanced away, flushing crimsonly, and began to tug at his wiry mustache.

"No," said Dallas curtly, "I don't. Do you?"

"Er—er—no," answered Sir James; then blurted out: "Theoretically."

Dallas regarded him through narrowed lids.

"Suppose we drop the woman part of it, James," said he, in his coldest voice, "until we get this other business off our hands."

"Quite so," said Sir James, and the two fell silent again.

CHAPTER XIV.

The full hunter's moon hanging poised above the silvery crest of the Dovo-Dagh looked down upon a wild and savage host as it wound up through the forested defiles of the north Albanian Alps.

For the Shkipetari were afoot and moving swiftly and silently to strike at the throat of their hereditary foe. An odd five hundred mountaineers had rallied at the hot message sent into the hills by Ishmi Bey, holy man and martyr to the cruelty of Prince Emilio. Foul wrong had been done to the Lady Thalia, daughter of their hereditary chief, and even more, and that which brought a savage oath to the lips of every shaggy Arnaut to whom the message reached, the prince was plotting to sell themselves and their free hills to the hated Servians.

For several days they had come dropping into Dakabar, singly or in squads. Fierce-visaged fathers had stalked down from their mountain fastnesses, their half-grown sons at their heels. Many were of different sects, blood enemies, victims or victors of sanguinary family feuds; but these, while eying askance the members of rival clans, had laid aside their private wrongs for the common cause.

Arms and costumes differed widely. There were men clad only in sheepskins, with the wool turned in, and

tight-fitting caps of white; others were more elaborately dressed in *kalpaks* of black wool, sometimes of astrakhan, with short, full-sleeved tunics, white kilts, woolen stockings, and shoes of red leather, with tufts of black wool upon the toes. Nearly all the men carried guns—long weapons with narrow barrels, often richly ornamented with tracerics and patterns wrought in silver and gold. Every one was armed with the weapon so dear to the native heart, the yataghan.

There were sheiks among them, and priests of both Greek and Bulgarian Churches, who eyed each other askance and with more vindictiveness than they did the devotees of Islam. The entire horde—for it could scarcely be called an army—was under the nominal command of one Sheik Izzat, himself a hermit who had gone half mad as the result of wrong dealt him by the Turks. But once in motion, there was no pretense of leadership. The object of the expedition as understood by all was to strike a final and fatal blow at the hated stronghold of the prince, and every man would fight his own fight in his own way.

So, as they strode along with the swift, springy step of the mountaineer, there was no dissension in the ranks. Mussulman jostled shoulders with Christian; pastoral feuds between herders and maize growers were forgotten; men from different valleys looked at each other for the first time without the hand going to the hilt of the yataghan. If there were any rivalry, it was only as to who should strike first, hardest, and last.

At the head of the "column," if so it could be called, Sir James rode at the side of Ishmi Bey, with whom he conversed in French. The holy man had done his best to persuade the mountaineers to return peacefully to their homes. But, once gathered, it had proven impossible to disband them. In

the end they had clamored for Sheik Izzat to lead them against Rascia, when Ishmi Bey had accompanied the horde in the hope of giving such direction as he could to the evolutions of what was little better than a savage mob.

For some distance the road passed through heavy forest. The wind was blowing a clear gale; overhead, the treetops swayed and crashed, filling the air with their flying leaves, while the brilliant moonlight filtered through in swirling splashes of silvery light.

They wound up through a defile, skirted the flank of a mountain, and emerged presently upon a bare, boulder-strewn hillside, against which the moon blazed with startling brilliancy. The path ascended in a series of zig-zags, and at the top of the wind-swept ridge, Ishmi Bey drew rein. Dallas and Connors slipped from their horses, and the four men turned to look back upon the following Shkipetari.

The effect was curious and startling. Below them the vivid moonlight shone and glittered from the huge, fantastic boulders which were composed of a gneiss and mica schist, and which flashed back the shimmering rays until all the hillside seemed a vast heap of gleaming gems. Blackest shadows lay here and there, alternating patches of glowing moonlight. Slipping invisibly from these areas of gloom to flitter across the patches of bright light came a swarm of leaping figures, now appearing, now disappearing, suggesting trolls issuing from the depths of the earth to pilfer a Titan treasure-trove. Ignoring the zigzag path, they came springing straight up the steep hillside, and as they crossed the open spaces the yataghans and the gun barrels threw back the brilliant moon rays in flashes of pale-blue flame.

Far beneath, the still valley slumbered under a light veil of mist, through which shone faintly the silvered glint of the river. On all sides tumbled

the rough shoulders of the hills, their crests rimmed with white fire, and shadows of wondrous depths upon their breasts. Over the ridge swept the high wind in clear, cold blasts.

The route led along the top of the hill, then down a bare slope to the stony bed of a torrential stream, the water of which was very low and could be seen only in broad, standing pools. The gully worn by the cataract was over one hundred yards in width and choked with masses of loose rock and stone. Beyond it the bank rose steeply to meet the heavy forest, and a little distance downstream there was a rift between the hills, which marked the course of the trail to Rascia.

As Ishmi Bey was indicating this opening to Sir James, there suddenly emerged from the gloom of the forest a little squad of horsemen, which rode out into the full light of the moon, where it halted as if to reconnoiter.

The hermit reined his pony sharply backward under the crest of the hill, and Sir James did likewise.

"Who are those men?" whispered Ishmi Bey. "Our own scouts were unmounted. Let us watch for a moment."

The Shkipetari were springing up all about them. Ishmi Bey turned and gave a sharp order in the guttural Gegh dialect spoken by the tribes who live north of the River Shkumbi. The words were passed quickly from mouth to mouth, and the tribesmen sank to earth, then crawled up to peer down into the valley beneath.

The horsemen had disappeared against the shadow of the forest. A few moments later they came into sight again in the river bottom, dismounted, and leading their horses among the stones. Presently they passed under the near bank and were lost to view, to reappear immediately at the foot of the slope. Here they paused as if in consultation, and seemed to scan the

ridge above. Perhaps some instinct warned them of the ambush spread along its summit, for they seemed unwilling to proceed. They were still standing there, inky blotches against the brilliant background, when a dark column began to emerge from the forest across the valley.

A guttural whisper arose from the Shkipetari; its sibilant undertone was caught up in the fierce gusts of wind and swept from mouth to mouth. Ishmi Bey, crouching beside Sir James, turned his head, and his white teeth shone through his heavy beard.

"The prince!" he muttered in French. "He has heard that the Shkipetari were mustering to attack him at Rascia, and has decided to strike first himself at Dakabar!"

Across the river the dark column crawled like a thick, black serpent from the forest, turned to the left, and disappeared again in the sightless shadows which cloaked the rim of the bank. A troop of cavalry had appeared and apparently halted, when a column of infantry followed, and likewise disappeared.

"It is but a mouthful for the Shkipetari," whispered Ishmi Bey exultantly. "There are perhaps fifty horsemen and twice that number of foot, while we are over five hundred strong. We will strike when the cavalry is crossing the river bed."

He hurried off in search of Sheik Izzat, and a moment later the two dark figures could be seen flitting here and there among the mountaineers.

At the foot of the slope the horsemen forming the advance guard had remounted, and were riding slowly up the hill. At the same time the forward files of the cavalry came out of a gully in the opposite bank, leading their horses among the boulders and débris, until presently the entire column was in the river bed. The scouts were advancing slowly and as if in

doubt, for those in ambush could see the white moonlight on their faces as they turned them continually upward.

The six doomed men were within fifty yards of the summit when the Sheik Izzat sprang suddenly to his feet and with a savage scream waved his yataghan aloft. His cry was lost in the crash of a volley, the detonation of which was whirled on high and swept away on the gusty winds. Down went horses and riders, a struggling heap. Up rose the Shkipetari, but even more quickly Ishmi Bey had sprung in front of them and was waving them back with frantic words and furious gestures.

For a moment they paused. Ishmi Bey, a mad, whirling figure in the moonlight, poured out a frenzied torrent of speech. A few of the Shkipetari sprang forward, but the hermit, giant that he was, seized them by the shoulders and flung them back. Then Sheik Izzat, the blade of his yataghan a glittering circle over his head, plunged down the slope, howling furiously. With a roar, the Shkipetari were on and after him.

Ishmi Bey, who had been overthrown by the rush, sprang to his feet and shook his clenched fists with a gesture of passionate despair. He turned toward Sir James, and cried out something which Dallas could not hear. But the Englishman had understood. He looked at his friend with a pale and horror-stricken face.

"Good Heaven!" he cried. "It is not the prince at all! *Those are Turkish troops!*"

Silent and dismayed, they watched the furious combat in the valley beneath. Although more than doubly outnumbered, surprised, and taken at a disadvantage, the Turkish *hamdié* was not thrown into confusion. Well drilled, well disciplined, well officered, and well armed, the Shkipetari could not have found in all the country a

more difficult mouthful to swallow than the Turkish mounted militia.

At the first wild clamor and volley from the hilltop, there had been a quick, sharp order, and in the two minutes which it took the tribesmen to reach the foot of the hill the troopers had unslung their carbines, released their horses, and were deployed among the rocks. At the same moment the company of infantry, which was marching in column of fours and hidden in the shadow of the woods, was halted, then advanced in line of skirmishers along the farther bank, so that when the Shkipetari reached the watercourse, they ran pell-mell into a very nasty trap. Had they possessed any leadership or tactics, they might have halted and deployed on their own bank, when they could have engaged the enemy under fire and effected considerable damage. But, frenzied as they were, when once started, there was no holding them. Down they poured into the watercourse, yataghan in hand, only to be met by a volley at point-blank range from Turkish Mausers in the hands of marksmen who needed nothing better than the brilliant moonlight.

But although a number fell, the tribesmen did not waver. Into the rocks they leaped, agile as otter hounds and just as fierce. And here the slaughter began. For the yataghan, although an admirable weapon when opposed to steel, stands little chance against a bullet, and it was steel-jacketed lead at close range with which the troopers fed them. Then after the first few moments of scattering fire, finding nothing at which to aim in the leaping, darting figures, here came the infantry, charging down the bank with fixed bayonets, when the engagement promptly broke into a series of furious hand-to-hand combats.

If the Shkipetari came to recognize their mistake in the identity of their foe, they did not seek to remedy it.

The battle rage had seized them, and the Turks themselves, though not the folk whom they had come to seek, were their hereditary enemies. Straight into the muzzles of the rifles rushed the Albanians, and in the bright light of the moon the watchers on the hilltop were witnesses to acts of the most desperate fury. Here a screaming mountaineer took a bullet through the body at a range of two yards, only to rush in and beat aside the soldier's rifle and cut him down with the yatghan; near him an Albanian with a bayonet through his vitals was striving to reach with a thrust of his long, sinewy arm the man who held it. Wounded Shkipetari crawled on hands and knees to get within striking distance of a foe, praying only to kill one man before death overtook them.

Yet for all of their frenzied fighting, the injury inflicted by the Shkipetari was but very slight, while that which they suffered was terrific. In less time than it takes to tell, a third of them were down, and then, as though recognizing the hopelessness of the struggle, the tribesmen suddenly lost heart and the place was filled with flying figures, retreating not back in the direction whence they had come, but on down the watercourse, toward a spot where the forest grew to the edge of the bank. A moment later they had melted into the sheltering woods, leaving only their dead and dying and a few dark figures crawling away to hide in recesses among the rocks.

Sir James turned to Dallas a face which was drawn and tense.

"How do you feel?"

"Rather sick. And you?"

"What a beastly shame! That infernal fool of a sheik!"

Ishmi Bey, crouching in front of them, rose to his feet.

"What can one do with madmen?" he asked, throwing out his hands. "I had just recognized the uniform of the

hamdié when Sheik Izzat gave the order to fire. Come, my friends, we must go. If we are found here, we shall be shot."

They crawled back over the ridge, remounted their ponies, and rode in silence back down the trail. At the end of an hour the road led out upon a wind-swept ridge, and they saw below them the village of Dakabar.

"The work of to-night is an example of the guile of Prince Emilio," said Ishmi Bey bitterly, as they rode down the steep hillside. "He heard of the coming of the Shkipetari and sent word of it to the nearest Turkish *caracol*. Now the work has been done for him at no cost, and we may expect to see him here at Dakabar with a band of his Serbs!"

The house of the Lady Thalia was situated on a thickly wooded plateau a little above the village, and was surrounded by a park. As the four men rode in through the massive gates, they saw at the far end of the straight avenue several horses standing in the bright patch of moonlight in front of the main entrance to the house.

"Halt!" said Ishmi Bey, under his breath.

They drew rein and peered down the dark, tunneled driveway. Overhead the high wind was roaring through the treetops, but the foliage was still thick enough to screen the light of the moon.

"Who can that be?" whispered Sir James.

"I do not know," answered the hermit. "Perhaps it is the prince himself. Let us go forward quietly."

They advanced cautiously. Almost at the end of the drive they again drew rein.

In front of the door were six horses, saddled and bridled, and held by three men. Suddenly one of the animals raised its head and whinnied, when, before he could prevent it, Dallas' mount neighed in answer.

The three unmounted men turned quickly and stared down the drive. Then one of them handed his reins to a comrade, ran up the steps, and rapped sharply on the big oaken door. Immediately it was swung open, showing a lighted interior, and a moment later a short, thickset figure stepped across the threshold and stood for a moment in the full blaze of the moon.

Dallas heard at his elbow a quick, indrawn breath, and turned to see Ishmi Bey, his head thrust forward like a hound in leash.

"The prince!" growled the hermit, and drew his yataghan.

Dallas leaned toward Sir James. "It is Emilio," he whispered. "He has come for Thalia!"

Sir James' answer was to draw his own blade. He turned to Ishmi Bey.

"There are only six of them!" said he. "Let's make a rush!"

"Hold on!" said Dallas. "This is pistol work, James!"

"Steel for me! Ready, Connors?"

"Nivir more so, sorr!" growled the Irishman, and drew his heavy revolver.

"Then come on!"

The gravel churned under the ponies' hoofs as they sprang forward. Out of the shadow they flew, neck and neck, and dashed across the lighted space. A cry burst from the prince, and they saw him snatch a pistol from his belt. The horses held by the two troopers, frightened by the crash of hoofs, tugged violently backward, dragging the men after them.

At the first alarm two more men had appeared in the wide, open doorway. The prince raised his weapon and fired. At the foot of the steps, Dallas reined in with a jerk and began to shoot from the saddle. "*Pank! pank! pank!*" barked the deadly automatic arm, and one of the men beside the prince pitched forward and came headfirst down into the road. But Dallas' horse, frightened at the reports, was fighting to bolt,

and the other shots flew wide. Ishmi Bey was on his feet and leaping for the steps. Connors had killed one guard and wounded the other, but Sir James' pony, struck by a bullet from the prince's weapon, had reared and fallen backward across his rider, pinning him to the ground.

Dallas swung from the saddle, and rushed after the hermit, and Connors, pausing to haul Sir James from under his horse, followed him. At the top of the steps the man beside the prince thrust his revolver almost against the broad chest of Ishmi Bey and fired, then leaped back across the threshold, dragging the prince after him, and swung to the heavy door. But Ishmi Bey, who had reeled backward when shot, recovered himself, and, lurching forward, thrust the blade of his yataghan between the door and the jamb, when all four men threw their weights against it. Slowly it gave, to the noise of scuffling feet within; then a blade licked out through the aperture, and Connors dropped with an oath and went rolling down the steps.

"Stand clear!" panted Dallas, and, drawing back, fired two shots through the oak panel. At the same moment the door swung violently open, and they burst into the room.

Two thundering reports roared out, and Ishmi Bey staggered back against the wall. A swarthy man sprang at Sir James with a wicked slash of a cavalry saber, but the Englishman caught the blow on his yataghan, then thrust his antagonist through the body. Dallas, peering under the smoke, saw the prince and another man standing behind a large table in the middle of the room. He fired quickly into the smoke, and saw the man at the prince's elbow fall. Then the prince himself fired, and Dallas felt the wind of the bullet on his cheek. At the same moment Ishmi Bey sprang forward, when the prince turned and ran to a door

at the far end of the hall. With his hand on the latch the hermit overtook him, driving his yataghan so violently between the prince's shoulders that the blade transfixed the panel of the door.

At Dallas' right there rose the clash and clatter of steel, and he turned to see Sir James engaged with a man who had been hiding behind the arras at the other end of the hall. The room was dimly lighted by three lamps, but the farther recesses were buried in shadow, and as Dallas glanced warily about his quick eye was caught by a moving figure in one of these. His deadly weapon flew up, and even as it did so a scream from Sir James' antagonist told that the duel was finished. Simultaneously there boomed out from the lower end of the hall a harsh and raucous voice:

"Don't shoot! It vas I—Rosenthal—and the ladies!"

Dallas lowered his weapon, staring in amazement through the heavy, suffocating smoke. Sir James was leaning against the table, looking in the same direction, his breath coming in gasps, and a thin red stream running from the point of his yataghan. At the end of the hall lay the bodies of Ishmi Bey and the Prince Emilio, whose death struggle had snapped the blade which transfixed him. Dallas crouched lower to peer under the blinding smoke.

In the extreme corner of the room the huge bulk of the Jew was dimly defined through the vaporous gloom. He was standing erect, his big arms spread out, his hands braced against the wall on either side. As the two men stared, the Jew, who had been looking cautiously to right and left, let his arms drop to his side and stepped forward, when there appeared to their astonished eyes the dark-clad figures of the Lady Thalia and the Countess Paula Rubitzki.

"You can come oudt, ladies," said Rosenthal. "It is all ofer."

"Upon my word!" gasped Sir James. "Have you been there all the time?"

"Yes, Sir Chames. There was no time to get out of the way; you came so quickly. I was afraid the ladies might get shot, so I pushed them into the corner and stood in front of them. *Mein Gott*, a bullet went into the wall an inch from my head. I can see nothing for the plaster in my eyes."

"Good for you," grunted Dallas.

The two girls came forward shrinkingly, their faces very pale and their eyes wide with horror, for the room was a smoke-filled shambles.

"Where's Connors?" asked Sir James suddenly.

"He got a sword thrust," said Dallas, "and rolled down the steps as we came in."

Sir James went quickly out. The others, dazed by the violence through which they had just passed, stood for an instant regarding one another in silence. Then Dallas started on a tour of inspection, accompanied by Rosenthal, whose massive head was still swathed in bandages.

Ishmi Bey and the prince were both quite dead; so was the man at whom Dallas had fired, while the two victims of Sir James' yataghan appeared to be dying, both having been run through the chest.

"*Sapristi!*" said Rosenthal. "How far hate will take a man! Especially when he is a holy man. Here is Ishmi Bey with four bullet holes in his body, one of them over the heart, and yet he has lived to kill the prince."

As he spoke, Sir James entered the room. The Englishman's eyes were brimming over, and his face was pale and drawn.

"Dead?" asked Dallas.

Sir James could only nod. Followed by Rosenthal, Dallas hurried out of the house. They found the brave Irishman lying on his back at the foot of

the steps, stone dead, his revolver still clenched in his hand.

As they reëntered, Dallas paused on the threshold. Sir James had sunk into a chair, his elbows on the table, his chin on his knuckles, staring into vacancy. Beside him stood Paula, her hand resting on his shoulder. Dallas looked, and suddenly understood. His gray eyes opened very wide. He stepped quickly to his friend.

"James, old chap, I am sorry."

Rosenthal's heavy voice broke the silence which followed:

"Where are the Shkipetari? What happened you?"

In a few brief words Dallas told the Jew of what had befallen the Albanians. Rosenthal's face grew very grave.

"*Sapristi!* We must get out of here at once. The Turks will hold Thalia responsible. Come, Sir Chames, let us bury your man and get away. Thalia, find your servants and have them saddle some horses. We must lose no time to get across the border into Montenegro!"

CHAPTER XV.

A soft breeze from the Adriatic sighed and whispered through the lofty tops of the great pines which rose straight and dark and solemn from the brim of the high plateau. The yellow moon, which two nights before had looked down, cold and bright and merciless, upon the slaughter of the Shkipetari, now shone with a fervor almost caressing in its luscious warmth, tempered by the soft air from the sea.

Far below the rolling hills swelled away to infinity, bathed in luminous disorder, their crests converted into islands of enchantment, rising from the sea of mist which filled the valleys.

Side by side, at the foot of one of the big forest sentinels, Dallas and the Lady Thalia sat upon the carpet of aromatic pine needles and looked out

upon the moonlit wilderness. Not far beneath them on the mountainside there sparkled a light or two from the little inn where the refugees had halted for the night.

Presently Dallas spoke, his voice subdued to the murmur of the gentle breeze in the treetops, high above their heads.

"Dear, to-morrow you will have to say good-by to your savage mountains. Cettinjé is over there"—he pointed toward the vague distance before them.

"Am I never to see my hills again, Stephen?" asked the girl.

"It's hard to tell, sweetheart. Perhaps some day we may come back for a visit. But your home is going to be very far away from them."

"Where, dearest?"

"In my own country, Thalia. I've been too long away. We Americans are not built for the silly, aimless life that I've been leading; we are meant for strife and action and keen effort."

"*You* are." She nestled closer.

"I'm afraid," said Dallas, "that I'm not as civilized as I thought I was. Do you know, dear, I have never felt so fit and happy in my life as I have back there in your hills. The hardship and the danger and all seemed to fill some long-felt want. I could never go back to the insipid life in Paris, after this!"

"I'm glad, Stephen. I am not so very tame myself, you know!" She laughed caressingly, and took his hand in both of hers. "We're well mated, aren't we, dear?"

He drew her to him, and held her there, his lips resting against her cheek.

"I am afraid that we are two savages, dear. Your fathers were Shkipe-tari and spent their time in carving the Turks with their yataghans. Mine were Texas Rangers, and spent *their* time in carving up greasers with bowie knives. There's not much to choose! Then you and I come along, and are sent to school

in France and told to be polite. And at the very first chance we trot out and shoot up the country as naturally and joyfully as if we had been taught to do it! But it shows me where I really belong; and of course you belong with me."

Thalia seized his wrists, and turned to stare at him with large and startled eyes.

"Do you mean that you are going back to America to fight with—what do you call them—greasers? And Indians, perhaps? Oh, no, no, Stephen! What if you should be killed?"

Dallas took her in his arms. "No, darling," said he. "Those days are past. We are going to be married and live in a peaceful country enough, but one where a man does a man's work—and makes other men do it, too! I don't know what mine will be; but I have inherited big responsibilities, dear—railroads and factories and great tracts of half-savage country to be developed—and I am going back to develop it—and myself! And you shall help!"

"I shall try, dear." Thalia's voice was tremulous. "Do you think that I can really help? And, oh, Stephen"—a sob rose in her throat—"will you love me always and truly, when you have me all alone in that big, far-away country of yours?" She hid her face in his chest.

Dallas clasped her in his arms, then raised her face, and kissed her warm, trembling lips.

"Thalia, darling! If you only knew!" he whispered. "I keep asking myself what I have ever done to deserve such a woman! Resolute, cheerful, fearless, and tender. Ah, my dear, if you only knew!"

Her arms tightened about his neck, her face crushed to his. But the night wind from the valley seemed to whisper to the murmuring pines:

"Truly, and always!"

"As peace advocates who came to this country to help to prevent bloodshed," said Sir James a few nights later, as he and Dallas watched the lights of Cettinjé dwindling over the taffrail of the steamer, "it strikes me that we have proved pretty gorgeous failures, Stephen. Poor old Connors!" He caught his breath, and stared moodily into the sea.

"Don't take it so much to heart, James. Connors was a soldier, and he died a soldier's death. He is much happier than he would be if you had been the one to get that thrust through the heart."

"But I got him into it. It was his loyalty to me. Oh, hang it all, why couldn't it have been I?"

"Because, my son, the high gods have chosen you to marry Paula Rubitzki, and muzzle the hounds of the secret service, just as they selected me to marry Thalia—for what merit of mine, I am sure I don't know!"

"Perhaps Thalia does. And I say, Stephen, it *was* a ripping little fight."

There was a hoarse chuckle from the door of the smoking room behind them, and Rosenthal's huge bulk obscured the bright light from within.

"Bah!" said he. "But you Anglo-Saxons vill never get civilized! You can t'ink of not'ing but fighting. Some

day when you are older you vill understand, like me, vat foolish boys you haf been."

"At least, we did what we set out to do, baron," said Sir James.

"Yes, and a great deal more." Rosenthal's harsh laugh ripped its way through the peaceful night. "And now you are to be married, and happy like me, and I am fery glad, because it makes me feel as if my forty t'ousand pounds had not been t'rown away."

Two white-clad figures appeared at the head of the after companionway, and Dallas, whose eyes had not strayed far from that part of the deck, turned quickly on his heel.

Sir James thrust himself back from the rail. "We are going to watch the moon rise," said he to the baron.

"Yes? Then I vill vish you good night."

Rosenthal looked after the two young men, and a deep laugh rumbled in his chest.

"*Sapristi!*" he muttered to himself. "Isidor Rosenthal has played many parts, but he has never learned to be a chaperon. Such foolish boys!" he muttered. "But not so foolish, after all."

And he turned to the cheerful glare of the smoking room.

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AND, furthermore, Howaji," finished Najib, "he is a scourge, this Welec—a hell person—pretty bad."

Kirby solemnly drew out a packet of *deuxième qualité* cigarettes, with equal solemnity shredded the paper from four of them, and stuffed the resultant handful of free tobacco into his smelly black pipe. This he lighted. All without reply to his factotum's vehement speech.

"And, superadded to which, Howaji," pursued Najib, after vainly pausing for answer, "superadded to which, Je-hen-em yawns for him. But he has us, as the folklore of your West world land would say, in the hollows of his fingers. Wherefore, what is to be done?"

Logan Kirby withdrew the pipe from his lips, looked with contempt at the upheaved yellow tobacco in its bowl, and gingerly sought to tamp it down with his forefinger. Then he broke silence.

"Najib," he said, "hereabouts—somewhere between here and Bagdad—or maybe only between here and Damascus—that yarn was invented about the Magic Carpet. The rug that would

carry its owner anywhere on earth. I wish I had it. I'd climb aboard for a ruggy ride; and I'd tell it to start off and keep going till I told it to stop. Then, when I got just in front of a tobacco store of my acquaintance, a block or so from Times Square, I'd yell 'Whoa!' to the rug and hitch it to a lamp-post while I went inside and bought about seven and three-eighths tons of a certain pipe mixture I know of. I'd——"

"There is a plenitude of tobacco here, Howaji," interposed Najib, sore puzzled. "Both in cigarettes and for also the nargile. But I was speaking with an urgency of——"

"There's enough tobacco," agreed Kirby, "but it makes me homesick whenever I smoke it. It reminds me of the dear old days when I used to rake autumn leaves and make bonfires of them."

"Howaji!" spoke up Najib, with tearful impatience. "I ask you if it is a time and also a season for these sad memories of home. I request to know, is it? We are in peril to lose all. There is perhaps a peril to the life as well. And you talk sweetly of tobacco!"

"No," mildly corrected Kirby, "I talk

of the stuff in these Cairene cigarettes. Don't take the precious name of tobacco in vain by——"

"But we are in a danger!" wailed Najib. "The Welee——"

"That's so," assented Kirby. "The Welee, to be sure. You were speaking of him just now, I remember. Calling him pretty names, weren't you? When did he say he'd be here?"

"At the hour before Azim, Howaji. And I beseech——"

"H'm!" Kirby consulted his watch. "Sun sets at about five-twenty. That would bring him here by twenty minutes past four or so. I'll have barely time to write those two letters I must send off when Imbarak starts for Jerusalem."

He turned toward his tent. Najib interrupted him.

"Is it a time for being a scribe," he demanded, in dismay, "when the Welee is prone to be in our mongst within the hour?"

"There won't be time after he's gone. Imbarak starts for Jerusalem at seven."

"There also and likewise may not be time to be alive after the Welee is gone, Howaji," groaned Najib. "If the Howaji——"

Kirby cut him short by strolling into the tent and closing the flap behind him. But as the dingy tent flap shut him off from view of Najib and the lounging soldiers and laborers outside, the American's flippancy of manner fell away from him like an ill-fitting garment. The lazily tolerant grin he had worn for the natives' benefit was wiped from his lean face as a sponge wipes chalk from a blackboard.

He crossed to a pile of luggage at one end of the tent and fumbled with the contents of two or three bags and cases for a few moments, neatly wrapping in paper several articles and dropping them into his khaki pockets. Then he went to the deal table alongside the center pole, sat down on a camp chair,

drew a scratch pad toward him, and began to scribble. He headed his letter:

Cabell Smelting Company's Antimony Mine; Somewhere in the land of Moab, about seventy miles east of Jerusalem, Syria.

After which, he wrote:

DEAR UNCLE DICK: You're surprised to hear from me, of course. Especially since your gushingly cordial invitation to me, three years back, to go to the devil. A few months ago I accepted the invitation. At least I did the next best thing—I came to the land of Moab. I came here as manager of the Cabell people's antimony venture.

I don't know why they picked me for the job, for they have fully a dozen better men for it than I—except because I had spent my first ten years of life in this God-forsaken corner of the world, when father was in charge of the Nablous mission; and because I knew the language, and as much about the Syrian character as an outsider can reasonably hope to learn inside of two thousand centuries. But that's beside the point, which is—I'm here.

I'm not only here, but I stand a fairly bright chance of passing on to the hereafter, during the next couple of hours. That's why I'm bothering you with this letter. You're the only one of my kin who is still on top of the earth. And you were mighty good to me—at least, until I decided to keep on in the school of mines instead of going into the law school as you wanted me to. Honestly, I could have never have made a decent lawyer. Father was a missionary, and my inherited conscience would forever have been tangling me up. Never mind all that, though. As I remember, you and I threshed it out pretty exhaustively three years ago.

You're the only relative I have. And I'm sentimental enough to want to shake hands with you if this is really the end of the road, and to part with you as good friends. I'm going to give this letter to a muleteer who is starting this evening on a provision trip to Jerusalem. I'll give it to him before the row begins, and tell him to keep out of the way of the trouble, and to set out as soon as the road is clear—no matter what happens. If *nothing* happens, I'm going to get this letter back from him, and tear it up. For I don't want to extend the olive branch to you unless there's a scrap of crape tied to it. Because I'm pretty sure you don't want it—undraped.

So if this letter gets to you, you'll know it is a genuine good-by, and that I'm sorry

I couldn't meet your ideas about a career, and that I wish we could have gotten on better together, you and I. For I like you a lot.

Here's the fix I'm in: As I told you, I've been running this little antimony mine for the Cabell people. It's about the only one between the Hartz Mountains and Sarawak. And it's a good property, for all it's so small. We sell our output right here in Syria. Not only for drug use, but for *Kohl*. That's the stuff the Oriental beauties use to blacken their eyelids. My predecessor used to spring a merry wheeze about "working in a Kohl mine."

I was doing finely for a while. And I got a raise and the promise of another. We had a concession from the sultan. We'd "greased" the basha—you'd call him the "pasha," but the Arabs have no letter "P" in their alphabet, and they couldn't pronounce it if they had. We'd also sprinkled tribute money ("baksheesh" is the local word) among the nastier of the near-by Bedouin tribes. And we had—and have—an imposing and quite useless honorary guard of twelve Turkish soldiers to protect us. When the soldiers aren't eating they're sleeping. When they aren't doing either, they're stealing.

My superintendent is a Damascene, named Najib. Except that he insists on talking to me in a language which he mistakes for English, he is a treasure. For two years, long ago, he was with a show at Coney Island, and he can't seem to get it out of his system.

Everything was going beautifully at the mine until yesterday a Welee (native "faquit," or "holy man," same as "medicine man" among the Indians) happened along. At sight of our mine he nearly had a fit.

He explained to the *fellaheen* laborers and the soldiers that we were digging in the exact locality where Fathma, favorite wife of Ali, the Lion of Allah, was buried. She is a Moslem saint, and to disturb her bones, he assured my men, would let loose upon the desecrators a horde of djinni and afrits and similar Oriental hobgoblins who would torture them to death and then burn their souls.

Don't laugh. It isn't a joke. Or if it is my natives don't know it. To a man, they knocked off work. The *fellaheen* and the soldiers alike vowed they would not risk Je-hen-em by digging farther or allowing any one else to.

I flashed the concession on them, and threatened them with the sultan's wrath. Also the basha's. No use. The best I could do was to keep them from running away at once. For the present they graciously re-

main and gobble full rations, but they don't do one lick of work. And if we don't get off our next shipment this week we lose the biggest customer we have—a Damascus firm that takes seventy per cent of our output and is flirting with a German syndicate which is trying to undersell us and can't. Najib has known the Welee in other days. He is positive our German competitors have bribed the holy man to stir up this row. It's been done before out here.

It's a strike. And failure to the mine means failure to me. This job was my Big Chance. And I had no intention of losing it. Certainly not for an unwashed Welee. So I tried to bribe the slimy old crook. Nothing doing. He has evidently been too solidly fixed by the syndicate. He won't even talk terms with me.

He cursed me in a way that has set my men to looking crosswise at me ever since. Then, once more, he bade me leave this holy ground that my infidel feet were defiling. I refused. He cursed me again and went away. I thought I was rid of him.

I wasn't. Najib has found out that he is rounding up a crowd of Syrian fellaheen from near-by villages and preaching a sort of pocket-edition "holy war" to them. He's surely earning his syndicate pay. Najib found out, too, that he's got a bunch of natives worked up to the proper pitch of crazy zeal, and that he is going to lead them here against us at Azim (sunset) to-day.

As I understand it, his playful plan is to sic them onto me. And then, when they have slain the infidel, they are to enact one more pious duty by filling up the mine, so that the late lamented Fathma's mythical bones may rest in peace again. And incidentally so that the syndicate may grab our trade.

Pretty outlook, isn't it? Do you wonder I'm scratching off a word of good-by to the only living person of my kin? Not that it does any special good, but I'd like you to know what happened. No one would know otherwise. For it's a safe bet the natives won't tell. According to their report, I'll have died from cholera or the plague or snake bite, as has many another white man out here in these pink-brown mountains.

Najib's the only one of the crew who has too much sense to believe in every word of the Welee's bugaboo story. And he's scared stiff; so he isn't much use to me. I try to keep his pluck up and to impress the others by not seeming to take the thing seriously. But it's about the seriousest thing in the world.

I've only one hope left, as a matter of fact.

And that hope is so fantastic it wouldn't be a hope at all anywhere except in Syria—where everything is fantastic. It's a fifty-to-one shot. But I've made my arrangements to play it. In the meantime—

Logan Kirby laid down his fountain pen. For Najib, without any show of ceremony, came running into the tent.

"Howaji!" he almost screamed. "He is coming—the Welee is coming—up the hill he comes! And over five trillion men at his heels. All singing 'Din—Din—DIN! Muhammed *Din!*' and making ready to kill in very saintly joy. A half hour it is before the time the Welee have averred that he will come. He—*listen!*"

Through the drowsy stillness of the afternoon came a rumbling and muttering, with a singsong cadence in it. Kirby had heard the sound but once before—in his early childhood, when a horde of Moslem fanatics had tried to storm his father's mission house at Nablous—but he would have recognized it anywhere. He glanced down, regretfully at the letter there was no time to finish. He tore it across, then made for the tent door. The chattering and ague-stricken Najib pattered close behind him.

The camp was pitched in a little hollow a hundred yards in front of the mine, and facing a low hill that sloped down into the valley behind. From beyond the crest of this hillock came the droning chant of:

"Din—*Din!* Muhammed *Din!*" ("For the Faith! For Islam!") ever swelling closer.

The laborers and the dozen soldiers were already trotting up the hill's hither side to welcome the oncomers.

With a dash, Kirby was among his erstwhile workers and guards, pushing past them and making at headlong speed for the hillcrest. In thirty seconds he was at the summit, the ashen-faced Najib toiling along prayerfully in his wake.

At the crest, Kirby paused. Behind him his men were pressing forward. In front, moving in ragged formation and carrying flintlock guns and horse pistols and rusty, curved sabers and clubs, a body of perhaps fifty men and boys toiled up the steeper incline toward him.

They swayed to and fro as they climbed, moving their bodies in time to their eternal rumbling chant of "Din—*Din—DIN!*" Ten paces in front of them minced the Welee, a horrible figure, filthy, white-bearded, draped in a cloud of yellowish rags.

At the crest was a little stone-encircled spring, the camp's source of drinking water. Kirby had forbidden the sinking of a well nearer the mine, on the theory that men who must walk a quarter mile every time they are thirsty will not often waste the company's time by being thirsty.

Beside the rough coping of this spring he paused. The crowd in front caught sight of him, outlined against the coppery sky above them. And the chant took on new fierceness, intershot with words quite as unnecessary as untranslatable. Nor were the workers and soldiers, who had swarmed up the slope behind Kirby, overcordial in their looks. Indeed, one or two of them had even caught up the "Din—*Din—DIN!*" singsong.

Kirby lifted a hand for attention, and, before dropping the hand to his side, put its palm across his mouth to mask a yawn that had no existence. Then, as the hand fell, he carelessly let its fingers entwine themselves about the butt of the pistol at his belt.

His eyes were on the Welee. And the latter checked his uphill scramble as he noted the contact of the long brown fingers with the pistol butt. He came to a standstill a bare fifteen feet from the spring. His followers, disappointed at their leader's pause, straggled to a halt behind him.

And thus, for a brief instant, the whole party stood, the mine men and the Welee's followers in irregular semi-circles opposite each other, and at the edges of the summit Kirby, beside the spring, facing the Welee and with Najib crouching, doglike, at his feet.

The silence endured for the merest fraction of a second; then the Welee spoke, his husk-dry voice whirring like a locust's through the sudden hush.

"Feringhee (foreigner)," he puffed, still winded by the run. "Upon you be such peace as Allah the All-merciful can grant unto an infidel!"

"And unto you, O Son of the Prophet and father of an hundred sons," unctuously replied Kirby, "be peace and prosperity and the blessings of *Es-Semme!*"

It is said that in the Orient two stray dogs do not meet to fight without first swapping compliments. It is certain that no two humans—be their meeting never so urgent or hostile—fail to observe this world-old usage. It costs nothing—except time. And time is the one commodity wherein every Oriental is rich.

"You have desecrated the shrine of a saint," pursued the Welee, courtesy being sated, "and I am come hither to stop——"

"So you said yesterday," returned Kirby, with real urbanity. "But you were mistaken. I am glad you are here, so that I may tell you so."

He spoke very quietly, yet making sure that his voice should carry to the utmost bounds of two semilunes of listeners. Forestalling an answer, he went on:

"O holy and Heaven-descended Welee, you were right—Truth flowed, as sparkling and clear as the Abana itself, from your reverend lips—when you told me our mine was digged at the spot where sleep the ashes of immortal and glorified Fathma—on whom be the smile of the Most High! I know that

now past all peradventure. Though I was fool enough yesterday to doubt. Yet when you say I desecrate her shrine you err. That, too, has been revealed to me."

His voice had gradually taken on the droning intonation and his eyes the glassily exalted look of the true Eastern devotee. His body swayed as he spoke. The crouching Najib peered up at him in amaze.

The others, who had begun edging and milling slowly forward, came again to a standstill. They recognized the signs and instinctively did them reverence.

Even as the busiest street in Damascus or Jerusalem will respectfully suspend traffic while a ragged mystic proceeds to have an epileptic fit or a revelation or a vision in the center of the thoroughfare—even as the war-crazed dervish hosts slackened their mad onrush to a dead stop when their Khalifa was stricken by a heavenly trance, on the march to Omdurman, so now, at the time-honored symptoms of such a supernatural visitation—even in an infidel—the fanatics paused to look.

The primal check was but momentarily, and Kirby realized this. So he wasted no time before making use of it. He swung his hands aloft, his eyes glaring heavenward, his body swaying convulsively. White foam appeared upon his parted lips. His jaws moved awkwardly, as if he were chewing. (As indeed he was. The bit of shaving soap he had put into his mouth as he stifled the nonexistent yawn was "lathering" more slowly than he could have wished.)

But the sight of the foam capped the impression of the staring eyes and the chanting voice and the swaying form. There could be no possible doubt that this Feringhee infidel was in the throes of inspiration from Heaven. The villagers, the soldiers, the laborers gazed upon him with the awed delight that

Eastern onlookers ever glean from such attacks. Even the Welee looked at him, irresolute, the fanatic fire ebbing a little from his withered and unwashed face.

Kirby, through the tenseness of the moment, recalled how his missionary father had given him no less than three sound spankings, in childhood, for mimicking these "devotee ecstasies." It had been the lonely boy's favorite game at the Nablous mission house.

His voice scaling upward, almost to a falsetto, and his language taking on a formality worthy of Bible days, he intoned:

"Fathma the glorified—Fathma the loved spouse of Ali the Lion of Allah—Fathma appeared to me this day at the still hour before dawn. In a vision she appeared to me. And she spake. O Welee, wouldst hear her words from these poor lips of mine that are unfit to breathe them? They are a message for thee."

"A message!" snorted the scandalized Welee. "A message to *me*—through the lips of an infidel?"

"She said thou wouldst not believe," wailed the swaying Kirby. "She said thou wouldst not. Because I am an infidel. And she bade me remind thee that the Prophet—on whom be forever the peace of es Semme!—she bade me remind thee that the Prophet himself, in his hour of need at El-Mecca, deigned to send an infidel Greek to Omar with his call for help. Also that the blessed Koran saith—"

The lather strangled him, and he gulped. He was glad of the interruption. For he could not remember for the life of him just what the blessed Koran *had* said on the subject of using infidels as instruments for grace. The text's exact wording had slipped his tumult-stirred mind.

But, with his audience, the gulp and its accompanying shudder readily passed muster as a spiritual spasm.

The natives began to look impressed. The Welee still glowered, angrily doubtful, but the crowd was visibly—and audibly—interested. Mastering the strangulation, Kirby went on with his chant:

"Thus spake the glorified spouse of Ali, in my vision: 'Lo, I have chosen thee as my mouthpiece, that all may know the power of Allah and His servants to speak to mankind even through the lips of an infidel pariah.' Wilt hear me, O Welee? Or shall I hold my peace?"

The Welee made as though to speak in sharp negation; but an eager murmur of assent from the two half circles of hearers drowned his reply. And Kirby hurried on:

"This is the message, O my brothers, as the vision of Fathma the wonderful spake it to me at the hour of false dawn, standing at my couch foot, enwrapped in glory and with the face of the sun and—'and the stars in her crown were seven,'" he ended lamely, drawing on Rossetti for inspiration.

Bracing his taut nerves, he repeated:

"This is the message: 'My mortal ashes have been transmuted, by a miracle of the Most High, into the silvery-white dust of the mineral ye seek here. And it is my will that ye continue to seek it, so that men shall distribute it throughout the earth, and that my dust may serve to blend with potions that restore health to the stricken, and to darken and make lovely for their lords the eyes of women, and to weld rare metals into strength and beauty. Continue thy task, O infidel, thou and the believers who toil for thee! Thus may the power of Fathma forever reach out beyond the grave. It is my will.'"

Kirby threw out his arms and fairly shrieked the last words through his foaming lips. And to himself he was groaning:

"Good Lord! A six-year-old kid wouldn't be taken in by such piffle!"

A murmur of assent and dissent and of argument was running through the crowd. The Welee lurched forward in a furious gust of rage, shouting:

"He lies! He blasphemes! He would trick you! *I* say it—I the——"

"*Aiwa!* (Yes!)," intoned Kirby, as if verifying something he had wholly expected. "It is thus she told me thou wouldst speak, thy holy zeal for once overcoming thine Heaven-inspired brain. And she bade me prove by deeds what thou wouldst not believe from my words. She bade me give thee a sign. Yea, *two* signs, if need be. Though for thine own sake, O Welee, she bade me seek to persuade thee by the first and simpler sign."

"A sign?" repeated the Welee, in angry disbelief.

"A sign?" flew the muttered echo through the crowd.

"You repeat, all of you, the very words I spake to her," responded Kirby. "When she bade me give a sign, I said: 'O mother of a million believers, how may *I* give a sign that thine exalted servant, the Welee, shall believe? For lo, I am but an ignorant Feringhee who hath not wit to work miracles!' And she replied to me: 'Be of good cheer. For it is not thou, but *I*, working through thee, who shall make these miracles come to pass.' And then she told me those things which I should do."

By this time the crowd was as tense with anticipated thrills as a Sunday-school class at its first circus. For miracles are things not seen every day, even in Syria. And there was every prospect of at least one such manifestation. Perhaps of two. The Welee noted the change in his followers' mental attitude, and he strove hotly to counteract it.

"It is a trick!" he reiterated. "A windy promise whereby he seeks to fool you. To none but the holy is it granted to perform miracles. Behold!"

He drew his gnarled body to its full height and opened wide his toothless mouth. From between his jaws gushed a swirl of red flame.

"*Allah sa-id!* Nabi sa-id!" shrieked the wondering Syrians.

The Welee glared triumphantly at Kirby—who had seen the fire-belching trick a half hundred times, from the faquir booths of Bagdad to the circus side shows of Pompton, New Jersey.

Taking quick advantage of the crowd's stark amaze, the Welee drew a curved knife from his belt, and, in sight of them all, drove it hilt deep into his own emaciated chest. When he removed his fingers from around the handle, there was no sign of knife hilt, knife blade, nor wound.

"*Allah sa-id!*" gasped the onlookers again, many of them falling face downward on the earth and moaning forth Koran texts and prayers.

"It is well!" broke in Kirby, with difficulty steadying his voice again into the singsong. "It is well! None doubted the holiness of the Welee nor his Heaven-sent power to do things which are impossible to mere mortals such as we. The spouse of Ali foretold that he would do so. She told me he would spout forth flame and would drive a knife to his heart. She bade me say it is *she*—under the will of Allah—who hath given him such power."

The Welee eyed his opponent with a new look—a look in which rage was now mingled with something very like bewilderment.

"It is known," reiterated Kirby. "It is known to all folk that Allah endows His saints upon earth with miraculous powers. But it is also known to all folk that Allah doth *not* waste such power upon the Feringhee. Therefore, when *I* perform miracles before you, will it not be proof that I am but the unworthy and helpless instrument in

the hands of Allah—through his beloved handmaiden, Fathma?"

Again the Welee's hesitant denial was drowned in an eagerly assenting chorus of "*Aiwa!*" The crowd packed and jostled in its crass excitement. Here, forsooth, was more than a miracle. It was to be a duel of miracles. A sight to remember forever and to relate to one's ophthalmic grandsons.

For a moment Kirby stood motionless, facing his foe, waiting to let the impression sink in, and to sharpen by delay the nerves and the credulity of his audience.

Somewhere hereabouts, thirty centuries ago, Elijah and the priests of Baal had held their miracle contest. Kirby remembered the sacred tale, and he smiled to himself at the idea of enacting the same scene under twentieth-century skies. But Syrian skies, he reflected, are not twentieth-century skies. They are still the skies that looked down upon the childhood of the world. And at the thought he took heart.

"The first sign," he droned, body asway and mouth afoam, "the first sign she bade me give you was *this*."

He drew from the breast of his coat a half dozen flat little paper parcels. Every man among the miners and the soldiers was familiar with the sight of the packages. They were used for holding ore samples. In such packets the men had again and again seen Kirby wrap the silvery-white specimens of pulverized antimony.

"These," intoned the American, waving the handful of papers at the Welee, "are pinches of the dust and the crushed metal that I dig from the shrine of the blessed Fathma. Thine own brethren will bear me out in this. An hundred times they have beheld me fill the paper squares with such dust. Many of them have filled the papers for me. Is it not so?"

"*Aiwa!*" assented the laborers, zestfully nervous to see the miracle begin.

Carelessly taking one paper from the handful, Kirby thrust the rest back into his pocket. Opening the paper he held, he displayed a teaspoonful of the whitish powder.

"This is the sign," he droned. "The powder here is but the powder we gain from crushing the mineral yonder, as all of my men will attest. Brothers, ye have oft and again washed this powder for me, to cleanse it from earth stains. Bear my witness, hath the water changed it in any way?"

"*Lla!*" (No!), negativèd the workers, in ragged chorus, growing more and more impatient.

"Good!" approved Kirby. "Thus spake Fathma, the blessed among women: 'Sprinkle water upon this dust of mine, before the eyes of my servant, the holy Welee. And give him also of the dust, that he, too, may sprinkle it with water. If the dust he sprinkleth doth not change, and if the dust *thou* sprinklest doth become a cloud of snow, he shall know that thou art my messenger and he shall obey my will, and all my people shall obey my will and shall hinder thy labors no more, lest in my wrath I prevail upon Allah to send such snow throughout the land, to blast the pastures, even as snow has ever blasted the summit of Hermon."

It was a dire threat to folk in a country where prosperity depends on pasturage. Scarce a man there but had at some time been so inquisitive as to climb Mount Hermon's slopes to stare at the wet, soggy snow that plastered the mountain's crest after each lowland rainfall. Scarce a man but remembered the barren deadness of the earth on Hermon's summit. The threat was pregnant.

"It is a lie!" sputtered the Welee. "The blessed Fathma——"

"Then prove it a lie!" ordered Kirby, taking another of the papers from his pocket and literally thrusting it into the

Welee's clawlike hand. "Here is water," tapping a partly full earthen *ghoola* that stood on the coping of the spring. "I call on thee—in the name of the glorified Fathma—to do her bidding."

The Welee dropped the paper to the earth, where, one end of the packet opening, the silvery powder spilled on the dusty ground. Kirby had picked up the *ghoola* and was pressing it upon his foe. The natives had clustered close around, breathless, goggle-eyed. The Welee pushed back the *ghoola*.

"I will not!" he raged. "It is a lie! It——"

"Blasphemy!" reproved Kirby. "I have no means to make thee obey the vision's mandate, O Welee," he added. "Yet I, a mere infidel, respect her too profoundly to disobey. See!"

He shook upon a flat rock the powder contents of his own packet, then dashed a spoonful of water on it. Smoothing and manipulating the wet powder with one hand, he held aloft the other in supplication, his eyes rolling heavenward as he chanted:

"O Fathma, favored of Allah, spouse of Ali, if I lie or if I call on thee in vain, smite me with fearful death, or let these thy servants slay me. If I am in truth thy messenger, show forth thy miracle according to thy word and let this dust of thy lovely body turn to the snows of——"

He got no farther. His audience had broken into a cry that swelled to a roar. Wonder, veneration, fear—all were blended in that spontaneous outburst.

Kirby glanced downward. To the wrist, his hand that manipulated the wet powder was engulfed in a snowy substance that glittered white in the sunset.

"Allah!" quavered the awed crowd. "Allah hu akbar!"

To all intents and purposes, the powder had in a few seconds become trans-

formed into a little snowdrift of thirty times its original bulk. At least, to men who have seen no more of such phenomena than has the average Syrian, it was indubitable and flawless snow.

"Miracle! Miracle!" groaned the crowd. "The spouse of Ali hath spoken—and through a Feringhee! It is as he said."

"It is a lie! A trick!" stormed the Welee.

But for once no one heeded him. A miracle is a miracle, whoever performs it. And a miracle had been performed. The miners knew well that a pinch of antimony powder does not change to a double handful of snow through washing. The other fellaheen knew nothing of antimony nor of chemistry. But they knew snow—the soggy, wet, sticky snow of Syrian mountaintops. And, seeing, they believed.

Again Kirby caught up the *ghoola*. He shoved it roughly into the Welee's grasp, then stepped back. For the very briefest instant the Welee mechanically held the vessel, then in scorn he let it drop. It fell on soft earth and did not break. But a splash of water flew from it as it struck ground and spattered some of the powder that had been strewn from the paper the Welee had dropped.

"Now!" cried Kirby, taking swift advantage of the accident. "Thou also hast sprinkled the white dust with water—though against thy will—even as Fathma the blessed foretold to me thou shouldst. And her prophecy shall come true. For the dust does not change into snow."

And then and there the badly rattled Welee made the one and only blunder of his snaky career. Nettled at his followers' wavering allegiance, he dropped on one knee, and, as he had seen Kirby do, he began to manipulate the wet antimony. And it remained wet antimony.

A murmur rose from the little throng.

"Have I lied, O my brothers?" demanded Kirby, as the discomfited Welee scrambled to his feet, fiercely chagrined at his own blunder. "Have I lied? Does or does not the glorified spouse of Ali speak through me, her unworthy mouthpiece? Are ye content? May I carry out the wishes of the blessed one and continue to dig in yonder mine?"

"*Aiwa!*" burst from fifty throats. "The blessed one hath spoken!"

"It—it is false!" mumbled the Welee, more and more stricken at his devotees' defection. "It is a trick!"

But the miners knew better. They knew the ordinarily harmless action of water upon antimony. The fellaheen, too, had witnessed the miracle of the snow making, and they were convinced. Sure of his backing, Kirby wheeled once more upon the Welee.

"A trick?" he echoed. "A trick? It is sacrilege to say so. Must I make the second—the decisive—test?"

"*Aiwa! Aiwa!*" babbled the crowd, crazy to behold another miracle.

"It is well," decreed Kirby, taking forth the handful of the specimen parcels once more. "The blessed Fathma bade me, as a final sign, to devour two of these packets of her dust, and to bid her unbelieving servant, the Welee, also to devour two. If I be speaking in her name, no harm shall befall me. If he be right and I be wrong, no harm shall befall him. But if either of us be wrong in what we have told you concerning her will as to the digging of her dust, then she will at once let loose an *afrit* to afflict the liar in such way as shall show all men that he is false. Behold, I do her will!"

Choosing two of the packets, as at random, he tossed the contents into his mouth and swallowed them by the aid of a swig of water from the fallen *ghoola*.

"Now!" he commanded, thrusting

two more of the powders upon the Welee.

"I will not!" vowed the Welee, in a last burst of wrath. "It is fraud! How know I the dust is not poisoned?"

"Thou hast seen me devour it," said Kirby. "It has oft and again fallen on the lips and tongues of these my workers and no harm has befallen them. Take these two packets!"

"I will not! I——"

A general muttering—decidedly ugly in trend—stopped the Welee's hot refusal. His prestige was very much at stake. With a snarl like a cross cat's, he snatched the proffered paper receptacles, shook their powders on his tongue, and gulped them down. They stuck midway. He coughed and took a swallow of water.

"O Fathma!" breathed Kirby, in pious ecstasy, and in almost dizzy relief. "It is done!"

It *was* done. There could be no doubt of that. After a few seconds of breathless silence, wherein the eyes of the close-packed and breath-held throng devoured him, the Welee's expression of lofty contempt changed all at once to a look of trouble. The crowd cried out in sheer astonishment.

From trouble the Welee's aspect merged into agony. His mouth flew wide open, emitting marvelous sounds that were a blend of dog howls and the noise made by fifty exhausted siphons.

The Welee's claw hands gripped the Welee's sunken waist. The Welee's thin legs carried the Welee's thinner body high into the air in a series of frantic leaps whose nimbleness was astounding in one so old and weak.

"*Maschallah! Fathma el Sitt! Oäh! El Afrit!*" chorused the onlookers, jostling and shuffling in fanatic fervor.

One big fellaah cast down his antique musket and fell at Kirby's feet, crying adoringly:

"*Saadat el Basha! Rasoul Allah!*"
(Great Master! Apostle of Allah!)

Others followed his example. Ecstatic miners ran to the American, kneeling and seeking to kiss his hands and his dusty boots.

Meantime, the Welee was doing a dervish contortion dance whose splendid abandon would have won him a fortune on any stage. And he accompanied each flying step with ear-torturing screeches and with that nameless vocalization as of a half hundred emptying siphons.

At last, worn out, writhing in agony, moaning, and still siphoning, he rolled helpless at Kirby's feet.

The last of the rioters emeritus had drifted out of sight down the *wady*. The last miner had rushed back to work with tireless religious zeal. Kirby, weak with reaction, longed for some one—any one—with whom to talk over his victory. So he summoned to his tent the worshiping Najib, who had been frisking adoringly about him with the grace and glee of a drunken bear cub.

"In storybooks, Najib," observed Kirby, "the gallant young hero overawes the low-browed savages by some such good old device as false teeth or a wooden leg or a solar eclipse or a neat conjuring trick. But I don't know eclipse dates, and I'm shy on parlor stunts, and I've still got at least two fairly solid legs and most of my original teeth——"

"Praise unto the Most High for sparing these blessings unto you, O Howaji!" interposed Najib blissfully in English. "And may your father's forty lesser wives pay homage to your re-

spectable mother for that she have condescended to bear so grand a person as you! Blest likewise and also be thy paternal——"

"So," went on Kirby, unheeding the rainfall of adulation, "I had to do what I could with what I had. I never dreamed there could be so much beautiful snowy lather in one spoonful of shaving powder; but——"

"But," put in Najib, perplexed, "the powder you gave *him* to sprinkle? It pasted only, and it neglected to fuzz itself like——"

"It was a perfectly good antimony sample. So were the two powders I swallowed. I hope antimony isn't bad for the——"

"And the powder *he* ate? By the grace of the blessed Fathma—on whom be——"

"Those just happened to be seidnitz powders—the blue and the white. The sort I gave you when you were sick last month. But this time I had put the blue one in a white paper and——"

"But, Howaji!" babbled Najib. "They did not arouse hell fight within *me!* Oh, of an assuredly, the glorified Fathma hath——"

"*You* mixed the two powders before you swallowed them. The Welee swallowed them before he mixed them. That's all the difference. Just the trifling difference between a glass of soda water and a volcano. You see, I——"

"I see, Howaji," murmured Najib in solemn veneration. "And I see that the American Bible text is brought to pass: 'One man's meat is better than two in the bush; and—the way of the transgressor is the shortest way home.' Bismillah!"

**TERHUNE IS WRITING FOR US A NUMBER OF THESE
AMUSING ORIENTAL YARNS. WATCH OUT FOR THEM.**

The Terrace Inn Tragedy

By Roman Doubleday

Author of "The Saintsbury Affair," "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery," Etc.

Starting with a crime committed in the Terrace Inn, chargeable to persons unknown, Roman Doubleday has not merely built up a mystery baffling enough for the most confirmed trouble hunters, but has in addition put into the novel that vital touch which makes the personages of the drama real flesh and blood. Some of them you would like to meet in real life, notably the girl Clio Ellerson, who holds her head up jauntily and lives happily in the sunshine and the rain; the type that makes the world wholesome.

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION.

ON a certain day late in May of last year, Mr. Howard Allen arrived in the little town of Arlington, on a visit to his married sister, Mrs. Wilton Gardner. Allen was in the diplomatic service, and he had been abroad continuously for over five years, filling minor posts in Bulgaria, Russia, and Spain. It was generally understood that his present vacation was preliminary to an advantageous advance. He had attracted the favorable attention of his chiefs at Washington through his prompt acceptance of responsibility on one or two critical occasions, and, still more, by a savoir-faire and a diplomatic reserve which have not always characterized American representatives abroad.

Arlington was a typical American town, not too big for friendliness, not too small for mystery. The State capital, Brookfield, some twenty-five miles farther down the main railroad line, had drawn away "big business," leaving Arlington to the green trees and inclosed gardens of its villagehood. It was Allen's home town, but his absence

at school and college, at Washington and abroad, had kept him a stranger for the last fifteen years. Now, as he walked again through its elm-shaded streets and saw the tulips blooming in prim propriety under the old-fashioned bay windows, it seemed to him an ideal place for taking a rest-cure vacation. Surely nothing ever had happened, ever could or would happen, in so peaceful a place! Which proves that whatever Mr. Allen's other qualifications may have been, he did not possess the power of reading the future.

His appearance in Arlington was of sufficient local importance, at any rate, to be chronicled in the social column of the daily *Journal*. Mrs. Wilton Gardner had herself telephoned the item to the society editor, adroitly implying her brother's various honors and dignities, and when she saw it all in print she read the item with a satisfaction she did not always find in Browning, although she was a clubwoman and reputed intellectual. She had plans for that young brother of hers. Matrimonial plans, of course. For a year she had been impatiently awaiting his

return, in order to set her plans to work. She had intended to save that interesting society item in the *Journal*, but when she looked for the paper she couldn't find it.

The reason was that her young sister-in-law, Antonia Gardner, who lived with her and Wilton, had carried the paper to her own room. She clipped the important item herself, and she slipped it into a very secret hiding place in her writing desk, where Jessie would never think of looking, even if she did come hunting for a postage stamp. But, for that matter, nothing would have suited Jessie's plans better than this shy interest on Antonia's part.

Old Thaddeus Rantoul read the item, too—shaggy old Thaddeus Rantoul, harassed and beset by evil fortune, who had fled from Arlington to escape interviewers, and dug himself in, like a badger, at his country house in Breckenridge. And as he read, the nervous scowl between his gray old eyebrows softened, and he muttered half aloud: "Good boy, Howie! If anybody can do anything for the old man, you can. I wonder—I could trust you, if I could trust anybody—even to see Gordon. But Gordon is a snake!"

Gordon was not a snake. He was a State senator, and entitled to be addressed as Honorable. Rantoul didn't think he had a right to the title, but Rantoul was prejudiced, and he was not of a judicial temperament at any time. Gordon may have read the item about Howard Allen, for he made a point of skimming the State papers pretty carefully, but if he did it made no impression upon him at the time. He was in attendance at the State legislature, which was drawing toward the close of an extra session at the State capitol, and he was very busy. He had to live up to his reputation as a reformer, as well as to his title, and beyond that there was a political future which was not to be neglected. In-

deed, it is quite probable that he paid no attention whatsoever to Howard Allen's visit to Mrs. Wilton Gardner.

It was Mrs. Gardner's name that caught the eye of Madeline Hunt, as she sat alone in her room in the Terrace Inn that evening, studying in print the society doings of Arlington folk. Everybody knows that to read a menu card does a hungry man little good, but Mrs. Hunt read on and on, with a "Don't care!" look on her handsome face. Then she turned back to the Gardner item. "I suppose she will be more stuck up than ever, the peacock!" were the words that went through her brain cells, though she didn't speak them aloud. Of course Mrs. Gardner was no more a peacock than Senator Gordon was a snake. As has been said, she was an intellectual woman; also, she was very kindly and much occupied with good works at home and in the city. But she was slightly absent-minded. She had been casually introduced to Mrs. Hunt at a Civic Improvement luncheon, where all the world had come together to listen to an imported speaker, and then she had quite forgotten both the name and the woman the next minute. Of course Mrs. Hunt should have been reasonable, and given Mrs. Gardner the benefit of the doubt when the latter passed her without recognition. But a six months' bride, who is a stranger in a strange city, and who, regrettably, can offer no social indorsements whatsoever, is not so apt to be reasonable as to be lonely and resentful. She had not realized, before coming to Arlington, that social indorsements served any special purpose in the world. She had expected to be accepted at her face value—which was distinctly above par. After six months at the Terrace Inn she was still isolated. Not shunned exactly, but—isolated.

She read the item again, and her first bitterness melted into a sort of wist-

fulness that was more becoming. "Gee, she can invite *her* brother to come and visit her!" she thought to herself. "Me, I'm more scared that Sylvan should find out where I am than anything else!" And that shows another consequence of a too-thoroughgoing disdain of social indorsements.

The city editor of the *Arlington Noon* saw the Allen item in the social column of the rival paper, cut it out with his pocket scissors, drew a blue-pencil circle about it, wrote "Miss Ellerson—Interview" in the circle, and tossed it into his pick-up basket, from which a boy took it in due course of time to Miss Ellerson's desk.

Miss Clio Ellerson's specialty for the paper which availed itself of her services was interviews with persons of importance in their day. Her success was largely due to the fact that she was so much more human than professional. This was wholly against her wish and intent, for her ideal was to be perfectly professional—strictly and impersonally and splendidly professional. She had a quite romantic loyalty for her paper, and a sense of responsibility to the great American public which was amusing or pathetic, according to your view of the noble activities of the press. Perhaps both her ideal and her happy failure to meet it personally were due to the fact that her journalistic experience could as yet be measured in months.

It happened that at the moment when the rounds boy brought the clipping to her desk, Evan Baring was lounging against the end of it in an attitude suggestive of unlimited leisure. Evan Baring was a privileged person. Many privileges were granted to him, and the rest he took. He had been a reporter on the *Noon* when Clio Ellerson first went there, and his many kindly helps to her ignorance when she was a novice had established a friendship which had survived his resigna-

tion from the staff and the vicissitudes of fortune that had followed. For Baring had been bitten by the Sherlock Holmes bee. He was possessed by the ambition to establish himself as a private detective. He cultivated as extensive an acquaintance with the criminal world as the somewhat limited resources of *Arlington* permitted, and kept up unofficial relations with the police department, which had formerly been covered by his "run." He was a year younger than Miss Ellerson, so she called him by his first name and treated him generally as though he were about fifteen. He called her "Miss Ellerson" with respectful ceremony, and looked up to her as a person of very superior attainments, though he knew more about the world—not to mention the flesh and the devil—in any minute than she had learned in all of her twenty-three years.

"Do you mean to say, Miss Ellerson, that you don't know why the *Noon* is ragging old Thad Rantoul?" he was demanding at the moment.

"I don't know that it is ragging him," she protested.

"You bet it is—meanest kind of a way. Not only in the serious editorials, but in the news stuff—twisting a word here and there to create an atmosphere. You just watch."

"But if Rantoul's road has really forfeited the conditions of the franchise, it's to the public interest that the facts should be known."

"It's to Senator Gordon's interest to make a grand-stand play, and the *Noon* is playing party politics, that's all."

Here the boy dropped on Miss Ellerson's desk the clipping announcing to the world that Mr. Howard Allen was making an extended visit to his sister, Mrs. Wilton Gardner, and Evan Baring quite naturally picked it up and read it first.

"What you going to interview this guy about?" he asked.

Miss Ellerson took the slip from him and read it. Then, instead of answering, she made rather an odd remark.

"I wonder how it feels to kill a man," she said.

Baring straightened up into alert attention.

"Don't do it, Miss Ellerson! Whatever he has done, don't you get yourself in wrong. Believe me, Miss Ellerson, it's no cinch to have the police against you. They're a low set, and they haven't any feelings. No matter how high-toned a murder may be, just in itself, you understand, they are so used to associating with real criminals that they don't know how to discriminate. What have you got against this guy, anyway? Not that it's any of my business, if you don't want to tell."

"Oh, Evan, Evan!" laughed Miss Ellerson. "Your sleuth's imagination jumped in the wrong direction that time. I have no intention of becoming a murderess, even of the highest tone. I was just thinking of this Mr. Allen, and how he shot three men hand running a few years ago."

"Gosh! You don't mean it! How was that?"

"It was during a riot in Constantinople. A mob that had set out to clean out all foreigners started for the American hospital. Mr. Allen, who was an attaché of the American legation at St. Petersburg, happened to be in the city and on the spot. He stood before the door of the hospital and said he would shoot any man that mounted the steps. They came on, and he shot—three times. And he killed three men. Just killed them dead, without giving them time to think or explain or repent or anything!"

"Did the mob stop?" Baring asked eagerly.

"I believe so. If they hadn't, I suppose he would have kept on."

"Gee, but that was great! You don't lay that up against him surely?"

Miss Ellerson was meditative. "I just wondered how he felt about it when he thought it over. You see, these men were not criminals. They were fanatics possibly, but as individuals they may have been strictly moral men, with families dependent on them and all that. And he made himself their judge and their executioner without any authority. It must take an enormous lot of self-confidence to do a thing like that and not have it worry you afterward."

"But he stopped the mob and saved the hospital," protested Baring. "And you say he warned them not to come on. Why stay awake over that—nothing! Any man would be proud of it."

"That's one reason why it isn't worth while giving the ballot to women," smiled Miss Ellerson. "We take our responsibilities too seriously. To kill a man out of hand, just because your judgment runs against his judgment, is taking a responsibility. That is, if it is done with thought. If it is done just on impulse, what is the difference between him and any other murderer? Every man who kills another probably feels that he has a good reason for doing so. If you let down the bars——"

"Good land, Miss Ellerson, wouldn't you shoot a mad dog?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't you have shot the leader of that mob?"

"No. I am not saying I should not have had a right to, possibly a duty to shoot. But I know I should not have done it."

Baring looked baffled. He had always regarded Miss Ellerson as an exception to her sex—wiser, more reasonable, more intelligent about life. You could talk to her as you talk to a man. And here she was up in the air like the rest of them.

"Howard Allen always was pretty sure of himself," she remarked reminiscently.

"You know him?"

"I used to know him years ago, when he went to school, here in Arlington. I haven't seen him for many years."

"Gosh, I'd like to know him—a man like that! I'm going to have a look at him, anyway."

Miss Ellerson looked up at him and smiled. "Good-by, Evan. So sorry you can't stay any longer just now, but of course I know you are busy."

Baring picked up his hat with a grin. "Say, Miss Ellerson, maybe you think that isn't just as cold-blooded as drawing a gun on a fellow! You use different weapons, but you get rid of anybody you don't want just the same."

Clio Ellerson, left alone, picked up the little slip and read it over. Then she pulled her desk telephone toward her and called up Mr. Wilton Gardner's residence.

"Is Mr. Howard Allen in?"

"No, he's gone out," answered a sweet young voice. Miss Ellerson wondered subconsciously who could be speaking—certainly not Mrs. Gardner nor the maid.

"Can you tell me when he will be in?" she pursued, following the accustomed trail toward an interview.

"No, I really don't know. He has gone out to Breckenridge to see Mr. Rantoul, and he may likely stay there for dinner. Can I give him any message?"

"No, thank you. I'll call again," said Miss Ellerson, and hung up the phone.

Then she meditated a little on the information given by the sweet young voice. So Mr. Howard Allen had the entrée to Thaddeus Rantoul's house, where no reporter had succeeded in penetrating. Mr. Rantoul was very much in the public eye just then, and Clio Ellerson, special writer for the

Noon, was not the only newspaper representative who had tried to pierce the defenses of that Breckenridge bungalow, to ask Mr. Rantoul what action he intended to take in regard to Senator Gordon's bill—and had tried in vain. Mr. Rantoul was never "at home!" But if Mr. Allen was to be there this afternoon, the door could hardly be shut in the face of another caller arriving, possibly, a few minutes later. Miss Ellerson picked up her hat and gloves, and left the office with a subtle smile on her small dark face.

In the street she paused to get a copy of the *News* from a little newsboy who smiled at her in cheerful anticipation.

"Hello, Abram! How's your uncle?" she asked kindly.

"He sick yet," smiled Abram, with unabated cheerfulness.

Miss Ellerson smiled back, and went on. And for all her kind heart she never guessed that little Abram's ready smile masked a heart shaking with terror. For his uncle was very sick "yet," and sick people sometimes died, and if he should die the bottom would certainly drop out of little Abram's world. There was nobody in that world now but Abram and his uncle, and just around it stood a ring of harpies, called kind neighbors, who talked audibly about the uncertainty of life and the advantages of an orphan asylum for little boys who had nobody to look after them. When little Abram's mind was not preoccupied he frequently read the headlines of the papers he sold, for he was a sharp-witted youngster, and not without enterprise. But he never penetrated so far inside as the society column, so it is fairly certain that, though he had distributed many copies of the previous day's issue, announcing the arrival of Mr. Howard Allen in Arlington, he was himself quite unaware of that momentous fact.

CHAPTER I.

"Oh, Howard, I wonder if you would do me a great favor?" said Antonia one evening at dinner, with a shy glance across the table at her brother-in-law, once removed, Howard Allen. In spite of her effective air of shyness she really had very little doubt as to the answer, for Antonia Gardner did not often ask favors in vain. She was so little, so sweet, so appealing, and the rose-leaf color came and went in her cheeks so flutteringly that even her own family considered it a privilege to serve her, and is it possible to say more than that? And certainly Howard Allen, her sister-in-law's heretofore unknown brother, had shown no disposition during the week he had been a guest in the house to depart from the family tradition. Since the first day it had been taken for granted that his prime occupation was to carry out Antonia's wishes. His smile across the table now answered before his words:

"Ask what you will, to the half of my kingdom!"

"Ask quick, Tony, while the asking's good," adjured her brother Wilton from the foot of the table.

"The half of his kingdom's no great matter," gibed Allen's sister from the other end.

"The half of my material kingdom may not offer anything worthy of Antonia's acceptance," said Allen promptly, "but when it comes to my will and my willingness there is no limit to the resources I place at her disposal. What is the favor, Antonia?"

"Oh, I wondered if you would mind going over to Bolton's Bluff with me this evening. If you have nothing else to do. I want to go, and I don't quite like to go alone in the evening. I don't know the streets very well, and it isn't exactly a nice part of town——"

"You most certainly are not to go

there alone," interrupted her brother. "What under the sun do you want to go to Bolton's Bluff for, anyway?"

"On account of one of my newsboys—Abram Makowsky," Antonia explained, with a little embarrassment. Even before her own family she hesitated to refer to the private philanthropies which blossomed under her fingers—generous fingers which were fortunately filled with gold. "His uncle is ill—Abram told me a week ago—the last time I went down to the Newsboys' Club. And I said I would go out and see him soon. I ought to have gone before this—Abram expected me—but other things kept coming up." The tremulous color came into her cheeks again. The "other things" of the past week had mostly involved the entertainment of one Howard Allen.

"Of course Howard will be delighted to go with you," said Mrs. Gardner briskly. She was a large and competent woman, and she had no idea that her habit of deciding other people's affairs for them might sometimes be unwelcome.

But much to her surprise, and not at all to the credit of his diplomatic training, Allen looked distinctly embarrassed.

"I am so sorry—this evening—an important engagement—I am really so sorry——"

"Why, Howard!" cried Mrs. Gardner, with sisterly reproach in her voice. "What possible engagement can you have that we don't know about? Of course you can go!"

Allen did not answer her, but turned to Antonia. "To-morrow evening? Or any other time? You know I shall be happy to go with you."

"It doesn't matter at all," protested Antonia hastily. "I only meant if it was perfectly convenient, of course."

"Mayn't it be to-morrow evening—if it is to be an evening call?"

She shook her head, with a depre-

cating smile. "We have theater seats for to-morrow—but really it doesn't matter. I can go some afternoon. I only thought of the evening so as to be sure to see Abram—he is away in the daytime. But really it doesn't matter in the *least* about to-night."

So said Antonia; and yet it mattered just this much, that if they had gone that evening to see Abram Makowsky's uncle, who was ill, this story of the Terrace Inn Tragedy would never have been written. So seemingly accidental are the obstacles that change the current of the stream of events!

But the current of Mrs. Gardner's curiosity was not so easily diverted.

"What is your important engagement, Howard?" she demanded.

But Allen had had time to recover his diplomatic inscrutability.

"A matter of international politics, Jessie, dear," he said gravely. "I regret that I cannot say anything more. But if I should never return from this evening's fateful errand, remember that my correspondence is to be destroyed, unread, and you, Wilton, are to have my pearl studs."

"Thanks," said Gardner. "I suppose in exchange for the provisional studs—which Jessie would claim for earrings as soon as she was out of mourning—you would like a present and actual latchkey."

"Thoughtful as ever," murmured Allen gratefully.

"But I don't see why it is necessary to be so mysterious about it," persisted Mrs. Gardner. "We don't live in an age of conspiracies and dark dungeons. I thought American diplomacy was all open and aboveboard—what is it, Lizzie?" For the waitress was hovering at the dining-room door, with something in her hands.

"A special-delivery letter for Mr. Allen—the boy wants him to sign the book." She brought it to Allen at the table.

Allen scribbled his name, glanced at the superscription on the envelope, and laid it face down beside his plate.

"Don't hesitate to read your letter, Howard," said Mrs. Gardner blandly.

"Thanks, Jessie, but it isn't necessary. By means of a sixth sense which diplomats are supposed to cultivate, I know the contents of the letter by merely glancing at the envelope. Sometimes, of course, if I am out of practice, or if the handwriting is especially difficult, I have to hold it against my forehead and close my eyes for a moment. But not in this case."

"Of course your long-distance conversation with Thaddeus Rantoul this afternoon had nothing to do with your powers of divination," giped his sister.

Allen lifted his eyebrows, and then smiled, with a well-acted air of surprise and tolerant amusement.

"What made you think my conversation was with Mr. Rantoul?" he asked.

"I happened to answer the phone, and central said that Breckenridge wanted you. Then I held the line while Lizzie was trying to find you, and I heard some one—I thought it was Mr. Rantoul—say, 'Is that you, H. A.?' Of course I may have been mistaken," she added, with suspicious meekness.

"Give it up, Howard," laughed Gardner across the table. "I gave up trying to throw dust in her eyes the first year we were married. Besides, it is not a criminal offense to hold a telephone conversation with old Thad Rantoul. You run a risk of having his hoodoo settled on you, though."

"If settling on me would take it off of him, I'd run the risk cheerfully," said Allen. There was a flash in his eye that gave emphasis to his words.

"And be a fool for your pains," said Gardner coolly. "It's no joke, having to fight a hoodoo like Rantoul's."

"Really, what do you mean?" asked Antonia curiously. "You talk as though you believed it."

"Well, it really is enough to make any one superstitious, the run of ill luck that man has had," said Mrs. Gardner. "First, he met with an accident when he was a young man that crippled him, so that he has had to walk with a cane ever since. Then his bank failed—he was president, and all the property he had went into the wreck. Then there was some mining business that went smash. And other things, too—everything he has touched seemed to go wrong. Honestly, Howard, I wish you wouldn't have anything to do with him."

The momentary pause that Allen made before answering was really devoted to keeping the edge of temper out of his voice. For his years of diplomatic training had merely disciplined his naturally quick temper without eradicating it, and Thaddeus Rantoul was the great enthusiasm of his life. He gave to him something of the devotion which a boy gives Launcelot or Bayard, the loyalty which a passionate royalist pours out for his dethroned king. It was a romantic idealization which went far beyond ordinary filial affection, though there was also something filial in it. It was really the self-forgetful devotion of the boy carried over into manhood.

"Those facts are all true," he said now, "but they tell only half of the story. He rushed into the accident that crippled him to save another man's life—and he did it. When his bank failed he gave up every cent he owned to the depositors. More than that—Jessie and I lost practically our entire inheritance in that bank failure, Antonia, and Mr. Rantoul in effect adopted us and educated us from that time on."

"I haven't forgotten, Howard; I'm not ungrateful," said Mrs. Gardner, with a flush. "Still—it was through his fault that we were left penniless."

"Fault or misfortune, he took the responsibility. Then in that mining

deal. After giving years of time and thought and planning to developing a splendid property, he lost the whole thing through no fault of his own, but through some technical flaw in the title that his lawyers should have discovered in the beginning. As usual, he had to stand the racket, no matter who was at fault."

"He must have been born under an unlucky star," said Antonia. "If you are born under an unlucky star, you just can't help yourself, you know. Everything you touch turns to ashes. What is Mr. Rantoul doing now?"

Allen did not answer, but Gardner did: "There is a ghoulish gleam in your eye, Tony. You know you are anxious to hear what further misfortune is threatening the poor man."

"Well—just to make the story complete."

"I'm afraid you are going to be gratified. It looks as though Rantoul were in for a whole peck of trouble. After that mining-deal fiasco he took to railroading. He was made president of the S. & C. Road—an old road that was started long ago, when the State was young and needed railroads and was willing to give big concessions to get them. The S. & C. had been badly managed for years, and was hardly earning expenses. Rantoul worked the thing up, made some connections with other roads in the north, and altogether made the property valuable. And now, after he has put in time and energy and brains, and is just on the point of getting something back, somebody has discovered that the old road didn't live up to the conditions of the franchise. I haven't followed the matter in detail, but if the newspaper reports are correct it means that the entire property of the road would be wiped out to satisfy the claims of the State."

"And will it be?"

"Well, the matter is now before the legislature. Senator Gordon has been

particularly active about the investigation. He is making political capital out of it, of course. But there are a lot of people who have a grudge to satisfy against the old S. & C., and this gives them a chance. People in general have an idea that railroads just coin money, and that if you can beat a road in any way, you are merely getting even."

"What sort of a man is Gordon?" asked Allen thoughtfully.

"Ask Tony," said Gardner, with suspicious seriousness.

"Nonsense!" protested Antonia, lifting startled and reproachful eyes to her brother. "I never saw him more than once in my life."

"You made good use of that once, Tonykins."

But Mrs. Gardner came to Antonia's support. "Don't be absurd, Wilton. You make Tonia uncomfortable. Senator Gordon was here once, Howard, at a large reception. He may be a wizard in politics, but socially he is a dumb, driven beast, and if Tonia hadn't taken pity on him and talked to him I don't know what would have become of him. He's a farmer, isn't he, Wilton, when he isn't legislating?"

"Yes, he owns a large farm up near Daltonville, but don't make the mistake of thinking there are hayseeds in his hair."

"I liked him," said Antonia shyly. "He seemed so anxious to make himself pleasant."

"That isn't exactly the reputation that he has at large. To answer your question further, Howard, he is a man of the people, a farmer, as Jessie says, but for all that one of the keenest, shrewdest, hardest of practical politicians."

"Honorable?"

"Nothing has ever come out to the contrary."

Allen looked up with a smile. "Is that just natural cynicism, or do you

think that Gordon—might have his price?"

"They say that everybody has his price!"

Allen lapsed into an abstracted silence which lasted until dinner was finished.

Mrs. Gardner rose. "Does your important engagement take you away immediately, Howard, or are we to have the pleasure of your company in the drawing-room first? What is it, Lizzie?"

The maid at her elbow murmured an inaudible message.

"In the library? Good gracious, why didn't you let me know? Howard, Miss Ellerson is here to interview you—Miss Ellerson, of the *Noon*. That's what comes of being a celebrity."

"But I don't want to be interviewed."

"Nonsense! You aren't enough of a celebrity to take that pose. It's money in your pocket to have your name in the papers early and often. So be sweet to Miss Ellerson—she's as clever as they make them, and it will pay you to be in her good graces. Come on, I'll introduce you." And she slipped her hand in her brother's arm and led him to the library, where Miss Ellerson, of the *Noon*, had been asked to wait.

Whatever Allen came to think of Clio Ellerson in after days—and his thoughts on the subject of that young woman were many and various—it may be said at once that this introduction did not prepossess him in her favor. In the first place, his sense of personal dignity was affronted by the strenuous methods of American newspapers; furthermore, he wanted just at this time to keep out of the public eye as much as possible, for reasons connected with that interview with Rantoul which he had not discussed with his family, and even so faint a spotlight as could be cast by the *Noon* was

annoying. And, finally, he didn't care for clever women. Like most young men, he considered that the womanly woman was one made to love and be loved—like Antonia, for example. He therefore bowed somewhat stiffly to the young woman, trimly tailor-made and self-possessed, to whom his sister presented him. Then he looked up and met her eyes, in which a start of surprise melted into an amused smile.

"So it's you!" she said demurely.

"So you are Miss Ellerson!" he retorted. But there was no gleam of amusement in his face.

Mrs. Gardner looked from one to the other in some perplexity. "I gather that you have met before," she said.

"Not met, exactly," said Allen, recovering his self-possession. "Miss Ellerson stood by and watched me make a most undignified entry through Mr. Rantoul's kitchen window the other day. Did you take me for a burglar, Miss Ellerson?"

She laughed delightfully. "No, I took you for a rival and more successful interviewer. I had been unable to effect an entrance myself—the door was barred. You cannot imagine how I envied you when I saw you climbing in through the window."

Allen forced a smile, but it took an effort. He was still young enough to hate being laughed at above all things on earth.

"Howard would probably rather be taken for a burglar than a reporter," said Mrs. Gardner, with the large indifference to the delicacies of tact which is frequently found in efficient women. "He pretends to hate newspaper publicity. But if you make him appear clever in your interview, he will like it. Do your best for him, Miss Ellerson." She nodded smilingly, and left the room.

There was a hint of mischief behind Miss Ellerson's demure smile. She

looked up at Mr. Allen with guileless earnestness.

"What are your impressions of America, Mr. Allen?"

"You don't really want me to answer such a—such a question, do you?" Allen asked, struggling to keep his annoyance out of his voice.

"Not unless you like. As you say, it is a fool question——"

"Pardon me, I didn't say that."

"Perhaps you didn't. But you think so—vehemently. However, I'll ask something else. Can you tell me what attitude Mr. Rantoul is going to take in regard to this legislative investigation?"

Allen's diplomatic mask was on in an instant. "I beg pardon?"

"Is he going to fight, or defy it, or ignore it, or come across?"

"I am so entirely ignorant regarding the subject——"

Miss Ellerson waited, but he seemed to think the sentence completed.

"I've tried and tried to see him," she said wistfully, "but he won't say a word to me. Saturday, when I saw you get in through the window, I was tempted to follow, but I thought perhaps I'd better wait and interview you instead. It seemed possible that he might have discussed the situation with you."

On ordinary occasions Allen's eyes were recognizably blue, but they seemed to have turned blank and black as they met hers.

"And did it also seem possible that I might repeat to you his remarks, assuming that he made any?"

"In the newspaper business," said Miss Ellerson calmly, "we are not supposed to recognize impossibilities, even when we see them. We are expected to get the story."

"Even if it is none of your—of the public's business?"

Miss Ellerson did not flush at his words. She looked at him with quiet

earnestness. He had a swift perception that now he saw her real spirit.

"Publicity is like sunshine, Mr. Allen—it is antiseptic. Evil things cannot live under its rays. It may sometimes annoy our sensibilities, but it can do no real harm, and from that point of view there is no private business which is not in some degree the public's business. Certainly the public has a right to know the truth about the S. & C. Road and about Mr. Rantoul's methods and Senator Gordon's motives. Nothing flourishes in the dark except—fungus."

"Then the newspapers do not merely furnish gossip in print?" he asked, drawing her on to express herself. In spite of himself he was interested—less in her views perhaps than in herself.

She shrugged her shoulders lightly. "They may think they are merely furnishing gossip, and the readers may think they are merely reading gossip, but—God works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. The bad man knows that this gossip might land him in prison. Business 'secrets' are out of date, Mr. Allen, and mysteries are always open to suspicion."

"You will be justifying detective agencies next—and eavesdropping—and the opening of private letters." His smiling mockery teased her.

"I have great confidence in sunshine," said Miss Ellerson simply. "You see, Mr. Allen, a good deal of curiosity has developed in regard to this Gordon investigation of the S. & C. just because Mr. Rantoul has been so persistently silent about his position. It has been suggested that he has a trump up his sleeve which he is going to spring at the last moment. It isn't like him, you know, just to lie down and give up."

"No, it certainly isn't."

"That's why I have tried to get a chance to talk to him about it. He won't see any one from the press.

Now—if I could give an authorized statement from a personal friend of his—one who had a confidential chat with him no later than last Saturday—it would be read with great interest—and would probably do his side of the case no harm."

Allen smiled, but shook his head. "I see your position, Miss Ellerson. As you say, you believe in sunshine. But you may have heard the proverb to the effect that it is difficult to extract sunshine from cucumbers. In this instance I am a cucumber."

She smiled in answer, and rose. "As you will. But it is only fair to warn you that I am going to try to extract it from Gordon."

"When?" He looked startled.

She watched him curiously. "At the first opportunity" she said slowly, and noted the look of relief that unconsciously relaxed his features. "So you will not even give me your opinion of America?"

"May I give you instead my opinion of American newspaper women?"

"Some time—when your acquaintance is more extended," she said composedly. "Good evening, Mr. Allen." Her manner was slightly but perceptibly defensive, and Allen realized uncomfortably that his carelessly spoken words might not have seemed to her the compliment he had intended. Could she possibly have supposed that he meant to criticize her? He escorted her ceremoniously to the door, but his diplomatic calm was not a little ruffled.

It would have been more ruffled if by any possibility of telepathy he could have read Miss Ellerson's thought as she paused at the street corner. Not that she was thinking about him. Mr. Howard Allen had gone completely out of her mind. But she was thinking intently as she stood there—

"Now what car line will take me nearest to the Terrace Inn?"

Allen sought his sister. "Who is

Miss Ellerson, Jessie? Friend of yours?"

"Why, old Judge Ellerson's daughter. They used to live in our street when we were children—surely you remember him?"

"Oh, of course! I thought the name was familiar. I remember the girl, too—a wild little thing, with hair flying in the wind. We ran a race once on the playground, and she beat me—I tripped and fell, and she went past me like a flash. That rankled. Some sort of a classic name——"

"Clio."

"Of course. Why under the sun is a nice girl like that doing reporting?"

"Well, she had to earn her living when the judge died. What would you have had her do, you medieval man? Marry?"

"That wouldn't be difficult in her case, I fancy. But anything rather than reporting—horrid, prying business!"

"Did she try to pry into your affairs?" asked Mrs. Gardner, surprised and a little resentful.

"Oh, no, of course not," he answered hastily. "I was just speaking on general principles."

"Clio is clever, and I understand she is doing very good work. But I haven't seen much of her since her mother died. Now come into the drawing-room; Antonia is going to sing. You will love her voice."

Allen's face brightened, but it fell again as he glanced hastily at his watch.

"Sorry, but I can't wait. Some other time, I hope—and soon."

"Oh, I forgot your mysterious engagement. When shall we see you again?"

"I can't say when I'll be in, but not late. It's nothing but a business engagement, Jessie, so don't go making a mystery about it. Mysteries are always open to suspicion—as some one has said."

"Oh, I'm not going to be horrid and prying, like a newspaper woman, bless you. He shall have his little mysteries, if he wants them. Good-by. Don't get into any trouble, Howie."

"I won't," he promised easily.

On the street corner, he paused a moment to look about.

"Now I wonder what car line will take me nearest to the Terrace Inn," he cogitated.

CHAPTER II.

Allen may not have realized it, but part of his reluctance to have the guesses of his family so much as touch the edge of his errand that evening arose from his distaste for the errand itself. He paused under a street lamp to light a cigar, and walked on slowly, reviewing the situation in his mind.

His five years of absence in foreign lands had brought him home with all his sensibilities quivering with home affection. He was to make an extended visit with his sister in Arlington, but on the second day he had hurried off to look up Thaddeus Rantoul, who had gone off to his summer home at near-by Breckenridge. He was shocked to find Rantoul's hair much whiter than he remembered it, and still more disturbed to find that the accumulating troubles which Gardner had retold at the dinner table this evening had worn upon the nerve of the old fighter. He was still leonine, still magnificent, as he had been when he caught and held the devoted admiration of the boy Howard, but he was no longer triumphant over his evil destiny. He was fretted, harassed, resentful. He had leaned heavily upon Allen's sympathy, retailing the outrageous onslaughts of fortune with more vehemence than coherence. Allen had listened with keen interest and answering indignation, and had asked if there was no way in which he could be of service.

"Not unless you will sandbag Sen-

ator Gordon," Rantoul answered, with a flash of his old manner.

"Would the investigation be dropped if he were disposed of?" Allen had asked.

"I think so. I have strong friends in the house. And everybody knows that even if the management of the S. & C. was as crooked as a worm fence in its early days, its sins are dead and should be decently buried. The road itself would have been dead if it hadn't been for my work these four years past. I have made it worth investigating and penalizing, the devil take him!"

"Has the situation been laid before him?"

"Oh, he's a reformer, bless your soul! One of these reformers who go around with a brass band and a press agent. But I'll bet any balance that may be left me after they have confiscated the S. & C. that if somebody investigated *him* they wouldn't have to go very far to find something worth looking into."

Allen felt helpless. He was aware of his own ignorance in regard to a hundred aspects of the situation which might be vital. But most keenly of all he felt that this splendid old fighter was caught in an exasperating snare, and that it was pitiful. He urged his own willingness to do anything within the range of possibility and of his powers, and there the matter was left. But a few days later, Rantoul called him up by phone and demanded his immediate presence at Breckenridge. "I'm laid up with a broken leg," he announced in tones of tragic calm.

"Really?" demanded Allen, not from any doubt of Mr. Rantoul's veracity, but merely as an expression of surprise.

"Well, I've sprained my ankle, if you are so infernally particular about the exact details. But since I can't get about, it might as well be broken and be damned to it. Come on out. I've

got to talk to you, and I can't express myself properly without running the risk of having the company remove my telephone. You get the next car out without fail." And he rang off, to save argument.

This was on a Saturday. Allen had obeyed instructions and caught the next suburban electric for Breckenridge.

Breckenridge was a summer colony on the high banks of a lake some dozen miles from Arlington, and here Rantoul lived the simple life in his cottage, The Ridge, which was cared for by a woman of the neighborhood who came in "by the day." It was all right when the tough old man was in his usual form, but if he was laid up with a sprained ankle it would be tedious enough, Allen reflected. He should have to insist that Rantoul get a proper nurse, or that he return to his hotel apartment in town, where he could have proper care.

The door of the screened porch, which formed nearly half of the house, was locked—contrary to custom. As Allen shook it, Rantoul's deep voice boomed out from some interior:

"That you, Howie?"

"Yes. I'm locked out."

"Climb in through the kitchen window, and come out to the front porch. I can't get up to let you in."

Allen followed directions, though with some inward protest. To remove a screen from a kitchen window and climb in across a table covered with pans and dishes is not particularly difficult for an athletic young man, but neither is it a particularly dignified procedure, and Allen was young enough to have a lively sense of what was becoming to a man who might, on occasion, be called upon to represent his country to the world. He managed, however, to effect an entrance—and then he saw outside a trim young woman who had evidently been watching his efforts with wide-eyed interest.

Allen swore to himself as he dodged out of range of her vision and went in search of the front porch. Here he found Rantoul, with a stiffly swathed leg stretched out on a chair.

"You don't encourage visitors," was Allen's greeting.

"There's been a confounded woman reporter here from the *Noon*. Nothing saved me but having the door locked. Think of her nerve, when I came out here especially to get out of their reach, spies and tattlers that they are! Well, Howie, here's a pretty kettle of fish!" He moved his foot to see how much it would hurt, and then swore picturesquely at the pain.

"Have you had it properly looked after?" Allen asked.

"Oh, that's all right. There's a doctor summering right next door. But the dickens of it is that I can't put my foot to the floor for several days."

"No, I should suppose not. But you can't stay alone."

"Oh, heavens, Howie, don't worry me about unimportant things like that. That's the doctor's business. He is going to bring some one out from Arlington to-night. A wet nurse, I suppose! That's why I had to see you at once, before the eavesdropper got here. See here, Howie, you said the other day you wanted to do something to help me. Was that lip service or did you mean it?"

"I meant it, of course."

"How far would you go?"

"Any distance."

Rantoul smiled in content. "Good boy! I knew I could bank on you. I knew you wouldn't quibble. However, I'm not going to ask you to shoot Gordon, or do anything else that your honor would not sanction—or, perhaps, I'd better say my honor, since I don't know what delicate lines yours might draw." He stared at Allen a minute, as though perplexed by a momentary doubt

Allen was a little surprised, but he made no comment, and Rantoul spoke again abruptly:

"I want to send you as my representative to Gordon."

"Why, most certainly——"

Rantoul held up a checking finger. "It isn't so simple as all that. This is an absolutely secret mission. You must mention it to no one, now or at any time in the future. You must lie about it, if you are not clever enough to keep from being pushed into a corner. You must not leave room for a guess or a surmise."

"It sounds very mysterious."

"Not mysterious, but secret. Secret as the devil. So secret that you aren't going to know anything about the matter yourself."

"Then how can I act intelligently?"

"You will follow orders. I shall give you a letter, in a plain envelope, sealed, which you will place in Gordon's hands. When he has read it, he will indicate whether he regards my proposition favorably or not. If he does, you will give him a second letter, which will also be sealed in a plain envelope, but marked '2' for your guidance. If his position is unfavorable, you will come away, and bring No. 2 back to me. And then you will forget the whole thing. It happened while you were in a trance."

"It sounds fairly simple," Allen commented.

Rantoul groaned. "It would have been simple enough if I hadn't got myself laid up like this. I was coming back from Brookfield when I slipped, getting off the train——"

Allen reflected that Brookfield was the capital, where the legislature was even now in session, and drew his own conclusions.

"I'll telephone you when and where to discharge your errand after I have arranged the details. Don't come out here again."

"And the letters?" asked Allen.

"Those I shall send to you by registered mail, with full directions."

So the matter had been left at that time. Allen could hardly doubt, in his own mind, that he had committed himself to assisting in some sort of bribery or threat by which Gordon was to be influenced. He did not like the idea, but neither did he like the idea of failing the old man who relied upon him. That alternative was not to be contemplated. Nor was any other course open. His opinion was not wanted, his judgment was not consulted. He was simply asked to do something—one small thing—for the man who had done much for him and who stood alone facing a narrowing circle of foes. Of course he would do it.

But he liked it still less when a telephone message from Rantoul gave him his final instructions. He was to go that evening to the Terrace Inn in Arlington and ask for J. W. McGrath. He would be shown to McGrath's room, and he was to deliver the letter, which would be delivered to him by registered mail that afternoon, to the man whom he would meet in the room.

"Is McGrath himself?" asked Allen.

"You couldn't tell them apart," said Rantoul over the wire.

So there was secrecy on Gordon's part as well! Allen felt that he was getting into a coil, but he asked no further questions. He had undertaken to do Rantoul's errand, and the less he knew about things beyond the immediate line of his engagement, the better probably. Common sense told him that where so much secrecy was necessary there was good reason for a profound lack of curiosity on his part.

The registered packet which had been delivered to him during dinner contained the two letters from Rantoul. One was a long envelope, marked No. 2. He had placed both of them

in his coat pocket, from which he had removed everything else, so that he could get at them readily. Now, as he walked down the street smoking his cigar, a grim idea came into his mind: Suppose he should be run over by an automobile, or shot up by a lurking highwayman, and those letters be opened by the police to discover his identity. Accidents did happen in this world.

A street car took him to the neighborhood of the Terrace Inn, which he had previously taken the precaution to look up in the city directory. The inn lay in a midway region between the business and the older residence part of the town. It was an attractive building, in old English style, obviously catering more to permanent boarders than to transients. It took its name from a green and graduated terrace at the rear, which ran down the block to the street below, on which were railway tracks. Allen, taking in the location with interest and curiosity, guessed correctly that the inn might be easily reached by passengers who alighted at the cross street, instead of going on to the Union station, and who could therefore readily make a visit to Arlington without forcing that fact upon the attention of the public. This way station, within the city limits, was a sort of back door to the town.

Just in front of the Terrace Inn, which occupied a corner position in the block, there was a small, triangular park, filled with shade trees and park benches, and dimly lit by a solitary electric light. Allen noticed a young woman seated on one of the benches, and he was sufficiently uncomfortable about his errand to wish she were not there to observe him. He was not sufficiently familiar with Miss Ellerton's silhouette to recognize her in that light.

The entrance to the inn opened upon a wide hall, not at all brilliantly lighted. On the left was a small office, where

a clerk was talking idly to a young man who lounged against the cigar stand.

"Can you tell me if Mr. McGrath is in—J. W. McGrath?" Allen asked, making his tone as casual as possible.

"I'll see." The clerk crossed over to the other desk, and examined a wall register. "Yes, he is stopping here. Send up your card?"

"No, he is expecting me. I'll go up."

The clerk touched a buzzer, and a boy in modest livery appeared from some outer region.

"Take gent'mun to No. 83," the clerk said severely, and returned to his interrupted conversation with the young man who wore his hat on the back of his head.

Room No. 83 was on the second floor. The door at which the boy stopped looked exactly like the doors to right and left of it, except that it stood slightly ajar. When the boy's tap was not answered, he pushed the door open experimentally. The room was empty.

"Guess he's gone out," said the boy cheerfully. "D'ye wantta wait?"

As Allen had come there for the express purpose of seeing McGrath, he had no intention of taking any chances. The door ajar suggested that the occupant of the room could not be far away.

"I'll wait," he said briefly, and stepped inside. The door automatically closed behind him. The boy's diminishing whistle marked his departure.

Allen glanced about the room. It was the ordinary, impersonal room provided for transients—furnished with a bed, a dresser, table, and two chairs. A man's straw hat on the dresser, and the rumpled towels in the adjoining bathroom, the door to which stood open, were the only indications that the room had been recently occupied. Allen glanced at his watch. His appointment had been for nine. It still lacked ten minutes of the hour. He took a chair and settled himself to wait.

Some time had elapsed—more than ten minutes—when Allen was roused out of the semireverie into which he had fallen by the sound of voices in the hall outside the door. The voices were not loud, but they were clearly angry. With the bristling of interest with which man recognizes a fight, Allen sat up alertly and listened. He could distinguish nothing except that two men were talking at the same time. Then there was the sound of a scuffle, immediately followed by two shots from a revolver. Forgetting all reason for keeping himself inconspicuous, Allen sprang for the door. He could not open it at once—it seemed to be held from the outside. Then he wrenched it open, and a man fell in upon his arms—a man whose limp hand seemed to have just fallen from the knob.

Allen let him down upon the floor, and knelt beside him. It took but an instant's examination for Allen to satisfy himself that the man was done for. He had been shot through the temple, and might almost be said to have died instantly. As Allen rose from his knees, he suddenly realized how this affair must affect him. A murdered man in the room with him—it would mean publicity, investigation, possibly arrest and search—and he had Rantoul's letters to Gordon in his pocket! A sudden question that came into his mind made him glance sharply again at the dead man. No, this could by no possibility be Gordon; this was a young man. It must have been merely chance that had sent him to this door. But it was a chance in which Allen could not afford to be entangled. He stepped out into the hall.

The elevator that had brought him up was at the right. He could hear it ascending now, and guessed swiftly that some one was coming up from the office to investigate the disturbance. To avoid being seen, he turned hastily

to the left, where the hall ended in a stairway. A door slammed below, and some one came up the first flight on the jump. Allen swiftly and quietly took the second flight, leading him to the story above. He would walk the length of the hall, descend by the front stairway, and slip out while attention was centered on the tragedy on the second floor. Nothing whatsoever would be gained by staying; much would be risked. Yet his action had been directed rather by instinct than by reason. He had not had time to reason.

All might have gone as he intended but for the fact that as he hesitated a moment at the head of the stairs, listening for any sound that would indicate what was going on below, a portière was snapped aside, and a woman faced him—a young woman, with the same, intent, listening look on her face that was on Allen's. Her eyes arrested him as though she had spoken, and in an instant she did speak.

"Come in here!" she said authoritatively, holding aside the portière that masked the entrance to what was evidently a private suite.

"I beg pardon——"

Her fingers closed upon his wrist with a nervous grip. "You want to get out without being seen. Very well, I'll help you, but you must do as I say. If you don't, I'll give the alarm and say I found you skulking in my room."

"Madam——"

"Oh, good heavens, don't be a fool! Go inside!" She fairly pulled him in. From the little anteroom, which was masked by the portière, a door opened upon a room where a table was spread for two. The chairs were drawn back as though the diners had but sprung up.

"Listen—and answer!" the woman said tensely. "You want to get out of the hotel—quietly; isn't that it?"

"Yes."

"So do I. Wait a few minutes, and

we will go together. You can't go alone—because I will not let you."

Allen was no more inclined than the average man to yield under coercion, but she rather had him in a trap. He distinctly did want to get away quietly, and it was in her power to prevent it if she wished to. What her motives or object might be he could form no guess. Undoubtedly it had something to do with the crime below, but so long as she was not the murderess—and that her attitude made fairly certain—he would not be compounding a felony by accompanying her from the house. And if she was known in the hotel, her company might be as useful to him as his could be to her. She evidently saw his yielding in his face, for she placed her hand on the back of one of the chairs and swung it around to the table.

"Sit down here!" she said.

He took the chair at the table. For a moment she stood beside him, still with that intent look of listening upon her face, then hastily she took the seat opposite him, and facing the door, which was at his back. Almost at the instant there was a tap at the door.

"Come!" the woman called clearly, and a half-grown boy, evidently a dining-room waiter, entered with a pot of coffee on a tray.

"You are very slow, Jim," the woman said sharply. "You have kept us waiting half an hour. Look at my watch—half past nine to the minute, and I telephoned for that coffee at nine. What's the matter in the dining room? I shall complain to the office." She had risen as she spoke, and she took the pot from the boy's hands behind Allen's back.

"I came soon's I could," the boy muttered.

"What was that disturbance about downstairs, Jim?" she asked, with an abrupt change from severity to curiosity.

"When?" Jim asked, with surprised interest.

"Just now—a minute before you came in."

"I didn't hear anything," the boy responded dubiously.

"I wish you would go down and see what it was," she urged. "Then come back and let me know."

"All right." Jim was used to carrying out the erratic commands of feminine guests without question. He turned to depart, and the lady went with him into the hall.

"Mr. Hunt is laughing at me for being frightened," she said in an undertone, "but I am sure I heard shots." And then she paused at the top of the stairs, while Jim threw himself down in half a dozen jumps.

In a few minutes he returned, a very different expression on his careless face.

"Yes'm, there was shooting, sure enough. They say a man was killed, but I can't find out much about it yet. I'll come back and let you know more."

"Has the—have they—do you know who did it?"

"No'm; nobody knows. They say it was a man that ran out through the hall."

She drew a quick breath, and her hand went up to her throat. But her voice was less strained when she spoke again:

"How dreadful! Do let me know if you find out anything more, Jim. And when you go down will you order a carriage for me? Mr. Hunt has to catch the ten o'clock train. Order it at once, and tell them to send it to the side door. And when it comes, you telephone up to me, will you?" She held a coin out suggestively between thumb and finger.

"Yes'm, Mrs. Hunt, I'll 'tend to it right off." And Jim dropped downstairs to his own department, where Mrs. Hunt's orders were carried out

with care. Jim knew where his interest lay.

In the meantime, Mrs. Hunt returned to the apartment, where she had left Allen sitting at the deserted supper table. He still sat there, with his back to the door. She dropped into the chair opposite, rested her chin in her cupped palm, and looked at him. Suddenly a smile broke the tense lines of her face.

"It was fortunate you stumbled up here," she said

A swift wonder of "Fortunate for whom?" went through Allen's mind, but he did not put it into speech. He had a feeling that the less he knew about the situation the better.

"I have ordered a carriage; it will be here immediately," she continued. "It will take us to the railway station, where I shall leave you."

"How——"

"We will take the carriage at the side door, which is used only by guests who live here. You are a guest of mine; you have been dining with me."

Allen bowed. He guessed, of course, that he was to personate some man who had been dining with her, and whose informal departure he was to cover. The position did not please him, but he was not an officer of the law, and it was not necessary that he should cultivate suspicion. What was necessary was that he should get away without attracting attention. Unconsciously his hand went to his breast pocket, where Gordon's letters were, and he drew them out enough to assure himself they were both there. He was suddenly nervous about them. The young woman opposite was watching him under her eyelids, but she said nothing until the telephone tinkled.

"All right," she said. And to Allen she added: "The carriage." She picked up a light wrap, threw a lace scarf over her head, and opened the

door to the hall. Here she paused a moment, making sure no one was passing. Then she nodded to Allen, and they went quickly down the stairway, which circled about the elevator. Evidently the stairway was little used, for they met no one, and at the foot the young woman placed her hand on his arm and led him quickly and silently through an inconspicuous passageway, to an exit upon a side street. Here Jim was waiting by the door.

"Put on your hat!" the young woman whispered swiftly, and while she held Jim's eyes with the gleam of a coin between her thumb and finger, Allen slipped past her and into the waiting carriage. In a moment she followed.

"To the station!" Jim said, with proud authority.

On the way to the station both were silent. Wondering whether he would know his companion if he should see her again, Allen turned his head to look at her as she sat beside him. She was a slight, dark woman, in the neighborhood, he guessed, of twenty-five, and as the street lamps flashed their light now and again upon her face he saw it as a concentrated knot of determination. He could hardly fix her features, that look of intense concentration so covered them. He was not a little startled, therefore, when presently she put up her hands and began to sob. Silently at first the gasping breaths shook her slight form, and then she began to wail softly.

"I'm awfully sorry," Allen said awkwardly. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Oh, why was I ever born?" she wailed, and threw herself upon his breast. She did it so impersonally that Allen was not embarrassed, though he was surprised. He felt that she had merely sought the nearest support when emotion overcame her, and that it should at last have broken down her wonderful self-control was not surprising, if, as he suspected, the friend who

had dined with her had shot the man who lay dead in Room No. 83.

"Is there anything you want me to do?" he asked gravely. The carriage had stopped, and Allen perceived that they were at the station entrance. "If there is, tell me quickly." He spoke with a little annoyance, for a waiting porter had thrown the carriage door open, and the light of the street lamp revealed both to him and the driver what must have seemed like a very tender and intimate tableau.

"No, no, no; I don't want to be foolish. Of course you must go," she said. And then, to his amazement, she lifted her arms, clasped them about his neck, and kissed him.

He disengaged her quickly, though gently. "This is carrying realism to the limit—my compliments," he said in a tender undertone. Then, raising his hat and holding it so as to shield his face, he deliberately kissed her upon the lips, and stepped from the carriage. Tossing a coin to the porter, he hurried into the station. He walked through it quickly, looking about as though searching for some one, and then went out through another door. Here he made his way to a street car.

In the friendly shadow that enveloped the rear platform he hastily reviewed the astonishing events of the evening. It was not yet three hours since he had left home, knowing, indeed, that he was engaged in a mission whose very secrecy made it seem dubious, but expecting merely to act the part of a faithful errand boy. He had been next door to a murder; he had been dangerously close to unpleasant and risky publicity; he had had an amazing encounter with a remarkable woman. He had missed the appointment with Senator Gordon—or McGrath—but at any rate he still had the sealed letters, for the preservation of which he had acted so disingenuous a part. His hand went to the pocket where he had placed them—and

fell away as though it had been paralyzed.

The pocket was empty—the letters were gone.

CHAPTER III.

Allen's dismay on discovering that the letters which Rantoul had intrusted to him were gone was so overwhelming that for a time it simply blotted everything else out of his consciousness. He, out of all the harassed old man's friends, had been chosen for this mission because of his special trustworthiness, and he had bungled matters like the veriest tyro. Of course he must get the letters back. He would go to the Terrace Inn the first thing in the morning, and confront that amazing woman and demand his property. What her object could have been in robbing him he could not guess. She could hardly have known what the letters were. Perhaps she was just a common pickpocket, taking a chance. Perhaps she would be gone, like her supposititious husband, by the time he could get there. He tossed restlessly through the night, and was up as soon as daylight gave him an excuse. He saw the morning newsboy toss a twisted paper into Mrs. Gardner's nasturtium bed, and he went down for a first glimpse. The paper would have something about the tragedy, probably.

It did. The front page held this item:

MAN MURDERED IN THE TERRACE INN.

A mysterious murder was committed last night in the Terrace Inn, a quiet family hotel on Elliott Street. The victim was J. W. McGrath, address unknown.

McGrath registered at the hotel yesterday afternoon, paying in advance. He went out almost immediately, telling the clerk that he would return in the evening. A little before nine o'clock a man called to see him, and was conducted by the bell boy to McGrath's room. McGrath was not in, but as the door was ajar the visitor said he would wait, and the boy left him in the vacant room.

About half an hour later the clerk was startled by hearing shots on the floor above, and rushed up. McGrath was found on the floor in his room, dead from a shot through the temple.

The mysterious visitor who called on McGrath had disappeared. A waiter from the dining room was near the back stairway, and he claims that he saw a man rush past him and go out through the rear door. His testimony is expected to prove valuable.

McGrath was apparently about twenty-five years old, and had dark hair and eyes. One peculiar feature of the case is that there was nothing in his pockets to identify him, and in registering he gave no address. He wore a new suit of ready-made clothing, and his underwear was new throughout. The only article in his pockets was a handkerchief, which has never been laundered. The man who shot him must have also robbed him.

The police have a good description of the man who called for McGrath in the evening, and are working on the clew. Developments are expected shortly.

Allen's eye flashed through these short but important paragraphs, and then he read them again, very slowly and carefully, as though he were committing each item to memory. Then he twisted up the paper and dropped it back in the bed of nasturtiums and returned quietly to his room. When he came down to breakfast, an hour later, the little black mustache which in foreign fashion had adorned his upper lip since his return had disappeared, and instead of the Poole clothes which he had been wearing with much satisfaction he was in tennis flannels.

Antonia stole a glance of secret admiration at the athletic figure he presented, but Jessie Gardner regarded him with frank, sisterly appraisal.

"What did you take it off for?" she demanded. "I think you looked more distinguished with your nice little black mustache."

"I feel more American without it. I must have some clothes, too. Introduce me to your tailor, Wilton?"

"With pride. When?"

"I think I'll stroll down with you when you go to the office."

"Stroll? People don't stroll in America, Howard. They go to the office in an electric car, either public or private. Where's the paper, Lizzie?"

Allen watched his brother-in-law without seeming to do so, as Gardner unfolded the paper. He glanced at all the headlines, turned over to read the stock reports, glanced at the sporting page, and then turned back to the front page. Folding the paper so that he could read the story of the Terrace Inn murder at ease, he propped it against the sugar bowl and read the account, which Allen knew almost by heart, with deliberate care.

"Anything in the paper, Wilton?" asked Jessie. She was never wholly reconciled to her husband's unsocial habit of reading the paper at the breakfast table, so she tried conscientiously to drag conversation out of it, since she could not prevent it.

"A job for Doran," Gardner answered absently, feeling blindly for his toast.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Jessie.

At that Gardner looked up with a short laugh and shook his head. "Good Lord, what creatures women are!"

"Well——" said Jessie protestingly.

Gardner turned to Allen with an air. "Your sister, Allen! Would you have believed it of her? I tell her that a murder has been committed—a murder most foul and dark, as somebody says—and her only comment is 'Oh, good!'"

Antonia turned her soft eyes, full of questioning loyalty, upon Jessie. "Oh, but she didn't mean that, I know!" she breathed.

"Doran is the new coroner," said Jessie to Howard, in explanation. "He is a friend of ours, and Wilton helped get him elected. Of course I am sorry people have to be murdered in order that a coroner may live; but, since they will get murdered, coroner or no coroner, I'm glad to have them get mur-

dered in Doran's precinct." She finished with a mocking little face at her husband.

"I suppose it means that I shall have to attend the inquest," said Gardner. "Doran made me promise that I would stand by, as a personal and unofficial counselor, the first time he had to conduct an inquest. He is nervous about the technique of the proceedings."

"Who is the murderee, Wilton?" asked Jessie, with ostentatious sangfroid. "Any one we know?"

"J. W. McGrath his name is."

"Don't know him. Not in our set. And the murderer?"

"Didn't leave his card. Mystery about it. Read it yourself." He pushed the paper across the table, and gave undivided attention to his egg.

Allen had been thinking. He felt that he ought to know all that could be known in regard to the man who had been killed in Gordon's room—he was too closely mixed up in the affair to be indifferent to any aspect of it. And, though the newspaper assurance that the man who had called on McGrath would be traced had led him to make some obvious changes in his appearance, he had no intention of being forced into hiding.

"Would it be possible for me to accompany you?" he asked Gardner. "I have never attended an inquest in my life, and I think I should like to know something about the technique of the proceedings myself."

"Certainly. You can carry my green bag and go as my clerk."

"Oh, Howard!" murmured Antonia, with shy protest.

"That's what men are like, Tonia," said Jessie, with cheerful resignation. "You just have to get used to them."

At that moment the telephone rang in the butler's pantry, and everybody stopped talking while Lizzie answered the call. In a moment she appeared.

"Mr. Allen is wanted at the phone."

Allen threw down his napkin and went to the phone, fully conscious that every word he spoke would be overheard, even if the family made a polite pretense of talking among themselves. As he had anticipated, it was Rantoul's voice in the phone:

"Hello! That you, Howie? How do things go?"

"May I come and see you to-day?" Allen asked, by way of answer.

"Can't you tell me over the phone what he said?"

"Thank you, the family are all well," Allen remarked distinctly. "They are all right here at breakfast."

Rantoul's chuckle came faintly over the wire. "All right, Howie. I catch the idea. We'll make it a game of 'Yes and No.' Did you see Gordon?"

"No."

"The devil you didn't! What slipped up?"

"Yes!" said Allen, with emphasis.

"Oh, confound you, I can't pick things out of you that way. Go somewhere where you can telephone me intelligently."

"My only engagement in the immediate future," said Allen conversationally, "is to attend an inquest with Wilton. There was a murder at the Terrace Inn last night—some one by the name of J. W. McGrath was killed at—"

"Gad, Howie, what's that?"

"—and Wilton is going to attend the inquest professionally, and I'm going for the sake of my general information. That's all I know about it."

"Are you telling me that Gordon was killed last night?"

"No."

"Is there anything in the paper about it?"

"Yes, everything."

"You have the letters——"

Allen snapped the receiver on before the question could be fully formed.

That, definitely, was a question he could not answer over the phone.

He went out to the front hall, where Gardner was getting ready to depart for his office.

"Hop in, How, if you are going down with me."

Allen turned to Antonia. "Can't we have a game of tennis when I come back from the dressmaker's? You see, I dressed for it—in hopes." And while he spoke, a half-amused wonder ran through his mind whether he really was as adroit as all this by nature. He had donned the tennis suit because a sudden subconscious warning had told him not to wear again the clothes in which he had visited the Terrace Inn, and now, to justify the flannels, he must beg a game, and use up time which he might well have spent in considering the various aspects of the complicated circumstances within which he stood.

"Yes, indeed," murmured Antonia, with shy pleasure. She had fully intended to make this morning serve the purpose which had been frustrated last night, by going out to see Abram Makowsky's sick uncle. But wasn't it admitted that charity should begin at home; and wasn't it being charitable to do something for the stranger who had just returned home after five long years of absence? She would go out quietly by herself in the afternoon, after the game was over. No need to take any one. Antonia was shy about her charities—which were numerous. "Yes, indeed, I'll be glad to have a game," she murmured.

Gardner left his brother-in-law at his tailor's, and here Allen exercised his diplomatic gifts so skillfully that the tailor not only promised to produce the clothes he ordered with unprecedented swiftness, but even to fit him out temporarily with the makeshift street suit which he insisted he must have for the afternoon.

He did not, perhaps, know himself

what a triumph that concession was; but, as he strolled back to Antonia and the tennis court, he did reflect, with some amusement, on his Flora McFlimseylike state. That poor devil that had been killed last night—McGrath—he, too, had been dressed in new togs throughout, the paper said. Had that been for the purpose of avoiding recognition? Who was McGrath, anyway? How was he mixed up with Gordon? And who had killed him? A mystery, the paper had called it. As the murderer had escaped, and was not likely to come back for the purpose of clearing things up, it might remain a mystery forever. They said the police had a clew, but it was Allen's clear conviction that the clew led straight to him!

When he reached the house, Antonia was ready, and he stopped only for the balls and rackets before setting out for the court, which was a block away from the house.

"There was a telephone call for you," Antonia said. "Lizzie wrote the number on the pad. Perhaps you'd better see——"

Allen went back and looked at the pad. It was Rantoul's number.

"That will keep until afternoon," he said. "We mustn't let business interfere with tennis."

The court was in good condition, but Allen played a poor game. Yet, now, curiously enough, it was not the loss of the letters that oppressed him. He had made up his mind to attempt their recovery, and so dismissed the thought of them for the time being. But constantly there swam into that inner field of vision, which memory beholds, the outline of the man who had fallen into his arms when he opened the door, the face that had been turned up to him when he laid the man upon the floor and knelt for a moment beside him. Let no one say that death is a trivial matter, to be treated lightly by the philosophical. It is a sacred mystery, and

he who has seen it has seen the gods at their work, making and remaking the world.

Allen spun the game out till luncheon time. Then he improvised an engagement downtown as an excuse for not entering the house. He must keep out of the telephone reach of Rantoul until he knew better where he stood—and he could not go calling on the resourceful lady of the Terrace Inn until he had some proper clothes. Such was the amiability of Wilton's tailor, however, that a few hours later a well-dressed young man, with no touch of London about his clothes, paused to buy an afternoon paper from a small newsboy in the little triangular park that faced the Terrace Inn.

"All-about-eh-murder's on the last page," said the boy helpfully.

"Oh, do you read your own papers?" asked Allen, turning to the last page accordingly.

"Course I'd read about a murder in my own hotel," said the boy.

Allen glanced at him sharply. "How, your hotel?" he asked. The boy was ragged and looked uncared for beyond the average, but he might possibly be the son of some hotel servant. He had the sharp, pinched face of a worried squirrel, and below the impudent assurance of his look there was something of the dumb wistfulness of an animal—or of an overburdened child. "Do you mean that you live over there?"

"Naw," said the boy, in disgust, and plainly suspicious of chaffing.

"Oh, you mean you sell papers there? Do you know the names of any of the people living there?" He put the question casually and in a conversational tone, but the boy watched him warily.

"Some of 'em," he answered non-committally.

"Do you know the name of the people who have rooms on the third floor

—a man and his wife—the man went away last night?”

“Say, are you a tec?” demanded the boy. It was evident that, though suspicion bade him flee, curiosity held him bound.

“Of course not. I should think you’d be sharp enough to know better than that. I’m just curious. So you don’t know his name?”

“Hunt. That’s in the paper.”

Allen ran his eye over the afternoon paper’s rehash of the morning paper’s story. There was little additional information, except that it mentioned the time and place of the inquest, and indicated that everybody who could throw any light on the affair had been summoned by the coroner. A Mr. Warren Hunt, who lived at the hotel, had left on the ten-o’clock train for Chicago, it appeared, but that was a matter of no importance, one was to infer, as there were still a great many people in the hotel who could be questioned. The one important point was that the murderer had run out into the street immediately after the crime, though there now seemed some confusion as to whether he had run out through the office or through the back hall.

Allen folded the paper and slipped it into his pocket. Then the boy’s hungry look—Allen thought again of a worried squirrel unable to voice his anxiety—caught his attention, and his fingers came out of his pocket with a coin.

“Here, get yourself some supper—no cigarettes, mind! What’s your name, by the way?”

“Abram Makowsky,” the boy answered, subdued into civility by the glint of silver.

“Oh, hello!” exclaimed Allen, recalling Antonia’s concern. “How’s your uncle, Abram?”

But this was too much. With the snort of a little wild creature, the child sprang away, and only at a safe dis-

tance did he pause to glare back at the man who wanted to know so many things.

Allen crossed the street to the hotel. It was not without an inward quiver that he approached the desk; but, as good fortune would have it, the man of whom he had made his inquiries the evening before was not there. Instead, a young woman took his card, and directed him to a small waiting room, while she sent a bell boy up to Mrs. Hunt.

Very promptly his card was answered by the appearance of Mrs. Hunt herself—Mrs. Hunt, hatted and dressed for the street. She looked at him steadily, unsmilingly for a moment, as he rose to his feet at her approach. Then a flicker of something like mockery passed over her face.

“I thought you would come,” she said composedly. “I am just going out. Will you walk a little way with me?”

Allen bowed; and, without further words, she led the way to the street door. As they stepped out, Allen glanced across at the little park opposite, and saw the small Abram Makowsky taking the situation in with alert observation!

“I thought you would come,” Mrs. Hunt repeated, as he fell into step with her slow movement, “though we are neither of us far enough out of the wood to make it a very wise thing for you to do. Still, as I guessed that you would be plucky rather than wise, I waited for you. What is it you want?”

“I think you know.”

“I prefer to have you say.”

“Very well. When I left you last night—after I left you—I missed some papers—two sealed letters I had had in my pocket.”

“And you think you may have left them in my room?”

He looked down at her without answering.

"Or could it be that you left them in—some other room?"

Allen could not help an inward tribute to her cleverness. Indeed, if she denied knowledge of the papers, what could he do? He could not, as a matter of fact, be absolutely certain himself as to their whereabouts unless he could compel her to own up to having them. He adopted an attitude of pained disapproval.

"This evasiveness is not worthy of you."

"What is or is not worthy of me is the last thing you can know, Mr. Allen. However, I would gain nothing by evasiveness in this case, so I don't mind telling you that you are quite right in guessing that I took the letters from your pocket in the carriage. I was mighty thankful to get hold of them. Do you want to know what I am going to do with them?"

"Return them to me, I hope."

"A vain hope, Mr. Allen. And you were sensible to say merely 'hope,' not 'expect.' You know very well I am not going to return them to you—yet. What do you suppose I took them for?"

"I have not the slightest idea."

"Oh, you do yourself injustice, I am sure. You must have guessed that I took them to hold as a hostage for your silence." She looked up with a swift glance of assured triumph.

Allen had focused all his faculties in an effort to understand the woman, and he could see plainly enough that under her surface composure she was excessively nervous. There was a throb in the pulses of her throat, a quiver in her voice that betrayed deep, though controlled, emotion. There was no comfort for him in the discovery. He felt the impossibility of turning her.

"My silence regarding what? Please be definite."

"Everything that occurred last night. Everything. There will be an inquest.

I shall have to appear. If you contradict my story, or break your silence in any way, I shall give those letters to the papers."

"Have you read them?" he demanded, in astonishment.

"Certainly. Do you think I am playing a child's game? You know what a sensation they will make, if published. Is it worth your while to run that risk?"

And here she distinctly had him at a disadvantage, for, though she might not guess it, he did not share her knowledge of the contents of those fatal letters. She said they would make a sensation. If even she, a woman, saw that, they probably were highly inflammable!

"If I accept your terms, promise to keep silence——"

She shrugged her shoulders lightly and with a not ungraceful movement.

"I am not asking your promise—I have the letters. Speak, and I publish them. Keep silent, and I keep quiet. Nothing could be simpler."

"Nor more complete," said Allen, with indignant bitterness. He felt, indeed, that she held him in a cleft stick.

"I should hope so," said Mrs. Hunt composedly. "I have enough to think of, Heaven knows, without you making complications. And, now that that is settled, and you understand what you have to do, allow me to repeat what I said before, that it is not altogether prudent for us to be seen together. There is too much at stake. I think it will be well for you to leave me at the corner."

"I bow to your superior management," said Allen sardonically.

As Allen replaced the hat he had automatically raised to her retreating back, he found himself face to face with Miss Clio Ellerson, whose approach he had not noticed.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Allen," she said carelessly, as she passed him. But the glance she sent after the departing

figure of Mrs. Hunt was not careless, and he saw it.

"Confound it all!" he muttered to himself. It would not have been polite—or just—to confound Miss Ellerson for chancing to be on the street at that moment, but he felt a need to vent his annoyance somehow. He swore impersonally and inaudibly for half a block, and then turned his head to see which way she had gone. She was talking with Abram Makowsky at the edge of the little park. That sight did not soothe his irritation. What possible occasion could Miss Ellerson have to talk to the boy he had just been quizzing?

On the car, going home, he pulled Abram Makowsky's newspaper from his pocket. The world was still wagging, and there must be something in it besides that all-about-e-murder on the last page.

There was. On the front page, in large type, was the query:

Where is Senator Gordon?

Beneath this, a mock-serious paragraph told that this morning, on the convening of legislature after a three-day recess, Senator Gordon's seat was vacant, though important measures in which he was known to be interested were pending. He had not been at his hotel, and a telegraphic inquiry directed to his home had brought out simply the information that he was not there.

It was evident that the "story" was the work of some reporter who was trying to make copy on very slender foundations. Probably the privileged newspaper man was trying to chaff the distinguished senator. But—if the question should not be answered by tomorrow, or by the next day—it would be no matter for chaffing. It would be serious. Allen felt the tide of alarm rising to his throat. There was nothing for it but to go and see Rantoul and have the matter out with him.

CHAPTER IV.

Allen came away from Rantoul's house late that evening, feeling bruised and battered in all his nerves and sympathies. The hero of his boyhood, whose splendid courage and vibrant personality had dazzled his mind and formed a glorious standard which had largely influenced his own development, was certainly showing the touch of age. The sight filled Allen with passionate pity. More than ever he felt that he must protect him, save him—save him not only from external disaster, but, even more, save him from the humiliation of such self-betrayals as he had just witnessed.

Rantoul had been so panic-stricken at the news that his letters to Gordon had reached other hands that Allen could only draw the most damning inferences as to their contents.

"But can't you get them back from her? It isn't possible that you can't!" he had repeated again and again.

"It isn't safe to try. If it would be fatal to have them made public——"

"Why, it would be ruin!"

"Then the thing to do is to keep quiet. That is the price of her silence."

"How you could have bungled so simple a——"

But that was a profitless field, and Allen did not try to defend himself. He was quite willing to admit that he had bungled things, but a pickpocket so skillful as Mrs. Hunt was hardly among the ordinary contingencies which he might have foreseen. And if it came to fixing the ultimate responsibility, he felt that to write anything so explosive as these secret letters must have been was the initial blunder. But he did not have the heart to point this out. He merely tried to find out how things really stood.

"You have no idea, then," he asked Rantoul, "why Gordon didn't come to the rendezvous?"

"You don't know that he didn't, as I understand it," said Rantoul impatiently. "You say that the room was empty when you went in. But it had been taken in the name of McGrath. That was the name Gordon was to use."

"This was not Gordon—the man who took the room, and who was killed. This was quite a young fellow—twenty-odd, I should say. Probably Gordon sent an emissary—as you did. And his emissary was killed, while yours was robbed. A pretty mix, altogether!"

Rantoul shook his head dubiously. "I don't believe Gordon sent any one in his place. He probably was there, and when the excitement of the murder called attention to his room, he simply slipped away. He didn't want to be called on for explanations, of course. And, because the dead man was found in the room taken in the name of McGrath, the hotel people—or the police—jumped to the conclusion that he was McGrath. You may be sure Gordon wouldn't be the one to set them right."

"Gordon's whereabouts are unknown, according to the evening paper—you have seen it?"

"Yes."

"Does that suggest anything to your mind?"

"No. He'll turn up. It would be altogether too good luck if he didn't. If only he had been the one killed! You are quite sure there isn't any possibility that it was he?"

"Not a chance," smiled Allen.

"Pity! I could have spared him so easily! Oh, Howie, if only you hadn't let that siren bamboozle you!"

Allen felt that it was hardly worth while to point out that he had been tricked, not bamboozled, and that a subtle difference was involved. He saw that Rantoul's mind was so absorbed in the effect of the affair upon himself that he could spare no attention to considering its general aspects.

But after Allen had left the har-

assed old man barely in time to catch the last suburban train for town, he gave himself up, during the quiet hour of the trip, to considering these aspects. As he worked them out, they fell into about this order:

If "McGrath" was Gordon's *nom de guerre*, the young fellow who had been killed was not McGrath, as everybody assumed.

The police, working on the theory that he was McGrath, would be following a false trail. The man might never be identified. In that case, did not an obligation rest upon him to set them right?

He could take no open step in the matter without risk of Mrs. Hunt's carrying out her threat to publish the stolen letters.

His silence would presumably help the murderer to escape, and to that extent would be a thwarting of justice. That was not a comfortable thought, but he decided firmly that it was better to let a murderer escape, if circumstances and his destiny enabled him to do so, than to wreck the reputation of a man like Rantoul.

His obligation of silence should not go to a point where an innocent person might be put in jeopardy. He could see possibilities of development along this line where it might become necessary to sacrifice Rantoul.

Gordon's part in the whole affair was mysterious. Why had he not kept his appointment? Was McGrath his emissary? What had become of him?

Who was the man Mrs. Hunt was protecting? Was it Hunt? And did she know who McGrath was?

And finally, what might he have let himself in for? He realized that if he should become involved in a public scandal, or anything of that sort, it would be a serious matter for his professional future. Yes, Rantoul had certainly taken a rather unfair advantage of his friendship.

It was after midnight when he let himself into the house of his brother-in-law with that amiable relative's latchkey. When he had stumbled against the hatrack and knocked over a hall chair, Wilton, in pajamas, hospitably turned on the light in the upper hall.

"Hello, you nocturnal wanderer! What sent you home so early?"

"I've been out to see Mr. Rantoul," said Allen. He didn't feel equal to any liveliness of retort.

"By the way," added Wilton sleepily, "you really want to attend that inquest?"

"Yes, I do."

"All right; be ready, then. It's tomorrow at nine."

CHAPTER V.

The first person Allen saw when he entered the room where the inquest was to be held was Clio Ellerson. The sight somehow startled him. Even when he remembered, as he did at the second thought, that she was probably there for her paper, and that her attendance was therefore natural and to be expected, he had an unquiet feeling which refused to explain itself that her presence was, for him, in some way portentous. It was one of those subtle intuitions that prove to us occasionally that there is an alert consciousness in us which lies deeper than the brain.

But he resolutely turned his attention from her and listened to the proceedings of the inquest. Beyond what he had anticipated, the affair had an atmosphere of solemnity. A crime had been committed against the laws which society and the growing conscience of the race have established, and here the law, safeguarding society, was making an earnest attempt to discover the truth. The means might be inadequate, the result imperfect, but the object was profoundly impressive.

The hotel clerk was the first person

questioned. He was an alert, intelligent man, and he testified clearly to the little he knew.

J. W. McGrath had come in about eight o'clock on Tuesday evening and asked for a room for the night. The room had been reserved by wire several days before. He had referred to the reservation, had paid for the room in advance, and had been taken up by the boy. A few minutes later, he had come downstairs and gone out. No one had seen him come in again, and Burkey, the clerk testifying, did not know that he was in the house until he was found in his room, dead.

"Could he have come in again without being seen by some one?" the coroner asked.

"Oh, yes. My office is near the front door, but I was out. It is often vacant. We don't expect transients. Most of our people have apartments by the season."

"Then it would seem that McGrath was not acquainted with the character of your house, since he wired in advance for a room?"

"That struck me at the time."

"Where did he wire from?"

"I didn't notice at the time, and since this happened I have hunted for the telegram but have been unable to find it. It must have gone into the wastebasket."

"Did he say anything when he went out?"

"No. He went out in a hurry, and passed me in the door, but he said nothing. I went out just a minute after him, and I saw him cross the street and stop to speak to a man on the other sidewalk. I went on without paying any further attention to them."

"What sort of a man?"

"Well, I couldn't say. There was nothing noticeable about him as far as I could see—it was a good ways off, and it was rather dark. And I didn't pay special attention. It just struck

me that he was asking his way or something like that, and I wondered a little that he hadn't asked me, but I didn't think much about it."

"Would it have been possible for him to bring the stranger in with him and go up to his room without being seen?"

"Yes, quite possible. Mr. Cook is supposed to be in the office when I am not there; but, as I said, the office is often vacant for a short time when we both are called away."

"Describe the arrangement of the office and hall, please."

"The office is to the left of the front entrance. Opposite it, with the hall between, is a reception room. Back of the office is the elevator, with a stairway winding about it. Some people use the stairway going up to the next floor. Beyond that is a cross hall that leads out to the side street and a back hall with stairway. Beyond that, again, is the dining room to one side, and the back offices and kitchens on the other."

"Then this man could have come and gone either by the front door or the side door or the kitchen hall?"

"Yes—if he knew his way."

"And the murderer might have escaped in any of those ways?"

"Yes."

"McGrath had no luggage?"

"No. When I asked about his luggage, he said curtly: 'My grip was stolen on the train.' But he paid in advance for the room, so it made no difference to me."

"For how long did he pay?"

"For twenty-four hours."

"Did he seem excited? Was there anything in his manner to attract attention?"

"His manner was curt and abrupt. He seemed impatient. But there was nothing extraordinary about him. I thought at the time that he was probably in a temper over the loss of his bag."

"Did he mention any names? Ask for any one?"

"No."

"Did any one ask for him?"

"Not while I was there. But while I was out for supper he had a caller. Mr. Cook, the bookkeeper, was in charge of the office while I was out."

With an intimation that he would be recalled later, the clerk was temporarily dismissed, and the bookkeeper, Cook, was called.

"Tell in your own way, Mr. Cook, about the man who called to see the deceased."

Cook was evidently flustered by the responsibility which circumstances had thrust upon him. He was the man to whom Allen had addressed his inquiries, but after the first minute Allen knew that he had nothing to fear from the unobservant and untrained mind of the young bookkeeper. He told his story hurriedly and without detail.

"Why, he just came in and asked for McGrath, and I sent him up with the bell hop, and that's the last I knew about it. Then Burkey came back, and Baring and I went out for a feed."

"What sort of a man was he?"

"Why, I didn't notice."

"What time was it?"

"Well, I didn't exactly notice."

"You didn't see him leave the house?"

"No—sure I didn't."

"What time were you on duty?"

"From eight to nine."

"Then he must have called before nine."

"Why, yes, of course."

"And that's all the information that you can give?"

The bookkeeper grinned apologetically. Undeniably Allen felt relieved; but, as the thought passed his mind that he had nothing to fear now in the way of identification with that night's adventures, he glanced, without intent, in the direction of Miss Ellerson, and was startled at the look on her face. She was covertly watching him. If he

had caught her eye upon him merely, he would have thought nothing of it. But it was the fact that she was observing him askance that surprised him. Why should she be watching him? In his amaze he missed the question to which the witness next replied:

"Baring was with me—Evan Baring."

"Is Evan Baring in the room?"

A young man stepped forward. It was the young fellow who had been in the office with the bookkeeper, and Allen saw instantly that this was a man of a different type.

After the preliminary questions, he testified:

"Yes, I was in the office when the man came in who asked for McGrath. He was a young man of about twenty-nine, slight build, somewhat above the average in height, dark hair and mustache. He wore a dark-gray suit, English cut, and carried a cane. A bit of a dandy, I should say."

Allen gasped a little at that. In spite of himself, he stole a look at Miss Ellerson, but she was looking straight at the witness this time, and nowhere else.

"Would you know him again, Mr. Baring?"

"I'd know the clothes again—sure. Unless he alters his looks purposely, I think I'd know him again in any clothes."

"What is your business, Mr. Baring?"

"I'm a—a detective."

"Attached to the police force?"

"No, on my own account. Private office."

There was no reason why that answer should excite mirth, but a smile rippled around the room. Perhaps it was the incongruity between the impressiveness of the claim and the boyish look of the claimant. Baring felt the amusement, and his jaw set.

"Were you in the hotel at the time

of the murder, Mr. Baring?" asked the coroner.

"No; I went out with Cook when Mr. Burkey returned—a minute or two after nine."

"Then you know nothing about what happened later?"

"I know nothing about what happened later," Baring echoed. There was something dogged in his tone that apparently caught Doran's attention, as it did Allen's, for he looked at the witness thoughtfully for a moment, and then asked:

"Or before? Or at any time? Have you any further information that might help to throw light upon the murder?"

Baring paused a moment before answering; and his eyes, in an absent, meditative fashion, wandered across the room to Clio Ellerson, who was giving close attention to the proceedings. Allen, keenly watchful, was certain that it was not a chance glance. But after that meditative pause, merely enough to refresh his memory, Baring shook his head and answered Doran directly:

"No, I have no further information that would throw any light on the murder. I went out with Cook, but I left him at the door and went downtown. I heard nothing about the murder until I saw the paper the next morning; and then, of course, I remembered the man who had come to the office to inquire for him."

"You have given his description to the police?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do for the present, Mr. Baring."

Burkey, the clerk, was recalled.

"Tell about your finding the body, Mr. Burkey."

"I was at my desk in the office when I heard the sound of a shot. At the first instant I didn't realize it was a shot. I just said to myself: 'That sounds like a shot—wonder what it was.' Then I heard it again, and I

knew it was a shot, and that it was upstairs. I made a dive for the elevator, and let myself up. When I got to the second floor, there was no one to be seen, though I heard the sound of some one in the rear of the hall. I started to run that way, when I saw that room No. 83 was open. I pulled up, went in, and there was McGrath on the floor. I stopped to examine him, lift him up. He was dead. Then Joe, the elevator man, who had been out in the hall, came tearing up to find why I had taken the elevator, and I sent him back to telephone for the police, while I locked the room and went down the back way to see if there was any one there. But of course there wasn't. Whoever it was I had heard could have gone out the back way without any difficulty, as the back stairs lead down to a hall that opens on the side street."

"Is that passage ever used by the guests of the house?" asked Doran.

"They do, sometimes, for a short cut, though it is intended for servants and tradesmen."

"Did you see any one at all when you went through?"

"One of the dining-room waiters, Jim, was going upstairs; and when I looked out of the door I saw Cook on the opposite sidewalk. I called to him to come in, and set him in charge of the office. By this time the policeman had come, and I took him up to room No. 83 and unlocked the door."

Wilton Gardner, who was present in the interests of the new coroner, passed a scribbled slip to Doran, who read it in his palm. Then he recalled Cook, the bookkeeper, who had proved so inefficient a witness before.

"You were standing on the opposite sidewalk when Mr. Burkey called you in. How long had you been there?"

"Oh, just a few minutes."

"Five minutes? Ten minutes? Twenty minutes?"

"Maybe ten minutes."

"Did you see any one leave the house by that side door while you stood there?"

"Yes, I saw the man I took for Hunt," said Cook, looking uncomfortable.

"You saw a man you took for Mr. Hunt. You think now it was not Mr. Hunt?"

"No, Jim says Mr. Hunt was in his room."

"You thought at the time it was Mr. Hunt?"

"Yes."

"Did you speak of this to any one?"

"Yes, I told Burkey. But just then Jim came down from upstairs and says Mr. and Mrs. Hunt were eating supper in their room."

"Can you describe the man you saw come out?"

"No, I didn't notice particularly. I just thought it was Mr. Hunt, and didn't notice."

"Did the man seem in a hurry—running?"

"No, just walking kinda fast."

So! The alibi was by way of being established! Allen moved restlessly, and as he turned his head he saw a figure he had not noticed before—Mrs. Hunt. She had just thrown back the veil that had obscured her features, and she was looking at him with a quiet, direct gaze that would mean nothing to any one else, but that he could not mistake. A moment later, the coroner said deferentially: "Mrs. Hunt." And she rose and came forward.

"I asked the privilege of giving my testimony under oath," she said, in a self-possessed manner, after the preliminary identification, "because of the absurd rumor in the hotel starting from the gossip of Mr. Cook, the bookkeeper, who thought he saw my husband leaving the hotel by the rear entrance that evening shortly after nine. Mr. Hunt was with me in my room until nearly ten, when we went together in a car-

riage to the station. Jim, the waiter, brought us some coffee at half past nine. I noticed the time because he had kept us waiting nearly half an hour, and I spoke to him sharply about it. I hope you will take his testimony. Jim called a carriage for us, and we left shortly before ten. If necessary, the driver will doubtless be found to give testimony that I took him to the station and parted from him there." Her self-control seemed to break a moment at the word, and she touched her eyes delicately with her handkerchief.

Doran, the coroner, was a polite man, and not without susceptibility to feminine charms—and Mrs. Hunt looked charming in her black gown.

"It is hardly necessary to follow the matter up, madam, but out of deference to your very natural desire to make it impossible for the cruel serpent of gossip to raise its venomous head in the future, I will call Jim Owens."

Jim Owens, the waiter, testified that he had taken a pot of coffee to the Hunt apartment at half past nine, and had then told Mr. and Mrs. Hunt about the murder, which had taken place on the floor below. He had ordered a carriage for them, and had seen them enter and drive off a little before ten. He was well acquainted with Mr. Hunt, and swore positively on the point of seeing him at the table, and again entering the carriage. And Doran, who was doubtless a better politician than psychologist, never questioned the possibility that a man's eyes might deceive him when he looked for what he expected to see. He turned to Mrs. Hunt with a smile of reassurance.

"The record of this examination will be your complete protection against calumny," he said, with his slightly exaggerated air of deference. "The snake of suspicion has been scotched forever."

And Mrs. Hunt, bowing slightly in acknowledgment, allowed her eyes to

slide from the face of the coroner to Allen's. He met her look, with its carefully concealed triumph, with an air of complete detachment, but his soul seethed within in a tumult of exasperation. Bitterly now he regretted that he had come to the inquest. If the time should come when it would be necessary for him to give his testimony in the interest of justice, he would cut a sorry figure in recounting how this woman had forced him to sit silent while her adroit perjury went on record.

It was with relief that he saw the session was drawing toward its close and that Gardner was preparing to leave. He stood a little apart, waiting for Gardner, who was speaking to the coroner, and watching the people who drew together into little groups. They spoke softly among themselves, as though they were at a funeral. One by one they drifted out of the room. Mrs. Hunt, who had dropped an obscuring veil over her face immediately after giving her testimony, managed to pass him on her way from the room.

"You see, it was simple enough," she murmured, as she passed him.

"That may be a matter of opinion," he retorted. "You will be so obliging as to remember that I am bound by no promises."

"I do not think a promise would add anything to the situation," she answered sweetly, and passed on.

Allen turned abruptly—and encountered the eyes of Evan Baring, fixed upon him with a puzzled scrutiny. On the impulse of the moment, and without explaining his action to himself, Allen nodded, as if in recognition of an acquaintance. Baring returned the greeting automatically, and then turned to Miss Ellerson, near whom he was standing. Allen would have given something to hear their conversation. He was certain that he was the subject—as he was. He would have been edi-

fied if he could have listened, for Evan Baring said to Clio Ellerson:

"Who is that man in gray near the door? He just nodded to me. I know I've met the guy, but I can't for the life of me speak his name."

Clio answered without looking in the direction of the door—which Baring might have construed as a significant fact, if he had been in his best form.

"That is Howard Allen," she said. "I told you about him the other day."

"The dickens it is! The man who shot down the rioters! One of your quiet, deadly sort!" Evan turned again to study the figure in gray, now departing, with undisguised interest. "But, say! What made him nod to me? I never met him. I wouldn't have forgotten that, you bet!"

Miss Ellerson looked at Evan with the air of thoughtful consideration that occasionally made him feel very young indeed.

"You were staring at him," she said quietly. "I noticed it, and so, of course, did he. He probably thought you were staring because you recognized him, and so he nodded in greeting. He probably thought that he was at fault in not recognizing some one he ought to have remembered—a stranger is apt to confuse the faces he knows and those he has merely seen in the street."

"I suppose that's it," Evan conceded, evidently impressed by her elaborate reasoning. "But I was staring because he made me think of some one I have seen recently—some one I didn't know who came up out of the dark and said something. Jerusalem and jumping cats, I know who it was! He made me think of the man who asked for McGrath at the Terrace Inn!"

Miss Ellerson did not look as surprised as he might have expected. "Don't let the McGrath mystery get on your brain," she said impatiently.

"But he does look like him!"

"You didn't notice it at first? Mr.

Allen has been in the room all through the proceedings."

"No, I didn't notice him till just as he was leaving. Of course it was just one of those chance resemblances that sometimes strike you between people who perhaps don't look alike really. But, say! I was so dead sure I'd recognize that man if I saw him anywhere, and now I feel all mixed up. If I could think Allen looked like him, I can't trust my recollection." He thrust his hands deep in his pockets and looked at her with mingled dejection and exasperation.

"What would you do," asked Miss Ellerson slowly, "if you should really see—and identify—the man who inquired for McGrath?"

"Have him arrested, of course. On the spot!" His eyes danced. "Gee, I wish I had the chance! You bet they wouldn't grin the next time I said I was a detective!"

"You think, then, that the man who inquired for McGrath was the man who killed him?"

"Well, he'd have to show us who did if he wanted anybody to believe he didn't. I guess the third degree would soon settle it."

Miss Ellerson was silent and thoughtful for some moments.

"What is the first thing you look for when you are trying to solve a mysterious crime?" she asked suddenly. "A motive, isn't it?"

"Yes, a motive is important, especially when you have no facts. If you have facts, of course, you have to build from them. Now, the man who called to see McGrath was a fact. If we knew who he was, then we'd try to find out whether he had any motive for killing McGrath—since nobody actually saw the murder. If he had no motive—well, probably he wouldn't have killed him, in that case. But evidently he did, so evidently he must have had a motive."

"You are arguing in a circle, Evan," said Miss Ellerson earnestly. "But if you knew who that man was——"

"I'd look for the connection between them—it might be a woman, or a quarrel, or business interests, or rivalry of some sort. There's where I'd expect to find the motive. Gee, Miss Ellerson, I wish you had seen that man while you sat there in the park. You might have recognized him."

"Possibly," said Miss Ellerson dryly.

"Did the man you were waiting to interview come along?"

"No, he didn't. I didn't tell you who it was, Evan, when you stopped to speak to me, because I didn't want to explain just then. But the fact was that I was waiting for Senator Gordon. I got a tip that he had been seen at the Terrace Inn, and I went up to catch an interview. They said he wasn't there, so I sat down on the bench in that park, where I could watch the door. But Gordon didn't come."

Baring stared at her with every sense alert—the hunting dog guessing at a scent before it is fairly on the air.

"Well, but that may be very important, Miss Ellerson! They say that Gordon is missing."

"That's why I told you."

"What's the latest about Gordon?"

"They are calling the noon edition now. Let's go out and get a paper."

Outside of the building, the newsboys were hurrying up the street with the latest issue of the papers. Gardner, who had been detained, came out at that moment and joined Allen, who had been waiting at the steps for him. So it happened that the little group of four stood near together, waiting for the papers, and Baring took advantage of the nearness to scrutinize Allen closely.

"He doesn't look at all like that man when you see him near by," he murmured, in an undertone, to Clio, who listened without a smile. She even looked appraisingly at Allen herself.

Then the boy in the lead reached them with the papers, and all four of them caught sight of the headline:

Gordon's disappearance baffles his friends.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE ISSUE OF JANUARY 20TH.



DIGGING UP NEW STORIES

WHILE some of the biggest brains in the United States are at the head of the moving-picture business, it occasionally happens, as is frequently the case with every business that develops with phenomenal rapidity, that totally incompetent men are put into places of great responsibility. One such man, an official of a well-known producing company in New York, was lamenting to a dramatic press agent that his concern could not find enough stories to supply material for all its actors and directors.

"Oh," said the dramatic man, "there's a lot of stuff available for the movies if you people will only take the trouble to dig it up."

"Tell me what's in your mind!" said the movie man eagerly. "Tell me where it is. I'll get it."

"In that case," replied the other, "why don't you get hold of some of Voltaire or Racine or——"

"Wait! Wait!" commanded the movie magnate, with a great deal of curiosity and some alarm. "Do those fellows charge much?"

The Mutineer

By Frank E. Evans

Author of "Men of Iron," "The Melting Pot of the Islands," Etc.

The problem of this football player was what to do about the orders of the coach when they were palpably wrong. Discipline is an important factor in the winning of a big game, but there have been instances where the mutineer has pulled off the play that spelled victory.

THE vicious boom of the pigskins as they spiraled downfield smote on the ears of the Orange's side-line experts with a significance that the season had so far lacked. There was a harder drive to the sprints of the back-field men who captured the twisting ovals at the end of their flight. Scattered here and there in small squads, the big forwards were blocking and charging, feinting and thrusting with a restrained ferocity that won curt commendation from their coaches. The wide-flung activities synchronized at a sharp call into signal drill for the varsity and scrub squads, and a keen observer would have marked a more compelling bark to the signals of the quarter backs and a smoother dash, a more cohesive blending of plays as the squads drummed up and down the field. It was in the air, this feeling that the turning point of the season's drudgery had come.

Three days before, the lightly held Purple had come down from her New England aerie, and only a sixty-yard run by Templeton from a fumble had offset the Purple's dazzling attack, and partially redeemed the listless work of the Orange machine. Three more days of November, and the doughty Green

team, never so formidable as in its annual clash with the Orange, would put to the supreme test the team that had not yet found itself. The break of the season had come, but only the confirmed partisan undergraduate could crown his vision with the laurel of a successful season. A defeat by the Green, a few more recruits for the hospital squad, and the Orange coaches would face a herculean task to break even with the ancient rivals who sported the Crimson and the Blue in football's tourney.

The head coach threw up his hand, and the weaving evolutions halted. "Line up for scrimmage!" the order snapped, and the weather-beaten stands hurled it back in raucous echoes. "Scrubs' ball on the varsity twenty-five-yard line, first down! Now"—he paused to fill his lungs and then yelled with dynamic energy that poised the rival lines on their toes—"tear 'em up, varsity; get—that—ball!"

The scrub quarter, knees flexed, faced his back field. The smile left his frank, engaging face. He glared at them with a concentrated fury that changed it into the living counterfeit of a Chinese devil mask. He hammered the air with short, choppy punches of

his clenched fists, and the scrub went taut from wing to wing as he bit off the signals in vibrant, compelling numbers. The lines locked in an upthrusting lunge, the scrub's just a shade the quicker. A back shot through tackle for a plunge that carried him clear for a six-yard gain. Again the quarter infused the despised scrubs with a fighting élan that bent back the opposing line. Behind the regulars, the head coach knifed his way from flank to flank, storming, deriding, pleading in ceaseless objugation. The other coaches followed suit, lashing with verbal taunts, shouting to their respective charges advice that broke in angry falsettos. But the fury of the assault was not checked until the scrub quarter had carried the ball over the goal line on an elusive slice just off tackle.

"Varsity's ball on her thirty-yard line! Now show something, show something!" pleaded the head coach. Again the lines surged in a deadlock, split in the center, and the varsity full back smashed through for a first down. The scrub quarter raced back and forth, slapping the backs of his crouched line. The following play found no vulnerable point. Taunts and gibes, threats and jeers added nothing to the varsity's tries at the line. An end run netted fifteen yards before the secondary defense hauled down the varsity's captain, and then, as the scrub defense stiffened from wing to wing, the full back dropped back for a punt. It was blocked, and a scrub end fell on it. Again the quarter lashed his men into a frenzy of attack, a whirlwind of pounding smashes and stiletto-like drives that beat back the dogged varsity.

"Here, you scrub quarter, what's your name? Lance, eh? Know the varsity signals? Jump in there and see if you can whip some life into this bunch of cripples!"

Jeffrey Lance could no more have re-

pressed the elation in his eyes or the smile that twisted his straight mouth than he could have slowed up the sudden pulsebeats that the words had spurred. For a year he had waited for that call. A plethora of stars in the back field and the damning evidence of the scale beam in the training house had conspired against him since freshman year. He had worked his way to Europe and back on a cattle ship in the summer, and had reported back for the first day of practice hard as a wrought-iron nail and tipping the beam for the first time over the hundred-and-fifty-pound mark. Graduation had stripped the back field of half its regulars but Templeton, substitute quarter, and Burnham, the ex-freshman star, were slated by the college to fight it out for the pivotal berth.

Lance's knees, soaked by the trainer's big sponge, flexed behind the line, and his cleats bit into the turf. A quick survey of the line, an intuitive decision, and to the savage chop of his fists he rasped out his signal in that driving bark that infused the weakening line with a new strength. Pounding away at the tackles and guards, fighting his way past the flanks with his own knifelike sallies, shooting a dazzling pass downfield at an unexpected stage, he turned the tide of battle until it flowed strong. Over the steaming lines of jerseys he saw the goal posts foreshorten. The head coach, with the light of the discoverer of an unknown territory in his eyes, threw an arm about his shoulders and shouted something in his ear. The cries of the coaches, the individual exhortations of the fight-maddened players sounded dim in his ears. He needed every ounce of his faculties to crown the whirlwind march with a score now that the scrubs' secondary defense was close to the line. Two plays back he had caught the distress in the face of the scrubs' left tackle.

"Eighteen—twelve—sixteen—eight!"

"Signal!" boomed the head coach.

"Eighteen—twelve—sixteen—eight!"

The ball shot from center, and he slammed it into the cupped arms of his left half. Through the right side crashed a mass on tackle, and the left half's plunge landed the ball on the one-yard line. The head coach rushed up with his face distorted with rage.

"Here, you young idiot, didn't you hear me call signal? You know what that means? All right, then why in blazes did you repeat it? I told you to shoot a pass over the line as soon as you got inside the ten-yard mark."

"I know." And the quiet smile made the head coach throw up his hands in mock despair. "And I could see that Simpkins was all in at left tackle, and so I sent it at him."

The arms dropped, and then the jaw, of the stupefied coach.

"Oh, you did?" he sneered. "I suppose you were playing football when I was in short trousers. A helluva quarter you'd be in a real game! You can go back to the scrub and stay there"—his voice rose in a helpless splutter—"yes, stay there, you mutinous, bull-headed——"

Lance dropped back as though the infuriated head coach had struck him in the mouth. His chin tilted up an inch or so, and then he stood immobile, his face white for all the tan of the summer. His fists had clenched spasmodically as the unforgettable, alliterative epithet rolled out at the climax of the tirade. His blazing eyes held the other's in a cold scorn, defiant, truculent. Then, without a word, he turned in the direction of the training house. Some one barred his path, and he was face to face with the trainer, Jerry Craig. There was a mute appeal in the old chap's eyes, a wireless of sympathy; and Lance turned short, passed around the flank of the line, and took his place back of the scrub.

Templeton raced out from the side lines, caught a whispered admonition from the head coach, and shouted his signals while his head was nodding in understanding. And, in back of a line whose faces showed their resentment of the scene, Lance beat their backs with his open palms, and there was a quaver in his appeal: "Hold them, scrub! Tear 'em up, you old dogs!" that spelled breakers ahead before the varsity should batter its way across that yard of turf. Like a wall of concrete it held against the three assaults that Templeton, well schooled in fidelity to instructions, launched against Simpkins.

"All over, three times around the track," growled the head coach. Lance bent over with two of his mates to help the prostrate, half-hysterical Simpkins to his feet.

"Oh, you Billy Simpkins!" he crooned. "That was the gamest fight I ever saw on the old field. That's the stuff that will lick the Blue. Billy, I could kiss you if you were strong enough to stand it."

"Cut it out, Jeff!" mumbled the abashed tackle. "This man's outfit isn't going to lick the Blue, or even the Green, until it knows a fighting quarter and not a megaphone when they see one. You could make a grasshopper out of an Egyptian scarab. And that mucker of a head coach, fellows," as the scrub gathered about them in a close circle, "apologizes to Lance, here, or they'll have to get a new scrub. Does that go?"

"No, Billy," Lance cut in. "I don't want an apology. What is an apology from a mucker? I'll get him, man to man, the day we break training. We'll stick, and we'll show the varsity some football. Are you with me?"

The combined effects of Jeffrey Lance's counsel, the invigorating douche of the showers, and the soothing oils of the scrub "rubbers"

kneaded into aching sinews quelled the incipient mutiny. But there was treasured up a smoldering resentment of the head coach's methods and a dogged ambition to show up the varsity. The leading spirits of the scrub gathered at Lance's room that night to pour out afresh the vials of their discontent. The process was at flood tide when Jerry Craig dropped in. Jerry was regarded by both varsity and scrub with a confidence that would have amazed the coaching staff had it known its depth. With a sound strategy and the inborn faculty of gauging a team's salient strength and frailties he had also developed to the same uncanny point the trick of turning up latent brilliancy that the lynx-eyed coaches often overlooked. That evening he had divined the need of an older head and a sympathetic mentor to stem the insubordinate tide in the Orange's ranks. He listened in patient silence to the stinging comment that crackled from group to group, and to himself admitted the justice of its basis. Confident in the assurance that Jerry would betray no verbal outbreaks, the comment was unsparring and bitter. He cupped his hands about the match that flared over the bowl of his pipe and drew the smoke into his lungs before he cut in with the longest speech that he had delivered within the decade.

"The one long cry in college, boys," he began, in a quiet voice that stilled the tumult, "from the first day of practice to the last day of the season is 'We must beat the Blue.' Very well. It's up to you boys to help make that threat good. The team hasn't found itself, but I never saw a better lot of material." His hard blue eyes shone in the shifting lights like blazing gems. The lines of his keen, lean face were vivid with the same inner fire. "Play the game you did to-day with Lance leading the attack and stiffening up the defense, and when the time comes the varsity

will have caught the contagion of it just as sure as God made little apples. And then"—his voice went soft, but thrilled with its conviction—"if the varsity can have Lance in its line-up, we 'will beat the Blue.' This goes no further, boys. I never talked to you like this before. But there's been too much reliance on the side-line dope; too much loading a quarter from his head guard to his cleats with orders. We've got to have a quarter big enough to take the helm in his own hands and not wait for the pilot to come aboard with his chart. We've got to have one who'll drive the varsity straight through the Blue breakers ahead when defeat is staring at him, straight ahead and between the goal posts! Rally behind Lance, and, mark my words, he'll be out on that field before the Blue game is over, and every ounce that you give him until then will come back in a ton of fight."

He left behind him a silence that they were slow to break. One by one, with muttered "So long, fellows," they took their leave. Lance, his head sunk between his hands, clenched his fists and shook them at the open fire. "I'll stand it for old Jerry," he breathed, "but afterward——" A grim smile took the place of the unuttered thought.

The Green, in a driving rain, played the varsity to a standstill. With a wet ball and a treacherous footing, the game resolved into a test of fundamentals, and well-laid plans of strategy went by the board. The Green, better grounded in fundamentals, was weak in her substitutes; and the Orange, feeding them into the firing line with prodigal hand, was able to stem the marches of the mountaineers when they threatened defeat.

The week intervening before the Crimson battle found the vanguard of old varsity stars rallying to the field in answer to the call of distress. Schooled in conflicting systems that

had marked the progress of two decades, they harried the linesmen with new pointers on defense. Backs whose names had crackled to fame at the end of the long rocket cheer drove the back field to savage despair by the same tactics. The old fatuous system bred a feeling of insecurity that bordered on panic. The head coach drew on secret reservoirs of sarcasm and invective, and the varsity played with a sullen, cheerless endeavor that drove him to confide to his corps of helpers:

"These fellows don't play for the fun of it the way we did. Blast me if they don't seem to hate football! What's wrong with the college? Where's the old spirit? They've got about as much 'pep' as a man sentenced to jail for life."

That week Lance drove the scrub against the varsity in three grueling scrimmages with a fury that counterbalanced superior weight and class. They scored for him with a frequency that sent the news to the Crimson camp that "the Orange defense is shot to pieces." The last hard practice was held on Thursday, and that night Lance and Simpkins were in the big squad that left for the North. Burnham, the sophomore quarter who had crowded Templeton for his berth, had pulled a tendon in the last five minutes of play; and Simpkins, who had outwitted the first-string tackle substitutes on attack and defense, was sorely needed to bolster up the line.

Wrapped in his blanket on the side lines, Lance was oblivious to the color and pulsing life of the Crimson stadium. He was following plays with an eye that was searching for flaws in the Crimson's heralded defense. Unconsciously his lips moved to the signals a shade before Templeton's call rang across field. A hollow feeling gripped him in the pit of his stomach as the Crimson's defense outwitted the inane convention of Templeton's strategy.

But Templeton, he admitted in all fairness, had been drilled until letter perfect in the plays for midfield, the plays inside the twenty-yard line, the plays to use on certain downs after certain games. His was the strategy manufactured for weeks ahead. It had no alternative for the quick, shifting crises of a big game save for an ear always attuned for the bits of advice that dribbled out from the side lines with each substitution.

The first half, to the uninitiated, ended with the Crimson but a shade the better team. Lance knew that the Crimson quarter was trying out the Orange line from wing to wing, showing nothing to the Blue scouts until the time should come. In the third quarter the Crimson leader unleashed a blinding, feinting, thrusting resiliency of attack that tore great gaps in the Orange line. The last quarter found the Orange striving with the desperation of a beaten team to cross the unsullied Crimson goal. The long punts of the Crimson's great kicker offset it all with drives that crowded the Orange jerseys always back toward their goal posts. Twice Lance caught the eye of the head coach resting on him in unsettled decision, but the Crimson game ended and the varsity letter was still denied him.

There were times in the short week following the team's return when the varsity, goaded to fury by memories of those Crimson touchdowns and goals from the field tossed the battling scrub about as the Crimson had humbled it only to lapse back into indifferent play. Near the close of the final scrimmage, Lance jumped out at the sharp call of the head coach. The varsity answered to his hand on the helm with a fire and snap, and a machinelike drive that sent the undergraduate body into a delirium of hope that the team had found itself on the eve of its greatest battle.

Signal practice on the final day, how-

ever, found Templeton the head coach's choice. "Lance will be ripe in another season," he had told the advisory board. "Templeton has the steadiness for a big game. He'll carry out orders to the last word."

The Blue scored in the first quarter of that memorable game on a daring pass. Lance groaned as he saw the Orange ends drawn completely in and the secondary defense smothered while the ball shot across the goal line for the touchdown. Then the Blue took a leaf out of the book that had served the Crimson so well. The blond-headed full back sent the ball booming over the white lines for a mighty drive of fifty-five yards. Templeton called for a punt after a try that showed the Blue line adamant. Again the blond giant swung his kicking foot to the level of his head, and when the teams lined up the pigskin lay ten yards nearer the Orange goal. Lance groaned again as the Orange backs massed once for a futile attack and Templeton called for a kick.

"Where's the fight in that back field?" he wailed to Billy Simpkins. "Why doesn't he smash away at them or take a chance on a pass, even if the play is in our territory? Look at that Blue secondary defense, Billy; they're no more looking for a forward pass than a blizzard."

"Orders," grunted Billy. "Smash once and then kick. Keep it up until some accident of the game gives us the ball down in their territory. Don't we all know it by heart? They know it on the Blue team just as well as we do. Why should they worry?"

Another exchange of punts, a fifteen-yard return, a vicious drive at the Orange's left flank, and the Blue full back dropped ten yards behind his crouching line. With an ease that started a wave of despair rolling from end to end of the Orange stands on the west, and converted the Blue stands on

the east into a maelstrom of hysterical joy, he shot the ball over the bar with a force that carried it far up in the south stand.

"Nine to nothing," Lance said quietly, "and we haven't shown a thing. Outkicked, outplayed on the defense, and the game young."

"Yes, and outgeneraled," growled the substitute tackle.

Lance grinned in spite of the gloom that hung like a cloud over the Orange side line. In Billy Simpkins' simple soul, he knew, his generalship was enshrined as a sacred thing.

The Blue quarter shot another dazzling pass two minutes after the second quarter began, this time to one of his ends. The receiver, unhurried and deliberate to an extent that incited cries of protest from the Blue stands, stopped dead in his tracks as the Orange tacklers swarmed about him. Then his arm swung like a scythe, and the ball spiraled on its axis in a yellow streak across field to a waiting tackle. Carey, the swiftest back on the field, hauled down the fleeing receiver on the Orange's fifteen-yard line. The Orange stands were up in a frenzied cheer for Carey, and the cheer leaders gathered their energies into a long cheer that hurled defiance at their equally jubilant rivals. Again the masterful toe of the blond giant sent the ball hurtling end over end for a goal that offered little test for his supreme skill.

"We need two touchdowns to tie," was Lance's grim comment.

"Yes, and a fat chance," retorted Simpkins. "Watch us do it again—a try at the line, a kick, and that big whale outpunting us ten yards to a clip."

"There's only one way to do it," ventured Lance, "and that's to rush it, rush it! Don't let them have a smell at it."

Unconsciously his clenched fists were beating a tattoo on his knees, and

his voice rose above the sullen hum of the sweated substitutes on the low benches. The head coach looked sharply around.

Up and down the field the ball shuttled, weaving from full back to a waiting back. Another dull boom, and a Blue back would take the swirling pigskin on the run, elude a flying tackle, measure his length on the turf, and turn the ball over with a happy grin to the chunky Blue center. Another thud, and the Blue ends, racing with heads cocked over shoulder to watch the flight, would convoy the fifty-five-yard punt downfield.

"They haven't shown what they can do if they start to run the ball," Billy Simpkins shouted against the storm of cheers that followed the teams off field at the end of the half.

"They don't have to," yelled Lance in his ear. "May keep it under cover with the Crimson scouts out in force. You know what they did to the Brown last Saturday when they had to."

The head coach read the riot act between halves, revising it with words that scorched and seared. Lance saw Hathaway, the varsity captain, lift tortured eyes to the lines of jerseys and moleskins that ranged down the center of the room. Their looks met, and Lance flashed back a brave smile that relaxed the tortured lines into a faint smile. He waited at the steps as the varsity filed out, and caught Hathaway's arm.

"You can do it, cap," he urged. "Their ends are playing too wide. Drive some plays off tackle, and cut out the kicking game. Rush the ball, cap; rush it!"

Hathaway gulped as though the hard words of the head coach had fastened their humiliation on his throat muscles. "We've got our orders, Jeff," he mumbled thickly. "We're not to rush it until we cross midfield."

The Blue quarter chose to cut loose

his attack on the first scrimmage of the half—a powerful, versatile attack. Its power shattered the disintegrating defense. The staffs of the linemen dipped like lances at rest, and moved downfield to a march of first downs that threw the Blue supporters into a delirium of ecstasy. There was no stopping that relentless, machinelike drive. The full-throated cheers of triumph swelled out in a volume that drowned the high-pitched pleadings of the Orange legions to "Hold them, Orange; hold them!"

The march ended in a touchdown in the far corner of the field, and, when the blond full back missed the difficult try for goal, the Blue accepted the loss of the point with a good humor that drove home deeper the iron of impending defeat.

"Seventeen to nothing!" lamented Simpkins. "It's all over, Jeff, but the post-mortems."

"Why don't they throw the dope overboard, and fight, fight, fight?" Lance stormed back.

The Blue rushed in a covey of substitutes—clean-limbed, muscular, ardent athletes—and their impetuous spur started the shuttling, pounding advance afresh. There was a brief check, a retrieved fumble, and the Blue full back lifted the ball close to the Orange goal line. Templeton caught it, and for the first time was loose on one of the side-stepping, elusive sprints that had featured his early-season form. He flashed past tackler after tackler, squirming, twisting, wheeling, but always going ahead. Hathaway was convoying him, and when a smashing tackle tore his feet from under him on the thirty-yard line, forty thousand forgot their partisanship in a roaring tribute. He lay inert as the Blue jerseys disentangled themselves from the heap. Two of his men lifted him to his feet, and a wave of relief swept the Orange benches as he started back to his place

shouting the signal for the next play. Then, as the line sank into position, he crumpled in a heap on the turf.

"Knee's gone back on him again," was Lance's quiet verdict, and he felt his heart racing. Jerry Craig dashed out on the field, and the head coach caught his shoulder as he returned.

"Knee's twisted," Lance heard him say, "but I can patch him up for the last quarter." The head coach nodded glumly, and turned to the benches.

"Out with you, Lance!" he snapped. "You know the dope."

But as Lance tore across the field his plan of attack was clear to him. He slapped the referee on the back with a heavy hand, and the Blue thousands broke into carefree laughter as the sandy-haired official winced. His first signal crackled out like a string of giant firecrackers. A back shot off tackle for a plunge that carried him to the thirty-seven-yard line. Another, and the full back plowed through center for the first down that the Orange had registered by straight rushing. The linesmen pulled up their stakes with seeming reluctance, and the Blue quarter laughed and playfully slapped the backs of his center men. On the next play the Orange back field went catapulting at the same point, but Lance was clear of tackle, sprinting with a fury that carried him clear of all but the full back. Again the linesmen moved their stakes, and the Orange legions lifted up a mighty cheer.

A substitute came sprinting across field, tapped the referee's shirt sleeve, and whispered in Lance's ear.

"No, no!" he shouted back. "Get in the line and play the game."

In seven more plays, his fists perilously near the faces of his backs, he pounded out cabalistic numbers that had no place in the head coach's campaign, and drove the regenerated varsity over the Blue's line. Hathaway kicked an easy goal.

Carey was downed on the kick-off without gain, but Lance shot him outside tackle on the next play for an eight-yard gain. Seventy yards away lay the Blue goal. Another score and the big lead would no longer be an insurmountable handicap. From close formation he signaled for a wide pass. The daring of the maneuver caught the Blue flat-footed, and the Orange's left end threaded his way down the Orange side lines for a gain of thirty yards. The whistle shrilled for the end of the quarter, and Lance saw Templeton throw off his sweater and limp out to the side line. Of all plays in the Orange gamut, Lance knew that a forward pass in the Orange territory was anathema and taboo. He wheeled and caught Hathaway by the arm.

"Do I run this team or not, cap?" he snapped his ultimatum.

Hathaway caught the glow of battle in his eyes, and drew a sleeve of his jersey across his grime-streaked face.

"You do. Go to it, Jeff!" he snapped back.

From the Blue side lines the regulars poured back to stem the Orange's crazy tide. The battered Orange line, now threaded with substitutes, caught the reinforced Blue line on the charge, bent it back, and opened a lane for Carey. Another slice at tackle and Lance was free. One sleeve of his jersey was gone, and the bare arm flashed out like a piston rod and caught the diving tacklers off balance. With his stiff arm checking their lunges and his feet weaving in zigzag trails, he was headed straight for the goal, gaining speed at every stride. The old field rocked to the avalanche that poured down from the Orange bulwarks. On the side line Orange sweaters were waving, cheer leaders were spurring on their sections, and old stars were dancing, throwing their arms about each other in the abandon of the

realization that the despised team had come back in a mighty rally.

The guardian of the Blue goal posts sprawled at full length on the turf, his outstretched fingers clutching in vain at the flying quarter. Hathaway kicked the goal in a silence that told of the significant tension that had settled now on the warring legions.

Again the Blue lined up for the kick-off. One more touchdown by the amazing team that the unknown quarter back with the torn jersey was lashing to great deeds, and defeat would be changed into a glorious victory. Up in the somber Blue stand an old grad roared in a voice husky with emotion: "Touchdown, Blue!" The cry went racing down the stands, and the Orange shot it back in truculent defiance. Lance was under the kick-off, and his cloud of interferers swept down the field like a sotnia of Cossacks. The Blue regulars, still "cold" from their wait on the side lines through the third quarter, were caught flat-footed by a tandem split. A substitute tore out from the Blue benches to supplant the outwitted left end. Lance grinned sardonically as he saw the flanks close in. He shot another wide pass from close formation, and Hathaway fought with it to the forty-yard line. A Blue tackle sifted through on the next play and downed Carey for a loss. Lance tapped the Orange tackle on the arm. "You've played yourself off your feet, Tommy, old boy," he said. "Tell Simpkins I want him, and if they try to stop him tell him to come in spite of hell and high water."

The tackle shuffled off, heartbroken, and his name crackled out thrice as he dove under his blanket to hide the tears. Simpkins, full of fight as a hungry bear, opened up a gap through which Hathaway retrieved the lost distance. Lance gave the next signal with a determination that bit through jerseys and moleskins like a vial of acid. The

line ahead of him went taut as a strand of wire. The big Blue line buckled, broke, and Carey knifed through for a first down.

In the stands organized cheering had gone by the boards. Cheer leaders were swaying from side to side like madmen, tumbling to the turf like overwrought dervishes, and the torrent of noise came out to the playing field in a crazy, discordant volume. Lance, deaf to its tumult, could hear only the panting of the Blue forwards; could see that the face of the Blue quarter had gone drawn and haggard. There was no answering mercy in the call that rolled out for the fight-maddened Orange. The timekeeper had raced out and shouted: "Three minutes of play!"

Like madmen who yet had every faculty under control his line answered that signal. It lunged forward in a close-welded wall, split at left guard, and through the breach an Orange back stormed for a first down. Lance picked him up, and for weeks afterward he could picture the creases in the runner's neck, lined with the grime of battle. His roving eye caught the Blue's right end edging wide again, but he hurled Hathaway into the line.

"Now, Orange!" he yelled. The electric tone of that vibrant call steeled them for a supreme assault. Into center the big full back smashed, the lines surged like charging breakers meeting, and Lance was off with the keenness of a rapier thrust. The Blue's quarter met him head on and stopped him just inside the ten-yard line. Another feint at the low-crouched Blue line, now fighting with the desperation of devils; the desperate, unyielding shock of giants, and, from behind the line, Lance shot a pass to Carey. It danced for an instant on his upthrust finger tips as he flashed over the goal line, and the Blue quarter leaped like a hound for the loose ball.

They went down together with a crash, and Carey turned his face sideways with a blissful grin that told Lance the ball was safe beneath his jersey.

The score was tied. Hathaway, while the bedlam rose and fell only to soar to crazier heights, measured his kick with the aplomb of a gunner laying his piece for a telling shot. His foot swung back in a lazy arc. The Blue line swept forward, the foot bit sharp into the base of the ball in Lance's cupped hand, and soared to victory for the Orange in a curve of flashing yellow.

Outside the training house the jubilant Orange cohorts massed for a volley of cheers.

They broke into a room around which the varsity squad was ranged in an impenetrable double rank, and the strange silence was broken by Lance's vibrant refusal to take the outstretched hand of the head coach.

"No, not on your life, you low hound! I'll shake hands with no man who called me the name you did the day you threw me back into the scrub. I kept in the game only to help out the varsity, not you, and I've waited for this day with but one thought beyond that. Well, we beat the Blue, and now put up your hands, you coward!"

One of the old stars tried to break through with a sharp remonstrance, but Simpkins pushed him back. "You keep out of this!" growled Simpkins.

The head coach looked Lance full in the face, and then turned slowly, so that his blazing eyes took in the whole squad. He tore off his coat, tossed it to one of them, and faced Lance.

"You haven't a chance with me, Lance. I've got thirty pounds on you, and you've just finished the hardest game the old field has ever seen. But you've called me a hound and a cow-

ard, and if it will clear the air I'm game. Come on!"

It was a hard, short fight, with blows that landed with the impact of sledge smashes; blows that each took unflinching. The head coach's mouth dripped with blood where one of Lance's chopping fists had caught him. Above the silence of the room their breathing came hard and fast. The head coach stepped back with the agility of a panther, his right shot for Lance's stomach as he followed, and as Lance's guard dropped to block it the left smote Lance full on the point of his jaw. It sent him reeling over a bench, and there he lay, inert. One of the old stars broke through the relaxed lines, and his stern words quelled the angry mutterings.

"Not a word of this outside!" he commanded. "Get Lance up, and then get dressed and out of here!"

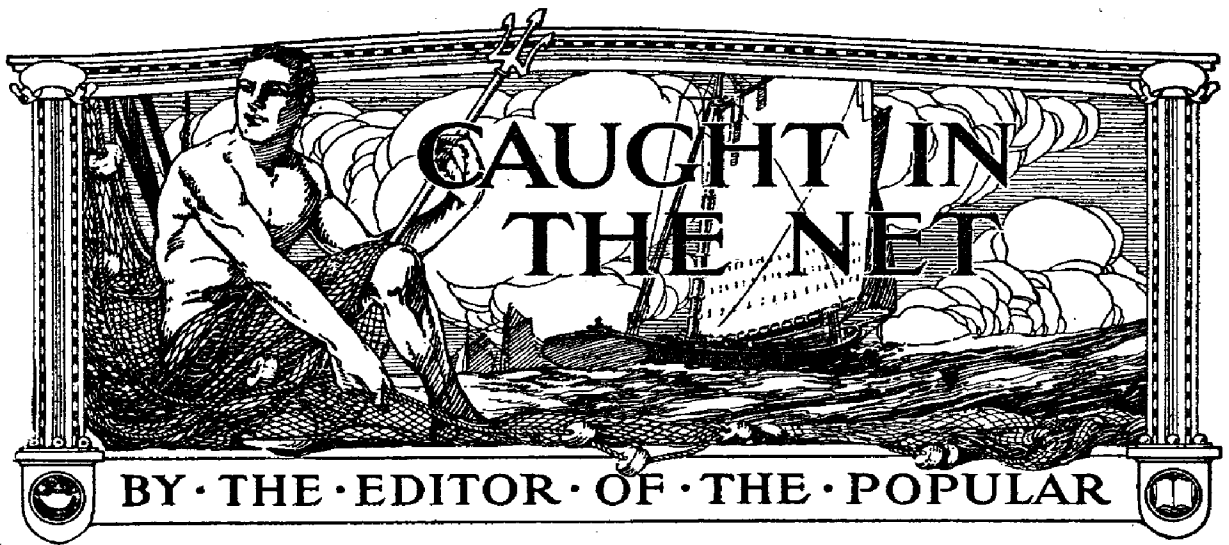
Lance stirred before they could carry out the orders, and he was smiling, with lips twisted in pain, when he found his feet unsteadily.

"We're quits," he said, and put out his hand. The head coach caught it in a grip that reeked little of the twisted lips. "You were in the right, Jeff Lance," he said quietly, "right from the start. If you can forget it I'd like to come back next fall and work with you. We'll trim the Blue before they ever get started. Do you want me?"

"I? I've got nothing to do with it," Lance stammered.

"Yes, you've got everything to do with it," the words rushed from the head coach, heedless of the thin, red trickle. "You're going to captain the team next fall or I don't know the old Orange spirit that we old chaps thought was dead. Do you want me?"

Lance's quick "yes" was lost in the roar of welcome that the varsity sent up for the new captain and head coach of the Orange.



THE UNDISCOVERED CONTINENT

RECENTLY in several of the great Eastern States the question of votes for women was voted on, and it was decided that for the present women were not to vote in the big dense centers of population. This is by no means a defeat for those women who want the vote. The fact that the question became an election issue of interest instead of a joke in such States as New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania is an indubitable sign of a rising tide. How far it will rise no one can say, but it is surely coming in. It is really already too late to argue for or against. The nucleus of the average political organization—which is patronage—is lacking to those who want votes for women, and yet their strength is growing. It is unlikely that there is anything artificial or spasmodic about such a growth. More probably it is the outward expression of a new idea which is growing in the mind and soul of our democracy. Is it a good idea or a bad? With all due respect to those who argue pro and con, we think that no one knows. The surest ground upon which to stand is that the idea seems to be an expansion of the democratic ideal which gives the vote to as many people as possible. But will the women turn out to be conservatives or radicals? Will they vote with the men or against? What's the difference between a man and a woman as a voter, anyway? No one knows, because it hasn't been tried enough yet; but it's anybody's guess. What do you think?

THE USES OF ADVERSITY

WONDERFUL are the benefits of adversity. Not many years ago the South raised bumper crop after bumper crop of cotton, and the price of the staple fell to so low a figure that it did not cover the cost of production. The South faced ruin, or thought so. Cotton had been its one stand-by, its money crop, and the world had more cotton than the mills could spin. When the situation seemed utterly hopeless, a demand for cotton came from unthought-of quarters. Its cheapness forced it upon the attention of manufacturers who never before had considered cotton possible. To-day cotton is used in hundreds of industries it didn't know before its days of

adversity. Nothing in all the history of King Cotton was better for the cotton planter than those years of depression in the late nineties.

So, too, with gas. It is one hundred years since gas came into use. A quarter of a century ago the advent of electricity seemed to mark its doom. For ten years its position was perilous. To-day its use is many times greater than before electricity was introduced. Adversity forced its makers to find new fields for its use. It has made a sphere for itself in the realm of heating and in the minor lines of power.

The household use of gas, not only for cooking, but for laundry work, supplying hot water for the bath and dozens of domestic needs, auxiliary house heating, et cetera, has expanded enormously. There are to-day few city-dwelling families—whether wealthy, well-to-do, of moderate means, or poor—that do not cook their meals with gas. The modern housewife considers her gas range her most dependable servant. So, too, gas has been employed for cooking in hotels, restaurants, lunch rooms, hospitals, clubs, and public and private institutions where large numbers of persons are fed daily. Its greatest use, however, promises to be in the field of manufacturing.

There are a thousand different ways in which it is utilized in the industries. Its activities run all the way from turning out heavy metal work, building an automobile, and helping to print a daily newspaper to drying a photograph plate, curling a feather for a woman's hat, and fashioning the delicate point of a fountain pen.

In the manufacture of clothing, in which New York City, with an annual output of three hundred million dollars, leads the world, there is scarcely an important process of any kind that is not dependent upon gas. Not only is it used for steaming, cleaning, and pressing, but for shrinking, dyeing, singeing, spraying, crimping, plaiting, stamping, and so on.

With ingenious appliances, wood is dried and bent, flavorings and sirups are made, silver is embossed and plated, and a hundred and one other interesting industrial processes are accomplished. By means of gas, stained glass is bent into the most delicate shapes, thermometers are made, automobile tires are heated and adjusted, eggs are candled, grain is dried, butter is renovated, motor-car bodies are baked, coffee is roasted, aeroplane and automobile radiators are put together, liquids are pasteurized, cravats are ironed, china is fired, bank notes are restored to their original cleanliness, ice-cream cones are produced in enormous quantities, candy of all sorts and kinds is manufactured by the ton, sugar is refined, meats are smoked and boiled, engagement rings are fashioned, fruits are preserved, false teeth are contrived, and so on ad infinitum.

The examples of cotton and of gas carry a lesson to men. What seems to be adversity not infrequently is a blessing in disguise. It makes us rise to higher things.

A PEANUT PARADISE

GAMBIA enjoys the distinction not only of being Great Britain's smallest colony in Africa, but of being the richest. There are other colonies rich in gold, rich in diamonds, rich in rubber and in copper, but in comparison with little-known Gambia they are poor. The peanut—the "goober," as the people of our Southern States call it—has made Gambia so wealthy that of all the colonies or the governments of Africa it alone owes not a penny. In

fact, it has one million dollars in its treasury. Compared with other parts of equatorial Africa it is a paradise, for its public roads are good, and, wonder of wonders, it has a twentieth-century water system, with filtration plant, water mains, hydrants along the streets of Bathurst, pipes in the houses, and a fountain in the city square.

In all Gambia there are less people than in Worcester, Massachusetts. The colony is but two narrow strips of territory along the river from which it takes its name, with Senegal on three sides and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. Nowhere in the world does the peanut grow so abundantly and so well. Outside of Bathurst, the capital, perhaps ninety per cent of the inhabitants raise peanuts. To gather the crop is a great undertaking—how great may be appreciated from the fact that the peanuts exported average nearly seventy thousand tons a year, and that means one thousand pounds of peanuts for every man, woman, and child in the land. This one crop brings an average of more than three million dollars a year to this little colony, and, as a general thing, the imports do not exceed two and a quarter million dollars, so that each year Gambia adds to its wealth and its comforts. These comforts are not elaborate, for the native has not been spoiled thus far. He has a longing for gayly colored calicoes and plug hats, but is not foolish in that respect. He likes rum, too, but is not inclined to be intemperate. Sugar and tobacco he craves, and their uses are broadening constantly. Aside from cotton goods, the principal items of imports are hardware and rice. The hardware is made up almost entirely of the three-legged iron pot of familiar memory. Everything is cooked in the three-legged pot, and all members of the household explore its depths for whatever may appeal to the individual taste.

Life has few problems for the Senegambians. They need few clothes, and fashions rarely change. The great river yields an abundance of fish, and the peanut brings them more money than they require for all their needs. Every day is a holiday except the time of planting and gathering the crop.

But peril awaits them. The automobile has discovered their paradise, and the chug of the motor is heard along the river roads. Worse than that, the introduction of the water system has led some of the residents of Bathurst to put in bathtubs. Soap is looming up among the articles of import. They are rich to-day, but waterworks and bathtubs mean plumbers' supplies and plumbers. The chauffeur and the plumber may bring woe to Gambia.

RAILROAD INVESTMENTS

WHEN the Argentine republic floated a loan in New York recently, the Norfolk & Western Railway was one of the subscribers. It may seem odd for a North American transportation company to be lending money to a South American government, but the fact is that a lot of railroad money goes into short-time notes and gilt-edge bonds. It is better so invested than to remain idle in banks.

To show how widely a railroad distributes its investments and what a variety of securities it picks up, this same Norfolk & Western may serve as an example. In addition to participation to the extent of \$270,000 in the Argentine loan, it holds \$1,150,000 of the bonds of Newark, N. J., \$1,340,000 of the bonds and

notes of New York City, \$1,120,000 of the notes of Schenectady, N. Y., \$200,000 of the notes of Toronto, Canada, \$300,000 of the notes of Troy, N. Y., \$200,000 of the notes of New Orleans, \$125,000 of the notes of Pawtucket, R. I., \$230,000 of the notes of Somerville, Mass., \$301,000 of the bonds of Yonkers, N. Y., \$242,000 of the notes of Durham, N. C., together with bonds and notes of Atlanta, Ga., Atlantic City, N. J., Albany County, N. Y., Barberton, Ohio, Boston, Mass., Buncombe County, N. C., Buffalo, N. Y., The Canadian Northern Railway, The Canadian Pacific, Chattanooga, Tenn., Charlotte, N. C., Chester, Pa., Chicago, Ill., Chicopee, Mass., Cleveland, Ohio, Cumberland County, N. J., Fall River, Mass., the State of Georgia, Harrisburg, Pa., Holyoke, Mass., Ithaca, N. Y., Johnson City, Tenn., Kansas City, Mo., Lynn, Mass., Manchester, Conn., Marion, Ohio, the State of Massachusetts, Mecklenberg County, N. C., Memphis, Tenn., Milton, Mass., Minneapolis, Minn., Montgomery, Ala., Morris County, N. J., Mount Albion, Pa., Mount Kisco, N. Y., New Britain, Conn., Ocean City, N. J., Ossining, N. Y., Peabody, Mass., Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Pa., Rome, Ga., St. Cloud, Minn., Salt Lake City, Utah, Seattle, Wash., Seneca Falls, N. Y., Swarthmore, Pa., Syracuse, N. Y., Vicksburgh, Miss., Waco, Texas, Wilkes-Barre, Pa., Wilmington, N. C., and York County, Pa.

It owns part of the bond issue of a West Virginia hospital and the water works of Coatesville, Pa.

All this is in addition to investments in coal mines and other industrial establishments along its route.

The short-term investments—that is, the ownership of bonds and notes to mature within six or eight months—of this one railroad aggregate \$9,679,726. Last year, at this time, it amounted to more than \$12,000,000.

Only railroads that are prosperous have surplus funds to employ so advantageously, but those so situated are able to average five or six per cent on such money as they have to spare, whereas formerly they got little from it except the thanks of the bankers and, possibly, two per cent.

FIGHTING ON THE DIAMOND BELT

DIAMONDS are not so much in demand as they used to be—at least, there has been a slump in sales since the war began. But they are still highly regarded. In South Africa, however, they are “as common as dirt.”

Two squadrons of British troops literally walked on diamonds for a week during a trek that they made recently in Southwest Africa. At every halt the soldiers sought for precious stones, and many really valuable gems were picked up. One trooper who knew diamonds in the rough garnered seventy-five in the course of the march.

The region that was traversed—and which has been the scene of some fighting of which only faint echoes have reached us here—is one of the largest diamond belts in the world. It is desolate in the extreme—a desert of rocks and sand where the sun beats pitilessly and the wind comes in gusts like blasts from an open furnace. Yet there are many mines there—mostly primitive workings. To win the gems from the gaunt soil is an incessant battle with the forces of nature. It is a land where rain never falls. The diamonds are obtained only through sifting endlessly the dry-as-ashes earth.

The Luck of Captain Slocum

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Pearl Fishers," "The Buccaneers," Etc.

IV.—THE BEAZLEYS

LIFE, when you have lived in the world for a good many years, is a most extraordinary spectacle to look back upon if you have vision and a certain amount of philosophy. You will see men who were tottering twenty years ago firm and successful to-day; you will see to-day wrecks that twenty years ago were men of promise, and if you have knowledge, as well as vision and philosophy, you will know that the three things that affect men most deeply for good or ill are circumstance, a woman, or a child.

The story of many a man's success is simply the story of a tug of war between a woman and drink, the man being the rope; and the power of a child, who can appraise it? Circumstance is a different matter; it is the great voice that envelopes and contends with all of us, and it is never more dangerous than when it appears under the guise of success.

One blue and gold morning, while the palm trees were bending to the warm trade wind, and the Pacific, creaming against the outer reef, filled the air with its slumber song, a topsail schooner of some ninety tons and with the name *Tamalpais* painted in fair white letters on her counter, passed through the reef opening and came to anchor opposite the beach of Nenkeohee.

A new arrival was always an event at Nenkeohee, and scarcely had the rum-

ble tumble of the anchor chain ceased echoing from the woods and cliffs than the beach became alive. From the pretty little town, bowered and half hidden by pandanus and coconut groves, idlers began to trickle down the waterside, natives stood on the blazing white sands shading their eyes, the inevitable beach comber, scratching himself awake, sat up to smoke and criticize the newcomers, whoever they might be, while from the mole—half mole, half boat slip—the port officer put off in a big white scow.

Beazley, the new trader, who had come to live at Nenkeohee, stood on the deck of the *Tamalpais* watching all this, wondering at the beauty of the place, and talking to the captain.

Beazley was a nice-looking young fellow of about twenty-eight; his wife, down below getting things together for landing, was a woman slightly older than he, a little woman with brown eyes, a practical but kindly disposition, and endowed with the most valuable *dot* that woman ever brought to husband—plenty of common sense.

It was a love match, and this was their first great venture in life. All their money was in the trade on board the *Tamalpais* and all their hopes. Beazley had bought the good will of a trading station, and he had the *Tamalpais*, which belonged to his father, or, at least, the use of her for trading purposes.

"That's MacAdam," said the captain of the *Tamalpais* as the port officer's boat rowed toward them. "It's four years since I've been to this island, but I haven't forgot him. He's port officer and doctor and all; there ain't no doctor here. Good morning, Mr. MacAdam, and how's yourself?"

As MacAdam came on board, Mrs. Beazley appeared from the saloon hatch.

"Good morning," said MacAdam. "Why, it's Captain Towler. No, cap, I haven't forgot you; thought I knew the schooner, too. Sort of sensed her as she passed the reef, but couldn't clap a name on her."

"This is Mr. Beazley," said Towler, "come to take up a tradin' station—and Mrs. Beazley. Here's the lady just come on deck."

MacAdam scraped up his best bow.

"Glad to see you, sir," said he to Beazley, "but which trading station have you come to take, for there's only one here, and that belongs to Captain Slocum."

"I've got a letter of introduction to him," said Beazley. "The station I'm after belongs to Mr. Will Lewin, or belonged to him before he sold me the good will of the place and the house; that was three months ago."

There was a hencoop fastened to the port bulwark, and MacAdam sat down on it as though afflicted by some sudden weakness of the legs.

"Will Lewin sold you a house here and the good will of a trading station," said he, "three months ago. Why, it's two and a half years since Lewin left this island, he and Sakers—pair of scamps—and he had no house to sell then, only one he rented, and as for his trading station, why, there's none; you've been done, sir."

"Oh, George!" said Mrs. Beazley.

She was just going to say, "I told you to beware of Lewin," but she checked herself. Beazley flushed.

It is a hard thing for a man to be told to his face that he has been done, harder still if his wife is present, and hardest of all under the conditions in which Beazley received the news.

For here he was in a strange place, at the end of a long voyage, with all his future prospects at stake, and the well-being of his wife.

Beazley, despite his pleasant appearance, was a fighting man. There was Welsh blood in his veins and a spice of ferocity derived from red-headed heathen who had clubbed and stabbed one another around the hills of Margam in days long forgotten.

"Well," he said, "it seems I am—from what you say. But the price I paid for house and good will wasn't much, and it was worth it to bring us to such a pretty place as this."

"More than worth it," said the plucky little wife, looking over the water at Ninea with a cold chill at her heart. Perhaps it was the setback, but it seemed to her that all that beauty was inimical to them. Yet not for a moment was she daunted. She had American blood in her veins as well as Scotch, and that combination is hard to beat.

"Well," said MacAdam, "it's pretty enough and healthy enough, too, and that reminds me, cap. I've come to inquire after your bill of health."

"You'll find it clean enough," said the captain. "Come on down below and have a glass of somethin'."

Down they went, and Beazley, taking his seat on the hencoop, talked to his wife.

"You told me you didn't trust that chap, Lewin," said he. "Well, you were right—and that's a comfort. It might have been worse, too. He didn't chisel me out of much, and as for the house, if we can't get one here I'll make a tent. I'm going to carry this thing through."

"And you will," said Mrs. Beazley.

They waited, he seated on the hen-coop, and she leaning on the rail watching the brilliant shore and the happy-looking little town that held their fate and their chance of prosperity in this world. Then the captain and MacAdam appeared from below, and MacAdam, who seemed to take a friendly sort of interest in the deluded ones, offered to row them ashore in his boat.

"It will be quicker than lowering one of the ship's boats," said he, "and I can put you up to things maybe, and show you the way to a man who may be able to let you a house. Martell is his name, an old Frenchman, honest enough, too, but a bit cantankerous."

He showed Mrs. Beazley over the side, and, followed with her husband, the rowers gave way and they approached the beach.

It was Mrs. Beazley's first acquaintance with the wonderland of the Pacific islands. They had touched at no port since leaving Sydney, and now, as she landed at the boat slip and walked on to the white sand of the beach, she forgot Lewin and MacAdam and all things disagreeable and practical in the enchantment that suddenly seized her.

It was like walking into heaven. She could scarcely believe that all this was real, that everyday people worked and lived here and made money here, and married and had children—and died.

Here, on the beach, the slight tang of sea and ozone mixed and mingled with the faint perfume of the earth and a million growing things, the blazing white sands shouted back at the blazing blue of the sea and sky, little brown children ran naked, laughing and happy, the wind bowed the palms and blew the leaves of the artu and the fronds of the tree fern.

"I'll show you the road to Martell's house," said MacAdam, "and when you have done with him you can make use of mine till you are fixed, and if you'll

come and have luncheon with me to-day I'll be very pleased. There's no hotel here."

They found the old Frenchman in and fairly friendly. He sent a Kanaka with them to show them the only place he had to let. It was Lewin's house of old time, and rather gone to pieces, but the godown Lewin had used for storing his trade was in good repair.

"It will do us finely," said Mrs. Beazley, "and I'll make it lovely with those curtains and things we have brought, and, oh, what a sweet little garden! Wait till you see it when I have been over it with a spud and hoe. Take the place, Jack. Don't be put off by the tumble-down look of the house. A hundred dollars will make it a little palace."

Beazley took the house that afternoon, and with the help of MacAdam secured native labor to help in repairing it. The godown was in much better condition. A day's airing and another day's fumigating with a bonfire of dry hibiscus sticks to drive out insects and other undesirable tenants made it fit to receive the trade goods from the *Tamalpais*.

Meanwhile, the Beazleys lived on board the schooner, sleeping there at night, breakfasting on board, and bringing provisions with them on shore.

After superintending the Kanakas working on the house or in the garden or those engaged in bringing the trade on shore, they would have luncheon or dinner, picnic fashion, on the beach or in the woods.

It was the time of the full moon, which rose early these nights and lit their return to the schooner.

Navahoe by day was beautiful, but on warm nights like this, with the moon upon the palm trees and the fireflies dancing on the fringe of the woods, stars and moon making a mirror of the anchorage, and the reef singing its

drowsy song, Navahoe was more than beautiful.

At least, so little Mrs. Beazley thought as she leaned on the rail of the *Tamalpais*, while Beazley, smoking a cigar, leaned beside her, and they talked and plotted and planned for the future.

Mrs. Beazley felt herself absolutely outside the world that she knew. In this place there was no post; letters came occasionally by a "mail brigantine" or a stray warship, and letters placed in the pillar box by the club would be collected and stored by MacAdam and dispatched by a stray warship or the mail brigantine, but you could not be sure in your own mind that anything you mailed would ever reach the person you mailed it to. As a matter of fact, the sense of uncertainty was entirely an illusion. Nothing in the world travels more surely to its mark than a letter, whether you post it at Nenkohee, in the sea letter box at the Straits of Magellan, or in the general post office of Chicago. Still, Mrs. Beazley did not know this; she only knew the illusion, and it fed her sense of isolation.

MacAdam had shown her the latest newspaper on the day of their first arrival. It was four months old. He had shown it to her as a joke, for the news of the world brought by the *Tamalpais* was months fresher than that.

The feeling of loneliness begotten of these things made the little woman cling closer to her husband. They were rarely apart, and, indeed, the social life at Nenkohee held out few inducements to draw him away from her.

There was the "club," a drink shop and little more; there were MacAdam and old Monsieur Martell, both of whom had their limitations, and lastly, but not leastly, there was Captain Slocum, known to all men as "The Captain."

Slocum was, in fact, the chief man at Nenkohee.

"Landed here two and a half years ago, and more," said MacAdam to Beazley. "He brought ashore with him a Kanaka baby he'd picked up in one of the islands, set great store by it, and called it his 'Luck.' Well, it certainly was that in a way, for he's been extraordinary lucky in business here. He's got a schooner, the *Contra Costa*, which does all his trading; he owns it, and he's got a fellow called Ambrose who's her captain and a sort of partner, good business man, too, he is. Slocum wasn't a bad sort of old chap when he came here first and had to fight his way against Lewin and Sakers, but since he knocked them out and grew prosperous he's got swelled head."

Beazley, it will be remembered, had a letter of introduction to the captain from Lewin. He had mentioned the fact to MacAdam, who had forgotten to warn him not to present it. The innocent Beazley, though he knew that Slocum and Lewin had been trade rivals, little guessed the depth of hatred that had lain between them. He knew nothing of the contents of the letter, which was sealed.

One day, as he was drinking a glass of lemonade at the club, the captain came in and ordered a cocktail.

The two men had not yet met, but they knew one another by sight. The captain, cock of the walk at Nenkohee, violently resented the coming of another trader. He had heard of the Lewin business, and of how Lewin had let Beazley down, and that knowledge did not increase his respect for the new man.

He was lifting his cocktail to his lips when Beazley spoke.

"Captain Slocum, I believe," said Beazley.

The captain sipped his drink, and placed it on the counter.

"Slocum's my name," said he. "And what, may I ask, might yours be?"

"Beazley," replied the other. "And, by the way, I have a letter of introduction to you from a man called Lewin. He served me a dirty trick, and I don't think he's a particular friend of yours; still, it may amuse you to read it."

He took the letter from his pocket-book, and handed it to Slocum.

The captain took it, put on a pair of old spectacles which he used on the rare occasions when he had to read or write, opened the envelope, and began to spell over the contents, reading aloud paragraphs here and there to himself, utterly forgetful of the presence of Beazley and the Kanaka behind the bar:

Hope you and your nigger baby are well—keep off the drink, old grog-blossom, for the bottle will be your rewin. If the Lord hadn't spoilt you in the bakin' you might 'a' been half a man.

A nice sort of letter of introduction!

"Why, blister it!" cried the captain suddenly, dashing the letter and spectacles down on the counter. "You've got the face to bring me a letter like this here and sit laffin' at it. Don't tell me. I saw y'—"

"I swear I did not know what was in it," said Beazley. "Yes, I was laughing, but not at you. I was laughing at myself for having carted that thing about in my pocket for the last three months. Tear it up and forget about it."

The captain put the letter back in his pocket, then he put his spectacles in their case, then he finished his cocktail, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and moved to the door.

"I'll l'arn them as has no manners," said he, addressing no one in particular.

Beazley went home and told his wife the joke.

It was no joke in reality, for he had

hit the captain on his swelled head, and that is always a dangerous thing to do, especially in the case of a man like Slocum.

Mrs. Beazley did not look on the thing as a joke, however, especially when she heard how Slocum had taken it.

"George," said she, "you ought to go and apologize."

"I—why, what have I done?"

"Apologize for laughing at him."

"I did. I explained that I was laughing at myself for having howked the thing round so long."

"Well, I wish it had not occurred," said Mrs. Beazley.

There was no use in wishing, however, and indeed the matter did not make things much worse for the Beazleys for the reason that Captain Slocum had "taken a down" on Beazley from the first. MacAdam was right. Slocum was suffering from that most detestable of all mental complaints, the swelled head that comes from success. I do not know anything that makes men more brutal, selfish, and unfit for the kingdom of Heaven than this disease.

Slocum, after two years and a half in Navahoe, was doing big business. His schooner, the *Contra Costa*, came and went between the island and Sydney always with full cargoes; the island, little known, was untroubled for him by competition, so much so that, as a matter of fact, he could not handle the whole of the copra it produced.

He had thought of extending his business and buying another schooner or chartering one. His difficulty lay in the fact that long experience had taught him not to trust men too much. Ambrose, the captain of the *Contra Costa*, he could trust implicitly, and he chose to leave it at that. Besides, a second schooner would mean endless outlay and expense.

The arrival of the Beazleys altered all this. Here was competition, and

competition, moreover, sent against him by the hated Lewin. The letter of introduction finished and sealed the business.

"I ain't a particular man," said the captain to MacAdam, "but there's things no man can swaller, and I can't swaller them Beazleys nohow. What did the chap want bringin' his wife here for? There ain't no wimmen here for her to consort with, and he thinks he's goin' to do business; well, he thinks wrong."

"Look here, cap," said MacAdam, "there's no harm to the Beazleys, and you know jolly well you can't handle all the stuff here yourself."

"Who says I can't?" asked Slocum.

"I do. The island could produce nearly half as much again, or maybe more, in copra, and it doesn't simply because there's no incentive to the Kanakas to put in more labor and time over their work. If you want to keep the place to yourself why not get another schooner?"

"And who says I won't?" replied the captain. "I've been thinkin' of it for months, and when Ambrose is back with the *Contra Costa* I'll see it done. They can't make small of me. I'll l'arn 'em!"

Meanwhile, the Beazleys were getting in. All the trade stuff on board the *Tamalpais* was transferred to the godown, and Mrs. Beazley, superintending the Kanaka workmen, was putting blinds up in the new house and spreading matting on the floors.

It was a pleasant house, situated just outside the town and beyond Captain Slocum's, and Mrs. Beazley sometimes, on passing the captain's house, would see the captain's chief treasure, the Luck, as every one in Nenkohee called it, playing in the garden, digging or dragging a little toy cart.

She had heard the story of it from MacAdam. How it was the baby of a Kanaka chief who had died, with all

his tribe, of smallpox—so the story went—how Slocum had saved it, how it had brought him good fortune, and how, when Arnold, the missionary, had christened it, the captain had insisted on naming it Luck.

It seemed to her much lighter in color than the natives she had hitherto seen; it was a most engaging child to look at, and her woman's heart went out to it. One day in passing she had spoken to it, and it had come up to the railings nothing loath, and began some lipping remarks when a gruff voice from the house called it in.

Mrs. Beazley passed on, half laughing.

She had seen the captain several times in the town, and she was not in the least afraid of him, and, despite his open hostility, she felt no animosity toward him.

"I don't think he's as bad as he seems," said she to her husband. "You know, I have feelings about people—and dogs. I can't stand slithering sort of people—you remember Lewin; he was all smiles, and he used to speak in such a soft voice, and his hands—the palms of them—were cold and damp; it was like shaking hands with a fish. I'm sure the old captain's hands are not cold and damp."

Beazley laughed.

The house was now in order, and it was time to think of opening up business with the natives.

"The fellow for you to go to," said MacAdam, "is Tapatukeea; he's chief over there on the north side of the island, and his people own a lot of trees. Slocum takes part of his copra, but not all; in fact, Tapatukeea was grumbling to me some time ago, saying it was a pity there wasn't another trader here to do business with. Don't say I told you this, though."

Beazley thanked him for his advice.

"How do you get there?" he asked.

"You can easily walk, and for a few

cents you can get a Kanaka to guide you."

Next day, the Beazleys, having hired a dusky individual for guide, packed some lunch in a basket, and started off for the village of the chief.

There was a fairly good road, the day was glorious, and a wind from the sea followed them, cooling the air and waving the palm fronds and ferns that lined the way. They passed groves and groves of palm, great tracts of mammee apple, and dark dells of fern. Huge trees of centuries' growth and unknown name shaded the way here and there, colored birds flew overhead, and colored butterflies led them, and all the time, as far as they went on, far as they might go, the song of the reef beyond the anchorage followed them on the wind.

The way led up and up till they reached the plateau that formed the summit of the island. It was clear of foliage, with the exception of one or two trees that looked like screw pines. Looking around, one could see the Pacific on every side—blue, desolate, and beautiful. Here they sat down and had luncheon, the dusky one vanishing and returning with some bananas, and, after the meal, Beazley smoked, and they talked of the future, happy and careless as children.

Then they resumed their way, going downhill through groves of banana and fields of taro till they reached the village, which was situated on a cliff edge.

There was no reef on this side of the island, and the sea, unbroken, came, blue and thundering, up to the cliffs. The whole place was filled with the drone and boom of the water on cliff-side or in cave. The village was almost deserted, the folk being away at work, but the chief, Tapatukeea, was at home and exceedingly friendly in his reception of the Beazleys. But he could sell them no copra; he had none, in fact, to sell. He had concluded a con-

tract with Captain Slocum under which he was bound to deliver all copra gathered by his people to Slocum and to none other.

"When did you sign that contract?" asked Beazley.

"It was yesterday," replied Tapatukeea.

"He wants to freeze us out," said Beazley half to himself, half to his wife. "He can't handle all that stuff he has, and now he's going in for more—swine!"

Mrs. Beazley said nothing; she looked thoughtful, and then, assured in their minds that nothing could be done, they bade good-by to the friendly chief and returned to the south side of the island and home.

They had delayed a long time at Tapatukeea's, and when they reached the plateau the sun had set and the moon was rising.

"That does us," said Beazley. "We won't do any good here; that pig intends to gobble all the copra that's to be had; he knows all the ropes, and he had got before us. I should have gone to Tapatukeea the day before yesterday."

"Well, Tapatukeea doesn't own the whole island," said Mrs. Beazley. "We can try other people."

"We can try them," said Beazley, "but I don't think it'll be much use. Slocum has bought the whole crop in advance, if I am not very much mistaken, and he has done it to freeze us out."

He was right.

Next day, making diligent search, he could find no one to trade with.

Copra is the kernel of the coconut; the nut is broken in two, the kernel taken out, dried, and strung on a string; it is valuable, but only in bulk; to make any profit out of it one must handle large quantities, and though I have said that Beazley could find no

one to trade with that statement is not rigidly correct. There were several small growers who were ready to deal with him, but they were so small that Slocum, with a fine contempt, had passed them over.

Mrs. Beazley was out when her husband returned from his second fruitless journey; he was making himself some lemonade when she returned, and when she heard his tale she sat down like a person upon whom a heavy burden has suddenly fallen.

"Well," she said, with a sigh, "we must go, that's all. Oh, dear, and I was so happy in this house, and the place is so beautiful, and the natives—I simply love them. They run to me if they are ailing, and they tell me their affairs; they are just like children, and I have to leave them."

She wiped her eyes, and Beazley stood by, biting his lips.

He was cursing Slocum.

It was just as if Slocum had hit his wife.

It was a bitter failure, all the more bitter on account of the sweetness of the place and the kindness of the people.

Slocum had once suffered in this island from the effects of a *tabu* put upon him by the lying stories of Lewin and his partner, Sakers, but this trouble was not in the nature of a *tabu*; the natives were willing to trade, and indeed anxious to do so, for Mrs. Beazley had found their hearts; it was not a question of willingness, however, but of copra. They had contracted with Slocum to supply him with the stuff, and they could not go back on their contract. Arnold, the missionary, was unfortunately away, else he would very soon have brought Slocum to his senses. Slocum, despite his hostility to missionaries in general, had a respect for Arnold.

Arnold not being available, there was no one to stand up to Slocum or point

out the fact that in driving the Beazleys off the island he was injuring the community and committing an act incongruous with honest dealing and fair trading.

Beazley went for a long walk to work off his irritation. Everything was now decided, and he had given his orders for the transport of all the trade back to the schooner and the removal of the house furniture on the morrow.

He returned at about six o'clock in the evening to find that his wife was not at home. At seven she had not returned, and, taking his hat, he started off to look for her. He met her at the gate.

"Oh, George," cried Mrs. Beazley, "poor Captain Slocum's little child is dying; he came here himself to fetch me, and I have been doing what I could for it—I've come back for the medicine chest."

"Been here to fetch you!" cried the outraged Beazley. "Like his cheek—what do I care about his child? To fetch you—as if you were a hospital nurse—after the way he has treated me——"

Mrs. Beazley took him by the arm, and led him into the house, led him into the sitting room, went and fetched the Burroughs-Wellcome medical tabloid chest, and opened it.

"There is no use in thinking of that," said she; "the little child did nothing against us. The captain may be a wicked and hard man, but he loves it, and he can't be quite bad. Think if it was our own."

The Beazleys had lost a child, the only child that had ever come to them, and this shot told.

He sat silent while his wife went over the contents of the chest.

"It has convulsions," said she, "and can scarcely breathe. I am going to give it a gray powder if I can get it to take it. Old Doctor Turner, at Syd-

ney, told me—that time—that it's always safe to give a child a gray powder, and that in many cases it will save their lives if its lungs or stomach are bad."

"Well, I don't want to stop you," said Beazley; "poor little chap——"

"It's a girl," said she. "It's a darling, and I've always wanted to take it on my lap and—and——" she went off hurriedly; and Beazley, left alone, lit a pipe.

Beazley was one of the men who can hate and keep hatred glowing; he was also a generous man, and, as men go, emotional. He was satisfied with the fact that the captain was getting punishment, yet he hoped the child would live.

Mrs. Beazley did not return that night, and he slept on the cane lounge in the sitting room. At breakfast time, she appeared, happy and weary looking, and with good news.

"It's safe now," said she. "I don't know whether it was the gray powder or not, but it took a turn for the better in the night, and now it's asleep—yes, it will live." She took a cup of tea and some food, and then she went upstairs to lie down and have a sleep herself.

Beazley, having covered her with a rug and drawn down the blinds to keep the light out, took his hat and went off to superintend the removal of the trade from the godown.

A hundred yards away from the house, he met the captain, who came up to him in a furious manner as if to pick a quarrel.

"Look here," said that gentleman, "me name's Slocum, and them that knows me knows me for a straight man. I'm goin' to be straight with you, and I don't deny I took a down on you more particular considerin' the letter

of that pig Lewin's. Let that be. You want copra—well, you can have it."

"Thanks," said Beazley, "but I've made all arrangements to leave here and seek copra elsewhere."

"You ain't goin' off this island," said Slocum. "What you want pushin' a man for? D'y' want to make me 'pologize? I ain't one to 'pologize, not on your life! Now don't you mind me. I'm dragged this way and that. I'm het up—but I say, man to man, you stay here and I'll help you all I can. It's that kid. She's allus bringin' me to my bearin's. Showin' me the sort o' fool I am. She's shown me now I acted like a skunk, cornerin' the copra against you. Why, that kid, she's my mainstay—she's the compass that keeps the fool end of me hindmost. I called her me Luck, and I guess she is, and on'y for your missis I'd 'a' lost her last night sure. Well, then, here's my hand—you'll stay?"

"Yes, I'll stay," said Beazley, taking the huge hand.

Arnold, the missionary, when he arrived back, a month later, found the Beazleys well installed, prosperous, and a great addition to the place.

When he heard the whole story, he laughed—he was talking to Mac.

"You're not what they call a religious man, MacAdam," said he, "but there's an everyday religion you stick fairly close to, the religion that rules between men and regulates their dealings. If the old captain hadn't that child to care for, he'd have been off the track with the Beazleys, and they'd have gone, and some worse trader would have taken their places. He calls it his Luck. It is. Give a man something to care for, and you give him a piece of luck. Call it a woman, call it a child, call it a dog—it's luck all the same."

Five Hundred Head for a Ranger

BEING THE ADVENTURES OF BILL GILLIS AND THE KID, TEXAS RANGERS,
ON PIRATE ISLAND IN THE RIO GRANDE

By B. M. Bower and Buck Connors

(A Two-Part Novel—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

PIRATE ISLAND sounds as though it should grow coconuts and breadfruit and colonies of strange sea birds that nest in the cliffs and fill the air with their screaming before a storm; and a coral reef all foamy with breakers upon the one side and beautiful blue transparency upon the other, and a hidden channel through which low, rakish feluccas slip in sinister silence. The very name visions plank walking and a general "Blow-high, blow-low, for-what-cares-he" atmosphere. Pirate Island sounds as though it belongs to that part of the map which holds the Sargasso Sea. All of which proves how little there is in a name.

Pirate Island is none of these things. It can scarcely be called an island, even—if you demand the full geography definition and insist that it shall be surrounded by water. It lies, a fair-sized chunk of broken land, in the river bed of the Rio Grande, and for most of the year it is an island in name only, with dry river bed on one side and a tangle of dry washouts on the other, and little ridges and a jungle of horseweeds and cottonwoods and underbrush all over it, and the boundary line running through—that is Pirate Island; wild enough and rough enough and God-forsaken enough in all conscience, but not what the name would lead one to expect.

Far from being given over to piracy, it held, somewhere hidden away in its tangle of washes and ridges and jungle growth, the outpost camp of the Texas Rangers set there to guard the Mexican border.

Where there's a boundary between two nations, there will be lawbreakers; smugglers always, and now and then fugitives from the justice of one country or the other—always some one who wants to slip across the line where he shouldn't and because he shouldn't. It is all very simple when you stop to think of it. Then there is opium, forbidden in the United States and with the price thrust skyward because, when the law wiped opium off the list of permitted things, it did not—because it could not—wipe out also the craving for it among the victims of the drug. Always there will be men who count the profit before they reckon the risk of getting opium across the line under the noses of the customs officers. Also there was at this time a continual, crying need of guns in Mexico and many pesos to be earned by the simple method of slipping them over the border, where the Federals commanded the country on the side of Guadalupe clear up to the boundary, and the Revolutionists held the other side. Juarez in the hands of Orozco, and Guadalupe in the hands of Ortega, and both wanting guns—all they could get. It was a mere matter

of selling to the highest bidder. The customs officers could watch the highways, but they could not patrol the whole boundary line; hence the detachment of rangers kept down there to help out.

Smugglers down that way don't like the Texas Rangers. On the Texas side, the dislike manifests itself in an occasional shot from ambush and in "frame-ups" in the little towns, where rows are hopefully started in saloons and bullets are set whining, and a ranger is the target. They learn to be cautious, those rangers; they learn to go with their eyes open and their mouths shut, and to sit with their backs to the wall, and to feel that their best friend swings at their hip and that no man may be trusted beyond a certain point. In Texas, the lawbreakers hate the sight of a ranger. Over in Mexico, everybody hates them, for one reason or another.

It is known that there is a standing offer in Mexico of five hundred head of cattle for a ranger—alive or dead, just so it's a ranger. No one knows for a certainty who pays the reward. You will not see the offer posted up in public places, either. But the offer is there, and every Mexican knows it, and every ranger. If one could walk out in broad daylight and shoot a ranger and collect the reward upon his body, there would be many a greaser going into the cattle business. Many have tried it—and it is because many have failed that the reward is made so tempting. It cannot give the ranger a comfortable feeling of security to know that every Mexican looks upon him as a nice little start in life if only he could catch the ranger out somewhere alone and off his guard!

The Kid, with the star so lately pinned upon his breast that his fingers still strayed up that way occasionally to feel the new dignity of its presence, rode humped in the saddle and saying

never a word to his partner, though silence was not his habit. The Kid was tired, and he had the blues, and he was almost sorry that he had ever joined the ranger force at all. He was tired because he had just come in off a long, hard, heartbreaking trip to the Franklin Mountains, and had no more than washed the dust off his face and filled his empty stomach at the ranger headquarters in Ysleta, when the captain sent him forth again to Pirate Island with Bill Gillis.

The Kid had naturally expected to rest a while, and to be hailed a hero for what he had done. For he had brought in his man. To bring in your man and three peons and dozens of brand-new, confiscated rifles the Kid considered an achievement of which a man twice his age might be proud; to bring in your man in face of the fact that your man once saved your life and should, by all the laws of common gratitude, be left his liberty, the Kid considered a sacrifice upon the altar of duty that should lift you up to the dignity of a martyr.

Instead, the captain had not so much as grunted a word of approval. The captain had told him just how to go about turning his prisoner over to the United States marshal, and in the next breath had ordered him to Pirate Island. Why, Bill Gillis, even, had received more consideration than had the Kid, though Bill had merely achieved a sprained and dislocated shoulder on the trip. The captain had told Bill to take care of himself because he was too valuable a man to be laid up. He had not said a word about Van Dillon being valuable, for all the service he had rendered—on his very first mission, at that. The Kid did not want to be petted and coddled, but for all that he felt that the captain failed to realize just how much he had done for the force, and to appreciate the fact that he had handled a stiff proposition as well as Bill, even, could have done it.

Over in Mexico, the sun was sliding down behind a ragged range of mountains, and the shadows were taking the faint purple tinge of the afterglow. Nearer, a long line of tall cottonwoods stood up in dark silhouette against the sunset. Before them lay the military bridge that spanned a boggy strip where the Rio Grande had overflowed upon the lowland at one end of the island.

"Well, there she is," Bill remarked cheerfully, though the silence between them had lasted for ten plodded miles. "This is Pirate Island, right ahead of us."

The Kid glanced morosely at the woods beyond the bridge and said nothing at all.

"Camp'll be up in the neighborhood of Monument Twenty, I reckon," Bill went on, ignoring the sulks. "That's where we generally make camp. Better catch up Boob, Van, and lead him the rest of the way."

"He's followed so far all right," said the Kid, sullenly glancing back to where the pack mule loitered to fill his mouth with some green stuff that he liked.

Bill looked straight at the Kid; and, though Bill was a little man, not as tall as Van by six inches, and though his glance was mild, the Kid swung his horse around and went back after Boob. Bill smiled a little, and awkwardly rolled himself a cigarette; awkwardly because one arm was in a sling. He knew very well what ailed Van Dillon. When a boy of eighteen chooses to make one reckless jump from boyhood into the ranks of picked men who have no time to pet their little, personal feelings, the readjustment of his mental perspective is going to be violent and at times exceedingly painful. Bill was sorry for the Kid, but he did not feel that he could help Van, except by leaving him alone. He rode slowly until Van overtook him, still sulky and

leading the reluctant Boob. They went on together, neither speaking.

Dark came while they were traveling a blind trail up the island; a trail which Bill seemed to know very well, but which to Van looked like a mere following of the line of least resistance through the weeds and undergrowth between the groves of cottonwoods. The moon came up, big as a barrel and yellow as California gold; and their way became ghostly, peopled with gigantic shadows that moved weirdly as the breeze swayed the bushes and trees and weeds. Bill slipped in ahead of the Kid, and kept the position. Once, when Van spoke sharply to Boob, Bill looked back at him quickly and made a gesture with his good hand. The Kid read it as warning, and afterward he rode as quietly as he could; Bill, he noticed, made little noise, and sometimes stopped abruptly to put a branch carefully out of his way, or rode around obstructions that would be likely to rustle more than usual.

"Halt!" a voice called suddenly—so suddenly that the Kid jumped. They were in black shade, and they had come on with scarcely a sound. And that sharp command came from somewhere—not loud, but distinct and with a timbre that stopped them where they were.

"Howdy, Charlie!" Bill called back softly, after three seconds of silence. "Some note to be stopping two law-abiding gents this-a-way! Hootin' up there on a limb like a durned owl!" He chuckled and urged his horse forward through the gloom.

The Kid followed him with a queer pang that was almost physical. Something there was in Bill's tone that spelled affection. Something there was that set this unseen sentinel apart from others. The Kid felt it vaguely.

From somewhere above and ahead of them, the voice answered: "That you, Bill? I kinda thought maybe it was, when I got a glimpse of you cross-

ing that moonlight open space away down. Thought I got that three-quarter seat of yours. How are yuh, old scout?" A slim little fellow appeared suddenly beside Bill and reached out to grip his hand. "What's the matter with your paw, Bill? What you doing down here all crippled up?" He laid an arm over the neck of Custer and gave the Kid a swift, appraising glance that seemed to set him aside afterward as a person of no consequence whatever. "Going to stay down here?" he added to Bill.

"Oh, I reckon I'll get to stay a while, anyway. How's she piling up, Charlie?"

Again the Kid felt something in Bill's tone that was different; something that brought this strange Charlie close into his friendship and his confidence, and pushed the Kid afar off, to the extreme edge of acquaintanceship. And Bill—why, Bill had been the Kid's pal! His trail partner on that trip to Franklin Pass; friend of the Brazos Peaks time that seemed so long ago. Their close intimacy had seemed to the Kid as fixed, as immutable as any of the laws of nature. Yet a little man had but to call out in the darkness, and Bill's voice, even, was different. The Kid nudged Eagle with his knee and sent him a few steps forward into the shadow again. Let Bill throw in with this Charlie if he wanted to—much the Kid cared! Only he wished they would jar loose so he could get on to camp. He wished—

"Come back here, Kid!" Bill called softly, but with a note of authority that sent the Kid all hot inside with unreasoning rebellion. He twitched the reins so that Eagle turned and half faced the two, but he did not go back. Boob, at the end of the lead rope, was browsing contentedly at some new leaves on a bush, and did not move. "What yuh want?" the Kid asked shortly.

"I want you to meet Charlie Horne—my old side partner." Bill's voice was not conciliatory, nor yet apolo-

getic; it seemed rather to place the meeting of Charlie Horne as an immense honor, and it rasped the Kid's temper.

"Hello, Charlie!" he grunted, without moving. "Say, Bill, do we go on to camp, or do we stay here the rest of the night?"

Bill did not say any of the things that he might have said, things that would have stung the Kid's pride intolerably. He did not reply to the Kid at all. He spoke instead to Charlie in that low monotone that makes words indistinguishable beyond a few feet, and the Kid was sure that Bill was talking about him.

"Just a kid," was what Bill was saying to Charlie. "Jumped up his age to twenty-one—only eighteen by rights, but don't say anything about it, will you?—and joined the force. Got nerve, believe *me!* Run in Jim Lyons and a gun train single-handed—tell yuh about it later on. Headstrong—ain't found himself yet—but some kid, believe *me!* Jealous of you right now; thinks a good bit of me, I reckon—I knew him in Brazos Peaks and chummed with him a lot." He straightened in the saddle as a signal that he was ready to go. "Well—see you in the morning," he said, in a tone that Van could hear. "Take care of yourself, old-timer."

"Shore will," Charlie replied, in that same warm tone of affection, waving his hand to them before he disappeared into the black shade behind him.

Bill rode up to the Kid, passed him, and took the lead again. He did not say anything. His method was to let the sulks wear themselves out, in the belief that words merely emphasize the mood. The immediate effect of his silence was to fix firmly in the Kid's mind the idea that Bill had no use for him now that he had got with Charlie, and to decide that he was going to hate that same Charlie Horne.

Ten minutes of slow progress

through sparse undergrowth and across a little, natural meadow, and they faced another black grove. Bill stopped and dismounted, and handed the reins to Van. "Hold Custer for me, Kid," he said, very cautiously. "Camp's just ahead somewhere. Can't go loping up on a bunch of sleeping rangers, yuh know. I'll locate 'em and let 'em know who's coming."

"All right," said the Kid, in a whisper, and leaned to peer into the blackness where Bill had already disappeared. It was all very mysterious and very grim. The Kid's mood lightened with the knowledge that he was playing a real man's game of chance and danger, and that all this caution was born of necessity and not for any love of the spectacular. His trip to Franklin Mountains had taught him how grim was the game. Presently he heard Bill's voice, raised a little and speaking distinctly:

"Howdy, boys! This is Bill Gillis."

"Why, gol-darn your soul, how *are* yuh, Bill?" There was welcome in the voice that answered; welcome and affection that stirred the Kid with a little, warm glow and made him forget, almost, his resentment against the strange Charlie. They hung together, these Texas Rangers! That was it—they hung together, and their friendships were real. The Kid did not analyze, but while he waited for Bill to come back he felt that he knew what breeds such friendships; he knew that when men ride out stirrup to stirrup, knowing that perhaps only one will ride back, or that the lives of them both may hang on their courage and their loyalty to each other, friendships are born that set those men apart from other men. It was that which had drawn him so close to Bill; it was the danger they two had faced together. He had not realized that others had also been drawn close, to Bill Gillis and to one another; but now he felt a warmth in his soul where be-

fore had been chill loneliness; and a pride that he, Van Dillon, was counted worthy a place among these men.

He went forward, guided by Bill, and he saw several white patches that he knew for beds laid out in a little open space in the horseweeds that grew high all around them. In two of the beds men were sitting upright, talking to Bill as to an old comrade returned after an absence—which he was. In a lighted space, where the moon shone through the branches of a tree, Bill was pulling with his good hand at the latigo of his saddle while he answered questions.

The Kid, now that the monotony of the long ride was over, forgot his black mood and went over and helped Bill get the saddle and bridle off Custer. Bill thanked him and went and squatted on his heels beside one of the men, while Van unsaddled Eagle, his own saddle horse, and afterward unpacked Boob. He thought that they had completely forgotten his presence among them, so absorbed were they in low-voiced converse—shop talk that would have sounded strange indeed to the world at large, so steeped were the sentences in life-and-death issues which were merely a part of the day's work. But when he pulled the pack saddle off Boob and with it the thick padding of Navaho blanket, Bill rose up and came toward him.

"Horses are out beyond this grove, Bill," said one of the men. "You know where that open is?"

"Sure, I know. If I didn't, old Boob would point the way, all right. We'll put night ropes on Custer and Eagle, Kid."

Afterward, Bill showed him where to place their bed in a clump of fresh, untrampled horseweed. Behind the fringe of the outer edge, Bill trampled a space large enough for the bed, and stood watching while Van spread the blankets and the tarp and tucked in the edges. From somewhere beyond came the faint

snapping of a discreetly small fire and the delectable odor of fresh-boiling coffee. The Kid turned his face that way and sniffed, made keenly aware of the fact that he was ravenous.

"Come and get a cup of coffee, boys," a voice called guardedly. To Van it seemed as though these rangers never spoke full-voiced, as did other men. "It's a long time till morning."

"Aw, you shouldn't have bothered, Rudd!" Bill protested gratefully. "A cold snack would 'a' done us all right." But he led the way hastily toward the crackle and the tantalizing aroma.

"No bother. I can stand a cup of it myself," growled the voice. "And the guard will be coming in directly—Charlie'll be glad of some. He's been off his feed, last day or so—didn't eat any supper at all hardly."

Again the Kid felt a difference in the tone—the same tender quality that had been in the voice of Bill when Charlie halted them out there in the trail; the same quality that had been in the greeting flung at Bill by the man in the bed over there. It was very intangible—the Kid had no word to call it by—but it was there.

The coffee was the best Van had ever tasted; at least, that was what he would have told you. While they were still squatted in the faint warmth of the dying blaze, drinking and eating cold bannock and cold bacon and joying in every mouthful, some one spoke in the darkness. In a minute a form Van recognized as Charlie came in out of the gloom and laid a hand carelessly down upon his shoulder. Over where the beds were, a man was moving out quietly, making ready to take Charlie's place out there in the trail.

"Well, Kid, how do you like it, far as you've got?" Charlie leaned his slim body forward and stretched an arm, reaching for the coffeepot. He leaned again in another direction and reached a cup, and began to fill the

night air with the fresh smell of coffee while he poured.

"All right," the Kid answered briefly, and was a little surprised because his own tone was friendly.

"Ah—that shore hits me where I live," Charlie observed, and dangled the empty cup from the forefinger of his left hand. "I wish Rudd would take a chance and celebrate like this every night. A cigarette, now, and I can turn in feeling that kings have nothing on me."

The Kid looked at him, his eyes big in the firelight. He had been going to dislike this Charlie; he had felt that very distinctly, half an hour ago. But now he knew that he couldn't dislike him—not if Charlie kept that manner and that little, drawly tone of good will when he spoke to him.

"Better roll in, Kid," said Bill quietly and with the same note of authority which was becoming his habit when he spoke to Van. Bill was sitting with his knees drawn up and his crippled arm resting across them in its sling, and he was smoking a cigarette with much relish. "Remember where you were at daylight—you've hit a long, hard trail since then. You turn in now and get some sleep. You sure need it."

"So do you," Van retorted. But in a minute he got up and started back toward their bed in the horseweeds. Standing with a hand outstretched to part the weeds, he looked back impatiently. But Bill had made no move to follow. Through the bushes he could make out dimly the two figures sitting hump-kneed in the fire glow. Though he listened, he could barely distinguish the low murmur of their voices while they talked—those two who had been so glad to meet away back there in the dark.

Once more the feeling that he was a stranger among strange men, forgotten by the one man to whom he unconsciously clung for companionship, set-

tled like a cloud upon the Kid. He unbuckled his six-shooter, knelt and placed the gun down under the blankets as Bill had taught him to do. He drew off his boots and tucked them under the corner of the bed where his head would rest and where his hand could go up and find them instantly. He listened again, heard no sound to indicate that Bill was coming, and laid himself down with a grunt of disgust. It was a wonder that Bill wouldn't take some of his advice to himself! Bill had traveled the same long, hard trail which Van had traveled since daybreak, and he had traveled with a crippled shoulder.

Moods that are unreasoning and childish may come to a lad of eighteen who has jumped recklessly into the man's hard game of life; moods that he would never admit to any one, himself least of all. But, such is the splendid resilience of youth, those moods are washed out upon the shores of sleep. Van was a much disgruntled youth, as well as a weary one, when he pulled the blanket up over his head and left only a breathing place with the tip of his nose sticking out. He was going to show Bill that he could be as independent as anybody. He wasn't going to ask any odds of him or any one else. Let them gang off by themselves, if they wanted to—he could hold his own, he guessed—

With the sharp discomfort of a fresh hurt, the dark, bearded face of Jim Lyons, as he had looked at Van before he turned away to obey the curt order of his jailer, flashed across his mental vision. That look had cut deep into the Kid's soul, and for all his youth and healthy optimism the wound it left would not heal overnight. Never once had he let Jim Lyons see that he had recognized him; never once had Jim Lyons shown any sign that he recognized Van. And yet, at the last minute he had turned and given Van that long, bitter look—the Kid squirmed as at a

physical hurt, and burrowed deeper into the blankets. He wished Bill would come to bed; vaguely he hungered for the close presence of a friend who knew and who must have understood, because never once had he mentioned Jim Lyons on the long ride from Ysleta.

Then came sleep; the face of Jim Lyons faded and was gone, and Van Dillon was just a boy, dog-tired and dreaming a boy's inconsequential dreams, and muttering now and then a blurred sentence addressed to Boob.

CHAPTER II.

To the Kid, fresh from sleep and with a boy's hunger riding him hard, camping on Pirate Island seemed very much like camping anywhere else. The camp was quiet, the island filled with bird song, and the peace that broods over a wilderness. Men awoke and stretched their arms and yawned after heavy slumber, and washed the sleep from their eyes with cold water, and thought about breakfast. They said hello to the Kid, and afterward seemed to take his presence as a matter of course; and the Kid was content once more with life. Bill awoke and smiled at him with a glimpse of white teeth and an endearing twinkle in his eyes, and the Kid grinned shamefacedly in response. He hoped Bill would not mention his grouch of the day before—and Bill, being wise in his way, did not.

A man came out of a thicket of green stuff, hitching his heavy gun belt into place over his hips. His eyes lighted on Van and widened a little with surprise.

"Why, hello!" he greeted cheerfully. "Ain't you pretty far from home—for a kid?" He came up and held out his hand. "What you doing with yourself away down here?"

This was Ranger Kent, unconsciously

the cause of Van's presence there. For had not Ranger Kent very calmly and very effectively cleaned Brazos Peaks of its undesirable human element at the behest of the law-abiding citizens, one Van Dillon would not so soon have taken the fever of hero worship—the fever that drove him headlong into manhood and the fulfillment of his sudden, overpowering ambition to be a ranger. Van blushed with pride and pleasure as he turned back his coat to show the star.

"I'm a ranger myself now," he volunteered, with all the nonchalance of which he was capable.

Ranger Kent looked at the star, and he looked at the Kid's round face. "Well, I'll be darned!" his astonishment jolted from him. "Bill, how about this? Is this boy——"

"Being of legal age and accepted by the governor and the captain, Van Dillon sure is a ranger," Bill hastily and convincingly assured him. "I saw him take the oath myself. I also rode along with him when he took a bunch of gun runners into camp—single-handed, you may say, since I wasn't in a position to help much. We just got in when we were sent down here." Bill's manner was perfect in its matter-of-fact seriousness.

"Funny—I got the impression in Brazos Peaks last winter that he was just a schoolboy; seventeen or eighteen, maybe." Kent spoke apologetically.

"He does look young for his age—that's because his dad wouldn't let him shave until his twenty-oneth birthday, maybe." Bill looked up from the problem of pulling on his boots with one hand. "I wouldn't have taken him for more than eighteen myself if I hadn't known different."

Shiny-eyed, the Kid turned away. To him it seemed the supreme test of loyalty that Bill should thus lie for him to Kent. Bill knew he was not twenty-one—why, of course Bill knew! Bill

could have put him out of the force if he wanted to, just on account of his age; they only had to write to Brazos Peaks to find proof—but they wouldn't, because Bill was going to stand by him. Right at that minute the Kid would cheerfully have laid down his life for little, smiling, loyal Bill Gillis, who was having trouble with his No. 5 boots while he went on talking to Ranger Kent, hero whom the Kid had worshiped for what he had done in Brazos Peaks. And last night he had been sore at Bill Gillis! Not for a long, long while had the Kid been so ashamed of his shortcomings.

He went out of his way to make overtures of friendship to Charlie Horne, who presently appeared from some sequestered sleeping place and found himself a comfortable place to sit down cross-legged in the crude circle of breakfasters. He got on all right with Charlie until Bill strolled in among them. After that, the Kid found himself talking to ears that did not listen. After he had asked a question or two that brought no answer at all, the Kid ate his breakfast and listened to the talk of the others; of Ortega and his rebel forces at Guadalupe and beyond; from the way they spoke, the Kid gathered the impression that it was very close, as miles went, to the heart of the Mexican revolution. He heard them name familiarly the name of Orosco, who commanded the Federal army at Juarez. Also there was talk of gun runners—upon which subject the Kid felt himself very well informed, since he had taken four of them to jail; and more than a dozen burro loads of guns. But when he started to speak about it to Charlie, he discovered that Charlie and Bill were having a little confab of their own, with their heads close together and their voices lowered and a laugh breaking now and then the mumble of their talk.

"I want you boys," Ranger Kent was

saying, "to keep an extra sharp lookout. Jesu Chaboya don't go to El Paso just to take in the picture shows. He's one of the brightest men in the Junta, and he was seen coming out of Boland Brothers' hardware store at two in the morning. Also it's pretty certain that Boland Brothers are ordering more guns than their regular trade demands. So, Davis, you and Rudd can ride up the river to-day, and see if there's any signs of burros crossing the river beds either way. They'll have to work pretty well down this way before they can cross, on account of Orosco's men.

"Dillon—that's your name, if I recollect right—I'll let you patrol the lower end of the island, here, and watch the road between the river and Fabens. Horsemen can dodge the sentry at the bridge by crossing down below the willows. But they're pretty apt to swing back into the trail farther on. If anybody looks off color, or can't show straight passes, take him to the river guard. You won't have any trouble at all—the customs men are pretty thorough, and beyond them is the cavalry, so it's mostly just stopping any chance leak there. You can handle it all right."

The Kid did not say anything. He drank the last of his coffee, sent a glance toward Bill, and saw that Bill was listening to something that Charlie was saying and smiling that smile which on the lips of a girl would be called lovable, or something like that. The Kid got up and walked away. Before the undergrowth quite hid the group from his sight, he stopped and looked back. Not a head was turned to glance after him; not a voice was lifted to give him a last word. Absorbed in themselves and in one another and in the work they had to do, not one of them seemed aware that he was leaving.

"At the camp—but I ain't *in* it by a darned sight!" he muttered, and parted the bushes and went his way. "Hang around the road to pick up anything

the river guard lets slip—it's easy; I can do it!" Whereat the Kid laughed disagreeably. "It's a wonder he didn't put me tending camp! Oh, well, he's got things to *learn*—that's all."

Ranger Kent would no doubt have been extremely humiliated had he known how low he sank in the estimation of the Kid. Ranger Kent had nerve enough—the Kid was willing to grant that—but he certainly had something to learn about the stern virtues and the cool-headedness and the good judgment of at least one of his men. Ranger Kent was certainly overlooking a bet when he sent a certain person off on a boy's job; with gun runners getting busy, he was foolish not to use all the good men he had. He might have sent Bill down the road to see if folks looked honest and had their passes in their hind pockets. It would be all right for Bill till his shoulder got well. On the whole, the Kid did not think as much of Ranger Kent as he had thought of him in Brazos Peaks.

So he went down the dim trail that was mostly a matter of guesswork, and when he came to the dusty highway he turned sulkily and rode down toward the border.

It was very quiet and very green along that trail. After the barrenness of his trip to Franklin Mountains, this river bottom seemed wastefully luxuriant. It was peaceful, and it was not in the least like the dividing line which separated him from a land torn with deadly convulsions of internal war. Orosco at Juarez, Ortega at Guadalupe, hundreds of men ready to fly at one another's throats—it all seemed so many words to the Kid, who had never looked upon bigger warfare than a personal fight.

The hoarse blat of an automobile horn stilled the bird songs, and straightway the Kid was blinking in a dust cloud raised by a dingy green roadster wherein were seated two perfectly ob-

vious American citizens. Van did not think they looked as though they needed searching, and he let them whiz past him. Hazardous work, this—riding along the public highway policed already at its point of crossing the border.

He went on till he came to that line, which was not far. He fraternized apathetically with the guard who was also bored with his duties and wished he was in the navy. He watched the guard hold up other perfectly obvious citizens and let them go by. He saw others, Mexicans and Americans, struggle up to the guard and interrupt his discontent while they convinced him that their mission was lawful. It was as simple, the Kid perceived, as taking tickets at a wild-West show.

"Up at Fabens," complained the river guard, "is where they slip it over on us. Or between there and here, I should say. Them that travels the road has got the papers for it nine times in ten. There's blind trails across the bottom, though, where they slip through to Fabens. Them we leave to the rangers to take care of."

It may not have been a hint, but the Kid presently left him and rode back whence he had come. This time he went as far as Fabens, an apathetic little tank station that squatted beside the track, and watched the trains go by. With the idea of furnishing an excuse for his presence, he bought half a dozen sacks of smoking tobacco and some papers. Then he rode back again. "It's easy—I can do this!" he told himself sarcastically for about the fourth or fifth time.

The sun was growing hot in his face as he went down the dusty trail. His soul was steeped in a boy's rebellion against authority, and not even the star on his breast under his coat could quite comfort him. It takes years and a ripened experience to bring steadfastness either of faith or of purpose; youth requires frequent demonstrations to

keep his interest and his faith alive. To Van, jogging down this much-traveled road in the growing heat of the day, all the hazard, all the glory that he had dreamed would come to him with the ranger star seemed vague and unreal and very far off. He did not even have Bill with him to tell him stories that stirred his blood with the brave deeds of his fellows.

He sighted what looked like a trail such as Kent and the river guard had mentioned, and he turned into it dispiritedly. He did not see any sense in patrolling that road, anyway. The blind trail promised more, and his spirits rose a little as he followed it into the thick jungle growth of weeds and young bushes.

Faint openings where the horseweeds had been broken by the passing of animals seemed to indicate that this blind trail had many branches. The Kid did not see how one man was going to accomplish much scouting around in that jungle. Forty smugglers could slip past him, and if he did run across one it would certainly be an accident. Still, he had been ordered to patrol this neighborhood, and so he meant to put in the time riding somewhere. He didn't see any sense in it, though. If he had the running of that camp on Pirate Island, and commanded those half dozen men, he'd simply keep a ranger stationed at Fabens to hold up any suspicious-looking characters that tried to catch a train there. That was the place to grab them, in the Kid's opinion; not prowling around in here—hunting for a needle in a haystack. He knew it was none of his business, but he would sure like to tell Ranger Kent a few things. He was eighteen, remember, which is the age of much wisdom. Never again, though a man lives to be eighty, will he know as much as he knew when he was eighteen.

Because he had no especial destination in view, he let Eagle choose the

trail for himself. Eagle had been on the ranger force almost half as many years as Van had lived. He knew blind trails as he knew his oats box at headquarters. Very likely he knew this blind trail, and where it led. At any rate, he went forward steadily and quietly, and he made a few turns which he would not have made had the Kid been guiding him instead of letting the reins lie loose on his neck. Eagle had carried the best men the force ever knew—Bill Gillis, for instance, and Charlie Horne, and Rudd, and Kent, of whose judgment the Kid was thinking with tolerant disgust while he rode—and his training had profited thereby. He knew how to stand as still as a rock so that he would not be seen or spoil his rider's aim when the saddle gun came up. He knew how to move softly, and how to save his wind when his rider wanted speed and more speed.

Just now he knew enough to look and listen and draw in long breaths to get the scent of any other animal. The Kid did not know, as he rode moodily along, that Eagle was more alert than he. But when Eagle stopped abruptly and threw up his head and stared fixedly across a little open space where the soil was pure, soft sand and therefore barren for the most part, the Kid dropped the cigarette he was just ready to lick into completion, and eased his saddle gun out of its scabbard. He did not see anything, and he did not hear anything—but he knew enough about horses to take Eagle's word for it that there was something ahead of them on that trail.

With the carbine at half aim and the reins held lightly between the fingers of his left hand, he pressed Eagle with his knees. The horse, ears perked forward, went on in a springy walk, his muscles tensed for a sudden lunge, a sudden swerve to one side or the other, or an abrupt whirling in the trail, as emergency or his rider might demand.

They crossed the little open space and made no more sound than a cottontail hopping over greensward. Eagle did not stop, but there was an indefinable quivering and a stiffening of muscles that warned the Kid. Very softly his thumb dragged back the hammer of his gun. His weight went to the stirrups, and his body poised and was ready—for what he did not know.

So they went another rod through a leafy thicket that seemed to be holding its breath it was so still; and they came abruptly upon a horse that lifted up its head inquiringly with a mouthful of dangling vines it had just snatched from off a bush. Its rider, warned by the movement, looked up, startled from lengthening a stirrup, and made that significant backward movement of the hand which comes to be second nature to a man who lives by grace of good luck alone.

"Quit it!" The Kid's voice cut the silence.

The man looked into the round eye of the carbine, gave a sour grin, and lifted his hand in token of submission. "You beat me to it," he conceded dryly. "Or I shore would have got you this time, kid."

"Oh, I don't know," the Kid retorted mechanically, while his mind groped dazedly for the meaning of this meeting down here in the river bottom of the Rio Grande. "I thought you was in——"

"Jail," finished the man. "Well, I was, but I ain't now." Which, being perfectly obvious, failed to get them anywhere.

"You will be," predicted the Kid, "if you ain't mighty careful. There's a ranger camp right around close, and these trails are pretty well guarded."

"I see they are." Jim Lyons grinned again, quite as sourly as before.

"I don't see," began the Kid complainingly, "how you managed to get away and down this far—so quick."

And he added, with a purely human interest: "How's your hand?"

"Pretty much on the bum yet—but I can use it a little. Say, why don't you go ahead with the proceedings?"

"I don't see," reiterated the Kid, "what you're doing this side the line. It looks to me like you don't give a darn whether you get caught or not. It's an awful chance to take."

"Not necessarily." Jim Lyons was looking at the Kid with a growing question in his eyes. "With my beard off, and these clothes, a stranger wouldn't recognize me by description—see? And I dropped off at Fabens in the night, when everything was closed up. In my haste at leaving El Paso"—he grinned—"I never stocked up with tobacco. I can't smoke that stuff the greasers hand out."

"Well, you're taking a long chance, if anybody should ask you," the Kid declared ill-humoredly. "You want to cut it out, and stay across the river. Here's tobacco and papers. If you don't object to their kind of matches, that heels you for a while, anyway." With one hand the Kid reached into his coat pocket, pulled out the package which the storekeeper had so painstakingly wrapped for him, and tossed it to Lyons. It fell at the gun runner's feet, and he stood looking down at it with a comical blankness in his face. The Kid deliberately slid his carbine into its scabbard.

"You better beat it back across the line," he advised, with self-conscious gruffness, "and stay there." He swung Eagle around in the trail, hesitated, and looked back over his shoulder, his face red with a boy's embarrassment.

"And, say!" he said, resting the flat of his palm on Eagle's rump. "I don't want you to think I've forgot about you pulling me outa that quicksand, because I ain't. I had to take you to jail 'cause you was smuggling guns and I'm a ranger. But this is different. You ain't

doing anything outa the way now, and the other deal you didn't git away with anyhow; we got the guns. This is just to—kinda square the quicksand deal. So long."

He rode away at a trot, looking red and confused, but nevertheless exultant. A load, whose weight he had not fully realized until it was removed, had lifted from his heart. He owed this man his life, and now he did not have to shun remembering how he had repaid the debt. He did not have to think of Jim Lyons in jail, facing a prison sentence for smuggling. He had instead the exhilarating sensation of having done the scar-faced one a great favor. He began to whistle while he rode back to the dusty highway, and then he remembered that he must ride cautiously.

"Gee! Bill would just about skin me for making all that racket," he admonished himself, and giggled happily over the thought of Bill's look of shocked disapproval if he had caught Van at such an indiscretion as whistling shrilly "Everybody's Doing It" while he was on scouting duty. Prudence had not yet become second nature to the Kid, but he stifled his impulse to "holler," and contented himself with grinning and slapping Eagle on his sleek neck.

Quite suddenly he came out upon the highway again, where the dust lay thick and the sun beat down hotly. The glare of bright sunlight after the green shade of the thicket half blinded him, and he shut his eyes tightly for a breath or two. When he opened them, a girl was riding toward him on a little gray pony, coming from the south.

The Kid had never paid much attention to girls, being so wholly taken up with big, heroic ambitions and with cultivating the sterner side of man's estate. For all that, he pulled himself straighter in the saddle, threw back his shoulders, and rode forward to meet her quite conscious of his own importance and

perfectly willing that the girl should appreciate it also. She was a pretty girl, dark of eyes, with straight, black eyebrows and hair black and wavy and with lips that were full and red and cheeks that glowed with color. She was a *very* pretty girl. And she smiled a little smile when she met his eyes, and then she looked away.

She did not look like a smuggler, or a malefactor or a questionable character of any sort; yet the Kid remembered his orders and stopped her by the straightforward method of swinging Eagle in front of the gray pony. His tone was very official—he had learned something from watching the river guard halt travelers who would cross down below there.

"Sorry," he said, "I must see your pass. I'm a ranger."

"But the guard at the bridge, he saw my pass, Mr. Ranger," she demurred, looking up at him through lashes unbelievably long and thick. "You must be a very new little ranger not to know that the guard——"

"I know all about the guard." The Kid suspected that he was being laughed at; you never could tell about these girls, anyway. "I've got orders to look at the passes. Sorry, but I'll have to do it. What's your name?"

"Well, then, it is Anita Montoya. What is your name?"

The girl simply would not take him seriously; she acted as though it was a joke, his being a ranger and wanting to see her pass. The Kid scowled, and threw open his coat so that she might see the star with the tiny knobs on the points, and the fateful inscription, "Texas Ranger Force," stamped deep across it.

"That's name enough," he snubbed her shortly. "Where do you live?"

"In Guadalupe, Mr. Texas Ranger Force. But really I cannot help it. Only spare me, and I promise, Mr. Texas Ranger Force——"

The lips of the Kid twitched, and he chewed the under one savagely. "Aw, quit your kidding!" he commanded gruffly. "Let me see your pass. I ain't here for fun."

"No?" Anita Mantoya was young, but she really knew a great deal about tones and glances and how to use them and when. "Not for fun? Well, here is my pass. I'm sorry it is not nice and clean—you see, I use it so much. My aunt, she lives at Fabens, and every week I go to see her, and I get the American papers and the magazines and bring them back for me and my brother to read. Did you think that I look like a Mexican invasion, Mr. Texas Ranger Force?"

The Kid looked at her and tried not to smile. "Never mind what I think you look like," he blundered, and handed back the paper which seemed to have been much used. She reminded him a little of a girl in Brazos Peaks—a girl who sat in front of him in school, and whose braid he used to twitch sometimes just to see her scowl over her shoulder at him.

"Is it something very horrid?" she persisted, after the manner of pretty girls the world over.

"It's fierce," declared the Kid, who had not yet passed from the teasing to the sentimental stage of masculinity—or if he had done so he did not know it yet. "But it ain't quite bad enough to hang you. I'll let you go this time."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Texas Ranger Force!" she said, in still another even more provocative tone. "So good you are to me, that looks so fierce!"

"Say, I wish you'd quit calling me that," the Kid broke out impatiently, but with a very apparent willingness to continue the argument. "I ain't the whole force, quite."

"No? But I thought you were. You *act* as if you were, and the American army and all." With that shot, calcu-

lated, no doubt, to render him speechless for some time, she struck the little gray pony with a switch she carried and rode away from him with much more enthusiasm than speed, since the pony's lope had about the same stride as a shoo-fly rocking-horse made for small children.

The Kid could have overtaken her very easily, but he did not. He started on toward the border, and he made up his mind that he would not look back, even. He'd show her!

Of course he did look back within three minutes after his decision. He saw Miss Anita Montoya now riding after him, but slowly, and bending low over the saddle horn, her eyes searching the ground for something. Neither the man in him nor the boy in him would let Van Dillon ride on until he knew what it was that she was looking for; that was not in human nature. He turned and went back to meet her.

"My bracelet—I threw up my hand because a wind caught my hat, and it flew off. It was so loose, anyway—but I can't find it."

"Your hand, you mean, or the bracelet?" The Kid grinned and dismounted.

"Mr. Texas Ranger Force, you are not very funny," she quelled, and dismounted also.

"Say, quit calling me that if you want me to hunt your bracelet."

"I asked you what was your name, and that was the name you showed me," she said. "Oh, if I can't find it—I need it now, for the fiesta. It is of silver, and my grandfather gave it to my grandmother when they were engaged. And never once has there been a fiesta in Guadalupe without it—I shall never dare let my mother know I lost it." She looked up at him quite unexpectedly, and met the Kid's round, honest eyes fixed upon her face. "Are you coming to the fiesta, Mr. Texas——"

"Say, my name's Van Dillon," the

Kid interrupted her, with some exasperation. "You've got an awful way of kidding a fellow."

"I called you what you showed me to call you," she defended demurely. "Just here is where I threw up my hand—or perhaps it was farther along. The wind——"

"I never felt any wind," Van commented banteringly. "It must have been the speed you was traveling."

Oh, it would be tiresome to repeat all they said while those two hunted the silver bracelet that had never missed a fiesta and must not miss this next one. The conversation of an eighteen-year-old boy and a seventeen-year-old girl seldom is clever enough to bear the test of repetition, especially if the girl is a pretty girl and not too shy to find words easily, and the boy happens to be on extra good terms with himself. An hour before, the Kid's mood would have lent him silence. He would very likely have given Anita Montoya an interested glance and ridden on without even knowing her name.

As it was, before the bracelet was found he knew a good deal about Anita Montoya, and she knew quite a lot about him, though not everything she would like to have known; for instance, she did not know just where the ranger camp was located, and she did not know how many men were there—for the Kid was not quite a fool, even if he did do foolish things, and Bill Gillis had impressed some things very deeply upon his mind. But she knew a good deal more than she had known when she first sighted him in the trail, and behind those black eyes with the unbelievable lashes her acute young brain was swiftly filing away the things she had learned.

The Kid knew that she was an awfully pretty girl, and he liked to hear her talk in that funny, book fashion, with an odd little Spanish twist, some-

times, to the words, and very little of the crude slang he was accustomed to. He knew that he had found her bracelet of silver at least a rod from where she had first told him she threw up her hand—that was why the finding took so long—and that he was glad Bill Gillis wasn't along; he wouldn't have had the nerve to put the bracelet on her wrist, and wish it on, if Bill had been there. He knew that she seemed to think he was the candy kid, all right, and that he hoped he wouldn't have to stand guard Saturday night, so he could slip over to that dance he was invited to.

What he did not know was this: He did not know that Miss Anita Montoya had not thrown up her hand to save her hat from going off in a wind, but instead had made sure that he was not looking, and had then tossed her bracelet of silver down in the edge of the weeds beside a bush that she had marked well, and had ridden on two rods or so before she turned the pony around. Also he did not know that Miss Anita Montoya rode on to Fabens with a note from a certain person in Mexico to a certain person who would call for it at the house of her aunt whom she was to visit. The note concerned a shipment of guns, and was folded very flat and was tucked under the insole of Anita's right shoe. And that was why she screwed up her mouth when she was walking along beside the Kid, talking about the fiesta. The note had managed to wrinkle under the ball of her foot, and it hurt.

When the Kid rode in to camp that afternoon, he had nothing to report to Ranger Kent. He had ridden faithfully the highway and a few of the blind trails that led from it, but he said he had not found anything. A mere bracelet of silver that must be worn to a fiesta was not, the Kid decided, of any official interest to any one, so he did not mention it even to Bill Gillis.

CHAPTER III.

Undersheriff Gatewood, having sold at auction the worldly possessions of a man who lived down below Fabens on the river, found his way to camp in time for supper that night. He had been one of the famous citizens' posse sent down to Pirate Island to prevent a threatened invasion of rebel bandits a few months before, and he had not forgotten how to find the place; also he remembered that the chuck in a ranger camp is worth riding a few extra miles—at any rate, there he was, with a tin plate piled full on his lap, and a cup of hot coffee in his hand and a grin on his sun-reddened face. Between mouthfuls he gossiped of events up El Paso way.

The Kid, inclined to silence and to rose-hued meditation, came out of a retired spot to refill his cup and to get more beans on his plate; him Sheriff Gatewood spied and recognized with a surprised hello.

"Say, you're the kid that brought in them gun runners—white man and three greasers—ain't you, the other day?"

"Yup," said Van cheerfully, and rolled his eyes to see if Kent and the others had "got" that proof of his prowess.

"Your prisoner broke jail that same night—Jim Lyons he calls himself here. They think a Mexican trusty helped him out. He didn't have far to go, a-course, to get over the line among his friends. Too bad—a fellow takes all kinds of chances running in some snaky devil like that, and then them simps don't know enough to keep him. I know Jim Lyons from away back. He's a bad one, too; gun fighter and one of the nerviest smugglers working on the border. Used to be over in New Mexico till it got too hot for him. You boys have heard of him—Scar Face they call him over there. Stands ace-

high with the Mexicans, and that's what makes him so hard to get. He's safe soon as he steps over the line. Pretty good work, Kid—bringing Scar Face into camp. Was it you shot up his gun hand?"

"That was Bill," said the Kid shortly, and retired into the shadows with his plate and cup.

Over his coffee cup, Bill's eyes dwelt upon the Kid for a full half minute before he turned to Gatewood. Half an hour later he followed the Kid when he went to look after his horse.

"What was Jim Lyons doing over on this side—and away down here, Van?" he inquired casually, after he had made sure that no one was within hearing.

The Kid jumped. "Jim Lyons? Why—is he over on this side?" He did it pretty well for one of his age. If nature had not given him a pair of round, innocent blue eyes that grew bigger and rounder than you would believe when he was under mental stress of any sort, he would have done it much better. As it was, Bill chuckled deep down in his throat like a baby when you first tickle its toes.

"That's all right, son. Nobody else is wise—but between you and me the trail must run straight and open to the sky. Sabe?"

"Yes, but I don't know what you mean——"

"Oh, yes, you do. Sure, you know. It didn't surprise you enough to know that Jim Lyons was loose. So you must have seen him; so he must be down here—and he must have been on this side. Kid, your face hasn't learned to lie yet. It will after a while—it'll have to. You know, I wondered what made you hit the camp so happy—and, Kid, I'm glad he got away; I am, for a fact. How's his hand?"

"Getting better," said the Kid, and then flushed to his collar at having been

trapped so easily. "Aw, thunder!" he grumbled. "You know everything."

Again Bill Gillis chuckled contagiously. "A man learns to read faces like he reads range signs. He has to. What did you tell him, Kid?"

Van faced the older man with a sudden frankness that might easily turn to defiance of Bill's opinion. "I told him he was taking too long a chance, coming over here," he said. "I told him there was a ranger camp pretty close, and the river was being watched."

"Well, you told him enough," Bill remarked dryly, after a pause. "Chances are you didn't tell him what he didn't know already—but you want to look out how you go handing out information. Don't answer questions for any stranger. Anything they think it's worth while to ask about, you take it for granted we don't want them to know. I'll tell you something, Kid. Ortega's pushed his men up close to the line—probably to receive the guns and ammunition he's bought over here before Orosco beats him to them. If they made a mistake and stepped over, they wouldn't mind at all—and you heard the record Jim Lyons has got. You're square with him now, Kid. But if you meet up with him again, bring him to camp just like he was a greaser. Personal feelings, Van—we can't afford to have any when they run foul of our duty. Ranger work comes first, if it was your brother or mine that had to suffer. And Jim——"

"I know," the Kid cut in impatiently. "But he was only after tobacco at Fabens, Bill. I had a package I just bought, and I gave that to him and told him to beat it. He wasn't doing any harm; he didn't have a chance to. He went back."

"Well, that's all right—this time. We won't say anything to Kent, of course; but next time——"

"I know—I don't have to be told." The Kid turned away, and Bill went

over and made sure that his own horse had plenty to eat before he strolled back to camp.

The Kid looked after him doubtfully. It was queer how Bill always got next to everything; he must be a mind reader. And then the Kid grinned. Bill, it occurred to him, did not know quite everything, after all; he did not, for instance, know about Anita Montoya and the silver bracelet and the fiesta and the invitation which he fully meant to accept. Bill wasn't a mind reader, exactly, even if he did have an uncanny way of jumping at a conclusion and landing flat-footed on a fact. The Kid decided that, much as he hated keeping secrets from Bill, it would be just as well if he did not mention Anita Montoya and the fiesta. He knew about how Bill would look at the matter; Bill would spring that you-never-can-tell stuff, and then go to preaching again. And while the Kid thought an awful lot of Bill, he did hate to be preached at all the time. He presently forgot Bill altogether, and began to wonder what a fiesta right among the revolutionists would be like.

He supposed it would be risky, going over there alone. He supposed he'd better give Anita a tip not to tell any one he was a ranger, or some smart Aleck might try to do him up and collect the bounty. They'd have a sweet time trying—they wouldn't catch *him* with his eyes shut, or get a chance to knife him in the back. He'd like to go, and stay as long as he liked, and leave—and then let them find out that there was one ranger that didn't give a darn for the bounty on him. He'd try and see Anita again and fix it up with her to tell who he was after he had gone. He hoped he wouldn't have to stand guard Saturday night.

For that matter, the Kid did not stand guard Saturday night, and the reason for that lies in what happened on this night, while he was still up-

borne in spirit because of his two chance meetings during the day.

The Kid was stationed close to the boundary line. He had what is called the middle guard, which is that part of the night when healthful youth sleeps soundest. The Kid had been in the saddle all day, and the night was very quiet. Because he must make no noise, he could not walk up and down a certain beat, as he had supposed sentries must do; he had to stand or sit in one spot, and he had to listen for any little suspicious noise, and he had to stare into darkness, and he had to keep awake.

For an hour or so the Kid did very well. He leaned back against a great cottonwood tree, and his wide eyes stared into the blackness before him that was Mexico. He had enough to think about—for an hour or so. There wasn't much to this night-guard business—he began to suspect Bill of telling things just a little bit scary for his benefit. Of course, a fellow gets sleepy—

Very cautiously—though he could not see anything to be particularly cautious about, even if there was a bunch of revolutionists within a few miles; it wasn't us they were fighting—very cautiously, because caution had been dinned into him, he moved a few feet to one side, and sat down on a stump. But there were ants in that stump, and he must have stirred them up, or something. He picked two off his neck and one off his hand, and then he moved back to the tree.

You bet a fellow can get sleepy standing in one spot in the dark! The Kid knew what ailed him—he had been going without a smoke. Of course, Bill wouldn't approve—but there wasn't anybody close enough to smell a cigarette or see the glow of it. The Kid leaned his carbine against the tree, got out his papers and tobacco, and by the sense of feeling alone he made a

cigarette. He felt better already, more awake. He found a match, and he scratched it on the bark of the tree beside him—and "*Pow-w!*" called a rifle from out there in the dark; and "*sput-t*" the bullet struck, six inches or so below his hand and the match blaze. His carbine tilted toward him from the jolt of the bit of bark pried loose close against the barrel.

Van jumped behind the tree, his carbine in his hand cocked and ready to shoot. Only, there wasn't anything to shoot at after the swift flash out there of exploded smokeless powder. He didn't exactly know what to do. Nobody had told him what to do in a case like this; so he did nothing, which was all that was expected of him.

Men came running toward him from the camp, and one from farther down the low ridge. This was little Charlie Horne, and he reached the Kid first, and found out that he was not hurt at all, and that he had merely lighted a match, and was pretty well scared at the result.

"Now, don't you let it worry you," Charlie muttered comfortingly while the others were coming up. "It was a close call—believe *me*, kid, those greasers can *shoot!* But you won't pull off a stunt like that again, so just consider you learned cheap. If Kent bawls you out, just grin and take your medicine, but don't go and feel bad about it. We all make mistakes." He gave the Kid a hasty pat on the shoulder, and slipped back to his own station before Kent arrived. His sympathy was the only pleasant feature of the occurrence, and heartened the Kid even when Kent ordered him back to camp and left Bill Gillis in his place.

"I'll trust my life to a cripple any time before I will to a kid," Kent grunted, and did not say anything afterward to ease the smart of it.

So that is why the Kid did not have to stand guard Saturday night. Kent

wouldn't trust him on guard; you'd think, by Jove, that it was a crime for a fellow to get shot at. Kent expected a fellow to know everything without being told anything. How was the Kid to know that some one was over there watching for a chance to pot him in the dark? Kent never told him. Charlie Horne was the only one in the bunch that acted human about it; even Bill had that What-did-I-tell-you look on his face and a kind of knowing twinkle in his eyes, as much as to say that the Kid wouldn't take *his* word for anything; and to remind the Kid that Bill had warned him against smoking on guard—because *you never can tell*. The Kid was beginning to hate those four words.

He did not see Anita again, for Kent put him scouting through the breaks at the upper end of the island with Davis, who rode along in solemn silence and never let his thoughts stray from the business in hand. But even if he did not see Anita, he meant to dance with her at that fiesta or know the reason why.

CHAPTER IV.

When Saturday night closed down on the border with a whispering breeze and bright starlight and no moon until late, the Kid ate his supper with his ears wide open. He heard the men assigned their stations, and made a mental note of the fact that Bill Gillis was to stand guard at the trail up from the bridge. This suited the Kid very well, for although he meant to slip past Bill if he could, he much preferred to have him stationed at the trail than some of the others. Bill would cuss if he caught him, but he wouldn't tell Kent.

He muttered something about putting Eagle on fresh grass, and went off through the dusk to the natural meadow where the horses fed. He pulled the picket pin, coiled the rope, and led

Eagle across to the farther side of the open, with no attempt at concealment. In a grassy notch in the surrounding thicket he staked Eagle out again, made sure that there was no brush within the radius of the rope, and carried his riding outfit over and placed it carefully beside the picket pin. Then he went and took care of Custer for Bill. After that he went back to camp and went to bed.

As carefully as though he was a prisoner planning an escape, the Kid had planned the details of his going. He lay well over on his side of the bed, with a fold of the blanket tucked under his back so that Bill would not feel the Kid's trousers and boots when he crawled in. He turned so that he could creep out of bed with the least possible movement of the blankets, and when Bill came over and started to undress, the Kid was muttering unintelligible sentences more convincing than a made-to-order snore.

He completely fooled Bill Gillis, which proves how well he did it. Bill got into bed, for an hour or two of sleep before he went on guard, very carefully, so as not to waken the Kid, who grunted "Get that mule outammmmm" and moved so that he lay still more on his face and grinned to himself at the consideration Bill was showing. In ten minutes—they seemed an hour—Bill began to breathe against a relaxed palate that vibrated gently. The Kid waited half a minute longer—he thought it was ten or fifteen minutes at the least—and then he slid very, very carefully out of bed, so as not to waken Bill.

Hard as it was to do, he actually got away from there without being heard. He knew just where he could creep through the bushes easiest, and he knew just where the shadows would lie thickest at the edge of the meadow. He had picketed Eagle in that notch because a shallow washout ran back of it, and in

the bottom of the wash was a soft soil and not much brush. He could get away down the gully without much danger, and once he was beyond the guards work his way to the road. Getting back was not so simple, because he was not sure that he could strike that particular gully in the night from the other end. If he tried and missed it he would run into Rudd very likely, which would not be pleasant.

In not much more than half an hour the Kid rode cautiously out into the blind trail more than half a mile from camp. The gully had really been a short cut, and he wondered why Kent didn't make some use of it. There were a good many bets that Kent overlooked, it seemed to the Kid.

He was too much pleased with himself, however, to waste any time thinking of the shortcomings of his chief. He felt that he had achieved something—which he had. He had put one over on the camp that time; on Bill Gillis especially. Next time Bill handed out a lecture the Kid could come back with some of that You-never-can-tell stuff. Some time, when the play came right, he intended to tell Bill about to-night.

A strange man was on guard at the boundary line, but the Kid showed him his star, and rode on unquestioned, though not unwarned.

"Say, kid, Daniel in the lion's den has got nothing on you, riding over there to-night," the guard exclaimed admiringly. "You want to look out—believe me, that's a trip I dunno as I'd care about taking right at this time."

"You ain't a ranger," the Kid pointed out patronizingly.

"Nor I don't want to be; and you better not go hollering it yourself. Maybe you know your own business best, but if it was me I'd say I was a vaquero for Terrazas. That'll let you out if they go asking questions. Terrazas has got so darned many on his

pay roll he don't know half of 'em himself, I reckon, and a lot are Americans."

"Thanks," said the Kid, not too ironical. "I'll do that if I get up against it. So long; I'll be back in three or four hours."

"If some greaser don't take a notion he'd like to start up in the cattle business," the river guard supplemented significantly.

"They won't trade in *my* hide for milk cows!" the Kid retorted confidently, and rode away, laughing. These fellows that were so afraid of their skins ought to get a job clerking in a shoe store, he reflected.

After him, coming from the deep shade, stole a much-bedecked individual with a green sash and a red-and-yellow serape and a greedy look in his eyes. But it was some distance to where his horse was tied, and the first fifty yards must be traversed crouchingly, so that the tall weeds would hide him. By the time he was mounted and in the trail, Van was far down the road and getting farther every pulse beat. For when youth rides to a merrymaking his steps do not lag.

Long before he reached the place, the lights of the town winked invitingly. By the time he had passed the sentry of Ortegos—and he passed that sentry because he remembered the name of Terrazas and used it, and because gringos are ignorant pigs who could not be expected to know the password, and the sentry let him go as such—the music of the fiesta came drifting out to him in tantalizing snatches, as the breeze quickened or died.

With the sentry behind him, the Kid's spirits rose; as for his courage, that never had ebbed. He did not know enough to be afraid of what lay under those lights yonder. Certain precautions he took, and felt himself equal to any untoward circumstances. He did not ride directly toward the music

and the lights; he circled the village as warily as a she-bear circles her kill, and he made sure of different street ends which might offer a welcome passage to the open beyond. Just outside the circle of scattering lights he staked Eagle with the rope he had brought along. There was grass, and the horse could feed while he waited.

The Kid took his six-shooter from his hip and slid it inside his shirt in a "sleeve holster" he wore, pinned his star well back on the lining of his coat, pulled the wrinkles out of his collar and the twist out of his tie, took off his hat and combed his hair down into place with his fingers, and started for the dance and the girl whose guest he considered himself to be.

He hated to go in his everyday clothes like that, but it was that or stay away. He hated to think that he had to sneak in, as it were, but perhaps that would add to the meeting the tang of adventure which Anita Montoya would like. He had an idea there was a good deal of dare-devil in that girl, and if she knew the risk he was taking—of course she knew it! Bill said they grow up knowing all about that reward business.

His shoulders squared as he sauntered forward down a narrow cross street that was empty, toward a main street that seemed to bulge with the crowd and the noise. His hat he pulled low over his eyes—some one *might* recognize him—and his cigarette he smoked with much carelessness of manner, as if such scenes were familiar to the point of being a bore.

At a long adobe building where the crowd seemed to concentrate, he stopped and leaned against the wall. There was a sign whose meaning he could get, even if he did not know much Spanish—"Palacia de los Fiestas," which, if it did not look much like a palace, was at least doing its share

in the fiesta. Within was music—a pensively haunting Spanish waltz.

Outside was carnival. There were games going on, and there was much laughter and shouting and buying of sweets, and plenty of plain, everyday flirting. It seemed to the Kid that half the men were soldiers—he knew them by the arms they carried, and by a certain air of conscious importance which they seemed never to lose. As for uniform, there was none that he could see; serapes of every shade and many patterns they wore; and the high-crowned, native sombrero. As for the rest, they seemed to favor plain dungaree suits with pleats down the trouser legs. There were girls and girls; black-eyed girls who laughed a great deal and were proud of their clothes, just as every girl under the sun is proud of her holiday finery. Coquetting under their close-drawn lace mantillas, sending swift glances here and there seeking fresh conquests.

But none of them looked like Anita Montoya. He gave each slim shape the second glance to make sure, and he returned a smile or two and got a hostile male glance or two that proved he was considered sufficiently dangerous. When the Kid went over to the place of music he had an extra little swagger in his walk and the conviction that he could have all kinds of partners if he wanted them. But he was faithful to his tryst; he was still looking for Anita.

He saw General Ortega—or so he judged from the deference paid the man and the swift Spanish greetings as he passed through the crowd—and he was surprised to find him not at all a splendid person, but a very ordinary individual whose insignia of rank seemed to consist chiefly of the broad band of red and white which he wore on his hat. Still he did not see Anita. He went inside the place of music, and stood a moment just within the door.

Soldiers, circling past with señoritas smiling on their arms, glanced at him sharply from under broad hat brims. On the benches and chairs ranged around the wall sat others who also gave him sharp glances of appraisal. He could not see the faces of these; the serapes were for the most part drawn up to the coal-black, unfriendly eyes, hiding the features as a Turkish beauty hides her charms.

It seemed to the Kid that he was rather conspicuous standing there by the door, and he moved a few feet to one side and sat down at a little round table—of which there were many—with his back to the wall and his round, boyish face to the crowd and his eyes always seeking for Anita Montoya.

A man came negligently toward him—a man well-muscled, stealthy-eyed, with a jagged white scar on his left cheek bone. The Kid looked at him with that betraying, widened glance which he would have to outgrow if he ever meant to hide his feelings successfully. Jim Lyons shot him an oblique glance which had in it something coldly malevolent, and sat down at the next table—also with his back to the wall and his face to the swirling crowd. The Kid braced himself mentally against the malevolence, and with his foot he gently moved a chair that might be in his way if he should want to make a dash for the door. Jim Lyons, he knew, need only speak one word in the ear of one of those swarthy-skinned fellows, and he would have no leisure for Anita Montoya even though she might stand before him.

Jim Lyons' hand, that Bill Gillis had seared with a bullet when the hand had been lifted for a treacherous blow at the Kid, was no longer in a sling. The Kid noticed that, though it was still bandaged, he could use it a little. Then, since Lyons made no hostile move, he went on looking for Anita.

Presently from out the crowd of

dancers she came swaying, her lips curved in a smile that was not for him, but for her partner, her black eyes turning here and there to greet those she knew among the onlookers. The Kid forgot all about Jim Lyons, all about those strange, silent watchers who masked their faces with bright-hued serapes and let no little thing escape their sharp eyes. As the girl danced nearer and nearer, the Kid half rose from his chair. Then she saw him, and he settled back against the wall because of something he had read in her face.

Her hand, that held a fan half closed against his shoulder, guided her cavalier toward the table. She stopped there, with a swift murmur of Spanish words to her partner. Both hands she pressed upon the table, and looked straight into Van's eyes. She was not smiling.

"But you should not have come here, you foolish boy!" she said softly, but with a certain fierce reproach. "I was joking when I asked you. I tried to see you again to tell you not to come."

"You asked me," Van told her bluntly. "You said you would learn me the Spanish waltz."

"I will not dance with you. What a fool, to come here—you! I thought you would know better. If you have any sense you will go back as quick as your horse can take you."

"I'm going to dance," said the Kid stubbornly. "If you won't dance with me, I'll dance with some other girl. There's plenty I can get."

"Go back, I tell you! No one will dance with you." She had spoken so swiftly that no more than a minute was gone into the past since she stopped at the table. She had spoken so low that even Jim Lyons, sitting near and openly listening, could catch only a word here and there. She had spoken so fiercely that the Kid was bewildered by her antagonism.

His eyes went to the bracelet of silver which he had found and had wished on to her arm. It had slipped down over her hand—and it was then he noticed how her hands were trembling, and her arms; as though she was shivering with cold, though that could not be, since the room was suffocatingly warm. He looked up at her, and his eyes went farther to the face of her escort. That individual had just laid hand to her shoulder, and was pulling her away with a quick sentence in his native tongue; in his voice was hot male anger, in his eyes was the fighting flame.

"Beat it!" came sharply to the ears of the Kid. He did not know who it was that spoke—certainly not Anita, for she was looking into the face of her cavalier, and she was answering in Spanish what he had said—explaining, it would seem, why she had stopped to speak to this young gringo.

The heart-twisting plaintiveness of the Spanish music, with its voluptuous, pulsing accompaniment, steeped the whole scene in a sense of unreality. It was like a play, with an orchestra playing beyond the footlights—

And then came the bedecked one who had listened at the boundary and had made haste to ride after. He stood within the door, looking here and there until he caught sight of the Kid. Then he started forward, and he named the name of the Texas Rangers as he came on. It takes so little to fire the blood of a people already war mad and full of rebellion against the powers that be that a dozen men started up cursing at the word.

The Kid had listened well to the tales Bill Gillis had told him; listened also to the others who had talked together around their supper fire in the hollow of the grove while their comrades stood guard a short rifle shot away; and now, unconsciously summing up the wisdom he had gained there, he

acted automatically as any one of them would have acted in such an emergency.

He sprang up with his chair in his hands, and let it fly with a swinging sweep that caught the bedecked one and two or three others, and sent them staggering back against the crowd. By the time they got their balance the Kid was at the doorway and through it into the street. As he went by, Jim Lyons jumped up with an oath and flung an impeding table out of his way. With his gun in his hand and a threat on his lips he slammed the two tables together as he lunged at the Kid.

But, as it happened, one table tilted square across the open doorway, and the foot of Jim Lyons caught a leg of it, and in pulling free he turned it so that the table jammed there in the door. The crowd did the rest, piling in and holding one another back in their very great haste to get out. It was cleverly done. Not one of those serape-draped fighters suspected that Jim Lyons was not doing his best to kill the Kid. While they fumbled the table and jammed this way and that against it, they believed that the Kid had no friend on that side of the border.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The second and concluding part of this novel will be published, two weeks hence, in the POPULAR for January 20.



BURTON'S ONE FUNNY STORY

THEODORE E. BURTON, of Ohio, at this writing a possibility for the Republican presidential nomination, is a man who devotes himself almost entirely to studious thoughts and to the delivery of weighty opinions on important subjects. A man who has been closely associated with him for many years says that he never heard Mr. Burton tell but one anecdote. Here it is, with the circumstances which occasioned it:

When Burton was chairman of the Committee on Rivers and Harbors in the House of Representatives, a delegation which appeared before him to ask an appropriation for the improvement of a certain river was peremptorily refused. After the committee meeting, one of the members of the delegation tried to argue with Burton in an effort to make him change his mind.

"You ought to be satisfied that you know exactly where you stand," replied Burton. "I've not attempted to mislead you in any way. That reminds me of a man named Einstein in Cleveland. He went to see his friend Jacobs, and asked for the loan of a thousand dollars. Jacobs somewhat reluctantly gave up the thousand. The next day announcement was made that Einstein had gone into bankruptcy. Jacobs, on reading the list of preferred creditors, saw that he was not among them. Greatly alarmed, he rushed around to see Einstein.

"What does this mean, Einstein?" he demanded. "Yesterday I loaned you a thousand dollars, and to-day you fail, and don't even put my name among the preferred creditors!"

"Don't worry, Jacobs," replied Einstein reassuringly. "Those other fellows who are named preferred creditors—you are better off than they. They think they're going to get their money. You know right now you ain't."

"So, you see," concluded Burton, "I'm doing as Einstein did to Jacobs. I'm not leaving you in suspense."

The Mystery of the Wheel Chair

By George Woodruff Johnston

Author of "The Ordeal," "The Hidden Claw," Etc.

The strange circumstances surrounding the death of a political boss at a seaside town whose bathing beach is the finest and whose municipal government is unquestionably the rottenest of any place on the coast.

HE was layin' back in that wheel chair, right alongside of me, looking as comfortable as you please," explained Morsch, the shifty political go-between, wetting his thin lips with a restless tongue. "I'd just roused up myself, and thought he hadn't finished out his nap. 'Wake up, Crudy!' says I. 'It's mornin'!' But he didn't take no notice. Then I give him a shove, but that wasn't no good, either. Still, I didn't suspicion anything, y'understand. I kep' on thinking he was asleep, and it wasn't till I'd laid my hand on him that I got wise. It felt wet—wet and warm and sticky. The lamps along the board walk had been turned off, but day had broke over the ocean, and it was light enough for me to see what had made my hand feel that way. But I didn't need to see. There's only one thing in the whole world that could have done it. That's blood! And at last I knew why I couldn't wake Crudy. He'd croaked!"

Morsch had begun his recital with an air of cynical bravado; he ended it with a shudder. Then he replaced between his teeth the frayed stump of a cigar, long since grown cold, took off his panama hat, and wiped his moist forehead with a big silk handkerchief. "I ain't the man I used to

be," he sighed ruefully, "or a thing like this wouldn't have got my nerve. I guess I'm growin' old; that's what!"

He looked it. In the pale midsummer dawn which stole through the open windows of the hotel baggage room where we were gathered, his ferretlike face showed pinched and gray, his small body seemed bent and shriveled. He sat huddled on a trunk. He couldn't keep still. His gaze wandered fitfully about. But upon whomsoever it chanced to fall, whether upon the manager of the house, the night clerk, or myself, it swiftly and surely swung back to the rolling chair standing in the middle of the floor, with the dead body of Phillipus Crudy, the up-State boss, slumped upon its cushions.

Suddenly Morsch jumped up and started to leave the room; but before he could do so, the manager stepped quickly to the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. With that, the politician scowled, threw away the stump of his cigar, and turned on him savagely. "Damn it, Cardiff, what do you mean! Take that chair away, or else let me out of here! I've had more'n enough already, sleeping all night in that infernal thing, with him leaning up against me! It's worse than the tremens, just to look at him!"

"It is, is it?" challenged Cardiff, the

manager, losing his temper. "Then why did you bring him here? What do you suppose is going to happen when my guests come down to breakfast? It'll cheer them up a whole lot, won't it, to hear there's a dead man in the trunk room, and to see the morgue wagon waiting at the door? What were you thinking about, anyway, Morsch? Did you want to ruin my house?"

"What else was I to do?" the go-between snapped back. "Wasn't him and his new wife stoppin' here? I couldn't leave him stranded out there on the board walk, could I? Supposin' I had—the whole thing would have been blowed all over town in half an hour."

"Well, how are you going to keep it from getting out as it stands now?" demanded the unmollified Cardiff. "You've dragged him in here; what are you going to do with him? Get busy, Morsch! You've put me in a box; now get me out of it, and do it quick! You shan't sneak through that door and leave me to do all the explaining."

"There won't be no explainin' to do. Easiest thing in the world to shut the matter up," blustered the little man.

"How, I'd like to know?"

The politician had slid his hand behind him, and he now pulled a roll of bank notes out of his hip pocket and held it so that it was visible to me, but not to the others. "I guess Doctor Dannart's seen a lot of suicides in his day," he suggested meaningly. "How about it, doc?"

I smiled. I knew Morsch. For the past twenty years I had been spending a part of my summer holidays in this seaside city, whose bathing beach is probably the finest, and whose municipal government is unquestionably the rottenest, of any place on the coast; and I had both heard much of and had met the diminutive politician, who

often ran down from the capital, it was understood, to bring the blackmail levied by the local gang upon every out-of-town corporation doing business with the shore. Crudy, also, I had noticed about the hotel every now and then. But I had never known who he was until some fifteen minutes before, when the manager had sent up to wake me and to ask if I would come down to the baggage room to see a man who had been shot. I had found Crudy already dead. A bullet had entered his body just below the right collar bone, and had left it at the lower edge of the shoulder blade of the opposite side. Hemorrhage, largely internal, had killed him in short order.

"Suicides? Surely!" said I, replying to Morsch's insidious question. "I've seen a good many suicides. But this was something different, absolutely different."

"What, then?" he quavered.

"Murder!" I flung back at him. "Willful murder!"

"Murder?" Once more the politician's roaming glance swept back to the rolling chair. He winced, and paled. He seemed, indeed, almost on the border of collapse. But in an astonishingly short time he got a fresh grip upon himself. "I guess you must be mistaken about that, doc. I'm sure you are. Think again," he coaxed, displaying his roll a little more conspicuously.

"If I am mistaken," I retorted, more amused than angered by his shameless effrontery, "I've come across this morning, I believe, the only man who ever shot himself in that particular part of the body—a site as unusual for a self-inflicted wound of this kind as the regions about the heart and brain are common. No! There's nothing in your suggestion, Mr. Morsch, and you may put away the bank roll with which you are trying to induce me to accept it."

"All the same, you can't prove he didn't croak himself," the go-between argued sullenly. "The gun he used was lying at his feet in the bottom of the chair."

"Granted!" I smiled. "But if Crudy committed suicide while beside you, the mere shock of the explosion would have brought you up standing. Furthermore, there are no powder marks on his body, and, while we do have soundless guns nowadays, there's no such thing as a vanishing bullet—yet. If the man killed himself in the chair, where's the ball that did it? It isn't in his body, for it made a wound of exit. It isn't in the chair, and that it didn't go through the chair you can see for yourself. Your theory is an interesting one, Mr. Morsch, but it presupposes that the boss shot himself to death elsewhere, and then strolled along the board walk, climbed into the chair, and calmly sat down by you while you slept. You can scarcely expect us to credit that, can you?"

"No!" I continued, examining the weapon, which, as the politician said, had been found on the floor of the chair after he had wheeled it back to the hotel. "No; this pistol may have been the one used to kill Crudy, but the hand that held it was not his own. That much is certain."

The go-between fidgeted about on the trunk upon which he was again seated. He put his roll of bills away, and once more fell to mopping his head with his handkerchief.

"Humph!" he ejaculated, frowning perplexedly. "Now you mention it, it does look as if some one else done it, and not in the chair, either. But I can't quite figure it out. We'd been in Crudy's rooms, me and some other fellows, and when we broke up after midnight, the boss said he would see me to my hotel. Well, we was all considerable lit up, and when the two of us got into a chair on the board walk, we

told the attendant to leave us by the outer rail so's we could cool off. We were both in the chair when I dropped asleep; and we were still there when I woke up at daybreak. According to your say-so, doc, somebody must have lifted Crudy out of the chair, carried him away somewhere, shot him, and brought his body back and dumped it down beside me. Who the devil would have made a fool play like that? It sounds almost crazy enough for a woman. Oh, that reminds me," he interrupted himself. "What are we goin' to do about the boss' wife, or, leastways, his widow? Who's goin' to tell her about this business?"

"Don't worry! I'll attend to that," Cardiff spoke up. Then for a long time he stared in silence at the little go-between, and finally turned to me. "Doctor Dannart, I've heard a good deal about your skill in the investigation of criminal cases. Will you take charge of this one? After what you've said, I see we can't shut it up. It's bound to become public in the end. But if I notify the police now, they're sure to bungle it, and the reporters will be roosting all over my place like crows on a straw stack. You and your family have been with me every summer for years, and if you'll kindly undertake the job I know I can depend on you to keep this hotel out of the mess if such a thing is possible."

"All right," I agreed. "But we'll have to send for the coroner."

"The coroner!" Morsch burst out, springing to his feet. "Not him! Not Pynket!"

"What's the trouble?" I queried. "Is he leaky?"

"No," the politician answered. "He's just the other way about; he's too close-mouthed, and is as obstinate as a mule. Besides, he's greedy. He's bound to get us, going or coming. He'll either refuse to keep this matter dark, or he'll soak us good and plenty for

doin' it—there's no telling which. Of course he's one of the boys. He wouldn't hold office if he wasn't. He's popular and pulls the votes. But, believe me, he's terrible hard to manage. No; just cut out Pynket, please."

"What do you say, Cardiff?" I asked. "For my part, it's the coroner, or I quit right now. I don't live in this State, but wherever I am I intend to obey the laws, and, anyway you put it, this is a coroner's case."

"I haven't much use for Pynket, doctor; but whatever you suggest goes," the manager replied.

"No, it don't; not here!" Morsch protested violently.

"Mr. Morsch," I observed quietly, recalling the bank notes with which he had tried to buy me, "a little less talk from you would be appreciated. Be patient. Your time will come, and, when it does, you'll have enough explanations to make to keep *you* busy."

This remark of mine had a wholly unexpected effect. Instead of the flare-up I had anticipated, the go-between gazed at me furtively, and without another word sat down again and began to smooth out with unsteady hands the wrinkles in his disheveled pongee suit.

During the next half hour I did a lot of work, and by the time the rising sun showed well above the horizon I had reconstructed the crime, and, to all intents and purposes, had solved the mystery surrounding it. True, I was still hazy as to the motive which had prompted the murder, and was wholly ignorant of the identity of the murderer. But these questions, which by most would be regarded as of the highest importance, I knew from experience to be mere matters of detail that could be cleared up without difficulty when the proper time arrived.

It seemed, however, that I should be compelled to rely upon circumstantial evidence alone. On the board walk I met the chair attendant hunting for

his vanished chair. But he who, next to Morsch, appeared to be the one most likely to have seen or heard something of the tragedy, protested that he had been asleep under the walk, and knew nothing of it.

My investigations finished, I returned to the hotel, and as I mounted the stairs which led upward from the beach level to a broad porch that surrounded the entire building, I saw a woman just beginning to descend them. She was slight and girlish of figure, was heavily veiled, and carried in her hand a small traveling bag. No sooner did she catch sight of me than she started, turned quickly, ran along the porch, and hurried down another flight of steps at the opposite end of the structure. But I was there before her, and at their foot I blocked her way.

"Mrs. Crudy," said I composedly, "I'm lucky to have caught you. My name is Dannart—Doctor Dannart—one of your fellow guests here at the hotel."

I waited in some suspense to learn if, indeed, this were the widow of the murdered man. As I have said, her face was hid, but in height, form, carriage, and style of dress she reminded me strongly of the person I had occasionally glimpsed in the dining room and about the porches with Crudy. Yet of her identity I was far from certain.

At my words the woman had shrunk back, had then tried to elude me, and, when I again stepped in her path, she cried: "Caught! What do you mean by that? Let me pass; I'm in a hurry!"

I glanced at the satchel in her hand. "There's no need of hurry," I assured her; "that is, if you wish to take a train out of town. Do you?"

"No!" Then, after a pause, she murmured hesitatingly: "Y-e-s; have I time?"

"You are too late for the earliest train," I replied, "and the next one does

not leave for forty minutes. Come and sit down, won't you? You can be more comfortable on the porch than at the station. By the bye, have you seen the manager of the hotel this morning?"

She shook her head.

"No? Then he has something to tell you; something very urgent, very vital. He will be glad to learn that I caught, or, as I might have said, met you, before you left this place. It's imperative that you should first hear what he has to say."

"I don't understand," the woman uttered sharply, but with a perceptible tremor in her tones. "You are an absolute stranger to me. How dare you stop me in this way! Where is the manager? What has he to tell me?"

"It's about your husband."

Again she drew back as if startled. "My husband!" she breathed.

"Yes; something serious has happened to him. He's badly injured—dead!"

I blurted this out with intentional abruptness, my senses on the alert to note what effect the news would have.

"Dead! He—was it an accident?"

"No. He was murdered!" I answered her.

Then a peculiar thing happened. Instead of displaying any evidence of dismay or grief, Mrs. Crudy—she had tacitly admitted who she was—stood silent and motionless, peering at me through her veil. Presently—apparently oblivious of what she did—she partly lifted this, and I observed that her pretty, young face was disfigured by an ugly bruise that involved the left eye and half the cheek below it. But it was not so much this injury which caught my attention and kept it riveted upon her features as the changes in expression that swept over them. I could not distinguish and interpret all of these, they were too varied and followed each other far too quickly. But

if I ever saw infinite relief pictured on a human face, it was visible on hers, while swiftly succeeding it appeared uncertainty, anxiety, and fright.

At this moment a motor car swung round the corner and drew up at the curb. Out of it sprang the manager, and after him a big, brawny man with a heavy jaw and deep-set, piercing black eyes.

"This is the coroner, Doctor Dan-nart," Cardiff began. "To save time I went for him myself, and, as we came along, I told him all we've found out so far. Shall we go up to my office? He says he'll view the body later on, if an inquest proves necessary. But who's this?" he queried, glancing at the woman beside me, who had again let fall her veil.

"It's Mrs. Crudy," I replied.

Scarcely had I mentioned her name, however, than the widow slipped past us, hopped into Cardiff's car, and tried frantically to get it started.

The coroner shot one look at her, and seemed instantly to take in the entire situation. "Stop!" he thundered. "Do you hear me, woman? None of that! I need you!"

That was enough. Mrs. Crudy heard the stern command, dismounted from the machine, and submissively followed the rest of us up the stairs and into the manager's private office. I understood now why Morsch, that tawdry little politician, himself a composite of craft, bluster, and cowardice, should distrust and fear this stalwart man, with his dominant, compelling manner, and few, sledge-hammer words.

Once in Cardiff's room, where we had instructed the night clerk to take Morsch and guard him, the coroner fixed Mrs. Crudy with his penetrating eyes, and without a moment's delay began hurling questions at her that were as swift and hard as bullets.

"Your man shot, eh? You trying

to make a get-away? Lift your veil! Hello! Who beat you up?"

The girl—for she seemed hardly more than that—shuddered and cowered lower in the chair into which, on entering the room, she had sunk dejectedly. "He did," she murmured.

"Crudy! You can't mean Crudy!" the coroner sneered. "Don't tell me that. A fine gentleman like the boss—he give a lady a black eye? I can't believe it!"

The insolent irony of these remarks seemed entirely lost on the young widow. Apparently she sensed in them only a defense of her late husband, and this brought her to her feet, her face flushed, her eyes flaming, her bosom heaving tumultuously.

"But he did!" she cried. "Yes, and he did worse. He fooled me, tricked me. He pretended to be a decent lawyer, but was nothing but a low, disreputable politician. He told me he was well off, and so he was—with money he had swindled and blackmailed other people out of. He lied to me, cheated me, until at last he got his clutches on every cent I owned. He swore he loved me, but he didn't. All he loved was my property; all he wanted of me was to use me in his shady schemes. Oh! And I trusted him!"

The coroner burst into a roar of laughter. "Say, you never trusted Crudy, did you? And with money, too? Gosh, you *were* an easy mark!"

If it were Pynket's purpose to fan to fury her resentment against the dead boss, and thus goad her on to make some betrayal of herself, he was succeeding admirably.

"I *was* an easy mark," she responded bitterly. "We were married more than six months ago, and I never even guessed what sort of man he was until last night. Then he grew careless; he gave a supper in our suite; he asked his real friends—the kind he'd always

kept out of my sight; such friends as I didn't know he had—and he drank too much, and talked. My bedroom is next to the room where the supper was, and I listened and heard him. Before he went home with you," she wheeled about and glared at Morsch, "he came in to me. He wanted to kiss me good-by! It makes my blood boil to think of it! But when I told him what I had learned about him from his own lips, and vowed I would leave him, he struck me in the face and knocked me down."

"And then you killed him, did you?" the coroner ripped out.

The girl blanched, and caught hold of the table near which she had been standing. Too late she saw the trap into which Pynket had jockeyed her, how he had led her on to saddle herself with a motive for the crime. But in an instant she regained her spirit, and her face reddened angrily.

"No!" she cried. "But if I'd had the pluck I would have done it. Instead of that, I got up and ran and locked myself in the bathroom, and hid there all night, expecting every moment that he would come back. I didn't know he was dead until the doctor, here, stopped me just now when I was hurrying to get the first train out of town. Then—well, I confess it—I thought I might be suspected—I was frightened—I jumped into Mr. Cardiff's car——"

"That'll do," the coroner interrupted roughly. "You women all tell the same story. You're always saints; the men, sinners." He waved his huge, muscular hand as though to sweep aside every statement she had made save one, and this he immediately cast back at her:

"Your husband talked, did he? What did he say—not about you, but about other things?"

"Let up on that, Pynket," Morsch pleaded. "You were in it; you heard what was said about them 'other

things.' Forget 'em! You shouldn't tattle out of school!"

Mrs. Crudy's brows lifted in astonishment. "Oh, were you there, too, Mr. Coroner? That accounts for it. I have been trying to remember where I had heard your voice before. So you were one of them, were you; one of Mr. Crudy's precious friends whom he kept hid from me so long?"

The coroner paid not the least attention, either to the widow's questions or to the go-between's behests.

"Go on! Answer me!" he ordered Mrs. Crudy. "And be careful what you say. Some day you may have to repeat it under oath in court. Remember, I have the law at my back."

"Well, this is how it began," she explained, her eyes snapping. "Mr. Morsch had brought down one hundred thousand dollars from the city. It was bribe money to pay for a franchise granted here. But what's the use of my telling you? Mr. Morsch has just said you were present at the supper and heard all about it."

"Never mind what I heard," the coroner retorted. "It's what *you* heard that I'm after."

"I shouldn't think any decent man would care to have me repeat that," the widow said contemptuously. "But if you insist I will. I heard Mr. Crudy and his friends snarling over that money like dogs over a bone, but no one said as little, or in the end got as much of it, as Mr. Crudy himself. Naturally this satisfied nobody—except Mr. Crudy. But what could they do? Nothing. He was their master. He not only knew how to strike a woman and cheat her out of her property, but he was able to rob men and yet whip them into line. Of course a good deal went on that I did not understand. But one thing was plain: However much his friends might hate and distrust each other, they loathed and feared him more. Oh, they were a fine crowd!

I've read of such people, but until last night I never believed they existed, or could exist."

Mrs. Crudy flung these words at her inquisitor with brutal frankness, and in this disclosing what she had learned she seemed to find a salve for her wounded pride and a measure of compensation for the humiliations she had suffered. It was not the pretty, and, doubtless, lovable young woman standing before us who, in reality, was speaking, but rather decent womanhood, disillusioned in marriage, and revolted at the filthy, sodden slough of politics in which it had so suddenly found itself immersed.

When she had finished, the coroner leaned forward, his elbows on the table, his eyes transfixing her. "Was that all?" he demanded harshly.

"No," Mrs. Crudy answered. "My husband accused that man——"

"That's a lie!" whined Morsch. "I know what she's goin' to say, but it never happened."

"My husband accused that man, Morsch," she went on unflinchingly, "of receiving, not one hundred but one hundred and fifteen thousand dollars from the railroad, or whatever else it was that got the franchise, and of planning to hold on to the odd fifteen thousand himself without saying a word about it to anybody. Mr. Crudy told Morsch that if he would give him ten thousand of this extra money he would keep his secret; otherwise, he would drum him out of the party and ruin him."

"Prove that you heard that!" Pynket challenged. He had dropped his browbeating methods now, and spoke slowly, incisively, and obviously in deadly earnest.

"How?"

"Crudy never used those high-toned words: 'Give him,' 'keep his secret,' 'drum him out of the party.' What *did* he say?"

Mrs. Crudy wrinkled her brows. "Once he said, 'come across,'" she replied hesitatingly. "He called money 'kale.' At another place he swore he'd 'put the red bean in somebody's ear'—I don't know what he meant by that."

The coroner grinned. "That's the boss all right. You've told the truth. I know whose ear he wanted to put 'the red bean' in. Now, what next?"

"Next, they quarreled."

"Are you sure? Would you swear to that on the witness stand?"

"Of course I'm sure. They sat close by the door, those two. It was open a little way. I stood behind the portières on the other side, and heard every word they said."

"And then——"

"Then, as it got later and they drank more, they made up, though only half-heartedly. Finally my husband got to bragging to Mr. Morsch about what a smart man he was—how 'foxy,' he called it—and to prove it he told him about me. Oh, why didn't I kill him then and there!"

"Never mind about you," the coroner interposed. "Did Crudy get his money?"

"I don't know."

Pynket whipped round to me. "What did you find in the boss' pockets, or didn't you look?"

"I examined them," the manager interposed. "There was no money in them."

"I give him the stuff; I swear I did!" groaned Morsch. "I seen him put it in his pants' pocket. It was in thousands—ten of them. I kep' the numbers; there's never any tellin' what'll happen."

"What have you got in yours? Shell out!" commanded the coroner.

Morsch hung back until Pynket hoisted himself from his chair and started toward him. Then he threw his roll on to the table in front of me.

"How much?" asked the coroner.

I counted the money. "Fifteen thousand and thirty-seven dollars."

Instantly his tormentor turned on the little go-between.

"You said just now, Morsch, that you had split with Crudy. How comes it, then, that he's got nothing on him, while you can show the whole of that extra fifteen thousand you soaked those parties in the city? How about it, I say? How did that ten thousand hop back from the boss' pocket into yours?"

Morsch spluttered, mopped his head, grew garrulous. He explained and re-explained that whereas five of the fifteen thousand dollars in his possession did constitute part of the additional sum he had grafted from the railroad people, the remaining ten thousand was his own, had nothing to do with the rest, and, most positively, was not the ten thousand out of which Crudy had bunkoed him.

"It looks to me as if you thought I done the boss," he wailed. "But I didn't know a thing about it till I waked up and felt that wet, sticky stuff——"

"Where's the gun?" the coroner broke in, addressing Cardiff.

The manager produced the weapon from his safe, and laid it on the table.

"Is that yours, Morsch?" Pynket interrogated.

"No. I never toted a revolver in my life. I can prove it."

"Whose is it, then?"

Mrs. Crudy looked closely at the pistol, and touched it gingerly with the tips of her fingers. "I recognize it," she averred. "It belonged to my husband. I never knew why he carried a revolver until I learned last night what sort of people he ran with."

"There's one of them!" cried the coroner, frowning viciously at the go-between, and thumping the table with his big fist. "Own up, Morsch! You took the gun from his pocket while he

was asleep; you shot him with it, and then you robbed him of the money he'd forced you to split with him."

Pynket "broke" the revolver, put his eye to the muzzle, and squinted into the barrel. Then he swung the cylinder around with his thumb.

"Look!" he added, passing the weapon to me. "One shot has been fired, and only one. Crudy got that. Besides, the smudge in the barrel's fresh. Come, Morsch! The game's up!" He turned to the hotel manager. "I'll phone for a couple of plain-clothes men, if you don't mind, Cardiff."

"I do mind a whole lot!" the latter objected excitedly.

Pynket stopped on his way to the telephone. "Oh, I see! You don't want any fuss around the hotel; is that it? I can fix that easy enough; bracelets on behind his back, a light overcoat over his shoulders to hide them, and then your car. People'll think it's an early golf party motoring out to the links."

The coroner reached the instrument, and laid his hand on the receiver. It was a ticklish moment for Morsch.

"Hold on, Mr. Coroner!" I cried as he called out the number he desired. "There's no smudge here! This barrel is as clean as a whistle!"

Pynket spoke no further into the telephone, but spun round and faced me.

"What!" he exclaimed. "I guess I know what I'm talking about."

"It may be," I admitted respectfully, "and I don't profess to share your expert knowledge of firearms. But, nevertheless, in my judgment, this revolver would look smokier, dirtier, if it had been fired off, even once, within the past six hours. To be frank with you, if I am called as a witness at the inquest held over Crudy's body, I shall feel compelled to testify that to the best of my knowledge and belief this

is *not* the weapon with which he was killed. And if such an opinion should prevail the whole case you have so skillfully built up against Mr. Morsch would fall to the ground. Still, I'm open to conviction. Show me a perfectly clean weapon to compare with this one—by the way, Cardiff, have you got such a thing about?"

"No," the manager replied.

I shrugged my shoulders, and laid Crudy's pistol upon the table.

"Here's one, you babe in the woods!" Pynket laughed, drawing from his pocket a revolver of the same caliber as the boss', and offering it to me. "Just take a look at the insides of the barrels of those two guns, Crudy's and mine, and you'll see the difference in a minute."

I "broke" his weapon, glanced at the muzzle and at the ends of every cartridge in the cylinder, and clamped the barrel down again.

"Well, I guess you've seen enough to convince you, eh?" the coroner smiled scornfully, reaching out for his revolver.

"Yes," I replied calmly; "I have seen enough to convince me."

Then, without an instant's warning, I leveled the pistol at his stomach.

"Hands up, Pynket," I cried, "or I'll fire! I arrest you for the murder of Boss Crudy!"

I had been overconfident; had, after all, misjudged my man. The last word I uttered had barely passed my lips when he fell upon me like a thunderbolt, and, before I knew what had happened, he had knocked the revolver from my grasp, and I lay flat on my back, with his huge hands gripping my throat.

For a moment I was helpless, and had it not been for my knowledge of anatomy I should have been strangled to death before the others had recovered their senses and come to my relief. With a violent effort, I threw into

play the powerful muscles which depress the lower jaw, and thus forced mine down until the point of my chin was almost in contact with the top of my breastbone. This maneuver dislodged the coroner's viselike clutch upon my throat. Again and again he tried to jam my head backward that he might recover it. But his efforts were futile; the windpipe lay safe behind the strong, wedge-shaped barrier of the under jawbone, a barrier that, despite his enormous strength, he could neither thrust aside nor crush.

Then, his hands being busy and mine free, I gripped his head with all the power I could summon and bored the ends of my thumbs into the two little pits—one near the inner end of the bony arch that roofs each eye—through which two nerves emerge from the interior of the skull. As every surgeon knows, squeezing these sensitive nerves against the unyielding bone beneath produces pain which is simply intolerable. So it proved now. And in less than two minutes I had Pynket subdued and laid out, face downward, on the floor, where I held him while Cardiff bound his wrists together behind his back with the first thing suitable that came to hand—some tough, insulated wire from an electric fan.

"Better tie up his legs also," I suggested, as soon as I had sufficiently recovered my breath. "I've had all the exercise I want before breakfast."

With this, I relaxed my hold on the man's head and glanced about me. The room seemed all at once to have become profoundly still. At her former place beside the table stood Mrs. Crudy, looking very white and gazing at Pynket and me with astonished eyes.

Our prisoner now secured, I turned him over on his back and searched his pockets. For me it was an anxious moment. Would I find therein that which I sought, or had I gone too far and laid myself open to arrest for un-

provoked assault, and to a ruinous suit for damages? At last I grasped something in my hand. I drew it forth. I glanced at it nervously, then assuredly, then jubilantly.

"There, Mr. Coroner!" I cried, displaying what I held so that he might clearly see it. "There is the final strand needed to weave the rope that's going to hang you—a roll containing ten one-thousand-dollar bank notes, the exact amount, and in the precise form, mind you, that Morsch declares he was compelled to give up to Crudy as the price of his silence. But wait! Morsch, didn't you say you had the numbers of these bills? Read them aloud!"

The go-between removed a slip of paper hidden behind his hatband, and called off the figures written thereon. These, at my request, Cardiff checked with the numbers of the notes I had discovered in Pynket's pocket. They were identical.

"You may wish to know, Mr. Coroner," I remarked, "how I learned that you had this money, and found out the way in which you got it. I'll tell you. You were watching; you saw the boss leave Morsch asleep in the rolling chair; you followed him until he reached a certain desolate, ill-lighted spot, a spot midway, and in a direct line, between his starting point and his probable destination—the Turkish baths, which are located near the beach and some three hundred yards from this hotel. There you confronted him; you demanded this hush money; he refused to give it up, and you thereupon killed him and robbed him of it."

Pynket, his massive jaws clenched, his piercing eyes roving about the room, now stabbing me, now searching for some possible means of escape, lay on the floor, apparently deaf to what I was saying.

"To find that spot," I nevertheless went on, "was an easy task. Taking

as a center the place on the board walk where the wheel chair had stood, I moved around it in ever-widening spirals, until I discovered what I was after—blood. It lay on the planks of a narrow footway crossing the sands; and nowhere in the neighborhood was either a bench or a chair to be seen. This last is all important, for it leads to the inference that Crudy was standing or walking, and was not sitting down when shot.

“The course of the bullet within the body, remember, was from above downward. It is fair to assume that it traveled in the same direction *before* it struck the body; that is to say, was fired downward at Crudy by some one standing over him. Of course, if Crudy happened to be seated at the critical moment, anybody standing up would have overtopped him; for instance, a man as short as Morsch, or a woman of Mrs. Crudy’s height. But he was on his feet, and, therefore, a downward-moving ball to have entered his body as high up as this one did must necessarily have come from a point considerably above him, which means that he was shot by a person much taller than he, hence by some one far exceeding the average in stature. Not Morsch, not Mrs. Crudy, but you, Mr. Coroner, are such a person.

“Again, there was no sand, nor any scratch, tear, or abrasion, on or about the boss’ clothes or shoes. From this it follows that his body was not dragged, but was carried back to the wheel chair. Could Morsch, could Mrs. Crudy have done that? No. Only an exceptionally strong man, a man like yourself, Pynket, would have been equal to such a job.

“Now, as to your motive. Mrs. Crudy has said that no one in that room last night was satisfied with his share of the plunder there distributed, and she added that all present loathed and feared her husband. Domineering,

avaricious, and conscienceless as this wretched go-between has told us you are, Mr. Coroner, and forceful and capable as we have seen you to be, it is not hard to imagine how you, of all others, must have resented being bossed by Crudy or by anybody else, and how especially you must have raged at being euchred by these two fellow bandits out of a share in this precious windfall—this extra fifteen thousand dollars of blackmail. You hated Crudy. You have practically admitted that it was you he had in mind when he threatened to ‘put the red bean in somebody’s ear,’ which signified that he purposed to ‘get’ you at the first opportunity. You likewise hated Morsch. And after you had shot the boss, a brilliant thought occurred to you. You would make it appear that Morsch had killed Crudy, and thus be revenged on both.”

As I said this, the coroner raised up his head and struggled fiercely to be free. But his bonds held, and he sank back, infuriated at his helplessness. Thereupon, I continued imperturbably:

“In your cross-examination of Mrs. Crudy, Pynket, you showed how plausible such an idea could be made to seem solely from the evidence you so deftly extracted from her. But in executing your plan you did the most foolish thing of which one could possibly conceive—just such an act of folly as every criminal appears foreordained to perform, in one shape or another, at such a crisis. After shooting the boss, what did you do? You took the exploded shell out of your revolver and put it into the one he had carried, and with an unexploded cartridge from his weapon you filled the chamber thus made vacant in your own. Then you threw Crudy’s pistol—with one ball missing—into the rolling chair in which you laid the body. That was a fine stroke. Together with Mrs. Crudy’s story of the quarrel between her husband and Morsch, and the other facts

you elicited from her, this made the case against the latter look almost impregnable, while by cleaning the barrel of your own revolver you sought to divert suspicion from yourself.

"But you forgot to do one thing. You neglected to examine the two cartridges before you exchanged them. Had you done so you would have discovered, as I did—after I had inveigled you into letting me see your weapon—that whereas they were of the same caliber, *they were of different make*. The tiny letters stamped upon the brass ring encircling the central copper cap are, in the two shells, absolutely unlike. In short, each revolver contains one cartridge taken from the other; *but the mates of the one exploded shell in Crudy's weapon occupy the chambers of your own*.

"Let me hold them out to you, Mr. Coroner, in order that you may see what an extremely painful joke you played upon yourself when, in this artless fashion, you tried to implicate one of the choicest spirits of your party, Mr. Morsch, in the sudden taking off of Mr. Crudy, the revered boss thereof."

As I finished speaking, Cardiff looked at his watch, and then drew me aside.

"Doctor," said he nervously, "in exactly twenty minutes the dining-room doors will open for early breakfast. We started out with one problem—what to do with Crudy's body. Now

we have two more on our hands. How on earth are we going to solve them?"

With this, he glanced successively at the coroner and Mrs. Crudy. Following his gaze, I observed that the courage and defiance bred of the girl's resentment had evaporated, and that now, looking quite friendless and forlorn, she leaned back in a chair, her eyes closed wearily, her hand nursing her injured face.

"Twenty minutes! Why, that gives us lots of time for everything," I reassured the manager. "First, as to Mrs. Crudy. She's bruised in body and in spirit, and is utterly worn out. I'll phone up to my rooms, and in ten minutes my wife will be mothering her. Crudy's body we can get to the morgue before the first guest comes downstairs, if you'll call up the mayor right away and explain the situation to him. And as for Pynket, he himself has told us precisely what to do. Don't you remember what he suggested in regard to Morsch?—bracelets on behind his back, a light overcoat over his shoulders to hide them, and then your car. As things have turned out, it will be the coroner who will wear the bracelets, but otherwise his plan can be carried out to the letter. And I've no doubt that as we hustle him to headquarters it will be just as he prophesied—people who see us from the hotel porch, if there be any such, will think we are an early golf party starting to motor out to the links."

CAPABILITY

NEAR a small Wyoming town there is a capable lady of great executive ability, who, besides being an ardent suffragist, an active member in church circles, a dominant figure in all local women's clubs, manages a ranch in connection with her multifarious household duties.

A visitor stopping at the front gate to ask for her, heard a loud commotion in the rear.

"Yes, she's home," replied friend husband, who, in the life partnership, is nil, "but she's busy." He added, in a voice which had an acid edge: "She's out in the back yard, teaching a queen bee how to swarm."

Reel Stuff

By H. C. Witwer

Author of "Whipsawed," "The Emancipation of Rodney," Etc.

II.—ASSISTING THE JUDGE

Reading, Pa.

April 10, '15.

FRIEND GEORGE: I guess you must have sent that twenty by the Erie because I never got it in Pottstown, probably it will pull in there to-morrow, all tired out, eh? I'll bet they think my last name is Pest at the post-office in Pottstown—I stalled around there all morning hoping you would send in. I would have slipped you, George, if you had needed it like I did. To get right down to it I often have—I'm not saying this to bring up bygones, George, but if you remember you are in me for \$1.87 from that box of cigars we give the manager in Bridgeport last year. I guess you must be shy yourself or I would have the twenty, eh George? The guy at the General Delivery window says to me the fifteenth time I asked him if there's anything for Tom Brennan:

"Are you waiting for the vote on Prohibition or to find out if it's a boy or twins?"

I suppose if I had took a wallop at him I wouldn't have done myself no good, they would probably have railroaded me for assaulting the U. S. government or something, eh George? Well, this here Levy didn't answer my wire until about four o'clock in the afternoon. You know how I felt by that time George, I didn't have a nickle—I thought sure you would come

through with that twenty—did you get my letter?—and as I told you in my last, if you got it, I even blew my ticket to this burg playing seven up with the hotel clerk, after these Canfields here had taken me in a poker game. I hope you have kept all this under your hat like I told you. Well, by four o'clock I'm figuring on starting a little three card monte or something when along comes this wire from Levy. I am copying it off. Here's what it said:

TOM BRENNAN, Agent, Hercules, Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

Get advance from house manager. Make Reading or quit. ABE LEVY, Mgr.

What do you think of a rat like that, eh? Well, I took the wire to Jepson, the manager of the opera house and showed it to him.

"Ain't your show got no money?" he says.

"Money!" I says. "Why, Steve L. Money himself is behind this film company. This Levy guy is a great kidder, he's probably latgging his head off now for sending me this. But I got to go away from here, so just let me take ten. I'll give you an I O U and when Levy gets here he'll give it to you right away."

"Ha! Ha!" he says. "You and Mr. Levy are both kidders, ain't you? I got a rule pasted right up here in the box office against giving advance men money. Fellow came in here ahead of

a dog and monkey circus one time and I let him have two dollars. If his show ever came into this town it must have been between 3 and 4 a. m. because I never seen it or him neither after that!"

You see what I was up against, George? Some crook had got to that guy and for the rest of his life he'll figure everybody is crooked. There's nothing like being on the level, George, unless of course, you don't expect to make the town any more. After I had worked on that Jepson guy for an hour, I got him where he let me have five dollars. I tied up my paper then and came on to Reading. I'll write you a letter to-morrow and let you know if the twenty got here all right. I left word at Pottstown to have it forwarded in case you came through. TOM.

P. S. I stuck one over on this here Jepson guy like I told you I would for that poker game. I gave him an I O U for the five he let me have. The same is made out in regular legal form only I signed it with some of that trick ink we got in Bridgeport last summer. It fades away in an hour. When he shows it to Levy I would like to be there. TOM.

Centralia, Pa.

April 12, '15.

DEAR GEORGE: The guy that laid out the route for this picture must be getting a cut from the railroad. I wouldn't be surprised if we jumped from the next burg to Sydney, Australia. I go from this tank to another watershed called Biddleboro, 110 miles up the line. I finally got some money from Levy in Reading. He sent me thirty dollars, so I will be able to get by for about a week now. When I went down to get my paper at the railroad station here, the baggage man calls me to one side.

"I'd like to see this here picture, mister," he says.

"How many?" I says, taking out my pass book.

"Well, let's see," he says, cocking one eye. "There's me and Martha and Joe and Freddie and little Tommie and Ann——"

"Wait a minute!" I says. "I'm not taking the census—leave room for the orchestra. I'll give you a pass for four, that's the limit!"

He took the pass as if he was doing me a favor and I'll bet when I went away he called me a cheap bum or something, eh, George? That only left him three to sell, see? Well, George, I left Reading so warmed up over Hercules that they'll have to throw police lines around the town when my picture gets there. I was busier than a one-armed paper hanger all the time I was there, as I'm a couple of days late, but I made a train out to this Centralia place last night. Before I left Reading I had supper in the dining room of the good hotel. You know, George, that I'm as loose as ashes with my money when I have it. Remember how I came through with that \$1.87 for you in Bridgeport? But I figures that this Levy guy is new to me and I can't take no chances because I'm getting further away from Times Square every day. Well, when the biscuit shooter left the check at my plate, I took a trial balance and found I was getting pretty close to the cushion, so I wrote out a pass for two and left it by the plate. I was just going out the door when she nails me and hands me the pass.

"I guess you forgot this in the excitement," she says. She held up my meal check.

"Oh, no!" I says. "I left this for you," and I pushes the pass into her hands.

"I'm not saving autographs this year," she says, edging me up to the cashier's desk. "That went out long ago—it's silk flags now. I never heard

of Hercooles and I don't care to meet no strange wops. If you don't come through I'll call a cop!"

Well, they had me right, George, a couple of big huskies come walking over and I figures it's no use starting anything there—it would only knock the picture when it came in, so I let them take six bits away from me. I never beat anybody out of a nickle, George, if I can help it, but I got as much right to look out for myself as anybody. Am I right? That's the worst of these small-time burgs, they think every strange guy with a clean collar and a shine is out to trim them and if you stole the whole town you couldnt' hock it for bean money.

Well, so long, George, I hope that twenty don't get lost following me around, eh?

TOM.

Biddleboro, Pa.

April 15, '15.

FRIEND GEORGE: Well, George, I told you I was going to give you the low down on this Hercules guy, so I will tell you about him now while I am waiting for the train. Hercules hung out in Rome or some place like that right after it was built. I told you before what a husky citizen he was. Willard couldn't have stayed a round with him. Well, like all these guys he fell for a skirt, so he went to her old man and told him about it. The old man was about as strong for Hercules as I am for Levy, but he don't want to start nothing, knowing he'll only get the worst of it. So he says:

"All right, Herc, you come around to-morrow and I'll give you the verdict!"

So Hercules goes away and the old man stays up all night trying to dope himself an out. Finally he draws up a list of twelve jobs for this Hercules guy to work on and then he turns in and hits the hay, satisfied that he's got the Indian sign on Herc. The next

morning Hercules is around bright and early. The old man takes him in the parlor and gives him a cigar. Then he says:

"I got a few little things here for you to do before I can take you on as a son-in-law."

With that he hands Hercules the list of the twelve jobs. We have the same list on the program and here it is I copied it off:

Strangling the Nemean Lion.

Killing the Lernean Lydia.

Capturing the Ceryneian Stag.

Capturing the Erymanthian Boar.

Cleaning the Augean Stables.

Slaughtering the Stymphalian Birds.

Capturing the Cretan Bull.

Capturing the Man-eating Mares of Diomedes.

Securing the Girdle of Hippolyte.

Fetching the Red Oxen of Geryon.

Getting the Golden Apples of the Hesperides.

Bringing to the Upper World the Three-headed Dog Cerebus.

Some layout, eh, George? Well, while Hercules is giving this the up and down the old man is laughing to himself and patting himself on the back for being a bright little fellow. "Here's where Herc quits cold!" he thinks. But somebody had give him a wrong steer on Hercules. Herc gets up and yawns.

"This will be soft for me," he says. "I'll be around in a few days for your daughter."

Another guy would have walloped the old man and taken a chance. I'd like to see Levy pull something like that on me and get away with it. Well, Hercules went out and cleaned up on the old man's list and got his daughter. Levy probably wired for the movie rights as soon as the flash came that Hercules had put it over the old man.

You can see from this that we have considerable picture, eh, George? Of course half of it is phony. Hercules probably went out and framed up these

Lernean Lydias and Stymphalian Birds and they laid down. But he got away with it and that's the big idea, George.

Well, so long, George, don't take no plugged nickles, I'll write you some more from Ashton, Pa., the next burg.

TOM.

P. S. I'll bet when I get that twenty the envelope will be all covered with addresses, eh, George?

TOM.

Ashton, Pa.

April 17, '15.

DEAR GEORGE: I just got a letter from Levy saying the picture was a riot in Pottstown and is going to be held over for two more days. I guess that's bad, eh? You know I don't like to hand it to myself, but I never met up with no advance men that had anything on me yet. Of course Levy will say it's the picture, but you know yourself George when you got a live one ahead you can get by with murder. Why, I'll bet Nero wouldn't have got six people to see the lions and the martyrs in stock, if he hadn't had a good man doing the press stuff. Levy didn't say nothing in his letter about the I O U I gave the guy in Pottstown, so I guess Jepson is a good loser and didn't say anything about it. Well, at the bottom of Levy's letter he says this will be a hard town because a picture called "The Dangers of Della," in six reels, showed here a week ago and might have killed it dead for us. He says this will be a chance to deliver the goods and to get out and get busy.

In a burg like this, the best place to start work is the hotel. The clerk knows everybody and he can generally lean over the counter and call the roll because most of the anti-suffragettes are sitting in the lobby, reading the *Police Gazette* and keeping the cuspidors in their proper place. Well, after getting the bill poster busy, I takes an armful of half sheet lithos and goes back to the hotel.

"Good morning," I says to the clerk, slipping him a pass. "How many will the firemen allow in the opera house?"

"Well," he says, "it holds 600, but we had 786 in there at the last Odd Fellow's benefit—didn't we, Mr. Allers?" he calls out to an old guy who's reading the register as if it was a French novel.

The old guy marks the place with his finger, looks up over his glasses, and misses the cuspidor by a foot.

"Seven hundred and eighty-nine," he says, and goes on reading.

"Well," I says, "there'll be 790 in there next week, gimme a cigar!"

I slides one of the half sheets on the counter so the clerk could see it. It showed Hercules worrying the Nemean Lion or something like that. The clerk looks at it with no more interest than if it had been a copy of his uncle's will, leaving him all.

"Looks like some picture!" he says finally. "But we had a moving picture here last week that was the greatest thing I ever saw. Why, in one scene an automobile goes right off a bridge into a river. Had three people in it, too—didn't it, Mr. Allers?"

The old guy turns over a page in the register.

"Four!" he says, without looking up.

"Well," I says, "we sent that picture ahead to give you a slight line on this one. This here litho is about the dull-est scene from the film." I showed him some more. "There's nearly as many people in this here picture as there is in Ashton," I says. "The last town we showed in people stood in line all night for tickets and thousands were turned away. Why, the mayor of the town wrote me such a pitiful letter asking to see the picture before he died, he had a serious case of barber's itch and was sinking fast, that I took the film over and gave a special show at the city hall."

"Well," he says, "they got a pretty

good crowd at that other picture, but they would have done better but for one thing."

"Who was he?" I says.

"If you go out on Main Street," he says, "you'll see some of their billboards, it's probably up there yet. One picture shows a horse race and there are about ten horses in it. They're supposed to be coming down the stretch. Well, we all got talking about it before the picture came here and Mr. Allers here went up there and studied the bill board and he saw that a little black horse was leading. So he came back and made a little bet with Councilman Bowes that the little black horse would win. It ain't often that Mr. Allers gambles with his money like that, although they say he was a high flyer in his younger days. Anyhow he figured from the way Councilman Bowes talked that he hadn't seen the billboard, and that little black horse was so far ahead that Mr. Allers was willing to risk his money on it, particularly as they was coming down the stretch.

"Well, they went to the opera house that night to see the picture all excited and everything, and when the horse race came along they was only four horses in it and a white horse with this Della riding it won the race and Mr. Allers who had bet on the black one from the billboard lost eighty-five cents. The manager of the picture told him that the other horses had been disqualified."

Well, so long, George, if I get that twenty I will let you know right away.

TOM.

Bloomsville, Pa.

April 21, '15.

FRIEND GEORGE: I would have written to you before but I couldn't get no paper and envelopes in the Ashton jail and I only got out last night. I was there for two days and I'm lucky I didn't get sent up for life. You know

I told you in my last that Levy told me to get busy in that town because he thought the other picture would hurt our business. His idea being for me to dope out a stunt to get the natives in the opera house when Hercules got there. I doped out a stunt all right and I'll bet when this picture hits Ashton they'll have to put the screen up on a lot, because the opera house will never stand up under the rush for tickets.

The city hall in Ashton had a point on the top like a church steeple and the opera house is half way down the block on the other side. If they had built them next door to each other I would never have been in jail. It's the first time I was ever in one except once in 1910—but that was only for beating a hotel bill. Well, I worked one whole day on a scheme to put Hercules over in Ashton and finally I hit on a plan to let them all know Hercules would be in their midst next week. I got the loan of a dummy from a tailor by giving him a pass for two shows. When I first went in he wanted me to deposit my right eye for security, but I made him see it my way and got away with it. I wrapped the dummy up and took it up to my room at the hotel. Then I dressed it in an old pair of pants and hid it in the closet. I went over to the opera house then and dug up the bill poster which I made into a regular fellow by buying him a couple of drinks. I told him my scheme and he said it was the best thing he'd heard of since Prohibition failed to pass the state senate and he agreed to help me put it over. We went down in the property room and found a couple of big cow bells, a lot of rope and a half a dozen roman candles, left over from the election celebration. I took them all back to the hotel with me and made the bill poster promise to meet me there at midnight.

He was there to the dot. I met him outside and we took the dummy and

the rest of the layout and went over to the opera house. I planted him and the stuff on the roof while I beat it over to the city hall, found the ladder where he said it would be and went to work. It was some dark night, believe me, George, and I might have broke my neck climbing and fussing around there in the dark, but I finally got on the roof of the city hall and fastened the end of rope I was carrying right on the top of that little pointed steeple. The whole burg was sleeping peacefully and it was so quiet I could hear the billposter breathing on the roof of the opera house. Well I beat it back to the opera house roof, hanging on to the other end of the rope and we fastens that end there. Then we sticks a roman candle into each of the dummy's wooden hands, ties the cow bells where they would do the most good and put a loop around the whole business on the line running from the roof to the city hall steeple. I had fixed it so the dummy would slide slow to the other end when I started it. I hung a sign around the dummy's neck, it said, "Hercules is Coming!" the bill poster lit the roman candles—and we let her go.

Well, George, that there dummy slid along the rope with the bells ringing and the roman candles sputtering about as slow as a rifle bullet. When it hit the city hall I thought it was going over—some of it did—the little point at the top went away from there, but the dummy stayed. Noise? A charge of cavalry would have gone unnoticed alongside of that! The crash when the dummy hit the city hall woke up Ashton from one end to the other. Windows commenced banging up, heads sticking out and I heard a few wild yells here and there. Some guy comes running out of the fire house across the street with a shot gun in his hand. He didn't have on nothing but a white nightgown and just as he got set in the

middle of the street, the roman candles opened up. A couple of little red balls bounced off this guy's head and he fell down four times getting back to the fire house. Another little blue ball went through a window of the hotel and a gang of the town's defenders who were coming on the run climbed over each other as the red white and blue bullets poured into their midst. Even though I felt I'd get the worst of it, George, I nearly fell off the roof laughing. The whole town was there by that time, but they were all satisfied to see the show from the back of the house, the front rows were empty George. Friend bill poster was there, too, I guess, because he had left me flat when the first candle went off.

George, while it lasted it was worth five dollars of any man's money for a ringside seat. But the dummy was through when the roman candles gave out—so was I. I crept down through the opera house to the street and ducked around in back to the hotel. I sneaked up the fire escape in the back and finally got in my room. I hadn't been there a minute when I heard them running up the stairs. I jumped into bed and pretended to be asleep.

"Come out or I'll break down the door!" some guy yells through the key hole.

I got out of bed and walked over to the window. George, the census is wrong when it says there are only 5,000 voters in Ashton, Pa. There was a million anyhow under my window. I figures that Levy has been a pretty good guy to me and it's up to me to help him get his money out of Hercules so I opened the door. If I only had myself to think of I would have made them guys step some—I'm a pretty bad guy when I'm right, George, you know that yourself.

"That's him!" yells the hotel clerk, pushing through the jam.

"Wait a minute!" I says. "I'm not

Hercules—Hercules is a picture, I'm the advance agent for it. It's the greatest moving picture ever thrown on a screen. Why, men, it cost——"

"Never mind that!" the guy with the sign butts in. "It'll cost you something before we get through with you! Come with me!"

Well, he had a gun, George, and all his gang was with him, so I went along. They took me over to the jail and threw me in a cell. The next morning I was brought before a justice of the peace. The S. R. O. sign had been outside the court house all morning—there wasn't hardly room for me when we got there.

The judge cleared his throat and picks up a long piece of paper. It looked like a ticket to Frisco on the Erie.

"You, Thomas Brennan," he says, "are this day before me charged with malicious mischief, disorderly conduct, attempted arson, in burning a public edifice, felonious assault, and violating the curfew law. How do you plead?"

"All I can say," I says, "is that I got a lovely future, ain't I?"

"Enter a plea of not guilty," says the judge turning to some other guy. "You will be tried at the fall term, and meanwhile, I'll fix bail at \$10,000. Can you furnish it?"

"I ain't got no change," I says. "Can you break a bill?"

"Take him back!" says the judge. He called after me as I was being hustled off, "You had better send for a lawyer."

"One lawyer would be useless to me," I says. "Send them all in."

I hadn't been back in the cell five minutes when the judge comes in to see me. He chases the keeper away and pulls me over in a corner of the cell.

"Not a word!" he says winking at me. "You've done this town a favor,

boy, although I doubt if you could get anyone to believe it right now. However, I do. I have fought this miserly town council and the picayune mayor for five years to take the tax surplus and build a new court house and city hall to replace the miserable coops that desecrate the town at present. They pooh poohed me—now, on account of your enterprise, they'll have to build one of them anyhow."

"Judge," I says, "you are certainly a regular fellow to look at it like that—but that ain't going to get me nothing just now——"

"Early to-morrow morning," he says, "there's a train stops here long enough to take on milk. If you were at the railroad station by then do you think you could board it?"

"I can beat that, judge," I says. "If you let me out of here I'll make it on the wing!"

Well, George that good old man shakes my hand and says he'll square everything all around and that the next morning I'll find the door of the coop unlocked. Before he went I asked him if he had seen any of the display the night before personally.

"My boy," he says, "when that pyrotechnic machine gun got in action and removed the two remaining hairs from the revered head of our respected fire chief I laughed so much I like to broke my fool ribs," and he took off his glasses and wiped his eyes.

Well, George, everything come out like he said. The keeper left the door open in the morning and I lowered the track record for the mean distance, as they say, to the railroad station. I got the milk train out and called it a day.

I'll never take no billposters on my staff any more, George. That guy probably pushed the dummy too hard off the roof, eh?

TOM.

The third story in this series, entitled "Score One for Bisselburg," will appear in the January month-end POPULAR.

The Free Hand

By Peter B. Kyne

Author of "The Man Behind," "Realism," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART

At the age of thirty Tom Warren felt he had gotten nowhere in the world, being merely an ordinary customshouse inspector. He provided comfortably for his widowed mother, but taking to himself a wife, under the circumstances, was out of the question. Ruth Spencer, his sweetheart, feared that Tom lacked backbone and ambition. So her father thought, too. Old John Spencer was a man of ability and money, and he disliked to think that his daughter had given her heart to a man of small caliber. Opium was being smuggled into San Francisco in incredible quantities. No one seemed to be able to stop it. Graham, the deputy inspector, was under suspicion. One day a secret-service agent from Washington comes on to Frisco to investigate. In a moment of anger and haste Tom Warren declares that he could round up the Opium Ring, if he had the chance. Graves, the secret-service man, tells Tom that his wish is granted; that he has six months in which to prove his boast. With some trepidation at the magnitude of his task, Warren begins his hunting down of the powerful opium interests. A faithful German, Karl Wemple, and a young chap named Lind are his trusties. At the end of five weeks Tom is on the trail hot-foot. Lind has observed some queer checking of boxes consigned to one Shui On, a Chinese merchant, and, furthermore, Karl Wemple and Tom unearth contraband opium aboard the steamer *Mongolia*. It looks as if Shui On were the key to the Opium Ring, and Tom and his helpers are watchful and wary.

(A Two-Part Novel—Part Two)

CHAPTER XI.

AS soon as his seizure of opium had been safely stowed in the appraisers' building, Tom Warren hurried back to the mail dock. He had had no sleep, but the fever of the chase was in his blood. The *Mongolia* was to sail the second day following, and if there was any more of the drug on board he intended to find it. He said nothing to Karl Wemple of his interview with Lind. Tom had little opportunity to talk with the old inspector alone, and, besides, he wanted to work this out by himself. Wemple had taught him a thing or two, and he was steadily growing more self-reliant, but it would be another little triumph to spring on Karl as a surprise when the right moment came. Moreover, Wemple had his hands full with the searchers, and, if necessary, they could thrash out this new problem together after the liner sailed. Warren

was learning the lesson of patience, and was soon to find out that he did have "backbone"—despite Ruth Spencer's assertion to the contrary.

It was close to noon when Tom Warren and Karl Wemple came up out of the engine room. They were hot and tired, and the want of sleep was beginning to tell on Warren. The fresh air braced him, and he sat down on a hatch coaming in the well deck, and felt in the pocket of his dungaree for a cigar.

The *Mongolia's* cargo had been transferred to the dock, and she was coaling from a barge alongside. The "bamboo men" were clearing the dunnage from the bottom of the hatches, and a Chinese sailor was rigging a fall on the mast, thirty feet above their heads. A piece of heavy machinery was to be taken aboard, and a cargo gaff was being swung into place as the inspectors came on deck. They watched the busy Chinaman for a while, then

Wemple suggested that they wash up and go to lunch. Karl led the way to the gangplank. Warren, following him, stopped for an instant, and rapped the hollow iron mast with his knuckles, for the instinct of the chase was strong.

The pause came nearly being fatal. Something flashed from the sailor's hand, whizzed through the air, and, passing within an inch of Warren's head, struck him a glancing blow on the shoulder and bounded to the deck. He leaped backward, with a cry, and clapped his hand to his shoulder, just as Wemple turned and picked up an iron marlinespike. The old inspector looked aloft and cursed the sailor roundly. The Chinaman jabbered protestingly, evidently in apology for his clumsiness, and started to slide down the mast.

Wemple looked at the marlinespike for a moment, then tossed it aside, and turned to Tom Warren, who was still rubbing his shoulder. "It vos a narrow escape, Tommy," he said. "Better we get out of here and pretend you don't think nothing of it. There's something in the wind, sure. They're trying to lay you out, Tommy."

"Nonsense, Karl!" protested Warren. "The boy dropped it accidentally."

"Sure—accidentally—on purpose! Better you keep your eyes open. Old Karl ain't such a fool all the time."

The incident of the marlinespike was quickly forgotten in the intricacies of the search. Warren spent a busy, though fruitless, afternoon on the liner, and it was an hour after quitting time when he ordered his men to knock off for the day.

It was late in the fall, and by six o'clock the water front was dark. Warren, dog-tired, decided to go home for supper and a good night's sleep. He changed his clothes quickly and left the dock, taking a short cut along the front. The Mission Street cars had their eastern terminus at the Ferry Building,

and he would be sure of a seat, while, if he waited for the other inspectors and took the roundabout course by way of Third Street, he would have to stand up all the way home.

The going was rough, but it was familiar ground to Tom Warren, and he made good time. Once he thought he heard footsteps behind him, and stopped. Perhaps some one else was taking the short cut. Evidently his ears had deceived him, however, for, although he peered into the darkness, no one came out of it, and the sound was not repeated.

He turned into Embarcadero Street, and, as he neared the old transport dock, the lights of the Ferry Building twinkled welcomingly, and he saw an electric car rounding the curve from Mission Street. He breathed easier. Unconsciously his nerves were strung to a high tension, and the lights were a relief. A coal bunker loomed darkly in front of him, and, just as he passed it, making a detour to avoid a lumber pile that he almost stumbled over, there was a sudden rush of feet behind him, a heavy object struck him between the shoulders, and he pitched forward against the pile of lumber, half falling, half sliding, to his knees in the coal dust.

The breath was fairly knocked from his body; he was sorely hurt, but as he crumpled up against the boards he turned, instinctively reaching for his gun, and saw four figures leaping toward him out of the darkness. He fired, as he drew, and, though the shot went wild, it had a deterrent effect upon his assailants. They stopped for an instant, but in that instant reënforcement arrived from an unexpected source. Warren's head reeled, the gun dropped from his hand, but through the haze he heard a wild "Hurroo!" and a scramble of feet on the loose boards. A revolver barked over his head.

Warren's next conscious move was a sputtering effort to rid his throat of a fiery liquid that was choking him the while it revived him. He felt the uplift of a muscular arm beneath his shoulders, and heard a soothing voice in a rich brogue as his rescuer bent over him.

"Sure, it's Gawd's own blessin' I had a pint av hootch in me pistol pocket." The voice of the unknown Samaritan seemed to the dazed inspector to proceed from an immeasurable distance. "Divil a worrd out of ye now, me lad, but down this flask av fixed bayonets like a sinsible man."

Warren struggled and gurgled as a firm hand held the neck of the flask to his mouth. Presently he managed to rid himself of the fiery gag, and, with the stranger's help, he sat up. He leaned, exhausted, against the lumber pile, coughing and weeping from the "crawl" of the water-front whisky, a fair portion of which had managed to find its way down his protesting throat.

"Who the devil are you?" he managed to gasp in tones anything but grateful.

"Not givin' ye a short answer, but what's it to ye?" retorted the stranger brusquely. He struck a match, and, after groping around a moment in the coal dust, he found Warren's gun and handed it to him. He snorted disgustedly.

"An' so that's the popgun ye carry, an' four crooks layin' for ye? The more fool you! Get yerself an auld service revolver, wit' a long barrel, an' ye may hope to hit somethin'. Praise be, I had wan o' that same litter on me, as wan av yer friends knows to his sorrer. Sure, the two that stayed carried No. 3 away wit' them, while another flew up East Street like a bat out av hell. I aimed for his legs, but what wit' me nerves upset an' twitchin' 'tis more nor likely I hit him high

enough for permanent damage. Glory be, but you're some cop—I don't think!"

"I'm a custom inspector," retorted Warren, "and I wasn't expecting to be jumped, although the attack doesn't surprise me. They would have killed me if you hadn't interfered. I owe you my life, Mr.—er——"

"Divil a mister about it, but Sergeant Thaddeus McSorley, av the Twentyninth Infantry."

"I see. You got in from the islands on the *Rosecrans* this morning, I take it?" He smiled sheepishly. "I'm glad you got home in time, Sergeant McSorley. I'm certainly obliged to you. Are you on guard here at the transport dock?"

"Man, dear," said the Irishman plaintively, "did ye ever find an auld soger dhrunk on jooty? Divil a bit! When the throopship docked this mornin', I slipped ashore. I'd just come off guard an' was wearin' me side arms, an' without waiting to ditch me artillery, I run across from the dock for a bit av a dhrink. I forgot to come back."

For the first time in his life, Tom Warren felt grateful for the fact that the army contained at least one thirsty soldier.

"But what were you doing here behind this lumber pile, sergeant?" he asked.

"Shleepin' off the effects av the campaign. Ye must know, sir, I've been fightin' General Jawn Barleycorn all day long. I attacked in force, but the auld codger flanked me, an' took a month's pay as the prize av war. I became demoralized, an' separated from me command in the retreat—sp'akin' plain English, I was howlin' drunk, an' mayhap disorderly. So I found me a quiet shpot back av this lumber pile, an' was sleepin' soundly, whin the sound av firing woke me up. 'Musha, now,' says I to meself, says I; 'they're

dhrevin' in the outposts,' an', wit' that, I dhrew me gun an' wint into action. 'Tis the merrcy av Heaven I didn't kill ye. I've been fair sphoilin' for a fight all day, an', to tell ye the truth, 'twas the wan thing needed to sober me up. Are ye feelin' betther, agra?"

"I think my back's broken," quavered Warren. "They hit me with something—a lump of coal, I guess. The Harbor Hospital's only a few blocks away, up at the foot of Mission Street, and if you'll help me to the hospital, sergeant, I shall be your debtor."

"Faith I will that same," retorted the bibulous one; and lifted Warren to his feet.

"Thank you," murmured the inspector gratefully. "If you should get into trouble with your commanding officer on account of your little spree, I shall be glad to write him a letter, and endeavor to square you. I'm Mr. Warren, acting deputy surveyor of the port of San Francisco. It isn't much of a job, but the title sounds impressive, and we have an engraved letterhead."

"Don't throuble yerself, sor. Me enlistmint's up the day afther to-morrer, an' t'will be aisier to dischargge me than thry me be summary court."

"Then you do not intend to reënlist?"

"Misther Warren, sir, I'm a sensitive man in me cups. Have a care would ye make fun av me."

"Then I take it you've had your fill of soldiering?"

"I have that! 'Tis back to civil life an' a job for Thaddeus McSorley. Sure only fools an' horrses wurrk, but then I was always a fool!"

Warren took the sergeant's arm, and the pair began their unsteady progress up the bulkhead. Warren had suddenly glimpsed the tag end of an idea, and the bibulous sergeant fitted into it to a nicety. A little later, when McSorley should be thoroughly sobered, he decided to have a serious talk with him.

CHAPTER XII.

At the Harbor Emergency Hospital, the night steward examined Warren's aching back, and discovered an angry red bruise between his shoulder blades. He bathed the sore spot with liniment, and, after resting for half an hour, Warren decided to go home. He telephoned for a taxi, and when the vehicle arrived he motioned Thaddeus McSorley to accompany him.

"I wish you'd see me safe home, sergeant," he pleaded. "I have reason to fear that my life is in danger, and I'm not in shape to put up a fight if there should be another gang waiting for me on my doorstep."

The call to arms and the ensuing skirmish at the lumber pile had quite sobered the son of Mars, and he readily consented to accompany the inspector.

Arrived at his home, Warren made light of his injury, and told his mother that it was due to a fall in his hurry to catch the car—which statement had at least a shade of truth in it. He introduced the now thoroughly embarrassed sergeant to his mother, and, at a wink from Warren, the soldier elaborated mendaciously on the "accident." While Mrs. Warren was worried at first, the irrepressible Irishman soon had her smiling, in spite of her fears.

At Warren's insistent invitation, and in view of the fact that his pockets were innocent of cash, McSorley was readily prevailed upon to spend the night at the Warren home. The years had been long, however, since McSorley had slept in a real sure-enough bed, and at sight of the spotless room and the snowy bed his courage oozed out at his finger tips. He swore that he was a filthy swine, and could not be induced to occupy the bed. Finally, however, he consented to accept a pair of blankets, and, removing his leggings and boots and rolling himself up on the carpet, he declared he would sleep "wit'

wan eye open." His heavy snores, however, soon gave the lie to his statement.

Warren's body was too sore to permit him to indulge in the sleep he craved, save for an occasional light doze, and when morning came his back hurt him so badly that, despite a plucky attempt to rise and dress himself, he was compelled to keep to his bed. His mother phoned the customshouse at nine o'clock to inform the deputy surveyor that her son was ill, but would probably be on duty the following day.

After breakfast, Thaddeus McSorley started to take his leave, but Warren had matured his plan of the night before, and called the soldier into his room.

"I believe you told me last night, Thaddeus, that your term of service expires to-day?"

"It does."

"I have a job for you, if you care to take it, Thaddeus."

"Well, 'tis hard to be a civilian——"

"But this is semicivilian—working for your dear Uncle Samuel. The job will last five months, at least, and the pay is forty cents an hour."

"Lead on!" said Thaddeus McSorley. "I'll enlist wit' ye."

"Then I must have your word of honor as a man and a—a soldier that you'll stay sober. Can you shun the flowing bowl for five consecutive months?"

"What kind av a job have ye in mind?" queried McSorley cautiously.

"It's guard duty."

"Have no fear. I never got ram-pagin' wit' liquor on guard. Ye have me promise—on me worrd av honor, an' I've never bruk that."

"Very well, you wild Irishman. I'll have you sworn in as a temporary laborer on the surveyor's force——"

"But I thought 'twas guard dooty——"

"So it is. You're to be my body-

guard, and if last night's work is a sample of what I may expect, you'll have to labor. You're to be my orderly—a sort of scout, and your position will be one of trust. Since you served me voluntarily last night, I thought you might not be averse to serving for pay. Certain people want to get me out of their way, Thaddeus, and you came to hand in the nick of time. I shall have you detailed as my helper, and you won't have much to do except keep your eyes and your ears open, and you can carry a gun for emergencies. I'll buy you a service revolver."

"Ah-hah!" said Thaddeus, and licked his lips. "Inemies within the lines, eh? Very well, sir. I don't know why ye're afther trustin' me, but wit' the help av Gawd I'll serve ye honest an' faithful."

"Thank you, Thaddeus. Now, here are a couple of dollars for you. Report to your company, settle your affairs with the army, and come back as soon as you can."

Scarcely had McSorley departed, when the telephone rang, and Mrs. Warren answered it. The call was from Mrs. Spencer, and when informed by Warren's mother of his mishap, she called Ruth to the phone. Ruth was greatly worried, and declared that she would visit the Warren home within the hour.

The sight of Ruth Spencer was a compensation to Tom Warren for his bruises. He had seen but little of his fiancée during the past month, and an hour of her companionship brightened him up. In fact, she had good news for him, for, since his appointment as active deputy surveyor, Ruth's father had appeared to take a more friendly interest in him, and had spoken of him twice with a note of grudging admiration in his tones. Perhaps he might yet be induced to look upon their engagement with a more tolerant and sentimental eye. John Spencer, after hear-

ing of Warren's risé, had, with the characteristic shrewdness of the business man, attributed it to native, although heretofore latent, ability.

"It may be," he had informed his daughter, "that I have misjudged that young man of yours, Ruth. He has always struck me as a slow coach of a man, but his appointment to this position must have come as the result of ability and integrity. Usually promotion in the customs service is political pull, and, to my personal knowledge, Warren has no pull."

This was a meager victory, but a welcome one, and in his heart of hearts Warren did not blame Ruth's father for his attitude, for, after all, it is only natural for parents, in modest or fairly comfortable circumstances, to wish to see their only child married well. Ruth's report of her father's awakening interest served to put Warren on his mettle, and strengthened him in his high resolve to fight the smuggling ring to a finish. He resolved that nothing should stop him now. He was bound that Ruth Spencer should be his wife, but he didn't desire any fuss or argument in the matter, and if, in lieu of cash and worldly position, earnest effort and ability could smooth the path of true love, Warren meant to leave no stone unturned.

Although he suffered painful twinges at every step, nevertheless Warren was back on duty at the mail dock the following day. Thaddeus McSorley had reported intact early that morning, and Warren took the ex-soldier with him to the customhouse and had him sworn in as a temporary laborer, detailed on the inspectors' force.

The advent of the ex-sergeant caused no comment among the inspectors at the mail dock. A laborer had acted as helper and messenger for Wyrick during his incumbency as captain of the watch, and it was but natural that Warren, having succeeded to Wyrick's job,

should dispense with his predecessor's man and employ a helper and messenger of his own. Moreover, preferment is, whenever practicable, given to honorably discharged soldiers or sailors for such temporary jobs.

CHAPTER XIII.

On the last day of the *Mongolia's* stay in port, Warren made another important seizure of contraband opium—a seizure that gave evidence of the lengths to which the smugglers would go to get the drug past the keen eyes of the customs searchers, and proved to Warren that he must needs possess a high degree of cunning to cope successfully with the smugglers.

Although his force of searchers had been over the ship fully a dozen times, searching in every conceivable place where opium might be cached, and, although heretofore it had been unusual to search the transpacific liners on their sailing day, Tom Warren was not satisfied. Some recently acquired instinct told him that his work was still incomplete. He sensed opium on the ship, and resolved to make one more thorough search.

Accordingly, he detailed his men to different portions of the ship, with orders to work systematically toward a convergent center. With Karl Wemple and McSorley, he went forward. Warren had confided to the old German the story of the attack upon him at the coal bunkers, and, while Wemple had twitted him for his failure to heed his timely warning, still he was greatly pleased at Warren's selection of the ex-soldier as his bodyguard.

They searched the porter house first, pulling out lamps and moving a heavy oil tank away from the steel mast. They tapped the hollow mast, but their soundings revealed nothing, and Warren flashed his electric torch down the ladder leading to the chain locker. He

had searched the chain locker thoroughly three times previous, and he paused now, irresolute.

"Think it's any use, Karl?" he asked.

The veteran inspector shrugged. Karl was very stout, and the opening into the chain locker was small.

"You only waste your time, Tommy. We been to the bottom of that hole three times already."

Had Karl not agreed with him, Warren would, in all probability, have elected to dispense with a fourth scrutiny of the chain locker. But with the perversity of all mankind, Karl's indifference merely served to decide him upon further action.

"Something seems to tell me to try it again, Karl. You know what the bells of Bow Church said to Dick Whittington?"

"Tell me," said the German.

"Dick was leaving London, followed by his cat. He was a poor, friendless youth, and, as he was leaving, he heard the bells ringing, and he turned for a farewell look at the town. Then he started on, but it seemed to him the bells kept saying: 'Turn again, Lord Mayor of London,' so Dick turned back, and, by George, he lived to be lord mayor of London!"

"Into that chain locker, deputy surveyor av the port!" mocked Thaddeus McSorley to the acting deputy, the man who had the authority for six months without the salary. "Into it, me bowld bucko bhoys, for another look!"

"The Irish rush in where Germans fear to tread," laughed Warren. "Come along, Thaddeus. Karl, I'm sorry you're so fat, and the hole is so small —"

And, leaving Karl sputtering protests, Warren swung a leg over, squeezed through the manhole, and, followed by McSorley, started down the grimy ladder. When they reached solid footing twenty feet below the main deck, their flashing torches but dimly

lighted the black compartment. The great anchor chain, stretched taut, ran through the hawse pipe, lost in the gloom high over their heads. The chain box was filled with tons of rusty chain, on top of which were piled cargo hooks, old bird cages which once had housed some sailor's beloved parrot or cockatoo, smuggled aboard in defiance of orders, broken blocks, and pieces of discarded tackle. Overhead, hung by a stout rope rove through a steel beam, two huge cargo blocks dangled.

Warren and his helper ran their torches along the chicks of the chain box, tapped the discarded blocks, and even went so far as to get down on their knees and scrape about in the dust on the steel plates beneath them.

"Nothing doing!" said Warren. "Sometimes it's an advantage to be fat," and he laid his hand on the ladder rail and started to climb out. Six feet up the ladder he found his face on a level with the two great cargo blocks hanging from the ceiling, and instinctively he turned on the ladder and flashed his torch on the blocks. As he did so, he thought he detected a faint glint in the slight crack between the wooden inside of the block and the metal casing of the wheel.

"Come up here, Mac," he called, "and help me lower these two cargo blocks."

The cargo blocks were cut down, and Warren and McSorley bent over them with their searchlights. Then they made the discovery.

The two blocks had four iron wheels each, but these wheels had been removed, and metal shells, made in their exact counterpart, had been substituted. These shells were readily shaken out, and Tom Warren had forty-eight five-*tael* tins of prepared opium as the reward of his industry and persistence.

The original steel wheels were not in evidence, having doubtless been stored in some secure hiding place. Nevertheless, these blocks had been used con-

tinuously in the unloading of the *Mongolia's* cargo, and this meant a change of wheels when the tackles were rigged and a second substitution when the blocks were replaced in the chain locker. The vigilance of the customs men had put the smugglers on their guard, and they had lacked the daring to attempt to smuggle the drug ashore under the hawk eyes of Warren and his men. As the steamer sailed within the hour, it was plain that the drug was due for another round trip to China, had not Warren discovered it, in the hope that upon the liner's return a more favorable opportunity for running the guard might present itself.

The touch of the master hand was again in evidence, and Warren knew what to expect if that hand should be reached forth to crush him.

He stood there, watching his torch light flicker over the neatly stacked heap of little brass tins, and pondered over the magnitude of the task he had set himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was the crafty McSorley who broke the silence which the surprise of the discovery impressed upon them.

"Be the Great Gun av Athlone," he murmured, "but 'tis a fine clew ye've got, Misther Warren. Find out from the mate the men he sint here afther these cargo blocks, an' ye have the men that are doin' the smugglin'."

"Thaddeus McSorley, for an Irishman, you have a head on you like a tack. The mate might be as thick in the mire as the coolie deck hands. I trust nobody but the skipper."

"Well, thin, sir, what are ye goin' to do?"

"We're going to stack this dope right back where we found it, Thaddeus. By the way, who called you Thaddeus, anyhow? Aren't there enough good honest saints to name a man after——"

"Me father—Gawd rest his sowl, an' may the heavens be his bed—found it in the back av a dictionary. 'Tis a Syrian name, and sorra wan av me ever saw anything good come out av Syria but a fig."

"I know it," said Tom Warren. "If they'd christened you Michael, you'd know, without even asking, what course I'm going to pursue."

"What is it, avic?"

"We're going to stow this opium back in these fake blocks and hang them back where we found them. Then we'll leave them alone. The dope will go out to China and back again; and when the *Mongolia* returns, the opium will be right here where we can find it. And when the ship gets in we'll examine the blocks again, after which we'll watch for the men who are sent in to bring them on deck when discharging commences. These are the men who substitute the wheels, and I'll be hiding in the chain locker, and catch them with the goods."

"'Tis well, Hawkshaw, the detective! Ye have my consint," replied the Irishman. "'Tis a good plan, and I'll watch wit' ye in the chain locker, and help ye make the pinch."

They carefully replaced the opium in the blocks and replaced the latter as they had found them, after which they returned to the deck. For obvious reasons, Warren said nothing to Karl Wemple of his discovery, and Thaddeus McSorley was pledged to secrecy.

When the *Mongolia* sailed at noon that day, Warren was confident that the only opium remaining aboard the vessel was the forty-eight tins there on his sufferance. He was confident that not another lot had escaped him. True, Johnson, the boatman, had gotten away with the lot in the sack thrown overboard as the vessel entered the Golden Gate, but the liner had been so thoroughly watched at her dock that Warren felt convinced that only a few scat-

tered tins could have gone ashore despite his vigilance. He was so proud of his searchers and the picked men he had detailed that for the moment he forgot the two mysterious cases that had been taken off the dock by the Chinatown drayman. The memory of Lind's report brought him vexation, but he comforted himself with the thought that while Lind had been certain of his count, still there was always room for a mistake, and there was a bare chance that the cases had not contained opium.

His illusion was shattered within the week. Answering a telephone call at the dock one day, Graves' crisp voice came to him over the wire:

"This is the party that gave you your present job, Warren."

"I shall mention no names, sir. Proceed!"

"I wish you were as cautious as that all the time, Warren. What's wrong with you? You've let an ungodly consignment of opium slip through your fingers from the *Mongolia*. The secret agents nosing through Chinatown report that hop has dropped fifteen dollars a pound, and that means that the market's glutted. I am not pleased with you, Warren."

"I don't care a particular whoop whether you are or not!" retorted the acting deputy surveyor crisply. "You keep off my preserves, will you, and save your advice and criticism? It's five months premature. You seem to forget that."

A profound silence greeted this outrageous speech. As a matter of fact, his effrontery almost amazed Warren, but at his first meeting with Graves something seemed to tell him that the way to make that astute individual love one was to stand firm on one's rights, and fight him all over the ring. Warren had suddenly remembered that Graves had promised him a free hand for six months, and after five weeks of

noninterference he resented Graves' criticism, and a sudden impulse of anger had stimulated his retort.

For perhaps a half minute he held the receiver to his ear. Then over the wire came a soft and surprised:

"Well, I'll be darned!"

Ensued more silence. Finally:

"Were you aware, Warren, that you had slipped up?"

"I was—a few hours after the slip and a week before you were aware of it. It won't happen again. Please do not bother me any more, sir. I don't care to hear from you until I appear in your office with a squad of smugglers all wearing steel jewelry. I'll blow in on you before sixty days, and you'll think I'm heading a chain gang."

Graves chuckled. "Go to it, youngster!" he snapped, and hung up.

"Well, I've made that chap like me, at any rate," grinned Warren, as he left the phone and went back to the dock. Out on the edge of a stringer he sat down, and, lighting his pipe, he gave himself up to reflection.

Lind had been right, after all. The two unmarked "S. O." cases had contained opium, after all. Warren was satisfied of that, for the amount which the boatman had managed to pick up off the harbor and under Warren's very nose could not have been sufficient to have caused this tremendous drop in the market price of the drug in the underworld. It indicated clearly to Warren that Wyrick, his own inspector, and Gilmore, the dock clerk, were members of the smuggling ring, in addition to one or more of the freight clerks on the *Mongolia*. Reference to the copy of the incoming manifest of the *Mongolia* on her last trip would reveal the identity of the man who had received the two cases aboard at Hongkong. The petty smugglers, who had their headquarters in the chain locker, would, at the very least, number four.

Should the Chinatown drayman return to the dock, Lind would be certain to recognize him, and his capture was certain. By trailing the teamster to his rendezvous, the higher ups in the ring would be discovered, and, figuring roughly, Tom Warren saw very clearly that with half-decent luck he would break the backbone of the smuggling ring at one blow.

He had found the pawns in the game now, and nothing remained save the capture of the men behind. It was well enough to make seizures of the contraband drug, and the newspapers had already given him his measure of cheap glory for that. But publicity was not sufficient, and, in a measure, it was injurious, for, knowing of his activity, the smugglers would be all the more wary, and he had already had sufficient evidence that his own life was a very insignificant factor in their reckoning.

Warren waited with impatience the arrival of the *Persia*. The vessel was due the following Monday, and he hoped—nay, prayed, that she would bring another consignment to Shui On. He resolved that upon her arrival he would leave to Karl Wemple and his most trustworthy searchers the intricate details of the search aboard ship for the contraband drug, while he himself, assisted by Lind and McSorley, cast quietly about for the men who were turning the big tricks right under his very nose.

He wondered if Bill Wyrick had had any hand in the attack upon him at the coal bunkers, but though he watched all of his force narrowly, not a man, either on the inspectors' force or the force of laborers, had been missing or injured the day following the attack, although McSorley was positive that he had wounded two of Warren's assailants. Perhaps they were merely water-front thugs, after all. Nevertheless, he

decided to take no chances, and kept the ex-soldier close to him at all times.

CHAPTER XV.

The *Persia* made port on Monday, as per schedule, and a busy afternoon at the dock followed her arrival. However, she would not commence discharging cargo until the following morning, the passengers' baggage having to come ashore first.

Warren superintended the checking of the declarations, and at four o'clock sent Thaddeus McSorley uptown to the customhouse with a packet of official documents, and, as the old soldier took the papers, Warren whispered a brief sentence to him. The "temporary laborer" answered with an almost imperceptible nod, and went about his business.

When the last declaration had been passed, the day men left the dock, and Warren walked to the cars with his fellow inspectors. Several of them dropped in at Black Pete's restaurant, but Warren announced his intention of going home for dinner and a much needed rest.

Later events evidenced a purpose in this announcement.

It was shortly after ten o'clock that night when Tom Warren felt his way along the railing of the landing stage at Curley's boathouse, on Folsom Street wharf, leaned over, peered into the darkness beneath him, and whistled softly. The signal was immediately answered in kind, and Warren groped his way down the ladder. An electric torch flashed momentarily, and Warren walked along the landing stage toward the source of the flash.

"Is that you?" demanded a rich, Irish brogue. Warren, wishing to test his lieutenant's alertness, remained silent, and, after a brief interval, he heard the soft click of a revolver.

"Faith an' if it's not you, you'll wish it was!" muttered Thaddeus McSorley.

"It is I," said Tom Warren.

"Is that so? Then, if that's I, this is me."

A chuckle came out of the darkness as the ex-soldier, grasping the painter of the skiff in which he had sat, awaiting the arrival of his chief, pulled the little craft in to the landing stage. He held the gunwale against the float with one hand and stuck the other out to Warren.

"This way, agra. Sure, I've been worried, sittin' here alone waiting for ye."

"The gang thinks I'm safe home in bed, Thaddeus. Quiet, now!"

Warren took his place at the muffled oars, and pulled the skiff slowly along in the deep shadow of the long black dock. They crept silently around the end of the wharf. Save where the twinkle of an occasional star showed on the placid surface of the bay, the night was well suited to their purpose, and, as they started down the bay, skirting the ends of the piers, they could see nothing save the myriad lights of the city behind them.

"'Tis a grrand night for a surprise party," quoth the irrepressible Celt in low tones. "While I've done me share av dirrty outposts, 'twas on dhry land, wit' more fightin' room than we have in this cockleshell av a boat. I'm not at home, Misther Warren. I was never much av a wather fowl, and divil a sthroke can I swim at all, at all. Have a care would you upset the boat. 'Tis pay day only to-morrow, an' I've made no will——"

"Have you got your gun, Thaddeus?"

"I have—an' well 'iled an' greased. This salt night air plays the divil wit' a gun. Are we out for a reconnoissance, as we say in the service?"

"Exactly. I haven't forgotten the old tricks of the smugglers when I was a night inspector. They usually try one or two of them the first night a liner

makes port. The *Persia* is nearly five hundred feet long, and a man in a boat can't watch every inch of her."

"Gawd willin', we'll take a prisoner or two," said Mr. McSorley piously. The lust for adventure was in his wild blood, and he was used to night attacks. He lapsed into silence thereafter, and Warren rowed steadily for ten minutes. They went gently up the bay on the vanguard of the returning flood tide, and presently they sighted the red and green lights at the end of Pier No. 44, and made out the huge bulk of the *Persia* tied up at the dock. Warren thereupon headed a trifle farther out into the fairway, and they were well beyond the south side of the pier before he brought the skiff around and pulled shoreward.

Pier No. 44 is the southernmost pier on the water front, and the *Persia* was docked on its north side. Cautiously and silently Warren pulled in from the south side and felt his way in through an eight-foot gap between the foul, barnacle-incrusted piles under the dock. He unshipped his oars noiselessly, and the momentum carried the skiff gently to the north side of the pier, where it bumped the piling. Warren quickly passed the painter around the pile. The boat swung easily away on the ebb, and the line held taut.

The great hull of the liner, lying close to the wharf, had shut off the dim starlight. Even the faint glow from an arc lamp on the dock failed to show her black bulk. The two men were in Stygian darkness.

For perhaps fifteen minutes they hung to the pile, listening; then, as no sounds came to them out of the night, Warren cast off the painter and slowly shunted the boat, from one pile to the other, shoreward toward the head of the dock. Frequently they tied up and listened, but save for the gentle surge of the returning tide around the piling no sound broke the stillness. The old,

familiar stench of the bay mud assailed Warren's nostrils, and brought vividly back to him half-forgotten memories of his five lean years as a night inspector. He wondered if the guarding officers were at their posts.

However, although he had expected he might find signs of life aboard the steamer, he was disappointed. There was never the sound of a voice or the ghost of a gleam of light. Gently Warren poled the skiff along under the dock, and they were close to the *Persia's* bow when they finally stopped to rest.

For two hours they hung there, while slowly the tide rose. Warren, fearing to remain longer at his vigil, in case the returning tide should catch them under the dock at full flood and endanger their lives, was about to give up and return to a safer position on the south side of the dock for a further wait of an hour or two, when a sharp click almost over their heads caused him to lean forward and press McSorley's knee warningly. An instant later a round, glowing eye popped out of the darkness. A port had been opened in the fo'castle and a light had been switched on.

Presently a face appeared at the port-hole. It was so close to him that Warren could have struck it with his oar by standing up in the boat. For a moment the face was framed in the lighted port, then it vanished, only to reappear an instant later. The man's hand came into view then, pushing a small bundle through the opening, and Warren saw that there was a cord attached to the bundle. Slowly it was lowered until, with a slight splash, it touched the surface of the water. Instantly a bright beam of light flashed from under the dock, athwart the bow of Warren's boat, and he and McSorley sprang to their feet.

A vicious curse came from back of the light, and darkness reigned once more. Warren stooped for an oar, but

before he could touch it something crashed into the side of their boat, careening it sharply, and Tom Warren and Thaddeus McSorley, clutching vainly at the air, went overboard head-first into the foul waters of the bay.

CHAPTER XVI.

Warren came up, sputtering like a seal, and in a stroke or two bumped into a pile and clasped its incrustated sides. He locked his arm about it tightly, regardless of the sharp barnacles, which cut into his flesh, and peered upward at the hull of the *Persia*. The light in the fo'castle had been extinguished, however, and he heard the furious splashing of oars not twenty yards away, and watched a recurrent flash of light playing on the waters ahead of the departing enemy.

All of this had taken less than a minute, but it was fully that long before the thought of poor McSorley flashed across Warren's startled consciousness. For obvious reasons, he had not dared to call to the Irishman, but he had no doubt the veteran was clinging to the boat or to a neighboring pile.

Warren felt in his pocket for his electric torch, but it had slipped out and gone to the bottom. Almost at the same time he heard a gurgling and splashing back of him, and suddenly he remembered McSorley's statement that he could not swim. He let go the friendly pile and struck out in the direction of the sounds.

The Irishman had gone down for the second time, and Warren was bewildered. There was no further sound to guide him, so he treaded water, and waited. Presently a writhing object struck his knee. He reached for it, and his fingers closed on a thick mop of hair. As he brought the almost unconscious Irishman to the surface, the surging tide swept them both against a pile, and Warren clung to it with one arm

while he held his companion's head above water with the other.

McSorley was almost gone, but he had life enough still left in him to grasp Warren. A terrible nausea had seized McSorley, and he was spouting salt water at a tremendous rate. When he had at least half emptied himself of his bitter cargo, Warren spoke to him in low tones:

"Can you manage to hang to the pile by yourself, Mac?"

"I can—for a while," whispered poor McSorley hoarsely.

"Then hang on!" ordered Warren, and shoved him against the pile. He clung to it like a limpet, and Warren's hand, feeling around the dripping body, found the electric torch in the helper's pocket. Well incased as it was, he hoped that the salt water had not as yet penetrated sufficiently to injure the dry battery, and as he pressed the button a beam of light lit up their dark surroundings. Twenty feet away, their boat was swinging, tied to the pile, and, with a great feeling of relief, Warren noticed that the oars were still in the boat. He handed the torch to McSorley, who was clinging to the pile with arms and legs.

"Hold the torch, Mac," he whispered. "I'm going to swim to the boat and come back for you."

"Be quick about it, sir!" replied the ex-soldier weakly. "I can stand this terrible bumping about five minutes, and then it's Kitty bar the door!"

But Warren was off, swimming for the boat. He reached it rather abruptly with his nose, climbed in, cast off, and, guided by the light from the torch held in McSorley's free hand, he ran the boat alongside the Irishman, shipped his oars, reached overside, and, with a quick pull, hauled the half-drowned man in over the point of the bow.

"I'm a good soger but a poor sailor," half whimpered McSorley, whose courage, inured to bullets, had nevertheless

been put to a severe strain by his terrific experience.

Warren made no reply, but took his place on the thwart, and thrust out his oars.

"Light us out from under this awful dock," he said. "It may not be too late to catch a glimpse of that boat."

Glancing back over his shoulder, as McSorley, huddled in the bow, flashed the torchlight, Warren pulled with all his might toward the outer end of the dock, the sounds of retreat having indicated to him the course which the other boat had taken. Warren was confident that whoever the boatmen might be, they had not recognized him or McSorley, for their torch had flashed for barely an instant, and then fully four feet in front of Warren's skiff, and, while the bow of their little boat had been visible, Warren and McSorley, standing farther back, had been invisible; the smugglers, for such Warren felt them to be, anxious to avoid identification, had been glad to retreat in the dark and without betraying any curiosity as to the identity of the men in the customs boat.

Of one thing Warren was certain. The smugglers had not taken the time to rescue the bundle dangling on the string at the porthole. Their haste to escape, during which they had crashed into the customs boat, was indicative of their fright, and Warren had no doubt but that the fellow in the *Persia's* fo'castle, alarmed at what had happened, had drawn the opium back through the porthole.

The possession by one of the smugglers of a powerful electric torch, while to be expected of parties cruising under a dark dock, nevertheless helped to confirm Warren in his belief in Wyrick's guilt. All of the inspectors on the night watch carried them, and Warren had a feeling that, even if Wyrick had not been in that mysterious boat, some one of the force had.

As Warren came out from under the wharf and headed his boat north toward the ferry building, the sound of oars grating in rowlocks came faintly to him down the slight breeze that fanned the bay. With all his strength and skill, he strained at his oars.

Suddenly McSorley shouted: "I see them! I see the divils! Arrah, wait till I get me two hands on them!"

Warren turned. A ferryboat, making in to her slip at the ferry depot, had bent her powerful searchlight and picked up the end of the slip, and in the dazzling light Warren could see a small black skiff containing three men, two of whom were rowing furiously. The skiff lay directly in the path of the ferryboat's searchlight, and a cry broke from Warren:

"The fools! She'll hit them and drive them under."

He was right. In their haste to place as much distance as possible between them and pursuit, the men in the skiff had taken the chance of crossing the mouth of the ferry slip directly under the bows of the ferryboat. They had miscalculated by a slight margin, and as the searchlight picked them up Warren and McSorley heard a shout from the bridge of the ferryboat. A second or two later the great craft bore down on the skiff, drove it under, and surged on into her slip.

"Pull, ye divil!" shrieked Thaddeus McSorley. "We're not too late to pick up a smuggler or two, bedad! Arrah, but 'tis an unprofitable business!"

Warren bent to his oars, and the tide, well at the flood by this time, retarded him but little, while it swept the fragments of the skiff and her unfortunate occupants down the bay toward them.

"I hear wan av thim shouting bloody murder," piped McSorley. Sure enough, faint cries for help came to them out of the night. Within two minutes they were so close at hand that McSorley, sweeping the surrounding

waters with his torch, made out a black object swimming and begging piteously for help.

Warren, guided by McSorley, pointed the skiff toward the cries, and, as they glided past, the ex-soldier reached out and grasped the drowning man by the collar.

"I have him, sir!" he yelled. "Do ye give me a hand to lift him in. I'm that weak meself I can't manage him alone."

Warren dropped his oars and ran forward, and, an instant later, the dripping body was hauled into the boat. McSorley turned the torch full in his white face, and Warren started.

"Hello, Johnson!" he said. "So I've got you at last. What's become of the others?"

Johnson, for it was the boatman, commenced to cry. "I dunno, Warren," he wailed. "The ferryboat hit us. I jumped and cleared the paddles, but the others—were slow—and I didn't hear—them—callin'—"

"No more did I," interrupted the philosophical McSorley. "L'ave us cruise around and look for them. The ferryboat's put out a small boat, and she's cruisin' around, too."

But their search was in vain. After a perfunctory search of fifteen minutes, the ferry crew put back. Warren and McSorley, assisted by the rescued Johnson, searched and shouted and halloed for fifteen minutes longer, but could find no trace of the two men who had accompanied Johnson in the ill-fated skiff. Johnson himself was the first to give up.

"It's no use, Warren," he sobbed; "they're gone."

"Who were they?" Warren demanded.

Johnson's crafty soul shone through the tears in his eyes.

"I dunno, Warren. They engaged me this afternoon to row 'em over to Mission Rock Warehouse. They stayed late there an' made me wait for 'em,

and I was a-pullin' 'em back to Jackson Street wharf when the ferry run us down."

"Faith 'twas in a hurry ye were, me lad," said McSorley quizzically.

"Don't lie, Johnson. We chased you out from under pier No. 44. I've been keeping my eye on you quite a while, and now I've got you. You're an opium smuggler, Johnson. I lost out that day the *Mongolia* came in, but I've got you now. You lie when you say you spent the afternoon at Mission Rock. You ate your dinner to-night in Black Pete's. I saw you there."

"Well, you won't get nothin' out o' me," growled Johnson.

Warren made no reply. He pulled in at Curly's landing stage and stepped out on the float. Johnson followed him, and McSorley came next.

"Have a care would you thry any funny business, Johnson," warned the Irishman. "I have a gun p'inted at the geometrical cinter av your black-guard back."

"Oh, put up your gun, Thaddeus. I'm not going to bother with Johnson to-night. We're all wet and chilled, and it's no time to fool with small fry. I've got the goods on you, Johnson, but you can go. You have a wife and some kids, haven't you?"

The boatman did not answer, and Warren continued:

"You trot along home to your kids and your missus, Johnson, and don't tell anybody where you've been. If you don't I'll keep mum, and so will McSorley. You're not the man I'm after. I want the chap higher up, and you're too pitiful. Skip along, now, or you'll catch your death of cold. And remember—stick to boating. Leave smuggling to the others."

Johnson stood silent for a moment, stunned in the face of such magnanimity.

"You mean—you mean you're not

going to can me, Warren?" he said slowly.

McSorley chuckled: "Ain't he the innocent lamb?"

"No, you're not arrested. You can go this time; but remember! No more opium smuggling. If you try it again I'll get you, and I'll get you good and hard. Now, good night, and behave yourself."

"I'd like to shake hands first," said Johnson, and stuck out a calloused, chilly paw. Warren shook it heartily, and Johnson departed into the night.

"Tra-la-loo," caroled McSorley. "And ye might have the manners to say thank you." He turned to Warren as they ascended the steps to the bulkhead.

"'Tis not me habit to question me superiors, Mither Warren, but to save me sanity, will ye tell me why undher Heaven ye let that lad go about his business?"

Warren laughed. "I'd rather have his friendship than his enmity. Besides, while I can bluff Johnson, I could never bluff his attorney if it came to a show-down. We didn't see him under the *Persia's* dock, although we know for a moral certainty he was there. We can't prove anything on him, and if I'm any judge of human nature Johnson has had his fill of smuggling. The man was scared stiff. He's afraid of me now, and I have placed him under a debt of gratitude. Anyhow, what's the use. Sloughing a poor, ignorant devil like Johnson doesn't break up the opium traffic."

At the ferry, they hailed a taxi and went home. McSorley had nothing to say, for his teeth were chattering with cold. As he went up the stairs into the home of the man he was guarding, however, his tongue was loosened.

"Wirra, wirra," he said, "but civil life ain't half bad, at all, at all! Sure I've had adventures enough to-night to do me a week."

Black Pete's saloon and restaurant was closed when Warren and McSorley passed it by the following morning on their way to the mail dock. At one o'clock inspectors returning from luncheon brought word that Black Pete's place was still closed, and at quitting time the word was being passed along the water front that Black Pete had mysteriously disappeared. Also Warren was short one man in his day watch. Inspector Brennan had failed to report for duty, and inquiry at his home revealed the fact that Brennan had not been home the night previous.

When two days had passed and neither Black Pete nor Inspector Brennan had materialized, Tom Warren had an inspiration.

"I believe I'm gradually breaking up this opium ring, Karl," he remarked sententiously to Inspector Wemple. "Hereafter, Karl, make it a point to search the lunch baskets of every longshoreman that leaves this dock."

CHAPTER XVII.

About the time that Tom Warren and Thaddeus McSorley were having their adventure under the dock, Inspector Wyrick, dressed in plain clothes, a slouch hat pulled over his eyes, walked down Clay Street Hill and stopped at the corner of Spofford Alley. He was in the very heart of Chinatown. The busy Celestials, pattering by, took no notice of him, and, after a cautious survey of the neighborhood, he entered the alley and hurried along the sidewalk for half a block, pausing at last before the basement entrance of a narrow building.

Painted in black, sprawling letters above the door was the legend "Fong Kee, Clam Depot," and, underneath it, several Chinese characters.

Wyrick went down the stairs. An old Chinaman, shelling clams by the light of a kerosene lamp at the farther

end of the room, looked up and shuffled a step or two forward at his entrance.

"Hello, Fong!" said Wyrick. "How's tricks?"

"What's a malla? Wha' you want?" the Chinaman responded surlily.

Bill Wyrick cast about for a chair. "I want to have a little chat with you, Fong. You needn't get huffy about it." He took a Manila cigar from his pocket. "Have a smoke?"

The Mongol accepted the cigar, leaned over his lamp chimney, and sucked a light from the flame.

The foul odors of the place nauseated Wyrick, but his business was important, and he had to make the best of it.

"You're a stingy old chink, Fong," he twitted. "Won't even waste a match when you get a smoke for nothing. Ain't you even going to ask me to sit down?"

The Chinaman mumbled an unintelligible reply, lifted a coal-oil can, into which he had been opening clams, from a bench, and crunched the scattered shells under his slippers as he carried it to the other side of the room. He shuffled to the doorway, peered up the stairs for a moment, then closed the door and bolted it. Wyrick sniffed disgustedly, lighted a cigar, and sat down on the bench. Fong Kee, as if begrudging the time he had wasted, resumed his clam shelling.

"What's the matter with you, Fong?" asked Wyrick. "You've got an awful grouch on you to-night."

"Me no likee lose *ah-peen-yeen*. Cost heap plenty money. Wha's a malla you no blingum ashore?"

Wyrick frowned. "New man, top-side, he catchum," the inspector answered, lapsing into the pidgin English of the old clam dealer. "Take um to customhouse. Boil um. Pour um down sewer."

"*Gow!*" (dog) muttered the Chinaman. "No good!"

"You're right, Fong. You bet he's

no good! Maybe you no be careful, you go jail, Fong Kee."

"Wha' you say?" Fong Kee stopped shelling clams and gazed at the inspector. "Me not go plison. Johnny, he fix."

"Johnny can't fix this fellow. That's what I came to see you about. Johnny wants you to fix him."

If the Chinaman caught the inspector's meaning, he affected ignorance. "No can do, Misto Wylick. Johnny he catchum plenty money. He fix insplecto' alla time."

"This is different, Fong. No can fix Warren. Johnny he say you kill um."

The old Chinaman glanced nervously toward the door. "No! No!" he protested. "Him not my pidgin. Fong he fix all Chinamans. White man he must fixee white man himself."

"Listen here, Fong. You've got to do as I tell you, or you won't get any more *ah-peen-yeen*." Wyrick's tone was threatening now. "I'll show you how to get rid of Warren, and you won't get caught. You belong to the Hip Sing Tong, don't you?" In the seriousness of the business at hand, Wyrick forsook his pidgin English for the moment.

Fong Kee grunted.

"It won't be the first man you've done up, you old highbinder."

"How much you pay?" Fong sensed a chance for profit.

"Two hundred dollars."

"No can do. You give Fong littlee piecee money. Fong get caught—he get hung. White man he laugh. He no get caught."

"Three hundred dollars."

Fong Kee shook his head.

"Five hundred."

The Chinaman was silent, and Wyrick knew that he had named a tempting price.

"All right; that's settled," said the inspector, after a long pull at his cigar.

"You sure Johnny he makee pay?" the clam dealer asked at length.

"Sure, Fong Kee."

"All li'. How can do?"

"You can do easy, Fong. We send letter to Warren. We tell him where he catch smuggled *ah-peen-yeen*. He no get um. Then you make highbinder war."

Fong's eyes widened. He gazed at the inspector blankly. "Me no sabee. Wha' you mean?"

"You sabee fish dealer's name—you know place—two doors other side Hip Sing joss house?"

"Pon Chung's *yue lahn*" (fish market) answered the Chinaman.

"Pon Chung! That's the fellow, Fong. The letter say to Warren two hundred five-*tael* tins *ah-peen-yeen* go bottom side Pon Chung's fish stall tomorrow night. Warren think letter sent by some one who Pon Chung not pay for help smuggle opium. Warren he go quick to fish market—you ketchum. You know Warren, Fong Kee?"

"Sure! Me see um thlee, fo' time by mail dock when China steamer come in."

"Good! You have plenty friends alongside. You get five, six tong men to help you, you payum ten dollars apiece. You hide in joss-house door. You tell highbinders they wait in other doors. When Warren he stop by Pon Chung's place, you come out quick. All make big tong war. Some Chinamen fire in air. Much shoot. You not get hurt; but Warren must make die. You make get-away quick. Papers will say 'accident,' Fong Kee. Highbinder war come lots of times. No one get arrested, maybe. Tong man make die—no matter. White man make die—Chinaman make very bad witness; he not know who kill."

Fong Kee nodded his head, and there was a murderous gleam in his eyes. Back of the old Chinaman's stupid

countenance there was a crafty brain. Fong Kee's besetting sin was avarice, and he had lost a round sum of money through Warren's seizures of the opium. Hence, by entering into Wyrick's scheme, he could serve two masters—Revenge and Greed. Besides, the plan was absurdly simple, and Fong Kee had engaged in similar enterprises on former occasions, and always with success, although the victims had always been men of his own race. Johnny's word was as good as his bond, and Fong did not suspect for a moment that Bill Wyrick was not Johnny's mouthpiece in this affair, for Wyrick had had dealings with Fong frequently in the past, and Fong had turned over large sums of money to Wyrick, who acted in the capacity of agent for the man called "Johnny."

"Johnny"—it was a potent name. The head of the smuggling ring carried a deal of weight. Indeed, if the inspector had approached Fong Kee on his own behalf—if he had offered Fong twice the amount of money to put Tom Warren out of the way, to satisfy his own personal grudge, it is doubtful if the Chinaman would have entertained his proposition for a moment. But Wyrick understood the old clam dealer thoroughly, and was wise enough to put the burden of Warren's removal up to the head of the ring.

Wyrick waited patiently. Although the wizened Chinaman was looking at him intently, the inspector knew that his thoughts were elsewhere, that his brain was revolving the possibilities of the suggested plan.

Presently Fong Kee drew a deep puff of smoke from his cigar stub, threw the stub on the floor, and exhaled the smoke slowly through his nostrils.

"All li'; me fix um," he said, and resumed the shelling of his clams. From which, it would seem that the killing of a man was a matter of everyday occurrence with Fong Kee.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Fortunately, Tom Warren and Thaddeus McSorley were none the worse for their ducking. The morning following their mishap, Warren made his round of the north-side docks, and stopped at the inspectors' room in the ferry building on his way back to the *Persia*. Here, in addition to the daily official communications from the customs-house, he found a letter which was post-marked "one a. m.," and addressed to him in a scrawling hand. Its receipt somewhat surprised him, for the messenger usually took his mail direct to Pier No. 44 when the China steamers were in.

Warren opened the envelope, and perhaps it was fortunate that none of the inspectors were on hand to study his countenance as he read the missive it contained. It was a gem of illiteracy:

dear sir, I take my pen to warn you that there is dope coming in. I been standin in with a chink wot promised to split \$5.00 a tin for me helpin him to get it off, but he aint seen me with no dough. They aint no chinaman can dubble cross me. Pong Chung, number 19 Spofford Ally, is the name of the place which it will be brought to, two hundred tins. I red in the noospapers wot you been doin, and I hope you ketch Pong Chung. I dont want no money for this. I want to git even thats all. You go to Pong Chungs place tomorrow night about 10 oclock with a cupple of men and you can pinch the gang, take it from me. Hopin you will take this tip
One who is sore.

Warren's first feeling was one of exultation. He read the letter again. At last he had something tangible—some things that would lead him up to the headquarters of the smuggling ring.

He thought at first of handling the affair single-handed, but quickly abandoned the idea. It was too foolhardy.

Who would he select to help him make the raid? His old failing, indecision, returned to him in his crisis, and inasmuch as he had consulted Karl

Wemple in past difficulties, he decided to do so in the present dilemma.

He put the letter in his pocket and took the short cut along the water front to Pier No. 44, where he went at once aboard the *Persia*. None of Wemple's men were in sight, so he walked aft, giving the little three-note whistle that the searchers use as a signal to call each other when working separately. His call was answered when he leaned over the after hatch, and in a moment Karl Wemple appeared, looking aloft quizzically. Warren beckoned to him, and Karl came up on the deck.

Warren took the envelope from his pocket and handed it to Wemple. The old inspector read the letter through slowly, looked about him when he had finished, and handed it back without a word.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Warren asked impatiently.

"I don't know."

"You don't know! What's the matter with you, Karl? You ought to be tickled to death."

"I don't see nothing to laugh at, Tommy."

"Oh, you know what I mean! Why, it's the chance we've been waiting for—the chance to break up the smuggling ring."

"I ain't so sure about that."

"What do you mean, Karl?"

"Just because some sorehead wants to get even on a Chinaman, don't think we catch the whole band already, Tommy."

"Well, it may lead up to that," returned Warren, who was becoming irritated by Karl Wemple's apathy. "Anyway, I came to you for advice."

"So? You haven't asked the old man for advice lately. You been going it on your own hook, Tommy." Karl tried to look hurt, but his eyes were twinkling.

Warren, however, was too deep in his new problem to argue with Wemple.

"Who do you think I'd better take with me to-night, Karl?"

"You was really going to Chinatown, yourself?"

"Why, of course——"

"Don't do it."

"Why not?"

"Better you take that letter and show it to Graham. *Dummkopf* what you are! How do you know what you go up against?"

"What can Graham do? He don't like me—he'll take all the credit himself——"

"No! He'll make a big raid of it. You and Graham will vork together, and he'll have a dozen men on the job—then nobody gets hurt. He'll play it up for the papers, and the whole force gets a boost, Tommy. Better you play safe."

Tom Warren did not take kindly to Karl Wemple's suggestion, and a heated argument resulted, but the placid old inspector finally won his point in the end, and induced Warren to go to the customhouse.

When Warren opened the door of the deputy surveyor's office, he stopped inside the threshold somewhat nonplused, as he saw, sitting by the window, Mr. Graves, the secret-service chief. Graham was not in evidence.

"Well, Warren, have you caught the smugglers?" said Graves. The man from Washington was imperturbable.

In spite of the touch of irony back of Graves' salutation, Warren sensed again that note of friendliness.

"Not yet; but I expect to," he answered. "Read this, Mr. Graves." He handed over the letter.

Graves ran through it quickly. It was an old story to him.

"Hum-m-m! Anonymous," he said, when he had read it through. "It's the old game, Warren. Your anonymous letter writer is worse than a snake. He strikes in the dark. He is too much of a coward to show himself, for fear that

he will feel your heel, so he hides behind his anonymity, and puts it up to you to do his dirty work, and take all the risks. What are you going to do about this, Warren?"

"I had intended to lay the matter before Mr. Graham. I—er—thought two heads would be better than one. I didn't expect to see you, sir."

The secret-service chief chuckled. "Never mind bothering Mr. Graham," he said. "I'll take charge of this case myself."

"But, Mr. Graves——"

"Don't you think I can handle it?"

"Yes—of course—but I was going to say——"

"Warren, this may be a dodge to put you on a false scent; to get you out of the way while the smugglers put something over." He smiled enigmatically. "You went to the hospital once, you know."

Tom Warren gazed at him.

"That's so," he said slowly. "But my back is no longer sore, and I'd forgotten."

Graves creased the letter carefully and put it in his pocket.

"You stick close to the *Persia*, Warren," he said, "and I'll find out if this letter is straight goods."

CHAPTER XIX.

Warren went back to the *Persia*. He was disappointed, for his enthusiasm had had a setback when Karl Wemple had persuaded him to share the glory of the capture with Deputy Surveyor Graham, and finding Mr. Graves alone in the office, and so willing to relieve him of his Chinatown detail, had put the cap on his misfortunes.

How true the old saying, "The ways of Providence are inscrutable."

Tom Warren would have gone to certain death had he not decided to consult Karl Wemple.

Clearly, Bill Wyrick had determined to ignore the threat of the man called

"Johnny." Johnny, the head of the ring, and every inch a smuggler, was, nevertheless, not a murderer, and had told Wyrick in the little back room at Black Pete's that he would drop him from the ring very quickly if he tried in any way to bring bodily injury to Tom Warren. Nevertheless, Wyrick had not heeded him, for no other hand save the hand of Bill Wyrick could have been back of the attack on Warren at the coal bunkers, an attack which had been bungled through the timely appearance of Thaddeus McSorley.

Wyrick was certain of his ground after his visit to Fong Kee's clam depot, for he felt confident Warren would rise to his bait. He had even had assurance enough to write the anonymous letter to Warren, carefully disguising his handwriting, and relying on its illiteracy to dispel suspicion.

It is hardly necessary to go into details of Graves' investigation of the pretended opium cache at Pong Chung's fish market, and it is reasonable to infer that there was no "highbinder war" and no one to "make die," for when Fong Kee, hidden in the doorway of the Hop Sing Tong's joss house, saw among the half dozen plain-clothes men, who searched the fish market and the cellar beneath for opium, no man who in the remotest degree resembled Tom Warren, he remained discreetly in his doorway. Moreover, the plain-clothes men were members of the municipal police force, with years of experience among the denizens of Chinatown, for the secret-service chief had several strings to his bow, and, through the lessons learned in a long career in the pursuit of criminals, generally knew which string to pull.

When Warren arrived at the *Persia*, he ordered Thaddeus McSorley to keep a constant watch on Lind, who, in turn, was to give a prearranged signal should the suspected teamster visit the mail dock while the *Persia* was in port.

McSorley went below and took his station in a stateroom where he could see Lind through the porthole. He did not have a view of the entire dock, but if Lind should be called to another portion of the wharf, the ex-soldier could easily change staterooms, and the dock clerk would never be out of his sight for more than an instant.

It was late in the afternoon, and nothing had developed, although Karl Wemple had been the recipient of a "tip" that there had been a large cache of opium aboard. It was not one of those mysterious "grapevines" that are in the air whenever an Oriental liner is in port, but a message that came direct from the customhouse during Tom Warren's brief absence in the morning, and was founded on consular advices from Hongkong.

Warren, Wemple, and the searchers had already gone over a great portion of the steamer, but had found nothing. Harrison, Toland, and Caplan were searching forward, and Warren and Wemple had worked their way aft. They had crawled about in the coal bunkers, looked in the fire boxes, tapped the engine plates, poked their heads and their torches into the donkey boiler without success. Then Karl had an idea.

"Better we search the water tank, Tommy," he suggested.

"All right," assented Warren. "I am afraid it's no use, though. The tank's too open."

However, they unscrewed the manhole in the top of the steel tank and squeezed through the opening. The tank was about thirty feet long and six feet high, and was divided into several compartments. Ordinarily, it was used for water ballast, but it was empty now.

Warren and the old inspector wriggled through the narrow spaces between the bulkheads and the top of the tank, flashing their torches into each com-

partment in passing. They found each one empty.

When they reached the end of the tank, Karl Wemple was first to climb over the bulkhead. His torch flashed, and Warren, hearing a cry of surprise, squeezed through in a hurry. Looking in over Wemple's shoulder, he saw a pile of five-tael tins of opium on the floor of the last bulkhead. They were not stacked, but heaped up loosely, and Warren's experienced eye told him that there were between three and four hundred tins in the heap, the value of which would aggregate close to ten thousand dollars!

CHAPTER XX.

It was by far the largest single seizure of contraband opium that had been made in years, and Warren stared rather stupidly at the heap of small, red-labeled tins.

Presently he laughed and drew his arm affectionately around old Karl Wemple's shoulder.

"This is your find, Karl," he said. "I'll see that you get due credit for this. Great grief, what a clean-up! There'll be wailing and gnashing of teeth in Chinatown when they boil this stuff and pour it down a sewer."

"I am glad for you, Tommy," replied the old inspector earnestly. "I—I am old—an also ran, but you are young. You need the record, and, my boy, you're making it."

So busy were they, standing there in the gloom of the great tank, tossing bouquets at each other, that a slight metallic sound somewhere in the distance made no particular impression upon them. Karl leaned nonchalantly against the steel bulkhead and spurned some of the scattered tins with his toe. He had grown old and hopeless in the service, and, unlike Tom Warren, he had long since grown used to thrills.

"You stay here and guard this stuff, Karl, while I round up some of the boys

and have it removed to the appraisers' store," said Warren presently. "I'll tell McSorley to——"

His words were drowned in a roaring, rushing sound back of him. His first thought was that a steam pipe had burst in the ship, but the volume of sound quickly dispelled that notion, for the fires were nearly all out, and the steam pressure in the boilers consequently very low. It was the German who guessed first the reason for the noise, and his apathy vanished on the instant.

"Mine Gott in Himmel!" he shouted. "They have turned the water into the tank."

"Right you are, Karl. They're on to us and want to drive us out before we find the dope. Well, by Judas, they're too late this time!"

"Beat it!" shouted Karl, relapsing into one of his infrequent Americanisms, and together they scrambled over the bulkheads. It was as Karl Wemple had guessed. The valves were open, and the several compartments in the huge tank were filling rapidly. As they reached the compartment under the manhole the roaring grew louder, and they found themselves sloshing around in water over their ankles.

"By George, the man that turned this water on will suffer for it!" bellowed Warren. He was fighting mad now. The third officer was aboard, and he would demand an investigation.

He groped about over his head for the opening through which they had crawled into the tank, but could not find it, and a horrible fear seized upon him. He flashed his torch at the roof of the tank, and a cry of terror came from him.

"The manhole is closed!" he shrieked. "They're going to drown us like rats in a hole."

Desperately they each pressed a stout palm against the cover, twisting and turning in a vain endeavor to loosen it.

Their efforts were in vain, and the phlegmatic old German's face was a sickly white in the glare of Warren's torch as they ceased their struggles and faced each other.

It was then that Tom Warren showed the stuff of which he was made. After that first terrible instant of fright he got back his nerve, despite the fact that he realized his enemies had trapped him at last, and that the tenure of his life was but a matter of minutes now.

"You hammer with your screw driver on the tank, Karl," he shouted, "and I'll see if I can plug the intake pipe," and he began to strip off his dungarees. Wemple commenced to pound frantically with his screw driver. Warren saw his lips moving, and knew that he was praying.

The intake pipe was a large one, and the pumps were powerful ones. Warren knelt in the rising flood and strove with all his strength to thrust his dungarees into the mouth of the pipe, but the inrush was too great. In despair, he dropped the garment and thrust his hands into the pipe, but the force of the water thrust them aside as if they had been so much thistledown, and realizing that he could not hope to stop the water, Warren seized his own screw driver and joined Karl in hammering on the side of the tank. The water was up to their knees now. In ten minutes it would be up to their armpits.

Minute after minute they tapped, while the water rose and the chill assurance of their fate gripped the two inspectors. Warren knew his men would search for him presently, and that the tank would be opened. There was a chance that they would come before it was too late.

The water had reached their armpits. Slowly it crept upward over their shoulders, and, standing on their toes, they still pounded. Only a new sound now filled the small space still left in the tank in which a sound might reverber-

ate. It was the sound of insane cries from the two imprisoned men, as the water encircled their necks.

Then they gave up hope and the tapping ceased.

CHAPTER XXI.

At about a quarter of five Thaddeus McSorley, standing well inside the stateroom and back of the open port, saw a teamster drive down the mail dock and swing his team in behind Lind, who was checking a load. The dock clerk looked up for an instant as the truck rumbled by him; then he raised both arms, stretched them full length, brought his closed fist back to his shoulders, and yawned profoundly.

Lind had not yet resumed his checking before Thaddeus McSorley had fled from the stateroom and dashed forward in a hurry to find Warren and get his orders, for Lind had signaled the arrival on the dock of the suspected drayman, and there was no time to lose. If the drayman took a full load, well and good; but if he had come for a few cases only, he might be loaded up and gone before Warren should have an opportunity to formulate a line of action, and it might take fifteen minutes to find Warren in the bowels of the great steamer.

McSorley leaned over the hatches and sounded the little three-note whistle of the searchers. It was answered at last from the chain locker in the bow of the steamer, where Harrison, Toland, and Caplan were searching. Harrison came on deck.

"Have ye seen the chief?" demanded McSorley.

"He and Wemple went aft," replied Harrison, and went back into the chain locker.

McSorley ran along the 'tween-decks, repeating his call continuously, but receiving no answer. He dropped down into the engine room, looked into

the coal bunkers, and peered out into the shaft alley. Still no answer. He was on the point of leaving the stern of the ship when he heard a faint tapping, and paused. Perhaps Warren and Wemple were sounding some hollow compartment. However, the tapping was continuous, and McSorley decided that it was some boilermaker at work and passed on. As he neared the water tank, however, the tapping sounds grew louder. He was about to pass the tank when he paused suddenly.

Surely that tapping came from inside the tank!

McSorley glanced at the top of the tank and saw that the manhole was closed. Nevertheless that incessant tapping continued to come from under his very nose. He stood there pondering, and presently the tapping became more irregular; McSorley thought the blows were weaker than they had been. He drew his six-shooter and rapped smartly against the tank thrice. Instantly the tapping from within was resumed furiously for perhaps thirty seconds; then, save for an occasional tap, it died away completely.

But Thaddeus McSorley had been answered. There could be no doubt about it. Somebody was imprisoned in that tank and desirous of getting out, so Thaddeus McSorley threw the lever, unscrewed the cover, and lifted it off.

The pale face of Tom Warren gleamed at him out of the water not six inches below the open manhole. Warren was holding Karl Wemple in his arms, for Karl was three inches shorter than Warren, and had not Warren lifted him above the rising flood his mouth and nose would have been under water fully two minutes before the water shut off the air from Warren.

Thaddeus McSorley's arm shot downward and grasped the old inspector by the collar. Up he came, limp and dripping, sprawling out on the tank where Thaddeus incontinently tossed

him. An instant later, Warren lay beside him, both thoroughly exhausted. They had been rescued not a minute too soon.

McSorley eyed them whimsically, but not without concern in his humorous Irish eyes.

"Well, sir," he said, as Warren, first to recover himself, grinned up at Thaddeus sheepishly, "ye'll need no bath this Satherd'y night, I'm thinkin'. Who tried the water cure on ye? Tell me his name, sir, an' I'll put so many holes in him he won't be able to contain himself."

"If I knew," said Tom Warren, "I'd do it myself. There's about ten thousand dollars' worth of dope floating around in there, Thaddeus."

"Well, there's more on this dock this minute, for that blackguard av a teamster is loadin' now. I was hunting for ye to tell ye about it, when I heard ye tappin'—here, ye little German bombshell! L'ave be, I tell ye! Hands off! You're as welcome as a wet dog—well, may the divil take ye for a sentimental auld fool, Karl Wemple."

After relieving himself of more water than he had drunk in a month, Karl Wemple had come to sufficiently to realize that the funeral arrangements had been postponed indefinitely, and with a sputter of oaths the son of the Fatherland had cast himself into McSorley's arms and implanted an affectionate kiss upon each of the ex-sergeant's suntanned cheeks. Had a mine exploded under McSorley he could not have been more surprised or horrified. He shoved Wemple away roughly, and, blushing like a girl, he said to Warren:

"The Dutchman's sufferin's have de-ranked him. Call Toland, sir, an' sind the auld fool home in a hack."

"Oh, Thaddeus McSorley," roared Tom Warren, "I love you like a brother!" and, grasping Thaddeus in his arms, he tangoed around with him for fully a minute.

"Don't blame Karl, Thaddeus," he said joyously, "it's a habit the Germans have with those they love."

"L'ave be, ye ramping lunatic," shouted McSorley, "an' pay attintion to me message. Haven't I towld ye there's a certain man on the dock awaitin' our attintion."

"Then get out of here, you Irish rascal! Lay for him outside the dock gate and pick him up when he drives out. Follow a block in his rear and find out where he delivers his load. Stick by him until the last chow case is disposed of, if it takes you a week. When you have the right information for me, report back. I shall be at the Eagle Café all evening. Run along now, McSorley. Leave the dock now without attracting the attention of Wyrick and Gilmore, and if you want me call me on the phone. Karl and I are going into the engine room to dry out."

McSorley turned without further ado and vanished. Before he had reached the dock he had managed to dig up a couple of official-looking envelopes from Toland and Harrison, and carrying them ostentatiously in his hand, he sauntered easily down the gangplank. In the inspectors' room, he discarded his dungarees, got into his street clothes, and walked briskly out the dock gate. In a saloon a block away, he paused, purchased a drink, and stood nibbling cheese and crackers at the free lunch counter until a quick glance over the swinging doors showed him the suspected teamster driving by with a dozen cases of "chow" goods; whereupon McSorley took up the trail, keeping a block or two behind the truck, but never for an instant letting it out of his sight.

CHAPTER XXII.

When Warren left the mail dock at the usual hour that evening, he casually remarked, for the benefit of several inspectors who were washing up and

joshing each other in the assembly room, that he had a hot tip on some smuggled opium in Chinatown, and was going to pull off a little round-up of his own.

He had already given his orders to Karl Wemple and the men he trusted. Both Wemple and Warren were both entirely recovered from the effects of their horrible adventure of the afternoon, and had dried their clothing in the engine room. Old Karl was still a little nervous, but declared himself game for whatever the night might have in store for him.

Warren had figured that if, as Graves seemed to suspect, the anonymous letter which he had received that morning had been a plant designed for the purpose of getting him out of the way, the news that he had taken the bait would quickly be passed to headquarters if, as he suspected, there were agents of the smuggling ring in his own force of customs inspectors.

He went uptown to a quiet café, entered a box, and ordered his dinner, mentioning to the waiter that he expected a call on the telephone. He made a leisurely meal, and was lingering over his cigar and black coffee, when Thaddeus McSorley burst in upon him.

"Well, Mac?"

"Begorry, we've got thim——"

"Why didn't you phone me?"

"I dassen't. I'm afraid av them tellfomes, and besides, I knew I'd have time to find ye in perrson. Besides, divil a bite at all have I had this day since breakfast. Ye might have the dacency to ask a man if he has a mouth?"

Warren ordered his henchman a steak and potatoes, and when the waiter had gone to the kitchen, McSorley told his story.

"I trailed him up into Chinatown, and he shtopped at Shui On's store in Washington Street, near Grant Avenoo,

where he unloaded all but wan case ——"

"That alibis Shui On," interrupted Warren. "I always did like that old chink. He's a merchant, and doing a legitimate business. Well, what next, Thaddeus?"

"I followed the truck down Washington Street again to Market. 'Twas dusk be that time, and whin we got down Market almost to the ferry, he turned down Stewart Street. 'Twas as dark as the Ninth Cavalry be that time, an' he pulled up in front av a buildin' between Howard an' Mission. After some palaver at the door, he rolled the case inside, an' I crept up close to the open door and hearrd the case go bumpin' an' scrapin' downstairs. Whin I hearrd them comin' upstairs ag'in, I lepped out into a vacant lot next door an' hid behind the fince. 'Tell Jerry to come at ten o'clock,' says wan av the two men. 'I will,' says the teamster, an' he got on his truck an' drove away, jinglin' goold in his pocket."

"What did you do next?"

"I hired a taxi an' come right away here, an' be the same token the taxi man is outside yet, waitin' for his pay. I towld him to wait till I'd had a bite."

"Did you mark down this place in Stewart Street, Thaddeus? You'll have to lead us there at ten o'clock."

McSorley raised his hand in disgust. "Ye gossoon! D'ye think it's a child I am. I reconnoitered it from all angles. It has big iron doors in front, all locked an' bolted tight, wit' a small door cut into the big main door. In the rear av the buildin' there's a small wooden door. Guard each door, an' ye have thim. 'Tis best to attack from the rear, for 'tis all vacant lot back av it, an' we can come in from Spear Street."

"Hurry up and finish your dinner, Mac. To-night's the night, and we'll bust this smuggling ring wide open or I'm a Chinaman."

When McSorley had finished eating,

they entered the waiting taxicab and went to a public-telephone station, where Warren entered a soundproof booth and called three numbers. After brief conversations with each, he came out, dismissed the taxi, and turned to his faithful bodyguard.

"Well, we have a couple of hours' time to kill," he explained. "Mac, let's go to a moving-picture show until it's time to get busy."

CHAPTER XXIII.

At five minutes past ten six shadowy figures, guided by Thaddeus McSorley, stole across the lot back of the Stewart Street building where the teamster had delivered the chow case that same evening. When they were close to the rear of the building, two of the figures detached themselves from the group and slipped along the wall into Stewart Street, under orders to guard the main entrance. Warren, McSorley, Toland, and Caplan made their way, with extreme caution, to the little back door.

Warren crouched close to it, his ear at the keyhole, listening. From within came the faint sound of voices.

Toland and Caplan carried axes, and Warren was on the point of giving them the signal to break in the door when McBride, one of the men who had been detailed in front of the building, came running back along the wall.

"We've got Gilmore," he whispered. "Ran plump into him as we were sneaking along the wall. I think he must have been on guard. He's scared to death and begging for mercy. He wants to see you, Warren, and says he'll squeal on the gang if you'll only promise to do your best to let him down easy."

"What have you done with him?"

"Harrison is holding him covered. What'll we do with him?"

"I'll see," said Warren, and, following McBride, he went around to the

front of the building, where he found Gilmore cowering under the menace of Harrison's gun. Fear had rendered the man spineless, and upon Warren's promise of a plea at headquarters for immunity for him, the dock clerk agreed to follow his instructions implicitly. He took the precaution to handcuff Gilmore, however, before ordering him to precede him back to the rear of the building, while Harrison and McBride resumed their vigil at the front entrance.

Arrived at the small door in the rear, Gilmore inserted a key in the lock, but the lock was evidently a false one, for the inspectors clustered behind Gilmore caught the sound of a distant buzzing, which ceased the moment the key was withdrawn. They waited. A minute passed; then six distinct taps were heard on the inside of the door. Gilmore answered with a pause between the second and third raps; a bar grated and the door swung inward.

Tom Warren presented a large black gun in the face of the man who opened the door, and Thaddeus McSorley, pressing close beside him, clasped a red, hairy paw over the man's mouth before he could cry out. Silently and swiftly the man was bound and gagged and laid on the floor, with Caplan to guard him and Gilmore.

A faint light showed below a stairway entrance some thirty feet inside the building, and toward this the raiding party cautiously went. Warren and Wemple, stooping, could just make out a group of four men gathered around a packing case, upon which a small kerosene lamp stood. A broad-shouldered man, with his back to the stairs, was leaning over the case and counting out coin into separate piles, while in the foreground stood a chow case with the lid ripped off, showing it to be level-full with five-tael tins of opium.

Warren and Thaddeus McSorley tip-

toed down the stairs side by side until the entire scene was exposed to view.

"Hands up!" It was the irrepressible McSorley who gave the order, and by way of emphasis he fired twice over the heads of the little knot of smugglers. They whirled, and every arm shot skyward, with the exception of those of the man who was counting out the money. He did not even turn to face the intruders, for, as McSorley's bullet flattened on the masonry dead-wall over him, he quietly blew out the light. On the instant the inspectors leaped down the stairs and sprawled on the floor, while a perfect fusillade of bullets from a brace of automatics whined over them.

"Don't shoot at the flashes," warned McSorley, to whom the song of the bullet was very old.

They were in total darkness, and the acrid smell of powder filled the basement. Presently, his automatics being empty, the cool individual who had blown out the light ceased shooting, and McSorley, who, finding himself in a gun fight, had naturally and inevitably assumed command, spoke.

"What a stupid fool ye are," he said gently. "I could have killed ye a dozen times, ye gossoon, and be the same token I've killed betther men for less. Ye're thrapped like mice. Think betther av it now, you with the automatics, but if ye must do *some* shootin' blow yer own brains out——"

A shot answered him. One of the smugglers had fired at the sound of the daring Hibernian's voice, and the bullet scored McSorley's shoulder. He rolled over on the floor, while the bullets sang over him; then fired at the flashes from the gun of the man who was shooting at him. There was the sound of a falling body, a voice cried chokingly: "My God! He's got me. I'm a dead man," and one of the smugglers whimpered.

"Next!" roared Thaddeus McSorley. He was every inch a soldier. "D'ye

think this is a strawberry festival, me bucko? I've had years av practice at night fightin'; I'm at home here, an' ye're not. You wit' the money! Light that lamp ag'in. Quick!"

A match scratched and flickered, and the big man cursed as he burned his fingers on the hot lamp chimney. Warren flashed his electric torch on the group, and every hand went up again, two of them clutching revolvers. Warren and McSorley kept their lights playing on the group and kept them covered, while Wemple and Toland removed the guns from the smugglers and snapped the handcuffs on their wrists.

"I hit wan av them," said McSorley complacently. To kill a man in the line of duty worried Thaddeus McSorley about as much as it worries a small boy to shoot an English sparrow.

"He's back of the packing case," said Toland, and flashed his light on the form huddled there.

The inspectors looked behind the case. Lying on his back, with his glazed eyes staring, unblinking, into the dazzling circle of light, lay Bill Wyrick, the customs inspector who had found his duty less profitable than smuggling. He had been shot twice through the breast, and was quite dead. In his hand he still clutched the revolver with which he had fired upon McSorley.

"Ach, dis iss terrible!" said Karl Wemple.

"'Twas the best way out for Wyrick," rejoined the philosophical McSorley. "Betther death nor dishonor. He saw the uniforms and knew the inspectors had got him. Why, he's in uniform himself——"

The Irishman paused, for Tom Warren's gun had fallen, clattering to the concrete floor of the basement, and he was staring, open-mouthed, at the broad-shouldered man who was evidently the leader of the ring.

"You—John Spencer!" he whispered,

and backed away, horrified. "I—I—didn't know! How could I?"

It was true. The leader of the opium smugglers was John Spencer, father of the girl Tom Warren loved and hoped to make his wife, and the capture had been made in Spencer's ship-chandlery store. In the excitement of the chase, and having approached the store from the rear, Warren had failed to recognize the place in the dark.

McSorley, born leader that he was, and the coolest man among them, calmly picked up Warren's revolver and twirled it gently by the trigger guard. He realized on the instant that Warren stood face to face with tragedy—that between the leaders of the smugglers and his chief lay something greater than the mere animal interest that must ever obtain between hunter and hunted. Spencer stood, licking his dry lips and eying Tom Warren curiously. McSorley, with the quick wit of his race, hastened to cover his chief's embarrassment.

He reached for one of the prisoners—a wizened little Chinaman, and about-faced him roughly.

"Up the stairs wit' you! Wemple, do you cover wan, and do you, Toland, take charge av the other. Misther Warren himself'll look afther the other lad. Up outer this wit' the gang av them!" and before Wemple and Toland realized that they were being ordered about by a man with no authority, Tom Warren found himself alone in the basement with John Spencer. Spencer was the first to speak.

"Warren," he said gravely, "I congratulate you. This will mean quite a feather in your cap."

"I would rather some other man had placed it there, sir," murmured Warren. "You must know the anguish this causes me—not to mention the terrible blow it will be to Ruth and her mother."

Spencer's glance dropped, and brave

and reckless as he was, a tear started down his cheek.

"This is awful," he said huskily—"awful. But it might be worse. Thank God you have made the arrest!"

"Why?" demanded Warren, stupidly.

"You love my daughter, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You wouldn't ruin her life by—by——"

Warren slowly shook his head. "I can't dodge the issue," he said miserably. "I'd like to—to——"

"You can do it clean, Warren. Only let me get away to-night, and I'll be out of the city and stay out for good. When we get upstairs, don't put the cuffs on me. Stand between me and your men, and when I make a break fire on me. You can fire high. One jump out the door and I'm gone in the darkness. Warren, for the sake of my family—for Ruth's sake, listen to reason. If I go to the pen they'll never hold up their heads again, but if I get away to-night they can follow later, and we can start life all over again in Canada."

Warren shook his head, although his heart was breaking. "It can't be done, it can't be done!" he murmured miserably.

"I'll make it worth your while to let me go. On my word of honor, once I get away clean, I'll send you ten thousand dollars——"

Warren raised his hand beseechingly. "Please don't make it hard for me," he said. "It's no use to try to bribe me. I can't be bought. It breaks my heart to do it, for Ruth's sake, but I'm going to land you in the city prison to-night."

Spencer's nerve was gone at that dogged ultimatum. He went to his knees and commenced to beg for mercy, imploring Warren, by every tie, to give him a running chance in the dark.

"For the sake of my wife and family—for the sake of your own future happiness, Warren, listen to reason. You've broken up the ring, you've got

the goods. Isn't that glory enough? This means a long prison term for me and disgrace to my family——"

"I can't dodge my duty, Spencer. We've both played the game according to our lights, and it's the fortunes of war that you lose."

"But think of Ruth——"

"I *am* thinking of her," and Warren choked back a sob. "Precede me upstairs—please—and don't try to get away. The Irishman will outrun you if you start, and he'll kill you before you've gone twenty yards."

Spencer bowed his head. The realization had come to him that here was a man who could not be bought. He gathered up the money piled on the packing case and stood looking at Tom Warren with a pleading, half-surprised look in his bold eyes. Warren pointed to the stairway, and, preceded by John Spencer, they rejoined the posse waiting with the other prisoners on the main floor. He turned Spencer over to Thaddeus McSorley, who promptly linked him to Gilmore, while Warren went into Spencer's office, called up the morgue, and instructed them to send the wagon for Wyrick's body. Next he called up the harbor-police station and asked to have the black Maria sent to Spencer's ship-chandlery store, and while he waited for both wagons to arrive he remained alone in the darkened office where none might see his great distress and silently fought between his love and duty.

When the morgue attachés and the police-patrol wagon arrived, the prisoners were bundled into the wagon. Toland and Caplan were left in the store to guard the opium until morning, and Warren sent Karl Wemple home to bed, for the excitement of that never-to-be-forgotten day had been too much for the old fellow's stolid nerves, and he was on the verge of collapse. Harrison and McSorley accompanied Warren in the patrol wagon with the pris-

oners up to the harbor station, where the smugglers were locked up for the night, pending their removal to the Alameda County jail by the Federal authorities in the morning. And when he had the smuggling ring under lock and key, Tom Warren rang up Graham, deputy surveyor of the port. The latter had evidently been awakened from a sound sleep.

"Well, well," he growled, "who is it?"

"Warren speaking. I've captured the entire smuggling ring."

"What!"

"All of them, sir. Rounded up the entire outfit in John Spencer's ship-chandlery store. Spencer is the ring-leader. And I regret to report that Inspector Wyrick, whom I had under surveillance for some time, was found with the smugglers. He resisted arrest, and one of my men found it necessary to kill him."

"Wha—who—why, what the devil, Warren! Wyrick killed and Spencer—what Spencer?"

"John Spencer, the ship chandler in Stewart Street. I've just made the raid, I tell you."

"Why didn't you inform me of your contemplated raid?" bellowed Graham. "You're running things with too free a hand altogether. Why didn't you consult with me?"

"Well, if you must know, sir," said Warren humbly, "I didn't have to, and it is merely an excess of courtesy which prompts me to call you up now."

"But, Spencer—surely you've made a mistake, Warren. Spencer's standing is beyond question. If you've blundered, Warren, you'll pay dearly for it. You'll feel the weight of Spencer's influence. Where are you now?"

"At the harbor-police station with my prisoners."

"Hold them there. I'll be right down. Stay there until I arrive."

"Foxy old Graham," mused Warren,

as he hung up. "He's going to try to save his face to-night. He'll beat the reporters to the station and hog the credit for this raid himself. And he can't get over his habit of giving me orders. Wish I knew where Graves could be found. I'd ring him up, too."

Graham arrived in a taxi within twenty minutes. He glowered at Warren, lolling with his back against the front of the sergeant's desk.

"Well, sir," he said brusquely, "explain your failure to keep me in touch with your plans——"

"Explain nothing, you crook!" roared Tom Warren. "Sergeant, I arrest this man in the name of the government of the United States and charge him with the crime of smuggling as an accessory before the fact. Graham, you're under arrest. Sergeant, will you please be kind enough to lock this man up? I'll prefer a charge against him in the morning."

CHAPTER XXIV.

For several seconds Deputy Graham stood, mouth agape, staring at Warren, the acting deputy, who had dared to impugn his integrity and order him under arrest. Presently Graham attempted a laugh—a dry, uneasy laugh.

"Warren," he said, "upon my word you're immense. A boob like you going to such lengths to get my job. Sergeant, pay no attention to this man. I am J. B. Graham, deputy surveyor of the port of San Francisco, and this fellow is merely a customs inspector and under my supervision."

"Show your authority to countermand my authority," smiled Warren. "Show the sergeant your badge of office."

"I—I left it home," quavered Graham.

"I figured you would." He flashed his own inspector's shield. "I guess that goes, doesn't it, sergeant?"

The police sergeant opined that it did, and called an officer. "Lock this man up," he said tersely. "Never mind now, Mr. Graham. Mr. Warren may be wrong, but I cannot decide that question. He has the authority to arrest you on information and belief, and I cannot argue with you."

Graham's face turned what Huckleberry Finn calls "a fish-belly white."

"Before you consummate this outrage, Warren, suppose you permit me to call up Mr. Graves."

"Certainly! I have no desire to abuse you. Mr. Graves gave me a contract to clean up this smuggling ring, and I'm only performing a very unpleasant duty. Sergeant, will you kindly permit Mr. Graham to use the phone?"

Graham called up Graves at his hotel and asked him to come at once to the harbor-police station, and within half an hour the secret-service chief arrived. Quivering with rage and apprehension, Graham explained the charge which Warren had made against him.

"This is very serious, Warren," said Graves. "It brings discredit on the service, and unless you can substantiate your charge beyond the shadow of a doubt, all of your good work in rounding up this smuggling ring will not avail to hold you in your job, I assure you of that."

"I have the affidavits of two witnesses. Spencer, the head of the ring, and Gilmore, the dock clerk. Each has confessed. For some time, Mr. Graves, I have suspected that Mr. Graham might have been a silent partner in this business—in fact, ever since I first became convinced that Wyrick, one of our own inspectors, was actively associated with the ring. To-night, when I made the astounding discovery that John Spencer was the head of the ring, I recalled the fact that he and Graham have been friendly for years. I had often seen them lunching together in a lower Market Street café. Besides,

Wyrick, the late captain of the watch, was Graham's appointee. It was just a hunch I had, Mr. Graves, but it occurred to me to work it up, so to-night I went into Graham's office and rooted through his files. In his desk I found some canceled checks, and in his letter files I found a letter explaining to Spencer that he was powerless to remove me from my position as captain of the watch. I sprung this evidence on Spencer and frightened him into signing a written confession. Gilmore was the go-between, and frequently carried the cash to Graham. I have their written confessions, signed before a notary public. I spent two hours with them before calling up Mr. Graham. I was too tired to go out after him myself, so he saved me the trouble by coming to the station himself. Inspector Brennan, you will recall, has not been seen for several days. He was drowned while being pursued by me. I caught him under Pier No. 44, attempting to smuggle opium off the *Persia*. Brennan, by the way, is Graham's brother-in-law. I have the goods on this man, Mr. Graves, and I demand his arrest," and Warren handed a sheaf of papers toward Graves. Graham made a wild grab for them, but Graves beat him to it.

"Lock him up, sergeant," said Graves, and showed the police officer his secret-service badge. Wildly weeping and protesting, Graham was led away to a cell, while Graves coolly skimmed through the documents which Warren had handed him and which conclusively proved that Graham had been cognizant of the operations of the ring and had shared in the profits of their illegal industry.

"Well, Warren," said the secret-service chief presently, "I congratulate you, my boy. You've landed the entire gang high and dry at one cast."

"Not quite, sir," replied Warren, smiling wanly. "I didn't get Black

Pete. He, with Inspector Brennan, was drowned when the ferryboat *Encinal* hit that skiff in front of her slip the other night. I captured a boatman named Johnson, who is a smuggler, but I let him go. He's a poor, ignorant devil, and has a family depending upon him. However, when the *Mongolia* gets back to port again I'll land a few more of the small fry, although I believe them to be independent operators. At any rate, the backbone of the ring is broken, as I promised you it would be."

"That's about all that counts, Warren. The searchers can keep the rest of the traffic within normal bounds hereafter. And now, if you are through here for the night, I suggest you go home. I have a taxi waiting outside. Come with me," and he drew Warren's arm in his and led him outside.

"Tell me where you live, Warren, and I'll take you home," said Graves, when they found themselves seated in the taxi.

"I'm not going home," replied the acting deputy sadly. "I have to go out to John Spencer's home."

"Why? Haven't you secured enough evidence——"

Warren laid his hand on Graves' knee. "After to-night, Mr. Graves, I'm off this case. I don't care to have anything more to do with it, and I want to be relieved. I'm going out now to break the news of Spencer's arrest to his wife and daughter. It's going to be a hard job—much harder than breaking up a smuggling ring."

"Then why bother about it, my boy? Let them read it in the newspapers tomorrow morning. Why distress yourself?"

"I've got to. Spencer's daughter, Ruth, is my affianced wife."

"What!" It had been a long time since Graves had been so surprised.

"Yes," continued Warren dully, "we've been engaged for more than a

year, and we were to have been married when I got ahead a little farther."

"I'm sorry," said Graves. "I'm dreadfully sorry. And I do hope it won't make any material difference in your plans—this affair of to-night."

"It will. You can't put a girl's father in a Federal prison and still hope to marry her. It's against human nature."

"I fear it is, Warren. Did you realize this when you arrested Spencer?"

"Did I realize it?" Warren tried to laugh, but made a dismal failure of it. "Spencer offered me ten thousand dollars to give him a ten-foot running start in the dark. He even appealed to me on the score of his family, and begged me for Ruth's sake——"

"You ass! Why didn't you let him go?" Graves demanded hotly.

"I was under suspicion myself—unjust suspicion, and I had to make good. Besides, I was never a crook. I can stand to lose the girl, but I could never be quite happy if I lost my honor. It's about all I have in this world; and, besides, I hoped Ruth would, in time, realize the fix I was in and see things in a different light."

He spoke slowly, monotonously, as if a supreme burden of woe had been placed upon him and the limit of human suffering reached at one stroke of fate. Graves was silent for several minutes as they rumbled through the deserted streets of the sleeping city.

"I never figured you a crook, Warren," he said presently. "I knew you for an honest man that first morning we met in Graham's office. Nevertheless, I didn't figure Graham as a dishonest man—merely a stupid, blundering fool, foisted on the service in payment of a political debt."

They had arrived in front of the Spencer home, and Warren alighted. He stood by the side of the taxi and held Graves' hand a moment. The little man stroked his whiskers cattishly with

the other hand and regarded Warren with a half-amused smile.

"Don't give up the ship, Warren," was his parting admonition. "If the girl is worthy of you she won't throw you over, and, if she throws you over, consider yourself lucky. Remember! This is a case of a crook's daughter tossing over an honest man. Stand your ground and wait patiently. It will all come out right in the finish."

He wrung Warren's hand, and the taxi rolled away. Warren climbed the steps and rang the front-door bell, and after about a minute Ruth answered the bell. She was dressed in a filmy, lacy garment which she had slipped on over her night robe, and her brown, luxuriant hair hung down her back in two long, girlish braids.

"Oh, is it you, Tom, dear?" she said, startled. "I thought it was father. I've been awake in bed, reading and waiting for him to come home—why, what's the matter, Tom?"

He had stepped silently inside and closed the door behind him, and was staring at her with troubled eyes. She came to him and placed her hands on his shoulder.

"Has something happened?" she whispered. "Tell me."

Tom Warren gently removed her little white hands. The dumb agony in his eyes affrighted her.

"Sweetheart," he said slowly and evenly, "your father isn't coming home to-night. I arrested him at ten o'clock as an opium smuggler, and he is now in the harbor-police station. He will go from there to the Federal prison at Leavenworth or McNeil's Island. I made a raid to-night, and your father was caught with the rest of the gang. He was caught red-handed—and I couldn't let him go. I couldn't warn him—I didn't know—I—I never suspected——"

She drew away from him as if his very touch contaminated her.

"And you arrested *my* father, Tom. You took him to prison—knowing what this disgrace means to—to—mo—ther—and me——"

She leaned against the wall and hid her quivering face in her bare, white arms.

"Yes, I realized all that, Ruth," the man went on inexorably. "I could have connived at his escape—only he offered me money to let him go, and—and—my honor and his life were both at stake. If I had let him go, I would have been a traitor to the service—and besides, McSorley would have chased him and probably killed him—I——"

He was silent a moment, biting his lip and gazing at her piteously.

"Is it going to be the same between us after this, Ruthie?" he said presently. "Answer, Ruthie. Can you view this thing as a man would view it——"

She turned on him passionately. "No, I cannot," she cried, "for if you had loved me you would have thought first of me and placed my happiness above your honor! Go! I never want to see your face again!"

He bowed with old-fashioned courtesy. "Good night, sweetheart," he said gently. "I do not blame you; only I've made the mistake of loving you too well, and of playing the game as men play it. Good night. I'm so sorry for you, dear—but I couldn't help it."

"You could," she sobbed. "You're climbing to promotion over the broken hearts of my father and mother and me, and I hate you."

He opened the door, passed out, and closed it softly behind him. Outside, a million stars sprinkled the sky with their radiance, but the light had gone out of the world for Tom Warren. He walked home, stumbling along, blinded by the tears which even a strong man may shed at times and without shame. He had done his duty and sacrificed his love, and the fruits of victory had turned to ashes in his hands.

CHAPTER XXV.

Three months after Tom Warren had made his spectacular raid which resulted in the capture of the opium smugglers whose organization had for years defied the law, matters in the customs service had settled down into their old routine.

With the arrival of the *Mongolia*, Warren had kept a close watch on the chain locker, and had the added glory of capturing three of the crew who were using the cargo blocks as a cache for their opium. That frightened the other petty smugglers to such an extent that for sixty days not a liner searched yielded a single tin of the drug.

At the coroner's inquest into the death of Wyrick, McSorley was exonerated from blame and the jury brought in a verdict of death from a gunshot wound while resisting arrest. From the moment he had fired the fatal shots until the formality of the inquest was over, the ex-soldier had worried not, for to him it was all in the day's work, and he was being paid forty cents an hour for his services.

Graham, out on heavy bail, was suspended from his office as deputy surveyor of the port and his office assistant temporarily installed in his stead. At the trial of Graham he had been convicted on the testimony of Gilmore and Spencer, but the trial judge had sustained an appeal. Gilmore pleaded guilty and was given a suspended sentence as a sort of immunity bath. The other members of the ring, with the exception of John Spencer, had been tried and convicted and sentenced to two years at Leavenworth. John Spencer never came to trial. While he was being taken from the Alameda County jail to San Francisco for trial by no less a person than the imperturbable Graves, the latter had been set upon en route by a gang of toughs, knocked down, and his prisoner taken away

from him. Despite the fact that Graves managed to stagger to his feet and empty his revolver at his assailants, his aim was wild—due probably to the blow which had felled him—and Spencer, accompanied by his rescuers, escaped in an automobile, and although every effort of the secret-service bureau was made to apprehend him, he managed to make his escape into Canada.

It was Graves who brought the news to Tom Warren one day at the mail dock.

"Well, Warren," he said in his crisp fashion, "I guess that man Spencer made a clean get-away."

"I'm glad of it," replied Warren dully, "and I'm infinitely obliged to you for letting him get away."

"Well, I tried hard enough to stop him, but they'd given me quite a rap on the head——"

"I notice they didn't hurt you very badly. And you didn't have Spencer handcuffed to you, as a bright secret-service man should have taken the precaution to do. And you started to bring him over alone. Rats! It was a put-up job, boss. You framed it, and it's just as well you did. Spencer is out of the country by this time, I dare say, and he can never come back. We've accomplished as much good as if we had him safe in Leavenworth. The ring's busted to pieces."

Graves smiled, despite an apparent effort to affect amazement.

"Well, you know, Warren, we might have let him go under a suspended sentence if he hadn't lost his head and started the shooting that night. Besides, he was the ringleader, and we would have had to make an example of him—and there was the girl to consider. I saw her in court when her father was testifying, and I—ahem! a-humph! I was a young fellow myself once. Of course, I'm not admitting anything, young man, but nevertheless if I hear a whisper from you again of

this frame-up talk it will go hard with you."

"I'm as mum as Cheops, Mr. Graves."

"How about that girl, Warren? Don't you think you'd better make an attempt to fix things up with her?"

Warren shook his head. "It's all up to Ruth," he answered. "I played the game fair, and I ask no favors. I can take my beating like a man, I guess."

"Well, here's something else for you to take," retorted Graves, and pulled a long envelope from his pocket. "This arrived from Washington for you this morning, and I thought it might be important, so I brought it down."

"Thank you!" Warren tore open the envelope and read it listlessly. It was a letter from the secretary of the treasury, informing him that the President of the United States directed him to inform Warren that he had that day been pleased to send to the Senate for confirmation the name of Thomas Warren for the post of deputy surveyor of the port of San Francisco, as a recognition of honest, faithful, and extremely capable service.

"What's that ye're readin', sir?" said a voice behind him, and Thaddeus McSorley interjected himself into the conversation.

Warren silently handed the Irishman the letter, and the latter read it, with great delight. When he had finished, he grasped Tom Warren by the shoulder and faced him up the dock.

"Turrn, Thomas Warren," he said, with mock solemnity, "turrn, deputy surveyor av the port, and go up to yer office an' yer fine, fat salary, for well ye've earned it."

He shook Tom Warren's hand, and eyed him a bit wistfully.

"Ye've been a good boss, sir," he continued, "but me job here is ended, an' 'tis the glad man I am that we're l'avin' the docks together."

"But you don't have to quit, Thad-

deus," protested Warren. "I'll appoint you to a far better job the moment I take office——"

Thaddeus McSorley waved a red, hairy, imperious paw. "Ye'll do nothin' av the kind—not givin' ye a short answer, sir. I'm tired av doin' nothin', an' I'm goin' back to the wars——"

And he whistled a bar from "The Minstrel Boy."

"You hear the East a-callin', eh, McSorley?" suggested Graves.

"Divil a bit! 'Tis the South that's callin' me, an' 'tis to Mexico I'm bound. I've been offered a fine job pickin' off Federal officers at two hundhred gold per pick."

And he was as good as his word, for the following morning he came in to Warren's office in the customshouse to say good-by. The war gods were calling to his wild nature, and he could not deny them.

"If ye don't mind, sir," he said shyly, "I'd like to keep this auld thirty-eight you bought me. 'Tis a good gun, an' God knows when I'll get a betther. I'd like it for a soovner av ye."

So they parted.

For a week, Warren was too busy with the reorganization of his new office to let his mind dwell at any length upon the events of the past six months. The old sting of his lost love still hurt, but time, the great healer, was doing its work well.

One day he received a telegram. It was dated from a town in Alberta, Canada, and as Warren read it the old exultant light leaped into his rather solemn eyes and for the first time since the night of the raid, he smiled. The telegram was as follows:

Starting life all over again, wheat farming in Alberta. Just heard of your promotion. I congratulate you. You earned it fairly, but I had something to do with your suc-

cess, and you owe me a little debt for that. Ruth and mother leave to join me to-morrow. Why not come off your high horse and ring Ruth up? I'm not much of a father-in-law, but I would like you for a son-in-law. Regards to Graves. He's a bird.

J. S.

"Well, the rascally old smuggler," laughed Tom Warren. "If he isn't trying to fix it up for me. He's as crooked as a bed spring when you view him from one angle and pretty much of a man looking at him other ways. I do believe I could stand the disgrace of having him for a father-in-law."

He had reasoned it out instantly. Ruth was willing to come to him, but ashamed to make the first advance, and Spencer, scenting the trouble, had appealed to his sense of chivalry to spare his daughter the humiliation of coming to him to—to——

He took down the phone and called a number. Then: "Hello! Is that you, Ruthie? . . . Oh, hello, Mrs. Spencer. This is Tom Warren. Will you ask Ruthie if she will please come to the phone and talk to me a moment? . . . Not in! Oh—that's too bad! W-ell, good-by!" and he hung up, just as the door opened and admitted Ruth Spencer!

Tom Warren sat staring pop-eyed at her over the top of his desk.

"Why, hello, sweetheart!" he said finally. "How've you been?"

"Just perfectly splendid, Tommy. And you?"

"Never felt better in my life."

"Forgive me, Tom——"

"Did that long ago. Lock the door behind you, darling. I'll lock this one over here——"

"Are we all alone, Tom?"

"All alone." He satisfied himself that no one might intrude; then held out his arms, and she came to him, sobbing out her joy.

The Bitter Scar

By William M. Rouse

The aftermath of a fight with spiked boots in the Champlain country. A story of French-Canadians.

IT was a day in October when Pierre Laflamme went up the lake seeking revenge. The wind, coming down from Canada with a good smell of winter, slapped Lake Champlain to whitecaps and sang in the cordage of the sloop *Celeste*. But for the white scars cutting across his cheek from nose to ear, Pierre Laflamme would have been happy. It was business concerning them that took him north this day.

Report had it that Papinaw Duprés had come again to Belle Isle. In the same hour that Pierre Laflamme heard this news he stood out from Valeboro Bay, sailing into the wind, that he might kill Duprés with his hands. For it was the spiked boot of Papinaw, at the end of a long fight, that had plowed across the face of Laflamme. Time would not take away those marks, nor anything but death the bitterness of them.

That fight had been much talked of along the lake. Papinaw had come down from the Dominion to Tunk Sosville's place on Belle Isle, bringing a pocketful of money and much whisky *blanc*. Laflamme stopped there, with a parted halyard, to make repairs. It is easy for a man to quarrel when he has the will. Duprés was ugly, and there were words that night in Sosville's kitchen. The next day he came upon Pierre Laflamme from behind with a stick of four-foot wood, but it was not until after a battle of half an

hour that he left him helpless on the beach.

Now Pierre, his corded arm upon the tiller, was driving the *Celeste* to do all that was in her, for he must not miss this long-awaited chance. Thought of the law he had put from him. It was not likely that a missing Canuck would rouse much inquiry. But if there were questions and the sheriff came, Laflamme was ready. In the months that the scar had lain across his face, telling its story to all men, he had come to hold revenge worth the price of life.

So, when Belle Isle drew near, a pile of rocks topped with green against the sky, Pierre's thoughts were only as to the manner of dealing with his enemy. Sosville's place was not alone upon the little island. There were two or three houses of peaceful folk scattered about, and one of these stood at the edge of the rocky cliff girding Belle Isle's southern shore. It would be well to land here and come upon Duprés suddenly, giving him no chance to take a weapon.

The sloop drew in under the shelter of the island, and Pierre looked up the face of the cliff to the little house there. It was white, and flowers grew about the door. A path ran up obliquely from the boulder-dotted strip of beach. This place was excellent for a quiet landing, thought Laflamme, as he hove over the anchor and dropped jib and mainsail. His dinghy grated on the sand, and he climbed upward.

On the edge of the cliff he stopped, with a quick breath, and held himself poised between two steps; for before him was a woman such as he had dreamed of but never hoped to see. She stood tall and strong, with all the curves of a frailer form. Dark hair curled against a fair, brown face, and in her eyes was the look of one who has become well of a great sickness. She was a woman to make glad the heart of any man.

"Excuse!" Pierre Laflamme's English was not always of the best when he felt emotion. "Me, I come up from the lake."

"Of course!" She smiled. "You couldn't come from anywhere else, up that path."

Pierre's heart beat fast. This wonderful woman was talking to him as to a friend, and almost, for the moment, he forgot Papinaw Duprés. Then the strength of his purpose returned.

"I go on Tunk Sosville's place," he volunteered, seeking to explain his coming and yet keep his errand hid, "for—for business."

"Yes?" Her tone was a further question. "Tunk's place is on a good cove; you could anchor there. But maybe you never come to Belle Isle before?"

"Me, I am Pierre—Pierre Mignon," he lied, "from Port James, down south. I thought it would make good place for anchor here to leeward."

The woman seemed to hesitate and argue some question within. Then her eyes looked deep into him, but with friendliness. Her voice was persuasive:

"It's getting dusk now. Supper's on the stove. Come in and eat before you go to Sosville's place."

"*Merci beaucoup!*" Laflamme hardly could believe it true that he was to sit at table and spend perhaps an hour longer with her. Such hospitable friendliness was not, in itself, unusual; but, coming from this woman, it was

a blessing and a delight to Pierre Laflamme. "I like to eat with you—better than go anywhere!"

She smiled and led him into a kitchen the neatness of which was pleasant to his eyes. He brought in wood for the fire, and then sat watching her go lightly from stove to table. It was great pleasure to do that, he found, and caught himself wondering how it would be always to see a woman such as she go about one's own kitchen.

When they sat down, in the lamplight, to biscuits and honey and tea and a steaming dish of fried *potac*, the woman bowed her head and pattered a brief grace that came musically to the ears of Laflamme, for it was in the French of Canada.

"You are a Frenchwoman!" he exclaimed, dropping into the language. "And yet you speak English better than many of the Yankees!"

"*Oui, m'sieu.* I came from St. Anne de Beaupré a long time ago. This is a good place. There are not many people—and I like the lake."

"Ah, the lake!" Here was something that only those of the good heart understood. "The lake is my home. I love her from my soul. She is strong and sweet—blue and cool to the touch. Sometimes she snarls and bites and goes steel color like the eyes of an angry man. Then I love her also. And next to the lake I love my sloop, *Celeste!*"

"*Celeste!*" cried the woman, and added in English: "Why, that's my name!"

"Now I know why she is so good boat, *mamselle.*" Pierre was finding himself, even in the more difficult tongue. He saw Celeste grow faintly pink. She rose from the table.

"Eat more, Pierre—Pierre Mignon," she said. "I must go to shut up my chickens for the night."

She went out of the door, strong and tall and lithe, and the heart of Pierre

swelled within him. Then, as suddenly, his lifting spirits fell. He had forgotten the scar—those twisted ridges of white that ran from nose to ear, banding his cheek with hideousness. But for the scar, he would have dared to love this Celeste; of heaven truly. The boots of Papinaw Duprés had killed what chance he might have had. Hate, tenfold more bitter, ate through him.

Laflamme rose up, renouncing the woman. He would go out and finish the business on which he had come and then sail from Belle Isle, if *le bon Dieu* so willed, never to land there again. For no torn wreck of a man would be the one to win this woman, and to see her again would but make it harder. Better go before she came into the house.

Darkness had come when Pierre stepped out of doors and made toward the patch of woods beyond which lay the place of Tunk Sosville. It was a gray darkness, for the full moon struggled behind a cloud curtain, and one could see well enough even among the trees. So he went on confidently, finding a path that led with many turnings toward Sosville's.

Of a sudden he heard the crunch of leaves and little twigs ahead. Whoever came, it was as well that Pierre Laflamme should not be met this night; and so he stepped among the trunks beside the path, hiding behind one of them. A dim figure loomed around a turn. Then hate and straining eyes told Pierre that here was his enemy, come to meet him by some good chance.

Laflamme was back in the path, holding himself loose-muscled and ready. The other man stopped ten feet away. It was Pierre who spoke.

"Ho, Papinaw Duprés!" he said evenly. "Stand up and fight! Me, Pierre Laflamme, have come back to kill you!"

A grunt. Silence. And then Duprés answered, sneering:

"You like some more of those boot heel, Pierre Laflamme? What you do on this end of Belle Isle?"

"*Sacré!*" Pierre's rage could not wait. "Fight!"

He leaped. Duprés gave ground, but it was only that the battle might be in an open space, where the footing was good and the light better. He met Laflamme, well braced and at no disadvantage.

The muscles of Duprés were smooth and of the kind that seem fat to the glance but hold great power. He was like a bear, clumsy and quick and terrible. Laflamme was long, hard, deep-chested, and thick of arm. He was a good sight to see when he moved. It was steel and stone meeting. If the steel did not break, it would pierce the stone.

They fought with every trick of the north woods, where always a man fights to win and by any means. Locked together, they sought neck-breaking holds, a chance to gouge or bite. But there was this difference: Each time that an arm swung free, Laflamme drove in a blow with all the force of his springing muscles. Duprés did not strike at all.

The ground was torn. The men were less swift, and for brief moments they rested, holding to each other. The breath of Duprés puffed, and he worked desperately to force Pierre down by his greater weight. There came an instant when they broke away. Then, as Duprés sprang to the attack again, Laflamme struck low, a smashing drive that had the weight of both bodies in it. He felt his fist sink deep just under the breastbone.

Papinaw Duprés' breath went sighing out, and he flapped to earth as though emptied of the spirit. His arms twitched. He lay still on his back. There was no more strength in him.

The moon came out. Pierre Laflamme saw his own hands outstretched

before him, and knew that he was moving forward to choke the life from Papinaw Duprés. He was glad.

"That was a good fight, M'sieu Pierre Laflamme!"

Pierre turned as one brought out of a trance, and saw the woman, Celeste, looking at him. The heat of the fight cooled a little, but not his anger nor his purpose toward Papinaw Duprés.

"Go back!" he commanded, although with no feeling save reverence and care for her. "This is not good place for womans!"

"I know what is in your heart, Pierre Laflamme." She spoke softly, but without fear. "You want to kill him there as he lies!"

Suddenly Pierre realized that she had called him by his true name. She must know, then, that he had come seeking revenge upon Papinaw Duprés. He turned and faced her in the moonlight.

"Oui! I kill him for the shame he put on my face! I wait three, five month, till he come again to Belle Isle. Night and day I hope for those time to come. I kill him pretty quick, and he die. Poof! But me, Pierre Laflamme, I have for always this mark. Men, they point; and womans not look at me but once. That is bitter, mamselle."

She stepped so near that he could hear her breathe, and there rose in him a great pain that he could not reach out his arms and take her into them, as he might have done but for the boot heel of the man he was going to kill.

"Pierre Laflamme!" In her mouth his name was a caress, but it was also a command to give heed. "See what I do now!"

She raised an arm and grasped the flimsy white waist that she wore. There was a sound of tearing cloth, and Pierre saw her shoulder, rounded and bare, gleaming white under the moon. But from neck to shoulder tip, and halfway down the arm, the flesh was knotted in cruel snarls and welts, now healed

a long time, but never to be made smooth again.

"Voilà!" she cried. "I also have my bitter scar."

When Pierre could take his eyes from that shoulder, he looked into her face. This scar hurt him a thousand-fold more than the wound upon his cheek, and yet he loved her greatly because of it.

"You are beautiful!" he cried, in his own tongue. "No one sees."

"The good God sees," she answered. "It is to be beautiful in His sight. Pierre Laflamme, you go to put a scar upon your own soul that will not wear away forever!"

Now Laflamme was really shaken, because it was she pleading, and he argued:

"You do not know revenge, mamselle. Your heart is good, and no man has done you wrong that cannot be forgiven."

She drew a great breath, and laid her hand upon his arm, hesitating before she spoke:

"Papinaw Duprés kicked me with his spiked boots, to make himself amused. I am Celeste Duprés, his wife!"

The words were in the ears of Pierre many seconds before their meaning. He shook himself and stared at her stupidly. Then he seemed like to burst with the rage that was in him.

"He dies!"

"No!" She was bending back his arm with strong hands. "Listen to me, Pierre Laflamme! How shall you judge when God does not? Do you think there is no strength in my arms or courage in my heart that I could not have sent a knife between his ribs? I have stood over him with the point almost in his flesh while he slept! Was it not hard to hold back my hand? There is no love, nor anything in life for me but waiting. I came here to hide, and he found me. Now twice a year he comes, and, when I will not

let him in, stands and curses with vile-ness. I have known hate!"

Before the splendor of this woman Pierre Laflamme was awed. His wrath ebbed slowly, and the hulk on the ground became a thing for pity; a man gone mad with sickness of the soul. Pierre no longer had desire to feel his fingers working into the corded throat of Papinaw Duprés. He would go back to Valeboro, scatheless of murder, and there worship the memory of Celeste Duprés until his bitter scar were eased by death.

"You—Celeste—I——" He struggled in vain with words to speak these things. Suddenly her fingers tightened on his arm. Papinaw Duprés was sitting up, a grin twisting his blood-smeared face.

"By gar, Celeste, you like those mans from Valeboro, mebbe!" with an ugly sneer. "You pay for this some time, hey?"

"You, Papinaw Duprés, go back to Canada!" Laflamme was steady. It was as though he spoke to a vicious dog. "Also you stay there!"

Duprés got slowly to his feet, reeled, and groaned at his weakness. Then he hurled a stream of curses at the man and woman watching. They heard in silence until they saw him turn, shaking his fist, toward Tunk Sosville's place. Pierre knew that now his time of greater trial was at hand. He looked at Celeste, standing straight and unafraid and doubly denied to him.

"I must go," he said, thinking aloud.

"Yes." But it seemed that there was sadness in her voice as she agreed. "First come and make yourself clean—there is blood on your hands and face."

Together they walked along the path and came to the little white house, lying like a haven of peace and rest. Celeste had given it of her spirit, thought Pierre Laflamme, desiring her with all his strength. He followed into the

shining kitchen, and waited while she filled the tin basin at the sink with warm water. Pierre washed, and then looked into the mirror in order to comb his hair. He shuddered. The scar lay white against his red-brown skin.

On the threshold he paused. It might be that this was his last look at Celeste Duprés, and it racked him that he must leave her with Papinaw still on the island.

"Celeste, what would you do if he should come here to-night?"

She smiled bitterly.

"He has come before now, as I told you. The doors are locked always. He dare not kill me—and, if he dare, I am ready."

She pointed to the wall, and in the shadows Pierre saw the black length of a rifle. He felt better, knowing the quality of her courage.

"Adieu!" He drank in the goodness of her, standing before him in the lamp-light, with the tattered waist drawn about her shoulders. The bare, scarred arm, round and white, held his eyes.

"Adieu, Pierre Laflamme."

He went out, and set his face resolutely toward the cliff. In a few moments he would be on board his sloop, sailing to the south——

A tiny shaft of fire streaked toward him from the cliff edge. Wind fanned his cheek, and the bark of a rifle was in his ears. Pierre threw himself face downward instinctively. Seconds went by, and then the head and unmistakable shoulders of Papinaw Duprés appeared where the path began its descent. He waited a moment before he advanced, trailing his rifle, over the score of feet that separated him from Laflamme. He drew near cautiously.

Pierre tensed his muscles to spring. Then from the house behind him came the voice of Celeste, low and steady and determined:

"Hold up your arms, Papinaw, or I will kill you where you stand!"

In the same instant Pierre sprang. Duprés leaped backward, zigzagging from side to side to spoil the aim of Celeste, and raised his gun. It was at his shoulder when his foot stepped out into empty air beyond the sharp brink of the cliff. He flung the rifle high, clutching at nothing, and plunged head-first from sight. There was a rattle of stones, and a thud came faintly up from the lake shore.

Pierre Laflamme went down the path in jumps that sent an avalanche of dirt and pebbles rolling before him. Between two bowlders he found a heap that did not stir under his touch, and a glance told him that what he could not keep from hoping was true. Papi-naw Duprés would trouble the world no more.

Up the path went Pierre with springing sinews, and yet with a weight upon

his heart. Celeste would be at peace now; but such a woman could hardly look at his face with love in her eyes. It was soberly that he walked up to her, framed in the doorway of her cottage.

"He is dead, Celeste."

The rifle that she held clattered to the floor.

"*Dieu merci!*" she breathed. "For when you turned to go away to-night I hated him again."

Joy surged in choking waves upon Pierre as he understood.

"In spite of this?" he cried, trembling, as he pointed to his cheek.

"It is the strong heart of Pierre Laflamme that I look at," answered Celeste, with shining eyes. "There is no bitter scar there."

He held her close to him, and the world was filled with a song.



GOLDEN NOTES AND SILVERY BELLS

CHAMP CLARK, the speaker of the House of Representatives, was lamenting that the exponents of the real old-fashioned oratory of the South had disappeared from the halls of Congress. He pointed out that only practical business men and hard-headed lawyers were being sent to Washington by the Southern States.

"The old school," he said, "has left us, and, when it left, it took from us a sample of language which we never enjoy now. There isn't a man in Congress who could get off a few sentences like those in a speech which I remember Senator 'Bob' Taylor, of Tennessee, once made."

He then repeated this extract from Taylor's memorable effort:

"I am from Tennessee, where the peach and cherry and every kind of berry bends bough and bush, and shines like showered drops of rubies and of pearls. I have seen heavens of delight where the linnet swept his lute and the thrush rang his silver bells in the dusky chambers of the forest.

"I saw June unbar her gate of roses in the sweet-scented morning, and come forth from the pavilion of enamored Night, carrying in her girdle of light the keys of a thousand heavens. I saw October open her gate of opals, and I walked in the heaven of autumnal glory.

"I saw the forest splashed with the tints of a thousand shattered rainbows, and then I saw the veil of Indian summer, that mysterious phantom of the air which conjures yellow sunlight into mystery and turns the world into a dream."

Business Letters of a Cowboy

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "Love Letters of a Cowboy," Etc.

DEAR MISS KITTY JIMSON:
As you know, when you come back from the East, you picked me out from the whole bunch here to ride with you, and your paw said it was O. K. Also, you called me Ruff right along instead of Mister Ruff which a lady would do if she did not care nothing for her esscort.

Now I have been talking over our case with a good friend of mine, Hank Todd by name, and Hank says that you being a heiress makes you scared to speak your mind to a man as there are so many who want to marry you for your money. But I am not that soft-soaping kind and you can see that this is a business letter and not no soft soap. This letter will give you a chance to speak your mind without no soft-soap, and I will say, if your paw would give me a start, I would think it O. K. to marry you. I am all business and do not feed no girl taffy as the saying goes.

Hank Todd said—Elmer, talk straight to her and give her a chance to speak her mind. Women dast not say what they think, Elmer, for that is the way they is raised. You know, Elmer, you are a good-looking scoundrel and no girl, let alone a heiress, can keep from being gone on you. You could not do better than marry Miss Kitty as her paw is worth all kinds of money, though, it is said, he stole the most of it if not all. I know Mister Jimson would a heap rather have his dorter marry a cow-puncher than one of them rabbit-headed dudes from

down East. Tell her the facts, Elmer. Be business right from the start.

Then I said—But Hank, for why does she always make me ride back of her instead of up by her side?

Hank then said—That is because she dast not look at you for fear she will show her feelings. That is a woman's way, Elmer. I have knowed many and many a girl and they all act about the same way when they are gone on a feller. They dont want to look at him except maybe sideways out of the eyes.

Then I said—But, Hank, do you suppose that it would make any diffrence because she is educated and what little I know I have got reading novels of a rainy day?

Hank then comes back—No, Elmer, this here love knows nothing about education. Love is liable to break out any place. Just you go ahead and write her a letter and consider yourself as good as engaged to her.

I then said—But, Hank, I am already engaged to a granger girl over on Little Thunder, and if I would go back on Millie that paw of hern would come after my scalp as he is a shooting son-of-a-gun.

Hank then said—Never you mind about Millie. She is not your kind. Her paw has got nothing, and all she knows is to stand and giggle and twist her handkerchief while Miss Kitty is a lady and will bring you a wagonload of coin and thousands of cattle.

So I said—Well, Hank, that settles it and I will write Miss Kitty and give her a show to say what she thinks.

While she is thinking I will consider myself as good as engaged to her and not go to see Millie next Sunday as I was figgering on as I always give my Sundays to Millie.

Hank said—That is the checker, Elmer. You got a good head on your shoulders and are bound to be something above a dog of a cow-puncher.

And I said—Now you have said something, Hank.

So you can think it over, Miss Kitty, and if you feel backward about speaking your mind to me personally you can set down and write it all out on paper. Yours Resp.

ELMER H. RUFF.

P. S.—You might tell your paw that we are as good as engaged, as that would make it easy for me to tap him for a little money to kind of get squared up on before the wedding. I got a few little bills I would like to square up before I get married. You can explain that to your paw better than I can, as he is such a queer old gobbler that he is liable to misunderstand and think I want to marry you for his money.

MISS KITTY JIMSON: So that was it? You claim that you wanted me to ride with you as a flunkey because the girls what ride in the parks in the East have a hired man a-follering them to help them on and off their horses. And that was why your paw consented to me riding with you? Well, I want to tell you something, Miss Kitty Jimson, you have started a little deal that will be hard for you and your paw to finish.

You forgot that I has some reputation in this country and that because of me riding around with you all the folks on the range was saying we would get married, and now you claim you thought no more of me than a hitching post or words to that effect. You were like the Englishman who thought a

cow-puncher was a cow-servant, but, Miss Kitty, you have got another guess a-coming.

As far as you being engaged to that feller in the East, and having no idear of encouraging me, that does not go with me for a minute. For why would a woman ride around over the country with a man unless she thought he was about right? I am not like those Eastern scrubs that think it all right for a girl to ride around with a man who she is not engaged to or married to. I got some self-respect, I have. And what is more, I have writ a lawyer, Mister Ketchem, and he will file soot against you and your father for deceiving me into telling around that you and me was engaged when you was only using me for a flunkey. So that was it, hey? That was why you always had me ride back of you, hey? Well, it will cost your old dad just about \$100,000 to square it, for a man has his rights as well as a woman, and I do not know how many times I have read where a woman brings soot against a man for breech of promise, and you will see that it does not pay to deceive people. I may look foolish, but you and your paw will not think I am foolish when I separate him from \$100,000.

As for you thinking you are above me you do not want to forget that I has as good blood in my vanes as ever a Jimson had, and that on my mother's side my grandfather was a preacher and on my father's side an auctioneer and was called Colonel fur and wide.

I see where, and I say it without a struggle that he is a idiot in some respects, I see where Hank Todd does not know straight up. We had some words about the advice he give me and he laughed and said—

Why, Elmer, you poor gopher-headed yap, did not you not know I was load-ing you? That Miss Kitty does not consider you good enough to dust off her last year's slippers which her maid

has wore and throwed away. I did not think you took me serious as I supposed you had *some* branes.

Then I said—So you pertended to be my friend while you was loading me all along? For a nickle I would step back and give you a slam in the jaw.

Hank then got a nickle out of his pocket and said—Here is your money. Turn loose your slam, but, when you do, boy, get ready for your funeral. While you and me have been good friends, there is something about you that makes me want to see just about how hard you would fall in case I leaned my right into you.

I then walked away and left him for I consider that Hank Todd a liar, a thief, and no more my friend than a rattlesnake and not as much, for a rattlesnake is a gentleman beside him and always buzzes before he strikes.

But what I said about tapping you and your paw for \$100,000 goes, and you will see that it costs real money to trifle with the affections of a honest man. If you was a man I could tell you some things that would do you a lot of good, but as you are a woman you can double-cross a man and he has got to keep still.

But I want to say you have got nothing to make you swell-headed as your paw got his start by branding mavericks so young that their mothers was horn-ing him in the back while he was branding them. And when you first come to the country your paw was lucky to have a clean shirt to put on and you never had a shoe on your foot till you was coming seven. Just where you got any reason to think you are better than me is more than I can see. You just got a smooth finish and a bunch of money, but when they take your money away you are no different from Millie Jones and at least Millie don't encourage a man and mean nothing, and I am beginning to see that maybe I did not give Millie a square deal. But when I

start in to do something I am a stayer, and until I make your dad come through with the money I will sure hang and rattle. Yours Resp.

ELMER H. RUFF.

MISS KITTY JIMSON: You have sure give me a good case now and my lawyer will win my soot against you and your paw without no trouble, as along with the breech of promise I have got asault with a stake from a wood rack with intent to kill and I would want nothing better.

You must have told your paw about me as he come down to the bunkhouse. I was just getting ready to leave anyway but before I could say a word he come at me like a gray-headed tornado.

Before I could square back and tap the old loonatick he had me out in the lane. I recollect that he hit me twice, once in the bunkhouse and once in the nose, etc. When he got me out in the lane he was using a stake from a wood rack. I tried to tell him that the only thing that saved him was that he was on his own ground and that I knowed he would have the best of it at law if I would tap him on his own ground. I just held my temper and it was not long before I was quite a ways ahead of him as he is a little short-winded. I could have run him to death if I had wanted to.

Because I has some sentimental recollections for you regardless of how you treated me, I did not poke your paw. Had I poked him once my lawyer would have had to clear me for murder, and that is no joke. When I land on a man with my weight behind it there is nothing left to do but walk around and view the remanes.

All the time your paw was working me over with that wood rack stake, he was bawling—

Telling around that you was engaged to my girl, you half-baked hoss-handler, you! I would not let you 'sociate

with no dog of mine if I had any re-speak for the dog! Dont let me kill you! Run, before I do murder!

So as to not have no more trouble I did as he asked. You can address me General Delivery as I am not stopping at no regular hotel at present.

Yours Resp.

ELMER H. RUFF.

P. S.—If you should think it over and want to make up with me, I would tell my lawyer to cut out the soot for \$100,000. In case you would change your mind and get your paw bedded down so he dont jump and strike so, I would consent to marry you if he would deed me the North ranch and give me a start say with 3,000 twos and enough cash money to go on. But if he will not listen to reason, he can exspeck to have to go down in his sock and drag up that \$100,000 as I need a little change about now.

MISS KITTY JIMSON: Just to let you know that I know that your little dude friend you claim to be engaged to is out to the home ranch and that you are riding around with him and not caring what people say about you being one of them vampires that rides with a new man every day or so.

You had better not let me see your little rich friend or I am liable to bust a dewdrop on his head or beat him to death with a hummin bird's feather. Just because his paw is a millionaire and owns a oatmeal factory is no sign he can get away from me as he is fur from home and not on his own ground.

You better lock your little Clarence boy up or something is liable to get him of nights.

Yours Resp.

ELMER H. RUFF.

P. S.—As I have not heard from your paw concerning his giving me a start I am going to take it up with him by mail this afternoon. But my lawyer

will bring soot for the money as stated unless your paw listens to reason and gets some of that foolish pride out of his system. I hear he is telling around that he would rather see you in your grave than married to a drunken cow-puncher like me. I suppose your paw, your nice old paw, dont drink. For thirty years he has never dared to go to bed without a quart at hand and he is parboiled in alcohol. As for me being a drinking man I can say that I have gone as high as three months on the range without touching licker as we could not get it. But your paw would come around with plenty of good licker under his buckboard seat and do you suppose he would offer a rider a little drop of kindness. Nothing doing with your paw, for he would not give away nothing unless it was a clout on the head. And yet he goes around per-tending that he is a regler human being.

MISS KITTY: I have writ your paw and he has consented to meet me in the county seat and give me a start. So that settles it. Your little Clarence boy had better pack up his kimona and blow back East for if ever I see him I am liable to slap him to sleep with a cigarette paper. Now that your paw has agreed to give me a start I will have my lawyer cut down my soot to say \$50,000 as I will need about that much money to go on.

Yours Resp.

ELMER H. RUFF.

P. S.—I got to thinking that maybe it would be best for my lawyer to cut down my soot to \$25,000 as I need some cash money now and could use it to a advantage. You might kind of feel around your paw as regards amount of cash money I am to have when I marry you. What I do not understand is why you dont anser my letters. It would not hurt you to correspond backwards and forwards so

that we would understand each other. Lets hear from you.

MISS KITTY JIMSON: As I said before I am a business man and believe in laying all my cards on the board, and it is no more than right that you should know what kind of a deal your paw and that very large finanie of yourn give me.

In the first place your paw did not give me the start I figgered on. He met me at the county seat, and he had your finanie with him. He called your finanie Rollo. I once knowed a newfoundland dog by the name of Rollo, and your finanie is made on the same principil as a newfoundland dog, only a newfoundland dog is not so crool.

You deceived me about your finanie. I thought he was one of them sissy dudes with a rich paw, but he is not no sissy, for he is the biggest, hardest critter I ever see stood up on two hoofs. I suppose he is a pleasant sort, when you come to know him, but I do not care to get intimately a-quainted with no such a critter.

As I said your paw did not give me no start of any kind. Had he give me any kind of a start he would not have caught me, and dont you forget it. He got me before I could break into a run as I would not have it said that Elmer H. Ruff hit a old man. Of course, if I had got away, and he took after me and I run him to death, that could not be held against me.

Well, after your paw and me had a little catch-as-catch-can exercise, he turns to your finanie, Rollo, and he says—

Rollo, what's the matter of you taking this off my hands? I am getting a little short-winded in my old age and cannot romp around like I used to.

Then Rollo said—Mister Jimson, is this what has been annoying Katherine with what he calls business letters?

Mister Jimson, your paw, handed me to Rollo, and said—

That is It, and look It over, and, when you are through with It, throw It outside the city limits as there is a law in this town against leaving such as that a-laying around.

Rollo then took me and placed my head some way in the holler of his arm and it was like I had my head in a boot jack.

Then your finanie, Rollo, said—Ever since I left college I have wanted to examine the head of a cowboy, and, by your leave, I will look yours over. Fernologists tell us that by the bumps on a man's head you will know him. I can see that your head needs polishing off and smoothing down. Also, your hair-line, Elmer, comes down too fur on your forehead. I will proceed to push back that hair-line so that you have a look of compar'tive intelligence. After which I will polish the head.

He then took the heel of his hand and pushed my forehead back till I could have kissed the back of my own neck. Then he started in polishing my head with his hand the same as a chambermaid polishes a winder. I cant say that I was thinking about anything much, for your finanie is a man that takes up a feller's mind as it were.

But all the time I was working around to get my gun, thinking to shoot my way out of his loving embrace. But, when he saw what I was after, he took my gun and looked at it pleased-like.

He then said—Elmer, I did not think you was a dope fiend, but how can I doubt my eyes when here in my hand is the siringe. I will have to give you a shot in the arm, for I see that is what you need.

And I be dogged if he did not take my sixshooter and hold it like a hiperdermick siringe and pertend to give me a shot in the arm.

He then said—I now see the cause

of you writing so many letters. You are a hop-head, for letter-writing is a sure sign of hasheesh.

I said—I have not had no hasheesh, and what I write is just business.

He then said—Go on. I love to hear you talk. I never heard such a inspiring talker. I can feel my arm get twice as strong when you talk.

He then felt my head over again, and tunked it like a grocery man does a watermelon. He is a head feeler, Rollo is, if a person dont care what they say.

Rollo then turned to your paw, and said—Mister Jimson, shall I give It my compliments just once, and your paw nodded his head and said he was tired of looking at me in a vertical position. Rollo then placed me where he wanted, and kissed me on the forehead like he was saying good-by forever, which he had my consent to do, and then something happened. I dreamed I run against a wagon tongue in the dark. And when I woke up who should I see standing there but Mister Jones and Millie, and Mister Jones had a 45—70 Sharpe's and he was peevish about something.

Mister Jones said—What do you mean by lying there in the weeds with your toes turned up like a kangaroo? And why have you not kept your promised word to my little Millie? Here, for three Sundays hand-running, you have not showed up at our place and Millie had set at her winder and cried herself sick. Do you not think I have no pride, you scuff of creation? Do you think I would con-sent to your calling on my dorter and then back out at the last moment? If that is what you think, you got a good chance to do your thinking as a corps.

I then set up and said—Why, Mister Jones, how you do talk! I never had no idear of going back on Millie. The reason I staid away was because I had business on hands.

And, Miss Kitty, if Mister Jones ever asks you about it, please tell him it was as I said—business on hands. Although he is now my paw-in-law, he is a proud old cuss and would just as soon lay that old Sharpe's across a fence and blam loose at a son-in-law as he would to down a maverick when in need of beef or slow elk, as the saying goes.

Then Mister Jones said—Come now, Elmer, my dorter says that she wants you for a husband and I always aim to humor my little girl. We will go right to the preacher's as soon as we get a permit. But let me say, when you become my son-in-law, you cant come to my place and lay down and eat my grub without making a showing that you are worth it. I reequire that my son-in-law get out and rustle, for I would hate to have to pull down on him in my own home and make Millie a widder.

He then turned to his dorter Millie, and said—Millie, is this the man you was mourning for? I cant say I admire your taste, but I am a indulgent father and you shall have what I can get you.

Millie then said—Paw, with all his faults, I love him still.

We then formed up a procession and they took me over to the preacher's and married me.

Coming back we met your paw and Rollo, your financie. Rollo was about to feel my head again when I told him I was married.

He then shook my hand, and said—Elmer, you are now safe from me. As I am about to be married myself, I could not work over the head of a feller married man. On second thought I will give the bride a kiss, and he did. Millie brightened up considerable, for your financie seems to have a good deal of experience in many things.

Then I said to your paw—Mister Jimson, you and me have had words

and I brought soot against you, but I now take it all back as I am married and at peace with all the world.

Then your paw took out his check-book and wrote a check out to Millie as a wedding present, and he said—

Missis Ruff, put that money in bank, and dont let that worthless scrub of a husband of yours have a cent of it.

Then Rollo said—I will write a check for the same figures you did, Mister Jimson, and give it to the fair little bride.

And he did.

All the time I was looking at Millie, and it come to me that she was about right and that I had been a little foolish to think that you and me could get along.

So I wish you well and everything is O. K. as far as I am concerned.

Only regret that I have is that when I had him dead to rights that I did not step back and swing on your paw and drive his nose around so he could use it for a collar button. But let by-gones be by-gones I say. But the

next time you deceive a poor cowboy into thinking that you care for him instead of wanting him for a spotted dog to run under the buggy, you want to pick a diffrent man than

Yours truly,

ELMER H. RUFF.

P. S.—You need not think there is anything in these letters that can be held against me in case you might think to bring soot against me as I writ nothing but business and cant be held responsible. Other men, as I read in the papers, have writ letters to women and been jerked up in court and made to pay big money, but I never writ nothing compromising for I know women and their ways and am wise, and you do not want to forget that as long as you live, Miss Kitty Jimson. I now see where Millie has you beat, and was figgering all along on making Millie jealous over you. You thought you was cute, but when you trifled with Elmer H. Ruff, you got a hold of a deep proposition, and I hope you commit that to memory.

Carr's next contribution lets you into the feelings of a cowboy whose girl leaves the range to join a moving-picture outfit. Don't miss "The Letters of a Cowboy to a Movie Queen." They are the funniest yet. If you haven't kept a complete set of these Cowboy Letters write for back numbers. They appeared in issues of September 7, September 20, November 7, and December 20.



ALL ABOUT THE VEGETABLE KINGDOM

IN a recent issue of a Virginia paper there occurred the following interesting announcements under the headline, "Doings at Dooms":

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Weed, of White Hall, have been recent guests of Mr. Weed's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Weed, in the Valley.

Mr. Ernest Wood was a Charlottesville visitor last week.

Mr. J. F. Wood and family have returned from a visit to Mr. Wood's brothers, J. W. Wood and John S. Wood, at Crozet.

J. W. Ellison and a party of friends motored to Sugar Hollow recently, and spent a day with friends.

A Chat With You

IF you have ever been fortunate enough to attend a Methodist watch-night service, you will doubtless remember the old hymn that begins: "Come, let us anew our journey pursue—" This number of the magazine finds us in the same frame of mind as the small hours of New Year's morning finds the good Methodist. We are girding up our loins, starting out on another clean page of the history of *THE POPULAR*, hoping—and with reason, too—to make it the best and most interesting page yet. It seems a long time ago that the first New Year's number of *THE POPULAR* came out. The magazine was a good deal smaller then, and we had little idea of the big future it had before it. We had the right idea, though. We proved it. *THE POPULAR* during the past ten years has been steadily and consistently the most successful fiction magazine that we know of. It is going to be still more successful in the future. We have the same idea. Only now it is bigger and means more, and we have better means for putting it into effect.



EVERY publisher says substantially the same thing: "I am going to publish the best fiction written." But words are peculiar things. They mean different things to different people. It is what the publisher means when he says it that counts and makes the difference. To one it may mean a hunt for prominent names among fiction writers. To another it may mean a feverish effort to be timely at all costs, and to reflect in his fiction every sudden flow and eddy in the wind of public inter-

est. To a third it may represent a ruthless application of rules and academic standards that will result in stories that tell us nothing, written in the prose of Addison or Matthew Arnold. We have no such ideas. No matter who writes a story, we don't want it unless it is the sort of a story you like. No matter how timely a tale is, we don't want it unless it has some quality that would make it interesting aside from its timeliness. No matter how well a story is written, it must be the sort of thing that any one would listen to with interest if it were told him, to get by with us.



WHAT is it that makes a story good, anyway? There are so many answers to this that you will find whole volumes of them on the shelves of almost any big library. We've talked about it in the past, first from one angle and then from another. Truth to life? There are many books painstaking in their fidelity that can only be read as they were written—with great painstaking. Incident? There are yarns packed with incident that make a noise distantly resembling that of a good story, but fail to hold or convince. Plot? There are only a certain amount of essential plots in all the fiction in the world; and of three stories with the same plot, one may be a stirring adventure novel, a second a roaring farce, and a third a dreary expanse of drivel. Delineation of human character? That comes a little closer to being the greatest of the essentials, and yet there are masterly analyses of character that have found their way to the library shelves, it is true, but are very seldom taken down therefrom.

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

THE great point is the method in which the impression of character is conveyed to us. Fabre, the Frenchman, knew more and told more about insects than any one. He did not arrive at his knowledge by dissecting the insects. He lay, face on elbows, over an ant hill studying the little lives beneath him, their romances, their tragedies, their matings and partings, and his scientific works are of transcendent value because they are stories of incident. To get back to the Methodist atmosphere for a moment, we know the character of David in the Bible about as well as any character that has ever been described. We are wont to say that David was "intensely human." He was most human and inconsistent, both good and bad. And yet nowhere does the author of Chronicles or Kings tell us so. He shows us David in action, and lets us see and find out the sort of man he was. These most widely read books are stories of incident and action. Shakespeare, next to the Bible, is most universally read. Does he tell us anything about Iago or try to analyze his feelings? Does he anywhere characterize Macbeth in so many words? He lets them tell their own stories and act them before us so that any one will soon know one for the consummate scoundrel and the other for the ambitious weakling.

Hamlet is such a wonderful study of human character that Goethe devoted a great part of his greatest novel to its discussion, and whole shelves of books have been written about it, and yet the play has incident and action enough to furnish forth three or four of the most lurid melodramas.

HUMAN life is not still life, and it is the peculiar privilege and greatness of fiction to show it in action. That's what we want to do in the fiction

we publish. Ferguson does it in the big novel called "An Irregular Game," which appears complete in the next issue of *THE POPULAR*. He does not waste much time in describing the characters of the two secret-service men who find themselves in the strange craft among the shoal waters off Holland, but we soon know all about them. The author is content to introduce them to us and then let them act and talk for themselves. Victor Maxwell, in the great detective story in the same issue, shows us a remarkable woman criminal and the man who pitted his brain against hers. He doesn't talk about them. He tells us what they did. You learn far more about Captain Slocum from what he says and does than from anything Stapoole tells us about him in the series of South Sea tales now running. Character just by itself, incident just by itself—neither of these is sufficient, and each becomes a weariness alone. They must be blended and united to make a really satisfying story. Even this talk, which we hope isn't getting tiresome, would be a thousand times more interesting and understandable if we or some one else could only put it in the form of a short story.

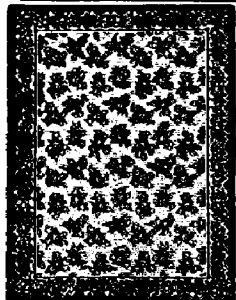


NINETEEN-SIXTEEN is going to be a big year for *THE POPULAR*. We are starting it well, and the magazine will get better and better as it goes on. It isn't just that we want to make it so, or plan to make it so. We see our way clear to doing it. We'll prove it from month to month, and perhaps within an issue or so we will discuss some of our plans in greater detail. In the meantime, the next issue is one of the best yet. It is going to sell very fast, and you can help us and the news dealer and yourself as well by ordering your copy in advance.



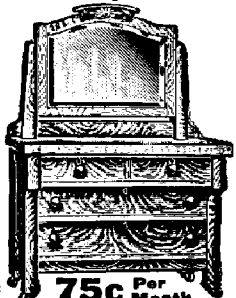
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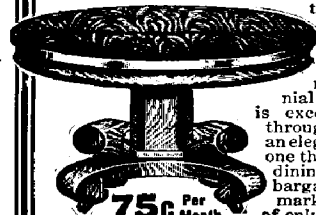
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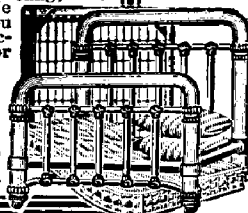
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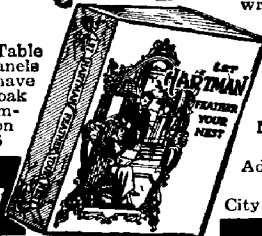


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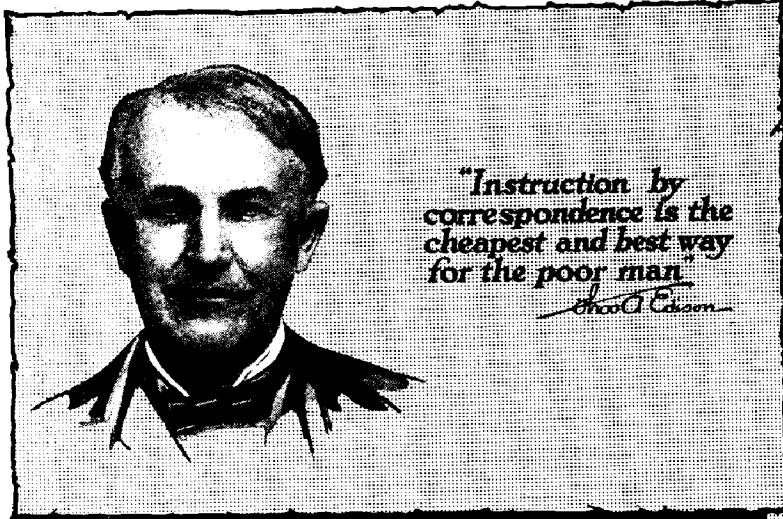
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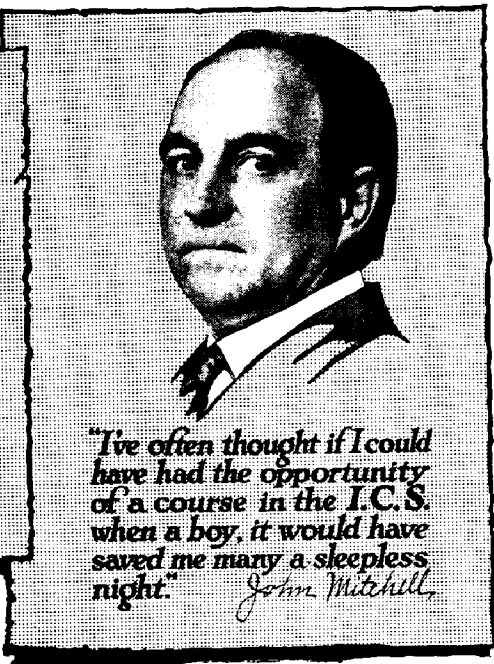
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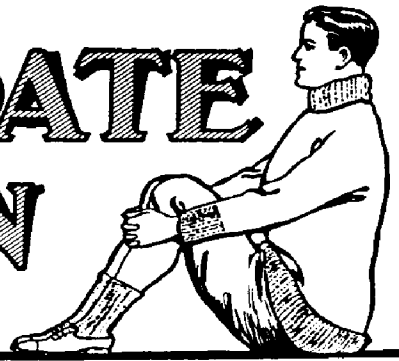
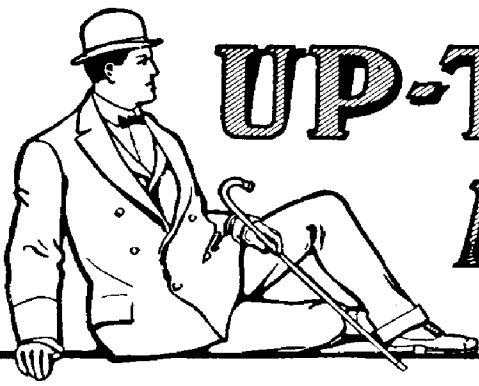
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THE UP-TO-DATE MAN



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.

WE are living in the United States of Hustle. Between the hammer of the automobile and the anvil of the moving picture "the fine art of leisure" —with pipe, book, and log fire—seems in a fair way to be crushed. Jumpy as a grasshopper, we are "always on the go." It is as characteristically American as ice water, Pullman sleepers, and ward politics.

To the mind which plumbs the depths, instead of the shallows, there's music in the bawl of the rowdy minds outside, while you sprawl right and tight inside, wrapped in a cozy dressing gown, steeping fingers and "building castles" in Havana or Virginia, as the smoke floats ceilingward.

It is a bromidiom to say that "they do such things so much better abroad," but those older and staidier civilizations certainly know how to dawdle, doze, and dream, and "lounging" almost rises to the solemnity of a religious rite among the best-turned-out men overseas, until they exchanged comforts for khaki and trenches.

Quite naturally, the growth of wealth and taste in our own country among all classes has brought with it a great increase of luxury in men's dress. We are more fastidious, because we are more observant. Any new fashion spreads like fire among timber. The day when a style could be kept "exclusive" among a narrow coterie has passed. This is just as noticeable among the clothes worn indoors as out.

Present-day house gowns, room robes, and "apartment suits" — for city dwellers — are very smart garments, tailored with all the care and finesse of the most pretentious evening coat.

Among the fabrics most used are velvets, vicunas, corduroys, blanketings, camel's hairs, soft woolens, surah and pongee silks.

House clothes may be simple or ornate, according to personal taste, though studied elaborateness hints disagreeably of effeminacy. The spirit of the day is so distinctly virile that it frowns upon any attempt to ape the women.



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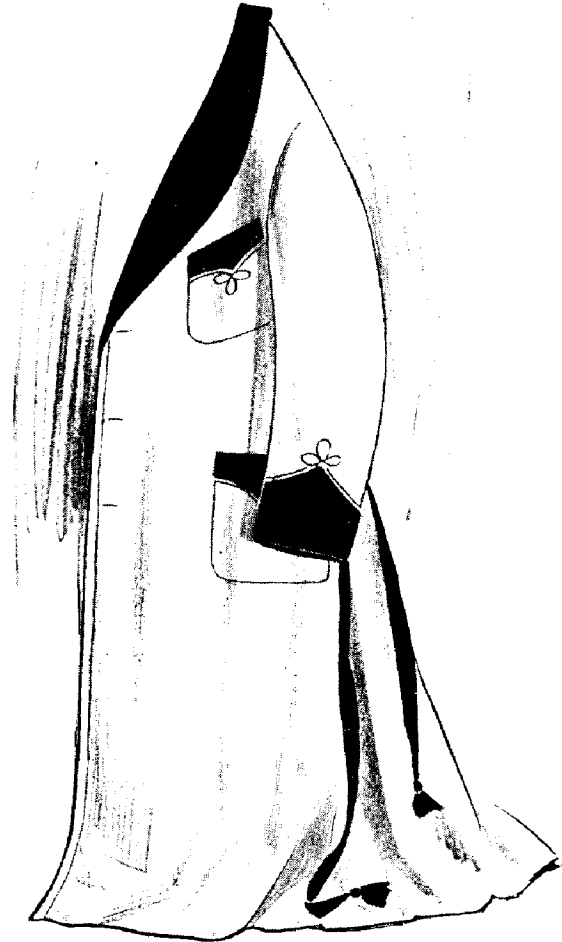
Prices are from \$15 up, on easy terms of \$1 or more down and a small amount each month. Sizes of Tables range up to 4½x9 ft. (standard). Balls, cues, and full playing equipment free.

No Red Tape—On receipt of first installment we will ship Table. Play on it one week. If unsatisfactory return it, and on its receipt we will refund your deposit. This insures you a free trial. Write for catalog giving prices, terms, etc.

THE E. T. BURROWES CO., 116 Spring St., Portland, Me.
Mfrs. Burrowes Rustless Screens, Cedar Chests, Folding Card Tables

On the other hand, there are a number of really smart and becoming indoor clothes that a man may wear a-lounging, shaving, breakfasting, in illness and so on.

Aside from the greater comfort of room robes, they save one's clothes to



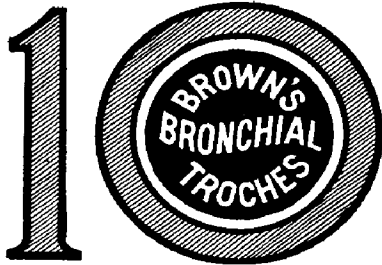
Smart Lounging Robe for Winter.

a degree that makes them almost indispensable. Any man who has experienced the grateful relief of putting off the stiff garments of conventionality for a lounge gown of some soft stuff will be loath to forego the companionship.

Many men take pardonable pride in their room suits or dressing gowns as an expression of individuality, not alone in fabric, but in the coat and fit, as well. To be sure, such garments

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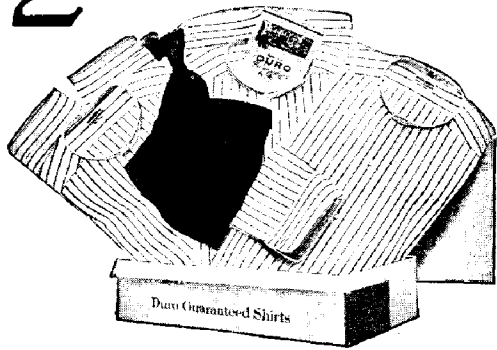
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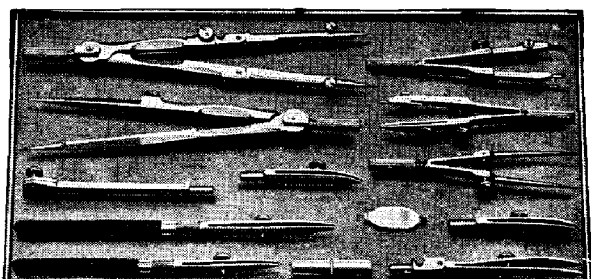
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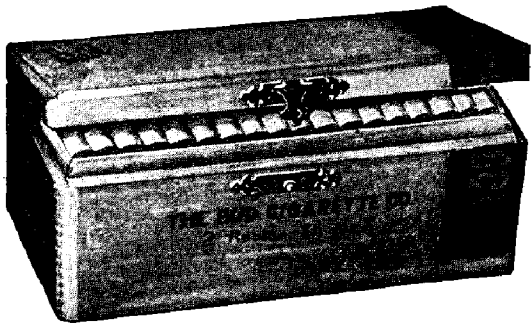
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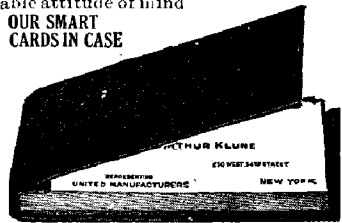
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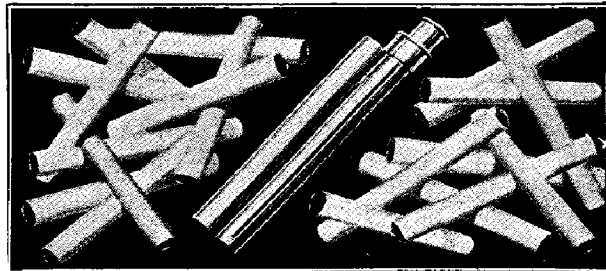
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